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# Employee Retention Strategies of the U.S. Power Industry

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College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Michael R. Schulz

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and that any and all revisions required by
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Abstract

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by

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MBA, Ashford University, 2012

BA, Ashford University, 2008



Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration



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Abstract

Employee turnover in the U.S. power industry continues to be a challenging issue. Leaders of U.S. power organizations tend to be concerned about employee turnover, which has a negative impact on productivity and profitability. Grounded in Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore successful strategies that some U.S. power company leaders use to improve employee retention. The participants were seven business leaders from seven power companies across the Midwestern United States who successfully implemented strategies to improve employee retention. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and company website information. Through thematic analysis, four themes were identified: (a) a happy work environment characterized by communication and trust, (b) work relationships centered around treatment and teamwork, (c) workplace policies that showed some leniency and flexibility, and (d) job engagement. A key recommendation is for power organization leaders to develop a workplace environment that is engaging and promotes a healthy work-life balance. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve employee retention and corporate profitability, which can increase tax revenues that can be used to support community programs.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to anyone who is looking for direction, amplification, and excellence in becoming and achieving anything that makes them better today than they were yesterday. May this work be a testament to the innate ability that all people have in becoming the person they were meant to be and achieving the purpose-driven life that they were born with. I also dedicate this study to God, who made it possible to achieve but put obstacles in the path that I had to overcome and grow through.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Organizational leaders tend to place great importance on building a firm's profitability by increasing revenues while decreasing costs as much as possible. Some of the factors that impact firms' revenues and costs are recruiting, hiring, and retaining educated, productive, and committed employees (Diah et al., 2020; Viray & Velasquez-Fajanela, 2023). Organizations are being impacted by baby boomer generation retirements, the fundamental behavioral changes of millennials in the workplace, the changes of the workplace due to COVID-19, and the increasing use of remote work capabilities (Hassan et al., 2019; Yildiz et al., 2020). Due to the changes in the workplace and society, employees are more apt to leave their current employer for employment elsewhere that is believed to improve the employees' personal, work, and social life. Employee retention should be analyzed to explore the strategies that business leaders use to improve their employment positions.

**Background of the Problem**

When good employees leave an organization, their departure can lead to information, skills, productivity, and economic losses. When employee turnover occurs, the financial costs to an organization for new employee recruitment, selection, and training range from 90 to 200% of the position's annual salary (Molahosseini et al., 2020). The three main energy subsectors—electric power generation; transmission, distribution, and storage; and fuels—had a total of 3.1 million workers in 2020, which represents a 9.8% decline since 2019 with retention issues as a key driver (Department of Energy, 2021). The nonretirement attrition rate during 2016–2020 was 15.4% and rising

(Department of Energy, 2021). In the power industry, the nonretirement attrition rate is hitting hardest on the key critical employment positions of line workers, technicians (including renewables), plant/field operators, and engineers (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). Retirement attrition along with general attrition are lessening the expertise level of power organizations, which affects the rate of teaching new hires and decreases the amount of information exchanged (Corbin, 2020; Memon et al., 2021). Such retention issues are creating greater workloads for the remaining employees in an industry that is only growing. The generational levels of the workforce are also adding their own unique burdens to the employee attrition issue.

Each generation of workers is adding their unique burdens onto the employee retention issue, especially the baby boomer and millennial generations. The baby boomer generation retired at a level of 11% in 2021, showing a slight decrease each year, but still represents 28.9% of all energy sector workers (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022; Corbin, 2020). The baby boomer retirements have caused millennials to account for 33.5% of energy sector workers, yet the millennial generation represents the largest generation of nonretirement attrition numbers (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). Up to 64% of the nonretirement attrition occurs within the first 5 years of employment, and 60% are in the 23–27 age range (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). The energy workers' median hourly wage is currently at $25.60 (34% higher than the national median wage), and energy utilities workers' median hourly wage is currently at $41.08 (115% higher than the national median wage), making the energy sector one of the highest paid sectors in the United States (Department of

Energy, 2021). Yet the salaries, and usually great benefits packages, have not been enough to prevent employees from leaving their jobs—especially millennials (Hassan et al., 2019). The millennial generation has shown considerable attention to more idealistic values in the workplace than to general compensation packages (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Hassan et al., 2019). Because of the new idealism of the youngest generation of workers, the effects of the global pandemic, and the enormous growth of green technologies (such as renewables) within the U.S. power sector, assessing the reasons why employees leave their jobs and the strategies that corporate leaders are currently implementing to retain their employees is important. Implementing successful strategies and best practices for employee retention can help U.S. power companies improve their financial, knowledge, skills, and industry positions.

## Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The general business problem is that multiple U.S. power companies experience high employee turnover rates, which has a negative effect on productivity and sustainability. The specific business problem is that some leaders of U.S. power companies lack strategies to improve employee retention.

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies that U.S. power industry leaders used to improve employee retention. The targeted population comprised corporate leaders at power plants and/or companies within the Midwestern United States who had implemented strategies for employee retention. The implications for positive social change include the potential to give workers sustainable employment that provides greater job satisfaction and improved workplace conditions. Improved job

satisfaction has the potential to reduce employee stress, improve employee health, increase productive work activities, and create greater life fulfillment.

## Population and Sampling

Data were collected from seven purposefully sampled executives and midlevel managers from seven power plants and/or companies within the Midwestern United States through a semistructured interview process until data saturation was achieved. The targeted population was the Midwest section of the United States. Purposive sampling was utilized to recruit interview participants. The participant criteria included leaders of power industry organizations who had developed and implemented employee recruitment and retention strategies. Additional participant criteria included leaders from power industry organizations that had a nonretirement attrition rate below the industry average of 15.4%. The data included responses to the semistructured interview questions. Organizational documentation collected from industry documents discovered through public sources regarding their strategies to improve job satisfaction and maximize employee retention was also analyzed.

## Nature of the Study

Three research methods were considered—qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method—and the qualitative method was chosen. A qualitative methodology enables the researcher to discover and explore issues, develop an in-depth analysis of an activity or event, describe a real-life context, and identify interconnecting themes (Matta, 2022; Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). The qualitative approach was appropriate for the study because I analyzed a specific business phenomenon. Using the qualitative method allows

for the synthesis of data derived from words (spoken and textual) and images that can lead to understandings of complex social phenomena. The qualitative method is appropriate for a research study that uses open-ended questions, is focused on a single phenomenon or concept, and analyzes rich and full data to discover meanings (Lanka et al., 2021; Wester et al., 2021). In contrast, researchers who use quantitative methodology tend to assess and measure relationships between variables through empirical data obtained through closed-ended questions to test hypotheses (Gilad, 2021; Ramlo, 2020). Using the quantitative method allows for statistical analysis of numerical data derived from surveys to create relational models limited by the range of the questions asked. The mixed-methods approach combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Gilad, 2021; Ramlo, 2020). Because the research did not test hypotheses or the relationship between cause and effect, the quantitative methodology and the mixed methods approach were not appropriate.

For the research, the pragmatic inquiry design was most appropriate. A pragmatic researcher explores experiential knowledge of those involved in events, efforts, attitudes, or histories to link theory to practice of a specific and evolving phenomenon (Allemang et al., 2022; Elder-Vass, 2022). The pragmatist believes that practical solutions to problems exist, but the world is ever-changing, which creates new problems that previous or existing solutions require adaptation to solve (Schildermans, 2022; Simpson & den Hond, 2022). Qualitative pragmatic inquiry was appropriate for this study because the research phenomenon was complex, practical, and highly contextual. A pragmatic inquiry design approach was also appropriate for this study because the research phenomenon

had been previously solved but changing social and cultural conditions required updated or original practical solutions. Other qualitative study designs were considered—narrative, ethnological, phenomenological, and case study. The narrative design is appropriate for reflecting on people and their stories, and the ethnographical design is appropriate for seeking to understand cultural behavior (Matta, 2022). The phenomenological design is appropriate for describing experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The case study design is appropriate for an in-depth analysis and review on a specific case or cases to draw out real-world perspectives such as behaviors, life cycles, change processes, relations, and organizational and management processes (Prosek & Gibson, 2021). The case study design also requires consent from gatekeepers at organizations to access participants, which is time-consuming. The principal objective of the study was to identify a model that contains interconnecting themes, patterns, and relationships of strategies that U.S. power industry leaders used to improve employee retention, thus making the narrative, phenomenological, ethnographical, and case study designs not appropriate for the research.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used to ground the study was Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory, also called the two-factor theory and the dual-factor theory. Herzberg posited in his hygiene-motivator theory that there are two types of factors related to job satisfaction that run independently of each other (Herzberg, 1966; Herzberg et al., 1959). The first set of factors is hygiene factors (dissatisfier-avoidance-maintenance factors), which are extrinsic to the individual (Leitão et al., 2021; Thobibah & Damayanti, 2020).

Hygiene factors relate to the workplace environment and can lead to job dissatisfaction/unhappiness if not present (Leitão et al., 2021; Thobibah & Damayanti, 2020). Hygiene factors relate to the need to avoid unpleasantness (Herzberg, 1966). The removal of negative hygiene factors decreases dissatisfaction, resulting in a neutral feeling, but never yields satisfaction (Staempfli & Lamarche, 2020). The environmental factors impacting an individual are the hygiene factors that make the workplace a pleasant or unpleasant experience for the worker. Removal or improvement of hygiene factors does not yield job satisfaction, but instead removes or reduces the negative influences of the hygiene factors.

There are internal factors that influence employees to enhance their work performance. The second set of factors is motivator factors (achievement-growth-psychological factors), which are intrinsic to the individual (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Leitão et al., 2021). Motivator factors relate to the personal feelings of accomplishment within the employee and lead to job satisfaction when present (Leitão et al., 2021; Thobibah & Damayanti, 2020). Motivator factors relate to the need of the individual for self-growth and self-actualization (Herzberg, 1966). The presence of motivators increases job satisfaction beyond the neutral feeling (Staempfli & Lamarche, 2020). Creation or improvement of motivator factors can improve job satisfaction by enhancing positive influences of employees at the workplace. Herzberg's theory relates to the nature of the research because the hygiene-motivator theory is a single theory with several behavioral concepts that can be used to understand the complex phenomenon of why certain strategies used by U.S. power industry leaders can lead to improved employee retention.

**Significance of the Study**

The research was significant because the results provided new insights regarding effective strategies leaders used to identify job satisfaction, employee motivation, and organizational citizenship. Effective strategies for employee satisfaction and motivation may enhance the cost-reduction capability and production efficiency at U.S. power companies through enhanced employee retention (Baranchenko et al., 2020). Increased satisfaction, motivation, and organizational citizenship can improve employee engagement and productivity, resulting in more committed employees in the workplace and surrounding communities.

**Contribution to Business Practice**

The research was intended to contribute to positive and improved business practices through personnel, finances, expertise/skills, and reputation. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations may contribute to business practices by enhancing the retention of knowledge and skills. Employee retention could result in improved organizational reputation and financial positions. Research has shown that higher employee retention results in lower employee replacement costs and increased knowledge and skills retention within the organization (Tirta & Enrika, 2020; Wesemann, 2024). Findings for this study may also fill gaps in current business practices by providing leaders knowledge and insights on improving job satisfaction. The research findings may provide U.S. power company leaders with new practices and strategies leading to possible greater work engagement, productivity, and quality among the younger generation of workers. The aim of the study was to increase the knowledge of leaders

necessary to implement strategies that improve employee job satisfaction by making work environments more pleasing to employees. More pleasant work environments can improve communities and corporate image.

**Implications for Social Change**

The intention of the research was to contribute to positive social change through exploring optimal strategies to enhance employee retention, which could strengthen employers' reputation and standing in the community. Positive social change can be promoted and facilitated through an improved quality of work-life and greater sustainability of the organization within the community (Kovalenko, 2020; Robertson, 2021). Research has shown that corporate leaders could ultimately lower costs and promote happier, committed employees through adopting strategies related to employee retention (Tirta & Enrika, 2020; Wesemann, 2024). Committed employees are more efficient, more productive, and more involved in charitable and volunteer activities within their local communies (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Robertson, 2021). Employee retention also enables stable employment, which affects local tax contributions and benefits the communities served.

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**Operational Definitions**

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*Employability:* The ability of an employee to retain their position with their current employer or to obtain a position they desire from another employer (Baranchenko et al., 2020).

*Involuntary attrition/turnover:* The termination of employment due to poor performance or other termination processes outside the control of the employee, such as

downsizing measures as seen in mergers and acquisitions or from organizational

performance measure pressures (El-Rayes et al., 2020).

*Nonretirement attrition:* The termination of employment due to reasons voluntary

or involuntary, excluding retirement (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022).

*Turnover intentions:* The driving factors behind an employee looking to

voluntarily leave their current employer due to external factors provided by other

organizations (promotion, higher salary, flexible work schedule, etc.) and/or internal

factors associated with the current organization (psychological, leadership, work

environment, etc.; L. Li et al., 2021).

*Voluntary turnover:* The termination of employment by the employee through

resignation—typically because of unhappiness in remuneration, promotion, work

environment, or management practices—or retirement (El-Rayes et al., 2020).

## Research Question

What strategies do leaders in the U.S. power industry utilize to improve employee

retention?

## Assumptions and Limitations

Identifying any assumptions that can affect the study while identifying any

limitations affecting the strength of the study is important for a researcher. The reliability

and validity of the study results are addressed through the assumptions and limitations of

a study.

**Assumptions**

Assumptions associated with research should be identified and considered to ensure that there is no effect on the research process. Assumptions are facts, positions, and statements that are considered but not verified to be true (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Dziak et al., 2020). One assumption was that interview participants would understand and provide meaningful responses to the interview questions. A second assumption was that each participant would answer each interview question truthfully and openly. The third assumption was that the research would provide valuable information that would aid leaders in the U.S. power industry in retaining employees.

**Limitations**

Where assumptions directly affect the rigor of a study, limitations directly affect the availability and attainment of the study data. Limitations are the potential weaknesses of the study and are usually outside of the researcher's control (Haynes & Loblay, 2024). One possible limitation for this study was access to power plant management in charge of employee recruitment, hiring, training, retention, and termination processes such as human resources, operations/production, transmission, and marketing departments. Another potential limitation of this study was that participant responses could be biased or exhibit socially acceptable behavior, which can influence research results. The possibility that participants' organizational public documents would not contain sufficient data to address the research question was another potential limitation. A final limitation for this study was due to the qualitative nature of the research design, where replication may not be possible.

**Transition**

In Section 1, the foundation and background, problem statement, purpose statement, and nature of the study were introduced. Other key content presented included the conceptual framework, significance of the study, and operational definitions, followed by the research question. Section 1 concluded with key assumptions and main limitations.

Section 2 provides a detailed literature review around the research topic as well as an overview of the current state of research, gaps, and synthesis of issues and trends. The literature review provides a critical analysis of concepts related to employee retention strategies in the power industry, including (a) review of the conceptual framework (Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory), (b) review of contrasting theories (expectancy theory and job demands-resources theory), (c) employee retention in the power industry, (d) employee retention and turnover rates, (e) employee motivation, (f) employee job satisfaction, (g) workplace diversity and inclusion impacts, (h) organizational culture impacts, and (i) leadership style impacts.

Section 3 begins with a restatement of the purpose statement of the study followed by a description of the research process including the role of the researcher, target population, sampling method, participants, research method, research design, and ethical aspects of research. The procedures for conducting the research are described, including details about the data collection instruments, techniques, organization, and analysis techniques, as well as the interview questions. How data saturation was achieved

is explained. Section 3 closes with a discussion on how the study's reliability and validity were ensured.

Section 4 contains a summary of the research study findings, including how the research results apply to business practices and implications for social change. Recommendations for action and further research are offered. Section 4 closes with a conclusion.

Section 2: The Literature Review

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

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies that leaders in U.S. power companies utilize to improve employee retention. The purpose of a comprehensive literature review is to provide an unbiased review of existing research, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, comparing conflicting views, identifying significant aspects of the topic, identifying research gaps, linking theoretical perspectives, and highlighting possible solutions in relation to the research question (Leite et al., 2019). The literature review provides a comprehensive review of previous and current research and critical analysis of the issues surrounding an employee's intent to leave. A synthesis of the theories constructed around employee job satisfaction and strategies used by business leaders to promote employee retention will also be provided.

A comprehensive literature review of peer-reviewed articles and publications was conducted for the research using multiple databases through the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. The databases included ABI/INFORM, EBSCO, Emerald Direct, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, and Thoreau. The keywords and phrases used to conduct the searches were *employee attrition causes, employee retention, employee satisfaction, employee turnover, energy industry/sector, expectancy theory, Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory or two-factor theory or dual-factor theory, intent to stay, job demands-resources theory, job satisfaction*, and *power industry/sector*. Government reports and publication websites such as those of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Center for Energy Workforce Development (CEWD), the

Department of Energy (DOE), and the Energy Information Administration (EIA) were also accessed. There were 184 total references used in this study, of which 157 (85%) were published between 2020 and 2024 (within 5 years of the anticipated date of completion). There were 163 peer-reviewed articles representing 88% of the references, and 151 of those peer-reviewed articles (92%) were published between 2020 and 2024. The breakdown of the various sources of references for this literature review is in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Study Literature Sources*

| Reference type | < 5 years | > 5 years | Total | % total < 5 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Peer-reviewed journals | 151 | 12 | 163 | 92.6 |
| Non-peer-reviewed journals | 3 | 1 | 4 | 75.0 |
| Industry publications | 2 | 0 | 2 | 100 |
| Books | 0 | 13 | 13 | 0 |
| Government sites | 1 | 1 | 2 | 50.0 |
| Total | 157 | 27 | 184 | 85.3 |

The literature review is organized into the following components: (a) review of conceptual framework (Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory), (b) review of contrasting theories (expectancy theory and job demands-resources theory), (c) employee retention in the power industry, (d) employee retention and turnover rates, (e) employee motivation, (f) employee job satisfaction, (g) workplace diversity and inclusion impacts, (h)

organizational culture impacts, and (i) leadership style impacts. Within these topics, the

literature review was focused on nonretirement voluntary turnover. A comprehensive

literature review should provide the evidence needed to explore, discuss, critically

analyze, and synthesize the factors that influence voluntary turnover and the effective

strategies utilized for employee retention (Leite et al., 2019). The literature review will

focus on those job characteristics that lead to voluntary turnover or intent to stay, the

impact on organizations from employee turnover, and the work environment factors that

impact employees.

**Conceptual Framework**

Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory (also referred to as the two-factor theory,

the dual-factor theory, and the satisfier-dissatisfier theory) was chosen as the conceptual

framework for the research to explore the factors that affect employee retention.

Herzberg et al. (1959) ascertained that employees' work attitudes are influenced by both

internal and external factors. The internal factors, which Herzberg labeled motivator

factors, improve an employee's work attitude, creating job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1966,

1974; Herzberg et al., 1959). Likewise, the external factors, which Herzberg labeled

hygiene factors, improved an employee's work attitude lessening job dissatisfaction

(Herzberg, 1965, 1974; Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg asserted that a state of job

satisfaction and job dissatisfaction could exist simultaneously because the two states

represent different constructs and have differing determinant factors from one another

(Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Using Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory, business leaders

are more likely to improve their employee's attitudes by increasing job satisfaction and decreasing job dissatisfaction.

Improving employee attitudes towards their work can increase job satisfaction. The primary motive behind Herzberg et al.'s (1959) research was to ascertain the attitudes employees have towards work and factors that affect workers' attitudes. Motivation to work and the productivity of that work are dependent on the workers' job satisfaction and attitude towards work. Herzberg believed that improving hygiene factors aids in removing the barriers to positive attitudes, whereas motivator factors aid in promoting job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1965, 1974). Job satisfaction is a measure of the amount of, or the degree to which, positivity is experienced by the worker relative to the job, and increasing those positive feelings leads to improved employee retention (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Leaders can increase employee job satisfaction by improving their employees' attitudes towards work.

If an employee feels that certain needs or conditions are not being fully met, there is a strong chance that the worker will become less motivated to work. A lower motivation leads to lower productivity, which balances the workers' contribution with the outcomes received by the organization (Alrawahi et al., 2020). The results of such behavior on organizations include increased employee turnover, lower production, less revenues, and higher costs (Memon et al., 2021; Molahosseini et al., 2020). Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory is designed for business leaders to identify the factors impeding the positive feelings of workers so that leaders can remedy the obstacles to improve job

satisfaction. Job satisfaction leads to greater productivity and higher employee retention rates, ultimately leading to a stronger financial position for the organization.

One way to improve an employee's work demeanor and morale is to lessen or eliminate job dissatisfaction. Herzberg identified the job dissatisfiers as hygiene factors, where the removal of dissatisfiers would lessen job dissatisfaction but not improve job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1965, 1974). Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory refers to hygiene factors as external factors because they are found in the context or environment of the job and are required to maintain an employee's expectations of the work environment (Herzberg, 1965; Thant, 2023). Negative work environments can cause employees to search for new work environments that are more agreeable to the employees' needs. Business leaders can better manage hygiene factors to lower job dissatisfaction, which can lower the intent to leave.

The organizational culture connects job dissatisfaction with intent to leave. Hygiene factors cover the basic needs at work and include such concepts as the organizational policies, the quality of supervision, the work environment and condition, job security, salary received, quality of personal life, status, and relationships with managers, leaders, and coworkers (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Herzberg, 1965). If hygiene factors are not properly managed by organizational leaders, then workers will experience greater dissatisfaction. Increased dissatisfaction influences workers to consider leaving the organization, causing nonretirement voluntary turnover (Deri et al., 2021). Hygiene factors are found throughout the organizational culture and influence employees'

attitudes. The management of hygiene factors is a link between reducing workplace dissatisfaction and employee retention.

Increasing job satisfaction is another method for enhancing an employee's work attitude and productivity. Herzberg identified the job satisfiers as motivator factors, where the presence and increase in satisfiers would improve job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1965, 1974). Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory refers to motivator factors as internal factors because they are found in the content of the job and are based upon an employee's needs, goals, and drive (Herzberg, 1965; Thant, 2023). Employees who feel more positive emotions about their work are more likely to experience positive attitudes towards their organization. Business leaders can improve their management of motivator factors to increase job satisfaction, which can enhance employee retention.

Motivation connects job satisfaction to intent to stay. Motivator factors are contingent to the individual and include feelings of recognition, performance and achievement, responsibility, being part of the decision-making process, challenging work (the work itself), and growth opportunities (education and advancement; Alrawahi et al., 2020; Herzberg, 1965). The use of motivator factors by organizational leaders can lead to job enrichment. Providing job enrichment can increase engagement and satisfaction, reducing nonretirement voluntary turnover (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Leaders can identify and harness motivator factors to improve employee job satisfaction, which reduces employees' intent to resign their positions. The utilization of motivator factors is established as a link between increasing job satisfaction and increasing employee retention.

Opponents towards Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory raise the sample population size as an issue of the research results. One of the primary criticisms of Herzberg et al.'s (1959) original study is that the sample size was too small (203 participants) to be representative of any industry sector or work type (Meltzer, 1960). The sample population was comprised of accountants and engineers from nine plants in Pittsburgh representing a small percentage of middle-class workers and did not involve management or lower class employees (Dabscheck, 1994; Meltzer, 1960). People have questioned the sample size being too small, resulting in doubts about the reliability of the study findings having any true impact on job attitudes and the motivation to work. The population underrepresentation is the basis for the argument that the study findings are neither generalizable nor transferable to other industries, other job classifications, or all levels of workers.

A study's validity is a major attribute to be considered when reviewing data, data collection methods, data analysis, and results. Another criticism of Herzberg et al.'s (1959) original study is the subjective responses from the participants. Questions concerning the validity of the study have been raised and are further echoed by the authors in the final report (Meltzer, 1960). Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory has also been criticized for the subjective use of language and interpretations of the questions and responses that lead to good experiences being under the control of the employees, whereas bad experiences are outside of the employee's control (Dabscheck, 1994). Such linguistic issues have raised concerns about the reliability of the findings due to the labeling and designation of the internal/external factors (Dabscheck, 1994). Herzberg et

al. designed their study to be a survey of employee attitudes towards work and not a study about actual problems experienced at work (Dabscheck, 1994; Meltzer, 1960). Even though the interpretive language has resulted in mixed reactions, the study's findings are consistent with the attitudes towards employment. Despite all these criticisms, Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory has been used as the conceptual basis for a multitude of studies over the past six decades with continual confirming results.

Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory is a useful conceptual framework for studying attitudes towards work and employee motivation. The logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of the research included facilitating, identifying, and understanding the core concepts of hygiene and motivator factors (the external and internal factors) for eliminating job dissatisfaction and increasing job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1966; Herzberg et al., 1959). Identifying any possible hygiene factors used by research participants in the development of strategies that decrease workplace dissatisfaction provides important inputs for improving employee retention (Leitão et al., 2021; Thobibah & Damayanti, 2020). Other important inputs to employee retention strategies include identifying any possible motivator factors used by research participants in the development of strategies to enhance workplace satisfaction (Leitão et al., 2021; Thobibah & Damayanti, 2020). Herzberg's theory relates to the research problem because the hygiene-motivator theory provides possible concepts that may improve job satisfaction for employees that result in employee retention. The hygiene-motivator theory provides a sound and verified theory to identify the strategies used by

U.S. power industry leaders to improve job satisfaction, leading to increased employee retention.

**Contrasting Theories**

There are other plausible theories that can be used to assess the factors associated with job satisfaction, intent to leave, and employee retention. One motivation theory was presented by V. H. Vroom in 1964, which he named the valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (or VIE) theory (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021; Vroom, 1964). Vroom's expectancy theory is an equity theory posited on the basis that workers are motivated to engage in those behaviors that achieve the results that are aligned with their goals (Nguyen & Prentice, 2022). The primary auspice of expectancy theory is that a worker will perform the requisite work based on the level of expectation of receiving a particular reward balanced by the attractiveness of that reward (Swain et al., 2020). The result of Vroom's expectancy theory is that the desire for the reward and level of expectation of receiving the reward motivate the worker, making such motivation singular and subjective to the individual. Leaders can utilize Vroom's expectancy theory to create greater motivation leading to enhanced employee job satisfaction.

Under Vroom's expectancy theory, motivation is the key to job satisfaction and intent to stay. As denoted by the name, Vroom's theory is based on the three variables of valence, instrumentality, and expectation (Nguyen & Prentice, 2022; Swain et al., 2020). Valence is the amount of value, or the attractiveness a potential reward has as held by the individual (Swain et al., 2020; Vroom, 1964). The amount of valence changes depending on the view of the individual: positive if the individual wants to attain or be a part of the

outcome, zero if the individual is indifferent to the outcome, and negative if the individual wants to avoid or escape the outcome. The variable of instrumentality is a measure of faith that the individual has in receiving the reward if the goal is attained (Swain et al., 2020; Vroom, 1964). Expectancy is the subjective variable that a worker has towards the idea that a certain level of work results in a certain level of reward (Swain et al., 2020; Vroom, 1964). Vroom also asserted that expectancy is a measure of the worker being able to achieve the goal through adequate knowledge, training, and skills (Özaslan & Özaslan, 2023). Using the variables of valence, instrumentality, and expectation, an organizational leader can manipulate the motivation of a worker to achieve common goals. Through expectancy theory, employee motivation can be influenced to enhance job satisfaction, leading to greater intent to stay.

As described in Vroom's expectancy theory, a worker will make conscious decisions about work motivation based upon the relationships of valence, instrumentality, and expectancy of the work and rewards. The first relationship is called the effort–performance relationship (expectancy), which represents the likelihood that the effort put in by the worker will be recognized (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). If the effort of an employee is recognized, then performance might improve because employees are more likely to feel supported by the organization. Performance–reward/outcome (instrumentality) is the second relationship and suggests that a worker can improve their performance if the reward/outcome is not only provided, but also increases with improved performance (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). Again, performance might improve because the employee is observing organizational support. The third relationship,

rewards–personal goals (valence), is based on the perceived value of the reward and the reward's influence on meeting the personal goals of the worker (Diah et al., 2020; Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). The key component in utilizing expectancy theory is that perceived organizational support needs to be apparent to the employee. As the rewards continue to help the employee attain personal goals, the employee can be more motivated to support and work towards attaining organizational goals.

Perceived organizational support is an independent variable and is not evaluated the same way by all individuals. Vroom (1964) postulated that if management supports an employee, provides adequate rewards, and enhances the reward system, the employee should experience greater motivation and job satisfaction, which can lead to employee retention (Özaslan & Özaslan, 2023; Swain et al., 2020). One of the primary issues with expectancy theory is the high subjectivity of the individual employee making it difficult to utilize collective or corporate-wide retention policies across a wide employee base. Some individuals might prefer certain rewards over others: i.e., promoting an employee may include an impressive raise in salary but also results in moving to shift-work or relocation, which puts stress on the work–life balance of the employee (Berglund et al., 2021; Vroom, 1964). Individual subjectivity causes some rewards to be satisfiers to some employees, dissatisfiers to other employees, and neutral to the remaining few. Such diversification of motivation techniques leading to job satisfaction and employee retention makes Vroom's expectancy theory not appropriate as the conceptional framework for this study.

Employees tend to evaluate their work and work environment by the amount of stress they experience from their jobs. Another popular motivational theory was posited by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) called the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory. The JD-R theory stems from occupational health and well-being of employees by monitoring the development of work strain and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hlado & Harvankova, 2024). Work strain develops over time throughout the course of an employee's work due to sustained physical and mental effort that drains the employee's motivation (Anasi, 2020; Sameer & Priyadarshi, 2021). Eventually, if not countered, the work strain develops into stress and has negative outcomes for the employee. Under the JD-R construct, work strain can be countered by the employer by providing the necessary resources to overcome the stress and gain motivation to work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Cho et al., 2023). If the work stress is not countered or eliminated, then employees will develop continual job dissatisfaction, leading to increased turnover.

Developing counter measures for work stress should be a primary consideration for organizational leaders to improve job satisfaction. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) asserted that working conditions can be split between two categories: job demands and job resources (Yang et al., 2024). Job demands represent all the sustained negative physical, emotional, and cognitive stressors of a job (Sameer & Priyadarshi, 2021). These stressors over time build up and eventually result in exhaustion and disengagement—referred to as burnout (Sameer & Priyadarshi, 2021). Exhaustion is defined as a depletion of physical, emotional, and cognitive energy while disengagement is the slow withdrawal and distancing from work due to a severe lack of motivation (Jing et al., 2023). If not

countered, negative stressors can result in burnout leading to low job satisfaction and high turnover intentions (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Such negative stressors include role ambiguity, long hours, time pressures, heavy workloads, and poor relationships (Jing et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024). Leaders can develop job resources to help overcome the negative stressors affecting employees' job attitudes, engagement, and intent to stay.

Positive stressors (eustress) and stress eliminators can be utilized to enhance employee job satisfaction. Job resources represent all the physical, social, and organizational resources available at the job to help achieve work goals, reduce stress, and increase motivation (Hlado & Harvankova, 2024). Job resources include autonomy, advancement opportunities, coaching and mentorship, training, recognition, and strong relationships (Sameer & Priyadarshi, 2021). The availability of resources and organizational support to overcome burnout conditions can lead to increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions (Cho et al., 2023; Marufu et al., 2021). Yet, one of the primary criticisms of JD-R theory is that there is a long list of job demands that add to stress, but a short list of job resources available and adequate to reduce stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Although JD-R theory does acknowledge many work-related factors that can affect both motivation and job satisfaction, the theory does not include other important factors such as wages, benefits, leadership styles, and culture. Due to these deficiencies, JD-R theory was not appropriate as the conceptional framework for this study.

**Employee Retention in the Power Industry**

Although employee attrition is a problem across all industry sectors, employee turnover rates are especially problematic in the U.S. power industry. In October 2022 total turnovers in the U.S. remained unchanged at 5.7 million (or at a rate of 3.7%) with voluntary turnover accounting for 4.0 million (or at a rate of 2.6%), also with very little change throughout the year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). The transportation and utilities industry, which encapsulates power and energy, represented some of the highest employee turnover across all U.S. industries at 4.2% which is a 0.5% rise from one year prior (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). The U.S. power industry is comprised of investor-owned utilities, public power entities, and rural electric cooperatives which represent about 10% of the energy industry workforce (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). The 5-year (2017–2021) nonretirement voluntary turnover rate in the U.S. power sector has been increasing since 12% in 2012 and was at 15.4% in 2021 (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). The high employee turnover rates in the U.S. power industry are extremely problematic, especially in consideration with the costs associated with education, training, certification, and expertise required in the industry. The cost of attrition in the power industry also increases due to the level of safety required around dangerous high voltage, live electrical work, and combustion materials. Due to the growing attrition rates, leaders in U.S. power organizations have been revisiting their employee retention strategies.

Knowing when employee attrition occurs and who is contributing to the attrition rates is vitally important for leaders in the U.S. power industry. Survey results have

shown that 64% of nonretirement voluntary turnover occurs within the first 5 years of employment where employees in the 23–27 age range (the millennial generation) account for 60% of the turnover (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). The millennial workers have shown considerable attention to more idealistic values in the workplace such as greater work–life balance, ethical and eco-friendly environments, faster promotional opportunities, enhanced learning opportunities, and greater servant leadership styles of their management team (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Berglund et al., 2021). Due to the increased integration of flexible work schedules and remote work environments, increased work–home conflict has been shown to increase turnover rates in all generational and cultural categories (Rubenstein et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Leaders in the power industry should consider the values of each generation of workers within their organization with special attention to the millennials who are a large and growing portion of the workforce. The younger generation and the current trends of the changing work environment are leading managers to explore more modern–day tactics for retaining their employee base.

Leaders need to be aware of the changing needs of their employees. Power plants and power companies operate very similarly across the entire U.S. power industry causing leaders to be more vigilant in monitoring the enticements of competing organizations and finding ways to improve their own benefit packages (F. Li et al., 2021). Competing power companies in the industry can easily entice employees to leave their current organization through benefits and programs that meet changing employee demands impacting voluntary turnover (F. Li et al., 2021). As the power industry changes

through the closure of fossil fuel facilities and the growth of building renewable power generation, the need to retrain and retool the next generation of power plant personnel is a necessity (L. Li et al., 2021; Ram et al., 2020). Successful leaders during the current energy transformation will build relationships on mutual trust and respect with their employees. Research has shown that there is a high dependency of the trust relationship between leaders and subordinates that leads to improved job engagement in the power industry (Gadomska-Lila & Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2022; Rai & Nandy, 2021). Trust in leaders' abilities and how they treat their employees affects job engagement of power industry personnel through autonomy, career growth, training and development, remuneration, knowledge sharing, positive work environment, work–life balance, and recognition (Dunnan et al., 2020a; Mukherjee et al., 2020). If leaders can find ways to improve their employees' job engagement, then their employee retention rates should improve as well. Consideration of the employability objectives of workers should be evaluated when revising employee retention strategies.

**Employee Retention and Turnover Rates**

The primary goal of this study was to explore the factors that increase employee retention, which results in lower turnover rates. Employee turnover can be segregated into three basic categories: voluntary, involuntary, and retirement. Voluntary turnover occurs when an employee decides to leave an organization on their own desires and occurs for a multitude of reasons (Al Shaher & Zreik, 2022; Robertson, 2021). Involuntary turnover occurs when an employee is released from an organization such as layoffs or downsizing, or has their employment terminated by the employer due to

performance, attitude, or behavioral issues (Al Shaher & Zreik, 2022; El-Rayes et al., 2020). When an employee leaves an organization after an expected amount of time or becomes retirement age and begins to receive financial installments from the employer, such as a pension, then the employee is typically in retirement (El-Rayes et al., 2020). An argument has been made that an employee's poor performance can be improved through better management relationships and possibly discourage involuntary turnover (Prasetyo et al., 2021). The research concentrated on the nonretirement voluntary turnover aspect only. With the understanding of what determinants employees use when considering staying or leaving an employer, leaders can create strategies that can reduce involuntary turnover in their organizations.

The occurrence and causes of employee turnover are a persistent and frustrating issue for most organizational leaders. Employee turnover is a costly experience for organizations and can account for 90 to 200% of the lost position's annual salary (Molahosseini et al., 2020). Salaried employee turnover costs can typically run an average of six to nine months' salary (Molahosseini et al., 2020). Replacement costs for employee turnover for U.S. employers totaled $600 billion in 2018, rising to an estimated $680 billion by 2020 (Molahosseini et al., 2020). The employee turnover replacement costs typically cover the recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and training of new employees (Molahosseini et al., 2020; Ward et al., 2022). The financial costs associated with employee turnover create an economic and administrative burden for most organizations, which can negatively affect firms' profitability and competitiveness. Because of the high

costs of employee turnover, employee retention strategies tend to be a top priority for organizational leaders.

There are costs associated with employee turnover beyond the straight monetary expense of replacing and training employees. When employees leave organizations their work projects and tasks are typically postponed or passed along to other employees (Memon et al., 2021). The remaining employees have their own workloads and increased workloads lead to missed deadlines and loss of productivity (Memon et al., 2021). Work morale amongst the remaining employees can be diminished from the loss of a colleague and the additional workload that needs to be assigned to other employees (Memon et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2022). Losing employees also means losing knowledge and expertise that can be difficult to replace (Molahosseini et al., 2020). Turnover, lower morale, and higher workloads can lead to further turnover which results in a damaged employer brand name and a negative impact on the employer's financial condition (Rai & Nandy, 2021). The nonmonetary costs of employee turnover create additional financial costs to organizations, affecting the bottom-line. Organizational leaders should have strategies to minimize or prevent subsequent employee separations.

Nonretirement voluntary turnover is the result of employees' intent to leave and can be caused by a variety of factors. Some of the reasons behind intent to leave occur externally to the employee such as toxic work environments, bad management behaviors, high workloads, inadequate compensation and benefits, and work–life balance issues (Berglund et al., 2021; L. Li et al., 2021). These external factors have been effectively related to and connected to Herzberg's hygiene factors (Deri et al., 2021; Leitão et al.,

2021). Herzberg's hygiene factors are often used to study the relationships between the work environment and an employees' intent to leave (Leitão et al., 2021; Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Studying hygiene factors and their effects on nonretirement voluntary turnover can help create and improve retention strategies by countering the negative influences and building the positive influences of intent to stay. Identifying and mitigating external factors of intent to leave have been shown to improve employee retention through the reduction of job dissatisfiers and should be highly considered by leaders.

Nonretirement voluntary turnover can be the result of employees' internal factors that impact on their motivation and job satisfaction. An employee's intent to leave can come from internal issues such as a loss of motivation, little to no job satisfaction, lack of recognition, burnout, and a lack of promotion or educational opportunities (El-Rayes et al., 2020; Tirta & Enrika, 2020). Internal factors of intent to leave have been shown to relate to Herzberg's motivator factors. Considering the internal factors more in the managing of employees and their tasks have shown to improve job satisfaction leading to lower intent to leave (Leitão et al., 2021). Improving motivator factors within employees produces happier workers who are more engaged with their work, results, and impacts on the organization. Leaders should attempt measures that improve job satisfaction at the workplace to lower employee intent to leave resulting in higher retention rates.

Employees typically do not make abrupt decisions to quit an organization. Research has shown that intent to leave builds up slowly over time and is usually triggered once an employee reaches a burnout condition that leads to physiological,

psychological, and behavioral changes (Leitão et al., 2021; Ramlawati et al., 2020). Leaders are encouraged to monitor employee's job satisfaction and work engagement because these are leading predictors of employee turnover intention (Robertson, 2021). Leitão et al. (2021) suggest that a disgruntled employee will go through four stages of intent to leave: first assess the current job conditions, next evaluate the level of job and organizational satisfaction, then evaluate the costs and consequences of leaving, and finally analyze the pros and cons of available job alternatives. Moving through the four stages of intent to leave is a process for the employee that takes time and effort to evaluate. The likelihood of an employee leaving increases if negatively influencing internal and/or external factors continue, worsen, or multiply. If leaders are monitoring their employees and the work environment appropriately, they should be able to recognize when an employee is becoming demotivated and dissatisfied with their current employment situation.

Leaders are not solely responsible for all factors that can contribute to employees' intention to leave. There are external sources that can entice and lure employees away from an organization such as increased compensation and benefits, promotional opportunities, education and training programs, and employment perks offered by competing organizations (L. Li et al., 2021; Ramlawati et al., 2020). The increased competition for employees has intensified greatly in this new age of technology which has created a boundaryless labor market that reaches into other industries, nations, and cultures (Baranchenko et al., 2020). Workers tend to consider their employability through their own education and skill sets rather than through the potential growth path of a single

employer (Baranchenko et al., 2020). Because power plants, substations, metering, marketing, and transmission operate very similarly across the entire U.S. power industry, leaders are encouraged to be vigilant in monitoring the enticements of competing organizations and find ways to improve their own benefit packages (F. Li et al., 2021). If a power company does not provide enticing benefits or create programs to meet changing employee demands, then voluntary turnover will increase and impact recruitment efforts for new employees (F. Li et al., 2021). In addition to the competitive labor market, leaders should consider the employability objectives of their workers when evaluating and revising their employee retention strategies.

**Employee Motivation**

A key reason for employee retention programs is to mitigate the costs associated with employee turnover, including recruitment, hiring, and training of replacement workers. Although employee replacement costs are quite substantial and should be controlled by management through improved policies and procedures, there are other important advantages to successful employee retention programs (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021). Another key advantage for retention programs is that employee retention helps to keep important and useful knowledge, skills, and abilities within the organization leading to greater productivity (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021; Mukherjee et al., 2020). Greater productivity can help counter the costs of employee turnover through increased revenues, greater expertise, happier employees, and improved brand name loyalty. The increased productivity is attributable to greater levels of motivation.

The basic duty of managers and leaders is to find ways to motivate their employees. Motivation is the need or desire that urges, moves, pushes, or influences a worker to perform their requisite tasks and complete business objectives (Ann & Blum, 2019; Tella & Ibinaiye, 2020). Even when workers have the necessary qualifications and abilities, motivation causes individuals to act or perform at the job in ways that benefit themselves and the organization (Tella & Ibinaiye, 2020). Leaders are typically responsible for developing processes, policies, and strategies to stimulate workers to act and achieve desired outcomes (Tella & Ibinaiye, 2020). Leaders should be looking for positive internal and external influences to motivate their employees. Stimulating workers requires having an in-depth understanding of what motivates and demotivates people.

Leaders should be referencing industry standards, innovative mechanisms, effective management styles, and their human resources (HR) departments to improve employee motivation. Leaders who engage in HR best practices help generate increased motivation within their employees that can enhance organizational performance (Memon et al., 2021; Mukherjee et al., 2020). The development of reward, incentive, and compensation policies that are fair, equitable, and transparent are key drivers for most employees to improve motivation in the workplace (Barczak et al., 2021; Edwards-Dandridge et al., 2020). Other motivational factors include the social, cultural, leadership, and organizational values that align with employees' values (Grzanka & Moradi, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). Motivation is the source of improved employee contribution and work performance through increased work engagement when the motivational factors of

the workers are being met (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021). Applying HR best practices can assist leaders in creating greater work engagement that leads to greater organizational success while lowering burnout and employee turnover (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021). Industry standards, HR best practices, and innovative programs can be leveraged by leaders to enhance the internal and external factors influencing motivation. Companies with low attrition rates and high performance typically have effective practices, standards, and programs for employee motivation.

Employees' motivation tends to influence their behaviors, and behaviors drive job performance and productivity. There is special emphasis on the indirect connection between motivation and job performance that leaders should identify and enhance (Murray, 2020). The indirect connection is the basis of the three-stage cycle of motivation-effort-reward that continuously drives employee behaviors (Müller et al., 2022). If an employee becomes more motivated to increase their effort, and the reward received for improved performance is positively influencing, then the employee is more likely to be motivated to achieve a high-performance level. Inversely, if an employee becomes more motivated to increase their effort, but the reward received for improved performance is not positively influencing, then the employee is more likely to be motivated to achieve a low-performance level. Research has shown that increased motivation leads to greater job satisfaction resulting in improved productivity and higher retention rates (Murray, 2020; Tella & Ibinaiye, 2020). Finding the optimal motivators to drive desirable performance behaviors of their workers should be a prime directive for all leaders.

Motivation is based on factors or desirables set by the employee. Because the factors of motivation can be internal/intrinsic as well as external/extrinsic to the individual, leaders need to be able to identify, understand, and operate through the most appropriate policies and procedures to retain their employees (Barczak et al., 2021; Murray, 2020). Ann and Blum (2019) posited that individuals use the motivators that are most important to them to assess their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which then predicts their turnover intention. Tella and Ibinaiye (2020) stated that workers evaluate their job satisfaction against issues that are most important to them. Employees typically have their own unique internal and external motivating factors that should be harnessed for improved job performance. Many motivating factors will be common amongst the workforce, which should help leaders and HR departments to develop programs and policies that help leaders to develop motivational factors (Kurtović & Štrus, 2023; Murray, 2020). To reduce voluntary turnover of high performing employees, leaders need to manage workplace policies to better align with the motivators that matter most to their employees.

Motivational factors are unique to the individual employee. As described in the three-stage cycle of motivation-effort-reward, an individual's motivation is connected to those rewards that are appropriate and satisfying to the individual (Murray, 2020). One of the primary drivers of motivation is fair, equitable, and competitive wages and compensation for the work accomplished (Barczak et al., 2021). Adequate remuneration was found to be the primary or amongst the top motivators for workers in several studies (Dunnan et al., 2020b; Murray, 2020). Ibrahim and Hussein (2024) stated that in addition

to remuneration, appreciation and recognition of efforts by employers is highly motivating for individuals. Job engagement was found to be a primary predictor of employee motivation because job engagement embodies all the satisfiers for workers under one indicator (Memon et al., 2021). Studies show the variety of individual motivators that leaders can leverage to increase employee motivation in the workplace (Cameron et al., 2023; Memon et al., 2021). Leaders are encouraged to find the more influential factors that help to improve job engagement amongst their employees. Utilizing the grouping of influential motivators can enhance employees' behaviors, job satisfaction, and performance.

Motivation can be segregated by employee generation. Ann and Blum (2019) utilized Herzberg's theory to identify motivator factors in senior employees who remained employed part-time after retirement to ascertain that recognition and the work itself provided the greatest amount of motivation. In younger generations, such as the millennials, social relationships tend to be more motivating than pay (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Ushakov & Shatila, 2021). Also, motivation has been found to differ among the varying job types and employment fields. For example, the quality of work life is common among nursing staff, especially when work life creates work–family conflict, and can be extremely demotivating (Leitão et al., 2021). Similarly, some motivators differ among the generation levels of the workforce. Leaders should be encouraged to understand how generational needs differ from one group to another and how to incorporate those differences into their leadership styles (Tella & Ibinaiye, 2020; Zabolotniaia et al., 2019). When leaders comprehend their employees' motivators, they

can better manage the work environment, organizational policies, and workload to maintain employee motivation, boost performance, and maintain employee retention.

**Employee Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is a fundamental indicator of how satisfied or dissatisfied an employee is with their job, workplace, and employer. Because job satisfaction is dependent on the individual employee, there is a broad spectrum of job satisfaction ratings. The grading spectrum ranges from those people who enjoy work and uses work to help fulfill their purpose to those who are extremely disagreeable with work and see work only as a means to an end, usually financial (Gadomska-Lila & Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2022). Employees tend to rate their job satisfaction by what pleases them or what annoys them (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). Job satisfaction has a high impact—positively or negatively—on productivity (work and quality), responsiveness, and retention (intent to leave; Dhir et al., 2020; Kurtović & Štrus, 2023). Leaders can benefit greatly from identifying what factors increase employees' job satisfaction.

Employees tend to have their own job satisfaction rating for their manager and their employer. Job satisfaction is defined as the emotional response an employee has towards their work position, condition, and compensation (Gadomska-Lila & Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2022). When employees have positive emotional responses towards their work, they are referred to as having or experiencing job satisfaction, whereas negative emotional responses are referred to as having job dissatisfaction (Dhir et al., 2020; Ramlawati et al., 2020). Job satisfaction is highly complex and impacted through multiple psychological, physiological, emotional, and social factors that can vary

day to day, person to person (Dhir et al., 2020; Kovalenko, 2020). When job satisfaction factors are not being met, job satisfaction lowers allowing job dissatisfaction to rise. Monitoring and measuring the levels of job dissatisfaction and its causes helps leaders to determine and forecast associated behaviors such as lower productivity, absenteeism, and eventual turnover (Ann & Blum, 2019). The rating and level of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction should be surveyed and evaluated so that leaders can implement the necessary changes or programs that improve job satisfaction and lead to lower levels of turnover.

The level of employees' satisfaction and dissatisfaction can impact on employees in different ways. Job satisfaction can improve an employee's health, spirit, duty, organizational commitment, imagination, creativity, and attitude (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). Job dissatisfaction can lead to depression, stress, burnout, physical symptoms, disabilities, and mental disorders (Leitão et al., 2021). The debilitating effects of job dissatisfaction typically results in lower productivity, more work and duties transferred to other employees, absenteeism, and turnover (Dhir et al., 2020). Changes in the physical, mental, emotional, social, and job behaviors of workers should be a warning sign for leaders that job dissatisfaction is on the rise and needs to be countered before nonretirement turnover occurs. Leaders are highly encouraged to find ways to improve employee job satisfaction and retention rates.

There are many factors that can influence job satisfaction within employees. Using a human resources (HR) balanced scorecard approach, Wesemann (2024) ascertained that job satisfaction is influenced through opportunities for career

development, professional influence, teamwork, and job challenges. Additional influences include social interactions, workplace relationships, the work environment, and income level (Ghani et al., 2022; Kovalenko, 2020). Job satisfaction is made up of two fundamental inputs: the individual characteristics and the job characteristics (Ghani et al., 2022). The individual characteristics include the personal needs, interests, motives, attitudes, and personalities of the individual employee, whereas the job characteristics include the work, environment, atmosphere, culture, and management of the job (Gadomska-Lila & Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2022). Further research in the electricity sector by Gadomska-Lila and Rogozińska-Pawełczyk (2022) reach similar findings where they identify that individual characteristics include psychological contracts (employee commitment and satisfaction) and job characteristics that include the pro-innovative HR practices of the organization. Understanding the specific needs of their subordinates can help leaders to improve the job satisfaction level of their employees, resulting in higher retention rates.

A recurring theme in employee job satisfaction is fair and equitable compensation for their work, but how compensation is valued changes by job type. An example of the individual differences can be seen with a full-time hourly employee wanting a pay-rate appropriate with the job and industry while a contract employee is more satisfied through job security (multiple and lengthy contracts) of continual pay than the actual pay amount, even though both are concerned with their financial well-being (Dhir et al., 2020). Additionally, what constitutes compensation can vary across industries and employment types. Barczak et al. (2021) studied the energy sector employee responses to their

company's remuneration policies. The research findings suggested that employees were firmly grounded in remuneration being influenced by work efficiency, education, seniority, and position (Barczak et al., 2021). Fair and equitable compensation for work productivity and quality is typically viewed as a two-way relationship between manager and employee. The remuneration policies drive employee work engagement while simultaneously providing a source of security for the employee (Barczak et al., 2021; Dunnan et al., 2020b). Regardless of how an organization chooses to compensate its employees, fair and equitable compensation remains an essential element of job satisfaction.

Using appropriate remuneration policies, pro-innovative HR practices, and engaged leadership practices have the potential to improve employee job satisfaction, which can lead to higher retention rates. Improving employee job satisfaction is paramount in the energy and electricity sectors due to the needs of energy security, innovation, intelligent energy management, and transformative energy production and delivery development (Dunnan et al., 2020a; Gadomska-Lila & Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2022). Other research has shown some conflicting results of remuneration policies being an important aspect to job satisfaction due to the definition, use, financial variables, and the individual employees' attitudes and needs towards compensation. Another study of employee satisfaction concluded that training and performance appraisals have a positive impact on work engagement and employee retention, but pay satisfaction had a weaker effect (Memon et al., 2021). Memon et al. (2021) found that the values of the contemporary workforce have changed to where financial motives are no longer the

primary driver of work engagement. Pay alone needs to be strengthened through other compensation mechanisms and perks to enhance employee job satisfaction (Memon et al., 2021). Whether as a primary driver or a trifle concern, fair and equitable compensation is still a key variable of job satisfaction when employees are considering perceived opportunities in alternative employment versus their current employment (Ramlawati et al., 2020; Sainju et al., 2021). The compensation policies should adhere to industry standards and influence employee engagement. If an organization wishes to reduce its nonretirement attrition rates, compensation policies should be coupled with effective programs and policies.

The needs of employees are determined by the positive and negative influencing factors that cause them to remain with their current employer or seek employment elsewhere. Employees tend to base their level of job satisfaction on their value of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Shuck et al., 2021). Cameron et al. (2023) found that some of the intrinsic factors include involvement in the decision-making process, autonomy versus micromanagement, significance of work, impact on organizational objectives, and recognition. Some of the extrinsic factors for job satisfaction were identified as the work environment, workplace culture, salary, rewards, and fringe benefits (Shuck et al., 2021). At the basic level, job satisfaction is measured on how well outcomes match up to the expectations of the worker and are based on the characteristics of the job (Tella & Ibinaiye, 2020). If the needs of the worker—internal and external—are being met, then job satisfaction is likely to increase, and the employee has a greater intent to stay.

Improving the job satisfaction level of employees is of great importance to leadership who are looking for ways to improve employee retention rates.

Employee job satisfaction and employee work engagement are coupled together regarding increased productivity and retention. As Shuck et al. (2021) pointed out, there is great debate on whether job satisfaction is an outcome or an antecedent to work engagement, but both support increased productivity and employee retention. Job satisfaction can be approached through a global position based on the overall sentiment of the job by an employee or from a faceted approach based on employee evaluations of specific, or a collection of, job characteristics (Rai & Maheshwari, 2020; Shuck et al., 2021). The typical job characteristics that are aligned with job satisfaction include: salary and benefits (compensation/remuneration), work and pressure (stress), career development, education and training (personal development), safety and environmental protection, management style, performance evaluation (feedback), promotional opportunities (advancement), discipline, work environment, work relationships, and work-family support (quality or balance of work-life; Shuck et al., 2021; Tsai & Yen, 2020). If the job characteristics that individuals prefer are improved, then they will become more satisfied with their employer. When employees become more satisfied with their work and work environment, then they become more engaged with their work resulting in higher productivity and quality of work. Because the typical job characteristics aligned with job satisfaction represent both internal and external influences, Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory is well designed for testing the effects of these influences.

Herzberg's theory identifies those hygiene (external) factors that lead to lesser job dissatisfaction and those motivator (internal) factors that lead to higher job satisfaction. Staempfli and Lamarche (2020) completed an extensive literature analysis and found ten job characteristics to be directly influential to job satisfaction. The researchers concluded that the hygiene factors—the influencers of job dissatisfaction—comprised of fair compensation, physical safety (workplace violence), psychological safety (job security, stress, work-life conflict), communication, and teamwork (Staempfli & Lamarche, 2020). The motivator factors—the influencers of job satisfaction—were found to be social relations, organizational support (respect, status), supervisor support (recognition, empowerment), personal growth, and career advancement (Staempfli & Lamarche, 2020). The research findings were supported and advanced with occupational healthcare as a hygiene factor and burnout as a demotivator causing low effectiveness, cynicism, and emotional exhaustion (Leitão et al., 2021). Other study findings showed that job satisfaction was predominantly influenced by work environment and work relationships (hygiene), and achievement and the work itself (motivators; Anasi, 2020). Clearly, managing hygiene factors is critical in minimizing job dissatisfaction.

Both hygiene and motivator factors are critical for employee retention. Other studies resulted in similar primary hygiene factors to be income, work conditions, and relationships and the primary motivator factors to be work itself, recognition, and professional growth (Anasi, 2020; Deri et al., 2021). The findings of Deri et al. (2021) showed deviations of both hygiene and motivator factors between the age (up to 40 years old) and the education level (university versus other) of the workers suggesting that

internal and external influences can differ depending on the generation, education level, and socioeconomic background of the employee. Monitoring and engaging with their workforce should allow leaders to identify not only the hygiene and motivator factors of their employees, but also how those hygiene and motivator factors change from one generation to another, from men to women, and across the various cultures that might exist under their control. Leaders are encouraged to monitor their employees, discern the most effective hygiene-motivator factors to improve job satisfaction, and incorporate the best HR practices that can lead to better retention rates.

**Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Impacts**

A leading topic of concern amongst workers is their employability. Employability is the ability of a worker to retain the job they already have or to attain a new job they desire (Baranchenko et al., 2020). Due mainly to employee perceptions of diminishing job security and the boundarylessness of the labor market, lifetime career development—or employability—is replacing life-time employment (Baranchenko et al., 2020). Workers want the chance to attain more job-related skills and training and are looking to their employers for that training. Organizations that implement skills-based training, career development, create challenging work, and allow employees to participate in job-design have better employee engagement and higher retention rates (Baranchenko et al., 2020). There are concerns that employees who have acquired new skill sets and training may still leave the organization for another employer. Leaders who align employees' career development needs with organizational goals are still more likely to improve employee retention.

Including employees in multiple facets of their work and work environment can improve their job satisfaction and intent to stay. Leaders can shape the organizational culture around moral benefits that are more inclusive of their employees such as participating in decision-making, loyalty, and advancement opportunities (Ayoko, 2020; Wesemann, 2024). Employees want to feel appreciated for their contributions and to be respected by their employer (Kurtović & Štrus, 2023). An organization that can embrace employee appreciation to encourage positive morale can lead to greater employee engagement and higher retention rates (Ayoko, 2020; Kurtović & Štrus, 2023). Allowing employees to be involved with key job dimensions such as job design, skill variety, task significance, and degree of autonomy can lead to higher motivation, improved performance, and higher job satisfaction (Gu et al., 2022). Inclusion is a cognitive need by most employees to feel welcomed, needed, and part of a team in their work environments. A more diversified workforce can be created by including workers' ideas and engaging employees in developing alternative solutions. Creating a work environment around inclusion promotes diversity and multicultural acceptance.

Employees are typically perceptive of diversity and inclusion within their organizational culture and expect fair treatment. Regardless of the focality of unfair treatment being upon themselves or others, workers will identify inequalities and use them in consideration when to trust peers, managers, and organizations (Ward et al., 2022). The perceptions that employees have about how their organization values and promotes the positive social differences within the culture is referred to as the diversity climate (Kovalenko, 2020; Vito & Sethi, 2020). Perceptions of inequality, exclusion, or

discrimination leads to unsupportive diversity climates (Ayoko, 2020; Vito & Sethi,

2020). Unsupportive diversity climates within organizations can lead to poor job

attitudes, poor job performance, and increased employee turnover rates (Grzanka &

Moradi, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). The identification of inequity or unjust treatment by

employees can result in increased job insecurity, job dissatisfaction, mistrust, and

decreased morale. Leaders can leverage supportive diversity practices to increase trust

resulting in greater organizational identification, job satisfaction, and intent to stay.

Diversity is the inclusion and integration of other people, ideas, and influences

from other cultures and from minorities within the same culture. Noted barriers of

diversity include an unwelcoming culture, negative views, language difficulties,

preconceived notions, perceptions of inadequate opportunities, and unfair or unfriendly

recruiting practices (Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021; Vito & Sethi, 2020). Although public

agencies typically operate by policies and principles, such as representative bureaucracy,

diversity requirements for private organizations are usually accomplished through law,

such as affirmative action and equal opportunity (Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021). True

leadership is more altruistic in the cause of inclusion, such as helping others, having

compassion, being self-sacrificing, serving others, being part of a larger community, and

providing higher quality service (Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021). To become more

inclusive, the most important initial step is to remove obstacles to diversity. Integrating

other people, ideas, and cultures can be financially, strategically, and professionally

advantageous for organizations. By promoting a diverse climate and acceptance of a

multicultural environment, leaders can improve employee motivation, job satisfaction, and retention rates.

**Organizational Culture Impacts**

An important aspect of job satisfaction and employee happiness can be found in the organizational culture. Employees want to be treated fairly, feel safe, and have their efforts appreciated (Cameron et al., 2023). Perceived organizational support is the belief employees have about how engaged their employers are with the employees' well-being and contributions to the organization (Al Shaher & Zreik, 2022; Naz et al., 2020). Positive effects of perceived organizational support include increased job satisfaction, improved organizational citizenship behavior, and lower employee turnover (Al Shaher & Zreik, 2022). Leaders who engage in greater organizational support with their employees can establish positive influences that impact work engagement and performance. Employees can have their perceived organizational support increased through better leadership relationships and supportive HR management practices.

Perceived organizational support helps leaders create a culture of teamwork and comradery that is welcoming to all in the work environment. Employees are typically engaged with their work in organizations that adhere to similar social norms and values (Diah et al., 2020; Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). Organizations that have supportive HR management practices, promote intrinsic values, and provide perceived organizational support climates tend to have improved employee retention rates (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Marufu et al., 2021). Supportive HR management practices that lead to increased perceived organizational support include employee self-development programs, work–

life balance policies, social activities, and well-being programs (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Naz et al., 2020). Employees are more likely to feel supported by their organization when their needs are being met. Meeting employee needs within corporations is typically done through HR management practices and programs that are centered around personnel (Baranchenko et al., 2020). Perceived organizational support creates a welcoming and nurturing environment for all employees.

Organizations can have employees of many nationalities and cultures as well as operate in multiple countries (and cultures). Leaders should be aware of their organizational culture and how it impacts their employees. After studying the cultures of 64 countries, Hofstede (1991) created a national cultural model that includes six dimensions: power distance, achievement orientation (masculinity-femininity), individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, long-term/short-term orientation, and indulgence-restraint. Through the cultural model, leaders can identify certain values and social/cultural norms of their employees (Gu et al., 2022; Hofstede, 1991). Leaders can then implement the necessary HR practices that will help lead to greater job satisfaction and engagement such as profit sharing, bonuses, skill development programs, job design, employee assistance programs, job rotation, and job enrichment (Dunnan et al., 2020b). Employees can have greater job satisfaction leading to a greater intent to stay when their cultural, social, professional, and personal needs are met. Employees' needs can include training, certification, networking, and professional development which can differ based on gender, culture, social status, and generation level (Gu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020). Leaders with knowledge of the cultural model can use the model to influence work-

related outcomes of their subordinates such as motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and retention.

Perceived organizational support, supportive HR management practices, and utilization of the cultural model can be used to create an influential organizational culture. Organizational culture can also be leveraged to build and enhance new social norms (Saeed et al., 2019). Some organizations are using the sustainable development goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations to create green initiatives, green HR management practices, and social drivers within their organizational cultures (Ram et al., 2020). The aim of the sustainable development goals is to improve sustainable economic stability, to increase social awareness and inclusion, and to promote environmental awareness and improvement programs—typically referred to as the "triple bottom line"—through behavioral changes in organizational and national cultures (Ram et al., 2020). The "triple bottom line" has become especially important with the millennial generation and should be considered by organizational leaders. Proper training, goal setting, teamwork, and performance evaluations of green initiatives can lead to improved recruitment, job satisfaction, and retention of committed employees.

The industry in which a company operates can have a significant impact on its organizational culture. Electrical power generation, transmission, and distribution is a critical infrastructure of any nation, meaning that the loss of service by failure or attack can lead to harm of national security, the economy, or public safety (Radvanovsky & McDougall, 2019). National, state, and local authorities place great importance on such critical infrastructure organizations to be able to manage the loss of service quickly and

safely (Radvanovsky & McDougall, 2019). To achieve faster and safer reactions, critical infrastructure organizations have moved from traditional hierarchical structures to self-managed teams (Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2021). Using two nuclear power facilities as a research site, Martínez-Córcoles et al. (2021) studied the effects of empowering team leadership on the improvement of safety and job satisfaction. Empowering team leadership encompasses five leadership behaviors: lead by example, have followers participate in decision-making, become more autonomous, communicate relevant organizational information, and be concerned about followers' well-being (Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2021). Through empowering team leadership and other such programs, organizational culture can be developed into a more inclusive and team-based environment that promotes job satisfaction, job engagement, and retention (Ayoko, 2020; Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2021). By leveraging industry initiatives, programs, and best practices, leaders are better equipped to infuse empowerment, diversity, and inclusion into their organizational culture, thereby making it more appealing to employees.

The organizational culture can have a deep impact on employee job satisfaction. The impact on employee satisfaction is based on the work situation—the activity and tasks associated with work—within the context of the work environment, which includes culture (Ghani et al., 2022; Koziol & Koziol, 2020). Utilizing Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory, Choi et al. (2022) identified having a culture based on positive teamwork and sufficient salary as the primary hygiene factors. Training, career growth, and recognition were identified as the primary motivator factors for improved job satisfaction (Choi et al., 2022). A positive workplace culture that enhances the working

environment and overcomes workplace bullying were also identified by Lee and Lee (2022) as key hygiene factors for improving job satisfaction. Leaders can improve the organizational culture through better cooperative relationships and increased resilience to overcome bullying and burnout leading to lower intent to leave (Lee & Lee, 2022). Creating a positive workplace culture by fostering relationships with leaders and implementing HR best management practices tends to enhance employees' perception of organizational culture, resulting in increased job engagement and satisfaction (Lee & Lee, 2022; Ushakov & Shatila, 2021). Improving the organizational culture to be more inclusive of the shifting social landscape, the environmental impacts, the multi-cultural makeup of the organization, and varying requirements of the different generations of workers can be a useful tool for leaders seeking to enhance their employee retention programs.

**Leadership Styles Impacts**

Employee intent to stay is directly connected to employees' job satisfaction, which includes the work itself, relationships with peers and managers, the work environment, and the organizational culture. Because many factors of job satisfaction are directly connected to management behaviors, leaders' styles can have a significant influence of employee job satisfaction, which impacts employees' intent to stay or leave (Ohunakin et al., 2019). Job satisfaction can be directly linked to employee work engagement which is largely influenced by the work itself and leaders' styles (Mey et al., 2021). When employee engagement is low, undesirable outcomes such as lower productivity, quality, performance, profitability, and customer service are more prevalent

(Book et al., 2019; Kiwanuka et al., 2021). Leadership style has a significant impact on employee's intent to stay and attrition rates. Leaders can leverage their style to provide a supportive environment that can lead to greater work engagement and organizational loyalty.

There are several leadership styles that, if properly utilized, can result in creating leader-follower relationships. Having leader-follower relationships improves productivity, engagement, loyalty, and intent to stay (Kiwanuka et al., 2021; Mey et al., 2021). Likewise, leaders who do not get involved or have little interactions with their followers tend to create environments that are ambiguous, unplanned, chaotic, and dysfunctional (Kiwanuka et al., 2021; Northouse, 2019). This absentee leadership, sometimes referred to as laissez-faire leadership, can result in increased job dissatisfaction and turnover. Instead, leaders should implement supportive leadership styles that improve job satisfaction and employee retention.

There are several leadership styles that are supportive but vary on the inclusiveness and development of the subordinates. One basic supportive leadership style is transactional leadership. First presented by Weber (1947) and advanced by Burns (1978), transactional leadership occurs when a transaction or exchange occurs between a leader and a follower resulting in a punishment or reward (Frangieh & Rusu, 2021; Rehman et al., 2020). If an employee receives a coveted reward in exchange for work performance, then the employee is more likely to repeat the performance, be more engaged, and create a stronger relationship with the leader (Frangieh & Rusu, 2021; Kiwanuka et al., 2021). The leader can take this exchange further into social and personal

needs that strengthens the relationship with the follower, creating the dyadic relationships for leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Vito & Sethi, 2020). Transactional leadership is a supportive leadership style because it provides a reward to the employee for a particular level of performance that is repeated. Even though transactional leadership can create a supportive and positive leader-member exchange and dyadic relationship, transactional leadership does very little to develop subordinates, nor does it attend to all the employee's needs (Book et al., 2019; Northouse, 2019). Although transactional leadership can generate job engagement and satisfaction, there is the probability that the long-term effect diminishes, creating the need to consider other leadership styles.

Another leadership style that promotes a supportive environment and is growing in popularity is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership originated from Burns (1978) and was advanced by Bass (1985) and occurs when leaders cause change in individuals, cultures, and social systems to support the greater good instead of self-interests (Ohunakin et al., 2019; Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021). Transformational leadership is broken down into four separate elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bastari et al., 2020; Ohunakin et al., 2019). Leaders who use transformational leadership styles tend to create a positive, supportive, and cohesive work environment that empowers employees and elicits contributions from employees (Mangisa et al., 2020; Mey et al., 2021). Transformational leadership can also reduce job stress and burnout for employees (Ohunakin et al., 2019; Pittman, 2020). Transformational leadership creates an

environment of teamwork, empowerment, and mentorship, where employees could not only make decisions but to also have failures without fear of being punished (Mangisa et al., 2020; Mey et al., 2021). Enabling leadership, such as transformational leadership, allows leaders to create trust and loyalty with their subordinates, which can result in higher retention rates.

An emerging leadership style that is still in the forming and defining stage is authentic leadership. The theory of authentic leadership was developed by George (2003) and is centered around a leader's integrity and transparency in sharing information, including followers' inputs, and following through on promises (Northouse, 2019). Authentic leadership includes having a sense of purpose (goal setting), establishing distinct values and behaviors, being genuine, and building relationships that create trust, loyalty, engagement, and commitment with followers (Shahzad et al., 2021). Leaders who use authentic leadership can improve retention rates by creating an inclusive work environment that promotes employee engagement (Shahzad et al., 2021). The differing detail for authentic leadership is the honesty and transparency of leadership whereas transformational leadership is more about the building of team players. Transformational leadership and authentic leadership styles have increased in popularity and utilization due to the positive effects and influences they have on employees' performance and retention.

Sometimes a leader must first serve the followers and organization before pursuing their own objectives. Originated by Greenleaf (1970), servant leadership is centered upon a leader prioritizing and serving the needs of the employees (Book et al., 2019). A servant leader develops ten principles: listening, empathy, healing, awareness,

persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Northouse, 2019; Pittman, 2020). Leaders who use servant leadership tend to improve job satisfaction and employee loyalty (Book et al., 2019; Pittman, 2020). Tending to the needs of employees while developing employees allows leaders to create inclusive and positive work environments. Employees are more likely to feel a part of the team and organization when they are included, which increases their desire to remain with their firms.

Another leadership style designed around developing followers is adaptive leadership. Developed by Heifetz (1994), adaptive leadership prepares and encourages people to deal with change and face challenges. Instead of being the sole provider of answers and responses, leaders who engage in adaptive leadership aid and facilitate their subordinates in learning new skills and methods, to grow in the process, and to resolve challenges (Heifetz, 1994; Pittman, 2020). Modern-day leaders need to retool their skillsets to include problem-solving, collaboration, influencing others, and facilitating change (Pittman, 2020).  Retooling will allow leaders to meet and transform the competing demands and challenges facing organizations that will lead to enhanced organizational outcomes such as improved employee retention (Pittman, 2020). Adaptive leadership behaviors center on mobilizing, motivating, organizing, orienting, and focusing the attention of others onto creating alternative solutions (Heifetz, 1994; Northouse, 2019). Changing environments, new technologies, and emerging skillsets require leaders to be more flexible in facing challenges and managing the human workforce (Rehman et al., 2020; Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021). Leaders who utilize

adaptive leadership can help develop coping skills and contingency planning skills within

their subordinates, increasing their empowerment to deal with situations on their own

instead of having to always require the manager to step in. Book et al. (2019) stated that

leaders will typically blend multiple leadership styles depending on the followers' and

organizational needs at the time. Leaders should have a basic model of acceptable

leadership behaviors that create inclusive, empowering, and positive work environments.

Effective leaders tend to use different supportive leadership styles as needed

depending on the needs of the employees, so having a basic model of acceptable

leadership behaviors is most paramount. Kouzes and Posner (2002) developed a model of

leadership, also referred to as exemplary leadership (Kiwanuka et al., 2021; Northouse,

2019). The model of leadership consists of five fundamental practices for the leader:

model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and

encourage the heart (Kiwanuka et al., 2021; Northouse, 2019). Leaders who engage in

exemplary leadership inspire confidence, promote decision-making at the employee level,

and share information effectively which results in higher job satisfaction (Kiwanuka et

al., 2021; Mey et al., 2021). The model of leadership mimics several aspects of

supportive leadership styles. Leaders should understand the model of leadership because

leader behaviors are antecedents of employee job attitude, satisfaction, engagement, and

commitment which have an impact on employee performance and retention (Rehman et

al., 2020). The application of diverse supportive leadership models and styles enables

leaders to meet the requirements of their employees while ensuring the achievement of

organizational objectives by boosting employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention.

Leadership styles can be best suited to the leader based on personality traits—both inherited and learned. A useful guide to help discerns a person's personality traits is the Big Five taxonomy that has been well-researched, cross-culturally examined, and related to different leadership styles (Northouse, 2019; Shahzad et al., 2021). The Big Five personality taxonomy is comprised of five categories: agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Northouse, 2019; Shahzad et al., 2021). Using well-established guides such as the Big Five taxonomy can help organizations to identify, recruit, select, and train potential leaders in the leadership style(s) best fitting to the organizational culture and strategic plans (Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021; Shahzad et al., 2021). When testing the Big Five taxonomy as antecedents for authentic leadership, Shahzad et al. (2021) reported findings in alignment with previous research: that agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively related, that openness to experience was significant related, that extraversion was the strongest predictor, and that neuroticism was negatively related to authentic leadership. Personality traits are essential when interacting and communicating with others, necessitating that leaders acquire the most effective personality traits possible to foster supportive organizational work environments (Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021; Shahzad et al., 2021). Tools such as the personality taxonomy can assist leaders and HR managers in developing the necessary leadership that fosters positive work environments that can improve employee retention.

The leadership styles and personality attributes of employees depend on their gender, social status, occupation, level of education, and generation. Because they account for 33.5% of the energy sector workers in the U.S. and growing, the millennial generation should be given specific attention when it comes to leadership style (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). Book et al. (2019) ascertained that employees of different age groups were affected differently with engagement, loyalty, and intent to stay. Because millennials tend to want more work engagement, leaders can incorporate policies that help ensure engagement such as task variety, expanding job duties, career development, and training assistance programs (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Yildiz et al., 2020). New leadership styles that appeal to the younger generations can be used by leaders to better engage their younger workforce. Çelik et al. (2021) as well as Ozdemir and Albayrak (2019) recommend that leaders should utilize leadership styles that are more coaching and mentoring such as participative, democratic, and empowering for the younger generations. Transformational and strategic leadership is preferred over transactional leadership and LMX styles by millennials to improve organizational commitment and engagement (Naim & Lenka, 2020; Ozdemir & Albayrak, 2019). The differing attitudes and requirements of the generations of workers necessitate a flexible leadership style and toolkit on the part of leaders. The objective of leaders should be to foster positive work environments that encourage creativity, teamwork, innovation, inclusion, engagement, and job satisfaction.

Leadership styles can move beyond the typical employee engagement, job satisfaction, and intent to stay outcomes. There are other important aspects of the work

and the work environment that affect the satisfaction and retention of workers that leaders have control over such as workplace safety (Dartey-Baah et al., 2021; Gracia et al., 2020). Because of the nature of the production, transmission, and distribution of electricity, concerns around employee safety become paramount when dealing with safety topics such as high-voltage electrical power, combustion, nuclear radiation, and fire/explosion potential (Gracia et al., 2020). In the power industry, transactional and transformation leadership styles tend to be utilized and have positive impacts on safety engagement and job satisfaction (Dartey-Baah et al., 2021; Dunnan et al., 2020a). Leaders engaging in transactional leadership tend to communicate expectations and rewards that cause employees to act safely (Dartey-Baah et al., 2021; Gracia et al., 2020). Leaders engaging in transformational leadership typically instill a safety vision within their employees who act on their own to improve the safety conditions, interact with their peers to protect them, and become involved with leadership in improving safety practices and equipment (Dartey-Baah et al., 2021). Such empowering leadership has the potential to change safety compliance leading to greater job satisfaction through lower safety-related incidents (Gracia et al., 2020). Increased safety-related incidents typically result in more management-involved exercises such as increased drills, training, and testing, which employees might perceive as punishment resulting in a negative work environment. By interacting with their employees to ensure their safety and happiness, leaders can improve the job satisfaction and leader-follower relationship that leads to retention.

Because leadership style has a direct impact on the work, work environment, and employee relationships, Herzberg et al.'s (1959) hygiene-motivator theory is beneficial for analyzing the relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction. Hygiene factors are external to the employee and include the organizational policies, the quality of supervision, the work environment and condition, job security, salary received, quality of personal life, status, and relationships with managers, leaders, and coworkers (Bastari et al., 2020). Motivator factors are internal to the employee and include feelings of recognition, performance and achievement, responsibility, part of the decision-making process, challenging work (the work itself), and growth opportunities (education and advancement; Alrawahi et al., 2020). All these hygiene and motivator factors are impacted by the leadership style of the manager. If the leader is improving the hygiene factors to lower employee dissatisfaction and increasing the motivator factors to raise employee satisfaction, then the outcome should be increased loyalty and retention.

The primary impact of leadership style on employees is on job satisfaction and motivation which leads to engagement and intent to stay. Bastari et al. (2020) utilized Herzberg's theory on transformational leadership and found that both motivation and job performance were significantly impacted by leaders engaging in transformational leadership through more creative leadership and better talent development of the employees. Sehar and Alwi (2019) ascertained that a democratic leadership style created a positive relationship and encouraged idea sharing leading to higher job motivation and satisfaction. Supportive leadership styles that are utilized to improve hygiene factors and increase motivator factors can improve employees' job satisfaction and job engagement

(Bastari et al., 2020; Zabolotniaia et al., 2019). Leaders who engage their employees with positive, supportive, and inclusive leadership styles promote healthier relationships, job satisfaction, and employee retention.

**Transition**

In Section 2, the literature review provided a critical analysis of concepts related to employee retention strategies in the power industry including: (a) review of the conceptual framework (Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory), (b) review of contrasting theories (expectancy theory and job demands-resources theory), (c) employee retention in the power industry, (d) employee retention and turnover rates, (e) employee motivation, (f) employee job satisfaction, (g) workplace diversity and inclusion impacts, (h) organizational culture impacts, and (i) leadership style impacts.

Section 3 begins with a restatement of the purpose statement of the study followed by a description of the research process including the role of the researcher, target population, sampling method, participants, research method, research design, and ethical aspects of research. The procedures for conducting the research are described including details about the data collection instruments, techniques, interview questions, organization, and analysis techniques. How data saturation was achieved is explained. Section 3 closes with a discussion on how the study's reliability and validity were ensured.

Section 4 contains a summary of the research study findings including how the research results apply to business practices and implications for social change.

Recommendations for action and further research are offered. Section 4 closes with a conclusion.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies that U.S. power industry leaders use to improve employee retention. Section 3 of the study begins with a restatement of the purpose statement followed by a detailed discussion on the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, and ethical research. The procedures for conducting the research are described, including details about the data collection instruments, data collection techniques, interview questions, data organization techniques, and data analysis. A discussion on how the reliability and validity of the research through the topics of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability were ensured, as well as how data saturation was achieved, is also provided. Section 3 concludes with a summary review and transition to Section 4.

## Project Ethics

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies that U.S. power industry leaders use to improve employee retention. The targeted population was comprised of corporate leaders at power plants and/or companies within the Midwestern United States who had implemented strategies for employee retention. The implications for positive social change include the potential to give workers sustainable employment that provides greater job satisfaction and improved workplace conditions. Improved job satisfaction has the potential to reduce employee stress, improve employee health, increase productive work activities, and create greater life fulfillment.

**Role of the Researcher**

In this pragmatic inquiry research study, I functioned as the primary data collection instrument. In qualitative research studies, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2018). The role of the researcher is to identify the correct participants, gain access to those participants, create and implement an interview protocol for data collection, analyze the data, identify and interpret findings, and maintain an ethical approach throughout the data collection process (Yin, 2018). Researchers have argued that the role of the researcher also includes being aware of the potential consequences of the publication of findings and on participants (Hagues, 2021). The role of the researcher also involves ensuring that the data collection process produces the greatest and best data possible for analysis, which requires establishing rapport and a relationship with the study participants (Collins & Stockton, 2022; Kågström et al., 2023). As the researcher of the study, it was my duty to ensure that all functions and steps of the research process occurred correctly, within established procedures, and met the ethical requirements of human subject research.

I have personal experience in the U.S. power industry, and I am aware of how the research topic of employee retention can affect power companies. Study participants were recruited from organizations with which I had no experience or relationships to minimize any personal influence. Personal biases were mitigated by using a well-prepared interview protocol (Appendix) with questions that were structured to prevent leading or cueing the participant down a predetermined path and instead allowed a natural flow of the participant's experiences. The utilization of a well-prepared interview protocol allows

the researcher to see the phenomenon through the study participants' perspective instead of the personal lens of the researcher. An interview protocol can minimize personal biases of the researcher by establishing proper alignment between the interview questions and the research question (Braaten et al., 2020; Hagues, 2021). Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I used member checking to ensure that initial interpretations aligned with the ideas the participant was attempting to portray to ensure data accuracy and credibility.

Researchers are required to maintain the ethical standards set by *The Belmont Report* for all research studies. Established by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979), *The Belmont Report* sets three mandatory ethical principles that researchers should comply with to protect human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Rousselet et al., 2020; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). According to *The Belmont Report*, respect for persons can be defined as treating study participants fairly and as autonomous agents who voluntarily involve themselves with the study (Siddiqui & Sharp, 2021; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). A Walden University-approved consent form met the respect for persons standard by providing all the necessary information on the steps of participation, including the ability to be removed from the study and requirement of a participant signature of agreement.

The second principle of *The Belmont Report* is beneficence. The ethical principle of beneficence means doing no harm to the participants (Tsosie et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). Maintaining participant

confidentiality can achieve the beneficence principle (Reyes, 2020). To meet the beneficence standard, all participants' personal identification information was removed from the data and replaced with code names. The third principle of *The Belmont Report* is justice. The ethical principle of justice means ensuring that minorities and vulnerable groups are not excluded from participation or from study results (Siddiqui & Sharp, 2021; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016). The justice standard was met by treating all study participants with fairness, equity, and professionalism.

I established trust and a working relationship with the participants while not introducing my personal biases and views into the interview process. Connecting and establishing a rapport with each study participant prior to the actual interview can help establish trust (Novotny et al., 2021). Establishing trust and a working relationship can be further enhanced by informing study participants of what to expect during the interview process and by providing interview questions in advance (Powell & Brubacher, 2020; Steinfeld, 2020). I began by building trust and rapport with study participants while explaining the consent form. A copy of the interview protocol and the consent form were emailed to each study participant agreeing to participate, which helped to minimize anxiety, mitigated confusion, and prepared them for honest and knowledgeable responses. A research journal was kept to record activities associated with data collection, analysis, and other interactions, and any secondary data collection was also reviewed for personal biases. Member checking is a suggested method to ensure the accuracy of interpretations of interview responses (González-Salgado et al., 2022; Yin, 2018). I followed up each interview through member checking with each participant to ensure that

my interpretation of their responses aligned with what the participant meant to convey. Through these efforts, I minimized my personal biases in the data collection and analysis phases.

An interview protocol (Appendix) was used for all the participant interviews conducted in this qualitative study. The interview protocol is an essential step in minimizing the influence of personal biases on the study data analysis and results (Geddis-Regan et al., 2022; Hagues, 2021). Personal biases of the researcher can influence the interview protocol by being too leading, fail to capture participants' experiences and perceptions, or cue in on the researcher's view of cause and effect (González-Salgado et al., 2022; Jiménez & Orozco, 2021). The interview protocol was designed to allow participant responses to flow naturally without the researcher directing the responses down a biased path (Jiménez & Orozco, 2021). The design of the interview protocol allowed flexibility and natural adaptation to the participant responses without my personal biases or influence. The interview protocol also allowed for a professional and uniform approach to data collection because the same protocol was used with all participants.

**Ethical Research**

All research should comply with ethical standards and involve consideration of any ethical issues that might arise. I used the principles from *The Belmont Report* as a guide for ethical research. *The Belmont Report* describes the three mandatory ethical principles—respect for persons, beneficence, and justice—that researchers should comply with to protect human subjects from harm (Favaretto et al., 2020; U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services, 2016). Walden University's Institutional Review Board

(IRB) review and permission was required to move forward with the data collection and

analysis phases of this research study. Walden University's IRB ethical review and

approval were required prior to contacting and gaining consent from potential interview

participants. The Walden IRB approval number for this study was 01-29-24-1072169. I

also completed the Human Resource Protection Training provided by the Collaborative

Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) and required by Walden University to

help ensure ethical research.

A major consideration of ethical treatment for research participants is the full and

complete disclosure of the voluntary position they are consenting to. *The Belmont Report*

defines respect for persons as treating study participants fairly and as autonomous agents

who voluntarily involve themselves with the study (Tsosie et al., 2021; U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services, 2016). A Walden University-approved consent form was

used to meet this ethical standard. The consent form provided all the necessary

information on the steps of participation and required participants' consent of approval.

Participation in the study did not offer any incentives. Sometimes, offering something in

exchange for taking part in a study helps in gaining participants (Vellinga et al., 2020).

However, the information provided in the interviews should be honest and forthcoming

from a completely voluntary position (Xu et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Participants were

informed about their ability to withdraw from the study with either verbal or written

notice at any time before, during, and after the interview with no repercussions. If a

participant withdrew from the research study, their withdrawal was noted in the research journal as a written record and any data collected were destroyed.

The second principle of *The Belmont Report* is beneficence. The ethical principle of beneficence means doing no harm to the participants (Rousselet et al., 2020; Stewart, 2021). Doing no harm to research participants can be achieved through maintaining participant confidentiality (Reyes, 2020). The ethical standard of beneficence was met by keeping the names and organizations of all participants anonymous and removing any identifying information from the data. Except for interactions with the direct participant, all interview transcripts were redacted to remove any identifying information of the participants and their organizations to prevent any harm to the study participants. Using codes instead of names associated with the data helped to maintain participant confidentiality by removing identifying information (Saunders et al., 2016). The codes were also used on all interview transcripts to remove any identifying information about the participants and their organizations. As part of the role of the researcher, it was my responsibility to maintain confidentiality and governance of the research study data. For those data stored on my computer, I used passcode folders that only I had access to. All digital data were transferred to a flash drive, and that flash drive along with any hard copy documents was stored in a locked safe for a period of no less than 5 years. After 5 years, all data will be permanently deleted and destroyed.

The third principle of *The Belmont Report* is justice. The ethical principle of justice means ensuring that minorities and vulnerable groups are not excluded from participation or from study results (Siddiqui & Sharp, 2021; U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services, 2016). All study participants were treated with fairness, equity, and professionalism.

## Nature of the Project

The research method and design selection are essential components of a research study. The research method and design are a general plan for how a researcher will answer the research question based on the objectives, data collection sources, data analysis, ethical issues, and constraints of the research (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Saunders et al., 2016). The research plan should be as transparent as possible in the methodology selection process and each individual step of the research design to aid in establishing and maintaining research rigor (Singh et al., 2021). Having a clearly defined research question helps a researcher to select the optimum research method and design to answer the research question.

### Research Method

The research method is determined by the type of research being conducted, the intent of the research, and the type of data that is expected to be collected. There are three general research methods that researchers can select from for research studies: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Turale, 2020; Valtakoski, 2020). The qualitative methodology is appropriate for research that explores issues, develops in-depth analysis of activity or an event, describes a real-life context, and identifies interconnecting themes (Boot & Bosma, 2021; Hoeyer & Bearman, 2023). Researchers utilize the qualitative method to explore the *what*, *how*, and *why* of a phenomenon (Turale, 2020; Yin, 2018). Qualitative research studies employ open-ended questions,

focus on a single phenomenon or concept, and analyze rich and full data to discover meanings (Lanka et al., 2021; Wester et al., 2021). The synthesis and analysis of data derived from words (spoken and text) and images that can lead to understandings of complex social and business phenomena can be accomplished in qualitative methodology. The qualitative method was found most appropriate for the research study.

The quantitative methodology utilizes numerical data. Researchers who use quantitative methodology tend to assess and measure relationships between variables through empirical data obtained through closed-ended questions to test hypotheses (Gilad, 2021; Ramlo, 2020). Numerical data derived from surveys, questionnaires, and databases are used to create relational models for statistical analysis in quantitative method research. Quantitative research is designed to answer *how many* and *how much* research questions (Yin, 2018). The mixed-methods approach combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Gilad, 2021; Ramlo, 2020). Because the research question was not testing hypotheses or the relationship between cause and effect, the quantitative methodology and the mixed methods approach were not appropriate for the research.

**Research Design**

The research design is determined by the route a researcher takes to attain data based on the intent of the research and the type of data that is expected to be collected. The commonly used research designs in qualitative research are narrative, phenomenological, ethnographical, case study, and pragmatic inquiry (Matta, 2022; Moustakas, 1994). Pragmatic inquiry explores experiential knowledge of those involved

in events, efforts, attitudes, or histories to link theory to practice of a specific and

evolving phenomenon (Allemang et al., 2022; Stompff et al., 2022). A pragmatist

believes that the world is ever-changing, which creates new problems or causes previous

or existing solutions to adapt and evolve to the new situations (Schildermans, 2022;

Simpson & den Hond, 2022). The pragmatic inquiry design also allows the researcher to

focus on human experience of a specific business problem to identify and reveal real-

world perspectives (Elder-Vass, 2022; Stompff et al., 2022). The real-world perspectives

of personal, professional, and business environments include behaviors, life cycles,

change processes, relations, and organizational and management processes (Gilad, 2021;

Lo et al., 2020). An action-oriented framework is used by pragmatists to research

practical problems using the most appropriate research methods for addressing the

research question (Dolan et al., 2022; Magalhães et al., 2022). John Dewey (1938)

designed a five-step systematic approach to inquiry as an action-oriented framework. The

five-step systematic approach includes the following: recognize the problem, consider the

nature of the problem, suggest solutions, consider the likely effects of the solutions, and

take action (Dewey, 1938; Stompff et al., 2022). Using Dewey's approach to inquiry

allows researchers to continuously develop better tools, knowledge, and solutions through

engagement and experience (Stompff et al., 2022). The qualitative pragmatic inquiry was

appropriate for this study because the research phenomenon was complex, practical, and

highly contextual. A pragmatic inquiry design approach was also appropriate for this

study because the research phenomenon had been previously solved but changing social

and cultural conditions required updated or original practical solutions into processes and activities for leaders in the U.S. power industry to utilize for employee retention.

Other qualitative research designs include the narrative, ethnographic, phenomenological, and case study. The narrative design is appropriate for reflecting on people and their stories (Matta, 2022). Qualitative researchers can use narrative design to elicit information related to a specific incident or a flow of related events (Matta, 2022). The study was not focused on life stories or incidents, so the narrative design was not considered. The ethnographical design is appropriate for seeking to understand cultural behavior (Matta, 2022). Researchers utilizing ethnographic design observe and engage in the everyday life of the members of a specific culture (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Matta, 2022). Because the research was not observatory and was focused on business strategies employed to retain employees, the ethnographic design was not considered. The phenomenological design is appropriate for describing experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers engaged in qualitative research can utilize phenomenological design to study the lived experiences and interpretations of others (Moustakas, 1994; Saunders et al., 2016).  The focus of this research was on business strategies and not lived experiences, therefore, the phenomenological design was not considered. The case study design is appropriate for an in-depth analysis of a specific case or cases from several organizations and across industries for a generalized approach to answering the research question (Prosek & Gibson, 2021; Yin, 2018). The case study design also requires consent from gatekeepers at organizations to access participants and organizational documents, which is time-consuming. Because the research was focused on multiple power industry-based

participants and associated documentation to produce findings associated specifically for the U.S power industry, the case study design was not considered. The principal objective of the study was to identify a business model that identifies interconnecting themes, patterns, and relationships of a specific scenario with the U.S power industry, making the narrative, phenomenological, ethnographical, and case study designs not appropriate for the study.

Obtaining data saturation is a critical component of dependable quality research for qualitative research. Data saturation is reached when additional interviews produce little to no new information or new themes that address the research question (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). Unfortunately, the number of interviews to be conducted to reach data saturation cannot really be known at the beginning of the research study (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). Interview participant numbers for qualitative research generally range from four to thirty, but six to twelve typically is enough for qualitative pragmatic inquiries (Guest et al., 2020). To ensure data saturation, I interviewed five purposefully sampled executives and midlevel managers from five organizations but continued with two more participants and organizations, in which no new information or themes were presented. Additionally, I used the same interview protocol for each interview and used probing questions to get as much information as possible (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). Also, I requested any public organizational materials such as documents and historical records that were focused on answering the research question during the interviews and follow-up discussions.

Through these strategies I aimed to ensure data saturation in the data collection phase of the study.

## Population, Sampling, and Participants

The sample size is important in establishing dependability of research results. Reaching data saturation is the measure typically used in qualitative research studies to ascertain reliability. But a priori determination of sample size for qualitative research studies is difficult to ascertain (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2016). Six to twelve interview participants are suggested for qualitative research studies (Guest et al., 2020). I interviewed five purposefully sampled executives and midlevel managers from five organizations. I continued with two more participants from two other organizations, in which no new information or themes were presented, thereby achieving data saturation. The same interview protocol is recommended to be utilized for each interview (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Guest et al., 2020). I continued interviewing participants until additional interviews produced redundant interview responses or no new information, thus reaching data saturation.

Because this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was focused on the strategies leaders in the U.S power industry utilized to improve employee retention, the population included executives and midlevel managers from power plants and/or companies within the Midwest United States. An eligibility questionnaire should be used as a screening procedure during initial contact to ensure each participant meets the eligibility criteria and ensure the selection process is fair (Iyer et al., 2020; MacKay et al., 2020). The criteria for eligibility as an interview participant for the study included: (a) currently in a

management position in a Midwest U.S. power company, (b) utilizes strategies to improve employee retention, and (c) works in an organization with a nonretirement attrition rate below the industry average of 15.4%.

I used purposive sampling to select participants for the research study. Purposive sampling is used when the targeted population is too small for random sampling or when a particular phenomenon is being targeted for research, as with what occurs in qualitative pragmatic inquiries (Guest et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). During the contact phase and the end of each interview, I asked the participant if there were any additional individuals to interview (the snowball technique) that met the eligibility criteria to ensure data saturation. The snowball technique occurs when a research participant provides a possible participant name, which can lead to another name, and so on (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Yin, 2018). Using the snowball technique can aid the researcher in gaining more purposive sampling participants within the geographic boundaries of the study without needing to expand into other areas. The eligibility requirements, purposive sampling, and snowball technique were enough participants to achieve data saturation.

Most power companies generate electricity and balance load over large areas that encompass several counties and a few hundred miles. There can be large distances between corporate headquarters and/or plant facilities within their electricity distribution system. The large electricity distribution systems create large geographic distances between one power company and its neighboring power company. Because of this geographic limitation on travel, I used remote technologies to conduct the interviews. Remote technologies, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams web-based conferencing

software platforms, include recording abilities and appointment reminders in virtual calendars that help to make scheduling and attending interviews simpler and more cost-effective than conducting in-person interviews (De Villiers et al., 2022). Utilizing remote technologies helped in gaining access to participants, scheduling and keeping interviews, reducing costs, and making interview recording and transcription easier.

Participants for a research study were qualified by meeting predetermined eligibility criteria. An eligibility questionnaire is recommended as a screening procedure during initial contact to ensure each participant meets the eligibility criteria (Yin, 2018). The criteria for eligibility as a participant for the study included: (a) currently in a management position in a Midwest U.S. power company, (b) utilizes strategies to improve employee retention, and (c) works in an organization with a nonretirement attrition rate below the industry average of 15.4%.

Once the eligibility criteria are set, finding participants for this research study was the next critical step. There are several strategies that researchers can use to find participants including social and professional networks, industry publications, and official communications with organizations (Yin, 2018). My strategy to gain access to participants was to utilize my social and professional networks to identify organizations and make initial contact with individuals within those organizations. My initial contact method was either a phone call or email to establish a relationship, followed by a short call to discuss possible participation. As further names and contact information is passed along, I then reached out to those new contacts and established a professional working relationship.

Establishing a working relationship with participants is essential in interview preparation. The research process can strengthen if the researcher establishes a positive rapport with the study participants prior to and during data collection (Novotny et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). Working relationships should be built upon mutual trust, openness, attention, and respect (Novotny et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). Researchers should get to know the participants they will be interviewing, being eager to learn about others' experiences (Webb et al., 2020). I began my rapport building with personal emails and phone calls to establish initial contact and interest. Communication continued as necessary, being honest and forthcoming throughout the entire process. The emails to interested participants contained the consent form and interview protocol (Appendix) to allow the participants the opportunity to review and be prepared for the interviews. The use of audio-recording was announced prior to the interviews along with the permission to be recorded during the interviews. Another strategy for rapport-building was to provide each participant with the option to conduct the interview in person or remotely using teleconferencing tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams to minimize coordinating travel and meeting schedules. For in-person interviews, offered options to meet at their office location or a location off-site in which they are comfortable. I also reminded the participant that the interview is completely voluntary and confidential.

**Data Collection Activities**

In this pragmatic inquiry, I functioned as the primary data collection instrument. In qualitative research studies the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Ehrmin & Pierce, 2021; Novotny et al., 2021). I used a semistructured interview

consisting of nine questions focused on the strategies used to improve employee

retention. A semistructured interview allows for the interview to be structured enough to

maintain the focus of inquiry while being flexible enough for probing questions to be

asked to gather deeper information (MacKay et al., 2020; Turale, 2020). Using a

semistructured interview method allows for deeper data gathering of a specific

phenomenon (MacKay et al., 2020; Turale, 2020). The semistructured interview method

enables two-way communication between the researcher and the interviewee using open-

ended questions and probing questions.

The interview questions were part of the interview protocol (Appendix) used in

every participant interview. The interview protocol aided to minimize the influence of

personal biases while maintaining proper alignment between the interview questions and

the research question (Braaten et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2021). I have prepared the

interview questions to properly align with the research question for the proposed

research. Designed to focus on the participants' views and discussions, the interview

protocol is designed to provide rich and detailed data. The interview protocol was used to

keep the interview process identical and within a specific time frame.

The semistructured interviews provided the primary source of data for the study.

Secondary sources of data were required to ensure reliability and dependability on the

data, research process, and research results (Creswell, 2014; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

There are six sources of data for qualitative studies: interviews, documentation, archival

records, physical artifacts, direct observation, and participant observation (Yin, 2018).

During the interviews and follow-up discussions, I requested any public organizational

materials such as documents and historical records that were focused on answering the research question. The participant organization website was searched for any public data. The organizational documents, strategic plans, historical documents, and procedures gathered were incorporated for data triangulation. These data sources provided enough data triangulation to provide validity to the research study. Research rigor can be enhanced for qualitative research through member checking (González-Salgado et al., 2022; Motulsky, 2021). Member checking is the process of synthesizing the interview data and providing those summaries to the interview participant for their confirmation or amendment (González-Salgado et al., 2022; Motulsky, 2021). I used member checking to improve the reliability and validity of the data collected by sending each participant my interpretation of their responses for their confirmation or amendment.

For this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I used the semistructured interview technique for data collection. There are several data collection techniques available for qualitative research such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and questionnaires (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Teti et al., 2020). A semistructured interview allows the researcher to engage in two-way communication with the research participant to discuss in depth a particular phenomenon that the participant is knowledgeable about (MacKay et al., 2020). Semistructured interviews are designed to ask prepared questions focused on the research question that ask direct, but open-ended questions, and allows for probing questions as needed to gather deeper information (MacKay et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). The interview questions are recommended to be guided by an interview protocol to help in minimizing researcher bias, creating a standardized list of questions, maintaining focus

on the research question, and minimizing interview time (Geddis-Regan et al., 2022; Roberts et al., 2021). An interview protocol (Appendix) was used in every participant interview. The semistructured interview allowed for a carefully prepared data collection plan that aligned with the research topic.

There are some disadvantages associated with the semistructured interview technique. One disadvantage of interviews is that the participant may not feel at ease enough to provide full and in-depth answers, which is why rapport building and using an interview protocol was important (Braaten et al., 2020; Novotny et al., 2021). Another disadvantage is the distance between the researcher and the participant. Although face-to-face interviews are preferred to allow observation of body language and more personable communication, the geographic positions may impose limitations on in-person interview and require virtual technologies that have their own limitations (Roberts et al., 2021; Rowen et al., 2022). Recording devices were utilized to ensure the best interview transcriptions. A third disadvantage of interviews is that the interviews take a measurable amount of time and can lead to other paths not intended for the research study (Powell & Brubacher, 2020). An interview guide and interview protocol were designed to help keep the interview focused on answering the research question and keep within a designated time limit (Evans et al., 2022). While these concerns are valid, I believe that the attention given to creating an interview guide and protocol as well as ensuring that the virtual medium used in the interviews is agreeable to the participant did overcome the concerns.

Remote technologies can be a useful tool to improve data collection. Web-based conferencing platforms, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, are recommended due to their

ease of use, low cost, recording ability, and security features (De Villiers et al., 2022). Another benefit of utilizing web-based conferencing platforms is the ability to schedule an interview event and having it placed directly into the participant's calendar which acts as a reminder to the participant and shows overlapping events. Several qualitative data analysis software platforms are designed to incorporate recorded files from Zoom or Microsoft Teams directly which reduced the workload of further transcriptions and data loading (Kalpokas & Radivojevic, 2022). Remote technologies helped in gaining access to participants, scheduling and keeping interviews, reduced costs, recording and transcribing interviews, and made data loading into data analysis software easier.

A research study begins with an outline of expectations, but the study can change for various reasons. The study data can cause changes in categories and themes, there could be thoughts and ideas from the researcher based on the study data, and inputs from organizational documents could affect the outcome of the findings (Yin, 2018). Keeping a research journal is recommended for the researcher to track changes, thoughts, memos, and other notes associated with the research study (Yin, 2018). A properly documented study in a research journal provided an audit trail that improved the reliability and validity of a study (Singh et al., 2021). I kept a research journal to record any changes in the study to include changes in the coding as well as my thoughts throughout the data collection, organization, and analysis stages. The research journal did aid in the reliability and validity of the study findings.

Ensuring the reliability and validity of the data collected is important to any research study. Data reliability and validity is enhanced for qualitative research studies

through member checking (González-Salgado et al., 2022). Member checking occurs

when the researcher sends their data interpretation to the participant for their

confirmation or amendment (Motulsky, 2021). The researcher's data interpretation can be

confirmed through the member checking process which improves the reliability and

validity of the data collected. Member checking was used with each interview participant

to ensure data quality. After each interview, I used member checking by paraphrasing the

responses to each interview question into an interview summary. I then sent an interview

summary to each participant via email requesting a review of my interpretations,

reminding them that it was permissible to amend my interpretations as needed, and

requested their feedback via email.

## Interview Questions

The interview questions were as follows:

1. What strategies do you use to motivate your employees?

2. What strategies do you use to improve employee retention?

3. In what ways, if at all, do your strategies for building workplace diversity and inclusion impact employee retention?

4. What strategies do you use to enhance employee job satisfaction?

5. In what ways, if at all, have these strategies improved your employee retention?

6. In what ways does your organizational culture impact employee retention?

7. What leadership styles and approaches do you use to improve employee retention?

8. What key barriers, if any, did you experience when implementing your strategies to improve employee retention?

9. What else can you tell me about your strategies to improve employee retention that I did not ask?

## Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

The interview transcripts, member checking responses, public organizational documents, and any materials found on the public webpage were data used for the study. The next step in the process was to organize and store the data into smaller, usable portions. Data organization is suggested to begin by breaking down the large amount of data into smaller pieces that can be sorted into categories and themes (Lester et al., 2020; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Researchers recommend using a code book to keep track of the coding scheme and any changes (Yin, 2018). Although the organization of the study data began with initial codes based on the conceptual framework for the study, changes in the categories and themes were expected to occur as the database builds and the themes become more identifiable. I used a code book to keep track of the categories and themes as well as any changes that are implemented to the organization of the study data. The next suggested step in data organization is to store the data along with the sorting into categories and themes into a database to begin the data analysis stage (Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020). Data storage and analysis software, such as NVivo or Microsoft Excel, aided in the process of storing and organizing the data due to the increased processing speed, organization control, and security of the study data (Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020). Software also aided in the speed of identifying categories and themes

(Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020). I used NVivo with Microsoft Excel as a secondary check in the storage and organization of study data. Taking these steps supported data organization as well as provided control and security of the study data.

The control and security of the data is just as important as maintaining the confidentiality of the participants. I used passcode folders that only I had access to for data stored on my computer. All digital data was transferred to a flash drive and that flash drive along with any hard copy documents was stored in a locked safe for a period of no less than 5 years. After 5 years, all data will be permanently deleted and destroyed.

Once the data was collected and organized, the researcher began the data analysis phase. Having multiple sources of data aids in the validity of the research study by providing opportunity for triangulation (Natow, 2020; Yin, 2018). There are four different types of triangulation: data sources (data triangulation), different evaluators (investigator triangulation), different perspectives to the same data (theory triangulation), and different methods of data collection and analysis (methodological triangulation; Lindgreen et al., 2021; Natow, 2020). I used methodological triangulation based on the multiple sources of data received from the interviews, organizational documents, and website for the study.

The data collected from the semistructured interviews, public organizational documents, and data attained from the organizational website was processed and analyzed. The primary data analysis technique I used in this pragmatic inquiry was pattern matching. Pattern matching involved breaking down collected data, sorting into categories and themes, and then comparing the smaller data (words, phrases, sentences,

or paragraphs) to predicted categories and themes based on the conceptual framework (Audette et al., 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2021). The breakdown of data is referred to as "coding the data" and the predicted categories and themes were set as an initial logic pattern (Audette et al., 2020; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Although the initial themes and categories were set a priori, the researcher was open to adjusting the themes and categories based on the data collected to aid in reporting actual study findings and minimizing researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Coding the data was an iterative process of the data analysis phase and notes of the coding changes were accounted for in the research journal.

All the data from the interviews, documents, and webpages were analyzed to determine whether the codes all fit into the a priori themes and categories or not. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the themes that fit into the conceptual framework, those that did not, and those that added to or altered the original themes. Qualitative data analysis software aided in data analysis because of the speed at which it processed data and identified themes (Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020). I used NVivo to aid in the data analysis phase with Microsoft Excel as a secondary check. Utilizing software programs, such as NVivo or Microsoft Excel, allowed the ability to import the transcripts and digital copies of the documents, create a database, code, sort (thematic analysis), and review findings (Bergeron & Gaboury, 2020). Qualitative data analysis software also created a visualization of data through various coding and thematic coloring and by graphic outputs for an enhanced interpretation process. The data analysis process allowed correlation of key themes with the conceptual framework as well as identified any new themes.

**Reliability and Validity**

Establishing good and proper research rigor is crucial in any research study process. Research rigor is especially important with qualitative research because the typical quantitative criteria cannot be measured with qualitative data, therefore, research rigor must be provided through processes that ensure the trustworthiness of the research study (Lester & O'Reilly, 2021; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Such qualitative processes include triangulation, member checking, protocols, and an audit trail (Guest et al., 2020; Lindgreen et al., 2021). The reliability and validity of a qualitative research study can be improved by maintaining a database, utilizing a codebook, documenting the research process through a research journal, and using multiple sources of data (McGinley et al., 2021). I achieved research rigor of reliability and validity in the proposed research study by following the standards of dependability, credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation. The reliability of the research study was enhanced through process controls such as using an interview protocol for all interviews, creating a code book to track and standardize the categorization of themes, and utilizing a research journal to document all steps of the study process. To add to the validity of the research study I ensured data saturation in the data collection process, used member checking to validate the interview data interpretations, and used a database that was aligned with the code book to aid in more authentic data analysis.

**Reliability**

A reliable qualitative study is one which provides a research process and findings that are dependable. Reliability is a basic measure of the consistency and stability of the

research process, primarily with the research design, data collection, and data analysis phases (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Rose & Johnson, 2020). A qualitative researcher creates reliability by providing a detailed description of all steps in the research study in a way that it can be repeated (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019; Yin, 2018). Reliability of a qualitative research study can be improved by minimizing preconceived notions by allowing the data to speak for itself, identify any researcher and/or participant biases and errors that might arise, and accurately reporting the information provided by the participants (Hamilton, 2020; Rose & Johnson, 2020). The reliability of a qualitative pragmatic inquiry can be enhanced by using an interview protocol, developing a database, creating a code book, and maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 2018). I used an interview protocol, a code book, a database, and an audit trail to enhance the reliability of this research study.

To achieve reliability with the research study, I used an interview protocol (Appendix) that was designed to welcome the study participant, described the interview process, asked precise questions focused on the research question, thanked the participant, and scheduled the member checking process. The same interview protocol was used in each interview. I also created and used a code book to aid in creating and tracking the codes used throughout the data collection, transcription, organization, and analysis phases. The codes began a priori to the initial data as a starting point, but all changes to the coding structure were documented in the research journal. The research journal also kept any notes, thoughts, and additional information as it occurred to ensure a detailed audit trail of the research study process.

*Dependability*

Dependability is a measure of the trustworthiness of data and findings. A qualitative research study is considered dependable if the data collected from interviews can be traced from the transcripts to the database, to the analysis, and finally to the interpretations clearly and with transparency (Hamilton, 2020). Implementing standardized protocols throughout the research study also improves dependability of the data collected and analyzed (Hamilton, 2020; Yin, 2018). For this research study, I used an interview protocol and a code book to ensure uniformity across the data collection and analysis phases. I also kept a research journal to track memos, coding changes, and reflective thoughts to help minimize biases and errors. I also used member checking to ensure the authenticity and confirmation of interpretations. The member checking process that I utilized consisted of summarizing my interpretations of participant interview responses, sending those interpretations to the participant, and requesting feedback that confirmed or amended my interpretations. Finally, I reached data saturation by continuing interviews until no new information or themes were obtained. Using an interview protocol, member checking, and ensuring to reach data saturation enhanced the dependability of the research study by improving the trustworthiness of the data and findings.

**Validity**

The study results strengthen when the validity of the data and data analysis strengthens. Measuring validity in qualitative studies differs from quantitative studies because the qualitative researcher is attempting to answer two basic questions: 1) does

the research design and process properly address the research question and produce new insights into a phenomenon, and 2) are the causal factors and processes trustworthy (Closa, 2021)? Qualitative research strives to collect detailed and rich data to identify themes and patterns that the reader may find usable in their field of interest (McGinley et al., 2021). Elements of research rigor for validity include credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Saunders et al., 2016). Researchers can implement concepts such as data saturation, triangulation, data collection protocols, member checking, delimitations, negative case studies, and an audit trail to improve the study's validity (Fofana et al., 2020). To ensure validity for this research study, I used pre-determined themes and categories based on a detailed literature review. I also used an interview protocol during the data collection process, used member checking to validate data interpretations, used a research journal to create an audit trail, and ensured that data saturation had been achieved.

I used the same interview protocol (Appendix) in all interviews. The interview protocol welcomed the study participant, described the interview process, asked precise questions focused on the research question, thanked the participant, and scheduled the member checking process. The member checking process allowed the participant to review my interpretations of each of their responses and provide feedback on the interpretations. The conceptual framework was used to create the initial codes used to design the codebook and database as well as initial data analysis. All changes to the coding, database, notes, and thoughts were logged in a research journal to provide an

audit trail of the research study. Interviews continued until no new information or themes were generated, thus achieving data saturation.

### *Credibility*

One method to improve the validity of a research study is to increase the credibility of the data and research findings. Credibility is a measure of the dependability and accuracy of the data obtained through the data collection instruments, coding, and data interpretation—meaning how trustworthy is the study (Closa, 2021; González-Salgado et al., 2022). The research findings should be based on a complete and transparent analysis of the data collected without researcher biases and predispositions to the research question (Fielding, 2020; McGinley et al., 2021). Credibility is also established through the dependability, relevancy, and congruency of the study findings (Singh et al., 2021). Methods to improve credibility in a qualitative research study include triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, use of negative case studies, prolonged engagement, use of multiple independent researchers, and connecting the data to theory (Motulsky, 2021; Rose & Johnson, 2020). To ensure credibility in this research study, I used methodological triangulation, member checking, and used an interview protocol.

The same interview protocol (Appendix) was used in all interviews. The interview protocol listed nine questions specific to answering the research question for the study. The interview questions were designed to answer the research question without proposing researcher biases and predispositions to the answers. After completion of each interview, I used the member checking process with each participant to ensure that my

interpretations matched the participant's intentions through confirmation or amendment of my interpretations. The member checking process aided in eliminating researcher biases and predispositions. I also gathered participant organization records that were provided as well as those that were found publicly on the organization website. The data gathered from the documents were used to triangulate the data gathered from the interviews.

### *Transferability*

Another method to improve the validity of a research study is to increase the transferability of the research findings. Transferability is a measure of how the findings apply to other but similar contexts—meaning how well the study transfers to the reader's situation (McGinley et al., 2021). In contrast to quantitative studies, transferability in qualitative studies does not imply the generalization of findings that can be passed on to like contexts (McGinley et al., 2021). Instead, the researcher uses thick narratives and descriptive details to present the data collected from the viewpoint of the participants such that the reader decides whether the study findings can be implemented in their own context (McGinley et al., 2021). Replicability of the research study is another definition of transferability that can be used by future researchers (Closa, 2021). Transferability is established through a detailed description of the research design, the participants and their selection process, the delimitations of the research study, and the research process (McGinley et al., 2021; Rose & Johnson, 2020). To ensure transferability in this research study, I provided a detailed description of my methodological approach, research design, participant selection criteria, data collection and analysis process, and findings. A

research journal was utilized to document all the steps in the research process including initial codes, code changes, database organization, and notes so that I could relate the process in my study data collection, analysis, and findings. Leaders reading this study may feel more enabled to implement the study findings to improve employee retention.

### *Confirmability*

A third method to improve the validity of a research study is to increase the confirmability of the data and research findings. Confirmability is a measure of how well the research findings match up to the collected data and analysis—meaning how transparent the research process is (McGinley et al., 2021). Another way to define confirmability is how well another researcher could reproduce the study process and confirm the study's findings (Closa, 2021). The key to confirmability is transparency in every step of the research process in such a way that an auditable trail is created and can be followed from beginning to end (Closa, 2021; Fielding, 2020). Methods to establish confirmability in qualitative studies include fully documenting the research design and process, utilizing field notes and memos, keeping a research journal, maintaining a database, utilizing research protocols (such as an interview protocol), and keeping a code book (McGinley et al., 2021). McGinley et al. (2021) also recommended maintaining a neutral posture through the development of the interview protocol, the interview process, transcription, and data analysis process to prevent researcher bias from impacting the research process. To ensure confirmability in this research study, I maintained a neutral position through an interview protocol and by providing an audit trail in the data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases using a research journal.

The same interview protocol was used for all interviews in the data collection phase to ensure standardization of questions with all research study participants. The interview questions within the interview protocol were constructed to minimize the effect of researcher bias. The interview protocol (Appendix) was provided to allow future researchers the ability to replicate the interview questions. A research journal was also used to document all steps in the research process to include coding, coding changes, notes, and thoughts to aid in documenting the research findings. The research journal also documented the creation and implementation of a database and any changes made to the coding structure within the database. The coding structure was documented in a code book.

### *Data Saturation*

The final method to improve the validity of a qualitative research study is to reach data saturation. Obtaining data saturation is critical for attaining research rigor for qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2016). Data saturation is considered reached when additional interviews produce little to no new information or new themes that address the research question (Fofana et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). How many interviews it takes to reach data saturation cannot really be known prior to the research study (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Each interview provides data that the researcher uses to identify ideas, topics, themes, and categories with (Bazen et al., 2021; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). When each successive interview provides no additional ideas, topics, themes, or categories, then data saturation is said to be attained (Bazen et al., 2021). For qualitative pragmatic inquiries, a range of six to twelve interviews is typically sufficient

to reach data saturation (Fofana et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Reaching data or thematic saturation in this manner assures that the research study analysis and findings are grounded in theory. To ensure data saturation, I continued interviewing participants and analyzing participant responses until no new information emerged. Each interview produced ideas, topics, themes, and categories that were coded specifically to those topics associated with the conceptual framework and to new ideas that were formed. As each successive interview was conducted and member checking had been completed, the data collected was sorted per the coding structure. Any new ideas, topics, themes, or categories were identified, coded, and added to the codebook. Data saturation was reached when interviews no longer produced any more ideas, topics, themes, or categories. The data collection phase ended once data saturation was achieved.

## Transition and Summary

Section 3 began with a restatement of the purpose statement of the study followed by a description of the research process including the role of the researcher, target population, sampling method, participants, research method, research design, and ethical aspects of research. The procedures conducted for this research study were provided including details about the data collection instruments, techniques, organization, analysis techniques, and the interview questions. I also explained how data saturation was achieved. Section 3 concluded with a discussion on how the study's reliability and validity were ensured.

In Section 4, the purpose of the research study will be restated, followed by a summary of the research study findings including how the research results apply to

business practices and implications for social change. Recommendations for action and

further research are offered. Section 4 closes with the conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

**Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies that U.S. power industry leaders use to improve employee retention. This section will present the findings derived from the semistructured interviews conducted with seven leaders representing seven different power companies across the Midwest region of the United States. As shown in Table 2, two of the seven interview participants were from a small power company, two were from medium-sized companies, and three were from large companies. Based on the findings, a set of hygiene and motivator strategies employed by power company leaders to improve employee retention was identified. These strategies included establishing (a) a happy work environment characterized by communication and trust, (b) work relationships centered around treatment and teamwork, (c) workplace policies that showed some leniency and flexibility, and (d) job engagement. These findings have the potential to enhance the capabilities of power company business leaders to improve their employee retention rates, which lowers costs and helps contribute greater social impact. This section provides the presentation of the study's findings, the application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, suggestions for future research, reflections, and conclusions.

**Table 2**

*Participant Demographic Summary*

| Participant | Gender | Role | Department | Company size |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| P1 | Male | Director | Transmission | Large |
| P2 | Male | Director | Marketing | Large |
| P3 | Male | Manager | Marketing | Large |
| P4 | Male | Vice president | Transmission | Medium |
| P5 | Female | Director | Human resources | Small |
| P6 | Male | Manager | Settlements | Medium |
| P7 | Male | Vice president | Operations | Small |

## Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question guiding this study was the following: What strategies do leaders in the U.S. power industry utilize to improve employee retention? I collected research data through interviews and research on participant organizational websites. Once I received consent from the interview participant as a reply to the invitation and consent form email, I then sent the interview protocol (Appendix) to them prior to the interview. I conducted semistructured interviews with seven business leaders from seven different organizations. The organizations ranged from small (< 300 employees), to medium (300–1,000 employees), to large (> 1,000 employees) based on the number of employees. I also partially considered each organization's generation capacity and load-balancing area to judge the size of the company. I ranked P6 as a

medium-sized company because the interview was based on corporate operations located in the Midwestern United States even though the operation had recently been acquired a few years earlier by a large company that was headquartered in the Southern United States and had corporate activities that ranged from the Gulf Coast all the way up to the Great Lakes. The newly acquired operations were unique to the overall company because it constituted the first power facility as well as coal-fired generation for the organization, and my research study centered around those specific activities. Additionally, I interviewed business leaders at various levels of management as well as from various but typical departments found within the power industry to obtain the greatest variety of interview responses possible.

I performed a member-checking process with all seven interview participants, and only four required minor edits. Finally, I researched each participant's organizational website to find data focused on answering the research question. For most of the supplementary data found, I was able to direct copy-and-paste the material into another document. Some of the data were downloaded as supporting documents, and seven screenshots were taken for data that could not be downloaded or copied over into a document. All data found on the websites supported the findings, thereby providing methodological triangulation.

I followed the research study protocols found in the interview protocol (Appendix) and the research study invitation and consent form to collect and analyze data. The same interview protocol was utilized across all seven interviews to ensure consistency. I maintained the confidentiality of each participant by assigning codes to

each participant based on the order interviewed and company represented—

IP(Number)C(Phonetic; i.e., IP2CB, 2 for second interview participant and B for

Company Bravo). For ease of communicating the findings, I will be using P1–P7 as a

simpler code during the remainder of this presentation of the findings. I continued to

collect data until data saturation was reached. Data saturation was assessed because

Interviews 6 and 7 resulted in no new themes or information.

After verifying the collected data with all interview participants, I uploaded the

data to the NVivo software, version 14. I then set attributes for gender, role (leadership

position), department, and company size to measure demographics to ensure a wide but

inclusive variation in interview responses. The initial coding was set a priori based on the

conceptual framework of Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory. There were six hygiene

factors and six motivator factors selected for initial coding based on the literature review.

After analysis of the coded material, each factor was expanded to subfactors

(subcategories) to better identify important subthemes within each factor, except for job

security (a hygiene factor), which showed only one primary and consistent theme.

**Hygiene Factors and Themes**

Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory was the conceptual framework used to

analyze the research data. The hygiene-motivator theory refers to hygiene factors as

external factors because they are found in the context or environment of the job and are

required to maintain an employee's expectations of the work environment (Herzberg,

1965; Thant, 2023). The removal of negative hygiene factors and the improvement of

positive hygiene factors would lessen job dissatisfaction but not improve job satisfaction

(Herzberg, 1965, 1974). The six hygiene factors employed for this research study were compensation, job security, policies, work environment, work relationships, and work-home quality. Table 3 shows the breakdown of the participants and number of references made for each of the six hygiene factors.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of Hygiene Factors*

| Factor | Participant count | References |
|---|---|---|
| Compensation | 6 | 21 |
| Job security | 4 | 13 |
| Policies | 7 | 47 |
| Work environment | 7 | 94 |
| Work relationships | 7 | 75 |
| Work-home quality | 6 | 20 |

*Note.* References represent the number of times the participants mentioned using elements associated with each factor.

The factors of policies, work environment, and work relationships were strongly thematic throughout all seven interview participants and in the number of references. The findings show that work environment and work relationships are the primary strategies used by business leaders within U.S. power companies to retain their employees. Within the work environment, leaders should strongly consider improving their communication, workplace happiness, and trust with their employees. Considering workplace relationships, business leaders are encouraged to review their treatment of their

employees and whether they are fostering a teamwork environment. Workplace policies were also found to be important among leadership tactics surrounding employee retention. Specifically, it is important to set standards and benchmarks that are evaluated on a consistent basis while showing some leniency and flexibility with work location and schedules.

Compensation and work-home quality represented six of the participants with a relatively lower reference. Although compensation and work-home quality are still important hygiene factors to consider and offer in recruiting and retaining employees, they are also surface level. Several of the participants mentioned that employees will bounce between power companies, not really because of pay and benefits, but due primarily to the policies, environment, and leader–follower relationships found within the corporate culture. Job security was only represented by four participants and revolved primarily around the long-term viability of the company and/or power facility. Once leadership established the longevity of the company, either through redevelopment of existing facilities and assets or through the expansion into other areas of the power industry, employees decided to remain with the company, again due to the policies, environment, and leader–follower relationships. Therefore, compensation and benefits, job security, and quality of life aspects of employment are considered important but surface-level lures for recruitment and retention.

### Theme 1—Shared Workplace Policies

Of the three main thematic hygiene factors, the workplace policies factor was the lowest referenced but was also a subject that each participant kept circling around. The

workplace policies factor was subcategorized as planning, policy and leniency, problem solving, and standards. Problem solving was only referenced six times by two participants; therefore, it was found to not be thematic. The planning subcategory was also found to be nonthematic with only being referenced 10 times across three participants. The standards and policy and leniency subcategories were found to be thematic. There were 17 references across five participants for policy and leniency while standards had 15 references across all seven participants.

All the participants agreed that setting, reaching, and maintaining a core set of standards was important in their employee retention strategies. The primary goal was for the managers to create a work environment, a corporate image of being a "best in class" company to work for and belong to. As P7 stated,

> One of the things we value ourselves for is we try to be "best in class," we try to offer the best overall package for employees, whether that be work culture, whether that be benefits and/or compensation. One of the things that we have actually experienced because of this type of atmosphere in trying to stay "best in class" is that we created an environment where employees want to be.

P5 reiterated by saying,

> The biggest part of our company is that we wanted to make it as the universal "a good place to work," where you want to come to work. You want to encourage people to come to work here. We look out for our people. They seem to remain loyal to us.

The primary method of establishing "best in class position" and employee loyalty is to measure these key performance metrics through a survey, gauge the results against the industry standards, and recognize trends from one year to the next. P1 stated this clearly:

> We will formally recheck the data a couple of times a year, and then with the company as a whole. There is one big formal survey at the end of every year, then we will compare it to U.S. benchmarks, compared to others, and go from there.

Using surveys, benchmarks, and "best in class" standards can have a significant impact on employee retention.

At the same time, the participants' responses bounced between the rigidity of corporate policies that needed to be followed and the flexibility a leader needed to have around those same policies, hence the policy and leniency subcategory. The corporate policy surrounding remote work was the most common theme identified throughout the data collection phase. None of the organizations represented in the study allowed their employees to work from home. P2 exclaimed, "We do have job requirements that you really cannot work from home." P4 noted this as well, "We do not offer a work from home option, even for jobs where it would fit." Although the COVID-19 pandemic forced companies to have their employees work remotely, specifically from home, once the health restrictions were lifted, power companies required their employees to return to their offices on a regular basis. This created resentment from employees, as told by P3: "Return to office really upset a lot of employees."

Remote work is a corporate policy that has gained a lot of attention since the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be a topic of concern, especially with the younger

generation of workers. This central topic is a major concern of business leaders in the power industry for both recruiting and retaining personnel. As P4 stated,

> We are competing today against companies that do work from home, that do different things … But especially with the younger folks, that is still a big deal. A lot of people are not going to take a job that is not work from home. And so that is an issue.

Managers should take a stronger look at remote work opportunities if they want to improve their employee retention.

With remote work not being allowed, power company leaders are looking to other ways to improve the workplace. The primary method seems to be leniency in other corporate policies. This method is proving to be effective for salaried personnel, those who work overtime without pay, and for nonbargaining hourly employees. Leniency is shown through the flexibility of the managers providing flexible schedules, comp time, and early leave for holidays. P2 stated the following:

> My shift employees, I motivate them by giving them flexibility when they can take vacation. Right now, based on workload, we have a lower workload at night and depending on weather conditions I do allow us to go down to one employee at night and have that other person be on call.

P4 showed flexibility being important in his comment:

> When people are working overtime that are not eligible for overtime pay, we do not necessarily have a formal comp time policy, but I always try to make sure that

they know that there is give and take here. When you are working over, you can

claw that back, you come in late next Monday.

Through flexibility, business leaders can provide some advantage with work schedules

and time off that helps to retain their employees.

**Correlation to the Literature Review**. Workplace policies have always been and

continue to be a strong consideration for people when they are looking to hire into or stay

with a company. Policy and flexibility considerations are especially important to the

younger generation, the millennial workers, who have shown considerable attention to

more idealistic values in the workplace such as improved work–life balance and a greater

servant leadership style of management (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Berglund et al., 2021).

Integration of more flexible work schedules and remote work environments has been

shown to decrease work–home conflict, resulting in lower turnover rates in all

generational and cultural categories (Rubenstein et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Power

companies should review their policies and provide more flexibility for schedules and

work location to meet the changing demands of employees to improve their retention

rates (F. Li et al., 2021). Simultaneously, power companies should also strive for being

"best in class" by setting standards and goals that attract good candidates and help to

retain their best employees. The standards and goals should be measured, evaluated, and

tracked to find problem areas as well as identify strong indicators of accomplishments.

**Correlation With the Conceptual Framework**. The findings associated with

workplace policies are consistent with the conceptual framework. For example, this study

found that the feelings surrounding organizational policies and procedures being fair,

equal, and equitable to the employee is important for retention. As the basis for previous studies, Herzberg's theory pointed out that organizational policies, especially those closely connected to quality of supervision and quality of life aspects, were highly influential in improving employee satisfaction leading to higher retention rates (Bastari et al., 2020). Because leader–follower relationships can be strained by rigid, obsolete, or nonexistent corporate policies, leaders are encouraged to find creative ways to ease relationship strains by being flexible with schedules and more open to improving an employee's quality of life.

### *Theme 2—Shared Workplace Relationships*

Work relationships represent the ability to create and maintain positive relationships with leaders, managers, colleagues, and coworkers in the workplace. The work relationships factor was subcategorized as direction, teamwork, and treatment. Direction was referenced 18 times across six participants. In relation to the other two subcategories, direction was partially thematic. Direction was defined as providing a clear vision, ensuring that everyone understands their role, and that everyone is in alignment. P1 stated this clearly:

> The goal is for things to be clear. The goal is for things to be aligned. The goal is for things to be genuine. The goal is for things to be open. And there is also a very clear and open expectation of how people go about things.

P7 reiterated this sentiment:

> We have also allowed our leaders to see the big picture … our goals and aspirations and our vision. So, whether they be short-term, midterm, or long-term,

we include our leadership team in understanding what we may have potentially

are actually coming into fruition, and they can help disseminate that to the

employees … so that everybody sees the same picture.

Role identity, vision sharing, and proper alignment are key to goal attainment and

corporate viability.

Direction is a predecessor to teamwork because teamwork can only occur once all

team members are unified and in alignment with an identified goal. P4 expertly pointed

this out when he said,

Just building a team, letting them know that I may be the boss, but we are

coworkers. We are trying to get the same things done … And if you foster that

atmosphere, that team atmosphere, I think it helps.

P6 backed this position up:

I like to take the management style that I work with them and not they are my

employees. I mean, they know that they are my employees, and I have to make

decisions about things, but I also like them to feel like it is more of a coworker

type of experience rather than a hardline manager experience. I feel much more

like I work with them than they work for me.

Referenced 25 times across all seven participants, the teamwork subcategory was found

to be thematic. A cohesive team is the byproduct of good workplace relationships where

everyone understands their roles and there is alignment across all activities.

The treatment subcategory was highly thematic. There were 47 references across all seven participants. Treatment is the next logical component in having good working relationships. P1 stated it this way:

> You do not get results no matter what, you take care of people no matter what …
> The bigger thing is just the fact that people are seen as people, as individual
> people, and they are expected, but also allowed to play the role.

The treatment that employees receive from their leadership team helps to solidify and expand their work relationships with their leaders as well as with their coworkers. As P5 remarked,

> Our culture is more of a family organization. You hear it a lot that we want people
> to look forward to coming to work every day. In our case that is true. People are
> friends with other employees. They hang out with other employees after work.
> They go to other employees' weddings and family events. They support each
> other in terms of not only here at work on the day-to-day work tasks, but outside
> of the office. They support each other in whatever is needed. Again, family,
> school, children, any events.

Employees want to be treated well and with dignity by their leadership and their peers. Building positive workplace relationships requires mutual respect, understanding, and support from each other. As P4 put it,

> Showing respect and trying to develop mutual respect and support, when things
> do not go as planned, try not to finger point. The idea is with mutual respect we
> find out what is the issue, what the problem is, and we correct it together.

He added,

> I think people want to be treated with respect and know they are valued, and they
> want acknowledgement that what they are doing, that the hours they are working
> are valuable and it is important. And so, you get to know your staff, and you have
> to let them know that you see that.

Having respect for and valuing employees is a character trait that great leaders want to obtain.

**Correlation to the Literature Review**. Business leaders should incorporate methods to encourage team building and empowering team contributions to the organization. Developing more inclusive and team-based environments has been shown to promote job satisfaction, job engagement, and retention (Ayoko, 2020; Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2021). Additionally, employees want to receive proper and supportive treatment such as fairness, safety, and appreciation (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). Leaders can create an organizational culture that is more appealing to employees if they can leverage programs and practices that encourage proper treatment of employees and cooperative teamwork.

**Correlation With the Conceptual Framework**. Teamwork is the combination of treating your employees with respect and value while effectively casting the corporate vision and aligning the employee's actions towards attainment of that vision. This form of transformational leadership has proven to be impactful on both motivation and job performance within the conceptual framework of this study (Bastari et al., 2020). Other studies have shown that Herzberg's hygiene factors, especially teamwork and treatment,

have positive effects on culture which creates a company that people want to go work for and stay with (Choi et al., 2022). Leaders can improve their organizational culture through better and stronger cooperative relationships leading to greater teamwork (Lee & Lee, 2022). Just having employees do their job and complete all their tasks may just be enough to maintain the business, but to grow a company and its brand image an organization needs to create cohesive relationships and partnering alliances with all its employees.

***Theme 3—Shared Workplace Environment***

The quality, condition, and standard of the work environment in which the employee does most of, if not all, their job duties are of utmost importance. The work environment factor was subcategorized as communication, culture, DEI, genuine, and happiness and trust. Being genuine was only referenced five times by two participants, therefore it was found to be nonthematic. The diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) subcategory was referenced 17 times across all seven participants. In relation to the three remaining subcategories, DEI was partially thematic. All seven organizations have corporate policies surrounding DEI through Affirmative Action, Equal Employment Opportunity, equality protocols, and cultural inclusion programs as found on all their corporate websites.

Equal treatment of employees was a position of pride amongst several of the participants. P4 remarked: "My focus, personally, has been really treating or trying to just treat all people the same, without regard to gender, color, orientation, any of those things. Treat everyone equally." The equality sentiment was echoed through P5 when she said,

"We feel like anytime we open up a position, or we do bring people in for consideration to the company, everybody is treated equally. Everybody has opportunities across the board for any position that we have with the company." Equality and inclusion were brought up consistently with all the participants.

The culture subcategory had 16 references across six participants making it partially thematic. The primary aspect of culture across the interviews was whether the work environment, and the company as a whole, was a good company to work for. As P1 put it:

> I know some departments that it is a mess because either you get a bad apple as a direct report, or you get a bad apple as a director, and things just get ugly … if you have something bad within your organization, it just sours, and it is not good. So, I have seen departments … that have been really ugly, and they got people leaving really fast, and they cannot keep employees.

P4 similarly said,

> I have seen multiple people from different departments leave when there was a top executive search and turnover. So, from that standpoint, you can see that when there is a little bit of turmoil or a little bit of uncertainty, it seems like the retention rate suffered. The corporate culture starting from the top can have a definite effect on if people want to be here.

But the possibility of being a good company to work for lies within the hands of leadership. This was conveyed through P5 who said,

I think if people do not enjoy the culture of the company that they are working

for, they are much more likely to seek employment elsewhere if they are not

happy. So, I know that companies that I have worked for in the past have always

tried to make sure that they have a good culture and that people feel the company

that they work for is a good company. I do not think anybody really wants to

work for a bad company. So, I think that just as a manager in a company overall,

we try to make sure that the employees feel good about the organization as a

whole.

Culture is a fundamental building block of the workplace environment and requires the

proper attention to make it attractive for people to want to come to.

Organizational culture is an important aspect of job satisfaction and employee

happiness. Referenced 23 times across seven participants, the happiness and trust

subcategory was found to be thematic. When trust is built by the leaders, then the

employees will become comfortable and happy with their jobs and content enough to

remain with the company. It is the job of leadership to build that trust. As P1 questioned,

"Are we consistently operating it and working towards those trust building behaviors?"

P4 also put it simply:

If people like coming here, they may or may not like all the duties they have to

perform, but if they feel like they are respected and valued, when they walk in the

door you ask them how the weekend went, take time to get to know them and chit

chat a little bit, you build that comfort level.

Creating a positive work environment can make employees feel happy, and making

employees happy helps to retain them. This belief was shared by P5 when she said,

> The biggest part of our company is that we wanted to make it as the universal "a
>
> good place to work," where you want to come to work, you want to encourage
>
> people to come to work here. We look out for our people. They remain loyal to us
>
> … because it is a happy place to work. If our employees are happy here, they will
>
> stay here.

Creating a positive work environment where employees feel trust and happiness is

important for retention efforts.

The key to building trust and positive work environments is effective

communication. The communication subcategory was also thematic with 36 references

across all seven participants. The ability to communicate with employees was a very

strong sentiment shared between the participants. As P2 put it, "It is mostly about

communication, right? So, if you have concerns about employees, you tell them. You

work through the issues. So, I am a big advocate of, I would rather over-communicate

than under-communicate." P3 furthered the communication piece by saying, "I can listen

to that individual and have a discussion with them about it. Listen to their opinions and

appreciate everything, even if we disagree on it." Communicating with employees allows

them the opportunity to know what the goal is, the reasons behind changes, and aligning

priorities. P4 remarked,

> The basic strategy is, I try to communicate the need or the benefit of whatever job
>
> or task that I am assigning. I think the more a person understands how that task,

that job, that duty fits in with the corporate structure, and how it benefits the

organization, the better off you are.

Opening up the channels of communication with employees allows for both sides to

discuss things from their viewpoint, which enhances relationships and trust.

One of the major points of communication that several participants brought up

was that communication was a two-way street. Communication from the top-down, from

leadership to the employees was important in transferring vision and creating alignment.

P2 showed the top-down approach when he stated, "If they know what is happening in

the business, and they hear from me and do not hear it second hand, I think they like that

better, too. So, communication is a big one for me." P6 confirmed this when he said, "I

try to make them aware of anything that the company is doing … I try to share more

information." But communication from the bottom-up, from the employees to the

leadership, was just as important to relay questions, concerns, possible issues, and

recommendations. P5 showed the bottom-up approach when she stated,

We want to make sure that employees feel like they have a voice, that they are

being heard, and that the organization itself is interested in their well-being and

what happens to them, whether it is at the office or outside of the office.

P7 exclaimed:

We work with our employees, keep our teams small so that the communication

voice can be heard from the bottom up and well as the top down. That

communication line allows upper management to be able to communicate on a

regular basis, and then allow all the employees to be able to communicate through

their leaders the other way, so that you get a good dialogue between all the groups

accordingly.

And, more importantly, the communication must be honest and clear to transfer the correct messages. The communication should also be realistic regarding the situations the company and/or industry is in. This type of communication helps to establish the trust and happiness factor of the employees. As P7 put it:

The ability to be transparent with our employees. A major push in our

organization is our communication. Not only talking about what is going on good

in the organization, but also where our challenges are, staying in front of those

challenges, identifying them and owning them, and then also the opportunities

that are in front of us.

For a positive and supportive workplace environment, consistent and effective communication must exist.

**Correlation to the Literature Review**. Workplace environments provide the foundational component of a satisfied employee. Perceptions that employees have about their organization begin with the work environment, specifically the culture, values being promoted, and relationships. If employees perceive that the organizational culture does not support diversity, inclusion, or equality, then employees will demonstrate poor job attitudes, job performance, and increased turnover (Grzanka & Moradi, 2021; Vito & Sethi, 2020). But, if employees perceive positive organizational support through effective communication, trustful relationships, and team building, then job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior increases resulting in greater employee retention (Al

Shaher & Zreik, 2022). Leaders are encouraged to create work environments that supports teamwork, comradery, and inclusiveness into its culture if they want to improve their retention rates.

**Correlation With the Conceptual Framework**. The work environment can have a deep impact on employee job satisfaction leading to retention or turnover. Using Herzberg's theory, it has been shown that leaders can improve employee satisfaction by creating more cooperative relationships that are built on trust, provide an environment conducive to enjoyment, and overcomes bullying and barriers (Lee & Lee, 2022). Key hygiene factors that support positive work environments can be implemented through HR best management practices and managerial training (Lee & Lee, 2022; Ushakov & Shatila, 2021). Improving the organizational culture to be more diverse and inclusive, fostering trustful relationships, encouraging effective communication, and creating an overall happy place to work can be useful tools for leaders seeking to enhance their employee retention.

### *Additional Insight Into Diversification*

Where the participants all fell short was on the diversity aspect. Diversity was a shortfall found with all seven participants and their respective organizations. Even though diversity was a highly sought-after character trait of their organization and departments, it was also hard to come across. P2 stated,

> I like diversity because it adds value to my team. But it is difficult to get diversity, because I do not get a lot of applicants that are diverse. I do like and encourage diversity whenever possible. I think it adds a better perspective to your workload.

> Just having different diverse backgrounds helps as a team because it just gives
> you more when you are brainstorming or whatever, you just get different
> perspectives. And it helps.

The lack of diversity is felt throughout the power industry. As P7 responded with:

> We are not a very diversified state. And, even if you go through the
> diversification between gender, it is a primarily male dominated industry in our
> region. It is just on the basis of really our location and exposure that we do not
> have a lot of challenges in that are just because we lack diversification.

The power industry is a dominantly white male industry, especially throughout the Midwest United States. Even when women are brought into the power company, they are mostly white and very few in number. Only two of the large companies had any true diversity numbers, even though they were small, mostly because they were headquartered in metropolitan areas.

**Motivator Factors and Themes**

An employee's work attitude and productivity can be enhanced by improving job satisfaction. According to Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory job satisfiers are motivator factors when present and would improve job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1965, 1974). Herzberg's theory refers to motivator factors as internal factors because they are found in the content of the job (Herzberg, 1965; Thant, 2023). Motivator factors are contingent to the individual based on the employee's needs, goals, and drive. Contrary to hygiene factors, motivator factors can enhance job satisfaction when present. Business leaders can harness the power of motivator factors to increase job satisfaction through job

enrichment, which can enhance employee retention. Providing job enrichment can increase engagement and satisfaction, reducing nonretirement voluntary turnover (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Viray & Velasquez-Fajanela, 2023). The six motivator factors employed for this research study were challenging work, decision making, growth opportunity, performance and achievement, recognition, and responsibility. Table 4 shows the breakdown of the participants and number of references made for each of the six motivator factors.

**Table 4**

*Frequency of Motivator Factors*

| Factor | Participant count | References |
|---|---|---|
| Challenging work | 6 | 11 |
| Decision making | 7 | 27 |
| Growth opportunity | 7 | 35 |
| Performance and achievement | 7 | 33 |
| Recognition | 7 | 30 |
| Responsibility | 7 | 32 |

*Note*. References represent the number of times the participants mentioned using elements associated with each factor.

All the motivator factors except challenging work were thematic throughout all seven interview participants and referenced closely to each other. Although challenging work was mentioned by six of the participants, it was only referenced 11 times and

primarily centered on redesigning jobs as changes to the industry, company, and technology occur. Several of the participants discussed how they managed job design and rework through simplification, standardization, and automation of tasks. Automation was a key topic that surfaced multiple times that eliminated repetitive tasks, simplified positional duties, and reduced human performance errors.

Of the six motivator factors used in analyzing the data, five of those factors were found to be thematic throughout all seven interviews. Decision making was a core concept that flowed from all participants. It was found to be important to include the employees in the decision-making process, especially at the individual level versus the group level. Employees also liked to feel recognized for the work done or going above and beyond usual expectations. Employees can receive recognition through acknowledgment directly or in front of their peers, exposure to upper management, or through some form of reward. The amount of responsibility an employee has in their job provided through authority or autonomy was also important. Participants discussed responsibility from either a duty position or through leadership direction. Performance was defined as how well one completed their tasks and jobs, meeting the day-to-day objectives, and how the leader judged their performance. Achievement covered the personal, professional, and corporate goals and achievements that were gained or made. Business leaders are also encouraged to provide opportunities for growth and development of their employees through education (development) and promotion (advancement).

*Theme 4—Shared Workplace Job Engagement*

The five thematic motivator factors held relatively the same weight across all participants. The motivator factors were also referenced significantly less than the highly thematic hygiene factors. Therefore, I grouped them together under the collective theme of job engagement.

**Subtheme 1—Shared Decision Making**. Involving employees in the decision-making process was an important aspect for all interview participants. The decision-making factor was subcategorized as group efforts and involvement. The group efforts subcategory was only referenced four times by four participants; therefore, it was found to not be thematic. Group efforts centered on the formation of teams, such as focus groups or departmental discussions, to identify, discuss, and problem solve solutions, whereas involvement was centered more on individual employees. Involvement was referenced 21 times by six participants making it thematic.

Employees want to be involved in the decision-making process as well as the discussion and solution-generating processes. It is important to not only involve employees by asking them for their input, but also to hear them out and give their ideas due consideration. It may or may not be a great idea and it may not be feasible at the time, but things change, and prior ideas may be more ideal later or in new scenarios. As P2 pointed out:

Even if somebody has a bad idea, there is a way to tell them that the idea they have is not great. You still listen to it. If they have suggestions, do not just say no, we are not doing that.

Everyone has their own opinions whether the leader agrees with it or not. But it is still important to listen to the employees because they may have something important to say. P3 explained,

> Listen to their opinion and appreciate everything, even if we disagree on it. There are times where I will come out and say, hey, we have to do this, and somebody will have another idea and say, well, what if we try it this way … they come up with something different, something better.

Giving employees the chance to voice their opinions is important and leaders should recognize that.

Involving employees in the decision-making process makes them feel valued and important. The employees will then view the company as being open and communicative, allowing for voices to be heard and acknowledged. This position was reinforced by P5 when she said, "We want to involve employees in more of the decision making, and the choices, and the input. We want to make sure that they realize that they are important, and their views are important." When a leader asks their employees for input, they are involving them in the process of figuring out solutions to issues together. This goes a long way to creating stronger relationships. As P4 put it:

> I try to involve them in the decision-making process. Sometimes it has to be, here is how we are doing it. We all just have to get on board with it. But a lot of times I try to ask for their input, here is the objective. Help me figure out how to get there.

And P7 stated, "We ask our employees to take ownership of their jobs, step out when they can, and learn more or participate more." Bringing employees into the decision-making process helps to build trusting relationships with their leadership and creates an environment of teamwork.

*Correlation to the Literature Review*. Employee engagement, job satisfaction, and intent to stay can be improved by including employees in multiple facets of their work and work environment. One of those facets that leaders can shape the organization's culture around is including employees in the decision-making process which improves the culture and promotes loyalty (Ayoko, 2020; Wesemann, 2024). An organization can encourage positive morale and improve job satisfaction when employees are included in decision-making, especially in decisions focused on their duties, job design, skill set, and autonomy (Gu et al., 2022; Sameer & Priyadarshi, 2021). Being included in the decision-making process allows employees to feel like they are a true team member and are valued. Leaders are encouraged to find ways to be more inclusive of their workers and let their voices be heard.

*Correlation With the Conceptual Framework*. Employee job satisfaction and work engagement work together to increase productivity and retention. In the power industry, there is a high dependency of the trust relationship between leaders and followers that leads to positive job engagement (Gadomska-Lila & Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2022). A large aspect of the trust relationship comes from involving employees in the decision-making process, allowing them to contribute to job design and solution generation (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Including employees' voices and opinions

into managerial decision making provides an opportunity for the employee to become more engaged with their work while committing more energy and thought to the organization.

**Subtheme 2—Shared Recognition**. Employees spend a lot of their time in the work environment and complete tasks and duties on a routine basis, so acknowledging their time, work, and effort is important. Recognition was subcategorized as acknowledgement, exposure, and reward. Exposure was defined as the manager going to bat for the employee and informing upper management about the individual employee and their performance. Because it was referenced only seven times by four participants, exposure was found to be nonthematic. The reward subcategory was defined as monetary bonuses, appreciation meals, thank you products, and other recognition rewards received by employees for their performance and/or achievement. Similarly to exposure, reward was only referenced eight times across 4 participants making it nonthematic.

Acknowledgment was found to be thematic because it was referenced 21 times across all seven participants. All interview participants agreed that acknowledging their employees, especially in small group settings, was important to their employees. As P3 stated,

> Sometimes it is just acknowledgment in a group setting that this person had worked on this project and the project came off well. That little personal acknowledgement and knowing your people really kind of gets them going and make some want to do better the next time.

P5 conveyed the same attitude:

More importantly, they want to be recognized that they did a good job, and they

did it well. It is more of a personal accomplishment. It is just feedback to the

employees personally and to themselves that they have done a good job.

And P6 mentioned,

I have found the best strategy that seems to work for me is positive reinforcement.

I always pay close attention to what people are doing and when they do something

good, or they take initiative in some way, I like to make sure that I recognize

them. And I do that in a number of ways.

Finding ways to acknowledge their employees and providing positive feedback should be

a priority for leaders.

***Correlation to the Literature Review***. When employes become more engaged in

their work, they become more satisfied with their employer. Perceived organizational

support is the belief that employees have about how engaged their employers are with the

employees' well-being, which is enhanced by recognizing people's achievements (Al

Shaher & Zreik, 2022; Naz et al., 2020). Greater employee engagement and higher

retention rates can be achieved by organizations that embrace employee appreciation and

encourage morale (Ayoko, 2020; Kurtović & Štrus, 2023). Work environments and

leader-follower relationships are drastically enhanced when organizations go out of their

way to acknowledge their employees individually and in groups when achievements and

extra work are accomplished.

***Correlation With the Conceptual Framework***. Employee intent to stay is

connected job satisfaction through motivation. Although motivator factors are contingent

to the individual, most people have positive feelings associated with being recognized for the work they have done, especially if done well or was above and beyond expectations (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Choi et al. (2022) identified recognition as one of the three primary motivator factors for improved job satisfaction. When leaders recognize their employees and provide acknowledgement of their activities, the resulting effect is pride and the need to continue that level of job engagement (Bastari et al., 2020; Sehar & Alwi, 2019). Improving job engagement through recognition has a strong effect on job satisfaction, which can result in increased loyalty and retention.

**Subtheme 3—Shared Responsibility**. Engaged employees want to have some ability and length of responsibility when it comes to their job and performance. Responsibility as a motivator factor was referenced 32 times across seven participants. But responsibility was subcategorized as duties and leadership, and both measured about equal. The duties subcategory was referenced 14 times across six participants and leadership was referenced 18 times across seven participants. Because the two subcategories were equal, the responsibility factor was found to be only partially thematic.

The subcategory duties represented the role of the employee within the corporate structure and the tasks assigned to them. Duty combined the efforts of taking ownership of one's job along with job restructuring and task automation. As P2 explained, "Anything that is a repetitive task, we try to automate that … it eliminates human performance errors. If you are doing a task over and over, and you can automate it through a computer process, you automate it." An employee must take ownership of their

position to have job engagement. P7 remarked, "One of the major motivating factors that we have in our facility is positional ownership. It is a bilateral transaction, as far as communication or ownership of a job." Taking ownership of a position, job, or task can be difficult for some employees to consider. P2 pointed this out: "I think the biggest issues I have are when somebody thinks they should not be doing a task, or somebody else should be doing it and not them." The first step of taking on responsibility is accepting the role one is taking on (ownership) and making it one's own.

Leadership represented the managers going to the employees and asking their help in facing challenges, overcoming obstacles, and creating solutions. Involving employees in problem solving and solution generating activities requires some authority and autonomy being given to the employees. Engaging employees requires a mental shift by management to be more inclusive of their employees. As P5 stated,

> We concentrate on how we can improve and move forward as opposed to where we have been … The big thing is going forward and transforming the energy market, the utility market, the electric market, the fiber market into where we are going. Management is very foresighted to look at that and see where we are going down the road. But they are backing that by taking the employees with them instead of going outside of the company.

Most employees do not want to be robotic at their jobs because it leads to boredom and a loss of concentration leading to human performance errors.

*Correlation to the Literature Review*. Engaged employees need some autonomy with their duties to encourage job engagement. Autonomy has been found to enhance

responsibility and job engagement leading to improved employee retention in the power industry (Dunnan et al., 2020a; Mukherjee et al., 2020). Trust and communication between the leader and follower are the building blocks of responsibility (Berglund et al., 2021). Leaders should be willing to relieve themselves of some of the responsibility and hand some responsibility over to their employees. Delegating tasks provides the opportunity for an employee to feel that they are trusted and respected enough to have more responsibility put on them.

*Correlation With the Conceptual Framework*. Herzberg's motivator factors essentially lead employees to greater job engagement if positively influenced in the workplace. Responsibility is a motivator factor that increases positive feelings, especially when an employee is allowed to make some decisions on their own (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Viray & Velasquez-Fajanela, 2023). When employees have responsibility removed or are skipped over when tasks are delegated out, this can have negative impacts on their motivation and job satisfaction, eventually leading to turnover (El-Rayes et al., 2020; Tirta & Enrika, 2020). Good leaders know when to transfer or delegate new tasks onto their workers, they know how much their workers can take on at a time, and they know when their workers can take on the extra responsibility. It is important to keep in mind that overtasking people will cause them to have less motivation and job satisfaction.

**Additional Insight Into Leadership Styles**. With respect to leadership from a management position, one of the interview questions was: What leadership styles and approaches do you use to improve employee retention? Only one participant had an actual leadership style, but she still had to look it up. P5 responded: "I actually had to

look this up and do some research on this question. But I felt like the two categories that kind of fits us well are democratic … and transformational." No other participant could identify their specific or combination of leadership style used. None of the leadership styles identified in the literature review were called out specifically by any participant, except for P5 who still had to research the leadership styles. Business leaders in power companies appear to be lacking in the knowledge of, the variety of, and the utility of leadership styles within their departments and corporate structures.

**Subtheme 4—Shared Performance and Achievement**. In alignment with recognition, employees prefer to be acknowledged regarding their performance as well as any achievements made. Like responsibility, performance and achievement as a motivator factor was referenced 33 times across seven participants. But performance and achievement were subcategorized singularly as performance and achievement, and both measured about equal. Achievement was referenced 14 times across five participants and performance was referenced 18 times across five participants. Because the two subcategories were equal, the performance and achievement factor was found to be only partially thematic.

The subcategory achievement represented the goals set and achieved by the employee and often resulted in promotion and recognition. Promotions could be within the department or across the organization. As P1 said, "I believe it was four people that moved on within the company to promotions that they were looking for, that were actively on their development goals." Promoting employees often requires a manager to expose their employees and their performance to upper management. If upper

management agrees to the promotion, then everyone is able to see the manager going to bat for the employees. As P2 explained, "After a long-fought battle, I was allowed to give some of them promotions, and so they see me go to bat for them, and just that alone adds to their satisfaction." And P3 said,

> I was actually able to help them connect within the company and get to where they wanted to be. Now to me, that actually helped improve the retention of my employees because the ones who did not leave, the ones who were there, they saw what I was willing to do for that individual. So, I think that actually made the employees who are working for me a little more comfortable and understanding that I value them as a person, I do not just look at them as a cog in the machine. They wanted something different, and I was willing to help them get what they needed.

It is important for leaders to recognize the achievements of their employees, personally to individuals, publicly in front of their peers, and upward to the executive management team.

The subcategory performance represented how well employees did their jobs, alignment with corporate objectives, and is the company moving in the direction of excellence. As P2 simply put it: "Are you continuing to mature and use structured ways to try to expect an individual, expect a team, expect an organization to experience something different next time than they did last time?" An employee's work performance is usually closely tied to the work environment coupled with leadership. P4 stated,

I think if you are scared of showing up every day and you are scared that you are

going to be let go, worried that a little slip up might result in demotion or

termination, you are going look for something else.

It is important to recognize an employees' performance and provide the appropriate

reward. As described by P7:

We recognize our employees at different levels. We have an immediate short-term

above and beyond recognition program which gives small financial benefits to

those that step above and beyond their regular job duties. We also offer spot and

annual bonuses for those that produce over a long period of time, whether it be

project-oriented or long-term services.

Performance reviews and metrics tracking are great ways to relay to subordinates how a

manager perceives them and their work activities.

***Correlation to the Literature Review***. Achieving goals and hitting performance

metrics requires employee engagement and motivation. HR best practices can help to

enhance performance by implementing motivational policies like rewards, incentives, and

bonuses (Memon et al., 2021; Mukherjee et al., 2020). Performance and achievement can

be enhanced through the three-stage cycle of motivation-effort-reward that continuously

drives employee behaviors (Dunnan et al., 2020b; Müller et al., 2022). An organization

that can create greater work engagement tends to have better success with employee

turnover (Mohanty & Arunprasad, 2021). Companies that have high performance

typically have effective practices and programs for employee engagement and

motivation.

***Correlation With the Conceptual Framework***. Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory provides an excellent framework for studying impact on work, the work environment, and employee relationships. Performance and achievement are usually found to be strong motivator factors for employees (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Supportive leadership that recognizes employees' achievements and provides some sort of remuneration for meeting performance metrics has been shown to improve job satisfaction and job engagement leading to retention (Zabolotniaia et al., 2019). Leaders are encouraged to set performance targets with some sort of remuneration when achieved and to recognize personal and professional achievements of their employees if they are strengthening their retention strategies.

**Subtheme 5—Shared Growth Opportunity**. The opportunity for growth is one of the biggest character traits an organization can nurture if looking to recruit and retain employees. Growth opportunity as a motivator factor was referenced 35 times across seven participants. But growth opportunity was subcategorized as advancement and development, and again, both measured about equal. Advancement was referenced 17 times across six participants and development was referenced 18 times across six participants. Because the two subcategories were equal, the growth opportunity factor was found to be only partially thematic.

The subcategory advancement represented the ability of an employee to be promoted within their department or across the organization. As P4 noted, "I try to be open and transparent on what opportunities, what future advancement opportunities there

might be there." Career growth is an important concept for many employees and companies want to be able to provide career opportunities. As stated by P5:

> In all the positions, when we look to bring either a candidate in, or we look to bring an employee, maybe shifting them to a different department, promoting them within the department, we bring those individuals who they would be working with into the mix.

And P7 explained, "The ability to grow your career within the organization is extremely important. We prioritize our career growth internally first before we go external for opportunities." Career opportunities through advancement are very important to most employees and leaders should be aware of any opportunities available and the interest level of their employees.

The subcategory development was defined as the programs and processes used by organizations to aid in developing their employees to be better at their jobs, for possible advancement, and for job enrichment. Employee development can occur through educational programs, cross-training, temporary assignments, and succession planning. As P1 discussed:

> What I have seen a lot over the years is those IDP type goals, those development goals a lot of the time have been used as an extension of additional performance goals. I think that is a very incorrect way to do that … I see the IDP goals as what you are asking from the company, both to help you as an individual develop whether it is within your role or just continue it in your professional life.

Training and development allow employees to learn and grow, but also to satisfy some internal needs or urges. P5 explained:

> People get kind of comfortable in their own area, but most of the people I have worked with have some desire to learn more, so I try to involve them. I try to do some cross training as much as we can and others to pursue work in areas that maybe they have a particular interest in or an aptitude for.

And P6 furthered the explanation:

> I like to let that person set their own goals so that they can decide what path they are going on in their career and what things they are interested in and would like to improve on rather than just me assigning them. I want them to take ownership over that process and develop goals that they are interested in to help keep them engaged.

Development helps to prevent employees from getting stuck in a rut in their jobs and losing satisfaction. As P7 stated, "The ability to not stay stagnant in a current job, to have the ability to grow within the organization." Development encompasses training and education programs as well as cross-training efforts provided by the organization, department, or partnered educational organizations. Employees should communicate to their respective leaders on development goals, training programs, and vocational education that they wish to receive and progress in.

*Correlation to the Literature Review*. Leaders should leverage the motivator factor of development and advancement to enhance job engagement. Growth opportunities are especially important to the millennial generation because they lead to

increased advancement opportunities and compensation benefits (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Berglund et al., 2021). Career growth, training, and education have also been shown to affect job engagement within the power industry (Dunnan et al., 2020a; Mukherjee et al., 2020). The younger generation is more interested in growing their employability through growth and development than they are trying to advance up the corporate ladder (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Tirta & Enrika, 2020). Consideration of the employability objects of workers should be evaluated when updating retention policies.

*Correlation With the Conceptual Framework*. Employee retention rates should improve as leaders find ways to improve their employees' job engagement. Growth opportunities, whether advancement or development, are motivator factors that can lead to job enrichment, which can lead to higher retention rates (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Previous research has shown positive results of providing personal growth and career advancement opportunities can improve job satisfaction (Deri et al., 2021; Staempfli & Lamarche, 2020). Utilizing influential motivator factors such as growth opportunities can enhance employees' behaviors, job satisfaction, and performance.

**Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice**

Developing and implementing employee retention strategies is vital to the bottom line and longevity of any business. Employee turnover carries a high cost monetarily, which is around 90 to 200% of the lost position's annual salary (Molahosseini et al., 2020). A loss of an employee also causes the remaining employees to carry the workload on top of their own leading to missed deadlines and productivity losses, which also

decreases morale of the existing employees (Memon et al., 2021). And, most importantly, turnover means losing knowledge and expertise that can be difficult to impossible to replace, which can have further negative effects on morale, productivity, and sales (Kurtović & Štrus, 2023). The employee turnover issue is exceptionally bad in the U.S. power industry where the 5-year (2017–2021) nonretirement voluntary turnover rate was as 15.4% in 2021 with millennials accounting for 60% of the turnover (Center for Energy Workforce Development, 2022). Due to the growing attrition rates, the costs associated with employee turnover, and the impact of the younger generation, U.S. power organizations have been revisiting their retention strategies to attempt to reverse the situation.

**Business Contributions**

The findings of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry could help to reduce employee turnover within the U.S. power industry resulting in lower costs, improved retention of knowledge and expertise, and implement creative solutions to retaining the younger generation of workers. There were four primary themes that emerged from this study: (a) create a happy work environment characterized by communication and trust, (b) establish work relationships centered around treatment and teamwork, (c) implement workplace policies that showed leniency and flexibility with schedules and location, and (d) build job engagement through personal motivators. Organizational leaders in the power industry can use these themes in the construction, implementation, and measurement of effective strategies that can address the issue of employee turnover.

The first strategy identified involved creating a work environment where employees feel comfortable, excited, and happy to go to. It is important for employees to enjoy not only the work they do, but also the environment they do the work in. A positive and happy work environment is built firmly around two-way communication channels and the establishment of mutual trust and respect between leaders and followers. The second strategy is expanding that trust into healthy leader-follower relationships. Work relationships are centered around the treatment of others, specifically how leaders treat their followers. Trust is turned into respect which turns into fellowship. Once good work relationships are established, then the environment, department, and organization can work together as a team, aligned to the same goals, and collaborating with each other to reach the goals.

The third strategy identified is implementing workplace policies that were updated and modern and addressed the ideals and attitudes of the changing times. Simultaneously, organizational leaders should show some leniency and flexibility with work schedules and work locations. If it is more advantageous, or if it fits the position and duties of a specific employees, then business leaders should try to provide more creative work solutions other than the historical nine-to-five with the "just because that is how it always has been done" attitude. The fourth strategy is the collective forging of job engagement through multiple motivators of the individual and team. Business leaders can promote individual and team motivation by including employees in the decision-making process, expanding employee's responsibility by delegating new tasks or providing autonomy, or recognizing employees by acknowledging their work and when they

exceeded expectations. Employees are also motivated through growth options by career advancement opportunities and educational and skill-building development. Leaders can also motivate their employees by recognizing personal and professional achievements or by setting, measuring, and hitting performance objectives. By applying the study's findings to professional practice, U.S. power business leaders can successfully enhance their employee retention strategies and improve their long-term viability within the industry.

**Recommendations for Professional Practice**

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry investigated the employee retention strategies of some business leaders in the power industry in the Midwest section of the United States. The four themes that emerged as successful strategies for employee retention in power companies included: (a) create a happy work environment characterized by communication and trust, (b) establish work relationships centered around treatment and teamwork, (c) implement workplace policies that showed leniency and flexibility with schedules and location, and (d) build job engagement through personal motivators. Successful implementation of these strategies into other power organizations could reduce employee turnover and associated costs.

My first recommendation is that power industry business leaders should build and enhance two-way communication with their employees. Communication from the top-down, from leadership to the employees, helps to transfer the corporate vision and establish alignment with roles, responsibilities, and activities (Grzanka & Moradi, 2021). Communication from the bottom-up, from the employees to the leadership, is a great way

to relay questions, concerns, issues, and recommendations. The communication must be honest and clear (transparent) to transfer the correct message while also being realistic about the situations the company is facing. This type of communication establishes mutual trust and respect between leaders and followers (Lee & Lee, 2022). Through this combination of effective two-way communication and the building of trust bonds, leaders can create a work environment where the employees feel comfortable, excited, and happy to be in (Al Shaher & Zreik, 2022). People want to work in positive and trusting work environments and effective communication helps to produce those environments.

My second recommendation is that power industry business leaders should build healthy leader-follower relationships. Work relationships are centered on the way people treat and support each other, notably through fairness, safety, trust, respect, and appreciation (Wesemann, 2024). Ideally, the best relationship is built on trust which turns into respect which turns into fellowship—the foundation of teamwork. Organizational culture is more appealing to employees if the company is developing more inclusive and team-based environments (Ayoko, 2020; Martínez-Córcoles et al., 2021). Cohesive teams are established through good workplace relationships where everyone understands their roles and are aligned with the corporate vision. People want to work at and stay with organizations that promote cooperative relationships (Lee & Lee, 2022). Employees want to be treated with dignity and be supported by their leadership and peers.

My third recommendation is that power industry business leaders should build into their corporate policies the ability to work from home or some other remote location. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, power organizations have implemented "return to work"

policies and this has created a lot of resentment. Business leaders need to be cognizant that the a-typical, nine-to-five, in-the-office, cubicle work style is no longer the norm and is being replaced with more idealistic values, especially with the millennial generation (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Berglund et al., 2021). Power company leaders should provide more flexibility for work schedules and work locations to meet the changing demands of employees if they want to improve their retention rates (F. Li et al., 2021). More flexibility in work locations can be an allowable work from home, or work from home certain days of the work week, or work in a location remote from the plant or headquarters but closer to the employee such as pilot offices. Requiring the need for employees to be in the office for some meetings, training events, and other corporate events is understandable. But if the employees' job duties can be done remotely or entirely on the internet then why not create some flexibility with work location.

My fourth recommendation is that power industry business leaders should either adjust their existing policies or implement new policies surrounding flexible work schedules. In addition to remote work capability, having more flexible work schedules can decrease the work-home conflict resulting in lower employee turnover (Arsu & Yıldırım, 2020; Berglund et al., 2021). Salaried, those who work overtime without pay, and nonbargaining hourly employees are especially at risk of turnover because they spend a lot of time working more than the typical 40 hours per week in addition to being on call (F. Li et al., 2021). The extra hours along with little to no extra compensation puts a strain on the quality of life of employees, which then creates strain on workplace relationships (Berglund et al., 2021). Leadership can ease some of the work and

relationship strain of their employees by offering flextime, comp time, late arrival or early leave for holidays and other special occasions, or moving to 4-day work weeks. Business leaders could provide more flexible work schedules and leniency for time off allowing for more quality of life, which can help their employee retention programs.

My fifth recommendation is that power industry business leaders should create and implement processes and procedures that improve positive personal motivators within their employees. Improving positive personal motivators can result in a higher level of employee job engagement, which leads to increased job satisfaction and retention rates (Ayoko, 2020; Edwards-Dandridge et al., 2020). A primary focus on job engagement activities is including the employee in the decision-making process by communicating problems or obstacles to the employee and allowing the employee to help in the solution-generating process (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Allowing employees' voices to be heard builds mutual trust and respect, makes them feel valued, and enhances workplace relationships. A second primary focus on job engagement is to find ways to expand an employees' responsibility. When employees are provided with additional tasks that expand their role, given some autonomy and freedom with their work, repetitive tasks are automated, or included in redesigning their job, then they feel more respected and become further engaged (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Finally, a third primary focus on job engagement is for leaders to recognize their employees, specifically acknowledging projects they have completed and when they have gone above and beyond normal expectations (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Sehar & Alwi, 2019). Individual achievements and team performance should be recognized publicly by business leaders to show that they

appreciate their work and contributions to the success of the organization. Including them in the decision-making process, expanding their responsibilities, and recognizing their contributions foster a perception of organizational support within the employees and can lead to higher engagement and loyalty.

My sixth recommendation is that power industry business leaders should provide as many growth opportunities as possible for their employees. Workers of all ages and cultures, but especially the millennial generation, are more interested in growing their employability through education, training, and career advancement (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Tirta & Enrika, 2020). Career growth, training, and education have positive effects on job engagement and employee retention within the power industry (Dunnan et al., 2020a; Mukherjee et al., 2020). Employee development helps to minimize feeling stuck or in a rut in their job by offering training and education programs as well as cross-training efforts provided by the organization, department, or partnered educational organizations. Employees are also looking for career growth. Business leaders should be aware that employees are looking for career growth and to make them aware of advancement opportunities, both within their departments and across the organization.

My seventh recommendation is that power industry business leaders should become as diversified as possible, and quickly. One of the major findings in the diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) interview question was that none of the participants were really diversified. The power industry in the United States is dominantly white male with very few white women. The lack of diversification was prevalent in the demographics of this research study where six of the interview participants were white males and one was

a white female. Several reasons for the lack of diversification are location (mostly ruralized or small-town communities), exposure (there is not a lot of advertisement for power industry positions), physical aptitude (very few women in physical labor jobs in power such as line worker, maintenance, or plant operations), education (power is not a degree-oriented major), and culture (very few ethnicities are found in power; Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021; Vito & Sethi, 2020). An organization who diversifies their workforce can see increased job satisfaction, job performance, and employee retention (Vito & Sethi, 2020; Ward et al., 2022). Business leaders will have to play an active role in their diversification efforts. Some possible solutions to improve the diversity of an organization include having career opportunity workshops with local high schools and universities, getting involved with colleges and universities in program development around power industry specific opportunities, actively searching outside of the local area for diversified applicants, and reaching out to under-represented communities to research how to get them involved in the power industry. Diversification is a highly sought-after trait in the power industry because it adds value to teams, departments, and organizations. Diversity allows people to see things from a different perspective and provides more alternative solutions to problem solving.

My eighth recommendation is that power industry business leaders should educate themselves on the various styles of leadership and select the one or combination most appropriate for their organization, values, and goals. One of the major findings of the leadership style interview question was that only one participant could identify an actual leadership style used, and she had to research the question prior to the interview. One can

only ascertain that power industry leaders are not being trained nor groomed in specific leadership styles beyond that of basic supervisory training. The leadership style of managers can have a significant influence on employee job satisfaction and intent to stay due directly to the behaviors of the manager (Ohunakin et al., 2019). Leader-follower relationships can be enhanced by implementing certain leadership styles to improve productivity, engagement, loyalty, and retention (Kiwanuka et al., 2021; Mey et al., 2021). Workplace environments can become ambiguous, unplanned, chaotic, and dysfunctional if leaders have nonexistent or laissez-faire (absentee) leadership interactions with their followers (Kiwanuka et al., 2021; Northouse, 2019). Implementing supportive and inclusive leadership styles aids in the development of employees and can help attain team, department, and corporate objectives with greater speed, accuracy, and profitability.

## Implications for Social Change

The findings of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry provided strategies to improve employee retention in the U.S. power industry. Addressing employee retention in the power industry may contribute to positive social change because business leaders in U.S. power companies will have new practices and strategies that could enhance work engagement, productivity, and life quality of employees leading to greater sustainability of the organization within the community (Kovalenko, 2020; Robertson, 2021). Adopting strategies to improve employee retention can promote happier, more committed employees who are more efficient, productive, and more involved in charitable and volunteer activities within their local communities (Baranchenko et al., 2020; Robertson,

2021). Additionally, a higher employee retention rate can help power organizations to reduce costs allowing them to redirect funds to replacing aging assets, expanding into other parts of the power market, or building new facilities. New business growth creates more employment opportunities while enhancing people's living standards and purchasing power. Engagement and productivity enhancements can also strengthen an employers' reputation and standing in the community while increasing profit margins. Stable employment and long-term viability of businesses affects local tax contributions which benefits the communities served by the business' presence.

## Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies that leaders in the U.S. power industry utilize to improve employee retention. The research study utilized semistructured interviews with seven business leaders in power companies located in the Midwest section of the United States. Regional specificity was a limitation for this study. However, this limitation was mitigated by incorporating participants from various leadership positions across various sized organizations and across various departments. Future research could select different regions and larger sample sizes to ascertain if findings are similar and generalizable. Another limitation for this study is that the participants came from power generation (predominantly coal-fired) and load balancing companies. Future research might get different responses if the participant pool involves other power company entities such as energy trading, nuclear, renewable, or energy service providers. A final limitation is the qualitative pragmatic nature of the research design. Expanding the interview participant pool to supervisory levels or

surveying employees in U.S. power companies could provide future research with a greater variety of responses as well as more precise and accurate findings.

The study findings expanded my understanding of leaders' knowledge, understanding, and willingness to create and implement strategies for employee retention. There were four themes with eight recommendations that emerged from the study findings. One recommendation for future research is to investigate more in-depth those factors and subfactors that were found to be slightly thematic or nonthematic in this study. Different locations and organizations as well as a larger participant pool could provide similar or different findings. A second recommendation for future research is to use a different conceptual framework for the data analysis. Even though there are hundreds of employee retention and turnover studies, there are very few specific to the power industry. Using a different theory as the conceptual framework could provide other, more modern strategies for business leaders.

**Conclusion**

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I explored strategies that leaders in the U.S. power industry utilize to improve employee retention. The research study utilized semistructured interviews with seven business leaders in seven power companies located in the Midwest section of the United States along with a review of relevant data found on the organizational websites. Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory was used as the conceptual framework for analyzing the study data. Using a comparative analysis of existing literature along with the conceptual framework, the study produced four primary themes: (a) create a happy work environment characterized by communication and trust,

(b) establish work relationships centered around treatment and teamwork, (c) implement workplace policies that showed leniency and flexibility with schedules and location, and (d) build job engagement through personal motivators.  Eight recommendations for action for business leaders in power organizations were also presented. The nonretirement voluntary turnover rates in the U.S. power industry are at a staggering 15.4% with millennials accounting for 60% of the attrition. Employee turnover has negative effects on organizations including financial and nonfinancial components. As a result, organizational leaders need to understand the drivers for turnover and the strategies to improve employee retention. Implementing strategies for employee retention can help improve performance, productivity, and profitability.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Topic: Strategies leaders in the U.S power industry utilize to improve
employee retention.

| **Interview Protocol** | |
|---|---|
| **Researcher Actions** | **Researcher Scripts** |
| Interview Preparation:<br><br>• Find participants.<br><br>• Get participant consent form signed.<br><br>• Set up interview meeting via in-person, phone, or video/conference call (Zoom or MS Teams).<br><br>• Email Interview Protocol to participants. | |
| Start recording. | |
| Introduce participant with their assigned pseudonym identifier. | This interview is being conducted on (Date) at (Time) via (Method) at (Location if in-person). The interview participant is IP (#) from Organization (Phonetic). |

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduce the interview and set the stage via in-person, phone, or video/conference call (Zoom or MS Teams), depending on the participant's preference and travel distance. | Good morning/afternoon. My name is Michael Schulz, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The goal of this research study is to identify successful employee retention strategies within the U.S. power industry. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you have the option to withdraw from participation at any point during the research study process. I provided you with the research topic and interview questions in the consent email. This interview has been allotted one hour for those interview questions provided as well as any follow-up questions that might arise; however, feel free to stop for questions, concerns, or further explanations as needed. I also want to take this moment to verify that I have your permission to record this interview |

| | for the sole purpose of ensuring proper transcription for data analysis. |
|---|---|
| Wait for participant's affirmative response to being recorded. | |
| Begin interview:<br><br>• Watch for non-verbal cues.<br><br>• Paraphrase as needed.<br><br>• Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth. | 1. What strategies do you use to motivate your employees? |
| | 2. What strategies do you use to improve employee retention? |
| | 3. In what ways, if at all, do your strategies for building workplace diversity and inclusion impact employee retention? |
| | 4. What strategies do you use to enhance employee job satisfaction? |
| | 5. In what ways, if at all, have these strategies improved your employee retention? |
| | 6. In what ways does your organizational culture impact employee retention? |

| | 7. What leadership styles and approaches do you use to improve employee retention? |
|---|---|
| | 8. What key barriers, if any, did you experience when implementing your strategies to improve employee retention? |
| | 9. What else can you tell me about your strategies to improve employee retention that I did not ask? |
| Wrap up interview thanking participant. | I thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to participate in this research study. You have provided me with excellent information and data focused on answering the research question. |
| Request for supporting documents. | Is there any publicly available supporting documentation that you might share with me as part of the data collection process that supports your efforts in improving your employee retention? These |

| | documents could include handbooks, policies, procedures, recruiting material, leadership guides, and coaching materials. |
|---|---|
| Wait for participant's response to having and sharing public documents. | |
| Schedule follow-up member checking interview. | As I described in the consent email, after I have transcribed this interview and had a chance to interpret your responses to each question, I would like to send you my summarizations of those interpretations to validate that they align with your intended responses. This process is called member checking. Are you willing to review my interpretations and send back whether they confirm with your intentions or with corrections within 5 business days via email? |
| Wait for participant's affirmative response for member checking process. | |
| Ask for recommendations of other study participants (Snowball technique). | Do you have any recommendations on who else I may talk to that may be directly |

| | involved in your company's or another company's employee retention processes? |
|---|---|
| Wait for participant's response for other participant recommendations. | |
| Stop recording. | |