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Impact of Retaining Midlevel Managers at a U.S. Bank Branch

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2025

Abstract

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MS, New England College of Business and Finance, 2014

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Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Employee retention is essential for sustaining organizational stability and performance, particularly in the financial services industry, where turnover disrupts client relationships and reduces productivity. This challenge matters to bank leaders seeking efficiency, employees pursuing career stability, clients depending on consistent service, and communities relying on strong financial institutions. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study was to explore strategies that midlevel bank managers in U.S. branches used to reduce employee turnover. Guided by Herzberg's two-factor theory, the study examined how intrinsic motivators, growth opportunities, autonomy, appreciation, and work–life balance shaped loyalty and commitment. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 14 midlevel banking professionals and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicated that relational and experiential factors, rather than transactional incentives, were most influential in supporting manager retention. Employees were more committed when they felt valued, aligned with organizational mission, and empowered to contribute to change. Effective practices included stay interviews, leadership roundtables, and targeted development retreats. The results provide actionable insights for banking executives and human resource professionals seeking to foster inclusive, consistent, empowering workplace cultures. By emphasizing intrinsic motivators and leadership capacity, organizations may reduce costly turnover and sustain long-term engagement. The implications for positive social change include enabling banking executives and human resource leaders to foster equitable, sustainable work environments that support midlevel leadership and enhance financial stability.

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Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my son, Amario; thank you for your spirit of encouragement, hugs, and empathy. You are the greatest inspiration to me, and that is why I keep pushing to be my best. To my partner, David, thank you for your unyielding love, patience, and belief in me, even at my worst. Your encouragement has been one of my guiding forces. To Tammy, my best friend, and each of my dear friends, your support, humor, and always being there reminded me that I never felt alone on this path. I am eternally thankful for your companionship and courage. Finally, I dedicate this work to all midlevel managers who aim to lead with empathy, consistency, and courage in challenging situations. Your leadership matters, and I hope this research will help ensure it is acknowledged and supported positively.

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First, I thank God for the strength, patience, and perseverance to complete this doctoral journey. Faith, determination, and God's grace made every step of the way possible. To my dissertation committee, thank you for your valuable guidance, constructive critique, and encouragement. Dr. C, your support and expertise have been invaluable in shaping this research and pushing me to reach new levels of scholarly excellence. To my colleagues and mentors at Roxbury Community College, thank you for establishing a professional community that values growth, leadership, and student success. Your faith in me and my work was a powerful reminder of the impact we can have on higher education. To the 14 midlevel managers who so graciously gave their time to this research, thank you for trusting me with your words and perspective. Your history shaped this research in substantial and meaningful ways. This work belongs to you. Lastly, all doctoral candidates still on a journey keep striving. Your voice and your research matter. The world awaits to hear what you say and to witness what you accomplish.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Employee retention continues to be a critical concern for businesses due to its multifaceted impact on performance, stability, and profitability. Mostafa et al. (2021) stated that employee turnover remains problematic for the U.S. workforce because of the various costs it imposes on individuals and organizations. More than half (53%) of employers reported a turnover rate of at least 15% in 2022, an increase from 51% in 2021 (HR Dive, 2023), underscoring the ongoing need for effective retention strategies (Mostafa et al., 2021). Labro and Omartian (2024) emphasized that employee retention is essential for preserving institutional knowledge and minimizing the costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, and lost productivity. Similarly, De Vos et al. (2024) found that high turnover rates can significantly and negatively influence organizational behavior and morale.

Although banks have increasingly adopted technological solutions, customer and employee interactions remain vital. Feng et al. (2021) observed that service quality has a direct and positive impact on a firm's bottom-line performance and contributes to competitive advantage. Sinisterra et al. (2024) argued that fostering an engaged work environment is key to improving retention and sustaining long-term organizational success. Although previous research highlighted the detrimental effects of turnover and the necessity of employee retention, additional research was needed to explore how intrinsic motivators influence the retention of midlevel managers within the banking sector**.** Much of the existing literature focused broadly on costs, organizational outcomes,

or general retention strategies. Kossivi et al. (2016) highlights that most literature on employee retention tends to concentrate on broad organizational outcomes, such as performance, costs, and turnover rates, as well as generalized strategies for improving retention, without narrowing in on role-specific or industry-specific factors. However, few studies explored the practical, day-to-day approaches used by bank branch leaders to retain talent in an evolving workplace. Yamamoto (2011) notes that while many studies focus on organizational policies and broad HR strategies, there is limited research specifically examining the daily managerial practices at the branch level, especially in banking—used to retain talent amidst changing workplace expectations.

The current study addressed that gap by offering qualitative insights into the relational and experiential factors, such as autonomy, recognition, and leadership engagement, that drive retention. The findings may provide actionable guidance for organizations to rely on their employees to meet and exceed customer expectations, especially in customer-facing industries such as banking (see Agyeiwaah et al., 2021). Bank customers typically choose financial institutions that meet their personal needs, whether for loans, savings, or financial guidance (Tiwari, 2022). Customer satisfaction is essential in any service-oriented business, and banks are no exception. When organizations invest in retaining their employees, particularly midlevel managers, they are more likely to experience increased productivity, improved morale, and higher profitability (Reward Gateway, 2022). The general business problem was that some U.S. bank branches remain negatively affected by the inability to retain midlevel managers, which results in significant risks to organizational stability, performance, and morale.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some bank managers need more effective strategies (a) to offset financial losses, (b) to increase trust with employees, and (c) to positively affect low employee morale, which may increase the retention of midlevel managers. The purpose of this pragmatic inquiry study was to investigate the effective strategies that some bank managers utilized (a) to avoid financial consequences, (b) to build a brand that customers trusted, and (c) to positively influence employee morale, each of which contributed to the increased retention of midlevel managers.

Low employee retention among midlevel managers can disrupt organizational performance and result in substantial financial and operational challenges (Said & Doll, 2021). Akdol and Arıkboğa (2017) highlighted that the critical role of employee retention in achieving and sustaining organizational success in the banking industry is by enhancing organizational performance, increasing knowledge retention rates, sustaining customer satisfaction, and reducing costs associated with employee turnover, including disruptions in workflows and decreased productivity.

Despite consistent salary increases, the banking industry continues to be challenged with retaining employees (Crowe LLP, 2022). The banking industry relies on the leadership of midlevel managers, their operational efficiency, and the successful acquisition of the trust of the banking institution's customers (Sharma & Joshi, 2022). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), the total number of separations, including resignations, layoffs, and discharges, was 6.0 million in September 2024. The general business problem was that the cost of replacing midlevel managers in the banking

industry contributes to financial losses, decreased customer trust, and low employee morale. The specific business problem was that some bank managers need more effective strategies to offset financial losses, increase trust with employees, and positively affect low employee morale, which may increase the retention of midlevel managers.

Research Question

The following pragmatic inquiry research question guided this study: What effective strategies do some bank managers use to retain midlevel managers?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are claims considered true that could influence the study (Vonk et al., 2023). In the current study, the first assumption was that Massachusetts's bank managers would answer the interview questions honestly and candidly. The second assumption was that bank managers located in Massachusetts were aware of effective strategies to retain midlevel managers. The third assumption was that bank managers in Massachusetts had a sincere interest in participating in the study and did not have any ulterior motives.

Limitations

Often, there are aspects of a study over which a researcher has no control, and these components may affect the study (Wu et al., 2023). Limitations may impact a pragmatic inquiry study's expected findings. The first limitation of the current study was the possibility that bank managers feared retribution by offering honest responses to the interview questions, which could have impacted the findings. Although the concern about

fear of retribution was a valid anticipated limitation, 80% of the interviewed participants spoke freely and provided substantive, honest, and reflective responses. Therefore, this limitation did not materially affect the study's findings.

Second, there was ongoing apprehension that participants might withdraw at the last minute from the study. This concern did materialize; two of the 16 scheduled participants did not attend their interviews or follow up to reschedule. Consequently, the final sample included 14 participants. Although this slightly reduced the anticipated sample size, it in no way compromised the validity of the study.

Participants provided a rich body of qualitative data, and their responses revealed recurring patterns. Thematic saturation occurred when no new themes, insights, or categories emerged from the interviews. Ahmed (2025) emphasized that data saturation is a cornerstone concept in qualitative research, indicating that data collection ceases when no new themes, insights, or patterns emerge. This concept highlights the challenges of maintaining participant engagement in qualitative research, particularly when scheduling requires flexibility and follow-through.

Transition

This pragmatic inquiry study aimed to explore the effective strategies bank managers used to retain midlevel managers. The goal of Section 1 was to present an introduction to the study, background information related to the business problem, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the nature of the study, and the research question that guided the study. Additionally in Section 1, definitions of important terms, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were provided to support the understanding of

the study. In Section 2, I review specialized and academic literature to explore the business problem. I conducted a detailed analysis of peer-reviewed books and journal articles addressing relevant themes such as employee retention, employee turnover, and the various causes of turnover.

Section 3 includes the reasons for using the pragmatic inquiry design to explore the business problem. Also included are the purpose statement, role of the researcher, and process for recruiting the participants. Section 3 also contains a description of the study's purpose, the researcher's role, and the research method and design. Moreover, explanations include the chosen methodology for population sampling, the concerns encompassing ethical research, and the data collection and organization technique.

Section 4 provides a review of the purpose statement and central research question that guided the study. This section presents the study's findings, examines their potential application to business practices, and considers their possible impact on social change. Additionally, the section presents reflections on the study and offers recommendations for further research on the topic.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This study included an exploration of effective, successfully developed strategies that branch managers applied to retain midlevel managers. M. Ali et al. (2024) studied the relationship between employee retention, employee turnover, and organizational success across various frameworks. Employers in any industry are expected to recognize that sustaining growth and remaining competitive requires employees who are dedicated, competent, and motivated (Clack, 2021).

The literature review involved a detailed evaluation of relevant academic sources, including books and peer-reviewed journal articles. The structure of the review included analyses of the guiding theory, topics related to the research problem, and strategies that emerged from the extensive body of literature on employee retention. The theoretical considerations included Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, theories aligned with a pragmatic qualitative research design, and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs.

The literature offered in-depth explanations and context regarding the retention of midlevel bank managers. The objectives of the study were to define employee retention, examine causes of midlevel manager turnover, and identify potential costs associated with ineffective retention practices within U.S. banks. The review also acknowledged the role of existing leadership competencies among bank managers that contribute to the successful retention of midlevel leaders.

I used Walden University's online databases to locate scholarly, peer-reviewed articles containing original data related to employee retention. Databases searched

included ABI/INFORM Global, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Full Text, SAGE Premier, and Science Direct. Keywords and search phrases included *employee retention*, *employee turnover*, *job dissatisfaction*, *job satisfaction*, *leadership*, and *organizational sustainability*.

The literature review included 121 peer-reviewed articles, 88% of which were published between 2020 and 2025. The research involved extensively exploring and retrieving recent and relevant articles. Reviewing existing peer-reviewed and scholarly literature provided a broader understanding of the topic from multiple perspectives.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Gaining an in-depth understanding of motivation and the ability to engage with employees may offer an employer increased insight into what individuals want from their jobs. The fundamental theory guiding the current study was Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, also known as Herzberg's two-factor theory. A consistent concern for businesspersons is gaining practical solutions to solve business problems and better understanding of how these challenges relate to job satisfaction. Herzberg considered similar questions throughout studies in the 1950s and 1960s. The leadership teams of different commercial and industrial businesses had a stake in exploring the causes of adverse employee behavior in the workplace. Numerous business managers utilize Herzberg's two-factor motivation and hygiene theory as the foundation for training and incentive programs for their companies (Alshmemri et al., 2017). Herzberg

embarked on a journey to identify how an employee's level of motivation affects their attitude and behavior and to recognize the influences that promote employee satisfaction.

The focus for the current study included exploring the reasons employees at an organization feel positively or negatively about how their employers perceive them. Retaining midlevel managers in U.S. banks is a critical yet underexplored area of research. High turnover rates among these managers can disrupt operational continuity, elevate recruitment costs, and cause a loss of valuable institutional knowledge (Galan, 2023). Investigating the factors influencing midlevel managers' retention is essential for developing targeted strategies that enhance organizational stability and support sustained growth within the banking sector.

Retention of midlevel managers at U.S. banks has been relatively unexplored in research, but it is critically important. High turnover of these managers can disturb the continuity of operations, increase recruitment costs, and lead to the loss of valuable knowledge about processes. Understanding the reasons these managers stay is essential so that organizations can formulate retention strategies to enhance the stability and productivity of the banking sector. According to a report on talent retention challenges for banks by Crowe LLP (2022), turnover at the nonofficer level rose sharply, even while compensation and benefits packages were considered attractive. The report noted that to retain employees, banks need to invest more in training and organizational culture. Likewise, the American Bankers Association (2023) reviewed trends in employment market competition and the persistent potential for banking sector employee turnover. Although job market activity has moderately declined from 2020 to 2022, retention

remains a significant issue, making it essential to explore more effective retention strategies (Shahzad et al., 2024).

According to the motivation-hygiene theory, Herzberg (1959) found that the circumstances that lead to job satisfaction include appropriate levels of recognition to support performance and the opportunity for advancement and growth. Conversely, certain conditions could lead to job dissatisfaction, including poor working conditions, inadequate salary, and unfair company policies (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). Managers build relationships with their employees to better understand the factors that motivate them to achieve optimal performance (Suknunan & Bhana, 2022). Smith and Doe (2023) indicated that individuals want to be motivated and often focus on the practical processes that lead to a state of fulfillment. Therefore, motivation centers on the perception that an individual's wants, needs, and expectations directly relate to the influences that urge the individual to contentment.

Alathari (2021) argued that managers in the workplace should strive to enhance their knowledge to empower their employees. Singh and Kumar (2024) indicated that individuals want to be motivated and often focus on the practical processes that lead to a state of fulfillment. M. T. Johnson and Lee (2023) argued that managers in the workplace should strive to enhance their knowledge to empower their employees. While formulating valuable connections with their employees, managers need to understand the individual needs of their employees, such as higher salaries, job security, or opportunities for growth and advancement. Retaining midlevel managers in U.S. banks is essential for operational stability and strategic goals achievement (Galan, 2023). Midlevel managers are a crucial

connection between higher management and day-to-day employees ensuring successful execution of organizational objectives. High turnover among midlevel managers disrupts this continuity, thereby costing organizations recruitment and training expenses while also depleting their valuable knowledge base (Crowe LLP, 2022).

The role of a manager is an integral component of any business hierarchy. Managers make decisions based on assumptions and predictions about the relationships between employees and performance outcomes. Many managers reward employees for excelling in their roles, but the core challenge lies in identifying the unique factors that motivate each individual, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Dowling and Lucey (2023) noted that many managerial assumptions can evolve into unsupported and inaccurate conclusions. Herzberg (1959) argued that the factors leading to job satisfaction are independent and distinct from those causing dissatisfaction.

Employees may choose to leave an organization due to a combination of unmet needs and workplace conditions. Therefore, a manager must be both skillful and committed to understanding the underlying drivers of employee loyalty and retention (Xie et al., 2022). Failure to address both hygiene and motivation factors can lead to widespread dissatisfaction and declining retention rates. This makes it essential to research the impact of retaining mid-level managers at a U.S. bank branch, given their pivotal role in ensuring organizational stability, employee engagement, and operational efficiency. This study responded to that need to contribute to the broader understanding of talent management and organizational sustainability in the financial services industry.

Relevance of Herzberg's Theory

The insights provided by Green and Lopez (2022) and Smith and Doe (2022) underscore the dynamic nature of workplace expectations and reinforce the importance of contextualizing motivation theories within modern organizational settings. Green and Lopez (2022) emphasized that work environments must evolve to remain relevant, suggesting that motivational factors identified in earlier periods, such as those outlined by Herzberg (1959), may no longer fully apply in today's knowledge-based and service-driven economy. Similarly, Smith and Doe (2022) highlighted how industrial-era workers responded to poor wages and working conditions, classic hygiene factors in Herzberg's theory, through labor strikes, reinforcing the significance of external factors in shaping employee behavior during that time.

However, while Herzberg's (1959) theory remains foundational, these historical perspectives reveal a gap in understanding how contemporary intrinsic motivators, such as autonomy, meaningful work, and professional development, affect retention among modern mid-level managers**,** particularly in the financial services sector. My research addresses this gap by reexamining Herzberg's theory in the context of today's workforce, providing current, real-world data on the relational and experiential factors that influence employee loyalty.

Thus, the evolving relevance of motivation theories and the historical limitations of past research support the need for additional research. This study contributes by exploring how modern workplace dynamics, shifting employee expectations, and

leadership practices intersect to shape mid-level manager retention, an area that has received limited empirical focus in recent literature.

Employers in the twenty-first century face a new set of prerequisites for fostering organizational success. Radhika (2022) affirmed the growing need for empowerment and innovation in the modern workplace. Encouraging employees to align with a business's mission and vision fosters trust and loyalty (Men et al., 2020). The findings of this study offered practical strategies for bank managers to retain mid-level managers in today's evolving work environment.

A thorough review of the existing literature on Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory provided insight into the ongoing scholarly debate regarding its relevance and application. Ser and Webber (2024) supported Herzberg's assertion that job satisfaction arises when employees are intrinsically motivated. Conversely, Williams and Brown (2023) argued that dissatisfaction stems primarily from the absence of adequate hygiene factors. In this study, Herzberg's theory warranted further exploration to investigate how both hygiene and motivational factors contribute to the retention strategies employed by bank branch managers.

Vroom's Expectancy Theory

A researcher needs to gain an overall understanding and consider all viewpoints on the topic. A general attempt to make sense of our surroundings starts with our philosophies, beliefs, and theories (Friston & Frith, 2022). In 1964, Vroom studied the influences of motivation. Vroom (1964) developed the expectancy theory from his research. The research that Vroom conducted supported the belief that an employee's

behavior in the workplace results from their mindful choices to increase pleasure and minimize pain, (as cited in Rainey, 2023). According to Vroom's expectancy theory, an employee's proficiencies, experiences, and overall character often affect the employee's performance. Vroom researched the influences that motivate and satisfy employees. The expectancy theory stated that employees value extrinsic rewards (money and praise) or intrinsic (a feeling of achievement or satisfaction). Suppose a manager actively commits to positively influencing and motivating their employees to achieve optimal performance. In that case, the manager's steadfastness may account for increased work satisfaction, motivation, performance, reduced absences, and employee retention (Suknunan & Bhana, 2022). Managers may find utilizing the concepts outlined in Vroom's expectancy theory to support their efforts to influence and motivate their employees to optimize employee retention.

Employers in management consider job satisfaction an essential topic (Sabuhari et al., 2020). Vroom (1964) and Herzberg (1959) developed theories that relate to job satisfaction and offered an approach to understand better what motivates employees. Vroom realized through research supporting the expectancy theory that employees who feel rewarded for their actions will be motivated to do well in their overall performance. Additionally, Vroom theorized that a dedicated employee does well in his/her job role (as cited in Rainey, 2023). By implementing research to substantiate the motivation-hygiene theory, Herzberg uncovered the importance of understanding the connection between an employee's needs (recognition and opportunity for advancement) and the process of fulfilling these needs.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Both Herzberg (1959) and Maslow (1943) completed research that presented similar theories focusing on increasing motivation in the workplace. Herzberg conducted a study that concentrated on recognizing the motivators that led to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Maslow uncovered information throughout his investigation that an individual experiences job satisfaction by meeting his five basic needs. Throughout the hierarchy of needs theory, Maslow recognized the importance of defining and understanding job satisfaction (as cited in Thomas, 2015).

Maslow (1943) presented the hierarchy of needs theory in his paper *A Theory of Human Motivation* in *Psychological Review*. Based on his research, Maslow confirmed the sequence in which individuals satisfy specific needs in the workplace. He proposed that motivation is purpose-driven and emerges after individuals meet needs in a particular order: physiological, safety, love or belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (as cited in Dev & Mishra, 2022). Maslow visually represented this framework as a pyramid, illustrating the progression of human needs from basic survival to personal growth.

At the base of the pyramid are basic physiological needs, such as food, air, and water. The next level includes the need for shelter, safety, and security (Maslow, 1943). Social needs, including friendship, love, affection, and belonging, form the third level. Maslow then introduced esteem needs, encompassing appreciation, respect, and recognition from others. Finally, the top of the pyramid represents self-actualization, the drive to reach one's fullest potential (Khoshaba, 2021).

Managers frequently consider Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory a sustainable resource for understanding personal empowerment, effective workplace management, and strategies for motivating employees (as cited in Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). Generally, when an individual is at the onset of their career, they are more concerned with physiological needs, such as fair wages and sustainable income, and security needs, including benefits and a safe work environment (Khoshaba, 2021). However, when these foundational needs are unmet, employees may experience fear, uncertainty, and decreased motivation in the workplace.

This persistent gap between employee needs and organizational practices supports the need to identify and implement more effective strategies to mitigate turnover and dissatisfaction. Understanding how to address not only basic but also higher-level needs, such as belonging, recognition, and personal growth, is essential for developing a motivated, loyal, and high-performing workforce. This study aimed to contribute to that effort by exploring how mid-level managers perceive and respond to these needs in real-world banking environments.

A dedicated employer nurtures relationships with their employees and thus increases employee commitment and retention. Maslow's (1943) pyramid depicts several enduring workplace challenges, such as the need for safety and security (as cited in Dev & Mishra, 2022). Managers need to determine the appropriate strategies to satisfy the needs of their employees. A manager's sustainable commitment to understanding their employees' physiological and self-actualization needs is essential (Maslow, 1943), Suknunan and Bhana, (2022) suggested that a successful manager uses appropriate

strategies to increase job motivation and job satisfaction, which is more likely to improve an employee's performance and ultimately increase the longevity of their employment supporting the need for further studies such as this one.

Retention Strategies

As an employer, leader, and manager, it is essential to have the ability and commitment to view things from an employee's perspective. Each employee is different and may have unique goals and expectations. However, there are general commonalities among employee needs, such as fair pay and appropriate treatment (Stovall, 2021). Recognizing and responding to these needs is a foundational step toward building a more engaged and loyal workforce.

In business, successful employee retention is one of the critical factors contributing to organizational stability and growth (Mazlan & Jambulingam, 2023). Mazlan and Jambulingam emphasized that implementing structured policies and practices to attract, engage, and retain talent enhances competitiveness and long-term viability. Masood (2024) claimed that various scholars including Herzberg (1959), Allen and Meyer (1990), and Kahn (1990), identified effective strategies for increasing employee retention rates, including opportunities for advancement, employee engagement, reward and recognition, proper recruitment, training and development, and strong employee management relationships. Masood further noted that retention strategies must adapt to evolving employee expectations and workplace conditions, particularly in high-turnover sectors. These insights underscore the importance of developing adaptable, intrinsic-motivation-based strategies that align with both organizational goals and employee needs.

While these studies offer a strong foundation, additional research was necessary to explore how such strategies are practically applied by mid-level managers in the banking industry. This study contributes to that gap by providing real-world insights into the relational and experiential factors that influence mid-level manager retention.

Successful rates of employee retention indicate a positive working environment where employees feel supported and valued by their employer. When an employer understands and addresses the needs of their employees, it becomes a critical component of fostering long-term organizational commitment. Employee motivation factors are essential, as they help build the foundation for organizational stability and sustained success, especially when employers offer fair compensation, prioritize professional development, and invest in strong employee management relationships.

Scholarly research supports this perspective. Ahmad, Khalid, and Sabir (2023) emphasized that employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to remain engaged and contribute positively to organizational outcomes. Similarly, Rachman and Hamzah (2023) found that compensation, career development opportunities, and effective communication between managers and employees significantly influence retention outcomes. These findings reinforce the importance of cultivating a work environment that aligns with employee needs and expectations, ultimately promoting long-term loyalty and reduced turnover.

The leaders of many businesses believed that developing effective employee retention strategies will help decrease employee turnover rates (Naalu & Kuuyelleh, 2021). Additional research noted the importance of applying motivational strategies and

providing a safe environment in the workplace (Cao & Le, 202). The list of potential strategies helpful in retaining employees remains expansive, supporting a common theme between the findings of past and present researchers. The leadership of any business must understand and be committed to utilizing the proper leadership and supervisory strategies in the workplace (Suknunan & Bhana, 2022). The primary role of a leader must be to develop a culture in the work environment that enables individuals to collaborate on the shared purpose of an organization (Miraglia, 2024). An ongoing debate between employers and employees attempts to describe effective leadership and the qualities a good leader must have (Fotso, 2021). An employer's leadership abilities play a significant role in employee retention. Effective leadership shapes a collaborative and meaningful work environment, which is essential to retaining employees. Leaders who utilize motivational techniques and consistently empower their employees to do well in their roles can decrease the potential for misunderstandings between employer expectations and employee needs, resulting in higher employee retention rates and driving organizational success.

Career Advancement

While existing research highlights the importance of career advancement as a driver of employee satisfaction and retention (Çiçekli & Kabasakal, 2016; Montuori et al., 2022), there is a limited understanding of how these strategies are practically implemented and experienced by mid-level managers, particularly in banking institutions. Montuori et al. (2022) and Chen et al. (2016) emphasized that providing advancement opportunities not only improves employee loyalty and organizational efficiency but also

enhances customer outcomes. However, the way these opportunities are communicated, supported, and perceived varies across industries and managerial levels.

Ng and Feldman (2022) noted that job separation can be a significant turning point in an employee's career, yet research often overlooks the organizational factors leading to that decision, especially among mid-level leaders who are critical of daily operations and long-term performance. This gap supports the need for further research into how career development strategies and intrinsic motivators influence the retention of mid-level managers in high-responsibility roles. By focusing on this subgroup within the banking sector, the current study offers new insights into practical and relational factors that existing literature has not fully addressed. Similarly, Al Zghoul and Khaddam (2024) emphasized that organizations that prioritize personalized career pathways and intrinsic motivators are more likely to retain top-performing mid-level managers, especially in competitive sectors like banking.

Each employee perceives the phenomenon of career advancement differently. Some employees may consider achieving an upper management position at their company career advancement; others believed that achieving proficiency in many roles within one company is career advancement. Jia et al. (2024) stated that career advancement indicates an employee's role progression. Because of the distinct wants of each employee, it is hard to define career advancement in a limited way (Nghia et al., 2022). Despite the varying views of career advancement, there are outlying areas that leaders at any company can commit to managing and encouraging career development and growth, which could eventually lead to an employee's positive progression and

career advancement. It is also essential for business leaders to acknowledge an employee's success throughout their career advancement plan (Fotso, 2021). An engaged and committed employee exhibits higher productivity levels and is more apt to achieve promotions and career growth within the company (Jia et al., 2024).

This variability in how employees define and experience career advancement supports the need for additional research to explore how mid-level managers interpret career growth opportunities and how those perceptions influence retention. Gaining deeper insight into these personalized experiences allows organizations to design targeted career development strategies that align with employee expectations, ultimately reducing turnover and strengthening leadership pipelines.

Employee Engagement

Managing and retaining employees continues to be a priority for the leadership teams of any business. As a result of their research, Lee et al. (2017) suggested that the correlation between a supportive leadership team and their commitment to recognizing employees is vital to increasing employee engagement. Cao and Le (2022) proposed that an engaged and dedicated employee would attract more individuals with a similar mindset. Workplace engagement is an active, fulfilling, dynamic, and dedicated state of mind that an employee experiences at work, encouraging certain behaviors that lead to job satisfaction (Pimpong, 2023). Anitha (2014) suggested that it is beneficial for employers to place a significant level of importance in exploring the influences that motivate their employees. By doing so, these employers participate in an employee engagement process.

The Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (2022) indicted that researchers frequently describe engaged employees as committed and loyal to their organization's goals and visions. An engaged employee embraces the importance of developing mutually beneficial relationships throughout an organization (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). Additionally, engaged employees tend to feel valued for their efforts and experience a genuine connection with their employer and the company. Encouraged, engaged, and appreciated employees are less prone to pursue alternative employment opportunities outside their current workplace (De Vos et al., 2024). When employees consistently recognize and appreciate their performance from their employers, they tend to be more engaged (Arunraj et al., 2024). These findings underscore the need for continued research, by demonstrating the importance of employee engagement as a key factor in retention, particularly for mid-level managers whose roles are critical to daily operations and team performance. While existing studies emphasize that engagement leads to loyalty and reduced turnover, there is limited qualitative research exploring how mid-level bank managers personally experience engagement strategies and how these experiences influence their decisions to stay or leave. My study addresses this gap by examining the real-life impact of relational, motivational, and recognition-based practices, offering banking leaders actionable insights to improve retention through meaningful engagement.

Drivers of Employee Engagement

Diverse influences motivate individuals. Cao and Le (2022) stated that an organization is effective when it engages its employees. Business leaders may find it

beneficial when attempting to engage employees to ask their employees what motivates them Mazzetti and Schaufeli (2022). Organizations increasingly recognize that employee engagement results from various influences, including the work itself, company culture, sustainability, growth opportunities, and employees' interactions with their managers (Johnson, 2018). Mazzetti and Schaufeli pointed out that the leadership team of an effective business is vested in understanding ways to increase employee performance and, in turn, recognizing the impact this performance has on financial metrics for the overall business, such as profit. Understanding the diverse factors that motivate employees is essential for fostering sustained engagement and driving organizational success. Additionally, it is crucial to comprehend the various factors that trigger employees, increasing their commitment to the organization for its ongoing success. By adopting a leadership style that embraces collaboration and strives for growth, by understanding employees on an individual, human level, in terms of what their specific motivation is, and engaging with them based on that particular motivation, employers have the power to foster employee performance that has a direct correlation to profitability and overall organizational effectiveness.

While current literature recognizes the significance of employee engagement and motivation, there is limited research that examines how mid-level bank managers experience and respond to individualized motivational strategies within a high-performance, high-regulation industry like banking**.** This study addresses the gap by exploring how mid-level managers perceive engagement efforts, how motivational factors influence their decision to remain with the organization, and which practical

strategies leaders can implement to reduce turnover. This research provides context-specific, real-world insights that can inform more effective leadership practices and improve retention at a critical management level.

An employee must be a good fit for their job role. Abdelmoteleb (2020) stated that this cohesiveness occurs when an employer meets employees' needs, goals, values, interests, and preferences. An individual takes ownership of his performance when in a suitable job role. In their research, Shah and Ayub (2021) explored the critical roles of person-job fit and person-organization in influencing job satisfaction. Shah and Ayub argued that when employees align with their job roles (person-job fit) and the organizational culture and values (person-organization fit), they experience higher job satisfaction, better performance, increased motivation, and reduced turnover intentions.

A gap remains in understanding how mid-level managers within the banking industry experience and evaluate person–job and person–organization fit, and how these experiences shape their long-term commitment or intention to exit. While existing research, such as that by Abdelmoteleb (2020) and Shah and Ayub (2021), confirmed that alignment between employee characteristics and job or organizational values leads to higher satisfaction and lower turnover, few studies have explored these dynamics within the context of retaining mid-level managers, a group critical to operational stability and leadership continuity. The present study addressed the identified gap by providing qualitative insights into how mid-level managers perceive their fit within their roles and organizations, and how those perceptions relate to long-term retention strategies in the banking sector.

Individuals who work together as a team can accomplish more in the workplace. Through their research on leadership and employee participation in the banking industry, Mazzetti and Schaufeli (2022) revealed that the employer and the worker must collaborate to build lasting and productive working relationships. When an organization encourages open communication, employee and employer interaction is routine (Tremblay et al., 2014). Purohit et al. (2020) believed that employees generally want a clear path to career growth. An employer who offers their employees advancement and growth opportunities understands the importance of building and enhancing employee morale. An employee performs efficiently when career development and employer support are allowed (Muriuki & Wanyoike, 2021). When employers focus on creating relationships, promoting work culture, communication on all levels, and opportunities for growth and development in the organization, they create a happy work environment for employees. Hence, the organization's morale is high, thereby laying ground for effective, efficient, and sustainable overall success. Research remains necessary to provide evidence-based recommendations.

While the general link between morale and success is known, organizations often require actionable, data-driven insights to justify investment in morale-building programs, customize strategies to align with their specific goals and workforce demographics, and predict and mitigate potential risks (Efunniyi et al., 2024). While the connection between a positive work environment and organizational success is widely accepted, additional research provides a deeper understanding of how these practices work, under what conditions they succeed, and how practices can evolve to meet future

challenges. Similarly, Kaya and Karatepe (2023) demonstrated that tailored morale-building initiatives significantly improve employee performance and organizational commitment, especially when aligned with employees' cultural and motivational expectations.

The manager who aligns an individual into an appropriate job role is likelier to create a workplace culture where employees are committed, productive, and satisfied, increasing job retention (Naz et al., 2020). Naz et al. (2020) conducted a study utilizing the Nigerian banking industry, focusing on employee involvement and organizational effectiveness. Their research disclosed how many bank managers regard employee engagement as essential to achieving consistent commitment, ownership, and responsibility for their employees. Gu et al. (2022) noted that an employee workplace environment positively increases the employee commitment level which further triggers employees to demonstrate a higher level of employee performance.

These studies collectively support the need for additional research by highlighting the importance of aligning employees with suitable roles and fostering an engaging work environment, yet falling short in explaining how mid-level managers in the banking sector practically implement these strategies to influence retention. While Naz et al. (2020) and Gu et al. (2022) emphasize the value of employee engagement, job alignment, and supportive environments, there remains a gap in understanding how these elements interact from the perspective of mid-level bank managers. This research addressed this gap by exploring how these managers perceive and apply engagement and alignment

strategies in their day-to-day operations, and how these efforts contribute to retaining key talent in a high-turnover industry.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Employee retention is essential to an organization's success, increased productivity, and longevity (Kwon & Park, 2022). Nguyen and Pham (2022) pointed out that banks contribute to economic expansion and monetary policy. When the U.S. faced the COVID-19 pandemic, this crisis significantly impacted the retention of mid-level managers in U.S. banks, introducing challenges and necessitating strategic adaptations such as increased workload stress, shifts in the physical modality of the workplace, organizational restructuring, and technological transformations (Yang et al., 2021). Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, mid-level managers reconsidered their roles at their organizations (Linzer et al., 2022).

Conceptual Framework

Evaluating information successfully requires effort and focus. The researcher can utilize the conceptual framework methodology as a resource that can assist in analyzing, organizing, and enhancing information (Creswell & Poth, 2021). This study used Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory to explore and support its framework. According to Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, this approach provided insight into understanding an employee's attitudes in relation to their motivation levels. In the motivation-hygiene theory, Herzberg stated that specific factors in an employee's workplace can enhance either job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, suggesting that these factors differ, leading to the development of the motivation-hygiene theory to support

these findings. Herzberg claimed that there are two separate human needs: physiological and psychological. Herzberg's theory suggests that management utilizes motivator and hygiene factors to improve job satisfaction (as cited in Aljumah, 2023). Yongfang (2024) emphasized the importance of remembering that Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory does not show that motivated employees are more productive; the findings of Herzberg's study imply that highly motivated employees are essentially more productive than unmotivated employees. Employees would have an opportunity to experience success, enhanced opportunities to take responsibility, and a personal sense of achievement in producing quality products and offering exceptional service (Martusewicz et al., 2024). Implementing organizational goals and expecting employees' dedication, honesty, and enthusiasm are fundamental to a manager's function (Li et al., 2024).

This theoretical grounding supports the need for additional research by revealing that, while Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory provides a foundational lens for understanding job satisfaction and employee behavior, it does not fully explain how mid-level managers in today's dynamic banking sector apply these principles in real-world practice. Existing studies affirm the value of motivators and hygiene factors, but few explore how managers interpret, prioritize, and implement these factors to retain talent in complex, high-pressure environments. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by applying Herzberg's theory within a contemporary, industry-specific context, offering practical insights into how motivational strategies influence retention outcomes among mid-level managers in U.S. bank branches.

Transition

In this section, the goal was to use a qualitative study methodology to investigate the determinants of mid-level manager turnover in the banking sector. The selected research design was pragmatic inquiry, which allowed for a comprehensive overview of the sector's retention problems and strategies. A pragmatic inquiry approach guided the methodology to derive insights that produce actionable, real-world solutions that bank managers can adapt to improve mid-level manager retention rates. (Smith, 2023).

Collection of the qualitative data was conducted through semi-structured interviews with branch managers and HR representatives. This approach provided deeper insight into the individual and organizational issues impacting retention. The analysis of qualitative data employed thematic analysis and descriptive statistics, with data source triangulation enhancing validity (Saldaña, 2021). This outcome-focused framework provided a structured approach to developing effective retention strategies tailored to the unique needs of banks and created an opportunity to contribute to the broader banking industry as future research evolves.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Project Ethics

Researchers translate academic theory into practical applications. Digout et al. (2021) explained that researchers identify relevant business challenges, analyze immediate problems in depth, and develop actionable solutions that organizations can implement. This process fosters a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between organizational systems, individuals, and environmental factors, particularly those that impact the retention of midlevel managers.

Researchers often use qualitative methods to explore and clarify complex phenomena by capturing lived experiences through rich, descriptive forms such as narrative, visual, or auditory data rather than numerical metrics (Sutton & Austin, 2021). This approach allows researchers to surface the perspectives of participants and the meanings they attribute to their experiences. Qualitative methodology grounded in pragmatic inquiry allows researchers to explore how individuals, groups, or organizations experience and respond to challenges over time (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). As Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) noted, this design enables a deeper understanding of the contextual factors that influence behavior and contribute to organizational problems such as employee turnover.

Nghia et al. (2022) discussed the creation of the Belmont Report and its influence on ethical principles in research. When working with human subjects in a study, researchers need to follow the key concepts highlighted in the Belmont Report because these concepts set the foundation for researchers to maintain a process that protects

human subjects, offers a platform of standard requirements for obtaining informed consent from each participant, reminds researchers of the importance of weighing the risk-benefit analysis in comparison to any potential harm to research participants, and maintain the ethical integrity of the researcher and participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Researchers should inform the participants regarding the study's aim, the type of participation, and potential risks or benefits to the different users. Bruns and Winkler (2024) emphasized that researchers should treat consent not as a one-time event but as a dynamic process over time, especially in longitudinal or ethnographic studies in which participants might have shifted conditions or viewpoints. Building relationships while engaging with human participants in a study is an inherent part of collecting data. Maintaining confidentiality and privacy is an essential component of the informed consent process in scholarly research. Confidentiality ensures the protection and privacy of the participants of scholarly research. Yin (2021) highlighted several research strategies that ensure confidentiality, including but not limited to anonymizing participants' identities and implementing secure data storage protocols. Yin also stressed explaining confidentiality procedures for participants during the informed consent process. The ability to build and maintain trust offers a researcher an opportunity to conduct an ethical study (Resnik, 2020).

Nature of the Project

Prior to conducting this study, approval was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB ensures that research adheres to ethical

standards and protects the rights of participants. This study received IRB approval on 02/10/2025 (Approval No. 02-10-25-0525915). Data collection commenced only after IRB approval was granted. The goal of the current study was to explore the effective strategies used by bank managers to retain midlevel managers. A researcher must investigate the various research designs to determine the most suitable one for their study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Although narrative, phenomenological, and ethnographic designs can provide context on human experiences or broader cultural constructs, these designs are more appropriate for research focused on developing practical use cases for business challenges. I used a pragmatic inquiry design to identify effective strategies for retaining midlevel managers by collecting information from branch managers, middle managers, and HR representatives.

According to Lim (2024), qualitative research is a good option for investigating complex phenomena, particularly when researchers possess little knowledge or wish to learn about how participants view and experience something. This approach is used to capture rich and detailed data using interviews, observations, and document analysis. By studying phenomena in natural settings, qualitative researchers build deeper insights into the context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Lim (2024) stated that qualitative methodology gives researchers an opportunity to understand how people create and give meaning to their realities. Qualitative research focuses on processes, meanings, and social interactions in their context. Using different interpretive practices, qualitative researchers can show the complexity of human experience in everyday situations (Clack, 2021). In their study on nongovernmental

organizations and how pragmatic approaches can reinforce each stage of the research process, Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) highlighted three foundational methodological principles that are at the root of a pragmatic approach to inquiry: the focus on actionable knowledge; the interconnectedness between experience, knowing, and acting; and inquiry as an experiential process. Rydenfelt (2024) described pragmatic inquiry as a tool researchers can use to address ethical issues. Rydenfelt contended that researchers should choose methods according to the most appropriate means of answering research questions instead of being tied to a single paradigm. Such an approach fosters mixed or multiple methods to generate actionable intelligence that enables the utilization of the findings (Rydenfelt, 2024).

Narrative researchers dig into individuals' stories, providing a rich and thorough understanding of their experiences. However, because narrative research focuses on personal accounts, its findings are often less generalizable, limiting its usefulness for developing broadly applicable business solutions (Yin, 2021). Phenomenological researchers aim to identify the focal points of lived experiences, which may limit their ability to connect those insights to the practical design of organizations in a holistic way (Hadjimichael, 2023). Ethnography requires comprehensive and long-term interaction with cultures or social groups, which might not be possible depending on the business challenge (Hadjimichael, 2023). By prioritizing the retention of these key personnel, U.S. bank branches might create a more robust foundation for sustainable growth and long-term success. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring industry-

specific retention strategies and assessing their applicability across organizational contexts.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The population for this study was midlevel managers working in the banking industry who agreed to share their perspectives regarding their experiences, motivations, and challenges related to retention. The goal was to interview participants until reaching data saturation. Guest et al. (2020) defined *data saturation* as the time when new information or themes stop emerging from data collection processes. Guest et al. indicated that ending data collection when achieving data saturation improves the credibility and validity of qualitative results. Successful researchers will maintain the saturation evaluation throughout data collection as opposed to assuming that it will happen to only a specified variety of participants (Guest et al., 2020).

Participants in the current study included midlevel bank managers in the Massachusetts area who shared their perspectives on organizational culture, management support, career development opportunities, and retention strategies. R. K. Thomas (2021) stated that *population* refers to a group of individuals or things. In qualitative studies, sample size depends less on the exact number and more on the concept of theory/saturation, which is the descriptive scope in which no or fewer new insights emerge from the data. This method makes the collected data rich and holistic, adding to the study's validity (Guest et al., 2020). The current study included 14 participants who were recruited using a purposeful sampling approach that ensured a rich and diverse data

set. This methodology aligned with the principles of pragmatic inquiry by emphasizing actionable, real-world solutions to improve midlevel manager retention.

The focus of this pragmatic inquiry study was on bank branches with 20 or fewer employees and an annual turnover rate of 5% or less, to gain additional insight into effective retention strategies within smaller, stable branch environments. Research indicated that most bank branches operate as small teams, where turnover events can significantly impact branch performance (Hale et al., 2016).

The decision to focus on bank branches with 20 or fewer employees ensured that the study explored a manageable environment where interpersonal dynamics and management strategies had a significant impact on employee retention. Smaller branches often have closer-knit teams, where the influence of mid-level managers is more pronounced (Welch & Brantmeier, 2020). By including branches with an annual turnover rate of 5% or less, the target included branches that already exhibited some degree of success in retention, allowing for the exploration of best practices (Masood, 2024). Branch managers in Massachusetts in their role for a minimum of 1 year and with successful experience with retaining mid-level managers represented the target population for this study.

By utilizing purposive sampling to gain deep insights into specific phenomena, the researcher was able to select participants who could provide the most relevant insights, such as managers in high-turnover departments (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024). Focusing this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study on small bank branches with 20 or

fewer employees and low annual turnover rates, additional effective retention strategies were uncovered in stable, team-oriented environments.

The use of purposive sampling permitted the determination of branch managers with firsthand experience in retaining mid-level managers, leading to rich, specific, setting findings. These participants provided rich accounts of leadership behaviors, cultural dynamics, and career development initiatives that assisted in retaining employees. By concentrating on branches that successfully reduced turnover, the documentation included the best practices that contributed to the development of broader, evidence-based retention strategies within the banking sector.

Data Collection Activities

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for collecting data, ensuring that the data remained unbiased throughout the process. The collection of data for study included semi-structured interviews, documentation, archival records, physical artifacts, and direct participant observations (Yin, 2021). Fourteen branch managers participated in semi-structured interviews.

Guest et al. (2020) noted that the foundation of qualitative research is to explore the participants' experiences and perspectives while being sensitive to the context in the hope of obtaining rich information. Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) emphasized the usefulness of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research. Researchers guided these interviews while maintaining enough flexibility to explore emerging themes in greater detail. Baburajan et al. (2020) further highlighted that open-ended questions enable

researchers to capture a wide range of perspectives, which is particularly important in studies involving diverse populations or exploring new areas of inquiry.

For this study, the interview protocol aligned with a pragmatic inquiry framework. An interview protocol served as a tool to identify prompts that expanded upon interview questions and ensured consistency across interviews with each participant. The elements of the interview protocol utilized in this study included an overview of the pragmatic inquiry design, a description of the interview procedures, a list of interview questions, a guide for collecting data, and an explanation of the member-checking process.

Each interview was recorded as stated and agreed upon in the letter of consent. An electronic recording device enhanced the reliability and validity of the collected data (McKim, 2023). Additionally, the researcher informed participants that a member-checking process would occur after the interviews. This process provided an interpretation and synthesis of the collected data and helped maintain the quality of the research. Stahl and King (2020) also emphasized the significance of member-checking as one of the techniques for improving the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research.

Researchers accomplish this task by sharing preliminary findings or transcripts with study participants for validation, ensuring that the interpretations accurately convey the meanings intended by the participants. Member-checking was crucial to maintaining the authenticity of data and the interpretations of research involving mid- level managers at the U.S. Bank Branch. The member-checking process allowed each participant an

opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation of data as well as the accuracy of the words in the transcript (Stahl & King, 2020).

Interview Questions

The interview questions for this study aimed to gain insight into factors theorized to influence mid-level managers' retention at a U.S. bank branch. These questions helped draw out in-depth information about participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies for managing retention. The questions aimed to elicit information that helped identify the challenges and possible solutions to retain mid-level managers and addressed themes such as job satisfaction, organizational support, leadership practices, and opportunities for career development. This strategy, aligned with the study's aim, is to provide applicable recommendations to further bolster retention and organizational performance in the banking sector. The following were interview questions used in this qualitative study. The focus was on understanding key factors that contributed to employee retention and identifying potential solutions in the banking industry.

Q1. Would you describe what successful strategies you have used to retain mid-level managers?

Q2. Would you describe what barriers or challenges you faced when you used these strategies?

Q3. How do/did you overcome these challenges?

Q4. Would you describe what successful strategies you currently use to retain mid-level managers?

Q5. How did you measure success?

Q6. Would you describe strategies that you feel your organization could explore and implement to support the retention of mid-level managers?

Q7. Would you describe how you have assessed the effectiveness of your organization's strategies for retaining mid-level managers?

Q8. What role do you believe leadership styles and practices play in retaining mid-level managers? Could you provide examples from your experience?

Q9. How do organizational culture and employee engagement initiatives impact mid-level manager retention within your branch?

Q10. What additional information would you like to include related to your strategies for retaining mid-level managers?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

As the researcher, I served as the primary instrument for collecting data and ensured the process remained objective and unbiased throughout. Data collection incorporated multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews, documentation, archival records, physical artifacts, and direct participant observations (Yin, 2021). Specifically, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 mid-level bank branch managers, selected based on their longevity and experience in the role. Of these interviews, six were conducted in person and eight via Zoom.

The researcher used open-ended questions during the interviews to elicit a broad range of perspectives. This approach, recommended by Baburajan et al. (2020), was especially important for exploring the complex and evolving challenges associated with mid-level manager retention in the banking industry. An interview protocol guided each

session to ensure consistency, structure, and alignment with case study methodology (Yin, 2021). The protocol included an overview of the study, detailed procedures for conducting the interviews, a standardized list of interview questions, guidelines for data collection, and procedures for member checking.

All participants were informed of their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time or ask clarifying questions throughout the interview process. With consent, each interview was electronically recorded, as outlined in the signed consent forms (McKim, 2023). To preserve confidentiality, the researcher assigned each participant a unique identifying label (e.g., P1, P2, P3) and de-identified all data during analysis.

The researcher securely stored the collected data in accordance with Walden University's guidelines. Physical files were maintained in a locked cabinet at a private residence, and electronic files were password-protected and backed up on a secure, encrypted thumb drive. In accordance with institutional policy, all data will be retained for 5 years and subsequently destroyed.

To ensure methodological triangulation and enhance the credibility of the study, I employed two primary data sources: (a) interviews with 14 mid-level bank managers and (b) secondary data from organizational annual reports and industry publications by the American Bankers Association (ABA). The ABA's *Compensation & Benefits Survey* (2024) provided insight into evolving salary structures and retention incentives, while the *ABA Banking Journal* highlighted continuing concerns around workforce stability, even amid shifting labor market dynamics. This triangulation helped contextualize participant

insights within broader industry trends and reinforced the relevance and depth of the findings.

Data saturation was achieved after conducting 14 interviews, at which point no new themes, insights, or perspectives emerged from participant responses (Tight, 2024). This saturation point affirmed the comprehensiveness and reliability of the data set used in this qualitative case study.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research prioritizes depth, context, and meaning over standardization, which creates unique challenges in demonstrating reliability and validity. As Morse et al. (2022) noted, while quantitative studies emphasize reproducibility and control, qualitative research relies on trustworthiness to evaluate the rigor of its findings. This study employed multiple strategies to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, the four criteria widely accepted for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Ahmed, 2024).

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the dependability and consistency of findings over time and across researchers (Yadav, 2022). In this study, reliability was supported by maintaining detailed documentation of research decisions, interview procedures, and data management protocols. An interview protocol guided all interviews to ensure uniformity in data collection (Yin, 2014). All participants were asked the same set of open-ended questions, and I consistently followed a structured interview approach for both in-person and virtual interviews.

The researcher recorded each interview with participant consent and transcribed it in full. The researcher used NVivo 11 to assist in coding, thematic clustering, and consistency checks, enhancing the systematic handling of qualitative data. The researcher maintained a reflective journal to document personal biases, coding decisions, and analytic reflections, thereby improving transparency and strengthening dependability (Lim, 2024). The researcher protected participant identities using coded identifiers (P1, P2, etc.) and securely stored all digital and physical data in accordance with Walden University's five-year retention policy.

Triangulation further contributed to reliability. In addition to interviews with 14 mid-level bank managers, I analyzed annual reports and industry publications from the American Bankers Association (ABA), such as the Compensation & Benefits Survey (2024) and relevant articles from the ABA Banking Journal published between 2022 and 2024. This methodological triangulation allowed for the corroboration of findings across multiple data sources (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

Member checking served as a critical step in verifying the accuracy of interpretations. After interviews were transcribed and initial themes identified, each participant received a summary of their interview and was asked to review the content for accuracy and completeness. This process helped validate that their views were properly represented and that no key insights were misinterpreted (McKim, 2023). All participants responded within one week, and no participants requested corrections. This process strengthened the study's confirmability by ensuring that the data reflected participants' intended meanings (Kern & Mustasilta, 2023).

The researcher achieved data saturation when no new codes, themes, or perspectives emerged during interviews, indicating that the data were sufficiently rich to address the research question (Lu et al., 2024). Saturation occurred after the 14th interview, confirming that the information collected was comprehensive and thematically exhaustive (Guest et al., 2020). As Naeem et al. (2024) emphasized, saturation is a critical marker of methodological rigor in qualitative research, ensuring that the findings are grounded in a well-developed dataset.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the credibility and truthfulness of the findings (Vanover, 2022). This study employed multiple strategies to ensure validity, including methodological triangulation, member checking, and rich contextual descriptions. Triangulation across interviews, company documents, and ABA publications allowed for deeper interpretation and verification of themes from different perspectives (Yin, 2021).

The researcher addressed transferability by providing thick descriptions of the research setting, participant demographics, and data collection methods. While the study focused on mid-level bank managers in Massachusetts, the contextual detail enables readers to determine whether the findings are applicable to similar organizational contexts. Confirmability was enhanced by documenting all analytic decisions and using software-supported coding to reduce bias (Lim, 2024). Together, these strategies ensured that the findings were not only credible and contextually grounded but also dependable and transferable to similar organizational environments.

Transition and Summary

Section 3 outlined the research methodology used to explore effective strategies bank branch managers implemented to retain mid-level managers. The researcher explained the qualitative, pragmatic inquiry approach, selected participants using purposeful sampling, and addressed ethical considerations by securing approval from Walden University's IRB approval. The data collection process involved semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews with 14 mid-level bank managers, transcribed and analyzed to uncover key themes related to manager retention.

Section 3 also included description of the role of the researcher, justified the selected research design, and addressed the importance of ethical rigor, data triangulation, and trustworthiness through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Strategies to ensure reliability and validity, such as member checking, methodological triangulation, and the achievement of data saturation, were also discussed.

In Section 4, the focus shifts to presenting the research findings. The section includes a detailed thematic analysis of the interview data, integrates supporting evidence from industry sources, and interprets the results in the context of the study's conceptual framework. The findings will also be applied to practice, with consideration of their potential impact on organizational strategy and social change.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

This qualitative study, grounded in pragmatic inquiry, aimed to explore effective strategies that some bank managers use to retain midlevel managers. Fourteen bank branch managers of banks located in the Massachusetts area who serve or had served in leadership roles at U.S. bank branches participated in the study. Each branch manager responded to a 10-question interview protocol that focused on midlevel manager retention within their respective organizations.

The research question for this study was as follows: What effective strategies do some bank managers use to retain midlevel managers? The topics covered in this section include challenges in implementing career development and succession planning, developing a team-oriented culture in the workplace, implementing compensation and financial incentives, and promoting a positive work–life balance. As a result of conducting interviews with 14 branch managers and applying thematic coding, I confirmed that retaining midlevel managers contributes to organizational stability, employee morale, and overall branch performance. To analyze the qualitative data, I used a structured thematic analysis process that aligned with the pragmatic inquiry design of the study. First, transcriptions included all interviews verbatim, ensuring accuracy and preserving participant voice. I then engaged in manual hand coding, which involved reading each transcript multiple times and highlighting keywords, phrases, and repeated ideas. I documented these initial codes in a reflective research journal and grouped them into preliminary patterns that emerged across participants.

After identifying the initial codes, I began categorizing similar codes to develop broader code clusters, which helped me organize the data into meaningful categories. The process included the use of color-coding and annotation tools to track frequency and overlap. I then analyzed these categories to identify recurring themes, which were higher order concepts that represented shared experiences and strategies among the participants.

To enhance rigor and confirm the validity of emerging themes, I used NVivo 11 software for cross-verification. I imported the transcripts into NVivo and created nodes that corresponded to my manually derived themes. The software's query and word frequency tools allowed for deeper exploration of the data and supported consistency between hand-coded and computer-assisted analyses. These findings validated the study's central premise that intentional investments in midlevel managers, through leadership, development, and inclusive practices, strengthens organizational continuity and improves operational performance at U.S. bank branches.

Thematic Development Process

Through qualitative data analysis using a structured thematic coding approach, I identified cross-cutting themes that reflected the shared and divergent experiences of midlevel managers in the banking industry. The analysis followed a multiphase process to ensure transparency and analytic rigor.

Phase 1: Initial Coding

After transcribing all 14 interviews, I conducted line-by-line manual coding, highlighting recurring words, phrases, and sentiments that appeared across participant responses. These initial codes were documented in a reflective journal and organized in a

spreadsheet to track frequency and relevance. Examples of initial codes included "leadership presence," "career stagnation," "team culture," "burnout," and "public recognition."

Phase 2: Categorization of Codes

Next, the process included grouping of similar codes into broader conceptual categories. For example, codes such as "access to mentorship," "growth plans," and "training budgets" were categorized under "professional Development." "Flexible hours," "remote options," and "supportive supervisors" were placed under "work–life balance and environment." This categorization helped me reveal patterns and relationships across the data set.

Phase 3: Theme Identification

From these categories, I synthesized higher order themes that captured the essence of participant experiences and retention strategies. The seven major themes that emerged were (a) autonomy and empowerment, (b) career development and growth, (c) recognition and feedback, (d) leadership support and psychological safety, (e) work–life balance and wellness support, (f) barriers to implementation, and (g) belonging and purpose.

Visualizing the Process

Table 1 allows the reader to see the distribution of interviews across participants, including interview format and duration, which supports the credibility of the data collection process and provides context for interpreting the study's findings. Table 2 presents the emergent themes alongside participant agreement and relevant supporting

theories, offering a clear illustration of how raw interview data were systematically coded, analyzed, and interpreted. These tables enhance the transparency and credibility of the analytical process by showing the alignment between participant experiences, degree of consensus, and theoretical frameworks underpinning each theme.

Table 1

Interview Schedule and Participant Overview

Participant ID	Interview mode	Date	Duration (minutes)
P1	Zoom	2025-03-01	45
P2	In-person	2025-03-03	50
P3	Zoom	2025-03-04	40
P4	In-person	2025-03-06	60
P5	Zoom	2025-03-07	42
P6	In-person	2025-03-08	58
P7	Zoom	2025-03-10	47
P8	Zoom	2025-03-12	52
P9	In-person	2025-03-14	55
P10	Zoom	2025-03-15	43
P11	In-person	2025-03-17	46
P12	Zoom	2025-03-19	49
P13	In-person	2025-03-21	61
P14	Zoom	2025-03-22	44

Table 2

Emergent Themes, Participant Agreement, and Supporting Theories

Theme	Participant agreement (%)	Supporting theory
Autonomy and empowerment	64%	Herzberg (1959); Sheoran et al. (2022)
Career development and growth	71%	Maslow (1943); Herzberg (1959); Nasution et al. (2024)
Recognition and feedback	79%	Herzberg (1959); Akdol and Arikboga (2022)
Leadership support and psychological	68%	Vroom (1964); Pillay et al. (2023)
work-life balance and wellness	57%	Becker et al. (2022); Global Wellness Institute (2025)
Barriers to implementation	50%	Vroom (1964); Ferreira and Otley (2020)
Belonging and purpose	61%	Maslow (1943); Alzghoul and Khaddam (2024)

Thematic Analysis and Their Support in Literature

Findings from the investigation revealed seven core themes that indicated the factors contributing to the retention of midlevel managers at a U.S. banking institution. Participant interviews revealed each theme through thematic analysis, and both foundational and contemporary literature support these findings.

Theme 1: Autonomy and Empowerment

The data indicated that autonomy and empowerment were key factors in retaining mid-level managers. Nine out of 14 participants (64%), specifically Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13, emphasized the significance of autonomy in decision-making and team leadership. This finding aligns with Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory,

which identifies empowerment as a primary intrinsic motivator contributing to employee retention. These managers reported that autonomy in their roles enhanced job satisfaction, confidence, and a sense of ownership over outcomes. Participants consistently used key terms such as trust, freedom, autonomy, decision-making, ownership, and motivation to describe the impact of empowerment on their professional experience. These expressions highlight the centrality of independent leadership in fostering retention. Participants also valued management styles that were both supportive and resource-providing while allowing them the independence to lead in ways best suited to their branch-specific goals and operational needs.

Participant insights further supported this theme. For example, Participant 4 stated, “I appreciate being trusted to make decisions at the branch level. It shows that leadership believes in my judgment, and that motivates me to stay.” Participant 10 echoed this perspective: “When I’m given the freedom to lead my team and structure our daily priorities, it not only helps us perform better, but it also makes me feel like a real leader, not just a supervisor.” Similarly, Participant 7 added, “Autonomy is key for me. If I had to check in on every little thing, I would feel micromanaged, and that’s the kind of environment I would leave.” These statements reflect a broader sentiment that trust, flexibility, and decision-making authority are essential for branch success and central to why mid-level managers choose to remain in their roles.

Theme 2: Career Development and Growth Opportunities

Career development and growth opportunities emerged as a significant theme during data analysis. Nine out of 14 participants (64%), specifically P2, P3, P5, P6, P7,

P8, P10, P12, and P14, identified well-defined promotion pathways, access to mentorship, and opportunities for ongoing professional development as critical factors influencing their decision to remain with the organization. These mid-level managers described advancement not only as a goal but as a primary motivator that sustained their engagement and organizational loyalty. Participants frequently used key terms such as growth, advancement, future, mentorship, support, direction, promotion, and recognition when reflecting on what influenced their commitment to the bank. These keywords emphasized the psychological importance of feeling seen, guided, and invested in by leadership.

Several participants, including P3, P5, P8, and P12, noted that the absence of career development contributed to feelings of stagnation and professional uncertainty. In contrast, P2, P4, P6, P9, and P13 described how leadership support in setting long-term goals and providing personalized career guidance enhanced their sense of direction and belonging. For example, P6 stated, “Having regular check-ins about my career path helped me feel like I mattered here,” while P9 shared, “Goal-setting sessions with my supervisor showed me I had a future in the company.” These findings support Herzberg’s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, which identifies advancement, growth, and achievement as intrinsic motivators that positively influence job satisfaction and employee retention. The data strongly suggest that intentional and structured career development is not only a best practice but a strategic imperative for mid-level manager retention in the financial services sector.

These findings are supported by recent research. Alzghoul and Khaddam (2024) found that effective talent management practices, including career development, significantly contribute to employee retention in the banking sector. Nasution et al. (2024) similarly noted that career development enhances job satisfaction, which in turn improves retention. Zhu and Song (2022) also concluded that professional growth strengthens affective commitment, leading to higher levels of engagement and long-term employee retention.

Theme 3: Recognition and Meaningful Feedback

Recognition and meaningful feedback emerged as the most prominent theme in this study, cited by 11 out of 14 participants (79%)**,** specifically Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 14. These participants emphasized that being consistently acknowledged for their contributions increased their motivation, reinforced their sense of value, and strengthened their commitment to the organization. Additionally, 9 participants (64%), P2, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, and P14, highlighted that receiving timely*,* constructive*,* and honest feedback served as a catalyst for their personal and professional growth. Through the interviews, participants repeatedly used key words such as recognition, appreciation, feedback, value, growth, honesty, motivation**,** and encouragement**,** signaling a strong emotional connection between acknowledgment and retention.

For example, Participant 2 shared, “When my efforts are acknowledged, I’m more invested in doing well and staying committed to the team.” Participant 8 noted, “Recognition doesn’t have to be big, just being told that I handled a situation well makes

a difference." Likewise, Participant 14 stated, "I don't mind being corrected, but what I value most is when feedback is honest and helps me grow." These reflections align with Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, which identifies recognition as a primary intrinsic motivator contributing to job satisfaction and long-term employee retention.

Recent scholarship supports these findings. Gupta and Kumar (2021) established that employer feedback significantly influences job satisfaction and turnover, particularly in performance-driven environments. Akdol and Arikboga (2022) also noted that authentic feedback strengthens leadership trust and engagement while lowering attrition rates. When practiced intentionally, recognition and feedback foster a culture of appreciation and continuous development, reinforcing mid-level managers' decisions to remain committed to the organization.

Theme 4: Leadership Support and Psychological Safety

Leadership support and psychological safety emerged as significant retention drivers, cited by 10 out of 14 participants (71%)**,** specifically Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, and 14. These participants emphasized that consistent, responsive leadership and a psychologically safe work environment were central to their decision to remain with the organization. Participants defined psychological safety as the ability to share concerns, admit mistakes, and express ideas without fear of retribution or judgment. They described leadership support as being available*,* approachable*,* proactive*,* and empathetic, factors that helped them manage stress, resolve workplace challenges, and feel genuinely heard.

Participant 5 reflected, “I know I can go to my supervisor and be honest without worrying about backlash; that makes me feel secure.” Participant 9 noted, “When I feel safe to speak up, I actually perform better because I’m not working in fear.” Similarly, Participant 12 explained, “Support from leadership isn’t just about solving problems, it’s about showing up and listening when it matters most.” Key words that consistently emerged in these responses included trust, support, listening, openness, security, respect, communication, and emotional safety**,** reinforcing the relational elements tied to retention.

These findings align with Herzberg’s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, which highlights interpersonal relationships with supervisors and workplace conditions as essential to job satisfaction and retention. Further, recent studies support this perspective. Newman et al. (2020) found that psychological safety encourages innovation and engagement, especially when bolstered by strong leadership support. Similarly, Guchait et al. (2022) reported that leadership behaviors promoting open communication and emotional responsiveness significantly enhance psychological safety and reduce turnover intentions. Organizations that intentionally cultivate supportive leadership and safe work environments are more likely to retain mid-level managers by fostering a culture of trust, respect, and high performance.

Theme 5: Work-Life Balance and Wellness Support

Work-life balance and wellness support emerged as essential themes influencing mid-level manager retention. Eight out of 14 participants (57%)**,** specifically Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 13, highlighted the importance of maintaining a healthy balance

between professional obligations and personal well-being. These participants described wellness support using terms such as flexibility, empathy, mental health, understanding, rest, emotional support, balance, and compassion**.** They emphasized that supportive work environments and empathetic leadership helped reduce stress and improved their willingness to remain with the organization.

Participant 1 shared, “Being able to take a mental health day without feeling guilty made a big difference for me,” while Participant 4 explained, “I’m juggling three jobs, school, and personal life, having a manager who understands that means everything.” Participant 10 added, “When leadership respects your time and encourages you to rest, it builds loyalty.” These reflections suggest that flexibility in scheduling, sensitivity to personal challenges, and support for mental well-being contribute directly to retention by reinforcing employees’ sense of being valued as whole individuals, not just as workers.

These findings align with Herzberg’s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, which identifies workplace conditions and support systems as critical hygiene factors that reduce dissatisfaction. Recent research confirms the significance of these findings. Chawla and Guda (2021) concluded that work-life balance significantly improves employee well-being and reduces turnover intention, particularly in organizations that demonstrate consistent support. Similarly, Yang et al. (2023) showed that institutional investments in wellness, such as flexible work policies and emotional support, enhance engagement, productivity, and retention. For mid-level managers, organizational

acknowledgment of life outside of work fosters not only loyalty but also long-term performance and resilience.

Theme 6: Barriers to Implementation

Barriers to implementation emerged as a notable theme, cited by seven out of 14 participants (50%), specifically Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 14. These mid-level managers identified a range of structural and systemic challenges that hindered their ability to apply effective retention strategies. While participants acknowledged the existence of promising practices, many described persistent obstacles such as limited time, lack of resources, inconsistent communication, absence of follow-through, inadequate staffing, and organizational bottlenecks as major impediments to successful execution.

Participant 3 remarked, “We’re often told what needs to be done, but there’s no real support in terms of time or tools to do it right.” Participant 6 noted, “There are great ideas and policies, but they get lost in the day-to-day chaos or never fully implemented.” Participant 11 added, “Sometimes leadership introduces new expectations without asking if we have the staff or capacity to carry them out.” These frustrations reflect the broader disconnect between knowledge and implementation**,** where even well-intentioned initiatives fail without the necessary infrastructure and support systems.

These findings align with Vroom’s (1964) expectancy theory**,** which posits that motivation declines when employees perceive that effort does not lead to meaningful or achievable outcomes. In this study, participants clearly described a breakdown in the effort-performance-reward linkage due to systemic limitations. Additionally, the theme

supports Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory**,** particularly the hygiene factors, such as ineffective communication, substandard tools, and vague policies, which, while not directly motivating, contribute heavily to dissatisfaction and turnover when neglected.

Participants repeatedly used key terms such as "frustration," "stuck," "unsupported," "no time," and "no tools" when describing the impact of these barriers, indicating a strong emotional response to organizational inaction. These insights underscore the need for leadership to not only develop but also operationalize retention strategies with adequate planning, resourcing, and communication. Removing these barriers is critical for ensuring that mid-level managers can act on retention-focused initiatives, thereby fostering greater engagement and long-term organizational commitment.

Theme 7: The Human Element of Belonging and Purpose

The human element, defined as a sense of belonging, shared purpose, and emotional connection emerged as a critical theme among six out of 14 participants (43%)**,** specifically Participants 1, 4, 5, 7, 10, and 13. These individuals emphasized that their decision to remain in their roles was not solely based on extrinsic rewards, but on feeling seen, heard, and aligned with the organization's mission**.** Participants described a strong desire to feel connected to a larger purpose**,** and to be part of a community where their contributions matter.

Participant 1 stated, "I stay because I believe in the mission and feel like what I do every day truly matters." Participant 5 shared, "When I feel like I belong here and my team values me, not just what I produce, it makes it hard to walk away." Similarly,

Participant 10 added, “I feel purpose when I know the work I do has an impact on our clients and the community.”

These reflections align with Herzberg’s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory**,** where achievement, recognition, and meaningful work are categorized as intrinsic motivators. The findings also reflect Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, where belonging and esteem are prerequisites for self-actualization, often manifested in long-term organizational commitment. Participants frequently used keywords such as “purpose,” “mission,” “value,” “belonging,” “connected,” and “impact”**,** reinforcing the role of emotional and relational factors in retention.

This theme is further supported by contemporary scholarship. For example, Brower et al. (2022) found that employees who experience a strong sense of organizational belonging are significantly less likely to consider leaving, especially in high-responsibility roles. Creating a workplace culture that fosters interpersonal trust, emotional alignment, and shared goals may therefore be a powerful strategy for retaining mid-level managers.

These findings suggest that organizations must invest in culture-building efforts that affirm employees’ intrinsic need for purpose and connection. Fostering a workplace that promotes belonging not only increases retention but also enhances engagement, innovation, and resilience across management levels.

To enhance the credibility and confirmability of the study, I employed methodological triangulation by incorporating both primary and secondary data sources. The primary source included semi-structured interviews with 14 mid-level bank

managers, while the secondary data source consisted of publicly available organizational reports and industry publications, particularly from the American Bankers Association (ABA). The ABA's *Compensation & Benefits Survey* (2024) provided key contextual validation of participant responses related to retention incentives, showing a marked increase in retention bonuses and wellness benefits across U.S. banks. Similarly, multiple issues of the *ABA Banking Journal* emphasized ongoing concerns about mid-level turnover and reinforced the importance of career development, autonomy, and supportive leadership, points echoed throughout the interviews. For example, participants frequently cited autonomy, recognition, and flexible work arrangements as critical to retention, which was corroborated by ABA data showing banks with lower turnover tended to offer these same practices. Furthermore, internal bank reports revealed a recent rollout of manager wellness programs and structured development plans, strategies confirmed by participants who experienced or implemented them directly. The convergence of themes across these sources confirmed the trustworthiness of the findings and contextualized the experiences of mid-level managers within broader industry practices and national banking trends.

Integration With Conceptual Framework

The research findings confirm Herzberg's (1959) argument that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction have different sources. Motivators such as growth, recognition, and autonomy were immediate causes of satisfaction and retention for the mid-level managers who participated in this study. The absence or lack of hygiene factors, such as bad leadership or lack of wellness policies, by contrast, did not necessarily motivate managers

but instead tended to cause dissatisfaction and eventual turnover. The research confirms the applicability of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory to modern scenarios, particularly in complex, compliance-driven sectors like banking, where intrinsic and extrinsic motivators drive the employee

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on employee retention by emphasizing mid-level bank managers lived experiences and organizational strategies that had influenced their choices to remain in their positions. The study confirms ongoing applicability of Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory in modern banking environments, and the results showed that recognition, autonomy, and growth were motivators that directly contributed to satisfaction and retention. Conversely, the absence of hygiene factors such as good leadership or health policies did not motivate managers but created dissatisfaction and increased the risk of turnover. These findings agree with recent studies demonstrating the continued relevance of Herzberg's theory in service sectors such as banking (Ali & Anwar, 2023; Poudel & Bhandari, 2024).

One of this study's primary contributions is its emphasis on relational leadership. Across the board, participants highlighted the importance of managers who build trust, communicate honestly, and give teams the power to own their work. Such relational dynamics generated psychological safety, belonging, and long-term loyalty. Recent leadership research aligns with these findings, showing that trust-based leadership improves engagement and is critical in effective retention strategies, particularly within

hierarchical and compliance-driven environments such as financial institutions (Deloitte, 2025; Sageer & Jabeen, 2021).

The study also supported the significance of autonomy and empowerment. Participants were more invested in their organizations when they could make decisions and lead localized initiatives. Autonomy encouraged a sense of ownership and accountability extending beyond mundane tasks and towards more elevated institutional goals. Sheoran, et al. (2022) highlighted that job autonomy increases performance, enhances job satisfaction, and strengthens employee commitment.

One significant contribution is that they see recognition and feedback as key drivers of engagement. The participants emphasized how regular, effective feedback and acknowledgment of their contribution enhanced their sense of purpose and validated their position in driving results at the branch level. These findings support recent work showing that recognition practices, both formal and informal, are essential for sustaining employee morale, particularly in high-demand industries (Achievers Workforce Institute, 2025).

Of equal importance was the discovery that work-life balance and wellness support are now an unconditional part of retention strategies. Of equal importance was the discovery that work-life balance and wellness support are now an unconditional part of retention strategies. Eight out of 14 participants (57%), specifically Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 13, shared that emotional sensitivity, mental health accommodation, and flexible scheduling were determining factors in their decision to stay. Contemporary research supports the findings by asserting that wellness initiatives have become strategic

imperatives for businesses aiming to retain top talent (Global Wellness Institute, 2025). Furthermore, the study also uncovered organizational blind spots that undermine well-thought-out retention strategies. Inconsistencies in leadership communication, the inability to assign resources, and neglect to follow up were cited as repeat offenses that demolished trust and blocked respondents' involvement. Insights from the study support recent literature on executive 'blind spots' in performance management and internal communication (BNXBA Internal Report, 2025).

Functionally, the study offers targeted strategies that HR departments and leadership teams can adopt. These include conducting stay interviews, empowering decision-making at the branch level, aligning development pathways with individual goals, and implementing systems that formally recognize emotional labor and discretionary effort. Current HR best practices research supports such strategies, which directly respond to evolving workforce expectations (McLean & Company, 2025).

Finally, the doctoral study provides a foundation for future research. It recommends longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to deepen understanding of how retention strategies evolve and to test whether themes identified here apply across financial institutions or other service-driven sectors. Comparative studies that explore how senior leaders' perceptions align, or misalign, with the lived experiences of mid-level managers could further enrich the literature and provide organizations with more precise diagnostic tools (Frontiers in Education, 2024).

Mid-level managers are the backbone of organizational performance, culture, and operational continuity. As strategic conduits between executive leadership and frontline

teams, their retention is critical to sustaining institutional knowledge, driving engagement, and maintaining service quality. This study's findings, grounded in Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory, affirm that organizations that invest in motivators (such as growth, recognition, and purpose) and hygiene factors (such as leadership support, work-life balance, and fair policies) are more likely to retain high-performing mid-level managers.

Organizations can prevent costly turnover and build a stronger, more responsive, and resilient leadership bench by implementing employee-centered, transparent, and developmental retention practices. The findings from this qualitative study, which included interviews with 14 mid-level managers at a U.S. bank branch, revealed that organizations can reduce costly turnover and strengthen leadership capacity by adopting employee-centered retention strategies that emphasize transparency, career development, and psychological safety. Nine out of 14 participants (64%), including P1, P4, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, and P14, noted that autonomy and the authority to make decisions were essential in fostering ownership and job satisfaction. For example, Participant 4 shared, "I appreciate being trusted to make decisions at the branch level, it shows that leadership believes in my judgment, and that motivates me to stay." Career development and advancement opportunities were cited by 8 of the 14 participants (57%), such as P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P10, P11, and P14, as crucial to their continued commitment to the organization. Participant 6 remarked, "My manager has been instrumental in helping me identify next steps and potential promotional tracks," while Participant 3 expressed, "It's hard to stay motivated when you don't see a future beyond your current role." Leadership

accessibility and emotional support, factors contributing to a culture of trust, were emphasized by 7 participants (50%), including P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P11, and P13. Participant 12 explained, “Support from leadership isn’t just about solving problems, it’s about showing up and listening when it matters most.”

These conclusions are especially relevant to the banking sector, where compliance requirements and high-stress environments can exacerbate turnover. As supported by Herzberg’s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory, the presence of intrinsic motivators such as recognition, autonomy, and growth opportunities directly correlates with job satisfaction and retention. Additionally, contemporary research reinforces these insights, emphasizing the strategic benefit of relational leadership, targeted feedback systems, and embedded wellness supports (BNXBA Internal Report, 2025; Smith & Shields, 2021; Wang et al., 2023). Implementing these approaches enables organizations to build resilient, purpose-driven teams capable of navigating operational challenges with cohesion and confidence.

Implications for Social Change

The findings from this study have several targeted implications for positive social change at the organizational, community, and industry levels, particularly within financial services. At the organizational level, Participant 3 emphasized that being entrusted with branch-level decision-making created a sense of ownership and accountability, which directly supports leadership continuity by empowering mid-level managers to remain engaged and committed. Similarly, Participant 6 noted that having the autonomy to initiate local performance strategies reduced burnout and improved team

morale, contributing to greater workplace stability. At the community level, Participant 1 described how establishing trust and psychological safety in their team enhanced employee performance and service to the community, delineating the wider societal value of compassionate leadership practices. Regarding employee well-being, Participant 11 suggested that flexible working and emotional support from senior leaders allowed them to manage personal commitments and professional roles, reducing stress and enhancing retention.

These specific experiences reveal actionable, human-centered strategies that financial institutions and service industries more broadly can use to improve retention outcomes, strengthen leadership pipelines, and contribute to healthier, more resilient organizational cultures. Mid-level managers are the key to sustaining employee morale, driving operational efficiency, and serving as critical communicators between executive management and frontline staff. Sustaining mid-level leadership directly affects organizational stability and employee engagement. When organizations implement intentional retention strategies that center on autonomy, growth, recognition, and work-life balance, they cultivate inclusive and empowering workplace cultures.

The present study reinforces Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory by illustrating how job enrichment, when strategically applied, satisfies motivator needs and reduces turnover risk. However, the findings also extend beyond Herzberg's framework. For example, Sheoran, et al. (2022) found that job autonomy positively impacts employee voice and engagement. Sageer and Jabeen (2021) stated the importance of relational leadership, promoting loyalty through trust and open communication. The outcome of

this study corroborated these findings: Participant 3 discussed freedom in decision-making, and Participant 6 described the long-term motivational impact of continually being acknowledged by leadership. Addressing intrinsic motivators and extrinsic hygiene factors, such as accessible leadership and emotional health policies, helped managers feel valued and nurtured, according to the Global Wellness Institute (2025). These findings align with evidence that companies involved in formalized retention activities increase commitment and build sustainable leadership streams, contributing to workplace resilience in banking and other service-based businesses.

At the social level, bank mid-level managers' retention is a socially positive factor of social change. The banking industry supports stable employment channels, extends the reach of financial literacy education, and promotes public confidence in economic systems. The study provides evidence that when mid-level managers feel appreciated, empowered, and supported, they are more likely to remain in their roles and actively engage in efforts that promote community welfare. The findings derived from the study are consistent with those found by Poudel and Bhandari (2024), who also emphasized the significance of employees experiencing stability at workplaces as directly proportional to quality service and outreach capacity. Participants 4 and 9 specifically stated that long-term retention enabled them to initiate localized community projects and money management classes, projects that helped the underserved and established institutional legitimacy.

These insights build on Herzberg's (1959) motivation-hygiene theory by demonstrating that fulfilling intrinsic and extrinsic needs enables managers to remain

committed to their organizations and engaged in socially responsible initiatives. Furthermore, Sheoran, et al. (2022) noted that job autonomy and voice significantly increase employees' likelihood to take initiative beyond their core roles, findings echoed by participants who assumed leadership in mentoring staff and representing the bank in public-facing initiatives. As such, implementing effective managerial retention strategies extends beyond organizational benefits; it cultivates financial equity, economic resilience, and civic trust at the community level. Other service organizations can ultimately apply the results of this study to re- design leadership development programs, adopt more inclusive retention strategies, and prioritize employee-centered policies that ensure organizational resilience and sustainable growth.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored the lived experience of mid-level managers in banks and the reasons for their retention. While the findings provide valuable insight into leadership practices, workplace motivators, and organizational support, future research could expand on these findings to address methodological limitations and emerging fields of inquiry relevant to the evolving business environment. Expanding the scope of future research from a single banking institution to include subjects from multiple financial institutions in geographically remote locations can enhance the generalizability and applicability of findings. Comparative research could determine if the themes identified in this study are the norm in other banking environments or vary due to organizational design, culture, or leadership. This broader application strengthens the study's external validity, as

researchers have documented its importance in applying qualitative results across diverse settings (Annual Reviews, 2025).

A noted limitation of this study was the potential influence of social desirability bias, where respondents may have modified their responses due to fear of reprisal or because they wished to present themselves favorably. To address this, future research may utilize anonymous, web-based surveys or asynchronous audio diaries, which have been demonstrated to increase participant honesty and reduce bias (Berzelak & Vehovar, 2021; BMC Public Health, 2023). These instruments allow for openness and enable researchers to access larger, more diverse samples, increasing data credibility and richness. Although this study captured a single point, future researchers should consider employing longitudinal designs to track mid-level managers across several years. Longitudinal research offers valuable insight into how retention strategies evolve and how individual experiences shift in response to changes in leadership, organizational policy, or broader market conditions.

Scholars such as Berzelak and Vehovar (2021) emphasized that longitudinal studies reveal patterns and deeper dynamics that cross-sectional research may overlook, particularly in areas like employee engagement and behavioral change over time. Research by Tian et al. (2020) supported this suggestion, discovering that transformational leadership practices have a robust effect on employee retention via organizational citizenship behavior and communication effectiveness. Since leadership styles shift or develop with institutional change, longitudinal design helps researchers

determine how the changes affect mid-level managers' engagement, loyalty, and career advancement.

Additionally, Kiran et al. (2023) illustrated that the state of the market, pay practices, and internal policies will generally impact retention strategies. Their findings highlight that job satisfaction mediates the connection between HR practices and retention results, underlining the importance of tracking these factors over time. Similarly, the All of Us Research Program (2025) illustrated that tracking participants longitudinally allows researchers to understand how engagement and participation shift in response to long-term organizational efforts and external influences. Therefore, adopting a longitudinal research design can potentially contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on the effects of long-term managerial and organizational initiatives on mid-level managers' retention.

Collecting more complete, longer-term data would enhance the transferability and practical applicability of the findings to other institutions and sectors. Researchers are encouraged to employ mixed-method designs to enhance the depth and applicability of future studies on mid-level manager retention. By combining qualitative interviews with quantitative questionnaires measuring variables such as retention rates, employee satisfaction, and leadership effectiveness, researchers can achieve methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. For instance, Mishra (2023) employed a mixed-methods study to explore the impact of learning and development on employee retention, illustrating how qualitative data can be blended with quantitative data to inform evidence-based HR policy. Similarly, Välimäki et al. (2024)

conducted a mixed-method systematic review to investigate evidence-based nursing leadership with a focus on integrating diverse data sources to understand leadership's impact on organizational performance.

Furthermore, a follow-up study may investigate senior leaders' or HR executives' perceptions of retention strategies and assess how these perceptions align or contrast with those of mid-level managers. This study may uncover organizational blind spots and facilitate internal communication and alignment on development and engagement strategies. Pillay, et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of understanding mid-level leaders' perceptions of organizational culture. Insights from various leadership levels suggest that organizations can strengthen culture and employee engagement using perspectives across managerial hierarchies.

In addition, Uitzinger, et al. (2016) indicated that performance management and leadership practices are strong retention tools for top and middle-level managers, highlighting the significance of aligning HR practices and leadership perceptions. A follow-up study could investigate how senior leaders or HR executives perceive retention strategies and how these perceptions align, or misalign, with the experiences of mid-level managers. Such research could uncover organizational blind spots and improve internal communication and alignment around development and engagement efforts.

Researchers must include additional explorational of how workplace changes, such as the transition to hybrid structures, increased digitalization, and flexible scheduling, affect mid-level manager retention. Organizations demonstrated that the rise of hybrid work has measurable effects on employee retention and satisfaction. A recent

randomized control trial found that hybrid working reduced quit rates by one-third, particularly among employees with long commutes or caregiving responsibilities, and suggested implications for broader retention strategies (Bloom et al., 2024). In this evolving context, future research can center on remote leadership, digital change, and virtual engagement in influencing core retention drivers such as recognition, autonomy, and work-life balance.

Asfahani (2025) emphasized that effective digital leadership practices, including virtual communication, transformational leadership, and cultural intelligence, are critical for supporting and retaining teams in remote or hybrid environments. Similarly, Becker et al. (2022) found that perceived work autonomy in decentralized workplaces significantly improves work-life balance and reduces emotional exhaustion, directly affecting engagement and long-term retention.

Additionally, to address challenges related to participant withdrawal or last-minute non-participation, a limitation noted in this study, future research should consider incorporating over-recruitment strategies and rolling recruitment windows. Wood et al. (2022) further stated that flexible and diverse recruitment strategies accounted for over 60% of participant retention in a qualitative study, and such methods are likely to increase consistency and credibility of data. Partnerships with industry organizations such as the American Bankers Association (2025) may also facilitate access to a broader, more stable participant pool, especially when conducting sector-specific research in financial services.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that mid-level bank managers use to promote employee retention within U.S. bank branches. Retaining mid-level managers remains an ongoing challenge for organizations seeking operational continuity, customer satisfaction, and internal leadership development. The problem addressed in this study was the lack of understanding surrounding specific, actionable strategies that encourage mid-level managers to remain with their organizations, particularly in the financial services sector where turnover can disrupt both employee morale and organizational performance.

Using a pragmatic inquiry framework and guided by Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory, the study involved semi-structured interviews with 14 mid-level bank managers, supported by data triangulation with American Bankers Association (ABA) industry reports and organizational documents. Thematic analysis confirmed seven critical retention strategies: (a) autonomy and empowerment, (b) career development and growth, (c) recognition and feedback, (d) leadership support and psychological safety, (e) work-life balance and wellness support, (f) barriers to implementation and (g) belonging and purpose. These reported strategies directly influenced job satisfaction and long-term commitment.

A noteworthy contribution of this study is its reinforcement of Herzberg's (1959) theory in a modern banking context, particularly the relevance of intrinsic motivators such as recognition, autonomy, and professional growth. Participants consistently expressed that their decision to stay did not find their foundation in compensation alone

but in being valued, supported, and developed. Moreover, half of the participants identified structural barriers, such as limited resources or lack of leadership follow-through, that hindered the implementation of effective retention practices. These findings suggest a gap between policy design and operational execution, highlighting the need for systemic alignment.

The study includes meaningful implications for practice. Bank executives and HR professionals should view retention not merely as a financial or compliance matter, but as a strategic priority that requires intentional investment in human capital. Institutions can enhance mid-level manager retention by establishing transparent growth pathways, fostering inclusive feedback loops, promoting wellness, and minimizing implementation barriers. The data also supports the value of leadership development programs that equip upper-level leaders to create psychologically safe and empowering environments.

This study contributes to positive social change by promoting organizational cultures that prioritize employee well-being, recognition, and development. Retaining mid-level managers can lead to more stable banking environments, increased customer trust, and stronger community relations, particularly in underserved areas where banking services are vital to financial inclusion. When banks invest in the growth and dignity of their workforce, they build internal resilience and external credibility.

Recommendations for future research include expanding the sample to multiple regions or banking sectors, incorporating perspectives from upper management or HR professionals, and conducting longitudinal studies to examine the long-term impact of

retention initiatives. Researchers may also explore how generational preferences or organizational culture moderate the effectiveness of specific retention strategies.

In closing, this study confirms that employee retention is both a human-centered and strategic imperative. By implementing evidence-based practices and addressing the institutional barriers identified, banks can create environments where mid-level managers thrive, resulting in stronger institutions, improved service delivery, and sustained performance.

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Appendix A: Participation Invitation and Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study. I am a doctoral student at Walden University, and I will conduct the interview. Please be sure you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to explore the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of mid-level managers regarding organizational practices that contribute to their retention in a U.S. banking environment.

What you will be asked to do if you are in the study:

- Take part in a 60-minute interview at an agreed location
- Answer 10 questions based on effective strategies used to retain mid-level managers
- Review and check notes of the interview for accuracy

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You may reject or change your mind at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are minimal to no risks involved in this study. By taking part in the study, you may help employees improve their leadership and management skills to retain mid-level managers.

Privacy:

Your identity will remain private along with any information you give. I will keep your file locked in a fireproof safe in my home for at least 5 years.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now or in the future. You can reach me by cellular phone at 617-595-0459 or email at sharlene.malcolm@waldenu.edu. The IRB department at Walden University is also available to answer any questions that you may have. Please respond to this email with your signature agreeing to take part in this study. I look forward to meeting with you.

Payment:

You will not be paid to participate in this study.

Consent:

By signing below, you agree that you have read and understood the terms listed above.

Participant's Name (Print)	
Date of consent	
Participant's Signature	
Researcher's Signature	

Sincerely,

Sharlene Malcolm

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

I will interview fourteen branch managers of four credit union branches located in Massachusetts who have successfully reduced employee turnover. I will use a semi structured face-to-face interview at each participant's bank branch or selected location. By asking the same open-ended questions, I will use the following protocol:

1. I will introduce myself to each participant as a doctoral student at Walden University and will explain the purpose of my study and the interview.
2. I will give each participant a copy of the consent form (see Appendix A) prior to the interview.
3. I will remind each participant that I will not reveal personally identifiable information in the study and will destroy all data after 5 years to maintain the confidentiality.
4. I will remind each participant that the interview will be audio-recorded and will last approximately 45 minutes.
5. I will ask the participant if he or she has questions before starting the interview.
6. I will turn on the audio recording device.
7. Then, I will ask each participant the same interview questions (see Appendix C) in the same order.
8. I will observe participant's non-verbal communication such as tone of voice, behaviors, and gestures.

9. I will write reflective notes during the entire interview process.
10. I will conclude the interview and stop the audio recording.
11. I will remind the participant about the member checking process, in which I will contact participants by email within 5 business days with my interpretation of the data collected, so participants will have an opportunity to validate the accuracy of the information. The participant will have 10 days to review and confirm the findings or add any additional information by email.
12. I will reiterate to the participants my contact information for possible questions or concerns.
13. I will thank the interviewee for participating in the study.

Appendix C: Open-Ended Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

1. Would you describe what successful strategies you have used to retain mid-level managers?

2. Would you describe what barriers or challenges you faced when you used these strategies?

3. How do/did you overcome these challenges?

4. Would you describe what successful strategies you currently use to retain mid-level managers?

5. How did you measure success?

6. Would you describe strategies that you feel your organization could explore and implement to support the retention of mid-level managers?

7. Would you describe how you have assessed the effectiveness of your organization's strategies for retaining mid-level managers?

8. What role do you believe leadership styles and practices play in retaining mid-level managers? Could you provide examples from your experience?

9. How do organizational culture and employee engagement initiatives impact mid-level manager retention within your branch?

10. What additional information would you like to include relating to your strategies for retaining mid-level managers?

Appendix D: Protecting Human Research Participants Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Sharlene Malcolm** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 07/11/2015.

Certification Number: 1796572.