3-19-2025

# Strategies to Attract and Retain Employees in Full-Service Chain Restaurants

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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MBA, Florida Institute of Technology, 1991

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Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The inability of full-service chain restaurant managers to attract and retain employees leads to significant understaffing. The shortage raises concerns about their capacity to meet consumer demand and maintain profitability. This qualitative pragmatic inquiry, grounded in transformational leadership theory, explored strategies restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees. The participants were six full-service chain restaurant managers in the locales of Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. of the United States, who had successfully used their strategies to attract and retain employees. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and reviewing publicly available restaurant websites. Using thematic analysis, four themes were identified: (a) attraction and retention strategies, (b) incentives, (c) assessment of strategies, and (d) training and development. A key recommendation was for restaurant managers to adopt and implement attraction and retention strategies focusing on the individual needs of the employee's development and growth. The implications for positive social change include restaurants providing excellent services to communities, hiring individuals in the community, and building partnerships with community organizations.

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## Dedication

I dedicate my study to God Almighty, my parents, my daughters, and the two God-fearing men God placed in my life. To my parents, Estelle M. Kittrell and Charles H. Kittrell, who sacrificed, preserved, and postponed their dreams to raise my siblings and me. To my father, Charles Henry Kittrell, who instilled in me the love to serve others. My husband, James Leon Johnson, a committed husband and father and a true servant of God, family, and community. To our daughters, Schiavone Rena Simmons and Sharonda Darnice Johnson-Davis, our greatest blessings and greatest achievements. May our daughters continue to be encouraged by our accomplishments and how we have lived.

Acknowledgments

With great appreciation for the excellence and reverence of God Almighty, Jesus Christ, my Savior, and the Holy Spirit, my counselor and comforter, thank you for your Blessings of encouragement, covering, and guidance during this doctoral journal to fulfill your plans for me. I am thankful for my beautiful and mature daughters, Schiavone Rena Simmons and Sharonda Darnice Johnson-Davis, who have provided the space for this time in my life. To my sister, Ellen Rose Farrow, and my Sisters-in-Christ Darlene Campbell and Gedra Butler, I thank you for your prayers and encouragement. To my brother, James Harold Kittrell, thank you for always helping me in my time of need. To my Sons and Daughter-in-Christ, David Simmons, Edmund Fleet, Dr. John Reaves, Reverend Dr. Kendrick Curry, and Reverend Karen Curry, thank you for your advice, caring, and support. Lastly, I thank committee members Dr. Jill Murray, Dr. Robert Banasik, and Dr. Denise Land for their guidance, mentorship, and integral roles in this challenging and rewarding journey.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

# Section 1: Foundation of the Project

## Background of the Problem

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) reported that full-service restaurants are one of the four U.S. food services industry subsectors. Restaurant managers have experienced understaffing due to changes in the industry. These changes include the economic recession of 2008 (Auberry et al., 2019) and the March 2020 to March 2022 period of the COVID-19 pandemic (National Restaurant Association Research Group, 2022). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024a) reported that the number of quits for accommodations and food services exceeded the annual rate for other industries. Although the number of job openings or unfilled positions was higher in other industries, there was a need to attract, hire, and retain 941,000 individuals for the accommodations and food services industries (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024b, Table A). Although understaffing in the restaurant industry occurred during the economic recession of 2008 and the two-year period of the COVID-19 pandemic, understaffing in the restaurant industry remained after COVID-19. The post-pandemic data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024a) reported that the restaurant industry's understaffing exceeded other U.S. industries. Therefore, the post-pandemic understaffing level in the restaurant industry necessitated the business problem focus and the project purpose.

## Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some full-service chain restaurant managers lack strategies to attract and retain employees. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study was to explore strategies that full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees. The population for the study consisted of full-service chain restaurant managers in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. The sample consisted of six such managers in these locales with 5 years of management experience, who had successfully attracted employees and maintained staffing levels for 2 years. The participants aligned with the purpose of the study, which was to explore strategies that restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees. Purposeful sampling was used for the study. Data saturation was reached after interviewing six participants. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and documentation on publicly available restaurant websites. The conceptual framework chosen for this study was transformational leadership theory developed by Burns and extended by Bass (see Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership theory was the lens through which I explored restaurant managers' strategies to attract and retain employees.

## Research Question

The overarching research question was: What strategies do full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees?

## Assumptions and Limitations

### Assumptions

The three assumptions underlying a study relate to ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Saunders et al., 2016). Epistemological assumptions are unproven circumstances a researcher believes are true and used to determine the research methodology and design (Saunders et al., 2016). My first assumption was that managers of full-service chain restaurants with 5 years of management experience who had successfully attracted employees and retained staffing levels for 2 years had the experience needed to provide information relevant to answering the research question. My second assumption was that the participants would provide honest responses during the interviews.

### Limitations

Limitations are potential threats to the validity of a researcher's study outside the researcher's control (Ellis & Levy, 2009). The limitations of this study were that participants (a) could refuse to answer questions during the interview process, (b) could withdraw from the study at any time, and (c) may not have truthfully responded to interview questions.

## Transition

In Section 1, I provided the study's foundation and the background of the problem related to the attraction and retention of employees in the restaurant industry. The purpose of the study was to explore strategies for attracting and retaining restaurant employees. The specific business problem is that some full-service chain restaurant managers lack strategies with which to attract and retain employees. The specific population studied and criteria for participation in the study addressed the overarching research question of the study: What strategies do full-service chain-restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees? Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., were the geographic locations studied. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit the sample and reach data saturation. The conceptual framework derived from transformational leadership theory was the lens through which I explored strategies for attracting and retaining restaurant employees. The overarching research question aligned with the specific business problem and the purpose of the study. I identified the assumptions used to determine the study’s research methodology and design, and I addressed the study's limitations, which could have threatened the reliability and validity of the research. I used qualitative research methods and a pragmatic inquiry design.

In Section 2, I review the professional literature, analyze its application to the applied business problem and conceptual framework, and conclude with a summary and key points. In Section 3, I discuss how I conducted the study, including my role as the research instrument, ethics, the nature of the study, data collection, the interview questions, data analysis, and the means used to establish the reliability and validity of the research. In Section 4, I summarize the study and its findings, list the overarching research question, identify themes, analyze and discuss findings as they relate to the themes, and identify how the findings confirm, disconfirm, and extend knowledge in the discipline through comparison with peer-reviewed literature. I tie the findings to the conceptual framework and application to professional practice, confirming or refuting the findings reported in existing literature. I address implications for social change, provide recommendations, discuss research limitations, describe the dissemination of the research, and reflect on my research experience.

# Section 2: The Literature Review

## A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This literature review is the critical analysis of the various professional and academic literature in seminal books, peer-reviewed journals, and government sources for the purpose of my qualitative pragmatic inquiry study to explore strategies that full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees. Exploring potential attraction and retention strategies requires understanding the restaurant industry and its challenges. Through reviewing various government sources and peer-reviewed journal articles, I obtained knowledge of the phenomenon in the restaurant industry, the roles of managers, and the factors that contribute to attracting employees, minimizing employee turnover intentions and turnover and retaining employees. The literature review begins with the applied business problem, conceptual framework, and associated literature, followed by a discussion of the opposition to transformational leadership theory and complementing and contrasting discussions of Herzberg's two-factor motivation theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs motivational theory. The emerging themes from the literature review are attraction, retention, turnover intentions, turnover, turnover avoidance, organizational commitment, and supervisory support. The literature review will conclude with a summary and key points.

I took a five-step strategy approach to search for academic literature. The first step was to understand the phenomenon in the industry. The second step was to identify a motivational theory consistent with the main concept of attracting and retaining employees. The third step was to use Walden University Library databases:

ABI/INFORM Global, Academic Source Complete, Business Source Complete, EBSCO, Emerald, Francis Taylor, Gale, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Sage. The fourth step was to use the following terms for searching the databases: *restaurant industry*, *full-service restaurants*, *employee retention*, *hospitality industry*, *tourism*, *retention*, *retention strategies*, *recognition*, *employee attitudes*, *employee satisfaction*, *employee loyalty*, *turnover, voluntary turnover, attract*, *COVID-19*, *leadership practices*, *ethical leadership theory, conservation of resources theory, servant leadership theory, transformational leadership*, *idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, Burns (1978)*, *Bass (1985)*, *Herzberg (1959)*, *Maslow (1954)*, *waiters*, and *waitresses*. As the fifth and continuous step, I reviewed and refined the search terms to expand upon the literature for strategies to attract and retain employees and to keep the literature current. I identified 162 sources, from which I drew on 94 sources: 85 peer-reviewed articles, one non-peer-reviewed article, four seminal works and books, and four government sources. This study includes 86 articles, with 85 (98.83%) confirmed as peer-reviewed using Ulrich's Global Series Directory and the home pages of journals; 88 of the 89 peer-reviewed articles and government sources (98.87%) were published between 2021 and 2025.

## Application to the Applied Business Problem

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore strategies that full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024a) reported that the number of quits for accommodations and food services exceeded the annual rate for other industries. Although the number of job openings or unfilled positions was higher in other industries, there was a need to attract, hire, and retain 941,000 individuals for the accommodations and food services industries (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024b, Table A). While this statistical information contains the staffing levels for the accommodations and food service industry and other industries in the U.S., the understaffing in the accommodations and food services industries exceeded all other industries in the U.S. post-COVID-19 pandemic. A brief overview of external and internal factors provides an understanding of some of the challenges in the restaurant industry.

### *External and Internal Factors*

External and internal factors are relevant to restaurant managers' ability to attract and retain employees in the industry. These factors include but are not limited to federal and state labor laws regarding work hours and compensation, intimidation, and violence in the workplace, recruitment methods, diversity, equity, inclusion, training and internships, turnover intentions, turnover, organizational commitment, and supervisory support. Based on state and federal labor laws, restaurant managers determine the number of workers they can afford to employ (Tang et al., 2022). The compensation method for accommodation and food service workers involves a subminimum wage plus tips. In contrast, those in other service industries receive minimum wage plus tips. Because of subminimum wage plus tips commonly applicable to frontline restaurant workers, restaurant managers compete with other service industries that compensate employees based on minimum wage plus tips (Allegretto, 2023). Tang et al. (2022) stated that customers may tip based on their concern about a server's low hourly income, the perceived quality of service provided, or guilt. Managers compete to attract and retain staffing levels partly due to the subminimum wage for adults and compensation mandates and working hour restrictions for teenagers. Further, because teenagers seek higher-paying jobs, they are attracted to other service industries that pay full wages plus tips (Allegretto, 2023; Owens, 2022). Federal and state labor laws and compensation regulations are external concerns beyond the organization's control. The restaurant manager should develop strategies to comply with these concerns and creative methods for attracting and retaining employees. Internal to the organization are safety concerns due to intimidation and violence in the workplace.

Restaurant managers should provide safe work environments. Within restaurants, managers may have to mitigate intimidation and violence in the workplace. Yanson et al. (2022) stated that younger workers versus older workers cause intimidation and violence in the workplace. Because employees seek job satisfaction, employees will not tolerate intimidation, violence, lack of family-friendly policies, or lack of supervisory support (Gordon & Parikh, 2021; Yaday & Sharma, 2023). Macaes and Roman-Portas (2022) stated that the manager could achieve satisfaction and employee commitment through open communication in the workplace. Intimidation and violence in the workplace could be mitigated by implementing zero-tolerance policies (Yanson et al., 2022).

Managers should mitigate or eliminate negative internal working conditions to attract and retain employees. While there is limited control over external federal and state laws regarding work schedules and compensation, restaurants must comply, implement policies and guidelines, and communicate the requirements to their employees. Due to work schedules, compensation, and the identification of teenagers as potential perpetrators of intimidation and violence, restaurant managers are challenged to attract and retain this segment of the workforce. However, beyond the concerns of the external and internal issues discussed regarding application to the applied business problem of this research project, managers address other issues and strategies in the workforce for attracting and retaining employees.

***Transformational Leadership for Attracting and Retaining Employees***

Leaders need effective leadership strategies to attract and retain employees. Effective leadership strategies potentially promote attraction to the industry (Yaday & Sharma, 2023). However, attraction to the industry should be followed by strategies to retain employees through job satisfaction. Job satisfaction mitigates turnover intentions and turnover (Zhang et al., 2021). Yaday and Sharma (2023) and Zhang et al. (2021) contended that successful attraction and retention strategies promote attraction to the industry, job satisfaction, and retention. The recruitment process is the first introduction of the organization to applicants.

Organizations use various methods to attract potential employees. Pfiffelmann et al. (2023) stated that photographs appeal to some potential employees, while other applicants have concerns about privacy invasion, ploys without positive employment outcomes, fictitious websites, and personal bias based on race, ethnicity, and gender. Likewise, the study on using photographs for job applicants in China to choose female restaurant servers was perceived as reinforcing the stereotype of women's traditional roles (Basnyat et al., 2021). Rather than using websites to build a pool of potential applicants, Lee et al. (2023) stated that a more realistic method would be to use websites to determine what draws individuals to the hospitality industry. Hult et al. (2023) stated that due to the historically low status of restaurant workers, some recruiters seek individuals who will adapt themselves to the profile of the organization and customer expectations commit to the organization, and receive a low return for their commitment. To avoid the potential negativity associated with photographs, collecting a pool of resumes of individuals for positions not available, and using deceptive advertising messaging designed to attract a diverse talent pool could be more productive.

Messaging could be a more effective way of recruiting particular groups of individuals and determining their work preferences. Lee et al. (2023) and Tews et al. (2023) stated that applicants seek various conditions of employment and respond to various types of recruiting messages. Lee et al. stated that when considering determinants of job satisfaction using the effects of compensation systems, work-life balance, advancement opportunities, and company culture on job satisfaction, experienced restaurant workers and former restaurant workers are potentially attracted to restaurants that offer work-life balance and positive company culture, and experienced restaurant workers are attracted to increased compensation and advancement opportunities. Tews et al. stated that employees seek upward mobility, flexible work schedules, a congenial atmosphere, competitive compensation, and appeal to different message types depending on their employment status and interest. Further, while most are attracted to compensation messaging, more males are attracted to advancement opportunities than females (Tews et al., 2023). It is important for leaders to use effective and honest methods for recruiting. Because advertising and recruiting are the first introductions of the organization to potential applicants, leaders should know how to attract a diverse audience and be knowledgeable of the market and what applicants are seeking. Another important part of the recruitment process and key to attracting and retaining employees is selecting the right individuals.

Twaissi et al. (2022) and Zhijie et al. (2022) stated that there are potential positives and negatives of hiring polychronic individuals. Polychronic individuals desire to multitask and may be suitable for positions in the fast-paced, multitasking hospitality industry (Twaissi et al., 2022). Contrary to Twaissi et al., Zhijie et al. (2022) stated that a polychronic worker in a self-management role may miscalculate the time needed to complete a task, prioritize other tasks over the task at hand, and not work within the manager's priorities. Further, hiring polychromic individuals may contribute to issues with time management, the perspective of the employee versus the perspective of the manager, and procrastination in the workplace (Zhijie et al., 2022). The concerns of Zhijie et al. regarding the self-management role of polychronic workers could be resolved by ensuring clear communication and adhering to the established recruitment and selection protocols to avoid not hiring the right persons and employee turnover (see Zhang et al., 2021)

Although polychronic individuals bring multitasking skills, the manager should ensure that roles and responsibilities are well-defined to achieve team cohesiveness in addressing priorities. The ability of polychronic individuals to multitask should not take priority over a manager's role in setting deadlines and schedules and working for the overall good of the organization. The work environment is more than the physical building or office space. In addition to recruitment methods, individuals are attracted to organizations with diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environments.

Leaders should understand what employees seek. Employees seek work environments that are diverse, fair, honest, and inclusive (Gonzalez-Gonzalez et al., 2021; Lins de Morales et al., 2024; Region-Sebest et al., 2022; Yasir & Javed, 2024). Because managers realize the importance of employer diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, organizational leaders have moved from dedicated diversity, equity, and inclusion departments to incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion in their organizational missions and policies (Region-Sebest et al., 2022). Leaders build pools of talented individuals consisting of various ages, ethnicities, and social and political viewpoints. Managers and employees should display sound ethics when dealing with each other and support employees' well-being through ethically sound practices to avoid contributing to job stress and job dissatisfaction (Yasir & Javed, 2024). Lins de Morales et al. (2024) stated that combining diversity, equity, and inclusion brings together the diversity of employees, cultures, and languages and introduces creativity and innovation by developing new entrees for restaurant menus. As frontline employees grow and commit to their organizations, they can potentially make suggestions to better their organizations because they have increasing contact with customers (Gonzalez-Gonzalez et al., 2021).

The implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in the workplace provides growth, opportunity, creativity, and innovation for job satisfaction. Individuals tend to be attracted to and remain in organizations that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive, and promote the well-being of their employees. Leaders provide for the well-being, development, and growth of their employees through various training in the workplace and internship programs.

Leaders use training, workplace learning, knowledge sharing, and internship programs to attract individuals to the hospitality industry (Ajambo et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2024; Collins & Pearlman, 2023). Knowledge and knowledge sharing are significant factors in enhancing an organization because knowledge sharing builds and increases the capabilities of individual employees and transmits internal expertise and technical skills throughout the organization. Through organizational learning, leaders manifest collective wisdom regarding performance and innovation (Cheng et al., 2024). Teachers and trainers in the hospitality industry recognize the need for one-on-one collaborations to build and strengthen people skills for successful learning and performance (Ajambo et al., 2024). Collins and Pearlman (2023) stated that individuals who participate in internships demonstrate an interest in and talent for the restaurant industry. Interns desire (a) the ability to innovate, (b) advancement opportunities, (c) recognition of their work, (d) steady employment, and (e) good working environments.

The opportunity for future professional growth and development through organizational training is an excellent incentive for employee attraction and retention. Training and development of the individual potentially transmit to the betterment of the individual towards accomplishing the overall goals of the organization (see Bass, 1985). Although training and professional development are factors that contribute to attraction and retention, organizational commitment and supervisory support are important factors for deterring employee turnover intentions, voluntary turnover, and increasing retention.

***Role of Organizational Commitment and Supervisory Support for Retention***

Employees desire employment in supportive organizations. Wei (2023) and Eviana et al. (2022) stated talented employees might stay in an organization based on the perceived organizational commitment of management, which benefits the leader and employees. Existing and future employees welcome growth, training, and opportunities, and leaders benefit from promoting organizational support and fostering employee engagement by decreasing turnover intentions and voluntary turnover. Employers demonstrate organizational commitment and supervisory support by offering reasonable compensation and benefits, identifying the right individuals for open positions, and maintaining competent staffing (Eviana et al., 2022). Employees desire supervisory support, a family-friendly atmosphere, job autonomy, and opportunities to gain experience and achieve advancement (Gordon & Parikh, 2021). Leaders provide organizational commitment by providing compensation, training, growth, a family-friendly atmosphere, and job autonomy. Employees look to their organizations and supervisors to treat them fairly.

Employer and supervisory relationships are relevant to organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Albashiti et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2022; Schwepker & Dimitriou, 2023). Employees make decisions to stay or leave based on their perceptions of the fairness of treatment by supervisors and the presence of family-supportive behaviors among managers (Hwang et al., 2022). Self-centered, controlling, and abusive supervisors demonstrate unacceptable behavior in the workplace and a lack of support. Further, verbal and nonverbal abuse by leaders makes the work environment unfriendly and unpleasant. (Albashiti et al., 2021). Schwepker and Dimitriou (2023) noted that although supervisors may demonstrate unethical behavior due to stress, the unacceptable behavior of supervisors can result in employees (a) missing work, (b) incurring medical expenses, and (c) reducing job performance, and business leaders may have to deal with (a) decreased productivity, (b) increased insurance and legal expenses, and (c) turnover intentions. Leaders could meet employees' expectations by providing desirable working environments that promote a sense of teamwork among employees and supervisors and the development of family-friendly policies that support issues of work–home conflict (Yaday & Sharma, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021).

Treating employees unfairly potentially leads to job dissatisfaction, turnover intentions, and turnover. Positive interpersonal relationships should exist between the employee and the manager. Managers should encourage management to institute policies and procedures that promote fair treatment of their employees. While managers should have successful strategies for attracting fit and qualified employees, employees will leave environments that are not supportive. The establishment of routine procedures and effective communications are important for providing supervisory support.

Cozzio and Furlan (2023) and Macaes and Roman-Portas (2022) stated that routine procedures and communications are supportive ways to support employees. Establishing routine and innovative means of accomplishing day-to-day tasks of restaurant employees could be a supportive and innovative way to (a) save time, (b) provide group cohesion, (c) establish consistency in operations, and (d) increase the enjoyment of customers (Cozzio & Furlan, 2023). Communication is important for maintaining confidentiality, firsthand interaction, timely feedback, and transparency among leaders and employees (Macaes & Roman-Portas, 2022). Turnover decreases when organizations invest in the well-being of their employees. Although turnover may result from dismissal to reduce staffing or improper conduct, voluntary employee separations have the biggest effect on organizational human capital because when voluntary turnover occurs, individuals on the same level will follow and quit (Sajjadiani et al., 2023). The establishment of routine procedures and communications can be effective for mitigating turnover.

Due to the fact that other employees will follow the actions of employees who voluntarily separate from the organization, voluntary turnover has the most significant effect on organizations. To mitigate turnover, organizations should invest in the development and implementation of strategies and policies that promote organizational commitment and management support (see Albashiti et al., 2021; Eviana et al., 2022; Gordon & Parikh, 2021; Hwang et al., 2022; Schwepker & Dimitriou, 2023; Wei, 2023).

## Conceptual Framework

In addressing the conceptual framework, I provide an extended discussion of transformational leadership based on the literature review and additional research. Theories that complement and contrast transformational leadership theory are addressed by comparing key constructs and evidence that are empirical and supported by real-world research demonstrating and supporting the effectiveness of transformational leadership for attracting and retaining employees. In concert with the four components of transformational leadership, various mediating and moderating factors directly or indirectly motivate employees. The first step in the transformational leadership process is to ensure that the individual needs of the followers are addressed.

### *Individualized Consideration*

Leaders should address the individual needs of their followers. Through individualized consideration, leaders build trust and promote personalized interactions with their followers (Khan et al., 2022). During crises, restaurant managers must address workers' individual needs regarding their health and well-being, prepare workers psychologically, and introduce employees to new skills and protocols. Further, in crisis situations, managers (a) mentor their employees, (b) show empathy, (c) communicate purpose, and (d) introduce new practices and skills, simultaneously applying individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence (Kim et al., 2021).

With individualized consideration, leaders support the varying needs specific to individuals for the betterment of their organizations. Because the needs of followers will vary, leaders must assess the individual needs of each follower. Leaders demonstrate concern for followers' well-being through mentoring, communicating purpose, and showing empathy. According to Hundley (2022) and Kim et al. (2021), assessing the followers' needs is a continuous and diverse process that includes one or more organizational stakeholders. Leaders create bonds with their followers through individualized consideration, building trust, and cohesive teams (Hundley, 2022; Kim et al., 2021). When crises or unplanned events occur, leaders must address many followers' concerns, which may include all four components of transformational leadership theory. Another role of transformational leaders is to encourage and inspire their followers.

### *Inspirational Motivation*

Leaders use different methods to inspire followers. Transformational leaders encourage, inspire, and motivate followers toward organizational goals (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Depending on the phenomenon, transformational leaders use different theories (see Farahdiba et al., 2022; Seitz & Owens, 2021; Stark et al., 2022). The results of a study using transformational leadership theory for an employee start-up in Indonesia to examine whether performance improved in a new facility indicated that followers were not inspired to improve performance based on the new facility and location (Farahdiba et al., 2022). Based on the results of a four-factor model of transformational leadership using implicit person theory for a study of 216 employees and 99 leaders in the healthcare industry to determine the relationship between transformational leadership, engagement of followers, and performance of followers, Seitz and Owens (2021) stated that followers do not transform uniformly because of the relationships among transformational leadership, follower engagement, and follower performance with inspirational motivation and idealized influence only applied to increments of implicit theorist followers. Studying the behavioral dimensions of inspirational motivation in followers using transformational leadership and leader-member exchange theory, Stark et al. (2022) conducted semistructured interviews with 27 leaders and followers. Based on the results of the study, Stark et al. stated that the effectiveness of storytelling to inspire followers depends on (a ) whether there is a need for storytelling, (b) the leaders' intentions and their followers' perceptions, and (c) whether misinterpretations may be construed as boasting by followers. Using implicit person theory and member exchange theory, the transformational leader may not effectively inspire and influence followers (see Seitz & Owens, 2021; Stark et al., 2022). Likewise, the physical aspects of a new facility in Indonesia did not motivate performance (see Farahdiba et al., 2022). Leaders should seek to inspire and motivate by promoting the well-being of their followers. Employees prefer family-friendly work environments, organizational commitment, and supervisory support (Eviana et al., 2022; Yaday & Sharma, 2023). Eviana et al. (2022) and Wei (2023) noted the importance of investing in human capital and that both leaders and employees benefit from organizational commitment and supervisory support. Through individualized consideration and inspirational motivation, followers are developed, encouraged, inspired, and supported. Intellectual stimulation fosters creativity and innovation for the overall betterment of the organization (see Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

### *Intellectual Stimulation*

Organizational leaders strive to stimulate creativity and to promote innovation. Liu et al. (2021) and Notgrass et al. (2021) stated that leaders can psychologically motivate creativity in their followers through intellectual stimulation, and creativity benefits can be obtained from the differences between leaders' and followers' risk orientations. However, based on research comprised of 172 teams of government agencies and collegiate accreditation programs, intragroup conflict may develop when the risk orientation of the follower is not consistent with the leader, and one party perceives that another party opposes their interests. Further, it is the role of the leader to manage intragroup conflict and promote team cohesiveness (Notgrass et al., 2021). The view of Notgrass et al. regarding the role of the leader in managing intragroup conflict and promoting team cohesiveness is consistent with the foundational concepts of intellectual stimulation (see Bass, 1985). Liu et al. stated that divergent thinking processes develop when individuals engage in new ways of thinking, and effective communication in training and development can facilitate team sharing and promote team cohesiveness. In addition to stimulating and promoting innovation internal to the restaurant, the leader should consider other sources for supporting and leveraging innovation.

Restaurant managers can seek, engage, and implement other means of promoting innovation. Balsarini and Lambert (2024) and Kim et al. (2021) addressed how the role of entrepreneurship, leveraging, and responding to crises and regulatory mandates can contribute to innovation. Through entrepreneurship, the innovative success in the food industry has amounted to billions of dollars. In addition to entrepreneurship, unlike independent restaurants, the franchisor and franchisee relationship of chain restaurants allows owners to leverage counsel and social capital unavailable to independent business owners (Balsarini & Lambert, 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurant managers developed and implemented innovative changes to respond to federal and state mandates for the well-being and safety of employees and customers. Further, restaurant managers revised operational procedures to deal with periods of complete shutdown, offered only take-out orders, modified streets, and sidewalks into outdoor eating facilities, and developed plans and procedures for the return of in-restaurant dining (Kim et al., 2021). A transformational leader directs the individual growth of followers toward creativity and innovation for the intellectual development of the individual towards the overall betterment and competitiveness of the organization (see Bass, 1985). The fourth component of transformational leadership theory focuses on the ability of leaders to influence employee behavior.

***Idealized Influence***

Employees respect, follow, and model the attributes of leaders. A transformational leader can use idealized influence to motivate, inspire, transcend, and influence employees. The transformational leader uses a charismatic role model (Bass, 1985). Afshari (2022) and Puni et al. (2021) stated that the leader as a role model effectively influences employee commitment and appeals to employees' personal gratification. Based on the results of a survey of 189 individuals in two manufacturing organizations in Australia and Iran, ideal influence based on the leader as a role model was more effective for accomplishing employees' commitment to the organization than specific communications. The degree to which idealized influence affected organizational commitment differed between the two countries. The variance between the two countries may be due to cultural differences (Afshari, 2022). Puni et al.(2021) stated that transformational leaders could mitigate distractions to working in the restaurant industry, such as the lack of time off for family commitments, education, and sick and vacation leave, by appealing to the personal gratification of employees to feel valued and needed. Holmes et al. (2022) stated that through transactional leadership, a leader's appeal can mitigate short-term employee commitment with work-life balance concerns, fewer hours per week, and compressed work schedules. Despite cultural differences, substantial evidence supports and substantiates the positive relationships among leadership, employee motivation, and organizational commitment (Afshari, 2022; Holmes et al., 2022; Puni et al., 2021). Leaders can use the positive effect of organizational commitment to influence followers' behavior and motivate them (Afshari, 2022).

Influencing and motivating followers is an important element of transformational leadership theory. Through the reputation and bond created with followers, the leader transforms individuals from self-interest to interest in the overall betterment of the organization (see Bass, 1985). The leader influences followers to commit to the organization by communicating the importance of the follower's role in meeting the tasks and goals of the organization. Leadership that demonstrates the followers' respect for the leader is a positive attribute for job satisfaction (see Afshari, 2022; Puni et al., 2021). Likewise, the followers' commitment to the organization mitigates voluntary turnover and turnover. By mitigating turnover, leaders increase the organization's ability to attract and retain employees. While there is support for transformational leadership theory, there is also opposition.

## Opposition to Transformational Leadership Theory

Some have opposed transformational leadership theory. Barbinta et al. (2017) and Yukl (1999) identified six major weaknesses in and objections to transformational leadership theory as developed by Burns (1978) and extended by Bass (1985). First, leaders should avoid transformational and transactional leadership styles because they rely on inspiration, intellectual stimulation, orientation development, and charisma and are charismatic, inspirational, and laissez-faire. Second, positive reward behavior is more relevant to transformational leadership than transactional leadership. Third, the intertwined relationship between charismatic leadership and transformational leadership, developed by Burns, is inconsistent with Bass's theory. Rather, Bass clearly distinguished between the two notions and labeled charismatic leadership as an essential component of transformational leadership, with charismatic leadership subordinate to transformational leadership. Bass, therefore, emphasized the ideology that leaders and their followers share a common goal and mutual objective. Fourth, a transformational leader (a) establishes long-term goals; (b) develops objectives not in the personal interests of followers; (c) conveys their interests, charisma, and beliefs to others; (d) motivates and inspires team members; (e) creates solutions and innovates; and (f) provides individual attention to team members. Fifth, Bass' concept of idealized influence and transformational leadership applied to more than just the team's success because of the concept of advancing from an individual consideration level to an intellectual stimulation level, and this escalation or development of the followers requires a mutual agreement between the leader and followers. Sixth, charismatic leaders may become self-absorbed and, unlike transformational leaders, fail to support subordinates in their quests for personal development and autonomy. Charismatic leaders often fail to encourage the personal development of their subordinates (Barbinta et al., 2017; Yukl, 1999).

## Other Leadership Theories

In addition to transformational leadership theory, I considered the two-factor motivation theory of Herzberg (1959) and Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory. Each subsection that follows discusses one of these theories, presenting the major components of the theory, contrasting it with transformational leadership theory, and discussing why I chose transformational leadership theory for my study.

### *Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation Theory*

Herzberg's (1959) two-factor motivation theory treats job satisfaction based on motivational and hygiene factors. The motivational factors are achievement, recognition of achievement, the job itself, and job security (Herzberg, 1959). Because hygiene factors are incidental or supplemental to motivation factors, workers who do not experience job satisfaction cannot obtain job satisfaction based on hygiene factors. Workers with job satisfaction and achievement rewards do not leave because of a lack of hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1959). Herzberg's work has received both support and opposition.

In a contrast and comparison of Herzberg's two-factor theory of job satisfaction using employees in the public and private sectors, Lee et al. (2023) stated that motivational factors promote job satisfaction rather than job dissatisfaction. Lee et al. also indicated that hygiene factors promote job satisfaction rather than job dissatisfaction. The three hygiene factors of company culture, management satisfaction, and work-life balance are significant to workers and positively contribute to job satisfaction. Further, the hygiene factors did not apply equally across all countries and industries (Lee et al., 2023). The findings of Lee et al. are contrary to the conclusions of Herzberg (1959). Valk and Yousif (2023) examined what motivated workers in the Dubai hospitality industry. Based on their study results, Valk and Yousif indicated that workers in the hospitality industry, according to Herzberg's two-factor theory, differed from those in hotels outside Dubai and restaurant workers in general. As noted by Lee et al., the hygiene factor of satisfaction with management contributes to job satisfaction; Valik and Yousif reported that the hygiene factor of leader quality contributed positively to motivation and job satisfaction.

I chose transformational leadership theory over Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation because transformational leadership theory has four components that transformational leaders in an organization use to motivate, develop, and transform individuals for the betterment of the individuals and the overall good of the organization (see Bass, 1985).

### *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Motivational Theory*

The hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory developed by Maslow (1954). Maslow contended that individuals have various needs and must fulfill lower-level needs before moving on to higher-level ones. At the lowest level of needs, managers deal with psychological needs and self-actualization at the highest level of needs (Maslow, 1954). Other researchers have rejected Maslow's contention that an individual must satisfy their needs sequentially—and that income is a need higher than safety, love, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Ihensekian & Joe, 2023; Rojas et al., 2023). Maslow's theory has influenced the development of priority studies and the design of economic growth and social programs (Rojas et al., 2023). Ihensekian and Joe (2023) stated that the models of Herzberg (1959) and Maslow overlap and address intrinsic and extrinsic needs that produce motivated employees and higher performance when combined. Ihensekian and Joe further stated that an organization's success depends on its manager's capacity to organize and recognize the varying needs of individuals. The focus of my study was not the development of priority studies or the design of economic growth and social programs. My study involved developing strategies for attracting and retaining employees in the restaurant industry. I did not use Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory for my study. I chose transformational leadership theory because transformational leaders simultaneously develop individuals and implement leadership skills that transform individuals for the good of the individuals and the overall good of the organization (see Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978).

**Summary of the Literature Review**

The introduction to the literature addressed the database sources, search strategies, seminal works, books, and peer-reviewed articles that support the application to the applied business problem and conceptual framework. The application to the applied business problem provides a discussion of external and internal factors that challenge the restaurant industry and continues with an in-depth discussion of transformational leadership theory for attracting and retaining employees, followed by the role of organizational commitment and supervisory support for attracting and retaining employees. There is support and opposition to transformational leadership theory as developed by Burns (1978) and extended by Bass (1985). Researchers have provided specific support for the four components of transformational leadership theory as applied in the United States, other countries, the restaurant industry, and other industries. In addressing the conceptual framework, the four components of transformational leadership theory are discussed, followed by a discussion of the opposition to transformational leadership theory and the contrasting of other theories with transformational leadership theory. After contrasting transformational leadership theory with other leadership theories and leadership styles, I chose transformational leadership theory and transformational leadership over other leadership theories and styles. Transformational leadership theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study. I used transformational leadership theory as the lens through which to explore strategies to attract and retain employees in the restaurant industry.

The literature review provides valuable insight regarding strategies for attracting and retaining employment in the restaurant industry. The attraction of employees to the restaurant industry commences at the recruitment phase and continues during the performance phase to obtain retention. The literature reviewed aligned with the research question, the study's purpose, and the nature of the study.

## Transition

Section 2 commenced with the introduction and organization of the literature review and discussion of database sources, search strategies, and the various types of seminal works, books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and government sources reviewed. A summary of the key points completed the literature review. I reviewed the literature to (a) determine whether transformational leadership theory was a viable concept with which to explore strategies for attracting and retaining employees in the restaurant industry, (b) understand national and international research supporting transformational leadership theory and transformational leadership in various cultures and industries, (c) identify support and opposition to transformational leadership theory, (d) identify and understand internal and external factors that impact job performance, (e) explore strategies for attracting and retaining employees, and (f) gain an understanding of the effectiveness of idealized influence, individual consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation for the development of individuals within an organization for the overall betterment of the organization. The conceptual framework for my study was based on transformational leadership theory. Through the lens of transformational leadership theory, I explored strategies for attracting and retaining employees in the restaurant industry.

In Section 3, I discuss how I conducted the study, including my role as the research instrument, ethics, the nature of the study, data collection, the interview questions, data analysis, and the means used to establish the reliability and validity of the research.

In Section 4, I summarize the study and its findings, list the overarching research question, identify themes, analyze and discuss findings as they relate to the themes, and identify how the findings confirmed, disconfirmed, and extend knowledge in the discipline through comparison with the existing literature review and current peer-reviewed literature. I tie the findings to the conceptual framework and application to professional practice, confirming or refuting the findings reported in existing literature. I address implications for social change, provide recommendations for further research, describe the dissemination of the research, reflect on my research experience, and provide the study's conclusion.

## Section 3: Research Project Methodology

As the researcher and the data collection instrument, I explored the phenomenon through the participants' lived professional experiences. Park and Park (2016) stated that a qualitative researcher explores a phenomenon through the lived experiences of research participants. I identified the population of interest, recruited participants, developed interview questions, collected data using semistructured interviews, analyzed the data, and reported the findings.

Using semistructured interviews for qualitative research is consistent with acceptable research practices. Mustafa (2021) stated that a researcher should (a) be considerate of each participant's schedule, (b) conduct interviews in unbiased and private settings, (c) mask the identity of each participant, (d) understand answers provided by participants, (e) pose follow-up questions for clarity, and (f) obtain ethical data using semistructured interviews. I have not been employed in the restaurant industry and do not have any relatives or associates who work in the restaurant industry as managers. My lack of association with individuals working in the restaurant industry and my lack of knowledge regarding the managerial and operational aspects of the restaurant industry minimized my personal biases.

I followed the guidelines for conducting ethical research. Bougie and Sekaran (2020) stated that ethics in research begins with researchers, ethical conduct in a study conducted within an organization pertains to the organization's participants and the researcher, and researchers should conduct research in good faith, paying attention to the results and surrendering egotistic concerns for the pursuit of research rather than self-interest.

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) set forth acceptable ethical practices and considerations for all participants in the research process. To meet these standards, I adhered to the corresponding ethical protocols throughout the development and conduct of my study. I took steps to embody the ethical consideration of study participants and their organizations with respect, goodwill, and fairness. In keeping with these ethical principles, I disclosed to potential participants the purpose of the study, the research method, the right of individuals not to participate, and potential benefits and risks, and I reviewed the institutional review board (IRB) consent form with participants to ensure they understood the requirements. I obtained informed consent from participants before conducting research and protected and preserved the confidentiality of the participants and their organizations.

A primary concern was ensuring the research was conducted ethically with respect to the participants and their organizations. Arafat (2024) defined ethics as a set of moral rules a researcher must follow throughout the research process. If a participant had withdrawn from the study, the participant would have been free to make that decision without any consequences or pressure. The participants would have been thanked for their time, and no information provided by the participants would have been included in the study. Business leaders could benefit from the information in the study regarding employee turnover, leadership skills, and leadership strategies. There was a minimal risk of exposure to a participant's or organization's identity. Before data collection began, I obtained IRB approval. I provided information regarding the study through an invitation to participate and obtained informed consent from each participant. Keeping with IRB requirements for pragmatic inquiry studies, I did not partner with institutions to gain access or introductions to participants. The IRB assigned approval number 06-17-24-1125808 for this study.

I took steps to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. Confidentiality of the participants and their organizations was protected and preserved by masking the participants and their organizations using a labeling convention, numbering participants, and identifying their locales only generally: Participants 1 and 2 were from Washington, DC, and Participants 3 and 4 were from Maryland, and Participants 5 and 6 were from Virginia. Cross-referencing of identities of the participants and their affiliated organizations occurs only in locked files accessible to me. All informed consent forms, letters of invitation, and data collected are in locked files accessible only to me. All data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion and publication of the study. Access to files on my computer is password protected, and recorded interviews, transcripts, and documentation regarding the coordination of member-checking activities will remain in my private safe for 5 years to protect the participants' confidentiality. The participants did not receive any incentives or rewards for participating in the study.

I took steps to mitigate personal and other biases. A researcher's view of the world works through one of three paradigms: (a) positivism, relying on established facts or evidence to approach a research problem; (b) interpretivism, seeing the world based on the interpretation of collected data; and (c) critical observation, considering the main role of research as fighting against inequity and helping minority groups through scientific investigation. Because researchers tend to view their research through one or more predictive ideals, I consciously strove to avoid interjecting personal biases. To mitigate biases during the study, I followed the interview protocol and ensured that the data collected were properly recorded and transcribed. The interview protocol ensured that every participant answered the same questions. During the interviews, I allowed participants to request clarifications of the questions, and I requested clarifications of their responses when necessary. For qualitative research, researchers interact with participants.

A review of a researcher's data analysis to confirm their understanding of the data collected is called *member checking*. Through member checking, a researcher provides an interactive human touch to understand the respondents' emotions and behaviors (Mwita, 2022). I conducted member-checking activities by presenting my written interpretation of the data to participants for their review and to confirm the accuracy of my understanding. I took notes, journaled day-to-day processes, and reflected on my experiences throughout the study. Keeping a record of the processes and steps of the doctoral study could help me and my colleagues in future research studies.

## Nature of the Project

I used a qualitative method for this pragmatic inquiry study. This approach was appropriate because researchers use qualitative research to explore a phenomenon (see Ozuem et al., 2022). According to Bougie and Sekaran (2020) and Saunders et al. (2016), pragmatism is a deductive approach focusing on the professional experiences of research participants and not organizations. I chose a pragmatic inquiry design because my data collection activities were based on the professional experiences of restaurant managers' open-ended responses to semistructured interviews and documentation publicly available on websites.

## Population, Sampling, and Participants

### Population and Eligibility

The population for the study consisted of full-service chain restaurant managers in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC, with 5 years of management experience who were employed as managers in full-service chain restaurants and had successfully attracted and retained employees for at least 2 years. The sample consisted of six such managers.

### Accessing Participants

I accessed participants by reviewing websites, contacting restaurant brands where I had dined to request interviews and referrals, and requesting friends to introduce me to managers and restaurants. I ensured them of the IRB guidelines for confidentiality and ensured that names and associated organizations would be masked in the study. Because managers are very busy, I established good working relationships with the participants by paying close attention to the opening and closing times of the restaurants, noting peak breakfast, lunch, and dinner times, and ensuring that I made contact between the peak meal hours. The participants were very congenial and apologized if they canceled or rescheduled. They were excited to participate and support my efforts.

Once I had contacted the potential participant, I confirmed their eligibility to participate in the study and shared verbal and written information about my study. I established working relationships with the participants by being considerate of their schedules and remaining thankful and pleasant when their schedules necessitated cancellation and rescheduling.

**Sampling Method**

I selected the sampling method and identified the qualifications for participation in the study. Saunders et al. (2016) indicated that quota, snowball, self-selection, and convenience sampling should be avoided because selecting participants without specified qualifications to participate in the study would compromise the study and potentially render the study unreliable and invalid. Purposeful sampling increases the potential for the right participants, who meet the requirements for participation, to be selected for a study (Sarfo et al., 2021; Saunders et al., 2016). I used purposeful sampling for this study.

I determined the sample size needed to reach data saturation. In a qualitative study, determining the sample size is an integral part of the research process, and the sample size is an essential factor affecting data saturation and the quality and richness of the collected data. For a qualitative study, data saturation occurs when there is no longer new information relevant to the study, and the information obtained instead begins to repeat (Naeem et al., 2024). Conducting a specific number of interviews does not lead to data saturation. Reaching data saturation requires posing the same interview questions to all participants and using more than one data collection method (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). I reached data saturation by (a) following the interview protocol in the Appendix,

(b) collecting data using semistructured interviews, (c) posing the same interview questions for all participants, and (d) collecting information from sources in the public domain. Data saturation was reached after interviewing the sixth participant.

## Data Collection Activities

I was the researcher and data collection instrument. Yin (2018) stated that a researcher can collect data from interviews, observations, and other documentation directly or indirectly related to the phenomenon under study. Kunkel and Tyfield (2021) stated that semistructured interviews provide a forum for an open dialogue between researcher and participant that yields clear and concise responses from participants. The data collection commenced after receipt of IRB approval. I ensured that participants met the minimum requirements for participation in the study and obtained the participants' consent before the interviews took place. I collected data using semistructured interviews with six full-service chain restaurant managers in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC. In addition to conducting semistructured interviews, I collected documents in the public domain. The audio of the interviews was recorded, and I listened to hesitations in speech and requests for clarification from the participants, provided clarifications, and took notes during each interview. I allowed each participant to pose any questions for purposes of clarification and understanding. Once the participant's concerns were answered, I followed the interview protocol. I collected data based on responses to the seven interview questions. Consent from each participant was obtained before the interview. Before starting each interview, I introduced myself, informed the participant of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and confirmed that participation was strictly voluntary and involved no compensation, gifts, or other incentives. I informed the participant that, for confidentiality purposes, the identities of the participant and the participant's organization would be masked and not disclosed. I provided an overview of the purpose of the study, allowed the participant to pose clarifying questions, and confirmed with the participant that only audio of the interview would be recorded. To ensure consistency, data saturation, and the validity and reliability of the study, I required every participant to respond to the same seven interview questions in the interview protocol (Appendix). I allowed each participant to freely respond to each question and request clarifications. Upon completing each interview, I thank the participant for their contribution and time. I informed the participants that I would prepare my interpretation of the information provided during the interview and provide them with an opportunity to check the accuracy of my understanding.

In addition to conducting semistructured interviews, I collected data from public sources. The information in the public domain was primarily obtained from restaurant websites, confirming that each restaurant manager interviewed was with a chain restaurant in one of the three locales for the study. There was very little information in the public domain regarding managerial and human resources practices and strategies for attracting and retaining employees. The semistructured interview protocol comprised seven questions aligned with the overarching research question. The interviews were conducted virtually, using audio recordings only. The participants and I participated in the interviews from our chosen locations. Thus, the participants and I were in comfortable and familiar environments.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using semistructured interviews to collect data. Kunkel and Tyfield (2021) stated that by using semistructured interviews, a researcher provides a forum for an open dialogue between the researcher and participants. Through the exchange and open dialogue, the participants can provide the researcher with clear and concise responses (Engward et al., 2022). Yin (2018) stated that the disadvantage of the semistructured interview process is the inability to determine whether responses from participants are honest and true representations.

## Interview Questions

1. The interview questions were as follows:
2. Based on your professional experience, what strategies have you used in your professional career to attract and retain employees in the restaurant industry?
3. What steps did you take to develop and implement these strategies?
4. How did you assess the effectiveness of the strategies implemented?
5. How did the strategies positively impact the employees?
6. What, if any, reward or recognition incentives were used?
7. What, if any, successful employee training and development programs were used?
8. What other information would you like to share about strategies based on your professional experience?

The questions and complete interview protocol appear in the Appendix. The interview questions align with the research question.

## Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

### Data Organization Techniques

I developed a labeling convention to protect the identities of the participants and their organizations. Fons-Martinez et al. (2021) indicated that the confidentiality of the participants and their associated organizations should be maintained during and after the research study. To maintain confidentiality, I organized and securely maintained data on a computer to which only I had access. For easy data retrieval, I used a labeling convention to associate each participant with a particular locale and restaurant in each locale. Yin (2018) stated that researchers should establish a system to organize data collection efforts. Theobold et al. (2024) stated that by coding their data, a researcher reduces the amount of data, develops emerging themes, and renders the data more manageable. For each locale (Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC), I selected two full-service chain restaurant managers who met the participation criteria. The data were organized for easy retrieval, further manipulation, and validation (Palczewska & Pilarski, 2022).

The collected data were organized using Microsoft Excel, with applicable codes and contact information for the participants, their respective organizations, and their locales. Audio files were placed on thumb drives, properly labeled, and secured in a cabinet in my private office. All paper documents and digital files will be destroyed 5 years after the study's publication. I will procure the services of a private shredding company to perform these services at my office.

I developed, updated, and maintained a research journal. The journal reflects my research experiences, commencing with the research methodology and design and continuing through the completion and presentation of the study. Apgar (2024) stated that developing and maintaining research journals benefit students personally and professionally through reflective learning processes. Students freely reflected their emotions and feelings when journaling was not disclosed in academic research programs (Apgar, 2024). Ely (2023) stated that students can effectively translate coursework into professional work using reflective journaling. Dinc et al. (2024) viewed journalling as an engagement experience for college students with the benefit of combining plans, feelings, and learning. Students embraced journalling because they developed a new way of thinking and connected previous learning with their current class (Dinc et al., 2024). As I continued my research endeavors, I used the research journal as a valuable tool to reflect on my challenges, successes, failures, ideas, and beliefs.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

Several types of triangulation apply to case study research: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. Using multiple data collection methods to investigate the same phenomenon is method triangulation. The participation of two or more investigators in the same study to obtain multiple observations and conclusions is investigator triangulation. Using different theories for the analysis and interpretation of data is theory triangulation (Vivek et al., 2023). I did not use multiple investigators or multiple observations and conclusions. Because I used one theory, I did not use theory triangulation. The collection of data from multiple individuals or groups is data source triangulation. The triangulation method I used was method triangulation because I used multiple methods consisting of semistructured interviews and documentation regarding the participants in the public domain.

The data analysis process had several components. Levitt et al. (2021) stated that a central part of quality data analysis is considering the research question and ensuring that reporting is concise and understandable. Naeem et al. (2024) stated that researchers must connect research findings to original data by adequately describing the research process, and research data analysis should be deep and thorough.

### ***Comprehending Qualitative Data***

I reviewed the data and confirmed and validated the data through member-checking. The first step in the data analysis was understanding and becoming familiar with the data. It was important to first connect the data with the research question (Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). I analyzed the data obtained from the responses to seven questions by six full-service chain restaurant managers in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

I was explicit about my assumptions and remained reflective throughout the research process (see Saunders et al., 2016). Thematic analysis is appropriate whether a researcher adopts an objectivist or subjectivist position (Saunders et al., 2016). As the researcher, I used thematic analysis to (a) comprehend qualitative data, (b) integrate related data, (c) identify key themes or patterns from the existing data set, (d) develop a thematic description of the data, (e) develop and test explanations and theories, and (f) draw and verify conclusions. This process occurred after each interview and collecting documentation in the public domain. Thematic saturation in a qualitative study is appropriate when a researcher takes the inductive approach and uses data from semistructured interviews and other sources in data analysis (Naeem et al., 2024). I took a deductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the collected data.

### *Integrating Related Data*

I reviewed the data for various themes obtained from the data analysis. Saunders et al. (2016) stated that searching data sets from interviews, observations, documents, or websites to identify patterns or themes is the essential purpose of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a systematic, flexible, orderly, and logical approach to qualitative data analysis (Saunders et al., 2016). The data collected from sources in the public domain were integrated with the data collected from the semistructured interviews.

I focused on the research question and conceptual framework to identify key themes. I correlated the themes with the literature review and newly published literature. Thematic analysis using NVivo or some other analytical tool can develop research questions and determine the appropriate sample size for qualitative research (Naeem et al., 2024). Dalkin et al. (2021) discussed the need for transparency in research performed by teams and acknowledged the usefulness of NVivo for creating an audit trail. All data collected relevant to the phenomenon were considered. Any data obtained from semistructured interviews that were not integrated into the study were documented, and explanations of why they were irrelevant to the phenomenon were provided.

### *Identifying Key Themes or Patterns*

I identified key emerging themes or patterns in the data. Coding was used to categorize data with similar meanings. Coding involves labeling each datum with a code that identifies or summarizes its meaning or applicable definition. Researchers use explanation-building to identify links to common themes in collected data (Yin, 2018).

### *Developing a Thematic Description of the Data*

I used thematic codes to identify links to central themes or patterns among the collected data. A thematic code may be a single word, a phrase, or an abbreviation. I made sure that each theme and code had a definition that was clear, easy to understand, and accurately defined the data. Braun et al. (2022) stated that thematic analysis is a beginning point, not a road map. I returned to the data set and compared the themes against the data to ensure the themes were helpful and accurate representations of the collected data. I determined whether additional relevant information was needed, whether the themes accurately represented the data, and whether changes would better represent the themes. I considered whether to split coded groups, combine groups, discard groups, or create new groups or themes to make the themes more accurate.

### *Developing and Testing Explanations and Theories*

I developed and tested explanations and theories. A researcher can test a theory using a particular design and analysis technique. Theory testing is adequate for determining whether a theory or conceptual framework applies to a specific context or is generalizable and transferable to explaining the phenomenon in other situations (Yin, 2018). Based on the collected data, I explored the practices of restaurant managers and other documentation with repeated patterns to test the theory of transformational leadership—the conceptual framework for my study.

***Drawing and Verifying Conclusions***

I performed all the steps needed to draw and verify conclusions. I thoroughly examined the data, categorized the data into themes, tabulated and tested the data, and combined or considered all data to draw conclusions. Researchers must correlate findings from emerging themes with existing literature related to the phenomena of interest (Szymanska, 2022). The five-step process of thematic analysis included (a) compiling the data, (b) disassembling the data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) drawing conclusions from the data (Yin, 2018).

I used NVivo to aid the five-step thematic analysis process. Dalkin et al. (2021) stated that NVivo is a productive resource for thematic analysis when using purposeful and snowball sampling because it reduces the occurrence of inaccurate information. NVivo was also used to determine data saturation. I used NVivo to code and identify patterns and themes. I considered all the data collected to identify themes related to the research question. I disassembled and reassembled data into identifiable categories and assigned codes and themes. I considered the research question and the conceptual framework and analyzed the themes. Emerging themes related to existing academic literature regarding restaurant managers' strategies to attract and retain employees. I analyzed emerging themes by reviewing the literature considered in the study proposal. I validated my findings using methodology triangulation. The data collected from semistructured interviews and documents in the public domain were included for methodology triangulation. Vivek et al. (2023) stated that using triangulation in qualitative research provides enrichment and an in-depth view.

## Reliability and Validity

Saunders et al. (2016) stated that doctoral researchers can achieve and demonstrate reliability and validity by employing triangulation and validation processes.

### Reliability

According to Yin (2018), a reliability test demonstrates that the same results will appear when a study is repeated by using the same interview protocol, performing member-checking activities, and maintaining a chain of evidence. I developed an interview protocol, consistently followed the interview protocol when conducting interviews, collected information from documentation in the public domain, analyzed all documentation, and maintained all documentation as evidence of the protocol followed. The protocol documentation included data for selecting participants, data collected from public sources, and member-checking activities. I reviewed the collected data, conducted member checking when feasible to confirm and understand the collected data, used thematic analysis to develop codes, identified repeating themes and patterns, and developed descriptions for themes and codes.

### Dependability

Mustafa (2021) stated that reliability primarily depends on dependability, achieved by carefully following procedures to ensure accurate data capture. The primary purpose of member checking is to ensure that a researcher accurately interprets and understands data (Motulsky, 2021). In addition to safeguarding interpretations, member checking allows a researcher to ensure that data correctly reflects the responses of participants and not biases of the researcher (Thomas et al., 2024). I performed member checking by ensuring that I understood the responses from the participants, preparing my written understanding of the responses from the participants, and presenting my written understanding of the responses to the participants for a review of accuracy.

## Validity

The validity of the research depends on how accurately the research reflects the phenomena studied (Makaruk et al., 2022). I ensured the interview questions aligned with the research question to obtain relevant data regarding the phenomenon during the interview process. Before conducting the interviews, I selected study participants who I anticipated would have knowledge of the phenomenon studied. Because full-service chain restaurant managers oversee the day-to-day activities of servers, I chose this population of managers. I performed member checking to ensure my understanding and interpretation of the data obtained during interviews were correct. Additionally, I used triangulation to ensure that no emerging data were relevant to the phenomenon.

### *Credibility*

Member checking establishes credibility and reliability. I performed member checking by transcribing my understanding of the responses provided during the interviews, sending the information to the participant for a review of accuracy, and making any necessary changes or clarification. Triangulation is a method for eliminating researcher bias and confirming research findings (Vivek et al., 2023). Vivek et al. (2023) identified investigator, methodological, and data triangulation as the three main triangulation techniques. To strengthen the credibility of my research, I used multiple sources of data, used member checking, and ensured triangulation was achieved. I ensured triangulation by searching documentation publicly available on websites as a source for supporting or substantiating the accuracy of data by deriving it from more than one source.

### *Transferability*

Pownall (2024) recognized the intertwining relationship between credibility, dependability, and confirmability for establishing the transferability of the research, robustly describing the principles that guide the research process, and examining the transferability of the research to future efforts. I established and adhered to a research process to establish the transferability of the findings. I adhered to the protocols for selecting participants, selecting research methods, and reaching data saturation. For a qualitative research study, data saturation occurs when no new data for analysis and elaboration emerges regarding the phenomenon studied. At the point of data saturation, data quality, quantity, and adequacy should fully support the study, and the information collected should be sufficient to replicate the study (Chitac, 2022).

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability of a study requires the participants, not the researcher, to shape the findings. The research findings must be free of the researcher's personal views and biases and the participants' biases (Thomas et al., 2024). I documented evidence confirming my research results through member checking, coding sheets, transcripts, and rich quotes supporting the research themes.

### *Data Saturation*

I reached data saturation. For a qualitative study, data saturation occurs when there is no longer new information relevant to the study, and the information obtained instead begins to repeat (Naeem et al., 2024). Conducting a specific number of interviews does not lead to data saturation. Reaching data saturation requires posing the same interview questions to all participants and using more than one data collection method (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). I reached data saturation by (a) following the interview protocol in the Appendix, (b) collecting data using semistructured interviews, (c) posing the same interview questions to all participants, and (d) collecting information from sources in the public domain. Data saturation was reached after interviewing the sixth participant.

## Transition and Summary

In Section 3, I identified my role as the researcher. I conducted the study following research ethics and the guidelines of Walden University using an established and approved interview protocol. I conducted a qualitative pragmatic inquiry study. I used purposeful sampling, established the criteria for participation, and identified six study participants in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC, based on the established participation criteria. I followed the requirements of Walden University's IRB, including informing participants of their rights to participate or not and to withdraw from the study at any time. I followed the IRB's requirements for obtaining informed consent from participants. Also, I discussed the data collection, organization, and analysis techniques. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained throughout the study using a masking convention for the participants and their organizations. In Section 3, I also discussed data saturation, methodological triangulation, and project reliability and validity.

In Section 4, I summarize the study and its findings, state the overarching research question, identify themes, analyze and discuss findings as they relate to the themes, and identify how the findings confirm, disconfirm, and extend knowledge in the discipline through comparison with peer-reviewed literature. I tie the findings to the conceptual framework and application to professional practice, confirming or refuting the findings reported in existing literature. I address implications for social change that will benefit individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies. In Section 4, I also address recommendations for further research and provide the study's conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

## Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of the research study was to explore strategies that managers of full-service restaurant chains use to attract and retain employees. The overarching research question was: What strategies do full-service restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees? Based on the responses from participants and data analysis, the four emerging themes were (a) attraction and retention strategies, (b) incentives, (c) assessment of strategies, and (d) training and development strategies.

The participants were selected using purposeful sampling to draw upon their professional experience to answer the research question: What strategies do full-service restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees? The participants were invited to participate in the pragmatic inquiry study and consented to the interview to respond to seven semistructured interview questions. In addition to conducting semistructured interviews, I collected data in the public domain from specific restaurant websites and corporate chain websites that provided information regarding the type of establishment and the number of restaurants located in the geographical area of the study, nationally and internationally. The websites of some restaurant chains provided general information regarding hiring platforms, job qualifications, and general information regarding human resource policies, and employee benefits.

The six participants had an array of restaurant industry experience and 10 to 34 years of management experience:

- DC-1 had 28 years in the restaurant industry, including working as a server, manager, and executive chef for five-star restaurants in the Washington, DC, area. For 16 years, DC-1 has developed a restaurant brand and was the owner and general manager of restaurants in Washington, D.C.
- DC-2 commenced operations in the late 1990s and has worked in all areas of the restaurant industry, including hostess, bartender, and server. As the owner and general manager of locations in Washington, DC, operational aspects of the restaurant were the responsibility of DC-2.
- MD-3 had 30 years of experience in the restaurant industry with 15 years of experience in management. MD-3 was the general manager for a national chain restaurant located in Maryland.
- MD-4 had 16 years of experience in the restaurant industry with 10 years of management experience. MD-4 had oversight of two chain restaurants in Maryland.
- VA-5 had 25 years of experience in the restaurant industry with 18 years of management experience. VA-5 was the manager of a worldwide chain restaurant located in Virginia.
- VA-6 had 30 years of experience in the restaurant industry with 20 years of management experience. VA-6 was the general manager for a worldwide chain restaurant located in Virginia.

The six participants met the mandatory requirements for participating in the study of 5 years of management experience, proven experience in successfully attracting and retaining staff for two years, and current employment in a full-service restaurant chain in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC. Table 1 provides a summary profile of restaurant managers.

**Table 1**

*Summary Profile of Restaurant Managers*

| Participant | Title | Years in industry | Years in management |
|---|---|---|---|
| DC-1 | Owner/General manager | 28 | 16 |
| DC-2 | Owner/General manager | 34 | 34 |
| MD-3 | General manager | 30 | 15 |
| MD-4 | Manager | 16 | 10 |
| VA-5 | Manager | 25 | 18 |
| VA-6 | General manager | 30 | 20 |

Table 2 provides overviews of each participant's self-reported attraction and retention history. The data on manager titles, attraction, and retention years were obtained through semistructured interviews and documentation on publicly available websites. Data regarding geographical locations and types of restaurants were obtained from individual restaurants and corporate websites. The self-reported attraction and retention rates were 3 years to 10 years.

**Table 2**

*Self-Reported Employee Attraction and Retention History*

| Participant | Title | Employment | Attraction and retention |
|---|---|---|---|
| DC-1 | Owner/General manager | Local chain | 4 yrs |
| DC-2 | Owner/General manager | Local chain | 4 yrs |
| MD-3 | General manager | National chain | 3 yrs |
| MD-4 | Manager | Local chain | 3 yrs |
| VA-5 | Manager | Worldwide chain | 3–10 yrs |
| VA-6 | General manager | Worldwide chain | 5 yrs |

After completing the interviews, I prepared the transcripts, manually analyzed the data to determine data saturation, and thematically analyzed the data using NVivo version 14. I discuss each of the four major themes and the emerging subthemes in the following subsections. I address how current research confirmed, disconfirmed, or extended knowledge in the literature review. After addressing the research under each theme, I discuss how the theme supports the research question and the conceptual framework.

Based on the analysis of the data, four themes emerged: (a) attraction and retention strategies, (b) incentives, (c) assessment of strategies, and (d) training and development. Table 3 provides the frequency of each major theme. The theme of attraction and retention strategies emerged more frequently and was 42% of the total themes, with an assessment of strategies at 25%, incentives at 19%, and training and development at 14%.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of Major Data Themes*

| | Attraction and retention strategies | Incentives | Assessment of strategies | Training and development |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of times participants mentioned a theme | 33 | 15 | 20 | 11 |
| Total all themes | 79 | | | |
| % for themes | 42% | 19% | 25% | 14% |

**Theme 1: Attraction and Retention Strategies**

Based on the participants' responses, considering employee needs and family working environment were the most frequently mentioned attraction and retention strategies at 28% and 24%, respectively. The other emerging subthemes were employee benefits at 18%, competitive compensation at 12%, and other subthemes of free or discounted food, not requiring prior experience, and offering affordable living space ranging from 3% to 9%, as provided in Table 4. This data suggests that when considering these subthemes individually, it should be noted that (a) competitive compensation and employee benefits are not as relevant as considering employee needs and family working environments; (b) free or discounted food, affordable living space, and not requiring prior experience are not as relevant as employee benefits; and (c) because not requiring prior work experience is a common practice in the restaurant industry, this is not a stand-alone strategy for attracting and retaining individuals in the restaurant industry.

**Table 4**

*Frequency of Subthemes for Attraction and Retention Strategies*

| Subtheme topics | Frequency | % of total |
|---|---|---|
| Competitive compensation | 4 | 12% |
| Considering employee needs | 9 | 28% |
| Employee benefits | 6 | 18% |
| Family working environment | 8 | 24% |
| Free or discounted food | 3 | 9% |
| Not requiring prior experience | 2 | 6% |
| Offering affordable living space | 1 | 3% |
| Total | 33 | 100% |

DC-1 stated that the first step in developing and implementing strategies was to address the individual needs of the participants by ensuring their well-being, prioritizing the employees' needs for fair compensation and fringe benefits, and offering training. DC-1 further stated that it was important for employees to know they are being treated fairly. DC-2 took a family-friendly approach to caring for employees who were family, friends, and members of a culturally-focused community. To compensate for the lack of written fringe benefits and bonuses, DC-2 offered free food and discounted housing and contributed to the daily needs of the workers. MD-3 and MD-4 focused on the role and significance of providing the needs of individuals through fringe benefits and training. MD-3 stated that benefits were available for hourly employees, including health insurance, PTO, and wages depending on wage levels with different benefits. As with DC-2, VA-5 took a family-friendly and supportive approach to address the individual needs of employees and explained the importance of moving from strict and rigid structures to unorthodox methods. VA-5 further stated that it was important to understand the people and the work in the restaurant industry and manage the company's and workers' expectations. Serving positions were not considered long-term for some workers, and he compensated more in addition to earned tips. He further stated that he treated workers more like family, so they stayed longer. VA-6 explained that on-the-job training was provided and that employees are not required to have previous experience in the restaurant industry. VA-6 stated that the lack of experience allowed management to provide training based on the restaurant brand. VA-6 further stated that training and development included daily coaching and counseling regarding procedures and policies. Lastly, VA-6 stated that those interested in advancing can be developed and groomed by the company for growth and increased job opportunities.

Leaders can meet employees' expectations by providing desirable working environments that promote a sense of teamwork in employees and supervisors and family-friendly policies that support work–home conflict issues (Yaday & Sharma, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). Addressing the individual needs of employees is an important aspect of preparing the employee for team participation. The transformational leader strives to foster a diverse and supportive working environment attentive to individual values. The transformational leader considers the feelings of others, is a good listener, and promotes communication (Bass, 1985). The conceptual framework of transformational leadership theory has, as a part of its fundamental foundation, the importance of addressing individual needs in order to develop a cohesive team for the overall betterment of the organization (Hundley, 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2021). Yasir and Javed (2024) confirmed the existing literature addressing individual needs to promote job satisfaction (see Hundley, 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2021).

Based on the data collected from the participants and publicly available on restaurant websites, the participants focused on considering the needs of employees and providing a family-friendly environment. This data is consistent with the role of the transformational leader and the component of individual consideration (see Bass, 1985). The findings of this study resonate with the existing literature on attracting and retaining employees in the restaurant industry. Employees seek work environments that are friendly, diverse, and fair. Promoting policies and practices for the well-being of employees is not totally focused on compensation and fringe benefits, but employees also seek friendly environments and leaders who address their individual needs (Lins de Morales et al., 2024; Region-Sebest et al., 2022; Yasir & Javed, 2024). The research in the literature review of Lins de Morales et al. (2024) and Region-Sebest et al. (2022) confirmed the importance of the managers' concern for the well-being of employees through ethically sound practices. Unethical practices in the restaurant industry can significantly contribute to job stress and dissatisfaction (Yasir & Javed, 2024).

Although not specific to restaurants, it is suggested that job and brand performance would be positively impacted by implementing fixed compensation for salaries and variable compensation based on brand sales. The method may be an incentive for encouraging rewards other than gift cards, cash, free drinks, food, and upgraded dinners for short-term promotions (Meyer et al., 2022). The focus is not on brand sales but on salary compensation. The research of Allegretto (2023) is not confirmed nor disconfirmed by Meyer et al. (2022).

Individuals hired without prior work experience were compensated during training. Leaders use training, workplace learning, learning sharing, and internship programs to attract individuals to the hospitality industry (Cheng et al., 2024; Collins & Pearlman, 2023). Knowledge and knowledge sharing are significant factors in the enhancement of an organization. Knowledge sharing enhances the capabilities of individual employees and transmits internal expertise and technical skills throughout the organization. Further, through organizational learning, leaders manifest collective wisdom regarding performance and innovation (Cheng et al., 2024). Teachers and trainers in the hospitality industry recognize the need for one-on-one collaborations to build and strengthen people skills for successful learning and performance (Ajambo et al., 2024).

Based on the responses from the participants, the training and development is an important element for success in the restaurant industry. The study participants stated that training and coaching of employees provide knowledge to help themselves and to help others through knowledge sharing, which is consistent with the transformational leadership theory literature on training, workplace learning, knowledge sharing, and one-on-one collaborations (Ajambo et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2024). The transformational leader strives to address the individual needs of followers. Leaders use various methods to address followers' needs from initial employment and throughout employment to retain employees. Some of the strategies that leaders use are training, workplace learning, and knowledge sharing to attract individuals to the hospitality industry. Good performance leads to various types of incentives.

**Theme 2: Incentives**

The participants used various incentives to attract and retain employees. Incentives are provided throughout the year and may occur weekly, monthly, yearly, holidays, or promotion of a specialty food or drink item. Financial incentives consist of awards of cash, gift cards, and tickets to a special event or restaurant. Formal recognition was a shout-out in the presence of coworkers and superiors for exceptional service mentioned in a review, recognized as employee of the year. Based on the data analysis, formal recognition had the highest frequency at 53% as incentives used to inspire employees. Financial awards and opportunities for professional growth at 20% each collectively represented 40% of the incentives used. The frequency of tips being used as an incentive for good service was 7%. Table 5 represents the data analysis of the frequencies of submerging themes under incentives to attract and retain employees. With 53% of incentives reported as formal recognition, the importance of the positive goodwill that can be obtained by acknowledging employees in the presence of their peers and superiors is suggested.

**Table 5**

*Frequency of Subthemes for Incentives*

| Subtheme topics | Frequency | % of total |
|---|---|---|
| Financial award | 3 | 20% |
| Formal recognition | 8 | 53% |
| Opportunities for professional growth | 3 | 20% |
| Tips as an incentive for good service | 1 | 7% |
| Total | 15 | 100% |

By establishing a system to advance, participants provided opportunities for growth within their organizations. The opportunity for growth and advancement within the organization contributes to attracting and retaining employees.

DC-1 stated that end-of-the-year financial awards are provided to all employees. One employee was recognized as employee of the year. The employee of the year may receive a cruise vacation or double the financial awards given to the other employees. DC-2 stated that contests were conducted, and financial awards and formal recognition were not provided. MD-3, MD-4, VA-5and VA-6 stated that they offered financial rewards for contests,  promotional events, and getting a review for doing a good job. The financial rewards consisted of a flashy free uniform, cash in the amount of $20, and gift cards up to $300, depending on the occasion. MD-3 stated that the award and incentives were important to building a good team and that giving a team member a shoutout and thanks in front of everybody was more rewarding than material things. Contests were conducted weekly and monthly. MD-4 stated it was not always a contest and that sometimes he surprised his team with a meal once or twice a month. Further, MD-4 stated that he provided his team with a path to grow to avoid them feeling like they were stuck in the same position forever.

In the literature review,  Seitz and Owens (2021) and Stark et al. (2022) discussed the transformational leader using implicit person theory and memory exchange theory. The literature of Jain et al. (2024) and Messmann et al. (2022) neither confirmed nor disconfirmed the existing research in the literature review. The research project is grounded in transformational leadership theory, providing a comprehensive view of incentivizing, inspiring, and motivating in concert with the other three components of transformational leadership theory. The transformational leader is to provide inspirational motivation by communicating clear directions to followers, encouraging good performance, and providing an atmosphere of teamwork. Through individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and encouragement, the followers of the transformational leader are inspired to meet their organizational goals (Jain et al., 2024; Messmann et al., 2022).

Based on the data collected and publicly available information from restaurant websites, the incentives were financial awards, formal recognition, opportunities for professional growth, and rewards for good service. Formal recognition inspired and motivated the employees toward outstanding achievements. Incentives served as a strategy for increasing performance and addressing the attraction and retention of employees. The assessment of the strategies implemented is significant in addressing the research question: What strategies do full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees?

### Theme 3: Assessment of Strategies

As provided in Table 6, participants determined the effectiveness of their implemented strategies based on (a) employee performance, (b) employee retention, (c) increased trust in employees, (d) employee development, and (e) monitoring employee performance. Based on the data, employee performance at 45% and employee retention at 35% were most frequently indicated as the methods managers used to assess the effectiveness of their strategies for attracting and retaining employees.

**Table 6**

*Frequency of Subthemes for Assessment of Strategies Effectiveness*

| Subtheme topics | Frequency | % of total |
|---|---|---|
| Assessing effectiveness through employee performance | 9 | 45% |
| Assessing effectiveness through retention | 7 | 35% |
| Employee development | 1 | 5% |
| Increased trust | 2 | 10% |
| Monitoring employee performance | 1 | 5% |
| Total | 20 | 100% |

DC-1, MD-3, MD-4, and MD-6 stated that they measured the strategies' effectiveness by employees' commitment to return to work, good performance, dedication to the job and organization, trust, willingness to stay, and online reviews. DC-1 stated that the best assessment of the effectiveness of implemented strategies was that the employees returned to work, provided quality service, showed dedication to the company and job, performed faithfully and truly, had personal development and trust, and willingness to stay, and did not steal. DC-1 further stated that he and his wife are like father and mother; their problems are our problems, and they show time and give 100 percent. Lastly, DC-1 stated that it was important to hire people who like what they do, provide a safe and nontoxic environment, communicate clear roles and responsibilities, and define roles, responsibilities, policies, and procedures.

MD-3 commented that if your turnover is low, it speaks for itself. People feeling happy is important. It is important that they feel happy with the people with whom they are working. MD-3 further stated that he must ensure they feel good about where they are working and with whom they are working. MD-4 explained that they were showing up for work, getting the job done, getting recognition, showing accountability, and showing up for work, which I like to keep well-balanced. MD-4 further explained that you must praise the good and correct when someone is doing something wrong.

VA-5 stated that it is really important to understand your team and feel them out during the interview process to see if they fit in the direction you are taking your current staff regarding techniques. VA-5 further stated that I know they will always show up, are doing their best, and are always seeking more information from me. They will come in and ask how I am performing and how am I doing? So, you know that you have that bonding relationship with your employees, and they trust your leadership. Lastly, VA-5 offered that it is really trial and error and that he stayed open-minded about how things get done and approached his team in the same manner he responded to his boss regarding accomplishing goals in an unorthodox way of allowing them to do it their way as long as goals are accomplished and no rules are violated, and the quests experience great service. VA-6 contended that the company maintains its reputation as an employer that treats its employees with respect and dignity.

Based on the responses from the participants, the most effective measures for determining the success of strategies and leadership skills are continued high performance and the retention of employees. High turnover is a strong indicator that employees are not experiencing job satisfaction (Gordon & Parikh, 2021; Yaday & Sharma, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). All participants in the study indicated that their main concern was the well-being of their employees. This concern for the employees is consistent with the individualized consideration component of transformational leadership and the importance of organizational commitment and supervisory support for employee commitment to the organization (Lasrado & Kassem, 2021; Macaes & Roman-Portas, 2022; Wei, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021).

**Theme 4: Training and Development Strategies**

The data analysis of the training and development strategies used by the study participants indicated that the frequency of on-the-job training was 82%, with the mentoring system and OSHA training having frequencies of 9% each, as provided in Table 7. The mentoring system consisted of corporate human resources platforms or organized internal plans for moving employees through training on various career paths for growth and advancement. On-the-job training is prevalent in the restaurant industry, and individuals can enter the industry without prior experience and learn while earning. All restaurant employees are subject to OSHA rules and training by an external entity or within their company. Mentoring, one-on-one collaborations, and on-the-job training commence at the time of hire and continue throughout employment.

**Table 7**

*Frequency of Subthemes for Training and Development Strategies*

| Subtheme topics | Frequency | % of total |
|---|---|---|
| Mentoring system | 1 | 9% |
| On-the-job training | 9 | 82% |
| OSHA training | 1 | 9% |
| Total | 11 | 100% |

DC-1 stated that on-the-job training was offered, and all training and development programs were internal to the company. DC-1 further offered that knowledge sharing and promoting teamwork were accomplished by pairing individuals to help them sharpen their skills. DC-2 declared that the organization's training and development programs successfully prepared their employees to seek work in larger organizations such as hotels and fine dining restaurants.

MD-3 stated that the training process diligently got their "workees" up to speed. MD-3 further stated that managers followed up throughout and after the training process to assess whether they could uphold the required standards mentally or business-wise. There were training and development programs for all operations throughout the restaurant. Lastly, MD-3 stated that when there are connections with employees, you build relationships with them and a family atmosphere. MD-4 stated that as a part of training, contests with prizes were used to challenge the employees to solve problems.

The manager used reversed psychology and made them think it was their idea. MD-4 explained that individuals without experience were hired as bussers, food runners, and hosts in entry-level positions. For individuals interested in growth, one-on-one collaborations were held to discuss their interests. MD-4 further stated that development programs were based on their interests as servers, bartenders, trainers, coaches, managers, or opening new restaurants. Lastly, MD-4 stated that the opportunity for advancement contributed to the success of retaining individuals.

VA-5 stated that an open-minded, flexible approach resonated with the younger workers because it gave them the flexibility and freedom to develop comfortable methods within the organization's goals. VA-6 explained that training and development included daily coaching and counseling regarding procedures and policies. Employees interested in advancing had the opportunity to be developed and groomed by the company for growth and increased job opportunities.

All of the study participants stated that training and development was an integral part of their organizations. Training commences with getting new hires accumulated to the organization or restaurant industry and continues for the growth and development of the employees for the overall betterment of the organization (see Bass, 1985). The study participants, through their responses, indicated that they used training and development to implement the four components of transformational leadership theory: (a) individualized consideration, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) idealized influence.

Using training and development, managers focused on the individual needs of each employee. Through individualized consideration, the managers create bonds, build trust, and develop cohesive teams (see Hundley, 2022; Kim et al.,  2021). Managers use inspirational motivation by encouraging and motivating employees to seek growth and development opportunities. Training and development is an investment in the employees. Therefore, by investing in the employees, both the managers and the employees benefit (see Eviana et al., 2022; Wei, 2023). The study participants, through their responses, indicated that intellectual stimulation was provided through continued training, daily coaching, one-on-one collaborations, and knowledge sharing. The responses of the study participants aligned with transformational leadership literature supporting the importance of continued training, knowledge sharing, team cohesiveness, and promoting followers to a higher level of critical thinking (see Ajambo et al., 2024; Balsarini & Lambert, 2024; Cheng et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2021). Employees respect, follow, and model the attributes of leaders. Through the components of individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and the manager has built a bond of trust and respect to effectively influence the employees. All study participants contributed their effectiveness in influencing high performance and retaining their employees partly due to identifying employees' individual personal and professional needs and identifying resources, relationships, and opportunities to support intellectual growth (see Hurtienne & Hurtienne, 2024).

The scholarship in the literature review does not address the importance of brand names for training and performance but focuses on compensation (Allegretto, 2023; Owens, 2022). The practices implemented by MD-3, MD-4, VA-5, and V6 included development programs promoting intellectual stimulation. attracting and retaining employees and confirmed the scholarship in the literature review (Lasrado & Kassem, 2021; Scott & Klein, 2022; Sulistiasih et al., 2024).

Positive outcomes in the workforce can be achieved when individuals reach their fullest potential. Identifying employees' individual personal and professional needs includes identifying resources, relationships, and opportunities (Hurtienne & Hurtienne, 2024). The research in the literature review of Ajambo et al. (2024) and Cheng et al. (2024) on the importance of training confirmed (Hurtienne & Hurtienne, 2024; Lasrado & Kassem, 2021; Scott & Klein, 2022; Sulistiasih et al., 2024).

Through data analysis and the literature, the research question: What strategies do full-service restaurant chain managers use to attract and retain employees was addressed. Mentoring systems, on-the-job training, and OSHA training were the emerging subthemes for training and development strategies. In keeping with the conceptual framework based on transformational leadership theory, the lens through which this study was explored, transformational leaders implement training and development practices for inspiration, motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and idealized influence. The themes of (a) strategies for attracting and retaining employees, (b) incentives, (c) assessing the effectiveness of the strategies, and (d) employee training and development addressed the research question: What strategies do full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees? The study results suggest that transformational leadership theory may be viable for this pragmatic inquiry study (see Bass, 1985).

## Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The findings of this research study align with and contribute to the existing research on transformational leadership theory as it applies to attracting and retaining employees in full-service chain restaurants. Given the spectrum of participants with professional experience in local, national, and worldwide restaurant chains with management styles that align with the four components of transformational leadership: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) idealized influence, managers in the restaurant industry have awareness of the information provided in this study. Due to the small size of this study, further qualitative research on a larger scale and using a different research design may render different results. Pownall (2024) stated that research studies that robustly describe the research process allow readers and researchers to examine the transferability of the research to future efforts. Chitac (2022) noted that the data's quality, quantity, and adequacy should fully support the study, and the information collected should be sufficient to replicate the study.

Restaurant managers could promote human resources policies that (a) address leadership training of managers, (b) promote and implement policies for organizational commitment and supervisory support, and (c) develop and implement established pathways for employee growth and development. Individuals are attracted to and tend to remain in work environments that are family-friendly work environments (see Eviana et al., 2022; Gordon & Parikh, 2021; Wei, 2023; Yaday & Sharma, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). Based on the scholarship, leaders' organizational commitment and supervisory support attract individuals to the organization, mitigate turnover intentions and turnover, and increase retention.

## Implications for Social Change

This pragmatic inquiry study has implications for social change for individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities. As restaurant managers implement strategies to attract and retain employees, others in communities will also benefit. Restaurant managers could attract and retain individuals in their communities through partnerships and collaborations with community leaders, educational institutions, and chambers of commerce. An attractive feature of employment in the restaurant industry is the opportunity to enter the industry without mandatory levels of education, formal training, and previous restaurant experience (Cheng et al., 2024). Developing effective collaborations, partnerships, and employment opportunities for individuals within communities could contribute to positive social change.

## Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations of the study remained as provided in Section 1. The insights from the study are informational only, and the study is too small to have practical applications without further research on a larger scale.

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry study aligned with the components of transformational leadership theory for exploring strategies full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees. Given the limitation of the study to the professional experience of managers and lack of data specific to the managers' organizations, such as the number of employees, employees' perspectives, and human resources documentation, worldwide chain restaurants could be explored to determine results due to cultural differences. Expanding the study using an increased population within a US region or all of the regions in the United States is another consideration for further research.

## Conclusions

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry study explored strategies that full-service chain restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees. Four themes emerged from the data collection activities consisting of semistructured interviews: (a) Theme 1: Attraction and Retention Strategies, (b) Theme 2: Incentives, (c) Theme 3: Assessment of Strategies, and (d) Theme 4: Training and Development Strategies. In addition to semistructured interviews, data was collected from publicly available organizational websites. Theme 1: Attraction and Retention Strategies consisted of emerging subthemes for addressing the individual needs of the employees and aligned with the individualized consideration component of transformational leadership theory. Theme 2: Incentives had submerging themes that attracted individuals to employment and retained employees aligning with inspirational motivation with formal recognition by supervisors in the presence of peers with the highest frequency. Based on Theme 3: Assessment of Strategies, the data analysis indicated that employee performance, followed by retention of employees, were the effective methods for assessing the strategies used by managers. Theme 3 aligned with individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence components of transformational leadership theory. The data analysis based on Theme 4: Training and Development Strategies supported the prevalence of on-the-job training for attracting and retaining individuals and the importance of continued training for future growth and development aligned with transformational leadership theory's individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation components. The study's findings confirmed the effectiveness of transformational leadership theory for attracting and retaining employees.

Managers can assess their human resources policies and procedures to determine their effectiveness in attracting and retaining employees or other organizational phenomena. Another recommendation is to conduct formal or informal surveys when hiring individuals and exit interviews when employees leave to determine what attracts individuals to the organization and why individuals do not stay. The findings of this study contribute to the existing knowledge and understanding of transformational leadership practices in the restaurant industry and provide valuable awareness and recommendations for attracting and retaining employees. Although the findings of this research are relevant and have the potential for transferability to other service providers, further research is encouraged to address potential limitations and build upon and extend the study results.

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# Appendix: Interview Protocol

## Primary Business Research Phenomenon Under Study and Overarching Research Question

The topic for my research project is *Strategies to Attract and Retain Employees in Full-Service Chain Restaurants.* The overarching research question is: *What strategies do restaurant managers use to attract and retain employees?*

## Primary Research Goal to Achieve from This Interview

The purpose of this interview is to explore strategies used to attract and retain employees in the restaurant industry.

## Introduction

1. Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation in this educational project on the success of attracting and retaining employees in the restaurant industry is important. It will help better understand how to support the restaurant industry, which is vital to the national and international economies, in implementing appropriate strategies to attract and retain employees.
2. I will be interviewing you and several other owners or managers of full-service chain restaurants. So, I hope to have adequate information for this research study. Before we get into the meat of things, I would like to go over just a few things with you.
3. First, you should know that your participation is totally voluntary. So, if I ask a question that you don't want to answer, or if you need to stop the interview at any time, just let me know.

4. Also, with your permission, I will be audiotaping the interview and taking some notes. Later, I will provide you with a transcript of the audiotape along with my notes so you can look at them, review them, and make any corrections that you see need to be made, making sure that we captured what you needed to say accurately.
5. This study may be shared with faculty members and colleague students and in sharing, there will be no mention of your names and organizations. Even if I use direct quotes, I will use pseudo names. It might also be used in conferences and professional meetings.
6. I will keep your shared information strictly confidential and safely stored for five years after my study's completion date and then destroy it.
7. Do you have any questions?
8. As you know, we have set about 45 - 60 minutes for this interview. Does that work for you? We won't go beyond that time unless you wish to do so.
9. Is audiotaping still fine?
10. Ready to go?
11. Let's get started then!

**Initial Probe Questions**

1. Please state your name and title.
2. What is your current scope of responsibility within the organization?
3. What is the number of years you have been in the restaurant industry at the managerial level?

4. How would you describe your restaurant management experience over the past five years?

**Targeted Interview Questions**

While asking these questions, I will watch for nonverbal cues, paraphrase as needed, and follow up on responses with probing questions to obtain more depth.

1. What strategies have you used to attract and retain employees in your restaurant?
2. What steps did you take to develop and implement these strategies over time?
3. How do you assess the effectiveness of the strategies implemented?
4. How do the strategies positively impact the employees and the organization?
5. What, if any, reward or recognition incentives are used?
6. What, if any, employee training and development programs have been successful?
7. What other information would you like to share about any strategies that have been implemented?

**Closing**

1. Thank you very much for your time, The information you provided is valuable and will help me successfully complete my study.
2. I would like to schedule a follow-up interview to review and discuss the audiotape transcript and my notes to ensure I interpreted your responses accurately. Would xx date and xx time be okay for you?

3. I will provide you with the transcript and notes at least three days in advance to allow you sufficient time to review.

4. Again, thank you very much for participating in my research study.