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Strategies That Clinical Research Site Managers Use to Minimize Employee Turnover

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Meredith College, 2011

BA, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

High turnover rates among clinical research staff present a business problem that reduces continuity, quality, and cost-effectiveness of clinical trials. This problem is important to clinical research managers because employee stability is essential for participant retention, regulatory compliance, and operational success. Grounded in the job embeddedness and transformational leadership theories, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore the effective strategies that some clinical research site managers use to reduce employee turnover in the southeastern United States. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with six clinical research leaders and triangulated with publicly available documents. Using Yin's five-step analytical process, the analysis revealed six key themes: employee engagement and communication, supportive leadership and management practices, career development and growth opportunities, recognition and appreciation, work-life balance and flexibility, and financial incentives and compensation. One key recommendation is that clinical site managers should be trained to exemplify retention strategies, including flexible, employee-centered practices. The implications for positive social change include the potential for clinical research managers to implement targeted strategies that reduce employee turnover, thereby enhancing clinical trial outcomes, increasing access to high-quality medicines across diverse populations, and improving quality of life for community citizens.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Organizational leaders and administrators face numerous challenges in retaining their workforce in a competitive employee recruitment environment. One major challenge, employee turnover – or the rate at which employees depart an organization and need to be replaced – is a significant concern for firms across various industries (Andrews & Mohammed, 2020; Stroo et al., 2020; Vardaman et al., 2020; Yam et al., 2018). High turnover rates can lead to adverse outcomes, such as increased recruitment costs, disrupted workflow, decreased team morale, and a negative impact on a business's financial performance. In the healthcare sector, employee turnover can have significant economic implications. Research results have indicated that U.S. hospitals may experience annual losses of up to $7.9 million because of nurse turnover (Henderson, 2020).

Clinical trials are essential in advancing medical knowledge and developing new treatments and therapies in the healthcare industry. However, clinical research is one field where employee turnover is exceptionally high, with a turnover rate ranging from 35%–61% among patient-facing clinical research professionals (Boulton & Beer, 2018; Freel et al., 2023). The continuous turnover of skilled personnel in clinical research settings may hinder progress, disrupt research timelines, increase training and recruitment costs, and compromise the quality of data collected (Buchanan et al., 2021; Henderson, 2020; Stroo et al., 2020), thereby delaying U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval for potential new therapies. Clinical research site managers are at the forefront of managing staff

retention challenges but may need more effective strategies to minimize employee turnover.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some clinical research site managers lack strategies to minimize employee turnover. While the impact of turnover on business performance is well-documented, there is a lack of targeted solutions tailored to the unique challenges faced by clinical research sites. Developing effective strategies to address this issue is important for enhancing the efficiency, sustainability, and social contributions of these clinical research site teams. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to explore strategies that clinical research site managers used to minimize employee turnover at clinical research sites. The targeted population was midlevel employees of clinical research sites in the southeastern United States.

Research Question

What effective strategies do clinical research site managers use to reduce employee turnover?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

I made a few foundational assumptions in this research project. Assumptions are common viewpoints shaped by individual experiences and preferences (Laguerre, 2023). One assumption was that employee turnover is an issue within clinical research site management that can hurt an organization. Another assumption was that some clinical

research site managers have formulated effective strategies to reduce employee turnover. Lastly, I assumed that my chosen conceptual and theoretical framework, population, sample size, and research design were appropriate for this project.

Limitations

Limitations are defined as shortcomings in research that are beyond the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). A potential limitation of this project was difficulty or resistance from managers or employees regarding information sharing. I mitigated this limitation by reassuring potential research participants that I would not share confidential information with a third party. In addition, I emphasized that any information obtained from publicly accessible company documents would corroborate the data acquired through the interviews.

Transition

In summary, I identified and explored effective strategies for minimizing turnover for managers of clinical research sites located in the southeastern United States in this project. In Section 1, I described the background of the problem, stated the business problem focus and project purpose, and outlined the assumptions and limitations of the research project. In Section 2, I will provide a comprehensive literature review. In Section 3, I will describe the comprehensive research methodology chosen for this doctoral research project, including the project ethics, nature of the project, research participants, data collection process, and methods used for data analysis. In Section 4, I will present the final results of the project and my conclusions, along with the potential implications for business practice, social change, and future research.

Section 2: The Literature Review

Literature Review Opening Narrative

The literature review is a vital aspect of this doctoral research project. Professional and academic literature provides the foundation for understanding the present body of knowledge and establishes the framework for future research (Theile & Beall, 2024). Reviewing the existing literature is necessary to understand the research process, determine a research question, and identify the conceptual framework or perspective (Neupane, 2021; Welch et al., 2022). In this literature review, I explore the conceptual framework of job embeddedness and determine the impact of job embeddedness on employee turnover and retention at clinical research sites. I present a critical analysis and synthesis of recent research, focusing on the challenges faced by some clinical research site managers who lack effective employee retention strategies. In my analysis, I highlight the issues and provide insights into developing retention strategies for clinical research sites.

This literature review is thorough and was focused on identifying strategies to reduce employee turnover at clinical research sites. I begin the literature review by assessing the job embeddedness conceptual framework, which provides important insights into employee retention dynamics (see Aman-Ullah et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020). The goal of the in-depth analysis of the job embeddedness conceptual framework was to reveal the significance and application of job embeddedness in reducing turnover in clinical research settings. I also highlight the complementary relationship between job

embeddedness and transformational leadership regarding employee retention and discuss other possible frameworks.

Next, I critically assess and synthesize current research on themes and phenomena related to staff turnover and retention strategies in the healthcare and clinical research industries. I review current studies on the challenges faced by personnel in healthcare facilities, particularly those who lack effective ways to reduce high turnover rates. Additionally, I analyze research that focused on factors influencing turnover, such as job satisfaction, organizational support, and leadership style (see Al Zamel et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024) and assess the impact of employee job embeddedness on decision-making processes. By reviewing these findings, I was able to identify practical approaches that site managers can use to reduce turnover and develop a more dedicated workforce.

Finally, I analyze how the current doctoral project may add to the existing body of research. This assessment provides insights into how my research project addresses gaps in the literature, particularly regarding employee retention strategies that have yet to be extensively explored in the context of clinical research site management. My goal was to present a comprehensive and well-supported review of professional and academic literature focused on enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover in clinical research settings.

To locate literature for this review, I used the following keywords and phrases: *employee turnover*, *clinical research*, *clinical trials*, *healthcare*, *nurse turnover*, *job satisfaction*, *financial impact*, *job embeddedness*, *transformational leadership*, and *retention strategies*. I searched the EBSCO host platform to access scholarly publications

from central databases, such as Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Sage Journals, ProQuest Central, and Emerald Management, along with other resources available through the Walden University Library. In addition, I used Google Scholar to increase my access to peer-reviewed literature. To ensure the relevance and timeliness of the evidence-based data, I primarily included peer-reviewed articles published within the last 5 years. I verified the peer-reviewed status of these articles using Ulrich's website. Where applicable, I used scholarly references published more than 5 years ago to discuss background information and provide the history of my conceptual framework and doctoral research topic.

I structured the literature review systematically to ensure a clear and cohesive presentation of material based on a well-defined methodology. I also included a table summarizing the research articles I used for this project. My goal was to integrate existing knowledge while identifying areas that require further exploration, allowing clinical research site managers to develop effective strategies to reduce personnel turnover and improve retention outcomes.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

Turnover is a prominent concern affecting organizations across the globe. Turnover, often referred to as employee turnover, is when employers experience the departure of personnel from their organization (Samašonok, 2024). Turnover can occur voluntarily when individuals choose to leave an organization of their own will or involuntarily when employees are terminated or laid off by the company (Lyons & Bandura, 2020). A high turnover rate indicates underlying organizational issues that

businesses must address (Neri, 2024). The objective of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to explore strategies that clinical research site managers use to reduce employee turnover.

Conceptual Framework

Guided by a theoretical framework, the pragmatic approach involves combining different components of qualitative methods to address a specific research question (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). The conceptual framework that grounded this research project were job embeddedness along with transformational leadership as a complementary perspective. Job embeddedness and transformational leadership collectively provided a nuanced perspective on the factors influencing staff retention.

Job Embeddedness Theory

Mitchell and Lee (2001) indicated that the job embeddedness framework provides a multidimensional view of the components that keep employees connected to their jobs, focusing on how factors, such as social connections, organizational fit, and the perceived costs of leaving a job, influence an employee's decision to stay. In addition, Mitchell and Lee (2001) expanded on Lewin's field theory, emphasizing how job embeddedness impacts organizational stability by making employees feel entrenched in their social and professional roles (Khan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022). This theory is particularly relevant for high-stress, high-commitment environments, such as clinical research, where the risks of staff turnover are notably high (Liu et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2020). Several scholars have explored the impact of job embeddedness at work (Aman-Ullah et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2020), emphasizing that employees with strong connections to their

jobs tend to perform better and are less likely to leave (Ampofo & Karatepe, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Menon & Sujatha, 2023). This connection is vital for maintaining a motivated and stable workforce. Understanding the principles of job embeddedness provides valuable insights into employee retention strategies, setting the stage to explore its practical applications.

There is minimal research on the impact of job embeddedness specific to employees in the clinical research sector. However, job embeddedness is significant to clinical research because fostering work and community connections may be essential in retaining clinical trial staff, such as nurses (Johnson, 2022; Vardaman et al., 2020; Yam et al., 2018). Job embeddedness is associated with lower turnover intentions (Vardaman et al., 2020) and reduced employee burnout and stress (Fasbender et al., 2019; Goliroshan et al., 2021). Given the complexity of clinical trials, losing key employees may put clinical trial outcomes and financial investments at risk (Peralta & Sánchez-Santiago, 2024). Clinical research site managers who understand and apply principles of job embeddedness, such as fostering strong workplace ties and ensuring a supportive community, can potentially reduce turnover and stabilize operations (Vardaman et al., 2020). Therefore, implementing job embeddedness approaches may be critical for increasing staff retention and ensuring the continuity and success of clinical trials.

Transformational Leadership

The theoretical framework of transformational leadership is one of the most well-known leadership theories. Transformational leadership, first conceptualized in 1978 by Burns (1979), is a theory that emphasizes the ability of leaders to inspire their followers

to effect change by being captivating visionaries, supporting and praising others, and making individuals feel good about themselves and their contributions to the greater good (Northouse, 2021). Skopak and Hadzaihmetovic (2022) defined leadership as influencing individuals to empower, motivate, and supervise their actions toward achieving the goals of an organization or group. There are four categories of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (I. Khan et al., 2022).

The four key components of transformational leadership are essential for effective leadership. Idealized influence occurs when followers credit the leader with bringing about their best efforts and attitudes. Leaders with these characteristics can motivate followers to become passionate advocates for their organization's cause. Leaders who can encourage their followers to improve their skills and remain committed to the cause can identify and express their objectives within their organizations (I. Khan et al., 2022). Leaders who are inspirational to their followers do so by modeling moral conduct and encouraging their followers to take meaningful action (Thompson et al., 2021). To foster innovative thinking, leaders must model actions that inspire people to reevaluate issues, generate new ideas, and adopt novel perspectives (Kozioł-Nadolna, 2020). Individualized consideration may take many forms, including providing a nurturing environment and access to educational resources like coaching (I. Khan et al., 2022; Raziq et al., 2021). Leaders who apply the four characteristics of transformational leadership can promote personal development, innovation, and dedication and commitment in their teams.

A number of researchers have explored the relationship between transformational leadership and employee retention and job satisfaction. Some quantitative researchers evaluated different variables and instrument scores to assess the effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction (Barnett, 2017; Raziq et al., 2021; Sun & Wang, 2017). The results of these researchers revealed that transformational leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction or employee retention, or both scenarios (Barnett, 2017; Raziq et al., 2021; Sun & Wang, 2017). Other researchers who conducted qualitative studies on the effects of transformational leadership in workplace settings utilized interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires to explore the impact of transformational leadership in work settings (Andersen et al., 2018; Escortell et al., 2020; López et al., 2022). These researchers found that transformational leaders improved workers' chances of being more content and willing to remain on the job (Andersen et al., 2018; Escortell et al., 2020; López et al., 2022). These findings supported using a transformational leadership perspective to examine staffing and employee retention difficulties in businesses conducting clinical trials.

Transformational leaders provide an avenue for addressing turnover in clinical research. Leaders who adopt the transformational leadership style may create a sense of purpose and belonging among employees, which may also increase retention (Barnett, 2017; Raziq et al., 2021). In clinical research, leaders must foster a culture emphasizing collaboration, professional development, and emotional support (Brenner et al., 2022; Patel & Shin, 2022). A clinical research manager with a transformational mindset may improve employee job satisfaction, decreasing the likelihood of turnover.

Job Embeddedness and Transformational Leadership

There is a notable connection between job embeddedness and transformational leadership. According to Saeed and Jun (2022), transformational leaders are pivotal in motivating employee retention and job embeddedness. Yam et al. (2018) affirmed that job embeddedness may significantly impact an employee's decision to remain with a company. Transformational leaders influence employee behavior by motivating and inspiring their teams, building a more substantial commitment to their work and organization (Romi et al., 2023). The ideology of transformational leadership includes developing an employee vision statement, focusing on desired outcomes, implementing solutions to challenges, establishing a clear purpose and direction, and allocating time for professional development (Saeed & Jun, 2022). Transformational leaders cultivate strong relationships, encouraging a supportive work environment that endears employees more deeply into their roles and organization.

Organizational leaders are entrusted with great responsibility. Thus, business leaders should choose the appropriate individuals for these roles. Employees are more motivated to dedicate themselves to company goals when organizational leaders can effectively articulate a clear and organized vision for the firm (Andersen et al., 2018; Raziq et al., 2021). Researchers found that there is a connection between leadership and employee motivation that affects job satisfaction and whether the employee remains on the job (Andersen et al., 2018; Barnett, 2017; Escortell et al., 2020; Gan & Voon, 2021; López et al., 2022; Raziq et al., 2021; Sun & Wang, 2017). For example, a clinical research site manager who promotes teamwork and acknowledges individual efforts may

significantly reduce turnover. Influential transformational leaders can communicate a compelling vision to employees with organizational objectives, thereby fostering an engaged and satisfied staff that is willing to continue working with the organization.

Other Frameworks

Some researchers have suggested that implementing multiple approaches to address organizational issues is often the most effective strategy. The contingency theory is one alternative framework researchers use to assess the issue of employee turnover (Neri, 2024). Lartey (2020) introduced the contingency theory as a framework incorporating adaptation, equifinality, effectiveness, and congruency to explore the relationship between variables. According to the contingency theory, organizational leaders analyze the factors driving high turnover rates and then implement tailored strategies to address the problem, recognizing that a single solution is not applicable universally (Neri, 2024). Under contingency theory, managers possess the strategic flexibility to adjust their turnover management approaches in response to business demands, contextual factors, or organizational challenges.

Some researchers may use Hofstede's corporate culture model to provide a framework for analyzing turnover through the lens of how organizational culture may impact employee behavior and decision-making. Hofstede's framework consists of six dimensions: power distance (i.e., the level of inequality accepted within an organization), individualism versus collectivism (i.e., whether employees prefer independent work or collaboration), masculinity versus femininity (i.e., a focus on competitiveness versus cooperation), uncertainty avoidance (i.e., how comfortable individuals are with

ambiguity), long-term versus short-term orientation (i.e., whether the focus is on future rewards or immediate results), and indulgence versus restraint (i.e., the degree to which people seek gratification of desires; Lartey, 2020). The dimensions of Hofstede's model may indicate how cultural values impact employee turnover tendencies.

The contingency theory and Hofstede's corporate culture model provide unique perspectives on the issue of employee turnover. However, managers who embrace the job embeddedness theory focus more on *why* employees stay, emphasizing the worker's attachment to their roles, the community, and their organization (Ratnawati et al., 2020). In addition, transformational leadership theory highlights leaders' crucial role in inspiring and motivating employees, a key factor in fostering retention and reducing turnover (Gan & Voon, 2021). Job embeddedness and transformational leadership frameworks provide a more suitable approach for addressing employee turnover in clinical research settings.

Other Potential Themes and Phenomena

Employee Turnover in Clinical Research

The concept of turnover is not a new phenomenon. Turnover has a long history dating back to the Industrial Revolution, when first identified as labor turnover. During the Industrial Revolution, workers frequently changed jobs for various reasons, reflecting the shifting employment dynamics. Initially, low wages, poor performance, lack of promotion opportunities, and the seasonal nature of many jobs were primary drivers of turnover (Douglas, 1918). Over time, as labor rights improved and economic conditions evolved, the reasons influencing employee turnover shifted. By the mid-20th century, factors, such as opportunities for professional development, organizational culture,

meaningful job responsibilities, and work-life balance, became more prominent in influencing employee decisions to leave or stay (Bishara & Westermann-Behaylo, 2012; Costa & Carvalho, 2022; Lin & Huang, 2021). Understanding the historical context of turnover in the workplace provides insight into the changing factors driving employee turnover and highlights the importance of organizational leaders developing or adapting retention strategies accordingly.

Turnover rates in the United States may vary among different industries. For example, sectors, such as hospitality, trade, transportation, utilities, and professional and business services, experience higher turnover rates than healthcare (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). In February 2024 alone, 3.5 million employees quit their jobs, with 668,000 of those employees leaving a healthcare position (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024).

While turnover has long been a concern in many businesses, employee turnover in healthcare, particularly clinical research, presents a unique challenge because of the high complexity of clinical trials, which amplifies the consequences of staff instability. In addition, clinical trials are critical for advancing healthcare science. Clinical research is the evaluation of the safety and efficacy of drugs, medical devices, diagnostic tools, and treatment regimens for human use aimed at preventing, diagnosing, and treating diseases (Herzog-LeBoeuf & Willenberg, 2020; Inan et al., 2020; Loucks et al., 2021). Clinical trials are vital for testing and discovering new therapies, medical devices, and products that can improve health and help change lives (Deglise-Hawkinson et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2021). The importance of clinical research extends back to Biblical times, as

illustrated in the book of Daniel with a nutritional experiment. One group consumed only meat and wine in the experiment, while another followed a vegetarian diet. After 10 days, the vegetarian group appeared healthier, prompting those in the meat and wine group to adopt the vegetarian diet permanently (Herzog-LeBoeuf & Willenberg, 2020; Neuhauser & Diaz, 2004). In addition, Lind identified effective scurvy treatments for sailors from his research findings in 1747 (Bhatt, 2010; Herzog-LeBoeuf & Willenberg, 2020). This milestone signaled the formal start of clinical studies. Clinical research has evolved throughout the years to encompass a variety of studies, including human and nonhuman participants, contributing essential data that informs global healthcare decisions and policies.

Although clinical research plays a critical role in advancing medical knowledge and patient care, numerous challenges may impede the success of clinical trials. Common reasons for trial failure include staffing shortages, limited resources, rising employee costs, and issues related to the safety and efficacy of investigational products (Freel et al., 2023; Koenig et al., 2024). Additionally, patient recruitment and retention difficulties as well as noncompliance with regulations further complicate trial execution (Deglise-Hawkinson et al., 2020; Fogel, 2018; Henshall et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2021). As a result, many clinical trials do not result in successful outcomes or produce marketable products. The obstacles mentioned above indicate the critical need for strong leadership in clinical trial management. Effective leaders must proactively address and mitigate risks to increase the chances of success, including the retention of valuable employees.

Financial Implications

Employee turnover can result in significant financial losses for U.S. firms. Thus, employees play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness and productivity of organizational operations (Kang & Sung, 2019). When staff members experience burnout or are burdened with heavy workloads, turnover may increase. Given the complexity of clinical trials, losing key employees may put clinical trial outcomes and financial investments at risk (Peralta & Sánchez-Santiago, 2024). Employee turnover is a critical metric for businesses because turnover directly affects the long-term viability and financial success of the organization.

High employee turnover in healthcare, particularly in specialized industries, such as clinical research, may have severe financial consequences. Replacing a clinical research coordinator costs $50,000–$60,000 in hiring and onboarding expenses alone, excluding productivity losses and the cost of potential burnout of remaining staff (Freel et al., 2023). Therefore, site leaders must carefully manage employee workloads and implement retention strategies to prevent turnover from threatening the success of clinical trials. The emphasis on retaining talent underscores the importance of leadership in cultivating employee dedication and commitment.

Other Strategies for Reducing Turnover

Increasingly, researchers are identifying key tactics for improving clinical trial outcomes. Previous researchers found several strategies to increase the likelihood of clinical trial success, including (a) expediting participant recruitment and enrollment, (b) reducing the burden for patients to participate in the trial, (c) selecting clinical research

sites with personnel experienced in running clinical trials, (d) modifying or simplifying the project design, and (e) establishing more efficient schedules and workloads for staff (Deglise-Hawkinson et al., 2020; Fogel, 2018; Wilson et al., 2021). Among these recommendations, resource availability and employee turnover are pivotal factors influencing trial success (Pennell et al., 2020). Implementing strategies to improve operational processes, such as optimizing staff schedules and reducing patient and employee burden, may significantly enhance employee retention and trial efficiency (Cooper et al., 2023). However, retaining skilled staff is often challenging in clinical trials, where employees frequently report feeling overworked and undervalued (Deglise-Hawkinson et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2021).

Turnover at clinical research sites may be attributed to employee burnout, lack of career advancement opportunities, inadequate compensation, and insufficient recognition of employee efforts (Costa & Carvalho, 2022). Retention strategies, such as increasing employee engagement, providing competitive wage packages, promoting career advancement opportunities, and cultivating a positive business culture, are vital for reducing turnover (Kang & Sung, 2019). Inan et al. (2020) found that employees who feel valued and have access to career development opportunities are more likely to stay in their positions. These researchers' findings underscore the importance of clinical research site managers creating environments where staff feel connected to the organization's mission and have a clear path for growth. To provide the reader with a better understanding of how to implement these strategies effectively, I explain each approach

in more detail in the following paragraphs and examine their impact on reducing employee turnover.

Increasing employee engagement involves creating a work environment where employees feel valued and connected to the organization's mission and goals. Employee engagement is achieved through regular feedback, recognition programs, and opportunities for employees to contribute innovative ideas. Providing competitive wage packages ensures employees feel fairly compensated for their work, which is crucial for retaining top talent in a competitive job market (Barkhuizen & Gumede, 2021).

Promoting career advancement opportunities allows employees to see a clear path for growth within the company. Training programs, mentorship, and providing clear advancement tracks are initiatives that company leaders could employ to promote employee career advancement. Employees with professional development and career progression opportunities may be more likely to stay with the organization. Cultivating a positive business culture includes fostering teamwork, encouraging work-life balance, ensuring employees feel respected and valued, and creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. A positive culture can significantly enhance job satisfaction and reduce turnover (Buchanan et al., 2021; Costa & Carvalho, 2022; Inan et al., 2020; Kang & Sung, 2019). By integrating the abovementioned strategies, organizational leaders create a holistic approach to reducing turnover and maintaining a successful organization.

Summary and Remaining Gaps

In this academic literature review, I explored the business problem of employee turnover in the clinical research industry. The logical connections between the framework

presented and the nature of the current research project include recognizing and exploring how the job embeddedness conceptual framework and the transformational leadership theory influence employee turnover at clinical research facilities. Using the job embeddedness framework and transformational leadership theory, I was able to adequately identify and examine the participants' principles, internal and external motivators, and leadership styles, which may drive clinical research site managers' strategies to increase employee retention and reduce employee turnover costs successfully. The financial ramifications of a high turnover rate are substantial because replacing an employee can cost an organization between 20% and 150% of that individual's annual salary (Hultman, 2019). The expenses stem from recruitment and training and the loss of productivity during the transition period (Costa & Carvalho, 2022; Hultman, 2019; Lyons & Bandura, 2020). Thus, effectively identifying the causes of turnover and implementing strategies to retain employees is vital for maintaining operational efficiency and controlling expenses.

Healthcare employees who demonstrate behaviors associated with job embeddedness are more likely to remain committed to their roles because they are emotionally and professionally invested in their work (Mitchell & Lee, 2001; Vardaman et al., 2020). Mitchell and Lee (2001) theorized that with job embeddedness, employees who feel connected to their jobs through social ties fit within the organization and are more likely to stay, reducing turnover risk. In addition to job embeddedness, transformational leadership is a significant factor in retaining skilled employees in clinical research. Transformational leaders who inspire, motivate, and support their

teams, foster higher levels of employee job satisfaction and commitment (Burns, 1979; Raziq et al., 2021).

In clinical research, where trials depend heavily on skilled and motivated staff, transformational leadership may be instrumental in reducing turnover. Leaders who engage with employees personally, recognize their contributions, and align individual goals with organizational objectives are more likely to cultivate a loyal workforce. Transformational leaders not only enhance job satisfaction but also boost employee motivation to contribute meaningfully to the success of clinical trials.

Despite the extensive research that exists on employee turnover and retention strategies (Deglise-Hawkinson et al., 2020; Fogel, 2018; Liu et al., 2022; Mitchell & Lee, 2001; Shah et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2021), there is a notable gap in applying these concepts to clinical research sites. Although existing literature primarily addresses patient retention in clinical trials, staff turnover is equally critical in determining trial success. Researchers have overlooked employee turnover in clinical trial settings, creating a significant knowledge gap.

The job embeddedness theory is underutilized in the literature on clinical research, resulting in a significant knowledge gap in understanding how to leverage job embeddedness fully to mitigate employee turnover in the clinical trial industry. Exploring the relationship between job embeddedness and employee turnover may help identify key factors that aid in retaining essential staff, thereby contributing to the success of the organization (Ratnawati et al., 2020). Bridging the gap in the literature required further research into the impact of job embeddedness and transformational leadership on

employee turnover within clinical research site staff. By addressing the gap, researchers can provide valuable insights for clinical research site managers on improving employee retention, reducing turnover costs, and increasing the success rates of clinical trials.

Clinical trial failure may be attributed to multiple factors, with employee turnover playing a central role. Staffing instability disrupts the continuity of trials and creates inefficiencies that jeopardize the timely and successful completion of research (Wilson et al., 2021). In the current project, I specifically focused on the impact of employee turnover on clinical research and clinical trials. Leaders of clinical trials must adopt strategies to ensure the efficient management of trials, including targeted approaches to employee retention (Buchanan et al., 2021). When clinical trial leaders are well-prepared and strategically organized, they significantly increase the likelihood of trial success. Implementing retention strategies or developing innovative tools and methods to manage trials more effectively may help reduce costs and ensure that employees and participants remain engaged. This process, in turn, accelerates patients' access to potentially life-saving therapies, underscoring the broader societal implications of minimizing turnover in clinical research settings.

In the current research project, I observed if transformational leadership and job embeddedness became evident during interviews with participants as they reflected on their reasons for staying with their current roles and overall satisfaction at work. I sought to identify clinical research site managers' strategies to reduce turnover and improve organizational outcomes. High turnover rates in clinical research have far-reaching consequences, from significant financial losses due to recruitment and training costs to

compromised research outcomes that can delay the development of critical medical treatments. Thus, addressing turnover is a matter of operational efficiency and is necessary to ensure the sustainability of clinical research efforts and improve patient outcomes.

Transition

In this literature review section, I analyzed the professional and academic literature on employee turnover in the clinical research sector. In addition, I explored the application of the research to the business problem at hand. Building upon the insights gained from the literature review, in Section 3, I will outline the methodological approach adopted for the project, detailing the project's design, data collection and analysis procedures, and strategies to ensure reliability and validity. In Section 4, I will present the research project findings and explore the implications for business practice, social change, and directions for future research.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

I chose the qualitative pragmatic inquiry research design for this project to explore how clinical research site managers in the southeastern United States reduce employee turnover. Through employee interviews, the qualitative approach facilitated in-depth exploration of the factors influencing management practices and staff retention. By speaking directly to clinical research professionals, I gained knowledge of the motivators, behaviors, and decisions that drive effective retention strategies. I aimed to identify and explore effective strategies that clinical research site managers have implemented to reduce turnover. In this section, I address the ethical criteria for my research aimed at protecting the rights of all participants in the project; the nature of the project; the population; data collection, organization, and techniques; and the steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the research project.

Project Ethics

As the researcher, my role in the data collection process was to manage the research process, including gathering the appropriate data to address the research question. The primary duties of a researcher include designing the research project; recruiting participants; ensuring the participants' rights and privacy are protected; mitigating potential risks; collecting and analyzing data; and ensuring the integrity, validity, and reliability of the research findings (Favaretto et al., 2020; Harnett, 2021; Iltis, 2021). I followed the ethical principles in the *Belmont Report*, which indicate that researchers should be respectful, do no harm, and be fair and just to human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). I used multiple approaches to

establish communication and trust with the participants and gather quality data to support the research analysis.

Niemczyk and Rónay (2023) indicated that the role of the researcher is evolving, and researchers should have some knowledge and expertise in the field in which they are studying. My career is in clinical research, and I have experience working with healthcare professionals in clinical trials. However, I had no power or influence over the research participants and had no direct involvement with the clinical research sites in the southeastern United States where I conducted the project. As advocated by Moriña (2021), I carefully cultivated rapport with the research participants by revealing my connection with the project topic. Transparency was essential to ensure that participants felt free to share their authentic and candid experiences without fear of repercussions. Because of my extensive background with the topic, I implemented strategies to minimize any researcher bias that may have arisen based on my personal beliefs and experience. To mitigate potential bias, I used member checking by sharing the interview summaries with participants to ensure I captured their thoughts accurately.

I collected data using semistructured interviews with the informed consent of research participants, ensuring that the interview protocol was approved by the appropriate Ethics Committee and Institutional Review Board (IRB). Drolet et al. (2023) proposed that the opportunity for ethical issues occurs during the research design, research conduct, or knowledge communication stages of the research process. Ethics Committees and IRBs help minimize the risk of moral concerns. Participants could withdraw from the research project at any time by notifying me. I provided a gift card of

$25 to each participant who completed the interview. I took measures to ensure the ethical protection of participants by keeping the names of the participants and project site organization confidential. I implemented specific confidentiality measures such as storing all interview data in password-protected files, using participant identification codes instead of names, and excluding any identifiable patient or company information from my report. The data will be maintained in a safe place for 5 years to protect the rights of participants. The Walden University IRB approval number for this research project is 01-15-25-1157007.

Nature of the Project

An effective research design is required to adequately address the research question in a doctoral project. The research method must reflect the purpose and objective of the project and consider practical factors, such as time, resources, availability, and access to research participants (M. D. Ali et al., 2024; Mwita, 2022). The qualitative research methodology was the appropriate method for this project's objectives. According to Renjith et al. (2021), qualitative research methods effectively explore behavior patterns, capture lived experiences, develop theories, assess needs, and develop interventions. I selected the pragmatic inquiry research design for this project rather than alternative designs, such as narrative, phenomenology, and case study. Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) and Ramanadhan et al. (2021) discussed that the pragmatic inquiry design accounts for varying individual experiences of organizational change while maintaining structured exploration of real-world challenges.

To address the research question, the current project included six semistructured interviews with clinical research managers, nurses, or coordinators from selected clinical research sites in the southeastern United States. As the researcher, I conducted the interviews. The following data were collected: participant responses to interview questions and publicly available documentation regarding methods to reduce employee turnover. During data analysis, I described the effective strategies clinical research site managers developed and implemented to reduce employee turnover at their organization.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The targeted population for this research project consisted of midlevel clinical research professionals at clinical research sites (e.g., doctors' offices, clinics, or research hospitals) in the southeastern region of the United States who have been in their roles for at least 1 year. Sampling decisions should be guided by the research and support the collection of thick, rich data (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020). The sample included six research participants with titles of clinical research coordinator, clinical research manager, research program manager, associate director, and director of clinical research.

I used purposeful sampling to select research participants. Purposeful sampling in qualitative research involves the systematic identification of participants based on specific research objectives (Stratton, 2024). Utilizing a purposeful sampling approach reduced the resources and time spent conducting the research project while allowing for rich, detailed insights from participants within the clinical research population (see Stratton, 2024). To ensure data saturation (Aguboshim, 2021), I conducted interviews and analyzed the data iteratively, collecting data until no new information or themes arose.

My strategies to gain access to research participants included using my professional network, social media, and word of mouth. To establish a working relationship with the research participants, I maintained a professional work environment; remained transparent; and provided clear communication, details, and reminders about the project. I reduced barriers by conducting interviews virtually and offering an incentive for the participants' time (Wong et al., 2021). The participant population was appropriate for this project because previous research results indicated that employee turnover in the clinical research industry is costly and affects productivity (see Stroo et al., 2020). Therefore, clinical research leaders are likely to have used some strategies to minimize turnover and encourage employee retention on their teams to better ensure a successful clinical trial.

Data Collection Activities

Data collection is one of the most critical components of a research project. Mwita (2022) defined data collection as a holistic process of information gathering that must be completed accurately and address the research question. One primary method for qualitative research is structured interviews and interview transcript data (Mannheimer, 2021). For data collection for my doctoral research project, I gathered information from participants by conducting six semistructured interviews with clinical research professionals at research sites in the southeastern United States.

During participant recruitment, I verified that participants met the inclusion criteria by confirming that each clinical research manager had a retention rate of 80% or better within the previous 12 months. During the interviews with the research

participants, I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix) to stay on topic. I used software to transcribe the participants' interviews verbatim. I also collected documentation from secondary, publicly accessible sources (e.g., the organization's website; the organization's mission, vision, and values statements; policy statements; strategic plans; reports; employee recruitment materials; training materials; press releases and other communications; interviews of organizational leaders given to the media, other media coverage; social media presence and indications of visibility; job listings; specialized financial publications; documents from the Securities and Exchange Commission; or online discussions and postings by the organization's employees in forums).

I maintained consistent data collection and analysis processes throughout the research project. By conducting a well-defined and semistructured interview process and allowing the interviewees to review their responses, I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection. In addition, this approach helped to ensure that the data accurately reflected the research participants' true perspectives.

Interview Questions

I conducted semistructured interviews to collect the data for this research project. The interview questions were as follows:

1. What strategies do you employ to reduce employee turnover?
2. Please describe any resources you may have used to retain employees.
3. Which strategies did you find to be the most effective in reducing employee turnover, and why do you believe it was the most effective?

4. Which strategy was the least effective in reducing employee turnover, and why do you believe it was the least effective?
5. Please discuss the evidence, if any, you observed that indicated that your strategies were working.
6. What budgetary effects or constraints, if any, did you have with implementing strategies to minimize employee turnover?
7. What challenges did you face when implementing strategies to retain employees, and how did you overcome them?
8. What would you do differently the next time you implement strategies to reduce employee turnover?
9. What additional information, not discussed, would you like to share?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

I used several methods to track the data and emerging themes throughout the research process to ensure the data remained organized. These systems included appropriately labeled, password-protected audio files, text files containing interview transcripts, a researcher notebook, and research logs. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to precisely document participant responses. I facilitated the organization, analysis, and presentation of the qualitative data by compiling all materials, including the interview transcripts, audio recordings, and research logs, in a structured manner (see Levin & Forward, 2021). Organizing the data in this manner allowed me to immerse myself in the data, reflect on emerging patterns, and develop meaningful interpretations.

Once I completed all interviews and collected all data, I coded the data using software. According to Yin (2018), qualitative data analysis should be structured involving compilation, disassembly, reassembly, and interpretation within the theoretical context. I used Yin's five-step analysis to compile interview transcripts, disassemble the data into codes, reassemble the codes into categories and themes, interpret the findings in relation to the conceptual framework and existing literature, and to draw conclusions about the interpreted findings.

In addition, I organized the data systematically to allow for the identification of patterns, relationships, and insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the strategies used by clinical research site managers to reduce employee turnover. I then conducted a thematic analysis based on the information gathered. Thematic analysis involves identifying and grouping key themes that emerge from the data and then organizing these themes into a coherent framework (Humble & Mozelius, 2022). The identified themes are relevant to the literature, research question, and conceptual framework. All the raw research data I collected during the research project will be stored securely for 5 years. Clearly describing the data organization and analysis techniques improved the consistency, reproducibility, and trustworthiness of the results.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Ensuring the dependability of this research project supported the reliability of the research findings. Dependable research is a fundamental factor in enhancing the

trustworthiness of the project. Qualitative research must be reliable and trustworthy to inform policy, improve services, and impact future research (Ahmed, 2024).

A key to having reliable project data is dependability (Ahmed, 2024). Tuval-Mashiach (2021) defined dependability as remaining stable over time. To ensure dependability in this research project, I maintained detailed documentation of the research procedures, findings, and decisions, providing transparency throughout the project.

Validity

To establish validity, I employed various strategies to enhance the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research findings. These are significant components of establishing validity in qualitative research (Ahmed, 2024). Additional important factors include maintaining accountability to the research community and project participants and effectively communicating research findings to the broader community (Hayashi et al., 2021).

Credibility

Another major element of trustworthy qualitative research is establishing credibility. To ensure the credibility of the research findings, I conducted member checking. Member checking is when interviewees are given the opportunity to review interview transcript summaries and data analysis to validate the accuracy of their responses and the interpretation of the data (Ahmed, 2024; Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). I also used the triangulation of data method, which involves analyzing data from many sources, to validate emergent themes and minimize bias (see Santos et al., 2020).

Transferability

To improve the transferability of my research, I provided a thorough explanation of my research protocol, research setting, sampling techniques, and data-gathering procedures. Transferability is the degree to which research findings are generalizable or applicable to similar settings or environments (Ahmed, 2024). I maintained comprehensive records throughout the research project to strengthen the transferability of the research protocols.

Confirmability

To enhance confirmability and maintain objectivity in the project findings, I used strategies, such as reflexive journaling, member checking, and seeking feedback from academic scholars and experts on my data analysis and interpretation. These methods helped minimize researcher bias and ensure impartiality in the findings (Ahmed, 2024). By increasing the degree of confirmability in the research findings, I enhanced the trustworthiness of my research.

Data Saturation

I used thematic analysis to interpret the data and identify recurring themes until I reached data saturation. In qualitative research, data saturation occurs when no new themes or insights emerge from the data analysis, indicating that additional analysis would not provide any meaningful information to add to the research findings (Naeem et al., 2024). By reaching data saturation, I ensured that my analysis was thorough and that the findings accurately reflected the data collected during the project.

Transition and Summary

I conducted this research project to identify and explore effective strategies that clinical research site managers use to reduce employee turnover at clinical research sites in the southeastern United States. In this section, I stated the problem and the purpose as well as described the nature of the project and related ethics. In Section 4, I will explain the findings and implications for business practice, social change, and future research before ending the project with a conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore effective strategies that clinical research site managers use to reduce employee turnover in the southeastern United States. Six clinical research professionals including coordinators, managers, and directors, participated in semistructured interviews. Analysis of the participants' responses revealed six overarching themes that inform employee retention strategies: (a) employee engagement and open communication, (b) supportive leadership and management practices, (c) career development and growth opportunities, (d) recognition and appreciation, (e) work-life balance and flexibility, and (f) financial incentives and compensation. With each of these themes, I was able to confirm and expand upon existing literature by providing targeted, practical strategies within the context of clinical research site operations. Through these findings, I can support and extend existing literature by contextualizing these strategies within the unique operational environment of clinical research sites. Table 1 provides an overview of the participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Research participant (Interviewee #)	Role/title	Gender	Clinical research setting	Transcript validated
I1	Director of clinical research	Female	Hospital	No
I2	Research program manager	Female	Academic	No
I3	Clinical research coordinator	Male	Academic	No
I4	Clinical research manager	Female	Academic	No
I5	Clinical research manager	Male	Industry	No
I6	Associate director	Female	Industry	Yes

Note. Participant demographics include role/title, gender, clinical research setting, and transcript validation status as of the finalization of the doctoral research report.

To structure the qualitative data, I coded interviewee responses using a thematic analysis process. Table 2 summarizes the individual codes organized into categories and then synthesized into overarching themes. The iterative coding process began with identifying recurring phrases and concepts across interviews, then grouping the codes into clusters. The clusters were then categorized under broader headings that reflect the core themes that emerged from the data.

Table 2

Codebook of Interview Data

Code	Category	Definition
One-on-one meetings	Communication practices	Individual check-ins between staff and leadership to promote engagement
Clear communication	Communication practices	Transparent sharing of expectations and feedback
Regular check-ins	Communication practices	Ongoing follow-ups to monitor progress and maintain rapport
Toxic behavior	Leadership practices	Negative behaviors that disrupt team dynamics
Career support	Career development	Guidance, resources, or tools for professional growth
Professional interests	Career development	Consideration of employee goals
Funded professional events	Career development	Paid opportunities for learning and networking
Team presentations	Recognition practices	Public acknowledgment of team member efforts
Appreciation	Recognition practices	Gratitude expressed for individual contributions
Group activities	Recognition practices	Social or team events celebrating employee efforts
Early departure	Work-life balance	Flexibility to leave work early when needed
Remote options	Work-life balance	Ability to work from home
Local hiring	Work-life balance	Reducing commute time through proximity-based hiring
Salary adjustments	Financial incentives	Pay increases to match market standards or performance
Bonuses	Financial incentives	Performance-based additional compensation
Flexible scheduling	Work-life balance	Modifiable work hours based on employee needs
No micromanagement	Leadership practices	Empowering employees with autonomy
Personal relationships	Leadership practices	Building rapport and trust with employees
Competency-based roles	Financial incentives	Assigning roles or pay based on skills and merit
Workload balancing	Work-life balance	Distributing tasks to avoid burnout

Table 3 supports the thematic analysis of the participant data because the table shows verbatim quotes from each interviewee aligned with the identified themes. This approach enhances the transparency and trustworthiness of the analysis by linking the raw data directly to the emergent themes. These quotes reflect insights into employee retention practices, particularly regarding communication, leadership, professional development, recognition, flexibility, and compensation.

Table 3

Qualitative Evidence Supporting Identified Themes

Theme	Research participant (I#) quote
Employee engagement and open communication	I1: "I check in with them one-on-one." I2: "Communication has been the most effective." I3: "We have team meetings once a week...try to be open and transparent." I4: "We have one-on-one meetings...that's been very helpful." I5: "We do weekly meetings." I6: "We have open communication. That helps build a better relationship."
Supportive leadership and management practices	I1: "If there is someone toxic...I do go ahead and remove them." I2: "I advocate for my employees." I3: "I tell them I know the job is hard...I try to let them know that I care." I4: "They have access to the PI [Primary Investigator]...they can talk to them directly." I5: "I give them space...I just ask them to submit a weekly report." I6: "My leadership style is really just building relationships."
Career development and growth opportunities	I1: "I ask them what their long-term goals are." I2: "I try to give them projects based on their interest." I3: "They go to professional society meetings...the company pays for that." I4: "They get to present their studies." I5: "We try to hire people who really want to grow in research." I6: "I help them get to where they want to go career-wise."
Recognition and appreciation	I1: "I recognize them in team meetings." I2: "We do team bonding activities." I3: "We do little celebrations...we have an appreciation board."

Theme	Research participant (I#) quote
	I4: “We recognize them by letting them present their data.” I5: “We do appreciation shout-outs.” I6: “We just make sure to tell them we value them.”
Work-life balance and flexibility	I1: “We adjust schedules if someone needs flexibility.” I2: “We offer hybrid flexibility.” I3: “They can leave early if needed.” I4: “We offer remote options.” I5: “We hire locally so the commute is shorter.” I6: “We try to be flexible based on their family needs.”
Financial incentives and compensation	I1: “I ask for market adjustments.” I2: “I give raises when I can.” I3: “We give bonuses when possible.” I4: “We don't always have the budget for raises...but we offer other resources.” I5: “We try to offer competitive pay.” I6: “We adjust titles and pay based on skills.”

Note. Direct quotes from research participants (Interviewees 1–6) highlight the key themes identified from qualitative interview data exploring strategies clinical research site managers use to minimize employee turnover.

To further highlight the rigor of the coding process, I created a frequency table to display the number of times each participant referenced a particular code. Table 4 provides an overview of how often specific concepts emerged across interviews, offering insight into the strategies most mentioned.

Table 4

Frequency of Codes by Interviewee

Codes	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	Total
One-on-one meetings	3	2	2	2	2	2	13
Clear communication	2	3	2	2	2	2	13
Regular check-ins	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Toxic behavior	1	0	0	0	1	2	4
Employee advocacy	2	2	1	1	1	2	9
Trust building	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Career support	2	3	2	2	2	3	14
Professional interests	1	2	1	2	2	2	10
Funded professional events	0	1	2	1	0	0	4
Team presentations	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Appreciation	2	1	2	2	2	2	11
Group activities	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Early departures	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Remote options	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Local hiring	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Salary adjustments	2	2	1	2	2	2	11
Bonuses	0	1	2	1	1	1	6
Flexible scheduling	2	1	1	2	1	2	9
No micromanagement	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
Personal relationships	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Competency-based roles	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Workload balancing	2	2	2	2	2	2	12

Note. The code occurrences per interviewee table displays the number of times each interviewee (1–6) mentioned or referred to specific codes during their interviews.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings in Relation to Identified Themes

In the following subsections, I present an analysis of the six major themes derived from the participant interviews. Representative verbatim quotes support each theme. The quotes are organized and presented in Table 3 to show the strategies discussed by participants.

Theme 1: Employee Engagement and Open Communication

Consistent across interviews was the importance of open communication and employee engagement as retention strategies. The interviewees highlighted the critical role of clearly communicating job responsibilities and maintaining regular, structured interactions with employees to foster trust and prevent dissatisfaction (see Table 3). These insights align with the existing literature that identified transparent communication as essential for building organizational commitment and trust (see Ali et al., 2024; Gustafsson et al., 2021; Raziq et al., 2025; Sundari & Poli, 2024). The theme of employee engagement and open communication also aligns with job embeddedness theory. According to the principles of job embeddedness theory, fostering open and frequent communication strengthens interpersonal and professional relationships, thereby deepening employees' connections within the organization (Nejad et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). This connection with the organization, in turn, embeds employees further into their professional roles (Li et al., 2022).

Theme 2: Supportive Leadership and Management Practices

The importance of supportive leadership and management practices also strongly emerged from the data. This theme aligns with both transformational leadership theory

and job embeddedness framework, as identified in the literature review. Participants described the value of cultivating trust, encouraging open dialogue, and providing employees autonomy while remaining available for support (see Table 3). Several participants emphasized the impact of proactive leadership behaviors, such as addressing interpersonal challenges directly, equipping staff with conflict-resolution skills, and reducing micromanagement. Research participants who implemented these actions contributed to improved morale and a stronger sense of commitment among clinical research professionals.

The findings align closely with two core dimensions of transformational leadership, individualized consideration and idealized influence, which emphasize trust building, transparent communication, and meaningful engagement with staff (see Edonomokumor et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2022). Additionally, supportive leadership practices enhance the fit and links dimensions of job embeddedness theory, fostering a work environment where employees feel valued and connected. Clinical research professionals who experience this supportive environment demonstrate increased organizational commitment.

Theme 3: Career Development and Growth Opportunities

Career growth and development were consistent themes as key retention strategies. Participants described practices, such as targeted recruitment of individuals with a genuine research interest, supporting professional advancement through career progression pathways, and providing growth opportunities aligned with employee goals (see Table 3). For example, participants shared how internal promotions, mentorship, and

exposure to advanced roles contributed to long-term employee retention. These examples align with job embeddedness theory, particularly the dimension of organizational fit (Karadaş et al., 2025; Mitchell & Lee, 2001; Wang et al., 2025). By fostering professional development and clearly articulating advancement pathways, clinical research site managers strengthen employees' integration into the organization and reduce turnover intentions (see Aman-Ullah et al., 2021; Thakral et al., 2025). This theme reinforces the conceptual framework and literature reviewed, emphasizing how career alignment promotes organizational fit and commitment.

Theme 4: Recognition and Appreciation

Recognition and appreciation were also identified as essential employee retention strategies. The interviewees emphasized the role of consistent and meaningful acknowledgement in improving morale and commitment (see Table 3). According to the research participants, leaders who use this recognition practices enhance employee satisfaction and reduce turnover. This finding is consistent with existing literature on employee retention (Abdou et al., 2025; Ampofo & Karatepe, 2022). From the job embeddedness perspective, recognition strengthens employees' emotional connection to the organization, increasing the perceived sacrifice associated with leaving (Li et al., 2022). This theme aligns with the job embeddedness theory as employees who feel valued are more likely to remain embedded in their roles and continue contributing to the success of the organization.

Theme 5: Work-Life Balance and Flexibility

Research participants consistently cited work-life balance and flexibility as key retention strategies. Interviewees cited flexible scheduling, remote work options, and efforts to reduce commuting burdens as effective in supporting employees' personal needs and professional responsibilities (see Table 3). These findings align with researchers that have posited work-life balance as a strong predictor of retention, particularly in high-demand industries, like clinical research (Johnson, 2022; Kismono et al., 2025). Employees experiencing a favorable work-life balance find greater compatibility between their job requirements and personal life commitments, strengthening their commitment to remain within the organization (Kismono et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2020). This theme is aligned with the job embeddedness theory because flexible work arrangements increase organizational fit and enhance employees' personal and professional satisfaction.

Theme 6: Financial Incentives and Compensation

Competitive compensation and financial incentives were widely regarded as crucial to minimizing turnover. Participants described market-aligned salary adjustments, bonuses, and compensation structures based on performance and responsibilities (see Table 3). These participant insights align with broader business literature that emphasized competitive compensation as critical to talent retention (S. Khan et al., 2025; Lyons & Bandura, 2020). In the context of job embeddedness, financial incentives increase the perceived cost of leaving the organization, especially in roles where institutional expertise or tenure is economically valuable. Economic incentives, therefore,

significantly embed employees within the organization, particularly in competitive fields such as healthcare (Alkan et al., 2024; Li et al., 2022). This theme aligns with both the literature and the job embeddedness conceptual framework by demonstrating how financial incentives increase perceived sacrifice and reduce turnover rates.

Data Triangulation and Theme Linkage to Literature Review Findings

To maintain methodological rigor and enhance the credibility of this research project, I triangulated the interview data with data from corroborating documents. Member checking was conducted by sending all six interview participants their respective interview transcript summaries. One participant confirmed its accuracy, while the remaining five research participants offered no revisions, which I interpreted as tacit agreement. This process supported the dependability and credibility of the qualitative data. In addition, I cross-validated emergent themes from the project with recent peer-reviewed literature, reinforcing theoretical alignment related to communication, leadership, flexibility, development, recognition, and equitable compensation.

In addition, I analyzed external reviews of clinical research sites in the southeastern region of the United States using public platforms, such as Glassdoor and Indeed. Interestingly, some of the employee reviews and quotes from those two platforms aligned with the project themes that were derived from interview data and public or subject-provided documents. Table 5 details these alignments.

Table 5

Employee Retention Strategies at Clinical Research Sites From Glassdoor and Indeed

Strategy	Key theme	Example from reviews	Quote
Collegial and collaborative culture	Employee engagement and open communication	Duke Clinical Research Institute (DCRI) employees note a welcoming, collaborative work environment.	"I feel as though I can go to my boss and even to upper management with concerns, questions, praise, etc. My boss has actually said to me, 'I've got your back.' Not many places have I heard that…I enjoy coming to work…I feel as though I make a difference here."
Flexible scheduling	Work-life balance and flexibility	DCRI employees note flexible work schedules.	"Good work life balance…flexible work arrangement."
Leadership that invests in employee success	Supportive leadership and management practices	M3 Wake Research staff note that supervisors genuinely value and invest in their growth and success.	"The supervisors truly value their employees and look to see them succeed as it foster's the company's success.
Encouraging growth and cross-functional opportunities	Career development and growth opportunities	Atlanta Center for Medical Research (CMR) team members note the company encourages career development.	"The company highly encourages its employees to explore cross-functional roles and promotes employees' growth."
Recognition for contributions	Recognition and appreciation	Florida Institute for Clinical Research (ICR) employees note feeling valued.	"You do not feel like a number there. You are recognized for your hard work."
401(k) matching and cost-of-living adjustments; competitive entry level compensation	Financial incentives and compensation	DCRI employees note structured financial benefits and fair entry-level compensation	"They offer 401K matching and annual cost-of-living raises, which help with long-term financial planning." "Beginning salary is a good starting point."

Note. Quotes in Table 5 were collected on June 27, 2025, from publicly available reviews on Glassdoor and Indeed (data may no longer be available). All data were anonymized; therefore, I did not need to request permission to use the data.

In addition to the participant interviews, I analyzed public employee reviews from clinical research sites in the southeastern United States to support thematic findings. These publicly available reviews from Glassdoor and Indeed reflect firsthand employee perspectives from clinical research sites. Table 6 directly aligns the key themes identified through the interview data and corresponding employee-reported strategies from public data sources.

Table 6

Alignment of Interview Themes With Public Data Strategies

Interview theme	Public data strategy from Glassdoor and Indeed	Alignment between interview findings and public reviews
Employee engagement and open communication	Collaborative and collegial culture	Both interview data and public reviews emphasized open communication and a sense of belonging. Interviewees discussed regular check-ins and transparent conversations, which align with the review mentioning DCRI's culture of openness and feeling valued.
Work-life balance and flexibility	Flexible scheduling	Interviewees cited flexible work schedules as key to retention. This is echoed by DCRI reviewers who describe their ability to manage personal and professional demands due to a supportive work-life structure.
Supportive leadership and management practices	Leadership that invests in employee success	Interview research participants emphasized transformational leadership through trust and support. M3 Wake employees reinforced this by highlighting how supervisors foster employee success and care about growth.
Career development and growth opportunities	Encouraging cross-functional opportunities	Interviewees discussed mentorship, promotions, and retention through internal career mobility. Public reviews similarly highlighted opportunities to grow across functions, confirming the organizational commitment to development.
Recognition and appreciation	Recognition for contributions	During interviews, research participants stressed that appreciation contributes to employee morale and reduces turnover. The Florida ICR review confirms this by stating employees feel recognized and not just "like a number."
Financial incentives and compensation	401(k) matching, cost-of-living raises, and fair starting salary	Research participants identified competitive compensation as vital for retention. DCRI reviews validated this with comments on structured financial benefits and fair pay practices supporting long-term employment.

Note. Alignment data in Table 6 were derived from publicly accessible employee reviews collected on June 27, 2025, from Glassdoor and Indeed. Reviews were selected from clinical research sites in the southeastern United States, including Duke Clinical Research Institute, M3 Wake Research, the Atlanta Center for Medical Research, and the Florida Institute for Clinical Research. All quotes are anonymized and reflect voluntary employee feedback; therefore, no permission was required.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The findings of this qualitative research project contribute significantly to professional business practice by providing clinical research site managers and organizational leaders with practical, evidence-based strategies to reduce employee turnover in clinical research settings. The research results revealed that open communication, supportive leadership, structured career development, meaningful recognition, flexibility, and competitive compensation are key to improving employee retention. These findings bridge a practical knowledge gap by providing specific, experience-based insights into how clinical research site managers can implement sustainable retention practices to improve organizational outcomes. In addition, the project results offer actionable guidance for clinical research site-level leadership in an increasingly competitive talent environment.

Staffing challenges often burden clinical trial research site operations. Employee retention issues directly affect trial continuity, data quality, and patient safety (Peralta & Sánchez-Santiago, 2024). The evidence from this qualitative research supports the tenets of transformational leadership theory in that when site managers actively build trust, create career development pathways, and demonstrate appreciation for their employees, site managers foster greater organizational commitment from their employees, which is consistent with transformational leadership (see I. Khan et al., 2022). Research participants' frequent mention of one-on-one communication and professional development practices further reinforces this alignment. These insights address a gap in

the literature related to clinical research site managers' roles in staff retention in the clinical research industry.

The themes reflected in Table 3 have clear business relevance within clinical research site operations. Investing in effective leaders, structured mentorship, advancement opportunities, financial incentives, and flexible work options may deepen employee engagement and promote job embeddedness, reducing costly employee turnover. The research findings further support the value of job embeddedness theory as a lens through which clinical research site managers and business leaders may better understand why employees stay on the job and how to improve these reasons.

Clinical research leaders should incorporate employee retention strategies into management training to improve business outcomes. Implementing structured communication strategies; developing clear, professional advancement pathways; offering targeted financial incentives and compensation based on market competitiveness; and creating flexible work settings that promote work-life balance are all important factors that clinical research business leaders may want to consider maximizing clinical trial operational efficiency. I plan to share the findings from this research project through clinical research conferences, peer-reviewed industry publications, and professional development webinars or meetings to facilitate a broader outreach and integration into clinical research environments.

Implications for Social Change

The research findings have substantial implications for positive social change because the results revealed methods to promote the development and well-being of

individuals and communities within the clinical research workforce. High turnover rates at clinical research sites disrupt research continuity, impede scientific innovation, and threaten relationships between research personnel and participants, many of whom belong to underrepresented or medically underserved populations (Snyder et al., 2025). Using employee retention strategies, site managers can make research procedures more consistent, ethical, and community centered.

The research results revealed an emphasis on supportive leadership, recognition, career advancement, and work-life balance; employees could benefit from these methods because clinical site leaders who use these methods will reduce employees' feelings of burnout or fatigue while increasing motivation and inclusion. Leaders who exhibit behaviors and operational processes that uphold the dignity and development of the clinical research workforce promote positive social change. Leaders who retain employees throughout a clinical trial help foster participant trust and engagement, which increases research participant retention rates, particularly in communities with a history of medical mistrust (Barsha et al., 2025)

Managers who implement retention strategies advance workplace equity. Leaders who promote empathy, equity, and flexibility in their management practices contribute to increased employee retention and social change by fostering fair, inclusive, and respectful workplace environments. When clinical research site managers integrate employee retention strategies into daily practice, they cultivate research environments that improve organizational outcomes and contribute to healthier, more empowered community citizens and a more unbiased clinical research system.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future researchers may expand upon the findings of this research project by exploring employee retention strategies across a broader range of clinical research environments and stakeholder roles. The qualitative nature of the project and the small sample size of six participants from the southeastern region of the United States limits the generalizability of the research findings. To address this limitation, future researchers may consider conducting multisite or cross-regional studies that include clinical research sites from diverse geographic locations, including rural, urban, academic, and private sectors, to identify potential regional or institutional variations in employee retention strategies. In addition, future quantitative researchers could examine correlations between specific retention strategies and measurable business outcomes, such as employee turnover rates, protocol adherence, or patient retention. Analyzing these correlations would combine qualitative insights with evidence-based practices, informing operational decision-making, human resource investments, and leadership-training programs at clinical research sites.

Furthermore, obtaining perspectives from frontline employees about effective retention strategies and the impact of specific retention initiatives on job satisfaction and commitment may be worth exploring. Another valuable area for further research includes examining the long-term effects of employee retention methods or interventions (e.g., mentoring programs, career ladders, flexible work arrangements) on turnover metrics and employee satisfaction in clinical research environments. Researchers conducting longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the sustainability of such strategies

and their evolving impact on workforce stability over time. By addressing these limitations and exploring these recommendations, future researchers may meaningfully contribute to evidence-based business practices in clinical research site management, supporting more sustainable workforce models and improved clinical trial outcomes.

Conclusion

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project, I identified and explored clinical research site managers' effective strategies to reduce employee turnover in the southeastern United States. Six experienced clinical research professionals provided insightful data through semistructured interviews that may help clinical research site managers retain employees. I identified six themes that highlighted the multifaceted nature of employee retention in clinical research settings: (a) employee engagement and open communication, (b) supportive leadership and management practices, (c) career development and growth opportunities, (d) recognition and appreciation, (e) work-life balance and flexibility, and (f) financial incentives and compensation. I used member checking and data triangulation to support the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. The project results also revealed that employee retention may be best supported through intentional leadership behaviors, structured career pathways, flexible and inclusive organizational policies, and competitive compensation packages. These strategies align with transformational leadership theory and the job embeddedness framework, affirming the practical effectiveness of both theoretical models in clinical research environments.

With these robust findings, I filled a literature gap regarding employee turnover in clinical research settings. Although other researchers have previously explored employee retention in various industries, they did not identify and explore the unique challenges and effective strategies within clinical research site management. The in-depth interviews with experienced clinical research professionals in the southeastern United States that took place in the current project provide valuable insights into the specific factors influencing employee turnover in this specialized field. The identification of six key themes contributes to the body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing retention issues in clinical research environments.

The research findings offer valuable insights for business leaders and human resource and clinical operations professionals in clinical research settings. Implementing the identified strategies may improve employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, and enhance research quality. Clinical research site leaders can strengthen workforce retention by improving leadership practices, investing in personnel development, and fostering a supportive work environment. By investing in their employees, clinical site managers can ameliorate turnover and retain competent team members who foster ethical, operational results.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Exemplar Interview Protocol for Qualitative Pragmatic Inquiry Research Project

Interview Protocol	
Introduce the interview and set the stage. Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview thereby setting the stage.	Hello, my name is Christina Holston. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. The purpose of this interview is to identify and explore the strategies that clinical research site managers use to minimize employee turnover at clinical research sites. I will ask you nine questions to which I would like your responses. Then, I will conclude the interview. Do you have any questions?
Watch for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase the participant response. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth	1. What strategies do you employ to reduce employee turnover at your clinical research site? 2. Please describe any resources you may have used to retain employees in your organization. 3. Which strategies did you find to be the most effective in reducing employee turnover at your clinical research site, and why do you believe it was the most effective? 4. Which strategy did you find to be the least effective in reducing employee turnover at your clinical research site, and why do you believe it was the least effective? 5. Please discuss the evidence, if any, you observed that indicated that your strategies were working. 6. What budgetary effects or constraints, if any, did you have with implementing strategies to minimize employee turnover? 7. What challenges did you face when implementing strategies to retain employees at your clinical research site, and how did you overcome them? 8. What would you do differently the next time you implement strategies to

	reduce employee turnover at your organization? 9. What additional information, not discussed, would you like to share?
Wrap up the interview, thanking the participant.	Thank you for participating in the interview.
Follow-up member checking process The member checking process will involve sending the interview transcript to study participants via mail and requesting their review, feedback, questions, comments, or concerns. After finalization, a copy of the study report will be provided to all study participants.	Follow-up email text to research participants for member checking Subject: Doctoral Research Project on Employee Retention Strategies – Christina Holston Dear [Participant's Name], I hope you are well. I am contacting you to provide the interview transcript for your review and verification. Please review and let me know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you and Kind Regards, Christina Holston