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Strategies for Driver Retention at Small Trucking Companies

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Dariell K. Cooper Jr.

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

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Strategies for Driver Retention at Small Trucking Companies

by

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MS, Walden University, 2018

BS, Walden University, 2017

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2024

Abstract

The trucking industry faces a critical driver shortage, which threatens the stability of supply chains and the economy at large. This issue is particularly challenging for owners of small trucking companies, as they form the backbone of the industry. Grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, this qualitative pragmatic inquiry aimed to identify the strategies small trucking company owners used to retain drivers and sustain their operations. The participants included five small trucking company owners from the southeastern United States. Data were collected through semistructured interviews, public records, and company websites. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Key themes included servant leadership, competitive compensation, and adaptation to technological advancements. A key recommendation is for small trucking company owners to implement servant leadership practices to improve driver retention. The implications for positive social change include the potential to enhance job satisfaction and work-life balance for truck drivers, ultimately leading to safer roads and more stable communities.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the following individuals who have played significant roles in my life and supported me throughout my journey. First and foremost, I dedicate this work to God for guiding me through all my trials and providing me with strength and perseverance. To my beloved wife, who has been my partner, best friend, and unwavering support—thank you for helping me find balance in life and for your unconditional love. My children, you continuously motivate and inspire me to reach for greatness, thank you. To my father, thank you for preparing me for life's challenges and instilling in me the value of patience and perseverance. To my stepmom and mother, I am grateful for lending me your ears to vent and offering me wise advice in return. I am also indebted to my family and friends who have stood by my side through thick and thin, pushing me forward even when I felt like giving up. Thank you to Dr. Betsy Macht for your advice, words of encouragement, and guidance when I was lost. I would also like to thank all the participants involved in this research. A special thanks to my best friends, Bryant and Antwan, who provided much-needed laughter and distraction during stressful times. Thank you to my friend Divya S., who guided and reassured me when I felt lost during my research phase. Lastly, I extend a special thanks to Tierney A. Brewer, my former spouse, who was there at the beginning of my educational journey, providing encouragement and support. She was not only a loving wife and friend but also a source of inspiration. May she rest in peace. Again, thank you, JESUS, for everything!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

The high turnover rate in the trucking industry poses a significant challenge requiring innovative retention strategies to maintain a stable and efficient workforce. Within the United States, the trucking industry is responsible for transporting 72.5% of freight (Schuster et al., 2023). The U.S. economy relies on the demanding work of truck drivers to stimulate the economy (Mittal et al., 2018). Despite its critical role, the truck industry faces challenges due to the high number of unfilled truck driving positions in the United States. Shuster et al. (2023) revealed in their research that the number of unfilled truck driver positions has increased to 80,000 in 2021; if this continues, it will be 160,000 by 2030. The trucking industry faces challenges with an aging workforce, technology disruption, work-life balance, compensation, and regulatory challenges (Dadsena et al., 2017).

Further research revealed that factors such as marital status, education, and gender are associated with the probability of a driver leaving their job (Trick et al., 2021). These factors show the need to address these challenges to improve truck driver retention. For instance, the demanding nature of the job and the challenges of maintaining a healthy work-life balance can lead to dissatisfaction and higher turnover rates among drivers (Hussain et al., 2022). Additionally, issues related to compensation and the perceived undervaluation of truck drivers can further exacerbate retention challenges. Furthermore, the aging workforce in the trucking industry presents a challenge, as older drivers may be more likely to retire, leading to a loss of experienced drivers. Given the high turnover rate

among truck drivers, this study explored effective retention strategies implemented by owners of small trucking companies to retain drivers and sustain their operations.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some owners of small trucking companies lacked strategies to retain the drivers necessary to sustain their operations. The trucking industry is deeply concerned about retaining truck drivers, identifying driver retention as the sixth most pressing issue (Sperry et al., 2022). This qualitative pragmatic inquiry project explored strategies owners of small trucking companies used to retain drivers necessary to sustain their operations. The targeted population consisted of five purposefully selected owners of small trucking companies located in the southeast region of the United States who have successfully used strategies to increase driver retention. By focusing on owners who have successfully retained drivers, I aimed to identify best practices and innovative approaches that somebody could share with other owners facing similar challenges. Data sources for this study consisted of the following: (a) business-related interviews; (b) public data, such as employment training materials and public websites; and (c) literature, such as books, peer-reviewed articles, and other bodies of written knowledge that communicate substantive research findings about practices that are relevant to the inquirer's topic. Herzberg's motivation theory (1959), with the support of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943), was the conceptual framework for this research project. These theories helped show how owners of small trucking companies understand employee motivation and use that understanding to develop driver retention strategies as part of their strategic initiatives.

Research Question

What strategies do owners of small trucking companies use for driver retention necessary to sustain their operations?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions in research refer to facts or conditions that researchers believe to be true but cannot be fully verified (Yin, 2017). Assumptions serve as foundational elements that impact the validity and accuracy of the findings (Verma & Abdel-Salam, 2019). In this study, a few assumptions were made. Firstly, I assumed that participants would honestly share their managerial experience and provide strategies for truck driver retention. Secondly, I assumed that participants would feel comfortable sharing their experiences and strategies in a safe research environment. Lastly, an assumption was made that enough data would be accumulated to effectively address the research question. These assumptions highlight the potential limitations and uncertainties within the research process, emphasizing the need for careful interpretation and consideration of the findings.

Limitations

Limitations can impact the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study outside of the researcher's control but directly related to the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Simon and Goes (2013) indicated that limitations are matters and occurrences that arise in a study that are out of the researcher's control. Two potential limitations include trusting the data received from the participants and researcher bias due

to personal interest in the logistics industry. Trusting the data received from the participants is a potential limitation as it relies on the accuracy and honesty of the information provided by the participants. Despite efforts to ensure data validity and reliability, there is always a possibility of participants providing inaccurate or incomplete information, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This limitation may impact the overall validity and generalizability of the study's findings.

Another limitation to consider is researcher bias. As the researcher, I have a personal interest in the logistics industry, and there is a potential for bias to influence the study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. This bias may manifest in the form of favoring certain perspectives, overlooking alternative explanations, or unintentionally steering the study toward preconceived notions. It is important to acknowledge this limitation to ensure transparency and objectivity in the research process.

Transition

In Section 1, I established the foundational elements of the research, providing a succinct overview of the problem's background, the specific business focus, and the project's purpose. I identified the critical components, including the research method, population, and conceptual framework, all framed within the context of applied business research. The concise articulation of the research question ensured alignment with the identified business problem and purpose, while assumptions and limitations acknowledged the inherent complexities and constraints of the study. This sets the stage

for a comprehensive examination of driver retention strategies in small trucking companies.

In Section 2, I will critically analyze and synthesize the professional and academic literature related to the conceptual framework, Herzberg's motivation theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. I will explore the key concepts of these conceptual frameworks to establish a foundation for understanding the application of these theories to the research project. Emphasis is placed on their relevance to my research topic which explores driver retention strategies in the trucking industry. I will also review the published peer-reviewed research on this topic identifying research themes and findings.

In Section 3, I will discuss my role as the researcher discussing data collection and ethical considerations. The nature of the project is expounded, justifying the qualitative methodology and pragmatic inquiry case study design. Population, sampling, and participant characteristics are described to provide context. Data collection activities, specifically the interview protocol, are outlined, detailing the rationale, techniques, and steps to enhance reliability and validity. The section concludes by addressing potential reliability and validity concerns through methods such as member checking, transcript review, and pilot testing.

In Section 4, I commence with the overarching research question, followed by an identification of themes derived from the collected and analyzed data. The findings are presented in relation to the conceptual framework and existing literature, providing a nuanced understanding of effective driver retention strategies. The implications for

business leaders are discussed, highlighting tangible improvements in professional practice. Recommendations for further research are presented to address identified limitations, and the section concludes with a concise summary, emphasizing key points of data collection, analysis, and findings.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project, I explored the strategies owners of small trucking companies use to retain drivers necessary to sustain their operations. It is key for researchers to conduct literature reviews to meticulously organize information concisely, offering valuable insights into the research problem (Anderson & Lemken, 2023; Korsgaard & Linneberg, 2019). In this literature review, I undertook a comprehensive and critical analysis, synthesizing current literature that aligned with the conceptual framework, while also identifying gaps in the existing research to provide a well-structured and comprehensive review of the phenomenon under investigation. The literature reviewed and analyzed took the form of peer-reviewed scholarly articles, academic journals, and books. Most articles included in this review are peer-reviewed and published within 5 years of my completion date. It is worth noting that approximately 85% of the references utilized in this literature review were derived from peer-reviewed sources.

The literature review includes several references, including peer-reviewed research studies, seminal texts, and books. Seventy-one references are included in this literature review; some include scholarly, peer-reviewed articles., representing more than 85% of the total references. The remaining works include four books (5% of total references) and 10 nonpeer-reviewed references (14%). The publication date for these references is within the 2020-2024 period, representing 96% of all included references in the literature review subsection. Table 1 shows my literature review sources.

Table 1*Literature Review Sources*

References by type	Published 2020-2024	Published before 2020	Total	Percentage of total references
Overall doctoral study references	30	70	100	100%
Peer-reviewed journals	61	0	61	85.92%
Books	0	4	4	5.63%
Other resources	5	5	10	14.09%
Total	96	79	71	100%

The purpose of this literature review is to explore research sources pertaining to retention strategies for qualified truck drivers, with a focus on small trucking companies. The objective is to provide a contextual understanding of the challenges related to the recruitment and retention of qualified truck drivers by business owners as well as provide frameworks and insights supporting this topic. The literature review is organized to review the driver shortage, its impacts, the cost of retention, and proposed strategies to address the shortage of truck drivers in the United States. The organization of the literature review was designed to (a) introduce the framework and its application to recruiting and retaining employees, (b) establish the parameters for the study, (c)

highlight the various causes of the driver shortage, (d) and provide a foundational understanding of the study based on current research.

To compile the literature review, I initially sought peer-reviewed sources published within the last 5 years from my anticipated completion date. The goal was to identify literature addressing retention strategies that impact all organizational levels across diverse industries. Subsequently, I reviewed literature focusing on factors directly contributing to the truck driver shortage in the United States. To find approved academic sources, I used different keyword combinations, such as *driver shortage*, *supply chain*, *recruiting*, *retention*, *work-life balance*, *job engagement*, *job satisfaction*, *turnover*, *demographics*, *employee retention*, *small trucking companies*, *sustainability*, *COVID-19 pandemic*, *benefits*, *social change*, and *regulatory*, in databases accessible through the Walden University Library. Additionally, I expanded my search for literature pertaining to my topic through databases such as Google Scholar, the National Bureau of Economic Research, SAGE, Google Books, and EBSCO. Finally, I concentrated on the literature on the truck driver shortage, specifically within small trucking companies.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework theories for this research project are Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Herzberg's two-factor theory, formally known as the two-factor theory of motivation, was developed to comprehend employee satisfaction and its contributing factors (as cited in Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). The expectancy of this theory posits that job satisfaction and employee motivation hinge on two sets of factors: motivators (intrinsic factors), such as achievement, recognition,

and responsibility; and hygiene factors (extrinsic factors), including salary, company policies, and working conditions. Understanding and leveraging these factors can assist employers and managers in creating a work environment that fosters employee motivation and minimizes dissatisfaction (Sobaih & Hasanein, 2020). Herzberg's theory posits that the primary sources of satisfaction are motivators while hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction. It is valuable for business leaders to comprehend this to enhance productivity and retention.

Supporting Herzberg's theory, Maslow introduced Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, a pivotal concept in the realm of human motivation (as cited in Masharipov & Ozodboyeva, 2022). According to this theory, individuals are driven by five fundamental categories of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Bozyigit, 2021). The theory proposes a hierarchical structure, wherein each subsequent need emerges only when the preceding one is adequately satisfied (Weber, 2014). In 1969, Maslow added the idea of "transcendence" to his model in the article "Toward a Humanistic Biology," exploring how theories can be integrated. Maslow's incorporation of transcendence suggests that individuals can move beyond their current state, achieving self-actualization and fulfillment through transcending, which plays a crucial role in personal growth and realizing their full potential in the hierarchy of needs (Oseas, 2024). This framework provides a systematic understanding of human motivation and serves as an essential reference for business leaders. Integrating both Herzberg's and Maslow's theories can be a crucial tool in retaining talent and enhancing overall job satisfaction within the transportation industry. This study used the learnings from both

Herzberg's two-factor theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to guide the exploration and development of business strategies that small trucking leaders can use to recruit and retain drivers.

Effective Leadership

Effective leadership inspires, empowers, and guides individuals toward a shared vision, fostering organizational growth and success. Effective leadership in the trucking industry involves adapting business strategies, prioritizing safety at work, and understanding and addressing employees' worries (Sperry et al., 2022). Leadership, a timeless concern for humanity, has existed in every nation's history. Across the globe, leaders have influenced cultures, politics, education, religion, and history. Despite its enduring nature, there's no universally agreed-upon definition for what constitutes a leader. Leaders play a crucial role in fostering an environment where employees unite toward a shared goal (Daniels et al., 2019). Effective leaders act in the best interest of the organization, cultivating an open and responsive work environment that fosters a sense of community and establishes the basic values for the organization, contributing to employees feeling safe and supported in their roles (Vidman & Stromberg, 2021). Leadership that is responsible, confident, and capable of fostering open and responsive relationships is crucial for promoting job satisfaction (Vidman & Stromberg, 2020). The impact of effective leadership on employee performance is significant in enhancing the employee's ability to fulfill their obligations and duties effectively (Pawirosumart et al., 2017). Additionally, effective leaders instill a strong work ethic and business ethics, which are essential for long-term success and sustainability (Indarti, 2021). Ultimately,

effective leadership could help leaders of small trucking companies establish an organizational culture that promotes good work habits and ethics, playing a pivotal role in nurturing job satisfaction and fostering success and longevity.

Leaders of small trucking companies can learn how their role affects employee performance. Indarti (2021) posited that leaders should start by educating themselves and improving their leadership and management skills. A leader's ability to manage change through trustful interaction and to act in the best interest of the organization, workgroup, and individuals is crucial for fostering an environment that promotes employee well-being (Vidman & Stromberg, 2021). These findings collectively underscore the leader's responsibility to create a work environment that leads to employment engagement, reduces turnover, and achieves its goals. Effective leadership is an important aspect of creating a sustainable organization structure and can be developed through leadership training.

Leadership Development

Effective leadership training is crucial for fostering a supportive workplace, which is essential for staff recruitment and retention. Vidman and Stromberg (2021) suggested targeted training sessions aimed at enhancing leadership characteristics, such as communication, listening, and motivation, for both first line and second line managers. Leadership can be a factor for an organization in accomplishing its goals. Ignatieva et al. (2020) highlighted that the prosperity and efficiency of a small business directly hinge on the leadership potential within its personnel. Honesty, knowledgeability, and effective communication skills are key attributes of effective leadership (Klagge, 2023). The

success and efficiency of a small business are intricately tied to the leadership potential of its personnel. In the realm of trucking operations, this implies that leaders within the organization must possess the necessary qualities to steer the team toward achieving organizational goals, a critical aspect when managing a workforce of truck drivers.

Alongside training, leaders also have to use a variety of skills to achieve effective leadership. Clear communication and trust between business leaders and their employees are imperative (Luria et al., 2019). Truck drivers often operate independently on the road, and effective leadership that fosters trust and communication can contribute to a positive work environment and enhance the overall efficiency of operations. In the trucking business segment, where the demand for skilled drivers is high, training leaders becomes crucial. Training leaders to enhance managerial skills and equipping leaders with the tools to create a supportive and healthy workplace is important to business sustainability (Luria et al., 2019). For business leaders of small trucking companies, training could be a strategic investment, contributing to improved recruitment and retention rates. This establishes the foundation for exploring the effectiveness of human resource management within the context of small business.

Human Resource Management Practices

Human resource management (HRM) is critical in the organization, helping create a positive and productive work environment. HRM involves recruitment, training, performance evaluation, rewards, and a healthy work environment (Molahosseini et al., 2019). These practices are not just administrative tasks but strategic tools that can significantly impact employee motivation and performance. For example, a well-

designed recruitment process can attract top talent, while effective training programs can enhance employee skills and capabilities. They also implement policies and actions that could make a difference in cultivating a conducive and healthy work environment (Molahosseini et al., 2019). By implementing fair and transparent policies, HRM can foster employee trust and respect, leading to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. Issues with leadership in HRM can hurt business sustainability. Additionally, HRM practices can address poor working conditions and emphasize job security, which is crucial for maintaining a motivated and engaged workforce (Ashton, 2018; Dobre, 2012). In small businesses, HRM is not just about managing employees but also about managing the company's reputation and fostering innovation (Morsing & Perrini, 2009; Murillo & Lozano, 2006). A positive reputation can attract customers and investors, while a culture of innovation can drive business growth and competitiveness. Therefore, effective HRM practices in small businesses can significantly impact organizational goals and employee well-being (Morsing & Perrini, 2009; Murillo & Lozano, 2006). In essence, HRM is like the designer of a happy workplace, ensuring everyone feels good and the business does well.

In the trucking industry, how companies manage their employees is key to keeping drivers on board. HRM plays a crucial role in retaining drivers. HRM should focus on strategies that improve training, performance metrics, and initiatives for their well-being (Ashton, 2018). HRM practices contribute to leadership development by emphasizing learning and skill enhancement, aligning with the demands of the trucking industry. Leadership for truck drivers involves navigating challenges independently, and

HRM supports this through continuous learning and skill development (Ashton, 2018). Motivation and skill enhancement within HRM practices contribute significantly to the satisfaction and retention of truck drivers.

In the trucking industry, small business leaders can benefit from effective HRM. Trucking companies can benefit from effective HRM by focusing on training and performance management (Lookman et al., 2023). Positive impacts on company reputation and fostering innovation align well with the competitive nature of trucking. Creating an environment that values truck drivers improve retention and positions the company as an attractive employer. Alongside HRM's influence on truck driver retention, examining the diverse economic factors that affect human resource managers is essential.

Economic Factors

Economic factors are crucial in shaping human resource strategies for retaining employees. Akwei and Nwachukwu (2023) underscored the direct influence of economic considerations on workforce planning, including recruitment, development, and retention efforts. This highlights the necessity for organizations to align their HRM practices with economic realities to remain competitive in attracting and retaining talent. Building on this, Bamberger et al. (2021) stressed the importance of cost-effective compensation strategies in enhancing employee retention and loyalty. This indicates that organizations must carefully design their compensation packages to not only attract but also retain employees in a competitive market environment. Moreover, Belzer's (2018) research on the trucking industry illuminated how economic factors, such as compensation structures and competitive market intensity, create pressure on truck drivers. This underscores the

need for companies to consider not only the monetary aspects but also nonmonetary factors, such as work environment and job satisfaction, in their retention strategies. Rakhra (2018) further expanded this perspective by identifying a range of factors beyond compensation that influence employee retention, including a supportive work environment, safety measures, welfare programs, and opportunities for career progression. This suggests that organizations should adopt a holistic approach to employee retention, addressing both financial and nonfinancial aspects to create a compelling workplace culture that fosters employee loyalty and engagement. In addition, Rakhra highlighted the importance of fair management decisions, employee well-being initiatives, and effective communication in enhancing employee retention. These factors emphasize the need for organizations to create a conducive work environment that values employees' contributions and addresses their needs, thereby increasing their likelihood of staying with the organization.

Economic considerations could be foundational to HR strategies for employee retention. Conducting research regarding economics in the trucking industry could make intricate connections between compensation structures, work environment, and overall job satisfaction. Findings also may suggest that a holistic approach is needed; for example, integrating supportive work environments and effective communication might be imperative for successful employee retention strategies. The goal is to discover the importance of fair management decisions and employee well-being activities to see if these elements further reinforce the idea that economic factors should be considered in conjunction with a broader spectrum of HR practices.

COVID-19

Economics plays a crucial role in the transportation industry, as demonstrated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This crisis significantly impacted businesses, disrupting supply chains and causing financial pressures, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (Giunipero et al., 2021). Smaller fleets and owner-operators were particularly hard hit, experiencing a 38% decline in freight levels (Giunipero et al., 2021). The pandemic also decreased pay and hurt driver morale and well-being, affecting truck driver retention (Sperry et al., 2022). Owners of small trucking companies struggled to survive due to cash flow issues, prompting them to take proactive measures such as resource restructuring, cost reduction, and pursuit of new opportunities (Du et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of business leaders having broader strategies to effectively manage operational changes, as more than traditional business continuity plans may be required. The pandemic highlighted challenges in maintaining employee employment and activity levels, with some companies facing decreased freight volume due to manufacturing shutdowns (Du et al., 2021). More research could show why business leaders should always consider economics as it impacts business strategies, operations, and overall survival. The pandemic was an example that highlighted the importance of adapting to changes and understanding the role of economics in business.

Benefits

One of the most significant factors influencing truck driver retention is the benefits they receive. Benefits become a crucial compensatory element for those with lower base pay (Chin, 2022). These benefits bring economic advantages to employees

and play a vital role in maintaining stable employment, a key factor for a company's success (Bamberger et al., 2021). In the trucking industry, supervisors stress the importance of offering competitive salaries and comprehensive benefits like immediate benefits, a strong 401k match, and generous paid time off (PTO) policies. Findings from a similar study conducted by Aryal et al. (2023) identified that providing benefits such as competitive salaries and policies to limit time away from family were strategic approaches aiding driver retention rates. Aryal et al. also found a correlation between industry turnover, health conditions, job expectations, and work demands. Additionally, practical healthcare benefits are highlighted by Chin (2022) as crucial for employee retention and improving the company's bottom line. More research is needed to see how owners of small trucking companies can enhance employee well-being and overall organizational success by addressing absenteeism and presenteeism and allowing personalized health benefits. Transitioning to the next factor, wages, it becomes essential to explore how competitive compensation fits into the broader driver retention strategy.

Wages

Employee compensation is crucial in reducing turnover risks, requiring alignment with the role's responsibilities. According to Cullen et al. (2023), maintaining a balanced approach to salaries—neither excessively high nor unreasonably low compared to market standards—is essential for compelling talent attraction and retention. Setting salaries close to the market median, guided by reliable benchmarks, significantly enhances retention rates (Cullen et al., 2023). Burks and Monaco (2019) examined the truck driver labor market from 2003 to 2017, highlighting that economic incentives were crucial

despite a tight labor market and competitive wages. The authors emphasized that higher earnings, especially for those willing to work extended hours, serve as a compelling inducement for individuals to enter the truck driving profession.

Business leaders may need to prioritize employee development programs and enhanced training for truck drivers. This shift may be critical in addressing the industry's multifaceted challenges, ensuring employees have the necessary skills and knowledge. More research is needed to determine if business leaders invest in professional growth and training initiatives; they could enhance their workforce's overall efficiency and effectiveness, contributing to sustained success and reducing turnover risks.

Training

Training is a critical element in fostering sustainability and retention within organizations. According to Bharadwaji (2023), when training and development are considered the cornerstone of employer branding, they wield significant influence over employee retention by fostering organizational identification. The link between employee identification with training programs and decreased turnover underscores the vital role of training in talent retention. Saberi's (2018) research accentuated the effectiveness of on-the-job training (OJT) as a cost-effective strategy. Saberi's research suggests that on-the-job training is crucial for sustaining business growth and retaining talent and that OJT ensures that staff members are well-equipped to meet the demands of their roles, positively contributing to the overall performance and culture of the organization. This research aims to discover how OJT can be implemented or improved in the trucking industry as a retention strategy. Research conducted by Yuan et al. (2021) indicated that

various risk factors, such as driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, fatigue, careless driving, and failure to drive in the proper lane, are associated with severe crash severities and safety violations.

Safety could be a linchpin for employee retention in the realm of trucking. According to Huang et al. (2019), safety could be crucial for keeping truck drivers because when there is a good safety environment, affected by things like relationships between leaders and team members and how much employees feel like they own their work, it can lead to happier employees and fewer employees leaving their jobs. With its inherent risks, the nature of the industry underscores the need for more research focusing on enhancing safety measures. Getting adequate training for truck drivers could ensure their well-being and contribute significantly to their job satisfaction and willingness to stay with a company for the long term. Additional research from Huang et al. suggested that excellent training can be a powerful strategy to attract and retain employees, especially in the trucking industry; it is critical in shaping safety climate and positively influencing safety attitudes and behaviors. Further research is needed to see if training and safety play a role in improving sustainability and retention. Recognizing the central role of safety measures and training in retaining truck drivers is essential for this research to help small trucking company owners develop comprehensive strategies to nurture a stable and committed workforce.

Safety

Ensuring safety in the trucking industry is paramount due to the high incidence of accidents and the complex challenges faced by drivers. Many accidents involving large

trucks result in fatalities and injuries, highlighting the crucial importance of safety (Lee et al., 2018). This underscores the need for proactive safety measures and interventions to protect drivers and other road users. Haq et al. (2021) found that over 30% of truck driver-related accidents in 2018 were caused by improper driving actions such as speeding, failure to stay in the proper lane, and aggressive driving. This statistic emphasizes the importance of driver training and the enforcement of traffic laws to reduce accident rates. Leaders need to recognize the dangerous nature of the trucking industry and take proactive steps to mitigate risks and ensure a safe working environment for drivers (Lee et al., 2019). Murphy et al. (2018) stated that safety is paramount in the trucking industry and is influenced by factors like long work hours, low wages, and the challenging nature of long-haul driving. These factors can impact drivers' social interactions and perceptions, potentially leading to safety issues (Murphy et al., 2018). To address truck driver-related issues, Pilcher and Morris (2020) suggested that leaders must prioritize workplace safety by implementing comprehensive policies, providing regular training, and ensuring the availability and maintenance of safety equipment. Pilcher and Morris further recommended integrating good sleep habits and circadian rhythm considerations into safety protocols to enhance employee productivity and reduce accidents.

This research provides some oversight on why leaders must stay informed about industry best practices and regulatory requirements and promptly address safety concerns. Truck driver safety is crucial due to the high risk of injury and death from crashes, with truckers being significantly more likely to die or get injured compared to

the average worker (Bharadwaji, 2023). I covered factors like adverse driving conditions, long work hours, and improper driving actions that contribute to accidents so that owners of small trucking companies see the importance of safety in mitigating the severity of truck driver violations. Discovering current and new strategies is vital not only for the well-being of truck drivers but also for fostering a safer working environment within the industry. Transitioning to the following economic factor, the consideration of work-life balance becomes pivotal in understanding and addressing challenges faced by individuals in the trucking profession.

Work-Life Balance

Balancing work hours with family time is essential for truck drivers' satisfaction and retention. According to Mittal et al. (2018), only 21% of truck drivers return home daily, and 45% reunite with their families once every 2 weeks. The ability to balance work and life makes truck drivers depressed. According to Hatami et al. (2018), the depression rates among them are very high, at 13.6% and 15.8%. Depression can make truck drivers quit their jobs because of stress and health problems. Prospective truck drivers must carefully consider if the lifestyle matches their preferences. Further research by Mittal et al. (2018) suggested that balancing work hours and family time is crucial for a truck driver's loyalty to a company. Further research on what family time means to a truck driver and how depression can lead to health problems or how depression can lead to truck drivers quitting their jobs highlights the importance of understanding the work-life balance challenges in the trucking industry, especially for those choosing between long-haul and short-haul driving careers. Leaders of small trucking companies must

understand the differences between long-haul and short-haul driving. This research can provide business leaders of small trucking companies with the understanding that helps them make better decisions about hiring, keeping, and scheduling drivers, which can improve how well the company runs and how happy the drivers are. If business leaders grasp how these driving choices affect their drivers' work-life balance, they can create a work environment that supports them better, leading to happier drivers who are more likely to stay with the company.

Long Haul Versus Short Haul

Understanding the differences between short-haul and long-haul truck driving is crucial for owners of small trucking companies involved in recruitment and retention. Long-haul truck driving, a profession involving the transportation of goods across extensive distances, often crossing state or international borders, stands in contrast to short-haul truck driving, which focuses on localized transportation within a confined area, such as a single state or metropolitan region (Rashmi et al., 2023). The challenges associated with long-haul truck driving are diverse, ranging from occupational crashes due to fatigue, psychological stress from tight delivery deadlines, health issues like obesity resulting from sedentary habits, to strains on personal relationships caused by prolonged periods away from home (Rashmi et al., 2023). These challenges emphasize the multifaceted nature of the occupation, calling for a holistic approach to address its complexities. Recruitment for long-haul truck driving positions brings challenges, notably high driver turnover, as highlighted by Gittleman and Monaco (2020). To effectively understand this issue, this research will dive deeper into understanding the

distinctive features and challenges of long-haul truck driving and under this topic, concentrating on turnover trends among long-haul truck drivers, difficulties in recruiting and retaining long-haul truck drivers, and the demands from both industry and policymakers to address long haul constraints.

Short-haul truck driving, with its focus on short-distance transportation and frequent stops, presents unique challenges for companies looking to recruit and retain drivers. Short-haul truck driving operates within a more restricted geographic area, typically within a 50-mile radius, often requiring multiple pickups and deliveries in a single day (Gittleman & Monaco, 2020). This research will define the differences between short-haul and long-haul truck driving. This understanding is paramount for new owners of small trucking companies and existing owners involved in the retention and recruitment process, as this study aims to provide customizable strategies that may not work in companies that focus on obtaining drivers for the long haul but work for companies that focus on the short-haul. As I delve deeper into the intricacies of the trucking industry, this research also provides some oversight on turnover costs within small trucking companies. Research conducted thus far has shown that turnover cost is another pivotal factor influencing sustainability and efficiency within the trucking industry. This research will provide insight into the financial implications of driver turnover, which becomes integral for decision-makers seeking to implement strategies that ensure stability and success in the competitive trucking landscape.

Turnover Cost

Employees represent a crucial asset for organizations, influencing profitability and goal achievement. In 2018, turnover costs soared to \$20,729 per driver, covering entry and exit administration, idle equipment, lost profits, safety, insurance, legal, maintenance, and productivity loss (Rodriguez et al., 2019). To mitigate disruptions and associated costs, organizational leaders must address turnover costs (Cepec & Grajzl, 2021). Neglecting high turnover costs can result in significant disruptions, impacting business operations and financial recovery, particularly during financially challenging periods like bankruptcy (Cepec & Grajzl, 2021). Furthermore, the trucking industry, reliant on low turnover, faces supply chain disruptions, reduced service capacity, and increased safety risks by recruiting less experienced drivers (Trick et al., 2021). The presented information emphasizes the urgent need for strategic measures among business leaders to retain employees and mitigate potential disruptions and associated expenses. This research explored how high turnover costs can significantly impact business operations, financial stability, and supply chains, especially during financially challenging periods like bankruptcy, underscoring the critical role of addressing turnover costs in ensuring organizational success and resilience. As organizational leaders grapple with the imperative of addressing turnover costs, the integration of technology emerges as a transformative solution.

Technology

Business leaders must acknowledge the potential impacts of technological advancements. Technology plays a significant role in the transportation sector in

retaining drivers by improving working conditions and upgrading equipment, ultimately reducing turnover rates (Zhang et al., 2019). Leveraging technology enables leaders to shape retention strategies through communication enhancement, real-time feedback delivery, and the promotion of a better work-life balance (LeMay et al., 2013). For instance, advanced dispatching software can optimize routes, reducing time on the road and improving drivers' home time. According to LeMay et al. (2013), technology streamlines processes offer training opportunities and creates platforms for drivers to express concerns and seek support. This approach fosters a sense of community and belonging, resulting in increased job satisfaction and reduced intent to quit, ultimately contributing to driver retention.

Given the rapid evolution of technology, this study covered the innovations in the trucking industry and provide insight into how business leaders can integrate these advancements into their operations to improve their retention strategies. Providing this insight can also help them adapt to the transportation industry's changing landscape and ensure that their approaches remain relevant and effective in retaining valuable talent. The objective is to show small business owners how adopting technology can elevate working conditions and overall satisfaction of drivers if technology is incorporated ethically following proper regulations.

Regulations

Government regulation plays a crucial role in controlling the trucking industry. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) serves as a pivotal federal agency overseeing the safety of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) and truck drivers in

the United States (FMCSA, 2005). The primary goal of the FMCSA is to reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities involving large trucks and buses (FMCSA, 2005). In addition to the FMCSA, the Department of Transportation (DOT) and other government entities contribute significantly to transportation regulation. Business leaders in the trucking industry must understand and implement these regulations to ensure drivers operate in a fair and safe environment (Cantor et al., 2011). Safety has become the center of attention for the FMCSA. The FMCSA has mandated carriers to use electronic logging devices (ELDs). This approach leverages technological advancements to enhance driver retention and commitment to safety (LeMay & Keller, 2019).

According to Cantor et al. (2011), leaders who prioritize safety support ELDs for carriers with substantial safety violations. This research will evaluate if leaders of small trucking companies aligned their companies with safety regulations by doing so could driver retention rates be improved. LeMay and Keller (2019) highlighted that the Motor Carrier Act of 1935 (MCA35) aimed to enhance highway safety and increase carriers' financial responsibility, which resulted in a more stable and appealing working environment for drivers, thereby aiding retention. Helping business leaders of small trucking companies understand the importance of comprehending and implementing regulations is crucial in developing retention strategies. By revealing this understanding, this research will illustrate how regulations can provide a stable and safe working environment, aligning with drivers' values and fostering increased retention. As we transition to the next topic, the impact of driver shortage, it becomes evident that

regulatory adherence is pivotal in addressing broader challenges within the trucking industry.

The Impact of Driver Shortage

The impact of the truck driver shortage extends far beyond the transportation industry, affecting supply chains, consumer prices, and economic stability. Since 2005, there has been an ongoing shortage of truck drivers, which is expected to continue (Trick et al., 2021). Projections suggest that in 2026, the shortage could reach as high as 174,000 drivers (Duggan & McMurtey, 2021). This projected shortage underscores the urgent need for the industry to implement effective recruitment and retention strategies to address this growing gap. Chandiran et al. (2023) discovered that the shortage of truck drivers has widespread effects, impacting supply chains, increasing transportation costs, and possibly leading to delays in delivering goods. This scarcity directly impacts customer satisfaction and overall business profitability. The average age of truck drivers is 49, highlighting the need for strategies to recruit younger drivers and keep the workforce strong (Duggan & McMurety, 2021). Without a concerted effort to attract younger individuals to the profession, the industry risks facing an even more severe shortage in the future.

The ongoing shortage of truck drivers has significant implications for businesses. The lack of drivers affects how products get to the stores, makes it more expensive to transport goods, and could mean delivery delays (Chandiran et al., 2023). Additionally, the average age of truck drivers, 49, suggests that businesses need to consider their recruitment strategies and plan for the future of their workforce (Lookman et al., 2023).

Wang et al. (2022) noted the significance for business leaders of trucking companies to hire skilled and qualified drivers. Wang et al. further noted the need for these leaders to understand how shortages affect logistics capability and performance. Customers who depend on trucking companies may experience longer delivery times, potential disruptions in the supply chain, and increased costs due to driver shortages (Gittleman & Monaco, 2020). These challenges highlight the importance of proactive measures to address the shortage and its impacts on businesses and consumers. In summary, the shortage of truck drivers is a multifaceted issue that requires strategic planning and innovative solutions to mitigate its impact on businesses and consumers alike.

This study focused on how owners of small trucking companies can develop strategic solutions to alleviate issues stemming from driver shortages and illustrate how the persistent growth of the truck driver shortage poses a significant threat to the industry's ability to meet demand. By conducting research in this area, owners of small trucking companies could inherit strategies that could improve driver retention by implementing more effective logistics and supply chain management practices. This situation led me to examine the retention issues that truck drivers face, exploring the various factors contributing to the ongoing difficulty of maintaining a stable and satisfied workforce in the trucking industry.

Retention Challenges of Truck Drivers

Leaders must recognize the challenges influencing truck driver turnover intentions to develop effective employee retention strategies. Steigenberger and Mirc (2020) identified various factors contributing to employee departure, including a weak

organizational connection, a robust occupational affinity, professionalization, and unmet expectations. According to Thomas (2020), retention issues in small trucking companies primarily arise from skilled labor gaps and shortages in technical, analytical, field support, and commercial skills, significantly impacting automation strategies and operational capacity. Aryal et al. (2023) posited that business leaders unintentionally contribute to challenges in driver retention by not setting realistic job expectations for new drivers, leading to increased turnover in the first year. They also identified workplace policies and culture, such as limited home time and inadequate benefits, as additional reasons for retention challenges. It is essential for business leaders to understand the complex nature of challenges affecting truck driver retention and to recognize their unintended contributions.

This research can provide insight for owners of small trucking companies to understand the challenges that can lead to reduced productivity and increased operational costs that negatively affect employee morale and retention. This study also aimed to uncover additional challenges owners of small trucking companies perceive in retaining employees and outline strategies successful leaders use to maintain their operations through effective employee retention. Given the impact of unaddressed retention challenges on productivity, costs, and overall organizational well-being, this research can help leaders understand why they must establish realistic job expectations, improve workplace policies, and promote a positive organizational culture to reduce turnover intentions and cultivate a stable workforce crucial for sustained operational success.

Small Trucking Companies

Small trucking companies grapple with high turnover rates, regulatory limitations, technological deficiencies, and equipment challenges, all of which impact their ability to retain drivers. Small trucking companies in the trucking industry face a high turnover rate of 35%, which is significant for jobs like truck driving (Burks & Monaco, 2019).

According to Talebian and Mishra (2022), small trucking companies need help keeping drivers because of rules on how long they can drive, especially for moving goods that can spoil quickly. Talebian and Mishra's research also indicated that small trucking companies need help to stay competitive because their owners cannot keep up with new technology. The lack of technology can make small trucking companies less appealing to drivers (Zhang et al., 2020). This research provides examples of factors, including the lack of technology and how it impacts driver shortage. Slowik et al. (2018) provided an example stating how some drivers prefer automatic trucks. However, some small companies still use older, manual trucks, resulting in drivers who want to drive automatic trucks not choosing a small company if they only have manual trucks. Another issue identified in their research was the buying of GPS systems. Some small companies want their drivers to have GPS systems in their trucks, but they must provide them. This research showed how it is imperative for a new owner of a small trucking company, which could be impacted by technology and seem less attractive without the right equipment. By covering this topic, owners of small trucking companies can understand what it takes to effectively sustain their operations by understanding truck drivers'

desires, improving their retention strategies, and making themselves an employee of choice company.

Transition

In Section 2, I conducted a critical examination of professional and academic literature concerning the conceptual framework, Herzberg's motivation theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These theories served as a foundational guide for business leaders in implementing driver retention strategies within the trucking industry, shaping the theoretical framework for the ensuing research. Leaders can employ both theories to establish purpose and consistency.

In Section 3, I will outline my role as the researcher, ethical considerations, and the project's nature. Justification for a qualitative methodology and pragmatic inquiry case study design is provided. The section details population, sampling, and participant characteristics, while outlining data collection activities, including the interview protocol. Methods to enhance reliability and validity are discussed, with a conclusion addressing potential concerns through member checking, transcript review, and pilot testing.

Section 4 initiates with the overarching research question, followed by the identification of themes from collected and analyzed data. Findings are presented in relation to the conceptual framework and existing literature, offering a nuanced understanding of effective driver retention strategies. The implications for business leaders highlight tangible improvements, with recommendations for further research addressing limitations and a concise summary emphasizing key points of data collection, analysis, and findings.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Project Ethics

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project, as the researcher, I explored retention strategies that owners of small trucking companies use to retain their drivers. Researchers are the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation (Karagiozis, 2018). Researchers must acknowledge and respect the individuality of participants, as this significantly impacts the quality of interview material and research data collected (Karagiozis, 2018). Researchers should be mindful of participants' emotional responses (Collins & Stockton, 2022). Therefore, as a researcher, I conducted semistructured interviews. Yin (2017) stated that researchers should ask what and how open-ended questions, listen attentively, remain adaptable, have a solid understanding of the topic, and conduct the research ethically. As the primary instrument for collecting data, I was responsible for recruiting qualified participants, analyzing the data, and stating my findings to complete this study.

As a social science researcher with experience working as a freight broker, I am aware of personal biases that could have affected the outcomes of this research. To minimize my biases as a researcher, who does have some knowledge of the trucking industry, I used the reflexivity approach throughout this study. According to Olmos-Vega et al. (2023), actively capitalizing on reflexivity throughout the research process is important when conducting qualitative research as this type of research is derived from a researcher's subjectivity and perspectives. Reflexivity was a crucial aspect of this qualitative research. With the reflexivity approach, I was able to remain critically aware

of the various aspects of this research. Researchers must acknowledge the inherent imbalances between themselves and research subjects to maintain ethical attentiveness and avoid biases during data collection (Buys et al., 2022). I selected owners of trucking companies as participants with whom I had no personal relationship or any prior knowledge of the strategies they use to recruit and retain qualified truck drivers. According to Amin et al. (2020), to further reduce the risk of bias, in qualitative research, various techniques can be employed: immersion, bracketing, member checking, keeping an audit trail, and following the interview protocol (see Appendix B).

Researchers should think about the moral rules and guidelines that control studies involving people. The researchers' role related to ethics and the report from the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, known as the Belmont Report (1979). According to the Belmont Report (1979), researchers should follow a series of ethical principles and guidelines governing research involving human subjects (NCPHS, 1979). The Belmont Report, a seminal document in research ethics, delineates the fundamental ethical principles and guidelines governing research involving humans, thus serving as a valuable resource for researchers in mitigating ethical risks (NCPHS, 1979). Aligning research with the Belmont Report principles serves as a means of verifying that ethics have been duly considered in the research process.

The Belmont Report outlines three principal constructs aimed at protecting research participants. This study followed the three principal constructs proposed by the Belmont Report to uphold ethical research guidelines. The first principle is respect for the

participant, which entails providing informed consent. This involves furnishing participants with an informed consent form detailing the purpose, procedures, and risks of the study, and soliciting their voluntary agreement in writing (NCPHS, 1979).

Demonstrating respect for participants thus entails transparently communicating the nature and implications of the research, empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their participation.

The second principle articulated in the Belmont Report is beneficence, which imposes an obligation on researchers to minimize risks and maximize benefits for participants. This necessitates a thorough consideration of the potential harms and benefits associated with the research endeavor, to safeguard participants' well-being adhering to the principle of beneficence involves implementing measures to mitigate risks and enhance the welfare of participants (NCPHS, 1979). Upholding ethics in research is imperative for promoting good and preventing harm. The third principle, justice, underscores the importance of fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of research. In practice, this entails ensuring equitable access to research opportunities and distributing risks and benefits fairly among participants (NCPHS, 1979). Upholding justice in research means carefully considering how participants are chosen and how resources are shared fairly. By adhering to the principles delineated in the Belmont Report, in this research I affirmed my commitment to the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects.

Researchers should maintain sole control of research data through password protection and adhere to ethical guidelines for data retention and confidentiality. The

responsibility to protect participants' privacy lies with the researcher (Husband, 2020). This involves being sensitive to ethical issues, establishing trust with participants, respecting them, and acknowledging their perspectives (Karagiozis, 2018). This study was conducted under IRB approval #06-27-24-0547579. The final analysis results should be shared with interviewees, and raw data should be kept before permanent destruction.

Nature of the Project

The research method selected for this study was a qualitative methodology. Patton (2015) posited that the qualitative methodology involves analyzing data from direct fieldwork observations, constructing case studies, and generating a detailed narrative description to comprehensively understand real-world settings. This method aligned with my research objective of exploring retention strategies implemented by owners of small trucking companies to retain their drivers. Quantitative methodology requires a researcher to test hypotheses and collect numerical data (Du et al., 2023). I did not test hypotheses or collect numerical data; the quantitative approach was deemed unsuitable for my research. Furthermore, mixed method research, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, was not chosen as it did not align with the research objectives.

For this study, a pragmatic qualitative inquiry was utilized. When researchers use the pragmatic inquiry design, their goal is to understand the factors involved in people's actions to solve problems that improve human and ecological conditions (Frey, 2021). Given the necessity for in-depth data collection from professional participants experiencing real-world situations, the pragmatic qualitative inquiry design was

warranted. A single case study design was not chosen to explore this phenomenon because it primarily examines a specific organizational context (Crowe et al., 2011). Utilizing a multiple case study design was deemed inappropriate due to the requirement for in-depth data collection from multiple qualified research participants within the transportation industry.

In this research study, I used a practical method to look at retention strategies implemented by owners of small trucking companies to sustain their operations. While ethnographic researchers immerse themselves in the distinct cultures of individuals or specific groups to delineate observable events (Loeb et al., 2022), this approach was not employed in my study as it did not focus on describing particular people, ideas, cultures, or facets of society. Similarly, a phenomenological study focuses on understanding the personal meanings of participants' real-world experiences based on their recollections of personal feelings from a single lived event (Larkin et al., 2019). This approach was not appropriate as I did not focus on exploring participants' meanings of experiencing a single lived event or phenomenon. As a researcher, I chose to use a pragmatic qualitative approach to investigate the retention strategies used by owners of small trucking companies to maintain their operations.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

In this pragmatic qualitative study, I defined the eligibility criteria for selecting study participants, focusing on owners of small trucking companies. The sample size for this research consisted of five owners from small trucking companies. The selected participants should offer insights that enrich the understanding of the research question

(Gill, 2014). The sampling method I used was purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling is a method in qualitative research where researchers intentionally select participants with specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the study, allowing for in-depth insights into the research topic (Marshall, 1996). Each participant was experienced in successfully implementing retention strategies for truck drivers to sustain their operations. Each participant was located in the southeast region of the United States. The owners I identified all survived the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this research, I also used convenience sampling. A researcher might use convenience sampling to quickly and easily recruit participants who are readily accessible, such as individuals in a specific location or community. According to O'Connells et al. (2024), this method involves selecting participants based on ease of access or availability, making it convenient to gather data. However, convenience sampling has a limitation which lies in its potential for selection bias, as participants are chosen based on ease of access or availability rather than random selection. I implemented convenience sampling because three of the participants came directly from my database from my time as a freight broker.

To ensure that participants were well-suited to answer the research question, I contacted each participant by phone. I introduced myself and provided a brief description of my research. Each participant opted into the research during the initial phone call. During that call, I provided an overview of the consent form and informed them that I would be sending the form via email, and I asked each participant to respond with "I consent." I also asked if they had any questions before ending the call.

Before conducting the semistructured interviews, I prioritized building a rapport during the interview with each participant before engaging in the actual interview. Establishing trust and building rapport with participants is crucial for obtaining high-quality data (Johnson et al., 2020; Karagiozis, 2018). The success of the research depends on accessing participants who meet the eligibility criteria (Amundsen et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Examples of participant criteria include:

- Currently the owner of a small trucking company with two to 10 trucks
- Operating within the Southeast region
- Successfully managed truck driver retention for at least 5 years
- Must be actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the trucking company
- Must demonstrate a willingness to share detailed insights and experiences regarding their retention strategies

I was able to leverage my network from my previous career as a freight broker and the contacts I made via social media to recruit qualified participants who met the eligibility criteria.

Data Collection Activities

Data collection is a critical aspect of research, enabling researchers to access raw data pertinent to their research inquiries and address their research questions. Researchers are the primary instrument for gathering data (Clark & Veale, 2018; Shufutinsky, 2020). In this research, I was the primary data collection instrument. Ensuring the rigor of the research process is the responsibility of the researcher, emphasizing the importance of employing verification strategies to establish the reliability and validity of findings in

qualitative research (Spiers et al., 2018). The primary data source for this study involved conducting 45-minute semistructured interviews with all participants. Semistructured interviews are a widely adopted data collection method in qualitative research (Bearman, 2019). Employing semistructured interviews affords researchers the flexibility to pose open-ended and probing questions (Azungah, 2018). Ensuring the availability of each participant was taken into consideration. I was fortunate enough to be able to speak with each owner directly and set up a meeting. I started the interview process for each participant with unstructured questions. The purpose of the unstructured interview questions is to build rapport with the participant. According to Moldestad et al. (2022), building rapport is crucial for establishing a comfortable environment that allows for the open sharing of thoughts and feelings, ultimately leading to rich qualitative data. I began the interview process once I saw that the participants were comfortable and relaxed. For each participant's response, I took notes. Techniques such as recording, journaling, and reporting occurrences are essential (Yin, 2018). According to Roulston (2017), note-taking during interviews is essential in ensuring a robust and thorough research process, allowing for a reflective and nuanced understanding of the participants' responses. The interviews were all conducted on Microsoft Teams.

The informed consent process involved inviting professionals to participate in an audio-recorded interview about their ownership experiences. This included sharing information about myself, explaining the study's purpose, briefly describing the interview process, estimating the time required, and providing links for participants to choose whether to participate. Once they agreed to participate, I briefly explained over the phone

the consent form I would be emailing to them. In the email, I requested that each participant reply with "I consent," which they all did. Consent was obtained via email. Before conducting the actual interview, I went over the consent form in more detail and asked each participant if they had any questions before we began. I did ensure that I used Walden University-approved consent forms. I communicated to each participant so there was no misinterpretation. I informed each participant that I would remove any identifying characteristics and use personal identification letters and numbers such as P1, to refer to certain quotes mentioned by the participants. Each participant was informed during the initial contact and at the beginning of the interview that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Researchers should inform participants that they can withdraw from the project at any time, including after initially agreeing to participate (Garrels et al., 2022). All interviews are saved and secured.

Data was transcribed and analyzed in NVivo 14. First, I labeled the interview transcripts before importing the data into NVivo. Once I imported the interview transcript(s), I started familiarizing myself with the data by reading through the entire interview transcript. Then, I did it a second time, but I started the coding process this time. During the coding process, I looked for emotional things, cognitive behavior, a description of the process, and actual solutions. I would go through each interview re-reading while coding. Once I was done with the coding process for each interview, I started the theming/retheming process. Last, I wrote a summary of my findings for each interview. For example, For Interview 1 I wrote,

The interviewee emphasized that respect and open communication are crucial for retaining drivers, as drivers need to feel valued and heard. Offering predictable schedules and ensuring drivers have ample home time are vital for reducing burnout and promoting a healthy work-life balance. While competitive pay is important, it's not sufficient on its own; drivers must also be compensated for their time during delays, such as loading and unloading, to feel their time is respected. Providing robust support, especially during incidents or challenging situations on the road, builds trust and loyalty among drivers. Utilizing technology to streamline communication and enhance safety measures is another key strategy that improves the overall driver experience. Recognizing and rewarding drivers for their efforts and achievements further boosts their satisfaction and loyalty to the company. Pain points include disrespect and poor communication, which lead to high turnover rates. Unpredictable schedules and a lack of work-life balance are also significant issues that contribute to driver dissatisfaction. Ignoring drivers' feedback and concerns exacerbates these problems. By addressing these areas—improving respect, communication, schedule predictability, and support—the interviewee noted a significant improvement in driver retention rates.

This process was repeated for each interview. After completing the initial theming, I began the refining process to ensure data saturation, verifying that no new themes emerged. I reached data saturation after the fourth participant. NVivo helped with the thematic analysis process. I ran a word cloud query within NVivo to highlight

specific words or phrases and used the table chart to analyze the frequency of nodes associated with the five themes identified in this research. I employed member checking and triangulation to enhance the data collection process's validity and credibility. Carr et al. (2019) suggested using methods such as triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to establish validity and ensure the accuracy and authenticity of collected data. Member checking involved emailing each participant a copy of their interview transcript and a summary of my interpretation. Participants were asked to review the transcript and summary for accuracy, provide additional feedback, and suggest any missing information. This process improved the accuracy of data interpretations and strengthened the research's credibility.

For triangulation, I utilized secondary data sources, such as organizational websites, Google reviews, and Glassdoor. However, these secondary sources did not significantly contribute to or detract from the research. They turned out to be only useful for the credibility of the companies. This research focuses on the retention strategies implemented by owners of small trucking companies to retain their drivers. While company credibility could influence employee turnover, the primary focus was on leadership practices within the trucking industry.

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you implemented to enhance driver retention within your organization?
2. What specific strategies or approaches did you use to successfully retain a driver in your company in a recent situation?

3. How do you prioritize driver retention within your overall business strategy, and what factors influence your decision-making in this area?
4. What are the most effective methods for fostering a positive work environment and culture that encourages driver retention?
5. How do you stay informed about the needs and concerns of your drivers?
How do you incorporate this feedback into your retention strategies?
6. What common themes or factors contribute to the loyalty and commitment of drivers who have stayed long-term with your company? How do you use this insight to inform your retention strategies?
7. How do you adapt your retention strategies to ensure they remain relevant and impactful for your drivers, considering the evolving landscape of the trucking industry, including advancements in technology and changes in regulatory requirements?
8. How do you measure the success of your driver retention strategies, and what metrics or indicators do you find most valuable in this regard?
9. What additional information on the strategies for driver retention at small trucking companies would you like to add that we have not discussed?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Data organization is crucial for researchers to collect, store, and protect data while adhering to ethical guidelines. Sarigollu (2019) highlighted that researchers must comprehensively integrate all collected data to view participants' lived experiences. The use of technology for electronic data organization is a crucial strategy for achieving this

goal (Cypress, 2019). A thematic analysis approach was used, which, as Braun and Clarke (2006) described, is instrumental in uncovering and interpreting patterns in qualitative data, offering a detailed understanding of complex phenomena. The initial step in qualitative analysis involves preparing and organizing data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Upon concluding each interview, I carefully labeled each transcript, for example, the first interview, was labeled as "P1-Interview." The primary purpose of cataloging data is to facilitate its importation into qualitative analysis software (Mattimoe et al., 2021). To maintain organization, I created a folder for each participant. For P1, I stored the interview transcripts, notes taken during the interview, a researcher-generated summary, and a screenshot of the email correspondence in which the participant provided "I consent". All documents, transcripts, and audio-recorded files were organized into directories using structured pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2) to preserve participants' privacy and confidentiality.

Microsoft Teams was used to transcribe participants' interview responses, and NVivo 14 software was employed to assist with the thematic analysis process. Ramadhan et al. (2021) emphasized that NVivo software supports qualitative data analysis by enabling data exploration, reorganization, and pattern identification within specific codes and across the dataset, thus facilitating efficient analysis. NVivo 14 was a valuable tool in the thematic analysis process, aligning the themes with the research question and supporting the study's objectives. Member-checking was also implemented in this research. Paulus et al. (2020) recommended using software to aid in organizing and analyzing data. While manual coding is possible, it can be time-consuming. Therefore, as

the researcher, I used NVivo software to match themes identified from the semistructured interviews. Each participant was allowed to review the transcript, provide any additional information omitted during the interview, and review a summary of my interpretation of the interview. All files are securely stored on a password-protected solid-state drive (SSD), which is kept in a locked office drawer. As a backup, the data are stored on Microsoft One Drive, which also requires password access. Five years after completing my research, all hard-copy documentation will be physically destroyed, and all electronic files will be permanently erased.

Data Analysis Technique

In this research, I examined employee retention strategies using Herzberg's conceptual framework, supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Data were collected through semistructured interviews. Consistency with the research question was assessed, and I identified key themes and concepts emerging from the interview transcripts. All data was organized into categories. The first step of the data analysis process involved conducting the initial interview. Next, I uploaded the transcript into NVivo and began familiarizing myself with the content by reading through the interview transcript. After reading the first interview transcript, I conducted a thematic analysis approach. Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommended starting the analysis process immediately after the first interview to allow for potential adjustments in sample size. I implemented best practices outlined by Braun and Clarke (2023). In detail the thematic analysis process involved, reading the transcript and then, reading through the transcript again, this time starting the coding process. Mattimoe et al. (2021) suggested that using colors for coding

helps researchers stay close to the information and better understand interviewees' perspectives. After coding, I initiated the theming process, followed by re-theming. Once completed, I summarized the insights derived from the themes. I repeated this process throughout the research until data saturation was reached. After conducting the thematic analysis, I labeled the data and stored it. As Moser and Korstjens mentioned, I adjusted my sample size by the fourth interview by starting the data analysis process after the first interview. At that point, I reached data saturation, with the fifth interview confirming that saturation had been achieved. Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) emphasized the importance of considering the research question during data sorting as new ideas emerge. After my second interview, I consulted with my committee chair, adhering to the iterative process, and continued to check in periodically to ensure alignment.

As the researcher, I employed triangulation to analyze my findings. Motulsky (2021) described triangulation as involving diverse sources of information to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of a phenomenon, thereby reducing research bias. Spiers et al. (2018) further emphasized that triangulation enhances the trustworthiness of research findings. I used my notes from each interview and information from the participants' company websites, public documents, Glassdoor employer reviews, and social media platforms such as Facebook. Utilizing multiple data sources provided a more comprehensive and reliable analysis of the research question: What strategies do owners of small trucking companies use for driver retention necessary to sustain their operations? Secondary data were not used in this research, as they did not provide additional data points supporting the research question. Consistency throughout

the research was maintained by adhering to a systematic approach that addressed the research question directly.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in research means that the results can be trusted and are consistent.

Reliability in research is a crucial concept that pertains to the consistency and adequacy of data analysis across different participants, ensuring that the findings are consistently supported by the data (Spiers et al., 2018). It is the responsibility of researchers to continually monitor and adjust their research processes to ensure the reliability of their results. Researchers must carefully consider the impact of their decisions on the reliability of the study (Yin, 2018). Carr et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of verifying that any data collection instrument chosen will maintain reliability and validity to ensure the production of reliable data. In my study, I collected what I believe to be reliable data through semistructured interviews to ensure the reliability of my findings. I also collected data via public documents, job postings, company website (i.e mission statement), and employee feedback that can be located on glassdoor.com. Coleman (2021) suggested that techniques such as mechanical recording, rich data collection, consideration of contradictory evidence, and member checking can enhance the validity and reliability of interviews, thus increasing the accuracy and credibility of the data.

Researchers need to make sure their research methods are consistent and reliable.

To address the issue of dependability in research, researchers must ensure methodological congruence and certainty throughout the research process by employing verification

strategies that are integrated into the research processes (Spiers et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers can achieve dependability by carefully designing the interview protocol (Harman & Azzam, 2018). Yin (2018) noted that there are various ways to ensure dependability, including documenting data analysis procedures and outcomes to validate and record decisions. Carr et al. (2019) suggested that researchers can enhance dependability by clearly defining the methods used to evaluate projects, adhering to the theoretical framework to maximize participant engagement, and selecting approaches based on the specific needs and goals of the research project. In my study, I used a well-structured interview protocol, asking participants the same questions until no new themes emerged, to ensure that I reached data saturation. I also triangulated the data using both semistructured interviews and document analysis to enhance the dependability of my findings.

Validity

Researchers can achieve validity by using methods that accurately measure what they intend to measure. Validity in qualitative research pertains to the appropriateness of data, ensuring a precise reflection of participants' experiences within and beyond the immediate context (Spiers et al., 2018). Validity encompasses dimensions such as credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Yin, 2018). To uphold credibility, a systematic approach is imperative. Holter (2022) suggested considering all data as potentially valid, carefully reviewing disputed data through repeated analysis, evaluating its impact on the researcher's understanding, and taking steps like clarifying, trusting the story, or excluding data if its validity is in doubt. Moreover, engaging participants in

verifying data accuracy through member checking adds credibility (Candela, 2019). Credibility means making sure the original data matches how researchers interpret it (Fusch et al., 2018). For this study, I used member checking to verify data interpretations with participants.

Transferability in research is about how well the results of a study can be applied to different situations or groups. Transferability evaluates how findings can be applied in different settings, which enhances the research's validity and usefulness (Holter, 2022). In qualitative research, patterns and descriptions of findings may resonate with other studies and contexts (Hartley et al., 2019). Researchers can enhance transferability by ensuring replicability and providing accurate reports, thus bolstering the reliability of qualitative studies (Coleman, 2021). In this study, I documented population demographics, interview protocols, sample sizes, methodologies, designs, and sampling techniques to facilitate the transferability of findings to broader audiences, aiding further research on truck driver retention.

Confirmability in qualitative research is crucial for validating findings, ensuring they reflect participants' perspectives and contextual nuances rather than the researcher's biases (Amin et al., 2020; Stahl & King, 2020). Techniques such as member checking contribute to establishing confirmability. In this study, I employed NVivo 14 software for data coding and utilized triangulation methodologies to cross-reference findings derived from coded data, documents, and journaling notes. Maintaining confirmability enhances the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Amin et al., 2020), ensuring that

findings are shaped by participants and context, thereby bolstering credibility and trustworthiness.

Data saturation is reached in qualitative research when new data no longer provide new insights or lead to new themes, indicating a thorough understanding of the studied phenomenon (Carter et al., 2021). Researchers can ensure data saturation by employing diverse qualitative methods to capture varied perspectives and tailor data collection to the research project's objectives (Carr et al., 2019). As a researcher, I looked for data saturation by observing if new data continued to provide additional insights or if repetition of information occurred. In this study, I used coding techniques to analyze data without any preconceived ideas, which helped me gain a detailed understanding of the research topic.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this pragmatic qualitative inquiry study was to explore the retention strategies that owners of small trucking companies use to sustain their operations. In Section 3, I outlined the key components necessary for completing this project, including the role of the researcher, participants, and the research methodology and design. I also addressed the ethical considerations inherent in the study. The latter part of Section 3 delved into discussions about data collection, data analysis techniques, and the research's reliability and validity.

Moving forward to Section 4, I will provide an overview of the study and present the findings. The findings will be presented according to themes identified during analysis. I will then describe how these findings can be applied to professional business

practices, discuss the implications for social change, and offer recommendations for further research. Finally, I will conclude Section 4 with a reflection on my research experience and a concluding statement.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research study, I aimed to explore the retention strategies used by owners of small trucking companies to sustain their operations. The primary research question addressed by this study was as follows: What strategies do owners of small trucking companies use for driver retention necessary to sustain their operations? I conducted semistructured interviews with five owners of small trucking companies in the Southeastern United States who have successfully implemented retention strategies to keep their operations running. From these interviews, I identified five key themes: servant leadership for driver retention, driver retention through compensation and scheduling, the impact of safety regulations on driver retention, the impact of technology on the trucking industry, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the trucking industry. These themes emerged directly from the interviews. I also conducted a secondary analysis of the participants' companies' Facebook pages, training material, and websites. However, these secondary sources did not provide additional evidence that supported or contradicted the themes, so the findings were not included in the final results. I completed five individual, semistructured interviews via Microsoft Teams with owners from five different trucking companies in the Southeastern United States. Each company served a different market:

- P1, P2, and P4 were business owners in the dry van industry.
- P3 was a business owner in the dump truck industry.
- P5 was a business owner in the oil/gas and heavy hauling industry.

The owners were identified as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. I used open-ended questions to allow participants to share their experiences and insights regarding employee retention, which was central to the research question. The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes.

Additionally, I searched for publicly available information as a secondary data source. In reviewing the documents available, I focused on mission and vision statements to see how they aligned with the retention strategies described. However, the secondary data did not offer sufficient insight to support my research question. Before starting each interview, I reviewed the consent form with the participants. Reviewing the consent form consisted of explaining that participation was voluntary, their right to withdraw, the study's purpose, and the interview process to ensure they fully understood. Consent was obtained both via email and verbally before recording the interviews.

After I completed each interview, I let each participant know that I would be sending them a summary of my interpretation of the interview, along with a transcript for their review. I also informed them that once they received the email, they should complete the member-checking process and email me back within 72 hours. If I did not receive a response within this timeframe, I assumed that all the information was correct. I began transcribing the participants' responses and sent them a summary of my interpretation for their review within 72 hours. In the email, I reiterated the member-checking process. I indicated to the participants that if I did not receive a response within 72 hours, I would proceed with the research, assuming the participant(s) agreed that the information was accurate.

Data saturation was achieved after the fifth interview when no new data emerged. Although I initially planned to interview six participants, new data had yet to appear by the fourth interview, so I used the fifth interview to confirm that data saturation had been reached. I used NVivo 14 to conduct the thematic analysis process. I identified five main themes: (a) servant leadership for driver retention, (b) driver retention through compensation and scheduling, (c) the impact of safety regulations on driver retention and turnover, (d) the impact of technology on the trucking industry, and (f) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the trucking industry. Table 2 shows the themes by participant.

Table 2*Themes and Participants*

Themes	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
The impact of safety regulations on driver retention.	10	9	3	1	1
The impact of technology on the trucking industry	7	1	2	3	7
Servant leadership and trust building for driver retention.	26	40	14	30	15
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trucking industry	13	1	1	4	1
Driver retention through compensation and scheduling	8	2	3	6	1

Theme 1: Servant Leadership for Driver Retention

The first theme to emerge from my research was servant leadership for driver retention. Each participant had something to say regarding serving their employees. When asked, "What strategies have you implemented to enhance driver retention within your organization?" each participant's response highlighted the importance of serving their drivers. P5 stated, "We start with wanting to know our drivers' expectations." According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, for individuals to be satisfied or motivated, their primary and higher-level needs must be met (as cited in Trivedi & Mehta, 2019). The participants clearly understood that effective leadership was crucial to retaining drivers. P2 was the first to name this leadership style, stating that his organization practices servant leadership. Following P2, the practice of servant leadership was mentioned throughout the research, with P4 also noting that his organization practices this style.

Servant Leadership Theory

The servant leadership theory posits that leaders should focus on serving their followers first rather than merely being in charge (Greenleaf, 2002). This leadership style aims to foster a more caring work environment. P4 noted that leadership spends time with their drivers every other Friday. P2 emphasized,

Whenever a driver would call in with an issue, like having trouble getting a load to a shipper or facing a mechanical problem, or any issue, whether it's with pay, fuel cards, or something breaking down, the fleet manager knows right away that he must help the driver as quickly as possible! He needs to do everything he can

to assist the driver in fixing the issue. And if a driver sees this, if they know you genuinely care about them as individuals and what happens with them and their families, they will go to the end of the world for you!

Greenleaf highlighted the importance of building trust in servant leadership and its significant impact on affective commitment. P4 added that in his company, drivers are not seen as numbers but as family and treated as such. He believed fostering a company culture of trust and collaboration through servant leadership sets his company apart from the competition and contributes to its high retention rate. A subtheme that emerged from this theme is building trust for driver retention. Table 3 gives some key excerpts regarding servant leadership.

Table 3*Key Excerpts Regarding Servant Leadership*

Participants	Excerpt from interview
P1	“So one of the things we do is we tell our drivers straight up, you know we are serving you! We try to foster a servant leadership atmosphere so that the drivers know that we don't consider ourselves any better or any different than our drivers. We just have a different role and that role as I said earlier is really to remove the obstacles so that they can do their job, and I think our drivers appreciate the fact that we consistently want to know how they're doing and take their feedback and do something about it.”
P2	“Just get the drivers into work, make sure that you have work for them to do, that means running them for miles and then get them home whenever they want to go home.”
P3	“I talked to the drivers and see if it's something I can do to help.
P4	“I would say we practice servant leadership. So we listen to our people and if there's something that we can employ to help better serve our people, that's what we do.”
P5	“So we start with what are your expectation are. We want to meet these expectations. We need to know what they are right off the bat. We then get those expectations established and then we develop a conversation around that.

Subtheme: Building Trust for Driver Retention

Posner and Kouzes (2022) discussed that trust is essential for true collaboration. The leader must be the first to extend that trust. I anticipated trust as a possible theme due to familiarity with this industry. In business, whether you are on the receiving or delivering end, it is crucial to trust the person you are interacting with. Herzberg's two-factor theory provides a valuable framework for understanding trust as a hygiene factor. Researchers use hygiene factors to assess interpersonal relationships, supervision, and working conditions (Alshmemri et al., 2017). The term "interpersonal relationships" was

mentioned verbatim by P1, who paraphrased that "leadership took an approach of looking at what the driver was asking for at the time of hire." From my analysis of P1, I see that the company focuses on understanding drivers' needs to identify what motivates them as individuals and then aims to meet those needs to retain drivers. P1 provided an example of work-life balance as a critical motivational driver, which other participants echoed. Although only one participant explicitly used the term "interpersonal relationships," all participants shared that we all have similar goals—taking care of our families. They also emphasized that no matter how much technology advances, it cannot solve people's problems, as interpersonal relationships are more of a people issue than a technology problem.

Alignment With the Literature

The findings from the data regarding effective leadership and its role in retaining employees align well with existing literature. Daniels et al. (2019) noted that leaders are crucial in creating an environment where employees work toward a shared goal. The retention of truck drivers is closely linked to the theme of servant leadership. Previous studies have suggested that leadership that is responsible, confident, and capable of fostering open and responsive relationships can create a work environment that enhances job satisfaction (Vidman & Stromberg, 2020). Servant leadership is identified as a proven style that helps retain drivers, supporting this study's findings.

Alignment With the Conceptual Framework

The connection between servant leadership and Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory explores how focusing on serving others can enhance job satisfaction by

addressing hygiene factors and motivators. This perspective suggests that servant leaders can reduce dissatisfaction while fostering an environment that increases intrinsic motivation (Russell & Stone, 2002). Additionally, the connection between servant leadership and Maslow's hierarchy of needs lies in the leader's ability to meet their followers' fundamental and self-actualization needs. By prioritizing the well-being of others, servant leaders can help individuals progress through Maslow's levels, leading to higher engagement and fulfillment (van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Thus, servant leadership and building trust with employees create a climate of trust that enables others to act, which can result in improved truck driver retention.

Theme 2: Driver Retention Through Compensation and Scheduling

Theme 1 focused on servant leadership and its essential role in retaining drivers within small trucking companies. Compensation first emerged as a critical factor when P1, a small trucking company owner, expressed a notably impartial viewpoint. When asked, "What strategies have you implemented to enhance driver retention within your organization?" P1 responded, "It does not matter about the pay; drivers demand respect." P1's theory was that regardless of competitive pay, drivers will leave if they feel disrespected by the company. To address this, P1 stated, "Part of our retention strategy is to ensure that we respect the individual, respect their ability to make decisions, and respect their family time and needs." P4 echoed P1's sentiment, stating, "I do not think it is the pay; it is the way we treat our drivers." P2, P3, and P5 mentioned that their company pay is aligned with industry standards. P3 mentioned that his company also offers additional incentives. P3 elaborated on one of his incentive programs, noting,

I may start a driver out with 22% of what the truck makes, then gradually increase the percentage within the first 30 days to 25% of what the truck makes. After a year, this could rise to 26%, and within another year to 27%, the driver would be considered capped out.

All participants agreed that one of the primary reasons drivers leave their companies is pay.

According to Mittal et al. (2018), the pay scale significantly contributes to the driver shortage. Competitive pay is crucial for both driver acquisition and retention. P3 highlighted how drivers frequently inquired about positions at his company primarily due to the competitive pay. P5 provided insight into how his company retained a driver through demonstrated integrity. P5 recounted,

One of our recruiters inadvertently misspoke and offered a pay package reserved for a more tenured driver this past week. However, since the driver was informed that this was the package he would receive if he remained with the company, leadership decided to honor it.

Mittal (2024) supported this view, stating that compensation strategies are designed to attract and retain employees by offering competitive pay and incentives. However, fostering internal equity and motivating employees through respect and recognition are equally important for long-term retention. P2 shared his experience of the challenge of pay issues within his company, stating, "On our regional side, their main issue was pay." P2 addressed this challenge by implementing a plan to improve driver retention, which guaranteed a minimum pay of \$1,000 per week for drivers who showed up to work five

days a week. P2, along with the other participants, noted that the subtheme of scheduling also influenced pay.

Subtheme: Scheduling

Work hours significantly affect driver retention (Mittal et al., 2018). P1 stated, "A driver has 11 hours a day to earn money." This regulation is due to the FMCSA passing the "Hours of Service" rule, which stipulates that drivers can only work between 60 to 70 hours per week (FMCSA, 2024). On average, truck drivers in the United States earn around \$57,000 per year, though this can vary based on factors such as the company they work for, the region, and their experience level (Cloudtrucks, 2024).

P2 mentioned that he "typically asks his drivers how many miles they are looking to run per week." He then plans out the week for all his drivers on Monday and Tuesday to ensure their expectations are met and their goals are achieved. This approach has proven profitable for the company. P1 noted that scheduling predictability is the second consideration for leadership in their efforts to retain drivers. He further explained that truck drivers often prefer to know when they will return home. From my analysis of all the participants, a schedule that is not predictable can cause frustration, particularly for drivers with families, potentially leading them to quit and seek alternative professions.

Further research revealed that approximately 25% of long-haul truck drivers report being away from home for up to two weeks at a time, while only 22% make it home every day (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). P5 shared insights from his research, stating,

In my research years ago, I surveyed over 700 participants through the American Trucking Associations, National Tank Truck Carriers, Truckload Carriers Association, and several state trucking associations. My surveys had over 400 respondents, which is phenomenal in the research world. What the research showed was that people wanted direction and structure.

From this, P5 concluded that improving work-life balance for truck drivers should be a strategic goal for small trucking company owners to retain drivers and sustain operations.

Alignment With the Literature

The findings from the data regarding driver retention through compensation and scheduling align well with existing literature. Mittal et al. (2018) suggested balancing work hours and family time is crucial for a truck driver's loyalty to a company. P1 stated, "Sure, getting our drivers paid is a priority; however, getting them home to their families is just as important." What Mittal discovered in his previous research aligns with what I found in this study: work-life balance should be a key focus for owners of small trucking companies aiming to improve employee experience and driver retention.

Alignment With the Conceptual Framework

Herzberg's two-factor theory can be used to analyze truck driver compensation by categorizing it as a hygiene factor. However, while adequate pay does prevent job dissatisfaction, it does not drive motivation or long-term job satisfaction among drivers. Instead, drivers' motivation and retention are better achieved through motivational factors such as recognition, career development, and meaningful work (Eneh & Awara, 2020). Compensation aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which supports my

research findings. According to Maslow's hierarchy, respect aligns with the "esteem" level, where individuals seek recognition and appreciation, contributing to their self-worth (Yarbrough, 2023). This psychological need for respect can often outweigh the desire for higher pay, as employees prioritize a positive work environment that fosters dignity and recognition over financial rewards (FIC HR Partners, 2023; Yarbrough, 2023). When employees feel respected and valued, they are more likely to experience fulfillment and engagement, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being and productivity. This supports Maslow's theory that once basic needs are met, higher-level psychological needs, such as esteem, become critical for motivation.

Theme 3: The Impact of Safety Regulations on Driver Retention

Theme 2 focused on compensation and scheduling predictability. The participants in this research emphasized that it is not always about the money; people want to be treated like individuals, not just numbers, so they consider a driver's schedule as a way to retain them. Theme 3, the impact of safety regulations on drivers, emerged when participants were asked the question, "How do safety regulations impact driver retention?" That question was a follow-up to my research question, "How do you adapt your retention strategies to ensure they remain relevant and impactful for your drivers, considering the evolving landscape of the trucking industry, including advancements in technology and changes in regulatory requirements?" All participants noted that if they have to let a driver go, it is usually due to safety violations. P2 remarked, "You also have to look at safety within your retention efforts because you do not want to hire unqualified drivers who will not meet the company's standards." P1 added, "If we have somebody

who defies regulations several times, we don't have much choice but to let the driver go."

The FMCSA serves as a pivotal federal agency overseeing the safety of truck drivers in the United States (FMCSA, 2005). The FMCSA's primary goal is to reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities involving large trucks and buses (FMCSA, 2005). P1 stated, "I would say that regulation has probably caused many drivers to leave the marketplace."

P1, P2, and P3 discussed the Department of Transportation's efforts to improve highway safety through tactics like the "Blitz." P3 described a Blitz as an unannounced inspection where DOT members inspect trucks to ensure they are operational and safe for the highways. P3 gave an example: "This week they could be doing a brake inspection." According to FMCSA (2021), the DOT Blitz is a focused safety enforcement effort on commercial vehicles, led by state and federal agencies and coordinated by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance. The most significant event, International Roadcheck, is a 72-hour inspection across North America, targeting safety compliance in areas like hours of service, maintenance, and documentation.

P4 highlighted that communicating regulatory changes is crucial for retaining drivers. In servant leadership, effective communication is vital for connecting with employees, building trust, and addressing their needs, making it a vital trait of this leadership style (Kumari et al., 2022). P4 stated, "We take time to go over and disseminate information on what's new, what's going on, and what the company's plan is moving forward. At the end of every meeting, we allow our drivers to speak." P5 mentioned that "drivers do not understand the full extent of the law when it comes to their profession." This statement highlights a significant knowledge gap that could affect

drivers' compliance with regulations and their ability to protect their rights. This lack of understanding might lead to unintentional rule violations, increased legal risks, or missed legal protections and benefits opportunities. P5 also said, "Truck drivers need to learn much more about how law enforcement works with commercial motor vehicle stops."

Within his company, P5 has training programs for drivers customized by demographic.

When asked to elaborate, P5 explained,

When developing training programs for drivers, we break it down by demographics such as age and sector. For instance, if I have a fleet of drivers in one area where the average age is 60, we use a different training approach. This is informed by studying pedagogy and andragogy, which address different learning styles. We offer high-tech training for my Louisville Petroleum drivers, who are generally 26 to 34 years old. They are eager for technology and automation, so our technology classes are very advanced and focused on digitization. In contrast, some of my drivers in Southeast Kentucky belong to a different generation.

Introducing new technology, like a tablet, can be challenging. They may resist or have difficulty adapting to these changes. Therefore, we tailor our training by age bracket and demographic, understanding the unique needs of each group.

The findings from this theme reveal that the focus was not on specific safety violations. Consequently, this research did not delve into issues like drivers failing drug tests or being involved in accidents with other vehicles. While these topics did arise during data collection, they were mentioned briefly and lacked sufficient data to develop into subthemes. Instead, the participants emphasized the critical role of communication

from leadership to drivers in preventing safety violations. According to the participants, effective communication through weekly group huddles, adequate training, and addressing drivers' safety concerns is critical to safeguarding the drivers' and the company's interests. Owners of small trucking companies should incorporate communication training into their strategic planning. By doing so, they have a chance to improve driver retention, reduce turnover, and minimize out-of-pocket expenses related to safety violations.

Alignment With the Conceptual Framework

Herzberg's two-factor theory explains that safety regulations are a hygiene factor that prevents dissatisfaction but does not necessarily motivate employees. For example, ensuring driver safety and clear regulation communication addresses fundamental concerns but does not increase motivation. In contrast, motivators like recognition and meaningful work enhance job satisfaction. Participants emphasized the importance of treating drivers as individuals rather than numbers. Leadership morals align with Herzberg's argument that motivators improve job satisfaction and retention (Rusu et al., 2022). Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that human needs progress from basic physiological needs to self-actualization. The focus on safety addresses the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy, particularly safety needs. Ensuring drivers' safety and clear communication fulfill these foundational needs. However, meeting drivers' desires for recognition and respect taps into higher-level needs, such as esteem and social needs. This approach aligns with Maslow's theory, which emphasizes that fulfilling higher-level needs leads to greater satisfaction and retention (Hassan et al., 2024). These insights

demonstrate how aligning safety, recognition, and respect with Herzberg's and Maslow's theories can enhance driver satisfaction and retention, emphasizing the value of integrating these frameworks into practical strategies.

Alignment With the Literature

The findings from the impact of safety regulations on driver retention align with existing research while highlighting opportunities for further exploration. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of safety in trucking companies, with research suggesting that business leaders must ensure compliance with regulations to reduce turnover and retain drivers. For example, Huang et al. (2019) stated that safety is crucial for retaining truck drivers, as a safe working environment can lead to increased employee satisfaction and lower turnover rates due to fewer safety violations. However, the research does not delve into strategies for communicating changes in safety regulations. This gap is significant because effectively managing and communicating changes to drivers can foster a climate of trust, enabling employees to act by company and industry standards.

In this study, participants provided new insights into the theme of safety regulations, emphasizing that clear communication of regulatory changes was vital to the success of their companies. Participants believed that effectively communicating regulatory changes was essential to reducing safety violations, decreasing turnover, and retaining drivers. Previous literature corroborates that communication is critical for leadership to consider when developing retention strategies. According to Kelliher and Anderson (2019), effective communication from leadership is essential for driver

retention and job satisfaction, as it fosters a supportive work environment, aligns expectations, and enhances employee engagement. These findings underscore the critical role of effective communication in driver retention strategies and suggest that further research is needed to explore how leadership can best implement and convey safety regulations to ensure long-term success.

Theme 4: The Impact of Technology on the Trucking Industry

Theme 3 focused on how safety regulations impact retention strategies. Interviews with participants highlighted how addressing safety violations connected to technology led to two perspectives: technology as a tool for driver retention and technology as a threat to job security. Zhang et al. (2019) found that technology in transportation improves working conditions, which helps prevent turnover in trucking companies. Each participant discussed using technology to reduce safety violations, aiding driver retention. P1 stated, "We embrace all the technology we can." P4 mentioned, "All trucks are required to have electronic logging devices." The electronic logging device (ELD) system automatically records a truck driver's driving time to ensure compliance with hours-of-service (HOS) regulations. ELDs enhance safety and operational efficiency by reducing fatigue-related incidents and improving logbook accuracy. According to the FMCSA (2024), ELDs have led to a 50% reduction in HOS violations, highlighting their impact on reducing fatigue-related accidents.

Other technologies, such as cameras installed in trucks, were also discussed. P2 said, "Our safety group had another program attached to the electronic logging device that showed truck speeds and had cameras to assist with any litigation related to

accidents." Cameras, especially driver-facing ones, improve safety by monitoring behaviors like drowsiness and distraction. They alert drivers in real-time and encourage safer driving habits, which helps prevent accidents (Freightcourse, 2023). Studies indicated that safety technology, including cameras, can reduce collision rates by up to 50% (Antich, 2019). These technologies enhance safety and contribute to driver retention (Antich, 2019). P3, although not currently using cameras, considered them for driver retention. P3 mentioned, "I was thinking about cameras. Many small companies avoid them because drivers feel like they are being watched. However, I considered cameras for safety and to lower my insurance costs." This statement from P3 indicates that while P3 is aware of drivers' concerns, he sees the benefits of installing cameras.

Participants also discussed advanced technology, such as autonomous trucks, and its impact on job security. Autonomous trucks, which operate without human intervention using sensors, cameras, radar, and artificial intelligence (Ayala & Mohd, 2021), represent a significant advancement in the transportation industry. They can reduce operational costs, increase efficiency, and address the driver shortage (Food Logistics, 2023). However, concerns about job displacement and the need for drivers to adapt to new roles, such as overseeing vehicle operations, remain (Goggin, 2020). The shift toward automation could reduce long-haul driving positions, requiring a reevaluation of workforce training (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Each participant had a different perspective on autonomous trucks. P1 expressed concern, "There is great concern within the industry about what will happen when autonomous trucks reach level four." P3, P4, and P5 were less concerned. P3 said, "I am not worried about that right now; it does not

affect me." P4 noted, "There will never be 100% autonomous vehicles on our roads," and P5 stated, "We have zero worry about autonomous trucking." Although each participant recognized the potential impact of autonomous trucks, they viewed it as a distant issue and did not consider it when developing retention strategies.

Alignment With the Conceptual Framework

The discussion of technology's impact on safety regulations and driver retention aligns closely with Herzberg's two-factor theory, which distinguishes between hygiene factors and motivators in job satisfaction. According to Herzberg (1959), hygiene factors, such as company policies and working conditions, can prevent dissatisfaction but do not necessarily lead to satisfaction. In this theme, technologies like ELDs and safety cameras address hygiene factors by improving safety and compliance, thereby reducing turnover and preventing dissatisfaction among drivers. These technologies enhance operational conditions and reduce safety violations, which can be seen as addressing the hygiene factors that Herzberg identifies. Conversely, motivators, such as opportunities for personal growth and recognition, were not directly addressed in this theme. However, by ensuring that safety and regulatory compliance are managed effectively, companies can create a more stable work environment, allowing for greater focus on motivational factors in future retention strategies (Herzberg, 1959; Judge & Klinger, 2008).

The theme's focus on how safety regulations and technology impact driver retention can also be related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory (1943) proposed that individuals are motivated by a hierarchy of needs, beginning with physiological needs and advancing through safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization

needs. Implementing technologies like ELDs and safety cameras primarily addresses the safety needs of drivers, which is the second level in Maslow's hierarchy. By improving safety conditions and reducing the risk of accidents, these technologies help meet drivers' safety needs, creating a more secure and stable work environment. Technology, in turn, can contribute to fulfilling higher-level needs, such as social belonging and esteem, by fostering a supportive and well-regulated work environment. The alignment with Maslow's theory suggests that addressing these fundamental safety needs through technology can enhance overall driver satisfaction and retention (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Maslow, 1943). Owners of small trucking companies should consider improving or implementing technology to improve safety conditions and as a strategy to retain drivers.

Alignment With the Literature

The findings regarding safety and technology align with both previous and current research. LeMay et al. (2013) emphasized that technology streamlines processes offers training opportunities, and creates platforms for drivers to express concerns and seek support. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2022) noted that technology has significantly improved the trucking industry by providing real-time data, enhancing efficiency and safety. Participants P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 unanimously agreed that effective communication is crucial for improving safety. However, they also highlighted the need for further measures, particularly technology integration, to prevent safety violations. This approach not only enhances safety but also aids in reducing turnover, thereby helping owners retain their drivers.

Supporting this view, a 2022 report by the FMCSA revealed that approximately 15% of truck drivers are terminated annually due to safety violations. This statistic underscores significant challenges in the trucking industry regarding adherence to safety regulations, potentially pointing to gaps in training or enforcement. Addressing these issues could reduce turnover and enhance safety for small trucking companies.

Theme 5: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Trucking Industry

While discussing technology and its impact on driver retention, participants highlighted another theme: the effect of COVID-19. COVID-19, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, emerged in late 2019, leading to a global pandemic that significantly impacted the United States in early 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). The pandemic caused widespread health, economic, and social disruptions across the country, with profound consequences for various sectors (World Health Organization, 2020). In the transportation industry, COVID-19 severely affected operations. Travel restrictions and lockdowns reduced demand for certain types of transport, while logistics services experienced a surge in demand (Rodrigue & Notteboom, 2020). Small trucking companies faced unique challenges during the pandemic, including reduced freight volumes, increased safety regulations, and driver shortages, which resulted in significant financial strain (Covington, 2021). By April 2020, the trucking industry saw a substantial disruption in employment, with over 88,000 truck drivers losing their jobs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Participants P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 noted that the pandemic had positive and negative impacts. Initially, they experienced a downturn; however, the market eventually corrected itself. P1 remarked,

In March, we began to experience a significant downturn in the trucking economy; our drivers felt it most because the work became less predictable. It was more of a roller coaster ride. We had good and bad weeks, affecting their paychecks and ability to support their families.

Contrary to Covington's research, these small trucking company owners did not struggle with freight volumes. P1 explained, "The pandemic did not change much from a trucking standpoint; volumes were greater because people were home and buying more. There was a lot more work, and pay rates were better." Similarly, P3 stated, "The pandemic did not bother my company much," and P4 noted, "COVID was probably one of our biggest years in production." P5 added, "Our chemical business took off during the pandemic." P1 even asserted, "We did not lose any drivers." To understand this statement further, I asked P1, "What did your company do to keep drivers on the road?" P1 responded, "We took every precaution we could." When asked the same question, P4 mentioned, "We provided all our drivers with equipment to sanitize their trucks daily and masks for all our drivers."

While the pandemic did not harm these participants' trucking companies, the post-pandemic period emerged as problematic for each participant. P1 identified the issue as "the shipping community," further explaining, "We had to find customers willing to pay for the services so that we could compensate our drivers appropriately." Pay remains a critical factor in driver retention, with approximately 40% of truck drivers leaving their companies due to dissatisfaction with compensation (National Transportation Institute, 2023). In 2023, the median annual pay for truckload drivers was \$76,420, reflecting a

10% increase from 2021 despite a downturn in the freight market. This increase underscores the high demand for qualified drivers (American Trucking Associations, 2023). Although the participants were not significantly affected during the COVID-19 pandemic, they encountered challenges afterward, particularly with getting customers to maintain the same payment rates they had during the pandemic. Despite not losing any drivers during COVID, they struggled to retain them post-pandemic due to customers unwilling to pay previous rates. Consequently, drivers were dissatisfied, and the participants in this research were also unhappy because they could not pay their drivers as desired. This research found that while fair pay is important, respect from leadership is even more essential to drivers. However, owners understood that respect alone doesn't pay the bills or feed drivers' families.

Alignment With the Conceptual Framework

The impact of COVID-19 on driver retention can be analyzed through the lens of Herzberg's two-factor theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Hygiene factors, such as salary and job security, are crucial in preventing job dissatisfaction but do not necessarily contribute to job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). During the pandemic, increased freight volumes and enhanced pay addressed drivers' basic needs, effectively mitigating dissatisfaction (P1, as cited in the study). However, the subsequent challenges in maintaining competitive pay rates post-pandemic underscore the significance of hygiene factors in job satisfaction. Herzberg's theory also underscores the importance of motivators, such as recognition and opportunities for advancement, in enhancing job satisfaction. The experiences reported by participants indicate that while hygiene factors

were sufficiently managed during the pandemic, the lack of postpandemic adjustments and recognition led to heightened dissatisfaction. This alignment with Herzberg's theory highlights the necessity for small trucking company owners to address both hygiene factors and motivators to improve driver retention.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a framework for understanding how the shifting focus from basic to higher-order needs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic influenced driver retention in small trucking companies. (Maslow, 1943) posited that individuals are motivated by a progression of needs, from physiological necessities to self-actualization. During the pandemic, small trucking companies successfully addressed drivers' physiological needs by providing job security and competitive pay rates, which are fundamental for meeting basic survival and safety needs. As the pandemic evolved, the focus shifted towards higher-order needs, including esteem and self-actualization. The postpandemic period revealed that while basic needs were initially met, challenges in sustaining compensation and overall job satisfaction became more pronounced. Drivers' dissatisfaction with reduced post-pandemic pay rates reflects unmet esteem needs, such as recognition and respect, which are vital for long-term motivation and retention. Thus, small trucking company owners must not only address fundamental needs but also focus on fulfilling higher order needs to ensure sustained driver satisfaction and retention.

Alignment With the Literature

Economic factors are crucial when developing retention strategies for truck drivers. Previous research underscores the importance of economic considerations in reducing driver stress and turnover. Belzer (2018) emphasized that competitive pay is

critical to retention strategies. Morrison and Gifford (2019) highlighted the significant impact of fuel price fluctuations, labor cost changes, and market demand variations on driver satisfaction. High fuel costs and volatile market conditions can strain company resources and negatively affect driver retention. This research focused on a recent economic factor: COVID-19. The pandemic introduced unique challenges, further influencing driver retention in ways that extend beyond traditional economic factors. Pfeffer (2015) argued that solid leadership—characterized by transparency, effective communication, and a clear vision—is essential for organizational resilience during economic crises. In line with this, my study found that communication emerged as a crucial element in retaining truck drivers during the pandemic. Effective communication and leadership were pivotal in managing driver satisfaction and retention during this unprecedented time.

Comparing these findings with prepandemic research reveals continuities and new insights into how economic and leadership factors impact driver retention. This research aligns with existing literature and contributes to a new understanding of the effects of a global crisis on driver retention. This study provides actionable strategies for trucking companies to enhance driver retention in current and future economic conditions.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

This research looked at how small trucking company owners can keep their truck drivers by focusing on the role of owners in improving working conditions and overall company performance. High turnover rates in the trucking industry are a significant problem, and it is up to company leaders to create strategies that help drivers stay with their companies.

According to Wygal et al. (2021), many drivers leave because of low pay, long hours, and the challenging nature of the job. Schuster et al. (2023) highlighted how necessary driver retention is, noting that trucking is responsible for moving 72.5% of freight in the United States. Small trucking company owners need to act quickly to fix these problems. This study found several strategies that business owners can use to lower turnover and improve their workplaces. Strong communication, focusing on the needs of employees, and regularly asking for feedback through surveys are some of the critical steps that can make drivers happier. For example, P4 explained that holding surveys gives employees a voice, helping the company understand their needs. Macey and Schneider (2008) agreed that listening to employees can improve job satisfaction. P2 also mentioned that weekly meetings between drivers, dispatchers, and managers improved communication, relationships, and overall job happiness. As Meyer et al. (2012) suggested, good communication helps employees feel more engaged and connected to the company. Owners in small trucking companies are responsible for creating a work environment that supports their drivers, both physically and mentally.

By promoting open communication and regularly checking in on employee needs, leaders can help drivers feel valued and supported. This can increase the likelihood that drivers stay with the company, reducing turnover and improving the company's performance. Additionally, offering flexible work hours and opportunities for drivers to learn new skills can help build loyalty and make employees more satisfied with their jobs. These steps show drivers that they are more than just employees—they are part of a company that values their well-being. Leaders should realize that improving the work

environment is not just about offering better pay. It is about taking care of employees as a whole, considering both their work and personal lives. The trucking industry operates in a challenging environment, so owners must constantly improve how they run their small trucking companies. Small trucking companies can boost driver retention and run their businesses more effectively by taking responsibility for their drivers' well-being and applying the lessons from this research. In the end, the success of small trucking companies depends on how healthy owners understand and meet the needs of their drivers, helping both the drivers and the company grow and succeed.

Implications for Social Change

Understanding the strategies owners of small trucking companies use to retain truck drivers is vital for the survival of a new owner or current owner of a small trucking company. According to recent studies, small trucking companies face a high failure rate, with about 20% failing within the first year and 50% by the fifth year (Wang et al., 2022). Shuster et al. (2023) revealed in their research that the number of unfilled truck driver positions has increased to 80,000 in 2021; if this continues, it will be 160,000 by 2030. This research provides small trucking companies with the experience of owners who started from the bottom and established a successful trucking company, increasing job satisfaction, revenue, employee of choice reputation, successful way to retain drivers, and competitiveness amongst their peers and larger companies. A well-established trucking company contributes significantly to the economy by providing stability and fostering economic growth. Timely deliveries ensure that shippers remain satisfied, which effectively meets public demand. Although small trucking companies may not have the

scale of larger firms, they play a crucial role in maintaining supply chain flexibility and regional connectivity. These smaller firms often serve niche markets and provide essential services that might not be viable for larger companies, thus supporting local economies and contributing to overall economic resilience.

This study provides the trucking industry with valuable retention strategies for reducing truck driver turnover. The experienced owners in this research have developed strategies that were effective in helping them sustain their operations, so they provided critical insight for both current and new owners. Understanding the factors influencing driver retention enables small trucking companies to enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover. Despite their smaller scale, small trucking companies are vital to the trucking industry and the American economy. The essential role of trucks in economic stability and daily life, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the importance of adopting these proven retention strategies. By doing so, small trucking company owners can sustain their operations and contribute to the broader economic infrastructure supporting U.S. families.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this research was to explore retention strategies that owners of small trucking companies use to sustain their operations. The data analysis process yielded findings that directly suggest targeted actions or reveal clear pathways for enhancing practices. However, certain limitations can impact the study's findings' reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study. These limitations include the potential unreliability of participant data and researcher bias. Trusting the data received

from participants is problematic as it depends on their accuracy and honesty, which may affect the overall validity and generalizability. Research bias stems from personal interest in the logistics industry and may also skew the study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

To address these limitations and enhance future research, it is recommended that future studies focus on gaining insight from truck drivers themselves. Understanding their perspectives on job satisfaction and their feelings towards their roles will provide a deeper insight into effective retention strategies from the driver's viewpoint. Expanding the sample size and including a more diverse population can help mitigate limitations related to sample size and provide a more comprehensive understanding of retention strategies across different contexts. Additionally, adopting a quantitative approach, such as conducting surveys using a Likert scale, could enable researchers to examine causal relationships among variables related to retention strategies. This method can improve the generalization of findings and identify specific factors influencing retention.

Conclusion

This research focused on retention strategies for small trucking companies. Through a detailed analysis of data collected from interviews, five key themes emerged: servant leadership for driver retention, compensation and scheduling, safety regulations, technology impact, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis revealed that servant leadership, characterized by supportive and empowering management, significantly enhances driver retention. Adequate compensation and flexible scheduling also play crucial roles in retaining drivers by addressing their financial and personal needs. Safety

regulations were found to have a complex impact, with stringent rules sometimes contributing to job dissatisfaction, while technology advancements and the COVID-19 pandemic have further complicated the industry dynamics.

In summary, small trucking companies that implement servant leadership practices, offer competitive compensation, communicate safety regulations to drivers, and adapt technological changes will likely see improved driver retention. Addressing these factors holistically can mitigate the negative impacts of industry challenges and contribute to a more stable and effective workforce. To retain drivers and maintain a competitive edge, small trucking companies must adopt comprehensive strategies that encompass supportive leadership, fair compensation, and adaptability to industry regulations and technological advancements.

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Appendix A: Invitation Template for Email, Social Media, and Flyer Formats

Tips for email invitations
Only the yellow-highlighted sections can be modified.
Remove directions in red font before using.

:

- *No attachments (people can be wary of attachments if they don't know you)*
- *Send individually because emails sent in large batches get flagged as junk*
- *Some organizations flag outsiders' batch emails as junk so consider asking a person within the organization to forward the invitation on your behalf (they just cannot pressure their subordinates to volunteer)*
- *Include key info in subject line or headline. Examples:*
 - *20 min interview on HR leadership, \$10 Amazon gift card (ends June 30)*
 - *Interviewing Logistics Managers (1 hr) for next 2 weeks, \$20 gift card*
- *Ensure that any links are from a familiar website where your history can be verified like Twitter or LinkedIn so they don't look like a virus/scam*
- *You can encourage the recipient to forward the invitation to others who might qualify, though be sure to add your email address so it is clear to others how to contact you.*

Invitation text:

There is a new study about retention strategies for small trucking companies that could help business leaders better understand different strategies that they can implement to retain drivers and sustain their operations. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences in developing and implementing successful retention strategies.

About the study:

- One 30-60 minute phone interview that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- You would receive a \$10 Visa gift card as a thank you
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Business leader
- Currently the owner of a small trucking company with 2-10 trucks.
- Operating within the southeast region.
- Successfully managed truck driver retention for at least 5 years.
- Must be actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the trucking company.
- Must demonstrate a willingness to share detailed insights and experiences regarding their retention strategies.
-

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Dariell Cooper Jr, a DBA student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during [you will provide the month/timeframe but don't fill this in until you have proposal/IRB approval and are ready to distribute invitations].

Please reach out [insert contact details] to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

Appendix B: Sample Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	What you will say—script
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee</p>	<p>Script</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thank you for making time to meet with me. Is now still a good time? The interview should take about 45-60 minutes. ● Do you need to take care of anything before we begin? ● Let's review the participant consent letter I sent you (Date). ● Let's start by reviewing the background of my research. ● The interview will have open-ended questions related to my study topic. ● You can ask to stop the interview at any time for any reason. ● There will be a \$10 Visa gift card for participating in my study.

-
- I won't use your name or any information that could identify you in my research to protect your privacy.
 - Original files will be securely stored and destroyed after 5 years.
 - Are you still okay with the information and consent form, and do you want to proceed with the interview?
 - I'll be audio recording the interview for transcription. Is that okay?
 - I'll also take handwritten notes during the interview.
 - Before publishing the study results, I'll let you review my interpretations of your responses for accuracy.
 - Are you ready to begin? (Start audio recording devices).

-
- Start with an Ice Breaker
 - Watch for nonverbal queues

Example:

-
- Paraphrase as needed
 - Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth
1. What strategies have you implemented to enhance driver retention within your organization?
 2. What specific strategies or approaches did you use to successfully retain a driver in your company in a recent situation?
 3. How do you prioritize driver retention within your overall business strategy, and what factors influence your decision-making in this area?
 4. What are the most effective methods for fostering a positive work environment and culture that encourages driver retention?
 5. How do you stay informed about the needs and concerns of your drivers? How do you incorporate this feedback into your retention strategies?
 6. What common themes or factors contribute to the loyalty and commitment of drivers who have stayed

long-term with your company? How do you use this insight to inform your retention strategies?

7. How do you adapt your retention strategies to ensure they remain relevant and impactful for your drivers, considering the evolving landscape of the trucking industry, including advancements in technology and changes in regulatory requirements?
8. How do you measure the success of your driver retention strategies, and what metrics or indicators do you find most valuable in this regard?
9. What additional information on driver retention would you like to add that we have not discussed?

Wrap up interview thanking participant

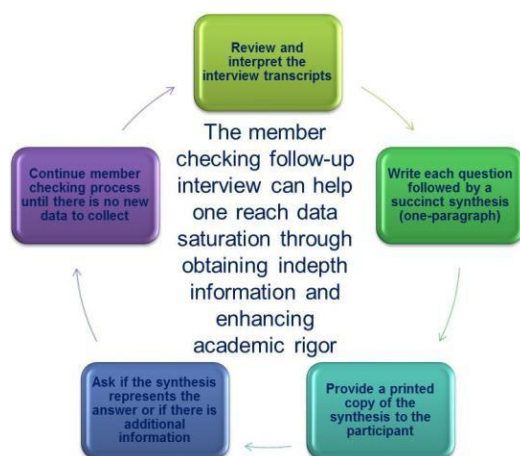
Script Thank you once more for sharing your experience with me today. Our discussion has

been very informative and will greatly benefit my research.

Schedule follow-up member checking interview

Script As mentioned before, I will provide you with a summary of my understanding of your interview responses. I will prepare this summary by (mention the time frame) and email it to you for your review. This is to ensure that I have understood your responses accurately. Could you please confirm your email address?.

Follow-up Member Checking Interview



Graphic by Gene E. Fusch, Ph.D. not needed in proposal or study—just a visual reminder during proposal stage when creating interview protocol.

Introduce follow-up
interview and set the stage

Script You will receive the interview summary by (Date). I expect it will take you 15-30 minutes to review. Please let me know within a week of receiving if you agree with my interpretation, if there are revisions needed, or if you want to add anything.

After I get your feedback on the summary, I might request a follow interview. This call should be no longer than 30 minutes. Would you be will to do this?

Share a copy of the	Script XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
succinct synthesis for each individual question.	1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed
Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found— note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval.	2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed 3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed 4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed 5. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed
Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask: Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add?	