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# Strategies for Addressing the Lack of Skilled Workers in the Gig Economy

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Joseph Charles Blanchard

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

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MBA, Athabasca University, 2012

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

In the competitive labor market landscape of 2023, skilled workers were in high demand, and owners of small businesses needed effective recruitment strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers. Owners of small businesses who failed to implement effective recruitment strategies risked continuing a cycle of frequent employee turnover that created reduced productivity and loss of institutional knowledge and expertise, resulting in reduced profitability. Grounded in Winston's recruitment theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to attract and hire skilled workers to achieve a competitive advantage and profitability. Six small business owners across Canada participated in this qualitative multiple-case study. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, literature on recruitment, available public sources of information, interview journal notes, and company websites. Using thematic analysis, five key themes emerged: (a) corporate culture, (b) organizational branding, (c) human resources management strategies, (d) advanced or disruptive technologies, and (e) retention strategies. A key recommendation is for owners of small businesses to establish a robust organizational employee recruitment outreach program locally or regionally by attending or hosting local skills events to attract skilled workers. The implications for positive social change include the potential for business owners to retain valued employees and lower community unemployment rates, which could enhance the economy and bolster the local community workforce.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to Sonia, Chris, Melanie, Mackenzie, Charlotte, and my family, who have watched me on numerous occasions, leaving them alone. At the same time, I pursue adventures serving my country and my educational endeavors. Their commitment to my scholarly pursuits has been steadfast over the years. Sonia has earned this degree as well. She has sacrificed the most from missed anniversaries during my degrees, limited birthday parties, and mostly the late nights when she would go to sleep, while I was still working. I would not have been this successful without your continuous and unwavering support, dear; thank you. To my son and daughter, who have watched me pursue higher education, and my pride in their return to school and advancing their education in areas of interest and the constant discussion about their courses and questions. I watch you both in amazement at your success in school and being able to manage work and school and take care of our beautiful Mackenzie and Charlotte. Mom, sorry for the missed events, no calls, and limited time spent with you. Thanks, Tim, Ann, John, and their families, for your understanding and acceptance of not being more involved with the family. Our mother has been ill and Tim has stepped in and taken care of our ailing mother more than I have. Thanks Tim for stepping up. To my dear departed Uncle Ron (may he rest in peace), he always said the right things during our discussions about school; I miss him dearly.

Now, Troy, it is time for you to complete your DBA. I could help with encouragement, support and dinner at 3-Brewers Pub. I know you can do this – go for it.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In this doctoral study, I sought to understand what recruiting strategies business owners used to overcome a skilled worker shortage that prevents organizations from implementing technologies, that will advance their business to gain or maintain market share and profitability. In Canada, on average, 66% of small to medium enterprises have identified challenges in recruiting skilled workers, and 85% reported a skills gap (Statistics Canada, 2022). Djankov and Saliolak (2019) added that globally, approximately 260 million young people (aged 15–24) are unemployed and have no desire to continue their education to build their skills for future work. However, van Laar et al. (2020) highlighted that skills workers in the 21st century (business skills and digital skills) will need technical, information, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills to ensure personal and professional success. Mohd Adnan et al. (2019) confirmed that employee education must include industry 4.0 critical skills, people management, emotional intelligence, service orientation, negotiation, and cognitive flexibility. The Society for Human Resource Management (2019) indicated that there is a skills gap and a lack of skilled workers in North America, and governments, institutions, and organizations must look at strategies to avoid the lack of skilled workers. I explored what recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to identify skilled workers, what the future of work will require for skills, what factors impact corporate recruitment, and what governments at all levels are doing to overcome this challenge.

**Background of the Problem**

Organizations require skilled talent to operate their businesses to profitability, with challenges such as globalization, gig work, and new generations wanting to do what is meaningful and, on their terms, has presented business owners with a lack of skilled workers to manage their businesses to success. Two thirds of companies in the United Kingdom experienced a lack of skilled workers, creating a productivity gap that will reduce the economic value digitation brings to organizations and economies (Azmat et al., 2020, p. 367). In a survey conducted by the World Economic Forum (2020), 55.4% of global companies stated that a crucial barrier to adopting advanced technologies to create economic value is a lack of skilled workers in local labor markets (p. 35).

Published data have revealed that more skilled workers have transitioning to a new form of work (gig), giving them the ability to work anywhere and on anything the gig worker may want (Mohamed et al., 2022; Okundaye et al., 2019). Organizational leaders want to implement advanced technologies to create production optimization leading to profitability, but the lack of skilled workers has presented challenges with implementing these technologies, as the gap in skilled workers continues to grow (Azmat et al., 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020). Add the complexity of external factors such as the gig economy, public crises like COVID-19 (work from home), and lack of workers wanting full-time traditional positions (De et al., 2020; Scully-Russ & Torraco, 2020). Awareness of external factors by owners of small businesses will allow them to become more creative in developing recruitment strategies to attract skilled workers. Scully-Russ and Torraco (2020) pointed out that these identified factors impact the availability of

work in the United States, where approximately 10% of available work has converted to gig work (i.e., freelance, self-employed, contingent work) supported by digital gig platforms. With the lack of skilled workers and organizations wanting to implement advanced technologies to increase competitiveness and profitability, my research could answer the business problem experienced by business owners in seeking skilled workers.

## Problem Statement

Finding the right skilled talent is critical in adopting and maintaining digital systems for businesses. U.S. industry growth was predicted to slow over the next 10 years (2022–2032) due to a lower employment rate and a decline in U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), lowering the economic value over the projected period (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [U.S. BLS], 2023, pp. 2–4). According to a 2020 survey, 55.4% of global companies perceivedh a lack of skilled workers in local labor markets as a crucial barrier to adopting advanced technologies to create economic value (World Economic Forum, 2020, p. 35). The general business problem is that business owners lack recruiting strategies to identify, attract, or retain skilled resources to manage their advanced digital systems to maintain a competitive advantage and profitability. The specific business problem is that some owners of small businesses lack recruitment strategies to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. The targeted population

for participation in the study were three to eight participants, owners of small businesses throughout Canada, who developed and implemented successful recruitment strategies to identify skilled employees to remain competitive and profitable. The implications for positive social change include the potential for small business owners to identify and provide different strategies to use in their efforts to reduce the high levels of unemployment in their communities and increase the standard of living for marginalized groups, thereby creating a self-regulating business model that helps them be socially accountable to themselves, their stakeholders, and the public, at large.

## Nature of the Study

The three research methods available to researchers are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed (Mukoka et al., 2021). Selecting a research method is critical to design a doctoral study to identify those strategies business owners used to hire skilled workers. For this case study, the qualitative method was appropriate (one-on-one conversations) to answer the research question: What recruitment strategies do owners of businesses use to recruit and retain skilled employees to implement and maintain digital systems, and to remain competitive and profitable? The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because I used a semistructured interview process to understand the recruitment strategies used by three to eight business owners who attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled employees. By contrast, quantitative researchers plan, design, collect, and analyze statistical data, objectively demonstrate the measurability of variables, and then present the results to readers (Mulisa, 2022). The quantitative research method would have been inappropriate because I did not seek to analyze data statistically and generalizing

findings. In the mixed methods approach, researchers combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore and examine a research question (Saunders et al., 2023). Because I did not use statistical data to explore a business challenge, the mixed method would not have been appropriate for this study.

Saunders et al. (2023) identified that several principal qualitative research designs are: ethnographic, narrative, phenomenology, and case study. In ethnographic research design, a researcher observes or interacts (interviews) with the study's participants about their experiences to understand better their actions, behaviors, and motivations in a cultural setting (Bird, 2020). I did not conduct fieldwork to observe participants in their environment; thus, an ethnographic design was unsuitable for the research. In a narrative design, researchers explore a person's lived experiences through the untold personal stories or written words of these people (Nigar, 2020). Phenomenology, as a research methodology, is used to explore and interpret the participant's lived experience, which a researcher will then interpret to develop a detailed account of the participant's experience while avoiding including their own research bias related to the research (Bonyadi, 2023). Phenomenology is about interpreting the lived experiences of participants, but I sought to determine what strategies business owners used to attract and recruit, not what or why the lack of skilled workers happened; therefore, for this study, I disregarded phenomenological methodology. Likewise, I did not seek to understand written history, so the narrative approach was inappropriate. Alpi and Evans (2019) described that the case study as a qualitative approach used to study a phenomenon over a time period. The authors also distinguished between single and multiple case studies to capture data from

numerous participants across time and space (multiple business owners from different companies). For this study, I used a multiple case design using semistructured interviews to identify and explore what recruiting strategies three to eight business owners used to identify, recruit, hire, and retain skilled employees to maintain digital business systems to remain competitive and profitable. Supporting the semistructured interviews, I researched the literature on recruitment, available public sources of information, interview journal notes, and company websites. Using a single case study would not have enabled me to engage in a robust exploration of the research problem from business owners in different industries experiencing similar challenges in finding skilled workers. Therefore, the multiple case approach to interviewing three to eight business owners was appropriate for the research and understanding of numerous company business owners and their shared challenges in attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining skilled employees.

## Research Question

What recruitment strategies do owners of small businesses use to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable?

## Interview Questions

1. What recruiting strategies do you use to identify skilled employees?

2. How do your recruitment strategies differ when you want to identify, attract, hire, and retain skilled resources other than local skilled employees?

3. What key challenges did you experience implementing your recruiting strategies?

4. What mitigating steps did you take to meet those critical challenges in attracting skilled employees?

5. How did you measure the effectiveness of your recruiting strategies to identify, recruit, and retain skilled employees?

6. What are your organization's specific human resources policies to support your recruitment strategies to identify skilled employees?

7. What consideration do you give to technological advancement, as you attract, recruit, hire, and retain internal talent?

8. What else would you like to tell me about strategies you use to build long-term strategies to seek, recruit, and retain skilled workers?

**Conceptual Framework**

In this study, the conceptual framework lens was recruitment theory developed by Mark D. Winston in 2001. Recruitment theory highlighted that the various influential factors individuals pursue in career development, which organizations look for when identifying individuals with the capacity (traits, attributes) and competencies to lead the organization to success. Winston associated recruitment with the broader concept of leadership, asserting that understanding the attributes and traits of a successful leader, an organization's internal development of leadership qualities, and the relationship between effective leadership and organizational success are crucial aspects when recruiting skilled workers. Winston (2001) identified that successful recruitment initiatives must include assessments of work experience, commitment to service, salary and benefits, ethnicity, and gender. Winston asserted that these tenets are the dominant recruitment factors that

allow leaders to identify leadership characteristics in others and assess beneficial

interpersonal skills, leadership styles, and administrative conservatorship.

In my study, I aimed to identify the elements that leaders of organizations looked

for in candidates, such as skills and competencies, work experiences, education and

credentials, personal traits, and organizational capabilities. I aimed to learn from business

owners what factors are considered when attracting and recruiting candidates, such as

organizational culture, goals and objectives of the organization, diversity, equity, and

inclusion (DE&I), and specific hiring strategies related to the immediate need to resolve

challenges or crises. These were the factors consistent with Winston's conceptual

frameworks on traits, skills, and competencies that individuals develop to pursue a career

for the long term.

## Operational Definitions

The following definitions are unique terms used in this study to define terms

related to the human resources field:

*Cultural probes*: The sets of creative items (e.g., cameras, diaries, maps, paint

supplies, postcards) given to participants to prompt them to document their lives in their

new environment (Kassan et al., 2020).

*Digital talent platform*: A highly skilled, on-demand workforce for companies to

use as and when required (Fuller et al., 2020).

*Dutch disease*: When resource booms cause currency and wage appreciation that

crowds out a country's other tradeable sectors that would otherwise generate greater

long-run growth (Hilmawan & Clark, 2021).

*Generic skills*: Generic skills are not specific to a given field but are identified as skills required for skilled workers in the future. These skills include resourcefulness, innovativeness and creativity, the ability to operate in new situations, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, the ability to solve occupational problems, continuing learning skills, and self-assessment skills (Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2019).

*Gig economy*: The use of digital platforms to perform short-term work by freelancers or self-employed labor force individuals for financial compensation (Hudek et al., 2020).

*Gig workers*: Freelancers, self-employed, independent workers, and platform workers who perform services or work on digital platforms (Sutherland et al., 2020).

*Knowledge worker*: An individual who possesses a unique set of competencies to execute a company's vision, goals, and objectives to increase its competitive advantage to maintain corporate profitability (Sobocka-Szczapa, 2020).

*Skill space*: The relationship between various skills provided in the gig economy, characterized by the relatedness between these skills (Huang et al., 2019).

### Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

To improve the quality of a study, authors should detail their assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to avoid misinterpretation of their data. Describing these elements will benchmark the foundational understanding for other researchers (Theofanidis & Antigoni, 2019). For my study, I continually reviewed my assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to ensure I understood my data, and I considered all

opportunities to understand my limitations and how I could address those limitations through further research.

**Assumptions**

Researchers begin studies with certain assumptions that they consider accurate while exploring the research subject (AbuRaya & Gomaa, 2020). First, I assume that participants in the study are able to provide personal and knowledgeable answers to the research questions. My second assumption is that all interviewees will offer honest or truthful responses to answer my research question. The third assumption is that business owners will accurately share their recruiting strategies. Last, I assume the sample from which data is collected in my research represents the broader population of business owners of small to medium enterprises in Canada.

**Limitations**

Limitations in qualitative research contribute to the study's reliability and validity. Discussing the limitations of a study enhances clarity during the research process and prepares readers for potential weaknesses that influence the deductions and inferences (Babchuk, 2019). There are four limitations in this study. The first was the reluctance of participants to provide accurate and valuable data. The second limitation was the availability of participants to complete the interviews promptly. The third limitation was that participants may only share strategies that worked or may not want to share successful strategies that their competitors may use in future recruitment initiatives. The last limitation was that the research sample size may not represent the larger business

populations in all locations, which impacts my ability to generalize the study results about business owners with different views and needs.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the planned and identified scope and boundaries the researcher sets in the research process and reflect what will or will not be part of the study (Coker, 2022). For this study, I selected three to eight small to medium-sized companies representing businesses seeking skilled workers. Second, I structured the questions to elicit owners of small businesses' strategies for hiring or retaining skilled workers. Third, the geographic location and industry population were in Canada. The final delimitation is that each of the selected companies employed between 20–200 employees.

## Significance of the Study

The study findings may have significance to both theory and practice. Theoretically, this study may help clarify when and how the tenets of recruitment theory, as conceived by Winston (2001), and are used within industry. In practice, this study may provide leaders with strategies, which other business owners used to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers. Having the ability to recruit or retain skilled workers will assist business owners in managing their complex digital business systems, thereby remaining competitive while increasing corporate profits.

**Contribution to Business Practice**

Business owners must understand how the on-demand gig economy will force them to develop strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers to maintain their digital business systems to remain competitive and profitable. Schake and Craft

(2019) explored the challenges of attracting and retaining a skilled workforce. Schake and Craft studied the increase in the gig economy and automation and determined that workers are leaving organizations to be freelancers and work for digital platforms on productive work. Companies that have adopted the gig worker model could expect a precarious balancing act between work and home life for their traditional employees, potentially exacerbating the shortage of skilled workers for organizations (Sutherland et al., 2020). Schake and Craft highlighted that the need to understand the current workforce, their expectations, and the existing skills mismatch with incumbent skilled employees. Understanding potential future business models (traditional or gig) is critical for strategic planning of corporate resources (human, technology, financial) to better synchronize with the skilled workers of the future (temporary or permanent).

In this study, I explored why small businesses need more recruitment strategies to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. The finding of this study may identify those strategies, processes, and skill sets business owners could use to identify, attract, hire, and retain skilled resources and highly technology-skilled workers.

**Implications for Social Change**

The findings from my study could provide insights and opportunities to develop social change programs for the betterment of society. Conducting research for social change offers a significant opportunity to understand the hermeneutics of injustice against marginalized groups and the potential to effect incremental change in organizations for societal change (Tawodzera et al., 2022). Developing a social change

model for leadership development will ensure institutions create programs that prepare and develop students for the recruitment and selection process after completing their education (Tugas, 2019). Technology progression over the years has produced goods and materials for organizations to create corporate profitability. New disruptive technologies take data and create information that organizations and society could take action against. Still, information technology has its downfalls, such as the fast spreading of misinformation/disinformation, creating social anxiety, and divergence of thought (Hilbert, 2022). Using my research, organizational leaders and human resources recruitment professionals will have information and supporting data on how to create impactful incremental change to tailor recruitment strategies, develop frameworks for training and development to enhance successful recruitment by the firm's business units and understand the benefits and disadvantages of technology on society; and incorporate changes as needed.

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The United States National Association of Manufacturers indicated that their industry will create 3.5 million jobs over the next 10 years (2016–2026), but 2 million jobs will go unfilled (Stockard, 2019). Stockard also suggested that the lack of qualified workers will cost the economy over $2 trillion in annual economic value. I employed Winston's (2001) recruitment theory as the conceptual framework for this study to understand whether owners of small businesses used recruitment attributes and traits in attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining skilled employees within their recruitment strategies. The purpose of a literature review of existing research about a phenomenon of

interest is to analyze the available information, data, and concepts, then make judgments based on the phenomenon researched. Researchers take on research to answer assertions based on the literature review of existing research, peoples' experiences, observing, and interviewing to answer their research questions (Peterson, 2019). Researchers could incorporate research design elements that identify the problem, research question, data collection, and data analysis to ensure their literature review is organized and aligned with the research methodology (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This literature review includes elements that influenced or impacedt recruitment by organizational leaders and what elements contribute to the success or challenges in finding skilled workers. In this review of the academic and professional literature, I apply Winston's theory of recruitment and inclusion of comparative and contributing theories (i.e., leadership theory, gig economy theory, resource-based view [RBV], and human capital theory [HCT]), and inclusion of contrasting theories (agency theory, resource dependence theory [RDT]) to explain recruitment factors, elements, and attributes that could contribute to developing effective recruitment strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers for their businesses.

**Organization of the Literature Review**

In this literature review, I discuss Winston's (2001) conceptual model for recruitment; compare Winston's framework against other theories with similar models constructed from Winston's traits, attributes, experiences, and competencies; and synthesize the information that could spark further interest or research by readers. The literature sources were comprised of peer-reviewed journal articles and seminal books on

recruitment, leadership, gig work theory, RBV, human capital management (HCM), human resource (HR) theory, agency theory, and other factors (technology, skills, corporate policies) that contributed to recruiting challenges. I then reviewed different theories (i.e., leadership, gig economy theory, HCM, HR theory) to associate or compare with Winston's recruitment theory and conceptual frameworks. I also highlighted those frameworks that align with successful recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers.

The primary databases consulted were Walden University Online Library, ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest, SAGE, Wiley Online Library, Science Direct, EBSCO Open Access Journals, Elsevier, and Emerald Management Journals. Additionally, I used cross-referencing of Google Scholar with Walden's online databases to ensure that available research is peer-reviewed. The key search terms included the following phrases: *recruitment, gig workers, gig economy, gig platforms, leadership, leadership styles, labor statistics, successful performance, resource-based view, resource dependency, human capital management, human resources, agency theory, future of work, new technologies, skills shortages, lack of skilled workers, skill gaps, disruptive technologies, technology impact on business, and automation*. For this doctoral study, I collected information from 211 sources: 95% from scholarly and peer-reviewed sources, 90% from sources within the last 5 years.

**Table 1**

*Details of Literature Review Sources*

| Reference type | Total | % of total | < 5 years | > 5 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scholarly and peer-reviewed articles | 211 | 95 | 200 | 11 |
| References between 2019 and 2023 | 189 | 90 | 167 | 22 |

In developing a structured approach to my literature review, I selected peer-reviewed research consistent with Winston's (2001) recruitment theory and factors such as the elements of leadership theories (how someone has the ability to influence others to accomplish the required goals to ensure success) that business owners are looking for in someone to manage their business into the future. Research on HRM is essential, as it consists of the HR processes and tools required to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers who could maximize organizational production. Comparative theories of recruitment and leadership are as HCT (employee attributes needed for the production process) and contain elements of recruitment theory but lack the specific recruitment tenets identified by Winston. Contrasting theories selected are agency theory (principal–agent) and RDT, which differ from recruitment theory as these theories focus on the complex dynamic of internal and external environments and their influence on the firm. Finally, I provided a basic understanding of some fundamental influencing environmental factors that contribute to organization recruitment.

The dimension of recruitment continues to become more complex and everchanging with the gig economy and globalization. In this study, I explored the environmental factors that contributed to or impacted a business owners' ability to

develop recruitment strategies due to globalization of skilled workers and the rise of gig work. The semistructured interviews, peer-reviewed literature on recruitment, public sources, interview notes, and company websites highlighted factors such as technological advancements, skill shortages, and the migration of skilled workers to the gig economy and their platforms. Additionally, I explored whether globalization influenced the internal organizational structure and if permanent positions evolve into temporary gig work positions.

**Recruitment Theory**

Organizational leaders use recruitment strategies to identify and seek skilled workers to achieve a competitive position and profitability within challenging and complex environments (gig economy, globalization, competitive landscape for limited skilled workers). HR professionals must develop recruitment strategies to attract and hire skilled workers to remain competitive and profitable (Alsaadat, 2019). Winston (2001) developed a recruitment theory that explained the essential factors necessary when pursuing individuals likely to become successful leaders in an organization, the influences upon their decision to pursue a profession, and how to lead an organization to competitiveness and profitability. Brandao et al. (2019) observed that business owners used recruitment theory to develop a talent management strategy that included processes and procedures, marketing, and communications. Business owners must use essential recruitment factors to identify future leaders that will ensure organizational competitiveness and profitability. Business owners used recruitment theory to develop strategies based on individual attributes to attract and hire skilled workers.

Recruitment factors encompass elements that attract individuals to pursue a particular profession, including skills, knowledge, competencies, and internal and external factors that guide individuals toward a specific career path. Winston (1998) stated that the baseline elements of recruitment theory included three aspects: (a) career path selection factors: the influences people (e.g., family, teachers, professionals) exerted upon individuals; (b) business owner selection factors: recruitment factors (e.g., education, job experiences, wanting to contribute to an organization, and leadership) used by organizational leaders when selecting candidates; and (c) candidate acceptance factors: attributes (e.g., salary and benefits, scholarships and internships, personal desire to work in that profession) candidates weigh when accepting an employment offer. Winston (1998, 2001) presented two frameworks of different recruitment factors (tenets and attributes) that business owners could use when developing strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain individuals or leaders that could lead the company to achieve its strategic goals and objectives, to remain competitive and profitable. Business owners use recruitment factors (attributes and tenets) when developing recruitment strategies that identify the right skilled workers for the organization. Winston's two frameworks could guide owners of small businesses to create a framework of skills, attributes, and competencies based on supporting the type of open position within the organization. Organizational performance is achieved when skilled workers strive to meet the organization's goals and objectives and create competitiveness and profitability. Recruitment factors are critical to developing recruitment strategies to attract and hire

skilled workers, and organizations must capture the factors required of each open position to ensure the organizations attract and hire the right skilled worker.

A critical element of an organization's HRM practice is recruitment-hiring, deploying, and managing employees used by organizational leaders to manage their internal resources (human, financial, and technology). HRM refers to the corporate policies and procedures focused on acquiring and developing employee performance to accomplish the goals and objectives and achieve organizational success (Battour et al., 2021). Historically, HR staff has managed the day-to-day operational recruiting requirements (i.e., attract, recruit, train, and develop employees) while ensuring alignment between corporate goals and objectives and its staff (Alsaadat, 2019). The organization's HR practice uses traits, skills, and behaviors to identify, attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers who could be future organizational leaders (Winston, 2001). Dunnette's (1998) and Stone's (2007) early work expanded Winston's theory, highlighting that HRM's complex concepts (e.g., organizational design, strategy, HR processes, procedures) need to manage the externalities of the firm and impact on their organization and employees. Zachery and Rudolph (2022) found that organizations continually practiced HRM during stressful internal and external environmental situations, requiring successful resolution by finding skilled workers to manage the business through stressful events. Recruitment is a critical HRM activity that organizations use to attract and hire skilled workers to manage the day-to-day activities of the business. The recruitment process is complicated, employing structured components to address internal and external challenges organizations encounter. Its goal

is to secure skilled workers who could help achieve the organization's goals and objectives.

Organizations lessen the impact of a lack of skilled workers by investing internally, developing partnerships with their employees, and managing the complex external environment that impacts an organization, such as the gig economy. Internal challenges for retaining employees could be mitigated by investing in their training and development to ensure the organization remains' competent in the business and technology skills required to establish and maintain a partnership with employees, thus increasing the firm's knowledge from internal investment (Mihanovic, 2021). Developing employee partnerships and a commitment to skills development demonstrates the organization's commitment to its skilled workers (retention), who maximize the productivity and profitability of the firm (Halimah et al., 2022). External challenges impact the firm's ability to deliver HRM practices, and one example was COVID-19, which placed significant stress upon the organization and its skilled workers, which changed employee and management behaviors and their ability to respond to stress both in and outside the organization (Zachery & Rudolph, 2022). The complex external environment has numerous influences like the gig economy, which has taxed the internal environment such as skilled workers resigning to become independent workers to enjoy less stress, a balanced work/home environment, and the limited or no support from a bricks-and-mortar organization (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). Organizations must plan and respond to internal and external factors that place stress upon them, such as the gig economy, pandemics, and skilled workers wanting to become independent workers.

Organizations must understand their internal and external pressures and develop

strategies, for example, employee engagement and commitment, to prevent losing skilled

workers.

Organizations face additional challenges that are changing the global business

environment. Recruitment is becoming increasingly challenging due to global phenomena

such as the great resignation, quiet quitting, and gig work, where the mindset of

introverted workers (from the pandemic) wanted flexible, understanding, and hybrid

work environments (Moon et al., 2023). Amidst the challenge of the great resignation

(during COVID 19), businesses witnessed a workforce that wanted more flexibility in

work arrangements, greater autonomy in determining wages, and improved work–life

balance; several factors (i.e., job openings, hire rates, earnings, and unemployment) in

government statistics (monthly labor review) suggested organizations are employing

advanced technologies to gain competitiveness and retain skilled employees (Amanor-

Boadu, 2022). The global workforce has changed, and skilled workers are harder to find;

organizational recruitment has been challenging for business owners looking for full-time

skilled workers to run their businesses. Business owners need to develop effective talent

management strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers to overcome

global challenges like the gig economy, work from home, and the great resignation.

In Winston's (2001) key tenets for employees to possess in relation to

organizational needs, leadership was a key competency. To stay competitive, businesses

necessitate ongoing organizational development and change management, requiring

effective leadership to navigate transformation (Northouse, 2022). Northouse confirmed

that the evolving competitive landscape demands diverse leadership styles, skills, and behaviors to align employees toward common operational goals and ensure profitability. Leadership theory has changed significantly, and traits and behaviors are everchanging as businesses evolve with the complex global economy (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Leadership is a key tenet or recruitment factor that business owners seek to ensure that the right leader manages their businesses efficiently and effectively.

Advanced or disruptive technologies present opportunities and challenges for organizations wanting to progress with digitization to increase their market share and profitability. Pan et al. (2022) suggested that companies must understand their technology, organizations, and environments to grasp the impact of complex technologies, the skills needed to support these technologies, and government influences upon the organization. The impact of technology upon an organization is used to create efficiencies and increase profitability through improved performance high-performance work systems, and disruptive technologies could create these efficiencies (Chen et al., 2019; Malik et al., 2019). Haenlein and Kaplan (2023) raised the same concerns that industry leaders are apprehensive about advanced technologies such as AI, robotics, and the Internet of Things, and the ethical issues accompanying these disruptive technologies will require legislation and policies to govern their use. Organizations wanting to transform with disruptive technologies to remain competitive find it challenging to find or retain skilled workers to guide the transition or digitizing required to stay in business (Oesterreich et al., 2019). Advanced technologies present complexities for organizations, who need to understand their technology, organizations, and environments and then

develop strategic partnerships with governments and industry leaders to create the right

policies for implementing disruptive technology in the organization. Disruptive

technologies impact organizations in various ways, leading them to strategize their

internal environments (concentrating on skilled workers) and external environments

(focusing on policy and legislation) to maintain competitiveness and profitability.

  Understanding the skills required to implement digital strategies will enable

leaders to achieve the organization's goals and objectives. Oesterreich et al. (2019) used

Winston's baseline theory and developed a skills profile based on Winston's key tenets to

achieve organizational success. Their research first looked at what companies posted

online and to see what skills and competencies companies were looking for. The skills

(generic and technology) and competencies identified were consistent with Winston's

(2001) tenets used to identify successful leaders. Oesterreich et al. (2019) were concerned

that the current outdated skills workers had, and with the onset of Industry 4.0, skilled

workers needed to develop advanced skills to manage the new tasks associated with

digitization (digital business systems). In specific industries, organizations are in a skills

mismatch situation, where incumbent workers lack the advanced technology skills to

implement advanced or disruptive technologies for production efficiencies (Brunello &

Wruuck, 2019). While responding to changes in Industry 4.0, organizational recruitment

strategies are more inclined to hire external skilled workers than develop internal end-to-

end talent management strategies to overcome the lack of internal skilled workers

(Whysall et al., 2019). Fachrunnisa and Hussain (2020) identified that organizations

could develop skills and competency frameworks for each position within the

organization, which would overcome the gap in technological workforce competencies required for effective operations. Developing a skill-based model based on Industry 4.0 would assist organizational leaders understand what skills are needed to adopt innovative technologies. Digitization in organizations will need the right skill sets to implement business and high-performance work systems, as internal resources lack, necessitating external recruitment of skilled workers.

Recruitment theory is about seeking future business owners for an organization based on individual attributes (skills and competencies) and the influences on individuals to pursue a career in any field. Winston's recruitment factors and tenets, coupled with existing opportunities and threats that impact the organization, offer a basic skills and competencies model to develop internal recruitment models and strategies needed to attract and hire skilled workers. Research demonstrated that the internal and external impacts on the organization influence the recruitment process and strategy development. The impacts are leadership styles and abilities, gig work and gig economy, the great resignation and quiet-quitting, needed digitization from disruptive technologies, and considering industry and government policies. These impacts are factors owners of small businesses use in developing strategies to attract and hire skilled workers. Skilled workers increase organizational performance to meet these goals and objectives of the organization, thus creating competitiveness and profitability.

**Supporting Theories and Concepts**

Numerous comparative or supportive theories focus on human resources; for my study, I present leadership theory, RBV, HCM, technology, and skills and competencies.

I selected these theories and concepts to convey an understanding of how an organization actively manages its resources (human, financial, and technology), including human capital. Knowing these theories and concepts will provide insight and information on recruitment factors (skills, experiences, and attributes) organizations use to develop recruitment strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled employees to maintain their competitive advantage and profitability.

*Leadership Theory*

Recruitment is an organizational strategy where companies attract and hire leaders to manage their business to market competitiveness and profitability. Winston (2001) stated that recruitment is a sub-theme to leadership theory, which has the speculative premise of identifying successful organizational leaders. Winston's recruitment theory discusses leadership styles (transformational, leader–member, servant leadership), which are essential to a leader's character and traits; companies are looking for these elements when recruiting leaders. The link between employees' and management's desire to get tasks done is leadership, and leadership is the partnership between a leader and employees based on a mutual desire to accomplish the mission (Plachy & Smunt, 2022). Winston (1998) provided two conceptual models of recruitment skills, competencies, and experiences that would assist business owners in knowing what recruiting factors could be helpful when seeking leaders for their businesses. Organizations conduct recruitment as part of their HCM processes, and management needs to develop a skills and competency framework for the human resources team required to complete tasks and activities needed to accomplish corporate goals and objectives (Mihanovic, 2021).

Leadership theory merges the abundant leadership styles, skills, and competencies necessary to become successful, and organizations would benefit from constructing a skills framework to know what skilled workers or leaders need to have to ensure organizational success. Leadership is a consideration for organizations when developing skill models to attract and hire the required skilled workers to create competitiveness and profitability.

A key element in leadership is the training and development individuals pursue themselves or which organizational executives nurture among those identified as internal future leaders for the firm. Leadership styles and self-confidence come from exposure to different situations in organizations and training and development programs could include these elements (London & Sherman, 2021). Ozkazanc-Pan (2021) warned that with the growing future of work in the gig economy, leadership training in organizations is declining and will specifically impact diversity, new generations, women, or minorities. With the inclusion of GEN Y and Z into the workforce, their level of technology intelligence, and their desire to contribute actively to the organization, management ought to become innovative in their leadership approaches, and leaders must seek personal and organizational leadership development (Lakshmypriya & Ramakrishna, 2020). Kniffin et al. (2020) questioned that if leadership training programs meet the objective of producing effective leaders that organizations need and if leadership programs are not developed or preach a stereotypical ideology of what leadership traditionally represented. Leadership development inspires self-confidence; however, different leadership approaches are required based on internal and external factors

impacting the organization. Do organizations use a standard leadership training program where experiential and theoretical training would benefit the organization the most? Leadership is a combination of training and development opportunities that increase the skills and competencies and build the confidence of identified leaders in an organization.

Leadership styles are an opportunity that may provide an impactful result for an individual when leaders are inspirational motivators, or the leader could instill self-confidence in their followers. Leadership is the ability to inspire and motivate people with a vision of how to accomplish the mission collectively, and management is the utilization of tools and resources made available to execute the plan to achieve the mission (Northouse, 2022). Leaders mediate the relationship or partnership between leaders and followers (Korzynski et al., 2021). Kniffin et al. (2020) proposed that leaders are inspirational and understand how to motivate and guide team members to have a common purpose. Management develops, manages, and implements the resource (human, financial, technology) plan needed to execute the vision provided by a leader. Leadership styles and self-confidence come from a new leader's maturity over time with exposure to different situations from internal and external impacts and develop their abilities to become a competent leader possessing the right behaviors, outcomes, and identity business owners need for organizational success (London & Sherman, 2021). Leadership styles and experiences assist leaders in effectively managing the human financial and technology resources required for profitability. Leadership in organizations could inspire and motivate skilled workers to accomplish the goals and objectives needed for organizational competitiveness and profitability.

Leadership in organizations means the different skills, attributes, and styles needed to effectively communicate the goals and objectives to employees to achieve profitability. Northouse (2022) contributed to the understanding of leadership, including traits, skills, and the impact of situations that influence what leadership style to use, to inspire change. Leadership is not only a personal trait or skill, but individuals must also incorporate organizational leadership competencies (strategic planning, resolving day-to-day operational issues) to ensure effectiveness (Anghel, 2022). Leadership requires two-way communication between a leader and their followers. Also, knowledge sharing is essential to foster a respectful partnership; at the right time, the leader positively influences followers (Gerpott et al., 2020). Gig work has created new relationships and opportunities for leaders by forcing them to gain new knowledge and competencies in managing and motivating gig workers (Scully-Russ & Torraco, 2020). Developing a positive leadership style facilitates a partnership between leader and follower, increasing employee engagement needed to accomplish work (Yan et al., 2023).

Adopting a collaborative partnership between leaders and followers is an important characteristic of successful leaders, playing a pivotal role in achieving the firm's success (Plachy & Smunt, 2022). Plachy and Smunt (2022) specified that the collaboration partnership is integral to accomplishing the goals and objectives essential for the organization's overall success. Leadership theory could assist business owners in understanding the recruitment factors needed when developing recruitment strategies. Leadership is a partnership between leaders and followers to implement the goals and objectives of an organization required for competitiveness and profitability.

Leadership has many dimensions that contribute to the organization's success and develop respectful and positive relationships with followers, increasing employee commitment to accomplish the organizational goals and objectives, leading to competitiveness and profitability. Leadership is about the relationship between leaders and followers in the organization and how leaders influence followers to complete the required goals and objectives. Understanding leadership styles, traits, skills, and experiences could assist business owners in documenting these elements in recruitment factors models to attract and hire the right leaders to manage the organization.

### Gig Economy

The changing global business environment and economies are changing, and work (temporary and gigs) and workforces (gig workers, freelancers, independents) are becoming part of the new gig economy. Winston's (2001) recruitment theory emphasizes that attracting and hiring employees who would be future leaders of the organization, but in the gig economy, are companies still finding it hard to find skilled workers? There are numerous factors (technologies, knowledge, economics, demographics) changing our work and workforce into independent platform economies, leading businesses to gig platforms (Scully-Russ & Torraco, 2020). There are new types of workers, called gig workers, freelancers, solopreneurs, digital micro-entrepreneurs, hybrid workers, or temporary workers, and all have new borderless roles in the new gig economy (Hudek et al., 2020). Djankov and Saliolak (2019) characterized that gig workers (freelancers) as entrepreneurs with advantages and disadvantages over their traditional organizational workers. Gig work has created new relationships with people and organizations looking

to have services or work completed by gig workers (Scully-Russ & Torraco, 2020). Behl et al. (2022) identified that the gig economy had considerable growth potential; however, there were negative impediments such as competition, low wages, gig worker pay, and the need for gig workers to become skilled workers. Gig platforms could potentially become the major employment vehicles of the future (Herrmann et al., 2023).

With the gig economy gaining global momentum, gig work has started changing how organizations view traditional work and the varied factors changing how organizations are or need to transition to gig platforms to get work done (Scully-Russ & Torraco, 2020). Gig workers or entrepreneurs are willing to work on anything, from anywhere, and without the obligation of being an employee for organizations (Djankov & Saliolak, 2019; Hudek et al., 2020). Organizations must understand their internal organization and the external impacts of the gig economy on their division of work (between traditional skilled workers or gig workers) to access the new gig workers or entrepreneurs, changing how businesses conduct recruitment activities.

Organizations must actively review the skills and attributes needed by skilled employees and gig workers, then identify where to find these workers and establish methods to measure their effectiveness within or in the organization. Williams et al.'s (2021) assessment highlighted that what skills and experiences workers need on a gig platform using the attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) model. The ASA model parallels (supports) Winston's (2001) recruitment theory by identifying similar employee attributes businesses could use in developing strategies focused on recruiting much-needed skilled workers. Gig work challenges Winston's recruitment factors (tenets and

attributes), and the knowledge required is different from traditional work, where gig platforms do not capture a worker's basic skills that conventional recruitment strategies used to identify potential leaders or skilled workers (Banik & Padalkar, 2021; Williams et al., 2021). The ever-increasing use of advanced or disruptive technologies requires new skills, and organizations must invest in the worker's knowledge, skills, and mental well-being to meet future work demands (Djankov & Saliolak, 2019). Gig workers do not need the skills or have the desire to acquire advanced skills, as gig platforms accept self-study skills (Herrmann et al., 2023). Banik and Padalkar (2021) highlighted that specific gig platforms like Uber, Skip the Dishes, and Upwork are the new short-term employment models, with specific minimal skill levels required. Gig workers migrating to gig platforms do not need advanced skills to work on platforms and do not want to seek the skills and competencies organizational leaders require to manage their business systems.

Will the new concept of a gig worker change Winston's (2001) recruitment theory tenets and attributes and how business owners identify the skills and attributes required of skilled workers, or will owners of small businesses change their recruiting models to attract and hire temporary workers to get work done? Some gig workers are changing their career paths and knowledge base due to the lack of advanced knowledge required in the gig economy (Williams et al., 2021). With the dumbing down of skill requirements, it is clear that organizations wanting to implement disruptive technologies to increase performance effectiveness, will lack effective strategies to find and hire skilled workers, let alone leaders, who could manage the organization. Developing skills models will be challenging for organizations as gig workers do not want to develop advanced skills and

knowledge, and gig platforms do not highlight gig worker skills (Banik & Padalkar, 2021; Herrmann et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2021). Gig platforms are a chance to facilitate temporary work required by an organization. To remain competitive for skilled workers, organizations must invest in the worker's knowledge, skills, and mental well-being to meet the demands of future work (Djankov & Saliolak, 2019) even if the individual's well-being is dividing up the work internal to the organization and outsourcing temporary work to gig platforms/gig workers (projects, HR programs like recruiting). The new gig worker is not looking to work in a traditional company position; gig workers seek new digital platforms to link people looking for workers and workers looking for temporary work.

These gig platforms could improve productivity or efficiencies with gig workers, where gig workers need to experience effective feedback promptly. Williams et al. (2021) discussed that the use of gig economy digital platforms agnostic to employee corporate culture and how business recruitment now functions on these digital platforms. Banik and Padalkar (2021) specified that a new economic model for how the gig economy and its platforms will function in the current business environment, replacing the traditional corporate bricks-and-mortar economy. Hudek et al. (2020) found that gig workers are increasing in numbers; companies hire them to improve their productivity, create efficiencies, reduce internal employee risk, grow the company's competitiveness, and promote innovation. Gig platforms present opportunities and challenges for the gig worker; for example, systems that provide immediate negative feedback on performance may impact a worker's motivation and interest in participating on gig platforms

(Connelly et al., 2021). Gig platforms offer non-traditional work opportunities for gig workers who could choose their preferred tasks and choose when to complete the tasks (Banik & Padalkar, 2021). The gig approach appeals to organizations seeking efficiencies without committing to long-term relationships as with traditional employees. Gig platforms are not necessarily desirable for gig workers, as workers could experience negative feedback from a dissatisfied client, damaging their career on gig platforms. Gig or digital platforms are becoming widely used in the changing economy to drive productivity and efficiencies without commitment to gig workers, resulting in changes to organizational design and recruiting practices.

Organizations need to partner with HR departments to cope with events like quiet-quitting and the great resignation. Therefore, organizations need to evaluate their internal structure's resources (infrastructure, positions, technology) and change the competencies and micro skills required by leaders or skilled employees. With the great resignation and quiet-quitting, HR functions must adapt to the emergence of digital technologies supporting gig workers and must reinvent the ever-changing business environment as traditional workers, supported with advanced technologies, convert to gig workers (Connelly et al., 2021; Minbaeva, 2021). With technological innovations (digital and mobile), traditional workers are becoming gig workers and pose challenges for HRM due to the rapid changes in technology that are changing the processes of employee engagement and employment and the actual long-term employee commitment to an organization (Connelly et al., 2021). The authors indicated that temporary workers have micro-skills, such as specific HR skills like health & safety, instead of those of a

traditional worker. With strategic planning in organizations, HRM has to prioritize how the organization structures the delivery of work and develop skills models to attract and hire skilled workers with an understanding of the organization's operational model (Oesterreich et al., 2019; Winston, 2001). Facing challenges posed by the increasing gig economy (attracting and securing most skilled workers), organizations strive to comprehend the internal knowledge needed by gig skilled workers following the division of work (internal organizational design) between full-time employment and gig worker requirements. Organizational leaders must participate in the gig economy, seeking the micro-skills required to implement specific goals and objectives (Banik & Padalkar, 2021). Gig workers are now globally accessible and could provide regional expertise on specific organizational strategies (Hudek et al., 2020).

Given that organizations are now creating divisions of work into core work activities verses gig work, therefore will the division of work change the original tenets of Winston's recruitment theory? With the globalization of work, HR departments need to understand the impact of disruptive technologies needed by the organization, the workforce required to implement and manage disruptive technologies, and the opportunity to know what work is short-term (gig work) and long-term (traditional) to guide organizations through the various global events such as quiet-quitting and the great resignation.

### *RBV*

RBV theory grew from the "growth of a firm" theory (Penrose, 1959) and how it employs resources (human, financial, technology) to increase a firm's productivity to

achieve competitiveness and profitability. The purpose of RBV theory is to achieve

competitiveness and profitability by managing all corporate resources (human, financial,

technology) available to leaders (Wernerfelt, 1984), incorporating internal (operational)

and external (industry, political, economic) factors. From early research, Penrose (1959)

developed a theory of 'the growth of the firm' that portrayed a firm's human resources

that the critical driver of determinant factors in a firm's ability to grow or decline and that

a firm's knowledge is a crucial factor in the firm's productivity capabilities. Garnsey

(1998) completed an analysis of Penrose's 1959 theory that conceptualizing the

beginning of a resource-based approach for companies and organizations having the

proper internal long-term structured governance to achieve sustained growth and

competitive advantage in a volatile marketplace. Wernerfelt (1984) introduced RBV

theory that took a different approach to analyzing a firm based on its resources rather

than its products. Wernerfelt's approach was in its infancy but opened new strategic

management considerations. He stated that a firm's growth strategy needed to strike a

balance between resources (human, technology, financial) for the organization and

resources for product development. Penrose (2009) reaffirmed that resource-based theory

focused on effectively managing the firm's resources within its human, financial, and

technology processes and how to plan their use to support and create a more productive

operation. When growing an organization, leaders need to understand that resources

within a firm drive its growth and profitability (Penrose, 1959). RBT is more than just

human resources; it is the employment of all resources (human, financial, technology)

available to the organization Wernerfelt (1984). RBV theory complements recruitment by

highlighting the tenets and attributes of leaders needed to employ resources effectively

for competitiveness and profitability (Barney, 1991). The RBV theory evolved from a

comprehensive understanding of the essential elements necessary for achieving

competitiveness and profitability within an organization, developing an enduring

governance structure to manage the firm's resources efficiently.

Over the last 30 years, RBV researchers have identified human resources as a

firm's valuable resource. Therefore, organizational leaders must develop the right

recruitment strategies to acquire skilled resources that could operate in each business unit

governed by processes to gain more effectiveness and efficiency in operations. Over the

years, researchers expanded upon Wernerfelt's (1984) RBV theory, understanding each

resource and its contribution to the organization's success. In 1995, Wernerfelt

determined that a firm needed a governance structure to ensure firms successfully

managed internal resources for a competitive advantage and profit maximization

(Wernerfelt, 1995). RBV strategic planning in organizations must incorporate external

environmental factors (policies, industry standards, crises) to gain or maintain a

competitive advantage and profitability (Lee, 2021). Barney et al. (2021) studied the

progression of RBV over 30 years (1991–2021); his (Barney, 1991) writings on RBV

formed the cornerstone of strategic management, resource alignment with a competitive

advantage, to finally incorporate the different business units (the whole of the

organization), and industries that firms operate in (external environment) 30 years of

research by Wernerfelt and Barney contributed to the understanding and utilization of an

organization's effective use of a firm's resources, contributing to increased productivity.

Organizations must implement and employ a structured governance framework

incorporating internal and external factors (Wernerfelt, 1995). In recruitment, a firm must

attract and hire skilled workers who could lead the organization in the short term (skilled

worker) or long term (potential future leader) by effectively employing all resources to

gain a competitive advantage and profitability.

Human capital and human resources management strategies within organizations

must use RBV theory to recognize the importance of skilled leaders managing valuable

resources and developing a governance structure to employ all resources effectively.

Collins (2021) highlighted that human capital (HC) strategies lead to a firm's competitive

advantage in cultivating skilled workers that are rare and valuable. Collins argued that

RBV is not the only view to a firm's success; he indicated that a firm requires human

capital HR strategies that will lead to increased productivity and a competitive advantage.

Hilmawan and Clark (2021) considered a macro-level view of resource dependency and

its positive global impact on a country's GDP. Countries that develop and cultivate their

HC could triumph over other countries and increase the country's economic GDP

(Hilmawan & Clark, 2021; Shaw, 2021). Penrose (2009) confirmed the use of HC within

a firm and that managers possess the skills and competencies to decide what strategies the

firm needs to succeed and how to manage the resources effectively to achieve the goals

and objectives. Strategic human resources management (HRM) on RBV has sparked vast

amounts of research on the linkages of HRM and confirmation that HRM strategically

adds value and depth to the firm's competitive advantage (Shaw, 2021). Organizations

need a strategic governance structure that values all the firm's resources and a need to

focus on the organization's recruitment strategies to obtain the right skilled workers to lead, be competitive, and be profitable (Wernerfelt, 1995). Over time, RBV expanded its conceptual frameworks and extension of resource-based theories, not to replace RBV but to provide rich data about distinctive human capital resources, complexity, and challenges related to attracting and retaining a skilled labor force (Shaw, 2021). HC and HRM strategies are used to seek skilled resources and to gain a competitive advantage within a structured organization that could effectively manage resources.

RBV is vastly different from Winston's (2001) recruitment theory, as research supports the concept of viewing all of the firm's internal resources as a path to increased corporate productivity (Barney, 1991); hence, the need for Winston's concept of identifying future leaders to manage the organization and its resources. RBV is comparable to recruitment theory because RBV is on managing and developing human resources to achieve productivity goals. Recruitment is identifying resources with the right skills to manage the firm's resources. Therefore, I used RBV as one of my main comparative theories as it contributes to understanding recruiting factors. Business owners could develop strategies to successfully attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers to manage the organization and its resources.

### *HCT*

The benefits of employees with lifelong learning goals of increasing their skills, competencies, and experiences will increase the organization's productivity levels to achieve competitiveness and profitability (economic value). HCT is the investment (personal or corporate) in human capital that builds and develops personal attributes such

as knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, and experiential learning of individuals

required to operate and manage a business to increase productivity (Becker, 1962).

Becker's premise of HCT assumed that a person's education and knowledge were the

determining factors of marginal productivity of labor, which also dictated that person's

income. HCT is a collective of works and contributions from different researchers that

make the base elements of the theory (production function, human capital formation, and

measures of the returns to schooling). Becker (1962) suggested that a skilled worker

acquires experience, knowledge, and education over their lifetime, which owners of small

businesses could place into a skills framework consistent with Winston's (2001)

recruitment frameworks. Organizational leaders use Winston and Becker's frameworks to

attract and hire the right skilled worker for open positions to lead their organization.

Understanding HCT, Becker expected that a person's skills and competencies to

contribute to productivity; competency frameworks or profiles could be used to develop

for each position within the firm, making recruitment more targeted (entry-level versus

leadership or future leader potential).

The relative importance of skills and competencies (factors) of individuals

acquired from personal or career decisions is the baseline understanding of recruitment

theory (individuals possess skills and competencies). Becker's (1962) study and

exploration of HCT introduced a novel perspective on the factors influencing

productivity levels expected from skilled workers. Becker observed that these diverse

productivity levels directly impact the competitiveness and profitability of the

organization. HCT highlights that skilled workers need to have (and acquire) knowledge

and education to become skilled workers over their lifetime to increase the marginal

productivity of the firm to realize profitability (Becker, 1962). Developing skills models

based on the HCT dimension of skills and competencies will assist in developing

recruitment strategies to attract and hire the right skilled worker.

HCT elements are integral to an organization's recruitment processes, and

different technologies will assist HR in reaching all age groups of skilled workers. Souto-

Otero and Białowolski (2021) expanded human capital theory elements (human, network,

and reputational capital) to illustrate that the applicability and importance of different

strategies in a firm's recruitment processes.

Villeda and McCamey (2019) linked HCM, recruitment, and technology,

emphasizing that the use of social networking sites (SNS) for attracting and retaining

skilled workers to gain or maintain a competitive advantage. Briscariu (2019) confirmed

that using SNSs is a new opportunity for a firm's recruiting and selecting (recruitment)

processes incorporating SNSs, which are no longer for Gen Y or Z but applicable to all

generations of skilled human capital. Briscariu (2019), Souto-Otero and Białowolski

(2021), Villeda and McCamey (2019) all acknowledged that the linkages between

recruitment theory tenets and HCT's concept of HC for the firm. What different HC

recruiting strategies were essential to attract, recruit, hire, and retain the diverse levels of

skilled workers? Leaders use HCT elements to consider the organization as a whole. With

the support of technology, organizational leaders could understand the linkages between

recruitment and HCT theories to identify and hire the right skilled worker.

Organizational leaders with knowledge-based workers within a human capital network may be able to increase their organization's marginal productivity. HCT is the basis of human resources management in companies. With support from industry and political stakeholders to create and manage government regulations on skilled workers programs, organizations could remain competitive and profitable (Wright & Constantin, 2021). Marginson (2019) contended that HC theory assumes a worker's skills and competencies increase the company's marginal productivity, creating competitiveness and profitability, but no research data is available that proves this assertion. Canibano and Potts (2019) introduced an evolutionary model of economic thought called *'meso perspective'* that would extend HC theory. Canibano and Potts proposed that people occupy a single node in a complex interconnected network of economic factors such as employment, unemployment, skills, careers, education, government regulations, and other economic factors needed in producing a human factors index. The idea of an evolutionary model says that interconnectedness is not just an individual HC factor but is also a social influence on the individual's growth (knowledge and competencies).

HCT researchers have identified and presented novel approaches that expand upon the total construct of human capital. Human capital is a complex network of employees with individual and corporate knowledge who work together to increase marginal productivity (Canibano & Potts, 2019; Marginson, 2019). Understanding the knowledge carriers' skills and competencies could assist business owners in developing human factors indexes, which could be used to construct recruitment strategies. Human capital is the totality of organization and individual knowledge supported by industry and

government programs for skilled workers (Wright & Constantin, 2021). The HCT supports and complements recruitment theory, providing researchers with an expanded understanding of the individual and organizational skills and competencies that drive productivity and increase competitiveness and profitability. Therefore, I chose HCT as the comparative and supportive theory of my research.

*Technology*

Organizations need skilled workers to develop and implement advanced specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) or disruptive technologies to increase productivity and profitability. Jobs are becoming increasingly scarce based on the changes in our work and HR factors impacting the organization: social, economic, demographic, political, environmental changes, and disruptive technologies (Scully-Russ & Torraco, 2020). Winston (1998) indicated that human resources are the economic engine to staff an organization's production level for competitive advantage and profitability. Industry 4.0 is becoming the new production model where SMART technologies will dominate the advancement of organizations wanting production efficiencies (Lemos et al., 2022). HR managers must develop a new conceptual model (SMART workforce competence model) to manage all human resource capabilities needed in Industry 4.0 (Dash et al., 2019). Organizations in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) work fields lack strategies to increase diversity, require innovation, and remain competitive and profitable (Ly-Le, 2022). With the changes in labor markets and the lack of skilled workers, organizational leaders need to implement SMART technologies to achieve the optimal production performance required for

profitability (Lemos et al., 2022; Ly-Le, 2022). Incorporating the changes within labor markets and skills into recruitment strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers will assist organizations in implementing the technologies needed to remain competitive and profitable.

Recruitment faces challenges due to the desire to implement new complex business systems. HCM must develop new recruitment skills and competencies to implement advanced technologies to realize production efficiencies, leading to profitability. Winston's (2001) recruitment theory incorporated that HCM by looking at a leader's skills, competencies, and qualities to advance corporate goals and objectives using different leadership styles. Recruiting is a crucial HCM challenge for company leaders who seek to recruit skilled workers to manage their complex business systems. When such efforts fail, organizational leaders stand to lose their competitive advantage (Torarcikova et al., 2020). Traditional recruiting methods are time-consuming, costly, and painful for companies and candidates to get through (Dhanala & Radha, 2020). For instance, organizations in the Midwest (manufacturing sector) confirmed the increased recruiting challenges faced regionally by skilled workers to manage their advanced business systems needed for production efficiencies (Schake & Craft, 2019). Winston (2001) premised that attracting and identifying skilled workers with appropriate business skills would become the leaders and drivers for the firm's future. Recruitment is a critical activity for organizations struggling to find skilled resources. It cannot upgrade or renew their internal infrastructure with leading-edge technologies needed for production to achieve competitiveness and profitability.

Business owners could employ Winston's (2001) recruitment framework to assist in identifying and determining what recruitment factors (skills, leadership abilities, job requirements, and competencies) are needed to manage and implement advanced business systems. Chen et al. (2019) confirmed that a conceptual framework is essential in recruitment because it provides information (recruitment factors) on the impact of implementing disruptive technologies and potential strategies to overcome the lack of skilled workers for business owners to manage a company's complex business systems. There is a new type of workers for Industry 4.0 (independent, gig, self-employed, casual, informal workers) that challenge business owners to develop frameworks based on positions required, level of skills and competencies needed, organizational structure of the future, and other environmental factors to integrating technologies (Mehta & Awasthi, 2019). Fachrunnisa and Hussain (2020) mapped out a detailed methodology framework to show the HR supply chain (recruitment pool of workers), then looked at how a blockchain platform (leading-edge technology) that could accept the internal inputs from a company to develop a competency model for skilled workers. Industry 4.0 will challenge business owners compelled to implement advanced or disruptive technologies (Mehta & Awasthi, 2019). Business owners could develop structured frameworks based on skills and competencies, future positions required (gig work or traditional positions), and the knowledge a competitive and profitable organization needs (Chen et al., 2019; Fachrunnisa & Hussain, 2020). Organizational leaders need recruiting frameworks to identify the attributes required by skilled workers and to minimize the time and difficulties associated with and within recruitment processes.

Advancements in technology could assist organizations in experiencing efficiencies in recruitment and operations, finding the right skilled worker, and understanding the challenges of not implementing innovative technologies replacing obsolete technologies. Dash et al. (2019) underscored that the onset of the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) and how organizations want internal digitization but need help finding skilled workers to manage the transition to new technology. Chen et al. (2019) underlined the impact of disruptive technology on incumbent skilled workers who use older technologies, only to become an obsolete skilled worker potentially. Companies that could implement a new eHRM (human resource management information system) with the right skilled worker for end-to-end talent management and their HR recruiting processes, will reduce time and money for the firm (Krithika et al., 2019). Krithika et al. (2019) also acknowledged that the future for companies is using advanced technology and artificial intelligence to recruit skilled workers to manage their business and remain competitive. Organizations are in dissimilar stages of development and implementation of leading-edge technologies that will contribute to their national economic competitiveness but face barriers (skilled workers, financial abilities, institutional support, and commitment by businesses) to achieving corporate technology goals (Skorobogatova & Kravchuk, 2020). Not transitioning to disruptive technologies will not create the efficiencies a firm needs to maintain its competitive advantage and corporate profitability (Torarcikova et al., 2020). Disruptive technologies need specific skilled workers to implement the new systems. The lack of skilled workers could challenge business owners, but implementing new eHRM systems and artificial intelligence (AI)

will assist in finding the right person (Chen et al., 2019; Krithika et al., 2019).

Implementing disruptive technologies could achieve competitiveness and profitability while contributing to the economic value of a nation (Skorobogatova & Kravchuk, 2020). Implementing disruptive technologies will increase the economic value of organizations and ensure their long-term sustainability by using the right skilled workers to implement and manage complex, disruptive business systems.

### *Skills and Competencies*

Some key tenets of Winston's (2001) recruitment theory are a person's qualities, skills, knowledge, and leadership abilities (attributes, traits, competencies) contributing to the firm's success. Schake and Craft (2019) highlighted that the need for more STEM skills as a gap among the new generation of workers entering the workforce. Schake and Craft highlighted several challenges with recruiting, including the need for more labor market information and a lack of knowledge of career paths for the new generation of workers to replace baby boomers retiring. Mishra et al. (2019) identified that a severe technology skills gap, specifically cyber security, critical to combating bad actors wanting to shut down or hold hostage critical organizational data until the money is paid and then the data restored to normal operations. Torarcikova et al. (2020) identified that employees need to increase their skills due to disruptive technologies needed and used by companies. With the lack of technical skills (STEM), organizations risk achieving optimal organizational performance to meet the goals and objectives required for competitiveness and profitability.

Institutions could develop skilled workers who are SMART. A SMART organization, leveraging SMART technologies, requires a workforce that possesses competencies in technological advancements, skills, and capabilities. Additionally, a SMART workforce must adapt to corporate environmental changes, including shifts in policy, culture, the future of work, the emergence of new generations, and the increasing globalization of the workforce (Dash et al., 2019). Mishra et al. (2019) recognized that the need for cybersecurity technology programming at institutions and the increasing lack of skilled workers in this extraordinarily complex industry. Education and training institutions must take leadership in preparing skilled workers so their competencies for digital readiness are evident for future labor market needs (Bartusevičienė & Valionienė, 2022). Fachrunnisa and Hussain (2020) highlighted that the importance of organizations working with training institutions to develop a standardized skills and competencies model using disruptive technologies and formalizing the model into a certified training program(s) to address the skills and competencies gap. The labor market is experiencing a skills gap for new SMART and disruptive technologies (Dash et al., 2019; Schake & Craft, 2019). Organizations need to find ways to assist in identifying the gaps in skills and competencies and develop formal education programs to fill the gaps identified.

Comparative theories and supporting concepts allow readers to see what elements contribute to a need for individuals to develop and increase their skills and competencies. The impact upon organizations is when resources are scarce, skills are tough to find, and the organization needs help managing its strategic resources effectively and efficiently. Identifying the skills and competencies required to manage organizational resources

could assist business owners in developing the skills and competencies necessary to attract and hire skilled workers. The changing work environment is due to workers becoming independent to seek a work–life balance, working anytime, anyplace, and on any type of desirable work. Organizations seek leaders to develop partnerships with employees to implement goals and objectives to achieve profitability effectively. Leaders need to understand the internal HCM objectives and the impacts of the external environment on corporate resources (human, financial, and technology).

**Contrasting Theories to Recruitment Theory**

Several theories contrast with Winston's (2001) recruitment theory; I explored two theories: agency theory and RDT. Agency theory is about the actions one person (agent) takes on behalf of an organization (agency). Throughout the research on agency theory, I discovered elements of recruitment theory by the agents needing the skills and experiences to represent the organization (agency) best. RDT revolves around the impact of external resources on organizations and their influence on organizational behaviors and leadership decisions. RDT compares with recruitment theory, where organizations seek leaders capable of navigating the complexities imposed by external resources with significant influence over the organization. Agency theory and RDT, chosen as contrasting theories, incorporate elements consistent with recruiting factors necessary for skilled workers for the organization.

*Agency Theory*

Individuals are considered their own representatives (agents); Individuals develop skills and competencies to create long-term success within an organization that sees them

as agents extending its economic value. An agent (skilled worker) has an economic value

to an organization, and the institutional agency is the support for an agent to make

corporate economic value (Mitnick, 2019). Bandura (1989) communicated that the

concept of human agency, within a social cognitive theory, is that a person is their own

agent influenced by internal and external environments, and hired by a firm to function as

its agent. Bandura expanded human agency theory as career human agency theory

(CHAT) and highlighted four pillars (career intentionality, career forethought, and career

self-reactiveness). These pillars provided a complex interconnected career counseling

model and guide that considers a total picture of the influences upon a person's

development (Bandura, 2006). Bandura also indicated that organizations took the

initiative to create knowledge for their agents, thus becoming the career counselor.

Connecting Bandura's 1989 agency theory concept with Winston's (2001) recruitment

theory, readers could deduce a person who steers their life toward a profession (such as

librarian), decides what training and professional development needed to become a

skilled worker, incorporating the internal or external influences to make such decisions,

and finally acts as an agent on behalf of the organization that employs them. Mitnick

(2019) stated that agency theory is about a person being their own agent and having the

skills and competencies to act as an organizational agent to create economic value. The

evolution of agency theory explains that the agent (skilled worker) supports an

organization to create economic value (Bandura 1989, 2006). Agents continually improve

their knowledge and skills to create economic value as agents for their organization.

Human agency theory integrates with comparative theories supporting the concept that individuals are their career planners. Human agency theory aligns well with Becker's (1962) HCT, where human capital develops to meet its contract with a company and is motivated to continue increasing its knowledge. Shapiro (2005) authored an essay on agency theory from a sociological perspective; he indicated that agency (synonymous with aliases like bureaucracy, organizations, professions, roles, markets, labor, government, family, trust, and social exchange) is a person's ability to act on 'their' behalf. Bandura (1989) and Becker (1962) supported Shapiro's ideas and writings that where a person is their particular agent in life and controls or creates a path of success as suggested in human capital theory. Agency theory aligns with HCT, where workers develop their skills and knowledge to function as agents for organizations (agencies) to create economic value (Bandura, 1989; Becker, 1962; Shapiro, 2005). Agency theory has different supportive theories that have illustrated agents and agencies and the need for skilled workers to increase their knowledge to become effective agents for organizations (agencies), raising a firm's economic value.

Internal and external environments are related to all aspects of a person's chosen domain that contribute to the social context needed to develop models or incentives in attracting the right corporate agent (skilled worker). Shapiro (2005) confirmed that agency theory is where agents (skilled workers) act on behalf of other agents (aliases). In a social sciences context, Shapiro discussed a need for more focused research on the relationships between writings and publications within their social contexts. Chen and Hong (2020) studied agency theory and developed a concept/model that contributed to

the numerous career theories used by organizations. Expanding upon Bandura's (2006, 2020) human agency theory work, Chen and Hong developed a career human agency theory (CHAT) model, encompassing the idea that a person's self and how to design their life based on financial survival. Bandura (1989) and Becker (1962) both supported the concept that a person is their own agent with the ability to create a 'path to success' by increasing their knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, training, and professional development.

Shapiro supported the agency theory concept, and her research examined the relationship between scholarly research and the social context of each writing. That encompassed a totality of the environment and what incentives in those environments are optimal to attract suitable agents (skilled workers), who will create economic value for the principals (organization). Winston (2001) noted that a person understands the importance of knowing the essential skills and traits needed as a successful leader; organizations seek skilled workers who will function as the corporate agents making critical decisions required for competitiveness and profitability. Agency theory incorporates new paradigms that contribute to recruiting incentives to attract and hire the right agent to create economic value (Bandura, 1989; Becker, 1962). Researchers in all domains (such as healthcare, technology, and librarian services) need to understand more about the social context of each domain and highlight the skills development dynamic of agents using CHAT skills models (Chen & Hong, 2020; Shapiro, 2005). Business owners could take advantage of available literature and optimal models to develop recruitment

strategies to attract, recruit, and hire the right agent to create economic value for the organization (Shapiro, 2005).

Agency theory is about an individual making strategic decisions for the organization (principal). Recruitment theory takes into consideration factors such as skills, competencies, and experiences, which an individual should have that make them attractive to an organization to act as their agent. Therefore, I did not use agency theory as a fundamental theory or framework supporting recruitment theory, but a theory that differs with elements of skills and competencies.

### RDT

RDT focuses on the complex external environment and the opportunities or challenges in obtaining resources for internal operations managed by leaders to create economic value for the organization. Organizations are complex and dependent on the external environment for resources, and the outer (social or political) environment significantly influences internal decisions by management (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Pfeffer and Salancik also conveyed that the strategic consideration for the RDT concept concerns the supply of resources (regionally, globally), who controls them (internally and externally), and the importance of resources on the organization (criticality). Decisions internal to the organization are formulated and owned by management concerning the use of all resources for strategic purposes, and management retains the consequences of their choices (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2019). Mizruchi and Schwartz (1987) also mentioned that these influences (external resource dependence and internal power struggles) create uncertainty in decisions-making it more complex to manage resource dependence

(political or organizational). RDT is concerned with actions firms could take to manage contextual dependencies and suggests that business units are differentially valuable in dealing with challenges emanating from their external environment (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2019; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). RDT differs from recruitment theory, where RDT focuses on the external dependencies of raw resources (human, financial, technical) and organizations' actions to manage the resources effectively.

RDT explains the importance of reducing environmental risk, uncertainty, and codependence on external resources while managing strategic social/political relationships. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) introduced RDT and the purpose of RDT is that independent firms need to understand and control their resource dependencies (externally and internally) that could negatively impact the firm's performance. Pfeffer (1982) expanded his previous research on the complex environments (internal and external) for making business decisions and how to effectively manage external environments (social, business, political) resource dependence. Pfeffer (1991) identified that the influence of one's position in a company is based on their stature or perceived stature in the external environment (social and political). Pfeffer (1982, 1991) specified that the process of improving upon previously written RDT and assisted in developing new organizational theories. Pfeffer's examination of how external resource dependency impacts various elements guided the firm in actively managing resource dependency to mitigate uncertainty and make informed business decisions. Pfeffer also identified the power one could achieve when utilizing resources effectively in strategic processes. resource dependency focuses on the dependence on external resources and the

uncertainty and risks to the organization, the strategic relations required to acquire

resources, and the effective use of those resources for the organization to create economic

value.

Internal politics (independents or agents) and decision-making could be

challenging for the organization but significantly reduce risk and uncertainty. RDT

applies to subsidiaries of multinationals, which are independent organizations with the

power to make and own their decisions (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2019). Alternatively,

Curervo-Cazurra noted that subsidiaries controlled by multinational companies are

designated as agents within the framework of agency theory. Shapiro (2005) confirmed

the understanding that an agent acts on behalf of another, in this case, the multinational.

Caillier's (2021) work underlined that the challenges with internal politics where higher-

ranking people in the firm avoided remediation of issues and problems, whereas lower-

ranked positions were more disciplined for issues and concerns than leadership. Internal

politics could create power struggles between leaders and followers within the

management of an organization (Pfeffer, 1982, 1991). Ineffective management decisions

from power leaders in independent organizations do not face negative consequences as

much as lower-level workers do (Mizruchi & Schwartz, 1987). Internal conflict could

create a toxic work environment for lower-level skilled workers, creating turnover.

Managing internal and external relationships is challenging for organizations and

is exponentially difficult when top management turnover (TMT) and political turnovers

are high. Sutton et al. (2021) challenged Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) idea that resource

dependence differs from uncertainty and turnover and how both impact the organization's

internal behavior and decision-making. Sutton et al. (2021) floated that a firm's TMT and regional political turnover decreased the organization's ability to manage resource dependence effectively, creating uncertainty. Additionally, the TMT and political uncertainty cloud decision-making by management to oversee operations and manage internal/external relationships. TMT and political turnover directly affect the organization's decision-making, thus creating more uncertainty and risk.

Organization members who practice resource dependency diversification (alternative sources of organizational resources) could sustain critical relationships (internally and externally), mitigating turnover and uncertainty (Jaafar et al., 2023). Wang and Liu (2021) pointed out that reliance on external global supply chains could provide depth (firm buys most of their production resources) in a global marketplace that practices resource diversification. In practice, Schaefer (2022) applied his RDT research to the U.S. Veterans Affairs (VA) department about their internal and external programs, and that the critical relationships to support veteran programs, specifically homeless veterans. Schaefer indicated that their reliance on relationships with external agencies is vital, and the department must practice resource diversification to ensure veteran programs across the U.S.A. By developing and implementing a resource dependency diversification strategy, organizations could mitigate resource dependency risk or uncertainty (Jaafar et al., 2023; Wang & Liu, 2021). Resource diversification will improve the challenges of TMT and political uncertainties and relationships from turnover (Jaafar et al., 2023). Practicing resource diversification regionally and globally will improve uncertainty and risk, reduce TMT, and provide operational effectiveness for

production. Recruitment theory relates to the attributes (skills, knowledge, competencies, and experience) that are important to the organization in seeking skilled workers that could lead the organization to competitiveness and profitability (Winston, 1998, 2001).

Contrasting theories, such as agency theory and RDP, provide an understanding that people are their agents, needing to develop their skills and competencies to manage organizations (principals or agencies). Multinationals employ agents in two ways: one is to provide the organization with independent authority over its resources, and organizations depend on multinationals to make decisions on their behalf, limiting the agents' ability to manage resources to achieve competitiveness and profitability effectively.

Recruitment theory is about individuals' career paths based on influences from their internal networks. Individuals acquire skills, competencies, knowledge, and experiences that could be summarized in frameworks or models, supporting business owners in formulating recruitment strategies to attract and hire skilled workers. Comparative theories and supporting concepts such as leadership are a way for leaders to build partnerships with skilled workers to achieve goals and objectives. The gig economy significantly impacts recruitment as organizations must determine the division of work that gig workers could do on gig platforms. RBV enlightens how the resources that organizations could leverage to attain sustainable competitive advantage and profitability. HCT discusses the increased support in developing skills and competencies that could contribute to increased marginal productivity, creating economic value for the organization. Digitization, significantly influenced by technology, plays a crucial role in

enhancing the organization by increasing production levels. However, the availability of

skilled workers possessing the necessary expertise in disruptive technologies remains

limited. Skills and competencies highlighted the need for leaders to develop skills,

knowledge, competencies, and experience of skilled workers (attributes) to effectively

manage the organization's resources (human, financial, technology) to achieve

competitiveness and profitability. Given the impact of these comparative theories and

concepts highlighted the potential attributes used in developing recruitment strategies.

Contrasting theories such as agency theory and RDT are different theories with some

recruitment theory elements (skills and competencies to manage the organization).

Agency theory defines that people are agents and must develop their skills and

competencies, becoming more effective leaders for principals or agencies (organizations)

with strategic resources needing agents (skilled workers) to manage. RDT concerns the

dependency on external resources and the impact of the organization's internal behaviors

in managing resources available to them (human, financial, technology), achieving

competitiveness and profitability.

## Transition

In Section 1, I presented the background of the problem, the problem statement,

the purpose statement, and the nature of the study. These elements of recruitment theory

and research data supported Winston's (2001) conceptual framework on recruiting factors

business owners could use to develop recruitment strategies to hire or retain skilled

workers. The literature review covered recruitment theory in practice. It introduced

contributing elements of leadership theory that Winston discussed in his theory and

comparative theories and concepts like gig economy, RBV, human capital theory, technology, skills, and competencies. These supportive theories and concepts explain how workers develop the skills, knowledge, competencies, and experiences needed to become leaders. Additionally, a review of contrasting theories, agency theory and RDT, provide connections to recruitment theory, but the differences these theories present support recruitment theory.

Section 2 includes my study's problem and purpose statements, the role of the researcher, the study's participants, the research method available to researchers, research design, population and sampling, ethical research for the study's participants, data collection instruments available, data collection techniques, data organization technique, data analysis, and the reliability and validity of a study's data.

In Section 3, I introduce and convey the findings of my study to readers. Section 3 includes a summary of the study's results, a presentation of the findings, how the research will apply to business practices, and information on the implications for social change. Additional elements include recommendations for further action, reflections on my doctoral study journey, and an impactful conclusion for readers of my doctoral study.

Section 2: The Project

The elements in Section 2 include the purpose statement, my role as the researcher, and the study's research methods and designs. In addition, Section 2 points out the participants' eligibility criteria, population, and sampling information, as well as participants' confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, privacy, ethical research, data collection instruments, collection techniques, data organization technique, data analysis, reliability and validity, and data saturation.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. The targeted population for participation in the study was three to eight owners of small businesses throughout Canada who have developed and implemented successful recruitment strategies to identify skilled employees to remain competitive and profitable. The implications for positive social change include the potential for small business owners to identify and provide different strategies used in their efforts to reduce the high levels of unemployment in their communities and increase the standard of living for marginalized groups, thereby creating a self-regulating business model that helps them be socially accountable to themselves, their stakeholders, and the public at large.

**Role of the Researcher**

Engaging in qualitative research provides an opportunity to explore a phenomenon, gain insights into the researched issue, and contribute to a body of

knowledge for future readers (Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers who craft their research

meticulously could make meaningful contributions within their field (Peterson, 2019).

Tomaszewski et al. (2020) provided a framework for qualitative researchers to identify

participants, construct a research question, collect data through techniques such as

interviewing, and analyze data using methods such as thematic analysis. Researchers

must remain attentive, transcribe the interviewee's experiences with accuracy, and ensure

that the principles related to validity and reliability are evident (Paraskevopoulou-Kollia,

2019). Yin (2018) indicated that the researcher in a qualitative study is the primary

instrument in data collection. I was this study's primary data collection instrument, and I

designed a study roadmap to collect, interpret, and analyze the data. I conducted

semistructured interviews of three to eight business owners who perform recruitment and

retention activities to attract, recruit, hire, or retain skilled employees. Additionally, I

captured data from peer-reviewed literature on recruitment, public sources, interview

notes, and company websites. I have worked in human resources for over 30 years and

have recruited skilled workers. I intend to recruit small business owners who have

successfully used recruitment strategies to recruit and retain skilled employees to

maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable.

The ethical standards and procedures required by Walden University's

Institutional Review Board (IRB) indicate that researchers must ensure the rights and

privacy needed to protect each participant's confidentiality. The *Belmont Report* noted

these ethical standards based on three main principles: respect, beneficence, and justice

(National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). Per these ethical standards and Walden

University IRB requirements, study participant recruitment and data gathering could only

start once the IRB had approved my proposed research activities (IRB approval no. 11-

22-23-1031175). Initially, I distributed the informed consent form to potential candidates,

indicating the purpose and process involved during the interviewing events. Once

confirmed, I spread the partnership agreement to all participating business owners for

their consent, allowing me to collect interview data and other sources of information the

organization wanted to share. I ensured that participants understood the voluntary nature

of their participation, including their ability to withdraw from the interview at any time.

Participants could freely express their thoughts and ideas on all research questions. I

ensured participants could discuss anything relating to the research questions and would

address any concerns that arose during the engagement process.

Researchers require an awareness of their personal biases based on their

experiences and competencies in the field of study (Kross & Giust, 2019). As a

researcher, I must also be cognizant of participant bias and ensure that I recruit

participants with the required knowledge for a study. Further, researchers must ensure

that participants understand their role in the research. The confirmatory process (i.e.,

member checking) allows participants to accurately authenticate their lived experiences

(Whitmore et al., 2019). A researcher must align their interview questions with the

research question to avoid any structural bias in questioning participants; questions must

proceed to allow participants to freely express themselves and explore the phenomenon in

depth (Roberts, 2020).

In designing the various elements of my study (research question, interview protocol [see Appendix A], interview questions [see Appendix B], and data coding), I have understood potential personal and participant biases and developed strategies to minimize them. My background as an HR manager and recruiter has equipped me to accurately document participants' experiences, ensuring that my own experiences, skills, and values do not bias the interpretation of the data collected.

In qualitative studies, Paraskevopoulou-Kollia (2019) determined that the primary way to capture research data is through the interview method. Semistructured interviews are the most effective method in qualitative research to penetrate the detailed lived experiences of interviewees (Ruslin et al., 2022). Semistructured interviews are the best method to collect data from the interaction of two people; the interview ignites the mental processes of the interviewee. Using the interview framework consistently can capture rich data with neutrality and validity (Dolczewski, 2022). A well-constructed and refined interview protocol allows participants to articulate their lived experiences in the data collection process (Braaten et al., 2020).

Because semistructured interviews are an effective process to gather data related to lived experiences, I used this method, structured it correctly, and used the same interview protocol to collect data from all participating business owners to answer my central research question. During my semistructured interviews, I listened to the small business owners' views and recruitment strategies, transcribed their data, and had the interviewees verify the data to ensure that their ideas and strategy accurately reflected their business problems (i.e., I used member checking). Presenting the data after member

checking ensures validity and less interviewer bias in communicating the business owners' lived experience in identifying, recruiting, and retaining skilled employees.

## Participants

Yin (2018) suggested that researchers use a one-phased approach to define the participant criteria (operational criteria) before searching for them when selecting case study participants. The purposive sampling technique allows a researcher to deliberately select participants with specific characteristics essential for the study (Mabaso et al., 2021). When selecting participants for qualitative studies, researchers use nonrandom participants from a group or individuals with experiences that could contribute to understanding the research topic (Knechel, 2019). Capili (2021) stated that researchers should have both inclusion and exclusion selection criteria for study participants. The participants selected for this study are business owners with a breadth of knowledge and experience in current recruitment strategies. I used the following selection criteria to identify research participants: (a) must be an owner of a small business with less than 250 employees, (b) must be actively recruiting skilled workers for their business, and (c) must have recruited skilled employees over the past 5 years. These selection criteria assisted me in answering my central research question: What recruitment strategies do owners of small businesses use to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital business systems to remain competitive and profitable?

In purposive sampling, researchers choose participants with the most knowledge in the specific field (Denieffe, 2020). Following the IRB approval, I accessed participants through my contact lists on LinkedIn's social media business site. LinkedIn is a social

media website designed for business professionals interested in connecting with professional individuals who have an interest in sharing business ideas, knowledge, and successes, as well as joining online industry groups and organizational recruiters seeking to identify business professionals who are exploring new work opportunities (Cho & Lam, 2021).

Saunders et al. (2023) suggested that researchers must (a) know more about their participants, (b) use existing business contacts, (c) provide the participant with a clear intent statement for the research, (d) tell them the benefit of their contribution to this research, and (e) establish the researcher's credibility in being able to conduct this research. The process I used for attracting participants was to provide information on LinkedIn related to the research study to gain interest and select three to eight business owners interested in participating in the study. When interested participants contacted me and provided their contact information, I emailed each individual detailing the study's objectives and how the information related to my research study. The email included a request for a verbal introductory conversation reviewing the emailed information and my appreciation for their support in providing their lived experiences and strategies to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital business systems to remain competitive and profitable.

As the researcher, I provided initial information about the study and its informed consent process to establish an essential relationship with participants and follow my study's ethical requirements, aligning with the protocol identified by Kraft et al. (2020). Understanding the process and intent of a researcher's work and a subject's participation

is essential (O'Sullivan et al., 2021). Researchers must develop the criteria to select participants who could share insights regarding the central research question. Provide participants with the informed consent form and the partnership agreement. Choosing a suitable medium to find business owners with the eligible criteria supported the credibility and trust of my research and allows me to gather the lived experiences of these leaders. Conducting a personal interview outlining the purpose of the research and participants' active support built the relationship with participants that could elicit the lived experiences required to understand what strategies business owners use to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital business systems to remain competitive and profitable.

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**Research Method and Design**

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In this study, I selected a qualitative methodology to gather data based on the lived experiences of small business owners who have developed and implemented successful recruitment strategies to identify skilled employees to remain competitive and profitable. Researchers use rigorous qualitative methods to increase their understanding of lived experiences (Draper et al., 2021). The research design will enable researchers to explore the business owner's effective recruitment strategies to answer the research question in a structured approach (Pathiranage et al., 2020). The appropriate design most suitable for my research is a multiple case study. I interviewed small business owners to explore what recruitment strategies were used to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled employees to manage their business systems.

**Research Method**

When conducting research, there are three methods available to researchers: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2023). A qualitative research study collects experiential data from structured interviews with small business owners. The data collected provides a deeper understanding of what small business owners do to identify, recruit, and retain skilled employees (Peterson, 2019). For this study, I used a qualitative research method to understand the motivations, lived experiences, and reasons small business owners select specific recruiting strategies to identify, recruit, and retain skilled employees.

Quantitative researchers focus on statistical data to examine a phenomenon and how often the event happens, using numerous data sets used in a deductive approach to assess an existing theory or hypothesis (Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, 2019). A quantitative method focused on statistical data and analysis against a current theory or hypothesis would not have answered the interview questions (see Appendix B) on identifying, recruiting, and retaining skilled employees; therefore, I did not select a quantitative method for this study.

A mixed methods approach is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods of conducting research. Researchers collect, analyze, merge the data, and draw conclusions based on qualitative and quantitative datasets (Fofana et al., 2020). Because I did not include any quantitative statistical research or analysis to understand the lived experiences of small business owners in identifying, recruiting, and retaining skilled

workers, the mixed methods approach would not have been appropriate for this research study.

**Research Design**

Saunders et al. (2023) identified several principal qualitative research designs: ethnographic, narrative, phenomenology, and case study, that can assist researchers with the opportunity to gather first-hand knowledge of participant experiences and the meaning behind them, and how those experiences drive behaviors. Qualitative study designs are complex and may challenge novice researchers (Alpi & Evans, 2019). Alignment, research questions, and collecting the data to review and analyze for themes and patterns to determine saturation requires experience; as Tomaszewski et al. (2020) noted that, designing qualitative studies is an opportunity to capture the real-world experiences, actions, or behaviors of people with complex global business problems.

For this study, I selected a multiple case study design using semistructured interviews to identify and explore what recruiting strategies business owners used to identify, recruit, and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. Most qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews, which are the best method to capture participants' lived experiences and behaviors (Renjith et al., 2021). Semistructured interviews allow researchers to gain more valuable in-depth information that could help them restructure their research questions to reflect best what their study is (Ruslin et al., 2022). Researchers use semistructured interviews to enhance their ability to obtain more information, and researchers could incorporate steps

to ensure alignment and accurate context for their study and the ability to change research questions to reflect the study's intent best.

To ensure trustworthiness in a researcher's work, additional supportive data collection methods include documentation, visual artifacts, member checking, and observations (Fisher & Bloomfield, 2019). In addition to semistructured interviews, I enhanced the data trustworthiness by reviewing the literature through Walden University's databases for peer-reviewed articles that contributed to my research topics and incorporated a member-checking technique with the participants in the study. In addition, I reviewed other publicly available documentation and an organization's website to contribute to data trustworthiness.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. The targeted population was executives in small businesses throughout Canada who have developed and implemented successful recruitment strategies to identify skilled employees to stay competitive and profitable. From this population, a sample of three to eight participants was drawn to participate in the study. The implications for positive social change include the potential for small business owners to identify and provide different strategies to use in their efforts to reduce the high levels of unemployment in their communities and increase the standard of living for marginalized groups, thereby creating a self-regulating business model that helps them be socially accountable to themselves, their stakeholders, and the public, at large.

In an ethnographic research design, the researcher observes or interacts with the participants' experiences to better understand their actions, behaviors, and motivations in a cultural setting (Bird, 2020). The purpose of an ethnography study researcher is to explore the cultural behaviors of the group's lived experiences. Ethnography is appropriate when describing how a cultural group works or exploring day-to-day lived experiences (Kassan et al., 2020). Researchers have used an ethnographic performance methodology that provides a descriptive portrayal of live experiences, allowing readers to see how the participant lives holistically (Bird, 2020). As I am not exploring or studying the specific behaviors of cultural groups or participants' lived experiences or understanding distinct cultures' business experiences or practices, an ethnographic design is inappropriate for this study.

In a narrative design, researchers explore a person's lived experiences through the untold personal stories or written words of these people (Nigar, 2020). In a narrative design approach, the researcher develops personal narratives that capture an individual's experiences or stories and uses storytelling to inform readers of those experiences and their importance (Renjith et al., 2021). Narrative design is best suited to capture the life stories of individuals over their lifetime (Pathiranage et al., 2020; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). I am not seeking to understand people's written history or personal stories, so the narrative approach is inappropriate for my study.

When using phenomenology research design, it is to describe the essence of a person's lived experience of a phenomenon. Phenomenology research design is an opportunity to capture participants' lived experiences about a single phenomenon

(Pathiranage et al., 2020). Tawodzera et al. (2022) confirmed that phenomenological

design is the ability to explore lived experiences from their perspective without any form

of or perceived pressure from social cohesion (everybody says the same thing) to say

something different. I did not select a phenomenological design because I do not need to

understand the participant-specific lived experience of a phenomenon, as my interest is

exploring what recruitment strategies business owners use to attract or hire skilled

workers.

One of the core concepts in qualitative research is when we have achieved data

saturation. Researchers achieve data saturation when 51% of interview participants reach

the same themes or data codes (Fofana et al., 2020). There is no accurate method to

calculate the sample size, but theoretical saturation could happen in less than 12

participants (Mukoka et al., 2021). For my research, I used a spreadsheet to capture all

concepts, emergent themes and supporting factors, ideas, patterns of information, and

coding to identify data saturation, which aligns with the process specified by Williams

and Moser (2019) to support data gathering. Monitoring and capturing data elements will

assist in knowing if I have achieved data saturation from the number of participants in my

semistructured interviews, publicly available information and documents, and corporate

websites.

## Population and Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting the right population that will provide in-depth

data using a define, explain, justify, applies (DEJA) strategy to identify the sampling plan

that will contribute to determining the sample size with precision and confidence (Bougie

& Sekaran, 2019; Mthuli et al., 2022). Researchers could use a one-phase approach when choosing a population within an organization and selecting up to 12 potential candidates to conduct their research (Yin, 2018). Qualitative business researchers could use purposive non-probability sampling, which is a technique deployed to avoid researcher bias and because it provides researchers with the ability to use a subset of the population to denote the total population when participants are easy to identify and engage as a participant in the research project (Knechel, 2019). Researchers choose participants from a population based on factors such as time in the company, the position held, and seniority in the company; these factors assist a researcher in determining whether participants in senior positions in organizations have the corporate knowledge of recruiting challenges or opportunities (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021).

With purposive sampling, the researcher engages only a population of specific interest and excludes those participants who do not align with the research objective (Andrade, 2021). For my study, I used a purposeful sampling of three to eight owners of small businesses who used strategies to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. The target population is business owners throughout Canada looking to hire skilled workers. I will use my LinkedIn contact list of business owners and other personal contact lists to engage potential participants.

Yin (2018) identified six possible origins of data for collection for case studies: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observations, participant-observation (different settings like site visits), and (f) physical artifacts. For

my study, I gathered data through structured interviews with three to eight small business

owners who recruit, hire, or retain skilled workers for the research. Selecting the right

participants from a population or group with lived experiences will ensure that it will

provide generalizability that could assist in answering the research question (Zickar &

Keith, 2023). When interviewing participants, it may lead to referrals (snowballing) of

other business owners with the same experiences that may provide additional data for the

study. Snowballing allows a researcher to ask interviewees for referrals who could

provide further data for a study, but it may create selection bias. To avoid selection bias

in my research, I invited three to eight small business owners from my contact sources

from the social media site LinkedIn and my personal business contacts. I did not look for

referrals from participants.

Researchers use different data sources (methodological triangulation) to ensure

rigor in their findings (Rooshenas et al., 2019). Methodological triangulation is another

measure in research coupled with techniques like interviews to determine how well the

data collection methods support each other (Ruslin et al., 2022). To ensure I provide

readers with a more comprehensive understanding and rigor of my study, I used

methodological triangulation to increase the validity of my collected data. Researchers

could use interviewing techniques and documentation analysis of peer-reviewed articles

to improve their data's validity (believability, trustworthiness) (Natow, 2020). To assist

researchers and readers in concluding a researcher's data collection, additional data

collection will not produce any further value. Researchers could process data by coding

and then identifying themes using statistical tools such as Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences and NVivo to analyze data, determine data saturation, and identify data themes (Fofana et al., 2020). Guest et al. (2020) suggested that researchers typically achieve data saturation within the first five or six interviews. Following Guest et al.'s approach, it is possible that the three to eight participants selected may provide data saturation. Data saturation is when no further themes and codes are present in the data being collected, meaning the researcher cannot require different interviewees or collect documentation for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). As I achieved data saturation, I did not continue to recruit additional interviewees to achieve data saturation.

To ensure I provide readers with a deeper understanding of my business problem, I used triangulation techniques to increase the validity of my collected data. Researchers could use interviewing techniques and documentation analysis of peer-reviewed articles to improve their data's validity (believability, trustworthiness) (Natow, 2020). To assist researchers and readers in concluding a researcher's data collection, additional data collection will not produce any further value. Data could be processed into themes and codes using statistical tools such as partial least squares regression to analyze data for saturation (Fofana et al., 2020). To assist researchers and readers in concluding a researcher's data collection, additional data collection will not produce any further value. To identify data saturation, researchers could process the data into themes and codes and use statistical tools such as partial least squares regression (Fofana et al., 2020). Guest et al. (2020) suggested that research studies typically achieve data saturation within the first five or six interviews; three to eight participants should provide data saturation. Data saturation is when no further themes and codes are present in the data analysis, meaning

no additional interviewees or documentation is required by the researcher in collecting

research data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). If I do not achieve the saturation levels needed, I

will recruit additional interviewees to perform data saturation.

## Ethical Research

Walden University requires all students to comply with the established ethical

standards to conduct research for their doctoral study (Walden University, 2016). In

compliance with Walden University's established standards, I obtained Walden's IRB

approval before conducting my research. During the development and implementation of

my research study, I maintained the highest level of professionalism and ethical behavior.

The Belmont Report (NCPHSBBR, 1979) provided direction to researchers

regarding the ethical principles and guidelines for conducting research with human

subjects. The Belmont Report has three main principles: respect for the participants in

research studies through anonymity; beneficence, protecting the participants by minimum

their participation in the survey may cause any risk or harm; and justice, ensuring the

study does not exploit all participants, treat all participants in the same manner

throughout the research and guarantee to all participants will benefit equally from any

costs and benefits (NCPHSBBR, 1979).

A well-constructed and refined interview protocol (see Appendix A) allows

participants to articulate their lived experiences in the data collection process (Braaten et

al., 2020). I have devised an interview protocol to manage the data collection process. In

the interview protocol, I outlined the research process and my strategy to gain participant

confidence in my study and encourage their participation freely (informed consent). The

decision to ensure participants have informed consent is my responsibility, and I took steps to ensure the participants' protection, anonymity, and participants self-determination, which is aligned with Kraft et al. (2020) concepts, as well as those identified by Belmont Report (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Following Braaten et al.'s approach, it should elicit broad-ranging responses to answer my research question. Following the data collection refinement process (Braaten et al., 2020) will assist me in modeling the interview questions (see Appendix B) sufficiently to strengthen and support the research question. For the novice researcher, following the interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework will substantiate and demonstrate effective interview questions and protocol and allow the novice researcher to recognize their participants' biases and personal agendas (Roberts, 2020). I followed the IPR framework, which should assist me in avoiding data collection errors, which lead to inconsistencies in research methodology and will not align with my research question.

The informed consent form is the formal communication protocol to contact participants. The informed consent form will contain the study's procedures, potential risks/burdens on participants, the inconvenience/time commitment, and breach of confidentiality risk and mitigating strategies (Kraft et al., 2020). Kraft et al. further indicated that participant involvement in research is voluntary, and the informed consent instrument will guide participants and explain their involvement in the research study. All participants in my research study will receive a copy of the informed consent form. This study is voluntary, and no participant will receive any incentive.

I crafted an email for participants for this study that will identify the study's procedures, potential risks/burdens on participants, the anticipated time commitment to participate in the interview, and confidentiality risk and mitigating strategies. Kraft et al. (2020) confirmed that participant involvement in research is voluntary; the informed consent instrument will guide participants and explain their involvement in a research study. Finally, during the informed consent process, I ensured all participants understood their right to withdraw from the study at any time. I informed participants that I will destroy the information or data collected regarding their participation by Walden's IRB requirements. Quickfall (2022) highlighted that participants could withdraw anytime during the interview. The researcher must explain that a participant's withdrawal requires no reason or explanation.

For this study, I secured all data collected in both electronic and paper, including transcriptions or member checking records and files, in a locked filing cabinet in my office for a period of 5 years; after the 5 years, I ensured all documentation was destroyed to safeguard that no personal or participant data is viewable or retrievable. Furthermore, all electronic data captured on my laptop will remain encrypted and deleted after 5 years.

Participant confidentiality is critical to data collection, so using pseudonyms will enhance participant confidentiality (Pietilä et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Participant confidentiality and protection must be communicated to them verbally and electronically. To avoid data exposure or loss, I used an alphanumeric numbering (e.g., P-01, P-02, P-03) to protect the participant's identity. To further guarantee participant confidentiality, I will purge the data (recordings, transcriptions, and emails) from my files after 5 years.

**Data Collection Instruments**

As the primary data collection instrument, my role is to collect and analyze the qualitative data received from participants and other data collection techniques. In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) identified different data collection sources: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observations, (e) participant-observation (i.e., fieldwork, site visits), and (f) physical artifacts. Select suitable data collection instruments (scales, questionnaires, tests, and rubric forms along with semistructured interviews, field notes based on personal observations, and company documents as secondary instruments) are used to capture data from participants and will adequately collaborate validity and reliability in qualitative studies (Hazeski & Ilic, 2019).

As the data collection instrument, I used semistructured interviews, publicly available documentation, scholarly documentation, and corporate websites as methodological triangulation to increase the reliability and validity of my collected data. Researchers could use interviewing techniques and documentation analysis of peer-reviewed articles to improve their data's validity (believability, trustworthiness) (Natow, 2020). Semistructured interviews were the primary important research instrument in qualitative studies (Ruslin et al., 2022). Using a structured interview process, such as the Formative Influences Timeline (FIT), will help curtail bias and maximize trustworthiness in one's research (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). Using the interview protocol developed for my study, I set up a phone call or Zoom video session to conduct the semistructured

interview following the developed protocol. Asking the questions will elicit responses to the participant's lived experiences, hopefully answering my research question.

Interviewing is one of the essential tools for qualitative research, where the interviewer develops a relationship with the interviewee and listens to their lived experiences to have a favorable interview (Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, 2019). After I received approval from the ethics committee, I sent each participant my interview protocol (see Appendix A) for my research. I started with the phone call or virtual semistructured interview by reviewing the participant consent form and answering any questions participants may have before proceeding. Once participants completed the consent form, I sent the partnership agreement granting permission to collect data from the organization. After confirmation, I asked the participants open-ended questions about recruiting, attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining skilled employees. The interview questions (see Appendix B) I asked small business owners elicited lived experiences and identified strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled employees. This interview protocol format will enable data collection related to the research question regarding the recruiting strategies owners of small businesses used to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled employees to maintain their digital business systems. I captured all interviews using a voice recorder, which I indicated to each participant. The purpose of the voice recorder is to accurately capture the participants' words about their lived experiences in finding or retaining skilled workers.

Member checking is having interview participants validate their captured and transcribed data to ensure it reflects their lived experiences (Motulsky, 2021). Allowing

participants to review their interview responses and confirm, deny, or change my

interpretation (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). Burke Reifman et al. (2022) specified that the

importance of an ongoing iterative member-checking process that could provide unbiased

transcription of the captured lived experiences. To conduct member checking, I shared

with participants a synopsis of their responses to my questions to solicit feedback

(confirm, add, or delete responses) and confirmation that the captured responses reflect

their intended meaning. Using an iterative member-checking process, I conducted another

member-checking exercise to ensure the responses reflected their lived experiences.

Conducting member checking will enhance a researcher's study credibility,

trustworthiness, transferability, and reliability (Motulsky, 2021; Santos Malave et al.,

2019). Validity (impartial observation) and reliability (reproducibility) could lead to

dependability and consistency in the research (Hazeski & Ilic, 2019). Conducting the

interviews in the same manner, asking the same questions, and coding the data will

provide the consistency needed for credibility or trustworthiness in my research. After

member-checking and consolidating the recorded data, I used organizational techniques

to prepare the data for axial coding. Axial coding will provide the researcher with a

methodology to understand the various concepts and themes with supporting coding

characteristics, that will identify emergent themes and allow the researcher to dissect the

data to ensure a complete understanding of the data collected (Williams & Moser, 2019).

      As the primary data collection instrument, I used semistructured interviewing as

the data collection process and utilized the member-checking process to ensure the

reliability and validity of my data. Employing various instruments to secure participant

acceptance in this doctoral study will help manage the interviewing process, covering initial engagement, informing the participants, and obtaining their acceptance for all aspects of the interview process.

## Data Collection Technique

Yin (2018) identified six techniques to collect sources of research evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. In a large amount of research, the two most used data collection methods are interviews and focus groups (Draper et al., 2021). Paraskevopoulou-Kollia (2019) determined that the primary way to capture research data is through the interview method. A well-constructed semistructured interview protocol (Appendix A) is the most effective method in qualitative research to penetrate the detailed lived experiences and allow participants to articulate their lived experiences during the data collection process (Braaten et al., 2020; Ruslin et al., 2022). The primary data collection technique will be virtual (MS Teams or Zoom online meeting tools) semistructured interviews using my research questions.

Data collection techniques have advantages and disadvantages for researchers; understanding them will overcome potential challenges in collecting and analyzing the data. Semistructured interviews conducted by telephone provide better accuracy in specific data (healthcare) collected during the phone interview (Rahman, 2023). Providing a structured plan for semistructured interviews, in person, digital, or by telephone, could ensure interviews avoid problems such as digital interviews and technology issues with computers or the internet (Ruslin et al., 2022). Researchers are

taking advantage of digital interviews, which provide a better advantage than phone interviewing and provide quality data, as do in-person interviews (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022). The digital interview process requires a structured plan to avoid potential technology issues. Researchers conducting a pilot interview technique could identify important insights into potential roadblocks during the actual data collection process (Roberts, 2020). By contrast, data collection techniques could put a researcher at a disadvantage when data collection uses small sample sizes, is supported with single-source articles, and has inadequately crafted data analysis techniques (Crick, 2021). Data collection techniques could benefit researchers when well-planned, well-committed strategies provide quality, rich data for readers.

Before conducting the data collection phase, I requested and received IRB approval; I recruited participants from the social media site LinkedIn and my personal business contact list. The participants selected for this study were business owners with a breadth of knowledge and experience in recruitment strategies. Once I had a group of three to eight participants, I engaged them through LinkedIn's InMail capability or an email, explaining the purpose of the study, the interview process, and their ability to opt out of the interview at any time if the participant became uncomfortable. Once participants confirm their inclusion for an interview, I sent a copy of the informed consent form confirming their participation, the partnership agreement to collect the data, and the interview protocol (see Appendix A) on how the interview process will be conducted.

A well-scripted interview process from a knowledgeable researcher could develop an interview guide with detailed interview questions that draw a participant's information to answer the research question (Roberts, 2020). When I formally engaged each participant through a virtual semistructured interview, (a) I reviewed the interview protocol, (b) indicated the interview recorded for transcription purposes with a Philips digital recorder, (c) ensured participants understand their ability to withdraw at any time during the interview, (d) used a scripted introduction before asking open-ended questions with additional questions to clarify further and gain an in-depth response, (e) I used a scripted closing statement with a thank you and next steps. A well-scripted interview process, knowledge-based questions, and positive interaction with participants provided in-depth responses to capture the rich lived experiences data required to answer my research question.

Semistructured interviews are the best method to collect data from the interaction of two people; the interview will ignite the mental processes of the interviewee. Semistructured interviews are the most used and consistent way to capture rich data with neutrality and validity (Dolczewski, 2022). A well-constructed and refined interview protocol will allow participants to articulate their lived experiences in the data collection process (Braaten et al., 2020). Tomaszewski et al. (2020) suggested that, during data collection, researchers should understand the context of the collected data and take measures to ensure research rigor through evaluation. Interviews conducted in the same manner, using the same questions, and capturing the data in the same manner will help with the reliability and rigor needed in research. Conducting data collection techniques

by following these suggestions will increase the credibility of the research, a deeper understanding of the challenge, and allow the readers to make informed decisions based on the context of the data.

Member checking will enhance a researcher's study credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, and reliability (Motulsky, 2021; Santos Malave et al., 2019). To enhance the credibility or trustworthiness of a study, researchers could use both member checking and methodological triangulation and member checking (Rino et al., 2022). Member checking is having interview participants validate their captured and transcribed data to ensure it reflects their lived experiences (Motulsky, 2021). To conduct member checking, I ensured participants understood the data collection process and their role in validating their lived experiences captured with an audio recorder, transcribed, and translated by myself. Then, I provided each participant with a copy of the transcribed notes for feedback. Their feedback will validate the authenticity and accuracy of my transcription captured by my notes or interview recording. During the interview process, if I did not understand any comments, I asked for clarification on the comment or concept presented by the participant. Researchers seeking clarification or interpretation of data could consider member checking an effective tool for validity in their research (Motulsky, 2021).

Data collection techniques are various methods used in qualitative research designed to explore a phenomenon and capture the data for analysis. Researchers commonly utilize interviews and data research of relevant documentation; hence, my doctoral study will employ these two techniques. I ensured I planned the data collection

to assist in structuring my interviewing protocol to elicit quality responses. I conducted

member checking to support the credibility and trustworthiness of my research.

## Data Organization Technique

Researchers use organizational methods to manage their collected data

effectively. Williams and Moser (2019) listed that a process to follow for data collected

by the researcher is: organize the data, categorize it, and use a thematic analysis to assess

the data. For my data collection, I used a semistructured virtual interview process to ask

the invited participants the seven questions I prepared, to explore the lived experiences of

small business owners in attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining skilled employees. A

data organization technique for the interviewing process is to use data coding that will

provide participant data confidentiality, remove personal or business identifiers, and use a

coding system such as P-01, P-02, and P-03 to P-08 as the participants' identities.

In my data collection process, I organized the data using Microsoft Word and a

file management system to store the data with a participant coding system and code my

data to identify key concepts and themes that made my data analysis more

straightforward. During the participant interviews, I maintained a journal log to gather

my thoughts, questions, and notes of significance or differences from the other interviews

that helped future interviewing or data collection. After data collection, I organized the

data into an Excel spreadsheet to code my data and then identified key concepts, themes

and supporting coding characteristics collected during my data analysis.

To assist researchers in organizing their data organization for data analysis,

researchers could use software such as NVivo. With training, researchers could use data

transcription and analysis tools to organize, analyze, and expedite the transcription, and the data analysis process could produce quality data for researchers and readers to interpret (Vindrola-Padros & Johnson, 2020). NVivo software could assist novice researchers in compiling their data, being able to present the data in various ways, and delivering meaningful data to view different relationships to understand a phenomenon (Elliott-Mainwaring, 2021). After analyzing and coding all the data, I will securely store the paper copies of data sheets in a locked filing cabinet in my office for a period of 5 years. On the anniversary marked in my work email calendar, I will use a multi-toothed shredder to destroy the data, ensuring no personal information is viewable by anyone.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis is an opportunity to organize, analyze, and interpret data collected by researchers about a phenomenon. For my multiple case study, the data analysis I performed provided a recruitment strategy framework that would assist business owners in attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining skilled workers. Researchers have four types of triangulations in qualitative research: data, investigator, theory, and methodological (Noble & Heale, 2019; Yin, 2018). Baker et al. (2019) employed a data analysis approach that studied secondary and primary data sources, then used triangulation methods of analysis to confirm potential strategies used through both data sources used in a recruitment strategy framework. For my doctoral study, I first analyzed the secondary data to find patterns and themes, then compared the data analysis from the primary source (semistructured interviews) to identify similar data that business owners could use as recruiting strategies to attract, recruit, and hire skilled workers. Yin (2018) indicated that

data triangulation supports research with multiple data sources that will conjoin ideas of a phenomenon. Triangulation increases credibility or trustworthiness in a study (Rino et al., 2022). Researchers must plan a structured in-person or digital interview process to capture participant data; the data quality between in-person and digital is sufficient to conduct a well-crafted data analysis process that will contribute to the quality of data presented (Saunders et al., 2023; Thunberg & Arnell, 2022).

Using methodological triangulation is a strategic way to increase validity and augment understanding. Methodological triangulation is a research procedure that encompasses multiple methods, such as semistructured interviewing, participant observations, questionnaires, and recordings (Arias Valencia, 2022). Using methodological triangulation provides researchers with a complete depiction of the data, making data coding easier to complete (Walton et al., 2020). As a researcher, I used semistructured interviews and relevant documentation (publicly available and peer-reviewed), and corporate websites to collect data for analysis. In my study, I focused on capturing and organizing data, which helped create a structured approach to the analysis phase. After conducting semistructured interviews, I obtained permission from participants to use an audio recording device and take notes. Doing this allowed me to record the lived experiences of business owners, summarize selected peer-reviewed documentation, and review website resources.

The principal way to analyze data from qualitative interviews and research documentation is by coding and the coding method (categorizing, organizing, and content reviews) will provide researchers with patterns in data for assessment (Reyes et al.,

2021). To conduct research, a logical data analysis process is to construct a framework to collect, organize, code, search, and shape my collected data and make interpretations during the process (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Using the data analysis method, I increased the trustworthiness of my research. To make data analysis more efficient, researchers have computer software tools to assist. Two distinct types of software are available to complete a system-generated analysis of the data collected. Leximancer and QSR NVivo12, both these software tools could assist researchers in interpreting the data after the researcher completes the data entry, data management, reporting, and visual forms (Wilk et al., 2019). For my research, I explored the different types of software tools available to enhance my data analysis.

Researchers use thematic analysis as a systematic way to identify data patterns and themes in interviewing to assist in data coding (Jowsey et al., 2021). To reinforce my data analysis, I used thematic analysis techniques to identify and understand the themes and supporting coding characteristics from participants' responses regarding small business owners' recruiting or retention strategies. Using thematic analysis and software tools could produce quality, reliable data that could produce recruitment factors for owners of small businesses to develop their recruitment strategies. Using these data analysis processes and tools may help answer my research question.

**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are essential to demonstrate quality in a case study design Yin (2018). Researchers need to understand both terms, reliability and validity, and their substantial importance for their study (Hazeski & Ilic, 2019; Krupat & Hall, 2021). As

important as reliability and validity are in research, the researcher must understand how to use the terms accurately while maintaining originality and imagination (Krupat & Hall, 2021). The criteria for reliability and validity that provide the foundation of research trustworthiness are (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Walden's Doctoral Study Capstone Research Handbook and IRB Manual confirm these criteria for reliability and validity. Researchers must understand the meaning of reliability and validity and how to use them in research as it creates the foundation of trustworthiness for readers. As the primary research instrument, I was actively cognizant of my research's need for reliability and validity.

Bias in research is any divergence from the truthfulness in data collection and interpretation that will lead to a predetermined conclusion (Florczak, 2022). Florczak emphasized that bias is nearly inevitable in qualitative research because the researcher serves as the instrument in data collection and the interpreter of the collected data. To reduce bias, Noble and Heale (2019) discussed how triangulation would increase the confidence or trustworthiness and validity of the concept researched if captured correctly and reflected precisely. I incorporated triangulation (multiple data collection methods) in my research to communicate a thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

**Reliability**

The main principle of reliability is for researchers to avoid errors and biases in their research by having well-documented processes and protocols and organized auditable data that another researcher could use to attain the same results (Yin, 2018). Developing a semistructured interview protocol (guide) could assist researchers in first

understanding the subject by reviewing the literature, but also help the researcher develop the right questions to answer their research question (Roberts, 2020). In structured qualitative research (as exemplified by a team-developed protocol guide), reliability, intertwined with validity, is achieved through specific processes (Reyes et al., 2021). The coordinated and developed protocols, particularly in semistructured interviews, helped reliability, ensuring consistent results. I logically researched and documented interview and analysis protocols for my research, enabling other researchers to replicate the study and achieve similar outcomes.

### *Dependability*

Consistency in research design (protocol, semistructured interview questions (see Appendix B), and data results will demonstrate the study's dependability (Janis, 2022). Research design will be central to a study's trustworthiness or rigor, leading to research quality and increasing dependability (Doyle et al., 2020). Dependability is a criterion of trustworthiness in qualitative research, and researchers maintain trustworthiness when gathering evidence-based data (Adler, 2022). The research design will support and sustain dependability in trustworthy data collected.

Matching participant responses during interviews to the different themes increases dependability in research (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). For instance, dependability was supported by member checking. After compiling the data from participant interviews, I confirmed the transcripts with each person to ensure the data captured reflected their experiences. Member checking will also contribute to triangulation in data, and the researcher's meticulous data collection and well-established processes could present

dependability in research. Another opportunity to achieve dependability is through data

saturation (Janis, 2022). Researchers will know when data saturation has been reached by

reviewing all the different data sets and ensuring no new themes are added to the

researcher's data (Fofana et al., 2020). Analyzing the collected data and identifying

themes and patterns facilitates the achievement of saturation by reviewing these same

themes and patterns. If no new ideas emerged from the data collected which included

peer-reviewed literature on recruitment, available public sources of information,

interview journal notes, and company websites, the necessity for further semistructured

interviews is concluded.

The steps I used to highlight dependability in my research were to have a

comprehensive study design, conduct semistructured interviews, peer-reviewed literature

on recruitment, available public sources of information, interview journal notes, and

company websites, and confirm data interpretation with member checking by the study's

participants. Using a software-based program, the data analysis was easy to complete,

which provided a structured set of themes and patterns from the data. If the two data

analyses are consistent, it will demonstrate the dependability and trustworthiness of my

study and its data.

**Validity**

Yin (2018) established that validity in qualitative research includes credibility,

transferability, confirmability, and data saturation. Fitzpatrick (2019) contends that

historically, validity in qualitative research must consider the expansive differing views

of participants but could address the validity threats by having validity checks such as

identifying which interrelated perspectives are essential. Validity checks are a researcher's way of instilling trustworthiness in their research. As a qualitative researcher, I must incorporate these elements to strengthen reliability and validity in my research.

### *Credibility*

In qualitative research, establishing credibility and rigor could be achieved through a qualitative data analysis process, which probes how a researcher's methodology, and procedures are explicable, justifiable, and understandable for readers, thus leading to credibility and rigor in one's research (Wood et al., 2020). Another method to increase credibility and rigor is triangulation, which reduces bias in research (Noble & Heale, 2019). Enhancing qualitative data analysis is achieved using analysis software by showing consistent themes and data, which also increases trustworthiness through triangulation (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Following a specified methodology, presenting the data consistently, and demonstrating triangulation could assist with understanding data from multiple sources, exhibiting credibility and rigor in research.

### *Transferability*

When a researcher could utilize their detailed data and apply it in different contexts and other research, it will reveal transferability. Transferability is an element of dependability in research that contributes to the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Doyle et al., 2020; Janis, 2022; Jowsey et al., 2021). Transferability is taking the participant's view in research, the researcher documenting the experiences with distinctive themes and codes, and then being able to apply it to other circumstances and

situations in research (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Mthuli et al. (2022) detailed that the concept of transferability includes the researchers' study design and methodology. To provide transferability in my research, I explained in detail the context of my research data and findings, the study's design and methods used, and the processes and procedures used to collect information from participants.

### *Confirmability*

Researchers could achieve confirmability by continuously validating their study's data throughout the collection and analysis process, thereby reducing personal biases and enhancing the research's trustworthiness (Renjith et al., 2021). One purpose of confirmability is to demonstrate the independence of the data collected and the researcher's ability to structure that data in a manner that readers could see the independence of the data about the research's intent with no biases (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Tuthill et al. (2020) confirmed that the purpose of confirmability when it is apparent that the data collected and analyzed reflect the participants' lived experiences and the researcher removes their personal biases leading to the trustworthiness of the data. Peterson (2019) stressed that researchers should use confirmability instead of objectivity by having participants confirm or validate the data results as their ideas and concepts instead of the ideas and concepts of the researcher (researcher biases). During the data collection and analysis phase of my research, I presented the data as captured and verified by the participants and communicated in a manner that another researcher could reproduce and achieve the same or comparable results and avoid my personal biases in the data.

*Data Saturation*

Data saturation is a core concept in qualitative research, and researchers could recognize saturation when no emergent themes, subthemes, or ideas are evident (Fofana et al., 2020). For my study, I conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions and had the flexibility to ask additional questions to elicit specific information about the participants' lived experiences. Included with the semistructured interviews, I researched peer-reviewed literature on recruitment, available public sources of information, interview journal notes, and company websites. Williams and Moser (2019) suggested that, in the data collection process, employing a spreadsheet format facilitates the efficient manual method of coding data, including themes, subthemes, ideas, and information patterns. As such, I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format to capture the themes and ideas, then used that document with a software product such as ConceptDraw to confirm consistent coding.

Mukoka et al. (2021) explained that there is no accurate method to calculate a sample size in a qualitative study. Still, Mukoka et al. implied that researchers will achieve data saturation with less than 12 participants. Qualitative researchers could develop strategies to determine the right study size by understanding their population and the details or objectives of the study (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Mthuli et al. (2022) explained that the define, explain, justify, applies (DEJA) approach as a framework and strategy that could assist researchers in determining the sample size needed for saturation. After reviewing the population and objectives of my research, I plan to attain data

saturation by conducting interviews with three to eight participants, confirming my confidence in achieving data saturation.

For reliability and validity, I merged the elements of dependability, credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation that contributed to the quality of my research. If I had not succeeded in realizing data saturation (no new ideas or themes), I would have supplemented the interviewing process with extra participants.

**Transition and Summary**

This qualitative multiple case study explored recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. In Section 2, I provided information on my role as the primary data collection instrument and how I followed the ethical practices outlined by Walden University. I incorporated the researchers' role, the research methods, and the study's design, as well as detailed information on the population and sampling process, descriptions of the data collection instruments, techniques, data organization, and the data analysis process. Finally, I summarized information on how to reduce bias in my research. I offered information on how I ensured reliability and validity.

In Section 3, I provide the findings of my study, how the research applied to business practice, information on the implications for social change, my recommendations for further action, additional research, reflections, and finally, a conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

**Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable. In this section, I present the findings from semistructured interviews I conducted with six owners of small businesses in Canada, peer-reviewed scholarly documentation, publicly accessible information, my interview journal notes, and company websites. Through the research findings, I identified strategies that leaders of small businesses used to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers. The impact of these findings may assist owners of small businesses to develop effective strategies to attract and hire the skilled workers needed to manage their complex business systems to achieve competitiveness and profitability.

Section 3 includes a comprehensive discussion of the themes identified, applications to professional practices, and the social change implications. I also provide recommendations for additional actions and further research. My doctoral study finishes with recommendations for action and other research, my thoughts on my doctoral journey in completing my doctoral study, and a conclusion.

**Presentation of the Findings**

The research question for my qualitative, multiple case study was: What recruitment strategies do owners of small businesses use to recruit and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable? The primary sources of data collection were semistructured interviews with six owners of small

businesses from Canada who attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers, a review of

the literature on recruitment, available public sources of information, and the

organizations' websites. Saturation in the data collected from semistructured interviews

occurred after six interviews, with no new strategies identified.

I analyzed the data collected and identified five main themes: (a) corporate

culture, (b) organizational branding, (c) HRM strategies, (d) advanced or disruptive

technologies, and (e) retention strategies. Reviewing the data captured, in overarchingly

manner, I discussed and elaborated on each element, highlighting each theme or coding

chrematistics' importance and contribution to attracting and hiring skilled workers.

**Figure 1**

*Identified Themes*
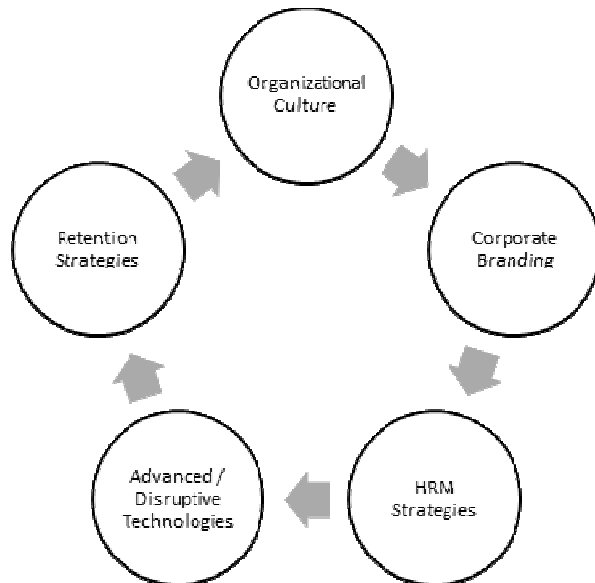


Organizational leaders develop strategic recruitment strategies to ensure internal

operations have the skilled talent to manage their business to competitiveness and

profitability. Winston's (2001) recruitment theory considered the factors that influence an individual's decision to follow a career and highlighted the factors that organizations could use to recruit individuals who have the potential to lead the organization successfully. The data collected from organizations of the study participants reflected parts of Winston's conceptual framework on recruitment factors. The data revealed that organizations sought specific individuals by creating structured job descriptions using Winston's traits and attributes, and advertised these positions through various channels to attract and engage skilled workers.

The purpose of HRM within an organization is to find the skills, knowledge, and competencies (experiences) of skilled workers achieved from a recruitment and selection process (Juicharoen et al., 2023). Juicharoen et al. found that during the past and future HRM eras (individual qualities, competencies, attracting talent, organizational values, digital technologies) the primary considerations or recruitment factors changed in each era. Each era, from HR1.0 to HR5.0, had brought new priorities and methods to the recruitment and selection process. Recruitment activities are critical to the organization and reside within the HRM policies and procedures. Organizational leaders rely on HR staff to design and implement recruitment activities based on the corporate recruitment strategies developed and supported by management.

In exploring the intricate dynamics of HCM and HRM and their impact on organizational competitiveness, this study delved into the multifaceted themes and coding characteristics present in the collected data. Shaw (2021) asserted that strategic HRM enhances a firm's competitive edge, underscoring the value of integrating HRM strategies

at the executive level for developing and implementing complex approaches. Building on this, Dunnette (1998) and Stone (2007) expanded Winston's theory, emphasizing that the necessity of HRM in managing externalities and their effects on organizations and employees. Furthermore, Zachery and Rudolph (2022) observed that organizations consistently apply HRM in response to internal and external stressors, highlighting the importance of recruitment as a crucial HRM activity for attracting and hiring skilled workers to navigate day-to-day business challenges. Overall, the analysis recognized the pivotal role of HR executives in navigating complex business landscapes and ensuring organizational resilience. Based on the information available, HR management must be at the strategic planning table for organizations to be competitive and profitable.

In the findings and data evidence below, I highlight all participants' discussions and ideas and reflect on five key themes and their supporting coding characteristics. The themes remain constant and consistent throughout all interviews. I achieved data saturation after conducting six out of the eight interviews, as no new themes, new ideas, patterns, or strategies emerged. The identified themes are presented as organizational themes, with each theme's supporting coding characteristics that contributed to the essence of the overarching theme. Themes not only extend the recruitment theory knowledge-base, but specific elements (influence to enter a profession, diversity, image, and perception) introduce a more comprehensive approach to attracting and hiring skilled workers. Elements identified contribute to my conceptual framework by introducing recruitment factors (skills, competencies, experiences) organizations look for in professional talent, but also feature factors organizations could use to attract and hire

skilled talent (themes) enthusiastically seeking a fascinating challenge or an organization that aligns with their professional aspirations and values.

**Figure 2**

*Identified Supporting Coding Characteristics Factors*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee handbook | Mentorship | Community Outreach Programs | Performance Management | Transparency |
| Recruitment Measurement | DE&I and CSR | Gig Economy | eHR ecosystem | AI Integration |
| HR Process Improvement | Employee Engagement | Leader - Follower Partnerships | Training and Development | Leadership Training Program |
| Workplace Wellness | Talent Management | Time to Hire | Brand Ambassadors | Fair Compensation |
| | Internship and Cooperative Programs | Organizational Digitization | Education Support | |

## Theme 1: Corporate Culture

From Winston's (2001) recruitment theory, the basis for recruitment is identifying leadership potentials that would lead the organization to success. Included with Winston's assessment, the organization must look at the documented recruitment factors that entice someone to pursue a profession in any industry or with a specific organization. Culture was a prominent strategy communicated by all participants. Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2022) suggested that organizations must develop a long-term sustainable culture strategy using a structured vision model, share the culture model widely, and

ensure organizational support and commitment to the culture model. Ketprapakorn and

Kantabutra specified that the organization requires a structured vision model concept,

supported by its resources (human, financial, and technology), to uphold the long-term

sustainability of its corporate culture strategy. The cultural elements provided by

participants and the frequency of these elements can be found in Table 3.

**Table 2**

*Frequency of Theme 1 and Coding Characteristics*

| Participant | Theme: Corporate culture | Coding: Mentorship and transparency | Employee handbook | DE&I and CSR | Knowledge and growth | Compensation and benefits |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P-01 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| P-02 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| P-03 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 7 |
| P-04 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| P-05 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| P-06 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 13 | 2 |
| Total | 17 | 26 | 3 | 15 | 23 | 22 |

*Note*. DE&I = diversity, equity, and inclusion; CSR = corporate social responsibility.

Table 2 denotes the coding characteristics associated with Theme 1 – Corporate

Culture. The coding characteristics are high-level and are discussed further in my data

analysis for Theme 1. Organizational culture requires a foundation of elements to build a

positive culture that will retain skilled workers and attract others looking for an exciting

organization. During the data collection, participants identified mentorship, knowledge

and growth, and compensation as the key elements dealing with corporate culture as

identified by owners of small businesses.

Participants P-03 and P-04 revealed that employees look for shared vision and

values, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a large part in their sense of

belonging and as a valued team member. P-06 added inclusiveness and flexibility as additional elements contributing to organizational culture. Nelson et al. (2020) emphasized that a foundation for a positive ethical culture (organizational) requires alignment with the firm's vision and values. Still, leadership and planning are needed to have a solid corporate culture. Pietruszka-Ortyl et al. (2021) added that the foundational elements of structure with norms and values, which are critical in the knowledge transfer supporting information technology (IT) professionals in organizations. All participants discussed cultural elements designed to support and promote their employees. Trust, diversity, openness, transparency, and autonomy contribute to organizational culture. Winston's recruitment theory does not cover specific aspects of organizational culture. However, organizational culture is an attractor that could influence individuals to enter a field or the organization. As such, organizational culture adds to the knowledge of recruitment theory and the factors organizational leaders could use to promote their company image and reputation (i.e., branding).

Leadership is a strategic imperative to building and cultivating organizational culture. Plachy and Smunt (2022) emphasized that leadership is the development of a strategic partnership between a leader and employees based on mutual respect and a desire to accomplish the mission. As with the leadership sources in my literature review, an organization's management team that practices high employee engagement translates into increased performance for the organization's competitiveness and profitability. Participants P-01, P-02, and P-03 discussed the importance of leadership and mentorship for new and existing employees. P-01 and P-03 implied that mentorship has numerous

key factors: engaging employees, developing their knowledge, and increasing their skills. Providing continuous feedback on employees' performance, actively monitoring their work, and evaluating the output are crucial elements in establishing a collaborative environment that all employees appreciate. All participants talked about the aspects of employee engagement and partnerships, which were success factors in supporting their organizational culture and the impact on employee retention. Some participants highlighted that employee engagement through communications and transparency increased the pride and loyalty of their skilled workforce.

The organization demonstrates its commitment to employees through the employee handbook, with management understanding and committing to the vision and shared values (P-03 and P-04). Nelson et al.'s (2020) positive ethical culture emphasizes this commitment to employees. Ferdiansyah et al. (2021) pointed out that organizations have to link culture to communications, increasing internal and external confidence within an organization's community. The organizational employee handbook provides direction on internal processes, onboarding, company policies, performance expectations and compensation, training and development opportunities, and information about different managerial positions. Transparency by management within the organization allows employees to understand the firm's direction and future, and open compensation programs (salary and benefits). P-02 shared that management allowed employees to attend management meetings:

> Under transparency, on Monday, the leadership team meetings where we would
>
> discuss the organization and anyone who wanted to attend; they were welcomed.

by Sunday evenings, all employees had to send weekly reports of six bullets: three

for what was accomplished and three for the next week's work. The information

was shared with all employees (transparences) to view what people were working

on. Some would read in detail, some would not be interested, but transparency

was provided. This open transparency was an excellent retention strategy.

P-04 and P-05 pointed out management's commitment to supporting employees

through mentorship and their active involvement in recruitment processes, including

participating in interviews and taking ownership of their (management) hiring decisions.

This commitment approach encourages managers to formulate long-term plans for their

employees.

Another key strategy for organization leaders is to develop internal and external

partnerships within their organization, communities, educational institutions, regional

governments, and industry associations. All participants discussed the elements of the

important strategic partnerships. Internal partnerships with employees will build a more

robust, shared organizational culture where skilled workers contribute to the

organization's success and become its brand ambassadors in attracting and hiring skilled

workers; the internal workforce commits to identity-driven brand strategies (Agrawal &

Paulus, 2022). Participants underscored the importance of the partnership with employees

and promoting their welfare. Listening to their employees, allowing them to participate in

management activities, and creating a culture representative of them were consistent

across participants.

Internal partnerships with employees were evident during the data collection process. Participants considered internal partnerships a strategic imperative to building and sustaining organizational culture. Plachy and Smunt (2022) highlighted that this strategic partnership between leaders and employees. An analysis of the data collected from participants supported the understanding that the relationship between leader and follower builds trust and understanding of each other's strengths, weaknesses, and the role each plays in the growth and success of the organization. Internal partnerships with employees will build a more robust, shared organizational culture where skilled workers contribute to the organization's success and become its brand ambassadors in attracting and hiring skilled workers; the internal workforce commits to identity-driven brand strategies (Agrawal & Paulus, 2022).

Organizational commitment to employees increases employee loyalty by investing in knowledge training and professional development. Pietruszka-Ortyl et al. (2021) studied the investment in future knowledge workers, identifying the concept of knowledge-oriented leadership. The knowledge-oriented leadership concept features knowledge empowerment for IT workers. Pietruszka-Ortyle et al. also demonstrated that their model applies to cognitive organizational workers, contributing to structural behaviors resulting in profitability. All participants identified several training and development strategies. Dash et al. (2019) stated that the benefits of increasing employees' skills to create a SMART organization using SMART technologies. SMART workforces require competencies in technology advancements, increased skills, and capabilities to maintain industry leadership, corporate environmental changes in policy,

building and contributing to corporate culture, the impacts on the future of work, a new generation of workers, and increasing globalization of a workforce. Participant P-03 also included paying for advanced training, leadership programs, security enhancements, annual certifications, education upgrading, and professional certifications annually to build a culture of support.

All but two participants discussed the role and commitment to DE&I incorporated into recruitment strategies, organizational planning, and daily culture of the organization. King et al. (2023) emphasized that individuals within the organization actively seek a sense of belonging and value as employees through participation in DE&I strategies. King et al. identified that diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) require the commitment by leaders within the organization, suggesting their participation is vital to achieving DEIB. P-01 and P-04 mentioned ensuring employees are engaged when discussing a shared vision, representing belonging to employees, which supports the concept King et al. presented. Two participants demonstrated their commitment to DE&I by hiring someone specific to drive developing and managing a sustainable and committed corporate DE&I strategy. Ly-Le (2022) deliberated that the internal opportunity exists to create a gender-based strategy to bring a fresh perspective to innovation. Without a gender-diverse strategy, organizations risk lagging in the industry and in their ability to implement innovative products. Participant P-03 has incorporated a diverse strategy to target a specific skilled worker demographic, with the lack of specific STEM-skilled workers, diversity becomes a challenge:

Seeking the ideal candidate with specific demographic skills, such as a female engineer, can be a significant data mining challenge. Finding diverse candidates to meet our commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) efforts is particularly difficult.

Recruitment theory (Winston, 2001) underscored the need for workers looking for a sense of belonging and an organization with a positive reputation. Creating and executing strategies for DE&I enhances an organization's internal culture and presents an opportunity to attract and hire talented individuals seeking affiliation with the organization.

Bilan et al. (2020) studied the elements and impact of chaotic HRM on the organization. Their study highlighted problems typical of attracting or retaining talent, wasteful hiring, lack of employee development, position design or composition, and how the organization motivates its employees. Participants underscored the importance of employee commitment and strengthening their corporate partnership (leader/follower). Financial support with education upgrading, paying for professional designations, performance management with coaching or mentorship, and leadership opportunities for advancement within the organization. Participants sought after increased support for education opportunities on new technologies to maintain their skills, specialized training supporting innovation for the employee, which could also benefit the organization, and engaging employees in developing the organization's vision, mission, and values. Bilan et al. confirmed that the lack of internal structure HRM and support for employee partnership will have an overall economic impact on the organization.

Corporate culture generates a sense of pride for employees who discuss with their friends and colleagues the organization's culture that supports employees, commits to their growth with internal opportunities, and autonomy in creativity. One item addressed by several participants was the need to support and cultivate employees. Dash et al. (2019) provided a concept of creating a SMART skilled worker as a method to support and cultivate employees. During the literature review regarding the skills and competencies section, Dash et al. discussed the need to invest in creating a SMART workforce. Other elements that supported employees were workplace hybrid models (effective for most organizations, but P-05 pinpointed the challenge where specific work and tools were only available at the office), lifestyle support with memberships in health programs, and contribution to local communities and activities (i.e., baseball team, hockey, soccer league). Participant P-06 accentuated that all the elements supporting and cultivating employees contributed to overall employee wellness, resulting in a more committed and productive employee. Work from home elements of a hybrid office were challenging, P-05 conveyed:

> Remote work is a challenge within the organization as to the nature of their work, but remote work is semi-achievable, working with regional management to allow remote work, but challenges are the teamwork concept with specific tasks needed in a team environment (tools and materials) could only be found in the office. As such, remote work is more a hybrid model that is semi-achievable.

One item addressed by several participants was the need to support and cultivate employees. Organizations could achieve support and cultivation by creating a SMART

skilled worker (Dash et al., 2019). The literature review brought the SMART skilled

worker concept to the forefront as organizations were investing in an organization's

skilled workers' competencies and experiences. Schake and Craft (2019) highlighted that

the need for more STEM skills as a gap among the new generation of workers entering

the workforce. Torarcikova et al. (2020) identified that the need for employees to

increase their skills due to disruptive technologies needed and used by companies. All

participants discussed the need to use advanced technologies to ensure competitiveness

and profitability; therefore, investing in internal staff will increase their technical skills

(STEM, SMART) to achieve optimal organizational performance. Several participants

educate their local educational institutions (high school and college), influencing

individuals to enter a profession. Influencing people to enter a profession was a key tenet

of Winston's recruitment theory.

External engagement opportunities to gain exposure in the local or region,

showcase new technologies and talents, support the industry's growth, and encourage

new entrants. Participants P-02, P-03, P-05, and P-06 explored the opportunity to

establish outreach initiatives centered around collaborating with their local communities.

These initiatives involve interacting with potential skilled workers, promoting mentorship

among employees, and engaging regionally and locally in communities where both new

entrants to the industry and experienced workers contribute to employees' personal and

professional development. Programs include events, educating the public on new

technologies, hackathons, software developer associations, social media programs

(podcasts, videos), and displaying new technology, methods of working with technology,

or the expertise of their staff. Singh and Misra (2020) acknowledged that organizations that create policies, management commitment, and CSR initiatives are essential in being socially responsible and effecting change in their communities.

Participants actively support and promote their employees by showcasing their expertise through writing articles in industry publications, organizing podcasts and events to educate fellow skilled workers on technology and advanced methods, and offering educational opportunities for younger generations in local and regional high schools and technology events. P-02 shared employee engagement and its effect on supporting and retain employees as part of the organization's culture:

If recruiting new grads, the company would participate in local events that attracted skilled workers. We participated in Hack-a-thons with skilled workers that could be potential employees. Sales meet up, java programmer meet up, so the organization would participate and develop a brand name and promote a culture of employee support. Conduct fireside chats on advanced skills and invite people. Speakers would be from organizations employing advanced technologies, people would come to listen to that expert within their field. Another strategy was to publish articles on a monthly basis in specific publications to build and retain skilled employees, enhancing name recognition. These elements supported employees and created a culture of belonging and aligned with the values of employees.

P-01 and P-02 engage local and regional governments to identify and understand support programs, which are opportunities for small businesses to leverage funding for

internship projects to give experience to new industry entrants and partner with colleges and universities to provide coop terms for experience. Participants P-02, P-03, P-05, and P-06 take the opportunity to engage industry associations and regional governments to influence policy on their technology or services and to provide expertise and education to policymakers to protect innovation or society in the future. The overall sediment from participants drew attention to employee benefits, and the organization's reputation in the community is viewed positively.

Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2022) studied and strengthened existing theories and knowledge on a sustainable organizational culture strategy. Participants confirmed in their semistructured interviews the basis of all six steps (vision, values, commitment, communications, adapt, and monitoring outputs) and a toolbox of other culture factors about employee-focused strategies that could assist organizations in developing their sustainable culture strategy. It was a common theme with participants that culture is a critical strategic element in creating organizational employee satisfaction and retention. Employees' sense of pride could create a positive experience, which translates to enthusiasm when speaking with new entrants to the industry or experienced skilled workers wanting to work for an organization with a great culture. Structured cultural strategies with frameworks consistent with regional sensitivities will assist organizations in developing an attractive, sustainable organizational culture.

Although Winston's theoretical models do not discuss culture specifically, organizations that invest in their skilled workers, participate in mentoring their industry and educational institutions and display a culture that influences people to enter their

profession or desire to work for that organization. A culture strategy extends the

recruitment knowledge based on its influential impact on new or experienced entrants to

an industry. All participants covered foundational elements of organizational culture.

Paais and Pattiruhu (2020) determined that the impact of organizational culture on job

satisfaction and employee performance. Their conceptual framework looked at

motivation, leadership, organizational culture, work satisfaction, and performance as the

foundational elements impacting job satisfaction and employee performance. Owners of

small businesses who want to increase the value of employees and their contribution to

the organization's success need to develop and implement a comprehensive

organizational culture. As Paais and Pattiruhu stated that, employees are the valuable

human capital of the organization, and if preserved and enhanced, it will establish their

satisfaction and increase performance. In my literature review, numerous references exist

to organizational culture through leadership partnerships, communications, internal HRM

strategies supporting employees, employee satisfaction that translates into optimal

performance, and valuing their contribution to the organization.

**Theme 2: Organizational Branding**

Organizational branding is the process of creating and promoting a unique

identity and image for a business or institution. It involves defining the organization's

values, mission, and personality, and communicating these elements consistently across

all touchpoints with stakeholders. The goal of organizational branding is to differentiate

the organization from its competitors, build a strong reputation, and foster trust and

loyalty among employees, customers, and other stakeholders. Organizational branding is

a strategic imperative that encourages employee retention, attracts skilled workers

wanting to belong with an organization with a strong commitment to their employees

(Azhar et al., 2024). Azhar et al. concluded that effective organizational branding could

lead to increased performance increasing long-term success, create a recognizable

reputation within a region and industry, and create the desirable employer for limited

skilled resources in the job market. .

     The cultural elements provided by participants and the frequency of these

elements can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of Theme 2 and Coding Characteristics*

| Participant | Theme: Branding | Coding: Brand recognition | Brand ambassadors | Strategic partnerships | Core competencies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P-01 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 8 |
| P-02 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 13 |
| P-03 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 7 |
| P-04 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| P-05 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| P-06 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 4 | 8 |
| Total | 23 | 31 | 9 | 18 | 44 |

     Table 3 denotes the coding characteristics associated with Theme 1 – Corporate

Culture. The coding characteristics are high-level and are discussed further in my data

analysis for Theme 2. The table coding characteristics incorporate coding characteristics

associated with corporate branding. Two key elements were brand recognition (included

name recognition) and core competencies (vision, values, trust and respect, employee

commitment, DE&I, CSR), both of which created an organization where local or regional

skilled workers or organizations could easily recognize the organization's name with positivity.

Table 3 theme and coding characteristics signify that organizational branding is key in attracting and hiring skilled workers. The participants organization's brand is an identity pointing to its committed to their employees, promotes their uniqueness, shows trust in the employee's capabilities, and results in developing strategic partnerships with customers, industry stakeholders, and other institutions. Participants focused on building and enhancing their reputation, bolstering their credibility within industry, and strengthening their capacity to influence individuals or organizations regarding innovations. Brand exposure articulates the organization's story to an industry where larger organizations seem to drown out smaller ones.

During the data collection phase, a strategic element for owners of small businesses is branding the organization to attract investment and the right skilled workers. The supporting theme factors present a build, commitment, and exposure strategy for organizations to accomplish an organizational brand. Tumasjan et al. (2020) introduced a concept of employer branding orientation that an organization's HRM processes contribute successfully to creating an employer brand that internal employees use as their energy to reach competitiveness and profitability in the labor market. Tumasjan et al.'s approach to corporate strategies was evident in the data collected with participants P-01, P-03, and P-05 specified that focusing on a recognizable corporate brand that employees were proud of, one that retains employees, but, importantly, a recruitment strategy to attract and hire skilled workers. Participant P-04 conveyed

(internally and externally) that a formalized corporate brand strategy specified a structured approach to organizational goals and brand development, making a controlled narrative:

> Organizational branding is key strategy, providing candidates with a better experience or journey with the organization. The website is our largest support tool for everyone, and the content must be useful and current. Organization looks for reviews on their website and using reviews on other sites to promote the organization's brand. Supporting the online brand is ensuring the organization has purpose, vision, and values communicated to everyone and posted for outside people to see. These elements must be structured both internally and externally, creating a world class eHR ecosystem for candidates and other organizations.

The brand building contains the internal elements that provide a foundation for employees to value and commit to, making the organization attractive and credible to build regional, educational, and industry partnerships. Azhar et al. (2024) created a strong employer brand that is fundamental in both theory and application, where it aids organizations in attracting and retaining skilled employees while bolstering their standing in the job market. Additionally, Azhar et al. point out that a robust employer brand could positively influence the organization's performance needed for profitability. Bargenda (2023) detailed that organizations could create an identifiable corporate brand by first architecting it with foundational parts (social, cultural, spiritual), which build the organization's reputation and attractiveness and make it enticing for new entrants and skilled workers. A beneficial organizational culture cements these foundational elements,

surpassing the architectural structure utilized to construct the organizational brand. Thus, a formalized brand strategy, the internal architecture based on foundational elements such as culture, HRM strategies, employee engagement, and leadership, will create a winning brand.

All participants indicated that DE&I is a critical element in building a culture and commitment in the organization; P-04 and P-05 stressed that DE&I was a tool for brand exposure. Supporting DE&I are CSR activities built and owned by employees that shape its culture, eventually a tool for brand exposure. Participants P-01, P-02, and P-03 suggested that transparency builds a brand that embodies trust and commitment to the organization. Along with transparency, the internal and external visibility into pay, compensation, and benefits allows skilled workers to see what the organization offers. Using advanced or disruptive leading-edge technology plays an essential role in building a brand, whether the technology is to drive efficiencies in the organization, create products and services employees are proud of, or seduce new entrants or skilled workers to the organization. Participants P-01 and P-02 encouraged employees to purchase and test technologies for personal use or to advance the organization. These internal elements build the desirable culture that translates into a brand prepared for external communication and exposure. P-02 underlined:

> Using the best tools for our teams is essential, employees had the ability to test
> other products (advanced or leading-edge technologies that could lead to
> efficiencies. Employees were allocated $100–200 monthly on software to test or

work with. This was more of a culture and brand imperative verses a brand strategy.

The second part of building a brand is a commitment to the organizational architecture by leadership and employees. During the literature review, it was emphasized that management could achieve a partnership with employees by investing in their knowledge, training, and development (Halimah et al., 2022; Mihanovic, 2021). This investment could enhance an employee's commitment and loyalty to the organization, and improve competitiveness and profitability. Transparency, trust, investment in employees' skills and knowledge, strategic partnership between leaders and followers, encouraging innovation, and supporting employee engagement in corporate business by leadership. Participants P-01 and P-02 encourage employees to purchase advanced technologies to help their position and evaluate advanced technologies that could innovate or support organizational goals and objectives. P-04 drew attention to their commitment to trust and respect for employees as a factor in loyalty and employee retention. In our discussions on culture and HRM strategies, participants considered loyalty, trust, and commitment important to employees and a brand strategy.

The final building block of a corporate brand is exposure within an industry, both regional and local communities. The initial brand exposure is from employees who enjoy their work and commitment to the organization and become brand ambassadors. Participants P-01 and P-02 drew attention to how brand ambassadors could attract other skilled workers, underscoring that the skilled workers who brings a friend into the organization, would integrate more effectively as a part of the team and have similar

work habits needed in a fast-paced environment. Participants actively concentrated on enhancing their brand exposure within a region and various communities by participating in events that attracted skilled workers, such as hackathons, software forums, and associations. Participants created events to draw in skilled workers and enlighten others about emerging technologies. These events offered a unique chances to attract newcomers and skilled workers to the organization or industry, while also fostering strategic alliances with organizations eager to embrace cutting-edge technologies. Another chance to gain brand recognition is to publish articles in industry or local publications, highlighting the new technology or services. Employees gain exposure and show their expertise, increasing their reputations in a field and inspiring others to increase their knowledge in the articles about innovations and discoveries. Adopting this approach will motivate others to incorporate similar innovations and findings into their organizations, enabling them to reap the benefits and share their experiences with this knowledge base.

Organizational branding is a complementary strategy that captures elements fundamental to developing recruitment strategies. The elements of values, diversity, commitment, leadership, brand exposure, and supporting regional and local opportunities by exposing them to innovations and discoveries. Recruitment theory describes the many influences upon people who make a decision to enter a field of study or work (Winston, 2001). The foundational elements contribute to my conceptual framework on what strategies owners of small businesses used to attract or retain skilled workers. A person's ability to communicate, inspire, and become a brand ambassador reflects the elements of

competencies and experiences. Branding is one of several components of recruitment

strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers.

**Theme 3: HRM Strategies**

Organizational strategies include managing resources (human, financial,

technology) effectively to deliver increased performance levels to create corporate and

economic value. HRM recruitment is one of the key strategies an organization could

develop and implement (Mukherjee & Yadav, 2020). Battour et al. (2021) pointed out

that HRM is a strategic approach to developing organizational policies and procedures

concentrated on acquiring, developing, and managing employees to take advantage of

their performance to accomplish goals and objectives required for competitiveness and

profitability. After conducting the semistructured interviews and other data sources

(documentation, notes, and websites), I realized that some small business owners have

limited resources to formalize HRM strategies and practices. This element was

emphasized by P-05:

It is challenging for a small company to compete for resources against larger

companies that have the financial resources to dominate recruitment in the skilled

workforce market. Frankly, our organization needs to increase the resources

(human, financial, technology) to be competitive in acquiring skilled workers.

However, business owners have modified HRM elements to fit their company

size, teams, work, and time required to accomplish goals and objectives.

The key elements for HRM provided by participants and the frequency of these

elements can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Frequency of Theme 3 and Coding Characteristics*

| Participant | Theme: HRM | Coding: Strategic HRM | Corporate commitment | Internal external factors | Measurement |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| P-01 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| P-02 | 2 | 12 | 0 | 10 | 4 |
| P-03 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 2 |
| P-04 | 0 | 12 | 1 | 8 | 1 |
| P-05 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| P-06 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Total | 6 | 52 | 4 | 38 | 9 |

*Note*. HRM = human resources management.

Table 4 denotes the coding characteristics associated with Theme 3 – HRM and is summarized here for clarity on the elements that contribute to coding characteristics. The coding characteristics are high-level and are discussed further in my data analysis for Theme 3. The key theme was HRM, and two coding characteristics were very prevalent for participants; strategic HRM that included development and implementation of corporate strategies to support recruitment activities and support employees, and internal and external factors that influence HRM policies and procedures.

Winston's (1998, 2001) theory on the elements and attributes that steer or influence people to follow a profession were, to some extent, apparent in the data collected. All participants developed recruitment strategies that started the influence process at the high school and college level (attending or creating events), demonstrating the technologies, providing internships, skilled employees showing their expertise for youth, and services offered to the market. In Theme 1, branding, organizations want to become a household name so that their image and reputation attract new entrants to the profession and select organizations based on their products or services. Participants

identified key elements (such as events, podcasts, technology competitions, and articles) that should be integrated into the organization's HRM recruitment strategy.

The following elements captured the insights and experiences shared by participants and integrated them into identified strategies for enhancing the internal HRM approach. Strategies identified by all participants were aimed at modernizing recruitment processes, leverage technology, and enhance staff training, particularly in the realm of effective candidate interviewing. Additionally, participants see that gig workers seek transient opportunities rather than long-term careers with organizations. The participants advocated for developing a robust external strategy to attract new entrants to their industry. Developing this strategy includes organizing or participating in events that appeal to skilled workers, contributing articles to publications frequented by industry professionals for heightened brand recognition, and establishing partnerships with regional governments and institutions.

These collaborations aim to foster knowledge exchange and demonstrate leading-edge technologies needing regulatory support. During the data collection phase, I encountered two dynamics in developing HRM recruitment strategies: First, the organization needed to strengthen internal processes, reduce the time involved in recruiting skilled workers, and establish an external approach (community outreach, partnerships) to attract and hire skilled workers. Second, internal and external factors played a role in successfully recruiting skilled workers at all levels to assist the organization in achieving competitiveness and profitability.

*Internal Strategies*

From the literature review on HCT, early researcher Becker (1962) considered that the primary goal of human capital was to develop personal attributes such as knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, and experiential learning. This personal development increased the firm's productivity, resulting in competitiveness and profitability. Villeda and McCamey (2019) indicated that HCM paralleled HCT in that recruitment strategies are needed to attract and hire skilled workers using different communication methods like social networks (job boards, LinkedIn, personal, relationships). In my study, the elements identified in my literature review and data analysis align with my conceptual framework. The aim was to explore the skills, competencies, work experiences, education, credentials, personal traits, and organizational capabilities evident in the collected data.

The factors identified, such as organizational culture, goals and objectives, and specific strategies like DE&I to attract and hire skilled workers, are integral to my conceptual framework. Many of the elements identified in my literature review, and from the data analysis and review, correspond to my conceptual framework. My study aimed to see what skills, competencies, work experiences, education and credentials, personal traits, and capabilities for the organization were evident in the data collected. The factors identified are included in my conceptional framework where many of the identified elements were organizational culture, the goals and objectives of the organization, and additional specific strategies like DE&I to attract and hire skilled workers. HRM is essential in finding the strategic recruitment strategies' development and implementation

mechanisms business leaders need to accomplish the goals and objectives for

organizational success (Battour et al., 2021).

All participants used internal and external strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and

retain skilled workers, including Winston's elements of attracting or influencing new

entrants to the industry through external strategies. Participants P-01, P-02, and P-04

highlighted their solid, committed recruitment process that assists the organization with

hiring by reducing it within two weeks of engagement with the potential skilled workers.

P-02 extended this comment by underscoring:

> Our recruiting process must be a short time-to-hire, 1–2 weeks maximum. HR
>
> screens the candidates for essential job requirements, candidates meet the team to
>
> see if fit is right, and finally meet with CEO for final interview, then the offer is
>
> sent out immediately or at the same time.

With a lack of skilled workers available for hire by participants, exceptionally

skilled workers, the recruitment process traditionally has ten steps: resume intake,

scanning the resumes, selecting potential candidates, initial HR interview, technical

assessments, manager interview, references and credentials, manager team interview or

VP/C-Suite, decision, offer. The reduced time-to-hire process could be shortened using

electronic employment technologies such as AI, structure software (VONC, Assessfirst,

TestGorilla), and gig platforms, making HR departments more technical (Vasanthy &

Venkatachalam, 2023). P-01 explained the process using AI to assist with the recruitment

process into 3-steps: filtering resumes to identify the right skills needed by applicants,

initial interview by manager, outsourcing to gig platform standard processes such as

references and testing, then interview with CEO, if all good, the offer is provided immediately. The same 3-step interview process with P-01 coincides with Vasanthy and Venkatachalam's (2023) recommended that process to hire skilled workers using AI to reduce the old multiple step recruitment process (resume screening, initial interview, technical assessment, HR interview, management interview, and final decision) that was cumbersome and inconvenient.

Organizations must ensure that stakeholder commitment is paramount to improve the interviewing process. P-01 and P-03 discussed the need to train internal recruiting stakeholders (management and executives) as active participants during the interviews and ultimately responsible for their decisions to hire skilled workers. P-03 and P-04 stated that interviewing techniques must include inclusive language to avoid stereotyping a position to a specific demographic, where all participants practice many forms of DE&I. The shortened process method has proven effective, as participants and stakeholders communicated their satisfaction with the speed and quality of hires. P-04 and P-05 drew parallels to management involvement in the process and their commitment to ensuring the recruitment process is effective and successful. P-03 explained the difficulty of finding specifically skilled workers as candidate pools are incredibly low. It was apparent that management's commitment to the recruitment process guarantees the right candidate is selected and skilled workers remain with the organization long-term. P-01 and P-03 emphasized the importance of thoroughly screening candidates at the management level to discern those who are likely to succeed and filter out those who may

not. P-03 underscored the need to thoroughly scrutinize candidates who will not be successful:

> The best time to fire is before hire, this will ensure the best candidate that will be successful, is hired.

Advanced technology and the skills required to manage those technologies, reduce the number of applications to open positions because potential candidates lack specific skills for advanced technologies. However, because of the digital platforms used (i.e., Glassdoor, Indeed, LinkedIn), thousands of people apply for any position without the necessary qualifications. All participants except P-06 use AI to reduce the number of applications that do not contain the right qualifications for positions (filtering). AI helps develop all-embracing (DE&I) and comprehensive job descriptions for advertising. AI could determine that the desired content for the job description is high quality and covers the desired skills, competencies, and attributes of a position. The AI-generates comprehensive job descriptions for different levels of skilled workers, listing all skills and competencies required. Another innovative technology is one-way interviewing used by P-03. Organizations provide a series of questions for a potential candidate; the candidate responds to the questions, the system records their responses, and the video interview is available to management at any time for viewing at a time convenient for them. The hiring team (HR, manager, executive) could review the video response at their leisure and could review the recorded interview as often as needed.

Advanced technologies could also be used to improve the quality of work required in the recruitment process (job descriptions, testing), reduce the time from

participant engagement to hire, and use end-to-end human resource information system (HRIS) systems to manage the organization's HRM resources (human, financial, technology) from hire-to-departure, and ensure clarity in DE&I efforts in attracting the diverse candidates. Participants P-01 and P-02 used AI to assist with refining their job descriptions and with platforms to post. P-01 used AI to offset the typical duties of another staff member, saving the organization money by hiring an HR professional to assist. P-01 indicated that in the future of work, AI tools will replace ordinary workers in small companies (administration, HR, finance). Business thinking was prevalent throughout the data on advancements in technology. Juicharoen et al. (2023) traversed the eras of HRM and underlined that digital technologies will drive the future of HRM.

Participant P-03 underlined the use of gig workers (freelancers, part-time workers) who were accepting full-time work and continuing to participate in the gig economy:

Overemployment is a concern, some candidates and employees have multiple jobs, remote work, and these workers had second and third gig positions that interfered with their primary responsibilities for the organization. Candidates take the position offered and do nothing, therefore the organization needed to tighten up our job offers to avoid any potential conflicts.

Participants needed to tighten recruitment strategies developed to screen out these gig workers. Participants P-03 and P-06 outsourced essential elements such as recruitment testing, reference verifications, and security checks, as these elements reduced the amount of work required in the recruitment process by HR departments. Gig

platforms are ambidextrous HRM-enabled platform-based gig organizations with the expertise available to promptly conduct the work needed for an organization (testing, references, security checks) (Johar & Singh, 2023). Outsourcing activities could reduce the time-to-hire and increase the effectiveness of HR recruitment activities in achieving process improvements.

Several participants floated the concept of an employee handbook that provided a comprehensive document that communicates your company's mission, policies, and expectations. P-01 and P-04 provided the document online for external viewing, giving potential applicants a view of the organization, pace of work, expectations, and transparency on the compensation program. Internally, the employee handbook approach could be beneficial for new employees, and externally, it would give them a chance for potential candidates to see if the organization was a good fit or not. The Employee Handbook (2022) acknowledged that, the importance of having an employee handbook to avoid misunderstandings, miscommunications, health and safety direction, and potential lawsuits. Still, the document is also an excellent roadmap for new and organizational employees to avoid ambiguity. Devine et al. (2022) put together a review of an employee handbook for students with learning disabilities and confirmed that a well-structured employee handbook is critical to an individual's success within the organization.

The organizational employee handbook covers many HRM elements that HR departments deliver. Participants identified comprehensive onboard, fair and equable workplace policies, steps to success, internal communications, professional development, knowledge and education programs, performance-based rewards programs, transparency

in the organization, employee wellness, mentorship programs available for new skilled

workers, but also for skilled workers identified for leadership advancement and growth.

Participants P-01, P-03, and P-05 successfully implemented the mentorship and coaching

strategy, as the constant feedback and employee concerns were dealt with immediately,

not letting them fester into more significant problems. Participant P-04 identified an eHR

ecosystem that could contain all the resources for potential candidates and internal skilled

workers:

> Our ultimate goal is to build the best her ecosystem, reducing the need to use job
>
> boards, and provide candidates and employees the key resources consistent with
>
> HCM and HRM strategies. This strategy would contribute to someone's success
>
> within the organization and the organizations success in attracting or retaining
>
> skilled workers.

By implementing these internal recruitment strategies, organizations could foster

personal and professional growth, retain skilled workers and specialized talent, and

efficiently fill key positions from within, ultimately contributing to the organization's

competitiveness and profitability.

### External Strategies

Participants P-03, P-04, and P-06 took the opportunity to hire specialized HR

organizations to bring in a fresh perspective, way of working (thinking outside the

organization's box), and insight into how other industries could assist or influence the

organization. Outsourcing gig work allowed organizations to create efficiencies in time

savings and lack of specific skills of internal HR staff. Tasks given to gig platforms or

workers take a unique approach, such as skills testing, reference checks, security verification, and functions like health and safety that gig workers could do with the expertise required. Organizations could select other elements for outsourcing, like events and team-building opportunities, allowing management teams in small organizations focus on work performance internally. Participants also highlighted team leadership-building activities, testing individuals and teams to complete stations (activity) to encourage innovative approaches to problem-solving and how to work together as a team to complete the activity.

Participants P-04 and P-05 mentioned the opportunity to develop strategic partnerships with institutions and regional stakeholders (chamber of commerce, local government, industry associations). These partnerships provided a chance to maintain consistency with government regulations and industry standards and potential opportunities to influence local institutions on required education programs. Participants P-01 and P-04 leverage government-funded programs to assist new entrants looking for opportunities and job experiences such as internships, school placements, and coops. Participants P-01, P-02, P-05, and P-06 developed organizational outreach program initiatives to connect with and positively impact their local or regional communities. Compion et al. (2022) supported the idea of events that could attract a large pool of interested participants. P-06 identified outreach driven strategies are a strategic imperative:

Internal and external investments are outreach driven. Networking events at different levels are opportunities for getting ahead of the curve based on annual quarters and the investment is used for branding and marketing.

P-01, P-02, P-05, and P-06 attended events where skilled workers look for employment or participate in a competition such as a hackathon. Develop initiatives to display technology or products that would showcase, educate, and create a desire in youth to enter a given industry. Other initiatives include local groups based on skills (sales events, marketing association, chamber of commerce), programmer meetups, and education institution events. These participants also developed an outreach program of educating other organizations on their products or services, authoring articles locally or in industry publications, and conducting fireside chats or podcasts to discuss opportunities and challenges with new technologies. Outreach programs or community engagement through events could build lasting relationships, foster cooperation locally or regionally, and contribute to the social or environmental goals of the organization. These initiatives come from the key items from Winston's recruitment theory (1998, 2001), influencing an individual to pursue a field of study or desire to work with an organization that uses the technology or service, has open positions, and opportunities for internships to gain valuable experience.

Participants identified measurement strategies to determine what works right and what does not. All participants measure elements such as time-to-hire, quality of candidates hired, what strategies worked (job boards or gig companies), surveys to identify issues within the recruitment process, reasons for leaving, offers accepted or

rejected, and where hires were first engaged. These measurements provide the opportunity to understand what strategies need adjusting to attract and hire the right skilled worker more successfully. P-02 used a different scale to measure success by a flattened curve based on the retention of employees:

> Unlike a bell curve, we measure our success through a flattened curve that has two bumps (one for two months of employment and the other for 5 years) based on the candidates who departed or stayed. The two-bump method demonstrates what strategies worked and what did not. Adjusting the recruitment strategies will mitigate the potential loss and avoid losing future candidates.

> Winston's recruitment theory (2001) recognized that organizations typically avoid measuring success in strategies, as it could expose failure in the goals and objectives of the organization, creating embarrassment. Evaluations could assist organizations in seeing what is working and what is not, and for what is not, how to improve recruitment strategies for success.

Many internal and external recruitment strategies include factors and attributes outlined by Winston's (1998, 2001) recruitment theory. HRM elements such as events to encourage new entrants to an industry or field (influence), screening candidates for long-term employment (leaders), the information provided on advanced products and services, and creating a positive image of the profession are all confirmed elements of Winston's recruitment theory. Several of the participants' recruitment strategies extend the knowledge beyond Winston's original theory writings, therefore extending the knowledge base. These factors (leveraging technology, faster recruitment process,

external image) lay the foundation for owners of small businesses to develop recruitment strategies but also successfully differentiate themselves from others or larger organizations competing to attract and hire skilled workers provide an opportunity to.

Newer elements such as external factors, the gig economy, advanced technologies, and retention strategies improve recruitment processes to create a positive experience for potential applicants. Skill sets, competencies, leadership, work experiences, knowledge, and credentials are key factors identified by all participants that contribute to my conceptual framework. I have revised my initial thoughts to recognize that the organization needs foundational HRM elements to develop and implement successful recruitment strategies, finding long-term leaders in the end.

In conclusion, my study revealed a combination of internal and external factors shaping successful HRM recruitment strategies for owners of small businesses. Leveraging advanced technologies, building strategic partnerships, community engagement, and adopting innovative measurement strategies emerged as critical elements for enhancing recruitment processes and attracting skilled workers. Emphasis was placed on supporting and valuing the skilled workers for their contribution to the organization and how organizations could develop comprehensive HRM strategies to help employees and make them successful. The findings contribute to the knowledge base, extending beyond Winston's original theory and incorporating contemporary elements essential for developing and implementing effective recruitment strategies.

**Theme 4: Advanced and Disruptive Technologies**

Winston's recruitment theory (1998, 2001) discussed the influences upon which individuals enter a profession. In addition to organizational influences, factors that drive individuals include being team players, contributing to meaningful work, and valuing the technologies an organization employs to create its advanced products. From my research, two corporate strategies (recruitment factors) that entice someone to pursue employment with a firm are their organizational branding and culture. Advanced technologies are rapidly expanding, impacting how organizations conduct their business and creating innovation for future work, boosting their competitiveness and profitability. These new technologies were prevalent during the research process, with participants who indicated that technology drives internal efficiencies (processes), highlights creativity in the organization, and employee engagement with a desire to associate with the future of work.

The advanced or disruptive technology coding characteristics provided by participants and their frequency in the data can be found below in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Frequency of Theme 4 and Coding Characteristics*

| Participant | Theme: Advanced or disruptive technologies | Coding: Technology to Gain Efficiencies | Technology to support HRM activities | Technology as recruitment strategy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| P-01 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| P-02 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| P-03 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| P-04 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| P-05 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| P-06 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 1 |
| Total | 6 | 14 | 19 | 10 |

*Note*. HRM = human resources management.

Table 5 denotes the coding characteristics associated with Theme 4 – advanced and disruptive technologies and is summarized here for clarity on the elements that contribute to coding characteristics. The coding characteristics are high-level and are discussed further in my data analysis for Theme 4. Each code characteristic was supported with the following elements: Advanced or disruptive technologies included innovation, AI tools, industry trends and compliance, and business operations. The most identified code characteristic was using technology to gain efficiencies using AI tools to reduce and improve the recruiting process. In a highly competitive job market, participants emphasized the importance of a swift hiring process, ideally within two weeks, due to the scarcity of skilled resources. Delaying offers risks losing potential hires to other companies that extend immediate offers, particularly impacting smaller organizations. And technology is used as a recruitment strategy to attract potential skilled workers looking to work with advanced or disruptive technologies because of their interest in being part of future solutions.

Participants P-01, P-02, P-03, and P-04 discussed using advanced technologies to develop meaningful products for their business and took advantage of these technologies to attract and retain skilled workers. Using AI in the early stages of creating job descriptions for the recruitment process allowed the organization to ensure job descriptions are comprehensive, leave no ambiguity about the position, and sanitize the wording (DE&I) to attract diverse candidates instead of targeting specific candidates to hire. Using AI, participants P-01, P-03, and P-04 indicated that using different technologies improved the recruitment, selection, and identification of top-skilled workers. Participants noted that using job boards (i.e., Glassdoor, Indeed, LinkedIn) produced thousands of resumes, creating large amounts of time for recruiters to filter away the unnecessary applicants and focus on the top candidates for further processing. P-01 expressed that using ChatGPT provided more efficiencies in recruiting:

> AI has influenced our recruiting process significantly whereby it becomes an opportunity to eliminate specific work tasks done by an employee, avoid the cost of hiring someone specifically or outsourcing particular recruitment tasks.

Technology, in this respect, has improved the time required to validate potential candidates for the next steps, expedite the hiring process, and potentially the need to hire certain workers in the organization. Several participants implemented talent management solutions to improve the recruitment process, which ultimately enhanced the time-to-hire of candidates but also provided the organization the ability to manage new hires from cradle-to-grave, again reducing the time spent manually managing the numerous factors

in HRM (i.e., performance assessment, benefits administration, educational opportunities, mandatory training) for employees.

Social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) have provided low-to-no-cost technology for advertising to the masses in hopes of gaining more exposure to candidates looking for specific positions and the opportunity to expose the masses to their brand. Another technology employed by participant P-03 is implementing new technology (one-way video interviewing):

> One-way video interviewing that will significantly decrease their time-to-hire of potential skilled workers. This advanced technology allows stakeholders the ability to view interviews on their own time reducing the challenges of scheduling interviews with management and over different time zones.

P-03 employs new technologies to assist and monitor employee engagement, helping the organization with mentorship efforts and dealing with problems immediately before the problem festers into more significant issues (i.e., employees leaving the organization). AI technologies could also provide organizations with monitoring industry trends, metrics, and standards, ensuring the organization mitigates any new policies or procedures that have changed, avoiding the potential of being out of compliance with government policies and procedures.

All participants discussed the opportunities with advanced technologies that contributed to the corporate culture and branding strategies. P-01, P-02, P-03, and P-04 provided an overview of how advanced or disruptive technologies contributed to creating an organizational culture employees or potential skilled workers wanted to be part of.

Participants also furthered the culture strategy into a branding strategy and P-02

expressed that:

> Advanced technologies are an excellent marketing tool (brand and culture) in
>
> attracting limited skilled workers to an organization wanting the challenge of
>
> future technologies.

Both Chen et al., (2019) and Krithika et al., (2019) identified that the lack of

skilled workers can challenge business owners, but implementing new advanced

technologies could assist in finding the right person.

Advanced or disruptive technologies are a significant benefit to the organization.

Process improvement, time-to-hire, and retention opportunities for skilled workers eager

to align themselves with advanced technologies or future products. Additionally, these

technologies support the skilled workforce with the tools to do their work, solidifying

HRM processes to attract and hire the right skilled workers and reducing industry risk

(i.e., keeping up with the numerous changes in government and industry policies and

procedures, DE&I, health and safety, and labor laws).

**Theme 5: Retention Strategies**

During the data collection process, most participants discussed retention strategies

while developing its culture and its brand. Strategies focusing on professional growth,

employee engagement, leadership, monitoring, and evaluation of work concentrated on

developing superior skills of employees, mentorship, and creating a partnership valuing

employee engagement. Rao (2022) studied the impacts of job satisfaction, remote work,

and the effect of compensation on employee retention. Rao concluded that compensation

was a key factor in retaining skilled workers. The retention strategies coding

characteristics provided by participants and their frequency in the data, can be found

below in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Frequency of Theme 5 and Coding Characteristics*

| Participant | Theme: Retention strategies | Coding: Leadership and employee support | Culture and brand development | Employee engagement |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| P-01 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| P-02 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 4 |
| P-03 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| P-04 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 2 |
| P-05 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| P-06 | 1 | 3 | 10 | 4 |
| Total | 18 | 23 | 29 | 16 |

Table 6 denotes the coding characteristics associated with Theme 5 – retention

strategies and is summarized here for clarity on the elements that contribute to coding

characteristics. The coding characteristics are high-level and are discussed further in my

data analysis for Theme 5. A summary of Table 6 highlights the theme of retention

strategies, focusing on developing approaches to retain skilled workers. Two key coding

characteristics, leadership and employee support, and culture and brand development,

were crucial for all participants. These elements were linked to employee engagement

and support through DE&I and CSR, which fostered a sense of pride and commitment

among employees toward the organization.

Other elements like remote work and factors in job satisfaction contributed

moderately to significantly to the retention of skilled workers. P-01, P-02, and P-03 spoke

of providing new executives with equity compensation based on their knowledge,

competencies, and experiences that grow the organization. Equity opportunities for staff were based on time in the organization, commitment to the organization, and performance level, which contributed to competitiveness and profitability. Transparency provided employees and potential hires with market information about pay and compensation. However, from the data gathered, compensation was not an overbearing retention strategy.

An organization's management team that practices high employee engagement translates into increased performance for the organization's competitiveness and profitability. Participants P-01, P-02, and P-03 discussed the importance of leadership and mentorship for new and existing employees. P-01 and P-03 implied that a key to mentorship has numerous factors (engaging employees, developing their knowledge, increasing their skills).

> P-03 expressed that employee commitment is paramount with mentoring and performance coaching. We have implemented technology (check-in-tracker) to ensure employee engagement while managers are accountable for their staff. Any potential problem is dealt with immediately to avoid exacerbation of the problem and employees have the coaching needed. This strategy resulted in very little or no voluntary attrition.

However, continuous employee performance feedback, monitoring their work, and evaluating production levels are critical to creating an enjoyable collaborative environment. Iqbal et al. (2022) determined that authentic leadership as an opportunity to motivate employees, which contributed to increased organizational commitment and job

satisfaction, essential for the organization's growth and competitiveness. Performance

evaluation was another key point from P-01, P-02, and P-03, where ownership by

management to mentor and manage employees provided continuous feedback every

30/60/90 days. P-01 qualified the performance management strategy as:

> For new employees, coaching them to success with periotic assessments
>
> (30/60/90) would bring skilled employees up to optimal working capacity.
>
> Employee reviews facilitated and supporting the level of mentorship required.

Participants suggested that constant feedback was a factor that was instrumental

in retaining skilled workers. Plachy and Smunt (2022) emphasized that the link between

employees and management's desire to get tasks done is leadership, and this leadership is

the development of a strategic partnership between a leader and employees based on

mutual respect and a desire to accomplish the mission. In organizational communication

between a leader and their followers, transparency is the opportunity to develop and

foster a respectful partnership between the leader and follower. The leader positively

influences followers (Gerpott et al., 2020). The partnership (P-01, P-02, P-03, and P-04)

is based on shared values and vision factors, fostering an environment of innovation with

employees through idea generation, engaging employees in developing a firm's strategic

direction, and measuring the organization's success and failures. P-02 underlined the

openness of management and employee engagement:

> Allowing employees the opportunity to silently participate in management
>
> meetings and decisions in organizational direction. This approach ensured
>
> performance needed razor-sharp leadership to encourage and foster the openness

of employees. Transparency of this nature was a double edged sword, deal making was a scary thing at times, but transparency helped with employee retention.

Leadership has many styles (Northouse, 2022), and organizational leaders must employ different styles to ensure employees are engaged, valued, motivated, and appreciative of the partnership created.

All participants identified that training and development opportunities are the top retention strategy for organizations. Managers understand what inspires and motivates employees and how to manage their careers from start to finish with organizational support resources. An organization's leaders are responsible for understanding their skilled workers' strengths and weaknesses and strategizing training and development initiatives to enhance employee knowledge and competencies (Mabaso et al., 2021).

Participants highlighted the necessity for managers to demonstrate effective employee management by showing concern and awareness of technological advancements, identifying areas of improvement for their employees, and recognizing the importance of upskilling to sustain competencies in technology and innovation. P-01 revealed that management encouraged their employees to seek new technologies, purchase them for trial, and educate the other employees or organization on that technology. This supportive and innovative approach assisted staff in maintaining and increasing their competencies and creating the internal innovation needed for new products and services to gain market share, leading to increased profitability.

P-01, P-02, P-03, and P-04 identified high performers and selected them for leadership opportunities based on their commitment to the organization. Typically, compensation strategies (pay and equity) are used to raise the morale of high-performing, skilled employees and inspire them to remain loyal to the organization. All participants looked for experienced management members who could provide a diverse strategic contribution to the firm's growth and the ability to mentor high performers into leaders. Investing (i.e., education, mentorship, leadership) for internal employees is another strategy to retain skilled workers. Professional development through leadership training, education pursuits, and increased Skill sets in new technologies are all elements skilled employees want to remain loyal to the organization. P-03 specifically developed a leadership development strategy:

> Strategic leadership development for high-potential skilled workers was created and the leadership accelerator course was being developed internally to incorporate our culture and future needs. The goal is to develop the competencies and knowledge of potential leaders for our organization and contain our organization culture and five core values; transparency, drive/growth, excellence, humanity, and team.

P-06 developed a leadership strategy focused on external resources:

> Growth of the organization was another strategic consideration to build strength internally. To accomplish this we hired external experienced executives (VP sales, VP strategy) to assist in driving the organization and bringing another industry perspective to strategic planning in a very complex and competitive industry.

Growth in the organization for new employees comes from a committed management team that mentors their staff to success. With increased leadership opportunities for high performers, it is essential that managers are committed to mentoring and coaching them. Employee's success in the organization is attributable to management. Conversely, organizational management benefits significantly from training and developing their skills and competencies. Organizations must support managers in the organization and how managers support their employees. Winston (2001) wrote that the importance of leaders possessing the necessary qualities for the organization, as well as the significance of developing their leadership attributes. The training and development element would apply to the development of future leaders of the organization with knowledge transfer and experiential opportunities.

P-01, P-02, and P-04 highlighted the opportunity to create the right internal conditions for employee success. Providing the right tools, compensation programs for performance, mentorship as a single point of contact, learning opportunities in management and work-related problem solving, and leadership opportunities will enable employee success. These elements are part of the required partnership (Plachy & Smunt, 2022) in an organization where employees need and feel valued by its support in their prosperity.

Winston's (1998) work included diversity in his recruitment theory, which mainly focused on library service but applied to other industries; it outlines how potentially diverse candidates will provide a broad range of perspectives based on previous experiences. These perspectives could also create culturally diverse strategies, assisting

the organization in developing the proper performance and product development

strategies. Investing in and maturing a DE&I strategy will demonstrate the organization's

commitment to having the right balanced workforce that will create a positive image of

the organization, encourage innovation from all perspectives (culturally), and increase the

businesses' performance to create economic value. Stamps and Foley (2023) concluded

that DEIB programs will create solid cultures and organizational strategies, create

strategic partnerships, support retention, and improve quality in the organization to

achieve profitability.

Most participants identified a safe workplace as a crucial factor for retaining

employees. Successful retention strategies included wellness programs, flexibility, work–

life balance programs, and a mature hybrid office policy. All participants highlighted the

challenge of developing a mutually agreeable workplace strategy that supports a hybrid

approach and work–life balance. However, participants did not provide specific solutions

to address employees' ongoing desire for an agreeable model. This challenge did not

provide any specific solutions from participants to mitigate the ongoing desire by

employees to have an agreeable model. Management in organizations view remote work

as inefficient, with lower performance levels and a lack of management control over

workers (Kowalski & Slebarska, 2022). P-05 stressed that employees were persistent in

pushing the matter forward as desirable; their work (collaborative) is done in the office as

the tools required are only available there. Other participants are trying different models

that could hopefully find a happy medium to strike a balance between office and work-

from-home strategies, encouraging retention of their skilled workers. P-06 recognized the

significance of wellness programming:

> Flexibility is number 1. We encouraged remote by choice, flexible days, we
>
> committed to meet team members where they are, recognizing that we are all
>
> complex individuals where one size does not fit all. We explored solutions this
>
> morning emotional wellness – Employee and family assistance program (EFAP)
>
> and quarterly well-being survey, electronic net promoter score (e-NPS) surveys of
>
> which results are shared, regular leadership coaching so employees are connecting
>
> with team member well-being and touch points. Our internal policies relate to
>
> building a strong company. Some of our policies such as "Right to Disconnect"
>
> follow employment standards act (ESA) requirements.

Leading-edge technologies contribute to organizational efficiencies and are an

essential factor in retention. P-01, P-02, and P-03 employed advanced technologies,

gaining leadership in their markets, creating efficiencies within their organizations, and

providing opportunities for employees to seek new technologies and test them for their

work or as an opportunity to spark innovation for the organization. These participants

expressed that advanced technologies attracted skilled workers who aspired to align with

technological advancements and retained internal skilled workers who desired to

contribute to the future through advanced or disruptive technologies. P-01 recognized that

skilled workers understood the potential value advanced or disruptive technologies would

bring to the organization if everyone wanted to buy their products or services; everyone

wanted to get rich.

Transparency was another key point for P-01 and P-03. Transparency on open compensation programs allows skilled workers to measure if the organization is at par with industry standards or salary compensation levels. Employees understood the elements of compensation or total compensation implemented by the organization (leave periods longer than usual, the market potential for success, and share price) and transparency in the company's performance. The transparency element contributed to the organization's success and direction in the future, something that was open for employee input. P-01 and P-02 had available-door policies encouraging workers to express their frame of mind on management's approaches. P-01 also invited employees to participate in management meetings (silent participation) to experience how management is leading the organization and its future direction.

Winston (1998, 2001) portrayed recruitment theory as the search for leaders who will successfully manage the organization. Winston's internal measures to support leadership look to exploit the qualities of leaders, drive the development of those qualities, and the impact these qualities have on the organization's success and increased competitiveness and profitability based on that leadership. The many elements in retention policies and strategies were recurring themes from participants and aligned with Winston's recruitment theory, where skilled workers wanted to work for an organization that is committed to them, open and transparent on compensation, has a positive image within the community, dedicated to building the skills of new entrants, mentorship, use innovative technologies, and advancement in the organization.

Designing and implementing recruitment strategies to find the right skilled workers are an initial step, but developing additional strategies will encourage youth to enter professions based on the technologies used in the organization, fair and open compensation, mentorship, transparent leadership, and skilled worker programs that engage and value them in the organization.

### Applications to Professional Practice

Owners of small businesses need help attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining skilled workers as globalization (gig work) takes root. Within my literature review, the U.S. shows a slowing of economic and industry growth over the next 10 years (2022–2032) due to a lower employment rate and a decline in U.S. gross GDP, lowering the economic value over the projected period (U.S. BLS, 2023). The World Economic Forum (2020) stressed that 55.4% of global companies experience a lack of skilled workers due to the barrier to adopting advanced technologies to create economic value. Accordingly, organization leaders are creative in attracting and hiring skilled workers while facing the challenge of implementing advanced or disruptive technologies without skilled workers.

The five themes that emerged (corporate culture, organizational brand, HRM strategies, advanced or disruptive technologies, and retention strategies) are foundational to building an organization that skilled workers want to work in. Another foundational element was that skilled workers actively seek support and encouragement for their active participation in leadership and developing strategies (i.e., technology, brand exposure, events, well-crafted expertise) to attract additional skilled workers. The participants were owners of small businesses across Canada, with employees ranging from 10 to 250. All

participants agreed that internal development, structure, and external partnership are

essential for attracting and hiring skilled workers. Developing recruitment and retention

strategies is half the battle, as building an organization's culture and brand is very

important to lay the foundation for the organization. The recruitment strategies presented

in the five themes contribute to what elements are in job descriptions and online content

used with job boards.

What are skilled workers looking for in an organization? Juicharoen et al. (2023)

highlighted that the past and future of HR departments with the primary considerations or

recruitment factors need to align with the new HR 5.0 era, focusing on implementing

digitation to streamline HRM activities (recruitment processes). All participants detailed

the efficiencies of using technology to transform their businesses. P-01 and P-02

understood that advanced technologies like AI could change the organizations' traditional

structure by replacing a full-time resource or outsourcing organizational tasks like HR

and certain financial activities.

Obel and Gurkov (2023) discussed what is the best organizational structure for

companies because of digitization and sustainability. The authors demonstrated that

organizations who adopt an agile and holistic approach to redesign the organization into

three parts—embracing a whole corporate approach, establishing large business units,

and defining operating units—to meet the evolving demands of a global business

environment. P-01 and P-02 eluded to the separation of business structure to maintain a

core structure focused on product development and support, and small business unit tasks

using digitization to accomplish them (HR tasks and finance) could be outsourced to gig

platforms or gig workers. The approach of cutting small business units as part of the functional structure and replacing them with digitalization or gig workers, was introduced by Scully-Russ and Torraco (2020) during the literature review found that 10% of organizational work would be converted into gig work. Several participants are going down the same path, leveraging technology to reduce the reliance on skilled workers, not just because there is a lack of them, but technology can replace skilled workers.

With gig work and smaller teams within an organization, the appetite for work-from-home solutions (participant P-05), would a virtual organization structure be more straightforward? To achieve this requires the use of technology to connect employees and partners but also opens the door to a global market and workforce (Obel & Gurkov, 2023). Vujicic et al. (2022) concluded that an organization's ability to adapt its internal structures is naturally rooted in organic processes. Vujicic et al. confirmed that internal structures were based on teamwork, culture, flat-decision-making structure, employee commitment and development, and the organization's digitization strategy. Both Obel and Gurkov and Vujicic et al. established globalization, digitization, and sustainability as the key factors dictating organizational structures and change.

World Economic Forum, (2020) stressed that the ongoing shift toward digitization (observed by all participants), owners of small businesses demonstrate inventiveness in both development and adaptation to persist in the face of continuous change. Williams et al. (2021) confirmed that organizations seeking to delegate functional work would achieve optimal results by employing a digital platform strategy when outsourcing such work. An outsourcing strategy would allow an organizational leader to maintain a flat

structure (as a small business), allowing the leader to concentrate on the identified five themes from the data analysis to attract and retain skilled workers. HR must develop transformation strategies for the organization to achieve HR 5.0 (technology), change recruitment strategies to the changing organization structure, and transition to digitization.

All participants agree that advanced or disruptive technology increases efficiencies internally and will continue to change or adapt their organizations accordingly. Outsourcing has started, but participants P-03 and P-05 have hired a fulltime middle manager to plan the strategic internal elements (recruitment, culture, HRM policies, and processes) that will contribute to developing recruitment strategies to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers. A permanent role within the organization will drive the transition and ensure structured plans for the growth and expansion of the organization will create a diverse and dispersed global organization.

All five themes and their supporting elements (coding charactoristics) lay a new foundation that extends recruitment theory and complements some of the original elements Winston presented in his theoretical tenets. With these five building blocks, organizations must continuously redesign their organizations based on the internal and external factors that will increase their stature in the industry, develop the required strategic partnership (i.e., governments, industry, education institutions) regionally and locally, and lead their skilled workforces with a vision, mission, values, and strong leader partnerships while valuing skilled employees. Promoting the organization's brand and culture, with the right HRM strategies based on the organization's image and regional

reputation, will attract skilled workers who desire to affiliate with tangible challenges and success with innovation and discoveries.

## Implications for Social Change

Organization leaders who encourage and support the development of social change policies and initiatives could support socially responsible employees who want to effect change in their communities. The implications for positive social change could be to use the organizational outreach programs highlighted from the data collected to target visible minority or disadvantaged groups. Organizations leaders foster an internal culture to create socially responsible corporate strategies targeting disadvantaged groups regionally. Strategies supported by the data collected, such as creating corporate events that encourage people to pursue a career in different fields, creating learning events for targeted groups, and creating learning opportunities for communities, could improve the encompassing well-being of their local/regional communities. Additionally, organizational leaders could create a positive corporate social impact in their community, ultimately creating the potential of gaining long-term skilled workers wanting to work for an organization with a corporate culture that fits their values and purpose.

The findings from my study could provide insights and opportunities to develop social change programs for the betterment of society. Small business owners could enhance their local presence and contribute to CSR by organizing or participating in skills events within marginalized communities. By forming strategic partnerships with institutions to offer industry-relevant skills training programs, business leaders could help increase the skill levels of individuals in these communities, leading to economic wealth

creation, reduced unemployment, and the attraction of skilled talent. This proactive engagement not only achieves the goal of developing skilled workers but also supports the broader community's development. Nurturing an internal culture that emphasizes CSR strategies specifically designed to benefit disadvantaged groups in local and regional communities further contributes to the organization's goal. Taking an approach of this nature may reduce community unemployment rates and capitalize on the skills these groups bring to the workforce, increasing local economic value. At the same time, owners of small businesses uphold the well-being of communities across Canada.

Conducting research for social change provides a significant opportunity to understand the hermeneutics of injustice against marginalized groups and the potential to effect incremental change in organizations for societal change (Tawodzera et al., 2022). Developing a social change model for leadership development will ensure institutions create leadership programs that prepare and develop students for the recruitment and selection process after completing their education (Tugas, 2019). Technological advancement has produced goods and materials for organizations to create corporate profitability. New disruptive technologies take data and make information that organizations and society could take action against. Still, it has its downfalls, such as misinformation/disinformation, social anxiety, and divergence of thought (Hilbert, 2022). Using my research, organizational leaders and human resources recruitment professionals will have information and supporting data on how to create impactful incremental change to tailor recruitment strategies, develop frameworks for training and development to

enhance successful recruitment by their recruitment teams and understand the benefits

and disadvantages of technology on society; and incorporate changes as needed.

## Recommendations for Action

Owners of small businesses who implement the recommendations from this

doctoral study could positively increase the organizations' ability to attract and hire

skilled workers who are looking for an organization that supports and promotes their

welfare. Mukherjee and Yadav (2020) concluded that selecting the right skilled worker is

essential to the organization; getting suitable candidates and putting them through the

proper testing (i.e., technical, behavioral, and skills) will authenticate the future

leadership and profitability for the organization. The findings of this doctoral study may

assist organizational HRM strategies and develop the internal structure to support

recruitment strategies. Juicharoen et al. (2023) pointed toward the future of recruitment

and selection using HR 5.0 (digital HR systems and technologies), where some

organizations are operating at HR 1.0 (individual qualities) and will need to transition to

HR 5.0 to take advantage of the required skilled workers to manage their transition to

digitization. With increased competition for skilled workers, organizations must have

high employee performance. Shafique (2012) considered an older approach to below-

standard employees called the Rank and Yank approach. Based on individual

performance levels, the rank and yank approach is when the organization fires the lower

performance tier to maintain high-performance levels. Several participants accentuated

that they conduct performance reviews on specified time periods (30/60/90) to bring new

employees up to the standard, provide mentorship to advance individual skills and abilities, and ensure shy employee performance levels were high.

Using thematic analysis, five main themes emerged: (a) corporate culture, (b) organizational brand, (c) human resources management (HRM) strategies, (d) advanced or disruptive technologies, and (e) retention strategies. The data collected answers my research question about the strategies, owners of small businesses used to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers. The recommendations from this doctoral study may provide owners of small businesses with ideas to develop and implement recruitment strategies based on the data and existing recruitment strategies being employed.

The information presented in my doctoral study could be used to develop articles in industry publications highlighting the recruiting strategies used by owners of small businesses and the mechanisms behind their development. Providing the results to industry associations could spark opportunities to contribute lectures or training materials with current practices. With refinement, the use of social media outlets could provide information to bring to light the recruitment factors used to attract and hire skilled workers, but also an opportunity to guide individuals wanting to understand what career path to follow for the future. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore what recruitment strategies owners of small businesses used to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled employees. My doctoral study pinpointed five key themes (corporate culture, brand, HRM strategies, advanced or disruptive technologies, retention strategies). The subsequent details outline achievable goals and objectives designed for owners of small

businesses or their HR departments to merge into corporate culture and recruitment strategies.

**Conduct an Organizational Design Review**

An initial recommendation is for organizational leaders to determine which elements of their businesses ready for technology-driven solutions, reducing traditional positions and outsource the work identified to a gig economy. The initial step to take is to gain an understanding of what type of organization owners of small businesses represent (two streams: gig work and traditional positions). Obel and Gurkov (2023) identified that the different organizational designs (corporations, large business units, operational business units) that businesses could adopt based on the transition to digitization and sustainability. Knowing what structure is best, owners of small businesses could determine the division of internal work and then develop outsourcing strategies using the gig economy to deliver non-critical business functions. The internal structure of an organization (dimension, formalization, centralization, standardization, specialization) is not a determinant of its culture (hierarchy, organizational, clan market, adhocracy), nor is there one management style to determine what the organization's culture is (Primorac & Domljan, 2022). Participants P-01 and P-02 agree that their flat organizational structure provides a decentralized culture where employees are engaged and contribute to the organization's direction, goals, and objectives. Corporate leaders who understand their internal structure could determine what type of organizational culture achieves success.

**Build a Corporate Culture**

A key recommendation from the data analysis is for owners of small businesses to establish a robust local presence (outreach program) through attending or creating skills events, strategic partnerships (industry and political) and collaboration with skills training institutions. An outreach program is an initial building block in a corporate culture strategy. The different elements of an outreach strategy is achievable by actively participating in or organizing events to draw in skilled workers with the potential to become new hires. The following data outlines various approaches to building a robust talent pool of required skilled workers. The initial strategy to build a corporate culture is to create an outreach program.

Participating in local events and sponsorships, attending local technology groups, hackathons, or associations, and creating local events to showcase innovations. Hackathons, codefests, and idea fests are events that attract skilled workers to participate but also provide an opportunity to engage with skilled workers (Longmeier, 2021). Additionally, I engage with educational institutions and cultivate strategic partnerships with governments and industry. Developing strategic partnerships, both internal and external, enhances brand awareness and expands the organization's reach, attracting a diverse pool of skilled professionals. Tumasjan et al. (2020) linked the organization's brand and strategic engagement of employees to the firm's performance levels, resulting in positive recruitment efforts. With the lack of skilled workers, organizations must engage with regional and local partners to meet or develop skilled workers required for their businesses.

Foster a positive and inclusive workplace culture that encourages collaboration, innovation, and employee well-being. All participants included elements of DE&I and explained some of the challenges to attracting specifically skilled workers to contribute to their organization and bring diversity to the team. Developing a DE&I strategy for the organization improves diversity in its vision, enforcing commitment to the vision, awareness of individual strengths and weaknesses contributing to the organization, and injecting the change organizations need to grow (King et al., 2023). King et al. introduced the inclusive approach, DEIB, which creates a sense of belonging for employees, enhancing their commitment to the organization. Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra (2022) suggested that organizations needed to develop a long-term sustainable culture strategy using a structured vision model, communicate the culture model widely, and ensure organizational support and commitment to the culture model and supported by corporate resources (human, financial, technology) to reinforce the sustainable culture strategy. Ketprapakorn and Kantabutra created a process that could create a long-term sustainable culture, construct a sustainable vision with sustainable values, communicate the vision and values, adapt to, monitor, and control the commitment to both and manage sustainable outputs. Building an internal inclusive and belonging culture strategy benefits the organization in the long-term.

Cultivating diversity within the internal team fosters innovation and creativity, attracting skilled workers who value a workplace that embraces varied perspectives. Lead by example, with top leadership actively demonstrating and promoting the desired corporate culture. Performance management through performance evaluations to monitor

and manage employee workloads and progress could significantly benefit employees. For new entrants, P-02 created 30/60/90-day performance evaluations to assist in mentoring and coaching new employees to success. Performance rewards include compensation, advancement within the organization, and leadership opportunities to help build and guide the organization to competitiveness and profitability. To maintain competitiveness, the organization must equip employees with the tools for success. P-01, P-02, P-03, and P-04 ensure the organization invests in the employees with knowledge of advanced technologies and the skills required of innovative leaders within their industry. Employee performance management could increase employee's motivation and desire to increase outputs that advance the organization's performance, resulting in profitability. Paais and Pattiruhu (2020) supported the need for organizational leadership, corporate culture, and employee motivations to impact the organization's performance positively.

Finally, define and communicate the organization's core values, ensuring alignment with business objectives. Internal communication is an opportunity to reinforce the organization's values, successes, and commitment to employees. Using a structured approach like IKEA's (togetherness, caring for people and the planet, cost-consciousness, simplicity, renewal and improvement, different with meaning, give and take responsibility, lead by example), employees are more committed and satisfied with their work, more confident with the direction of the organization, and consider a critical factor like communications contributing to an employee's satisfaction and retention (Perez-Perez et al., 2023). All participants recognized that internal communications were valued and required by employees, and external communications were the opportunity to

demonstrate the organization's expertise, knowledge of workers, and commitment to educating their community. P-01 and P-02 understood the value of the humanistic approach to internal communication that valued the contribution of skilled workers. P-04 characterized communications as the strategic tool for building and maintaining employee respect.

Corporate cultures are distinct ways for organizational leaders to build their brand and for their employees to contribute socially to local or regional communities. Carlini and Grace (2021) designed an internal model (contributing to the organization's brand) that created an awareness of CSR elements, increasing the employees' knowledge of social responsibility and engagement in developing initiatives to gain experiences. Corporate culture was a key strategy for positive social change owners of small businesses could cultivate an internal culture that emphasizes corporate socially responsible strategies specifically designed to benefit disadvantaged groups in local and regional communities. Taking this strategic approach could reduce community unemployment rates and capitalize on the skills these groups bring to the workforce, which may increase local economic value. At the same time, owners of small businesses uphold the well-being of communities across Canada.

**Design and Implement Organizational Branding**

A key recommendation from the data analysis is for owners of small businesses to build a recognizable brand that people distinguish and associate with the values, identity, and unique offerings of the organization supporting their community and industry. After creating the internal culture support for external relations, participation in local events

and sponsorships: Involvement in local events and sponsorships enhances visibility and fosters community connections, attracting skilled workers committed to the organization's values. All participants agree on building the organization's brand and communicating it regionally and locally. Participant P-01 explained that employees are the brand ambassadors while attending events, participating in events, and speaking within their networks and on social media. Perez et al. (2022) emphasized that a stepped approach to marketing the organizational brand, including testimonials, different mediums to expose the brand, utilizing social media to the maximum, publishing in industry publications and journals, presenting at national and internal industry events, and designing these communications channels properly. All participants identified that the elements of brand exposure by word of mouth, strategic partnerships, influencing institutions and governments, transparency in operations, which was open to others, and leveraging personal and professional networks as many of the strategies participants used. Designing a strategic communications plan requires organizational communications strategy, identifying the different mediums to present the message, and managing and monitoring the effectiveness of all communications. As Perez et al. concluded writing articles in industry publications establishes thought leadership, creating awareness and showcasing the organization's values to potential candidates seeking alignment with industry trends.

Monitoring the delivery of communications helps detect any issues or challenges that require recalibration, ensuring the delivery of the intended message. Granizo et al. (2021) confirmed that the components of communication design and delivery,

emphasizing the continuous and iterative nature, focused on managing and monitoring

external communications. Participants P-01, P-02, and P-03 identified that the

opportunity to write and publish articles in industry publications and provide podcasts on

advanced technologies that interest other companies or skilled workers. These elements

were successful measures to attract skilled workers looking for a challenge and an

organization that supports them. Granizo et al. give emphasis that redesigning the

organization's brand to ensure clarity and changing external factors would assist in

delivering the brand to external audiences through different mediums. Agrawal and

Paulus (2022) supported Granizo et al.'s concept of design and management of internal

communications, that would render an industry reputation of expertise and commitment

to a supportive culture of their employees. The concept of design and management could

enhance the attraction and retention of skilled workers for an organization. To

successfully promote their brand within their industry and institutions, organizational

leaders should incorporate monitoring and controlling into their corporate measurement

strategies. This approach will not only promote internal skilled workers but also have a

positive impact on attracting external skilled talent.

Developing strategic partnerships, both internal and external, enhances brand

awareness and expands the organization's influence regionally, attracting a diverse pool

of skilled professionals. Building internal and external strategic partnerships: developing

strategic partnerships, both internal and external, enhances brand awareness and expands

the organization's reach, attracting a diverse pool of skilled professionals. Transparency

in vision, core values, organizational policies and practices, and expectations: Openly

sharing core values and expectations demonstrates a transparent work culture, attracting

individuals who resonate with the organization's vision and values. Building

relationships with regional and local institutions creates a talent pipeline, ensuring a

connection with emerging professionals and aligning education with industry needs.

In conclusion, the diverse array of communications strategies outlined in this data

underscores the complex nature of talent acquisition. By combining participation in local

events, strategic sponsorships, transparent communication of values, performance

management, commitment to values and culture, and cultivating partnerships,

organizations could create an attractive environment for skilled workers. The emphasis

on diversity, continuous learning, and community engagement positions the organization

as a workplace and a hub for professional growth and collaboration.

**HRM Strategies**

*Improved and Shortened Recruitment Processes*

A key recommendation for organizations is to review and improve the recruitment

process. This recommendation emerged as a critical focus for participants as the

recruiting process must be completed within two weeks to hire skilled workers before

another company offers a job offer for their position, as businesses are in a very

competitive market for skilled workers. Juicharoen et al. (2023) confirmed that the

critical process within an organization is the recruiting and selection process. Vasanthy

and Venkatachalam (2023) detailed that a well-designed recruitment technology could

ensure the data captured is logical for the company and provides potential candidates

with an exceptional user experience using the technology platform. Leveraging advanced

technologies, specifically AI, is a common subtheme among participants, streamlining processes from resume screening to the final interview within two weeks and hiring limited-skilled workers before larger firms hire them. Participants P-01 and P-02 have successfully utilized AI to refine job descriptions and automate certain aspects of the recruitment process, reducing the workload on internal HR staff and ensuring high-quality content in job descriptions. Additionally, adopting one-way interviewing, as implemented by P-03, demonstrates an innovative approach to flexibility and convenience in the hiring process. One-way interviews are stored and allow management and executives the opportunity to actively participate during interviews and decision-making at a time convenient to them. These multidimensional strategies mutually contribute to a more agile, streamlined, and effective recruitment process for small businesses, which is critical for attracting and retaining skilled workers in a limited and highly competitive market.

### *Comprehensive Employee Handbook*

Another key recommendation was to develop an employee handbook containing the policies, procedures, and other critical information guiding new and seasoned employees and management teams. The Employee Handbook (2022) offers a structured approach to ensuring a comprehensive employee handbook to guide staff with organizational clarity and transparency. Participants P-01 and P-04 have adopted an employee handbook that serves as a valuable document for potential applicants to gain insights into the organization's mission, policies, and expectations. The participants provided the document online for external viewing; the organization offers prospective

candidates a glimpse into the organizational culture, pace of work, and compensation structure, enabling them to make informed decisions about their fit within the company. But internally, the employee handbook becomes a valuable resource for new employees, guiding them through essential aspects such as fair workplace policies, steps to success, professional development opportunities, and performance-based rewards programs. The employee handbook strategy avoids misunderstandings and miscommunications and supports the participant organizations' commitment to transparency and inclusivity.

### Build a Cultural Strategy for the Organization

A key recommendation is to build a recruitment strategy committing to developing and promoting an organizational culture with employee support, diversity, and social responsibility, which was evident in the participant's data, which highlighted community engagement and external strategic partnerships. Commitment to DE&I practices, as emphasized by P-03 and P-04, is integral to the recruitment process to avoid stereotyping positions and ensure fair and inclusive job descriptions for the hiring environment. Companies that neglect diversity (DE&I gender-based recruitment strategy) risk falling behind in innovation, while those that implement proven practices could increase workforce diversity and stay competitive (Ly-Le, 2022).

A strategy that fosters diversity in thought and innovation enhances long-term profitability. P-03 implemented sensitized job descriptions and targeted recruitment for underrepresented demographics within their team and organization. Participants noted that employees were developing DE&I and CSR strategies, which support organizational innovation through creativity, diverse problem-solving skills, perspectives, and

experiences. As employees commit to managing DE&I and CSR strategies, employees experience a sense of pride, and according to Carlini and Grace (2021), these strategies also boost employee commitment, brand exposure, organizational reputation, and performance.

Another part of a CSR strategy is cultivating an internal culture to emphasize CSR to support the organization's industry and local and regional communities. During the data collection phase, instances of CSR were apparent. Participants P-04 and P-05 actively developed strategic partnerships with institutions, regional stakeholders, and industry associations, aligning their recruitment efforts with broader social and community goals. The organizations all identified that participation with regional governments, institutions, and industry partners provided the ability to influence policies, procedures, and education standards to develop the new generation of future workers. Participants also leveraged government-funded programs for internships, school placements, and coops, demonstrating a commitment to supporting new entrants and providing job experiences within the community. Events organized by participants, such as those attended by skilled workers or competitions like hackathons, attract potential candidates and contribute to community building and engagement. Events organized by participants, such as hackathons coding fests, draw in potential skilled worker candidates and foster community engagement and development.. Another strategy by participants P-04 and P-06 identified outreach programs and community engagement initiatives extending beyond recruitment intentions, fostering positive relationships and cooperation, and contributing to the social and environmental goals of the organizations. Building

social support programs with the employees and focusing on community relationship building will increase the organization's reputation stature and positive role in their communities.

*Performance Management*

An additional recommendation is to build and implement a performance strategy incorporating leadership support and a mentorship program and develop a leadership development strategy to demonstrate the organization's commitment to its skilled employees. A performance management recruiting strategy is implicit in the study through participants' focus on internal strategies aimed at human capital development and creating a positive workplace culture. The study highlights that small business owners, such as participants P-01, P-03, and P-05, implemented mentorship and coaching programs as part of their recruitment strategies. P-03 implemented a mobile application that supports the employee by monitoring their well-being and providing feedback to the HR department to ensure any potential issue did not fester into a more significant problem.

Participants identified other theme supporting elements that are important to the HRM strategic development. Comprehensive onboard, fair and equable workplace policies, steps to success, internal communications, professional development, knowledge and education programs, performance-based rewards programs, transparency in the organization, employee wellness, and mentorship programs available for new skilled workers, but also for skilled workers identified for leadership advancement and growth. van der Velden et al. (2023) asserted that mentorship and leadership are critical in the

first year of a new employee's employment, which dictates their sense of belonging over the long term. Rubinos et al. (2024) provided a 3-step program (important concepts in mentorship, shared mentorship goals and growth opportunities, relationship-based model) to assist organizations in formalizing their approach to mentorship. Participants P-01, P-03, and P-05 successfully implemented the mentorship and coaching strategy, while P-03 implemented a structured mobile app to support employee engagement. Mentorship programs assist in developing the skills and attributes needed by workers to become skilled workers and leaders of the organization (Miller, 2023).

Leadership and mentorship development programs are critical factors for employee engagement and retention. Mentorship involves active engagement, knowledge development, and skill enhancement. Continuous feedback on performance, including regular evaluations 30/60/90), is essential for fostering a collaborative and engaging work environment. Employee evaluation programs are excellent motivators and increase employee performance (Tutar & Guler, 2022). Participant organizations with high performers provided compensation and selection into their leadership growth programs. Leadership training. P-03 had taken a modularized approach to developing high performers for the organization and implemented a mobile application support tool that facilitated employee engagement for periodic reviews to ensure everything was going well and problems were identified and resolved immediately.

Leadership and mentorship development strategies are integral components of the recruitment approaches identified in the study, particularly in the context of small businesses seeking to attract and retain skilled workers. As participants P-01, P-03, and

P-05 have implemented mentorship and coaching programs as part of their recruitment strategies, organizations are building their leaders of the future. The mentorship and coaching programs foster a positive workplace culture, align with the organizational goals and objectives, and ensure that the organization supports employees throughout their professional journey within the company. It would be prudent for corporate leaders to develop a mentorship and leadership development program to help employees and the organization's growth potential. By integrating leadership values and mentorship principles into the recruitment strategy, owners of small businesses not only attract skilled workers but also create an environment conducive to long-term commitment and success.

Finally, organizational leaders could begin measuring the success of their recruitment strategies. Organizational leaders must develop measurable metrics to evaluate and review periodically (quarterly or annually) what is working and what is not with their recruitment strategies. Wai et al. (2021) pointed out that to measure recruitment efficiency and effectiveness, organizations could focus on factors such as cost, quality of hires, and speed of hire. Participants identified measurement strategies such as time-to-hire, quality of candidates employed, exit interviews, what strategies worked (i.e., job boards, gig companies), surveys to identify issues within the recruitment process, reasons for leaving, offers accepted or rejected, and where (social media, websites, job boards) new hires were first engaged. These measurements provide a chance to understand the necessary adjustments for a more effective attraction and successful hiring of the right skilled workers.

Of note, P-02 used a different scale to measure success by a flattened curve based on the retention of employees. Unlike a bell curve, the flattened curve has two bumps (one for two months of employment and the other for 5 years). Based on the candidates who departed or stayed, this method demonstrated what strategies worked and what did not. Adjustments to strategies will effectively mitigate the potential future loss of candidates. Organizations invest significantly in acquiring skilled workers to manage their complex businesses and must develop measurement strategies. With technological advancements, measurement is more straightforward using the adaptive network-based fuzzy inference system (ANFIS) measurement of employees on HR with a Fuzzy Logic tool (Demirel & Cubukcu, 2021). A rule-based application measures skilled workers through their recruitment journey to their departure. Using AI tools to measure organizational HRM performance data will give the organization a step ahead of its competitors in acquiring long-term employees.

**Implement Advanced Technologies**

A fundamental recommendation from the data analysis was to develop and implement advanced or disruptive technologies to improve organizational performance and processes, encourage innovation, and attract skilled talent. In the landscape of talent acquisition with limited skilled workers, leveraging AI has become imperative for optimizing recruitment processes. Utilizing AI algorithms enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of identifying top candidates by analyzing vast datasets to recognize patterns and predict candidate success by presenting the right candidate. Participants signified the advantages of using AI algorithms to drill into online resumes to ensure the

pinpoint accuracy needed to find specific skilled workers is making a difference. P-01 and P-02 identified that being innovative and using advanced technologies was advancing the organization and also attracting skilled talent wanting to be part of something cool.

This technology streamlines the initial stages of recruitment (AI-driven recruiting) and minimizes bias by focusing on candidate qualifications and potential. Yamasaki and Hosoya (2019) implied that using AI could streamline intensive work to analyze large amounts of data and provide considerable clarity for others to understand. AI-powered tools could analyze resumes, assess candidate skills, and even conduct preliminary interviews (one-way interviewing), building comprehensive job descriptions and allowing HR practitioners or owners of small businesses to focus on more strategic and personalized aspects of the hiring process. Hamada (2019) suggested that better corporate decision-making comes with increased knowledge of advanced technologies, and the impact of implementing these advanced technologies will increase their productivity, alluding to the lack of skilled worker knowledge of advanced technologies. By adopting and implementing cutting-edge technologies and incorporating AI tools into recruitment practices, organizations not only expedite the identification of top talent but could reduce the hiring process to 2 weeks and make better-informed decisions on whom to hire. However, the organization could position itself as a tech-savvy and forward-thinking organization and contribute to a positive employer brand.

Organizations seeking skilled workers could use retention strategies to repurpose their existing workforce by upskilling them. Invest in training programs to upskill employees to make sure their skills are proficient in using advanced technologies.

Stockard (2019) explained that the American workforce will need more skilled workers, where over 2 million open positions need strategies planned and filled with workers getting the vocational training required. Connelly et al. (2021) recognized that the growing digitization in organizations through automation, algorithmic workforce management, and technology-driven decision-making by business leaders presents an opportunity to better manage a workforce that is susceptible to external influences or commodification. Cardenas-Navia and Fitzgerald (2019) stressed that the need to upskill an organization's skilled employees to manage advanced or disruptive technologies. The increased use of technology and lack of skilled workers necessitates strategies to retain existing skilled workers (upskilling them) and develop partnerships with local institutions. Most participants mentioned the opportunity to create these partnerships and teach their advanced technologies to the new workforce, increasing skilled workers locally. Consequently, those employees who are upskilling on technologies transferred through knowledge courses may recognize the organization's brand and seek further information about working with the technology teachings. Organizations must develop internal strategies to upskill their workforce and partner with institutions to develop the advanced technology skills required of future workers.

Tutar and Guler (2022) advised organizations to adopt and implement advanced technologies and become more of a virtual digital organization that is required in the new realities of competitiveness in a digital economy. Tutar and Guler identified that a change management strategy for digitization requires digital leadership. Of note, the authors listed that 38% of the workforce is tech-savvy millennials, whereas 62% need more

skilled in advanced technologies to compete. Tutar and Guler pointed out that by 2028, 58% of workers will be technology-skilled workers. Leaders in organizations must digitize their organizations to remain competitive. P-01 and P-02 adopted the idea of allowing employees to experiment with new technologies by providing reasonable financial support to evaluate advanced technology tools to improve operations and be more innovative to increase the products the marketplace is looking for. Participants P-01 and P-02 referred to implementing advanced technologies as a recruiting tool, as everyone wants to work with an organization that innovates and produces advanced products.

Technology utilization extends beyond recruitment processes into talent management and candidate experience enhancement. Implementing advanced technology tools for talent management (HRIS) ensures employees a seamless and engaging experience from onboarding to ongoing professional development. Leveraging technology for candidate experience improvement involves utilizing platforms that facilitate communication, feedback, and transparency throughout the hiring process. The introduction of video interviewing platforms (P-03 introduced one-way interviewing) not only expedites the interview process but also accommodates remote candidates and contributes to a more inclusive recruitment strategy. Moreover, implementing business systems automation enhances the candidate experience by reducing administrative burdens, enabling faster responses, and creating a smoother and more efficient recruitment process. As technology evolves, organizations that embrace these

advancements optimize their operations and elevate the overall experience for candidates and existing employees.

Organizations must frequently assess and update the technology infrastructure to remain efficient and competitive. Review opportunities to incorporate innovation and use advanced or disruptive tools to modernize and digitize the organization. P-01 and P-02 pointed out that supporting employees to purchase and test new technologies, could benefit the organization as new technologies provided operational efficiencies, but also encouraged innovation towards improving the firm's digitization requirements. Introducing education to leadership on technology modernization will spark the innovation needed to progress into the digital industry 4.0 (Dash et al., 2019). Participants were integrating AI into the recruiting process to expedite it and reduce the work required to hire someone. Investing in knowledge and education to upskill or enhance skilled workers will retain participants and will become the leaders of the organization's future. Participants were, finally, implementing and imparting advanced technologies upon new entrants to the industry and attracting the skilled workers seeking the challenge and experiences using advanced or disruptive technologies.

**Retention Strategies**

An essential recommendation from the data analysis related to retention data was identifying and developing strategies to retain skilled workers. Organizational leaders should consider implementing mentorship programs for new entrants to foster a culture of continuous learning and professional growth. All participants confirmed. These programs guide newcomers and facilitate knowledge transfer and skill development within the

organization. By mentoring, coaching, and pairing experienced employees with those just starting, organizations could create a supportive environment that accelerates the integration of new talent into the company's culture and work performance. Participant P-01 supported the notion and included government support for new employees needing mentorship and experience, which benefited the organization and new employees. Training for mentors or coaches will assist them in helping and guiding less experienced employees (van der Velden et al., 2023). Coupled with the training for mentors, van der Velden et al. included those new employees (first year) who flourished and felt valued in the organization. Rubinos et al. (2024) detailed three steps: educate the mentor and determine the factors to success, mutually identify growth opportunities and shared mentorship goals, and develop a mutually agreeable structure to have continuous feedback and knowledge transfer loop that would support success for employees. The element of mutual mentorship was prevalent in discussions with participants on performance feedback (30/60/90 and quarterly assessments), knowledge transfer to new employees, and continued innovation within the organizations. Regular performance reviews, both periodic (30/60/90 or quarterly) and annual provide a structured framework for evaluating employees' contributions and aligning individual goals with organizational objectives, which are elements used in making decisions about compensation and rewards. Moreover, P-01 and P-02, recognized that high-performing employees, presented opportunities for an organization to assign more responsibilities and mentorship roles to develop the leadership and potential for long-term employees. All participants acknowledged that employee expertise and performance lead to advancement

and leadership development. Participants P-01 and P-02 highlighted the support of high-performers by granting equity in the organization, reinforcing their commitment to the success of the organization.

Mentorship and coaching contribute to individual career development and strengthen the overall cohesion of the workforce, promoting a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Recognizing and rewarding employee performance is crucial for both motivation and retention. Organizations should consider a comprehensive HRM approach to retention, offering performance rewards, equity, salary raises, and advancement or leadership opportunities. Rao (2022) agreed that compensation was a driver of retention, and job satisfaction had a moderate role in both compensation and retention. The authors suggested other elements, such as remote work options and flexible work hours, and devised better compensation policies and practices for skilled worker retention. Other elements like compensation, performance rewards, and personal growth in the organization are keys to retaining skilled workers. Finally, creating a supportive internal environment through compensation policies, feedback, mentorship, and coaching, along with investing in professional development and leadership opportunities, could foster organizational understanding and commitment. This approach makes employees feel valued and motivated to contribute effectively to the organization's success.

In conclusion, the all-encompassing approach outlined in the recommended organizational steps, from refining internal structures to fostering a cohesive corporate culture. Implementing an employee handbook and a robust HRM strategy lays the foundation for effective management and employee engagement. The leadership and

mentorship program further bolsters the organization's growth by nurturing talent from within and preparing future leadership. Simultaneously, the emphasis on brand-building and retention strategies ensures a positive external image and the longevity of skilled workers. Leveraging advanced technologies creates a commitment to innovation and efficiency, which skilled workers seek. By developing a measuring strategy for recruitment outcomes, the organization will be in a position of success, sustained growth, and adaptability by understanding what strategy works and what is not. These recruitment strategies are foundational for the organization and support Winston's initial recruitment factors of influencing individuals to embark upon a career in an industry of interest, but also identifiable factors and attributes to hire the right leaders of tomorrow. The remaining research, information, and strategies contribute to and extend the knowledge of recruitment theory.

## Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify the recruitment strategies used by owners of small businesses to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers. The study's findings may provide owners of small businesses with more strategies to attract and hire skilled workers. Organizations have limited skilled workers and must implement retention strategies to retain their existing skilled workers. All participants met the eligibility for this research as all participants were experienced business professionals actively recruiting skilled workers for their organization. A multiple case study design was used, and six participants were interviewed using semistructured interviews.

The first limitation identified involved the potential reluctance of participants to provide accurate and valuable data. The unwillingness of participants to offer accurate and useful data poses a challenge in the qualitative research study. Owners of small businesses may be reluctant based on factors such as privacy, potential failings perceived by others, and revealing proven recruitment strategies in their region or locality. With the lack of valuable information from participants, the data might distort or skew the reliability and validity of the data's findings. To gain the trust and cooperation of participants, strategies such as creating an environment of trust with the openness of data gathering, data compiling, member checking, and security of the information gathered. Establishing a trusted relationship will allow participants to communicate rich details for analysis openly.

The second potential limitation was related to the research sample size. Sample size adds a layer of difficulty that raises concerns about the generalizability of the findings across a wide range of business populations and locations. With the understanding that owners of small businesses are significantly different from medium to large companies, the complexity of the sample size may limit the ability to draw inclusive conclusions from the data for all businesses. The different views and needs of owners of small businesses will vary from location to location and may not adequately capture regional opportunities and challenges, bringing external validity into question. The interpretation of the data may not apply to all businesses; therefore, it is essential to interpret the results within the study's boundaries of using owners of small businesses carefully and thoughtfully of potential divergences in the larger business community.

Another consideration that leads to a potential convergence of factors on small businesses. Research regarding what strategies owners of small businesses are developing to handle the gig economy and the impact of the gig economy on organizational design. Undertaking a qualitative study on the strategies employed by small business owners to navigate the challenges imposed by the gig economy represents a timely and critical research endeavor. In the constantly evolving business environment, marked by the increasing prevalence of gig work, it is essential to understand how small business owners adapt and respond for both academic insight and practical application.

With the industry challenge of the great resignation and quiet quitting, my study's purpose would be to explore innovative approaches owners of small businesses adopt to incorporate gig workers into their organizational structures effectively. Additionally, a parallel investigation into the gig economy's impact on organizational design would provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics within small enterprises. A study of this nature would contribute to the knowledge of recruitment and have practical implications for business owners, policymakers, and industry stakeholders (educational institutions, regional businesses, communities) seeking to enhance the organization's ability to attract or retain skilled workers with the changing labor landscape due to globalization and digitization. By uncovering the nuanced strategies employed and assessing their impact on organizational design, the study would offer a more complete understanding of how small businesses find a way to respond to the complexities of the gig economy.

**Reflections**

During my DBA journey, I have grown as a knowledge seeker, aspiring teacher, and wannabe researcher in the business and technology sectors. For the writing process, I now understand how to separate my personal opinions and business writing from research data and structure data based on summarizing peer-reviewed articles that support or counterarguments in scholarly work. Dr. Dwyer was instrumental in guiding me during my doctoral journey to become a better researcher and taught me how to separate my opinion from writing, resulting in being more scholarly. Dr. Dwyer's multitude of hints and suggestions to assist researchers, such as DOIs, peer-reviewed sources, and many other elements that cloud the quality of research. Dr. Dwyer's dedication has kept aspiring DBA candidates on track to completing their doctoral journeys.

I highly recommend that fellow doctoral students diligently adhere to the comprehensive guidelines provided by Walden University and seek guidance from their doctoral mentors, including the Chair and second committee member. Following these resources closely will greatly expedite the writing process and save a considerable amount of time towards the completion of your dissertation.

I have cherished my experience during this doctoral journey and understand the challenges highlighted during our first year at Walden and our in-house residencies. My DBA experience has profoundly shaped my understanding of my role in society and how I could contribute academically to its betterment. The knowledge I gained has reinforced my comprehension of scientific principles and the importance of challenging research based on its validity and reliability. The research I undertook shed light on the evolving

business landscape due to globalization and technological advancements, offering insights into how governments and businesses could navigate the future of work. This knowledge is valuable in guiding younger students, including my son and daughter, in critically assessing the reliability and validity of information from various sources. In the future, I aim to explore the gig economy's impact on governments, educational institutions, firms, and the implications of globalized skilled workers on competitive markets.

Personally, I am inspired to challenge my family and friends to pursue their goals actively. My doctoral journey also allowed me to use a Canadian non-profit organization I chair, to assist another Walden doctoral student in completing his capstone study, learning about the successful Baldridge framework for organizational improvement. Finally, I have gained a deeper understanding of social responsibility and how to effect social change in my community and business sector, committing to giving back and guiding organizations to support underserved populations.

Thanks to Walden University, the many professors who provided an understanding of topics, Dr. Denise Land for her contribution and leadership in managing my file through to the end, and especially Dr. Rocky Dwyer for his mentorship, guidance, encouragement, and leadership during my doctoral journey. I have often mentioned your dedication and approaches to helping and guiding aspiring postgraduate students. I will continue to do so when friends want to embark on their doctoral journey.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by owners of small businesses to attract, recruit, hire, and retain skilled workers needed to manage their complex business systems to competitive advantage and profitability. My study used semistructured interviews to collect data from six participants (owners of small businesses) seeking skilled workers from across Canada, peer-reviewed literature on recruitment, available public sources of information, interview journal notes, and company websites. Analyzing the data collected using thematic analysis, five key themes emerged to answer the research question. (a) corporate culture, (b) organization brand, (c) HRM strategies, (d) advanced or disruptive technologies, and (e) retention strategies. The themes that emerged touched upon Winston's recruitment theory but furthered the body of knowledge of the HR profession. The themes identified supported the research question on what elements owners of small businesses could used to develop recruitment strategies in a highly competitive job market, to attract and hire skilled workers. Scully-Russ and Torraco (2020) recognized that gig work is taking over and will erode traditional jobs with the changing work landscape. Hence, business leaders should concentrate their strategies on shaping an organization that skilled workers find desirable and aspire to work for.

To achieve this, organizational leaders must focus on the skilled employee's culture (values, trust, and well-being) by engaging them to develop elements that will increase or solidify the organization's culture, such as CSR activities. Employ a brand strategy highlighting employee values and commitment, DE&I through communications

(regionally partnerships and brand ambassadors), and strategically worded comprehensive job descriptions. Demonstrate employee growth through leadership selection based on their performance. Highlight organizational transparency internally and externally; competitive compensation, robust benefits, and continuous support to learning and advanced skills opportunities are crucial factors in retaining skilled employees. Additionally, incorporating technology, such as AI and data analytics, enhances the efficiency of recruitment processes, ensuring organizations stay ahead in identifying and securing top talent. Finally, mentorship and coaching are additional critical factors in attracting, recruiting, hiring, and retaining skilled workers. These approaches could foster a positive workplace environment that skilled workers are seeking and motivate them to increase their performance levels, which makes organizations more competitive and profitable.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this doctoral study. As a doctoral student at Walden University, I Joseph Charles Blanchard will be the primary data instrument conducting this study. As previously mentioned in the consent form, my doctoral study is focused on the strategies owners of small businesses leaders use to recruit and retain technologically competent skilled workers. Your contribution to this study may assist other owners of small businesses attract or retain skilled workers by adapting the strategies identified in my study. Before we begin, I will review the interview protocol to ensure you understand what to expect and to answer any of your questions. With your permission, I recorded our interview to ensure that I captured your input and responses accurately. For each of the questions, there is no right or wrong answer; please answer based on your personal experiences and knowledge about the subject. All of your responses and the information that you provide will remain confidential. As a reminder, participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without reason. With your withdrawal, I will immediately destroy any data captured, notes, and electronic records. Following our interview, I will prepare a summary and interpretation of your responses. I will send you this summary for your review. I will also contact you and arrange a follow-up interview to allow you to provide any additional information or request any changes or revisions to your responses. The interview should last approximately 30–45 minutes. Do you require anything before we begin? Do you have any questions before we start?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Research Question

What recruiting strategies do owners of small businesses use to identify, recruit, and retain skilled employees to maintain digital systems to remain competitive and profitable?

Interview Questions

1. What recruiting strategies do you use to identify skilled employees?

2. How do your recruitment strategies differ when you want to attract, recruit, or hire local skilled employees?

3. What key challenges did you experience implementing your recruiting strategies?

4. What mitigating steps did you take to meet those key challenges in attracting, recruiting, hiring and retaining skilled employees?

5. How did you measure the effectiveness of your recruiting strategies to identify, recruit and retain skilled employees?

6. What are your organization's specific human resources policies to support your recruitment strategies to identify skilled employees?

7. What considerations do you give to the technical advancement, as you attract, recruit, hire, and retain internal staff?

8. What else would you like to tell me about strategies you use to build long-term strategies to seek, recruit, and retain skilled workers?