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Effective Strategies for Minimizing Employee Turnover to Enhance Profitability in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Catherine Nyambura Mbugua

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Effective Strategies for Minimizing Employee Turnover to Enhance Profitability in

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

by

Catherine Nyambura Mbugua

MSC, USIU 2010

BA, Daystar University, 2003

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2025

Abstract

Employee turnover in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is a persistent business problem that can negatively impact financial performance. Business owners are concerned about employee turnover because it disrupts operations, weakens customer relationships, and reduces profitability. Grounded in social exchange theory, the purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry was to explore the strategies that business owners use to minimize employee turnover and enhance profitability. The participants were six business owners of MSMEs who successfully implemented practices that reduced employee turnover. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and a review of organizational documents related to employee management and retention. Through thematic analysis, five key themes were identified: (a) employee support systems and incentives; (b) continuous learning and development; (c) feedback, communication, and participation; (d) organizational structure and role clarity; and (e) leadership and relationship-based retention. A key recommendation for business leaders is to integrate structured employee support programs and enhance leadership visibility to build trust, strengthen commitment, and reduce turnover. The implications for positive social change include the potential for MSME business owners to implement effective employee retention strategies that promote workforce stability, enhance employee well-being, and support the economic sustainability of local communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents, Charles Mbugua and Salome Wanjiku Mbugua, whose unwavering belief in the power of education laid the foundation for my journey. To my brothers, James and Michael, and my sisters, Beatrice and Christine, your love and encouragement have been my constant source of strength. And my dear nieces and nephews, Charlotte Joy, Nathan, Sally, Clarence, Natalie, Nashipae, and Hailey, may you outdo your Auntie and reach the highest levels of education in your field. I also dedicate this to my future husband and children, with hope and faith for the beautiful chapters yet to come. Finally, I dedicate this to every girl with a dream, those who face challenges and limitations yet continue to believe in the power of possibility. This is a reminder that you can do it. To all who dare dream, it is possible!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) rely heavily on their employees as essential contributors to organizational growth, innovation, and competitive advantage. With increasing globalization and rapid technological advancements, managers are increasingly dependent on the skills, knowledge, and expertise of their workforce to enhance organizational performance and adaptability (Weisblat, 2019). However, persistent employee turnover remains a significant challenge for MSME business owners, resulting in substantial costs related to recruitment, onboarding, training, and productivity losses. Estimates indicate that turnover-related expenses exceed \$ 11 billion annually, underscoring the magnitude of the problem for businesses of all sizes (Galanti et al., 2021). Beyond direct financial costs, turnover also disrupts workflow continuity, reduces institutional knowledge, and weakens team cohesion. For MSMEs, the dual responsibility of attracting and retaining qualified employees is particularly significant due to their limited resources and operational structures. Effective employee retention is often more cost-efficient and strategically beneficial than repeated cycles of hiring and replacement, as noted by Obrenovic et al. (2020). In this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry, the strategies employed by MSME business owners to minimize employee turnover and enhance profitability were explored. This section provides the foundation of the project by presenting the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the research question, the conceptual framework, the assumptions, the limitations, and the delimitations that guided the study.

Background of the Problem

Employee turnover presents a persistent challenge for MSME business owners. High turnover rates impede business owners by disrupting operational stability, reducing productivity, and increasing replacement and training costs (Banerjee, 2019). Even when turnover occurs at the individual level, its negative effects extend to work groups, creating disruptions that diminish morale and overall performance among remaining employees (Tambunan, 2022). MSMEs are central contributors to economic growth, job creation, and innovation, accounting for approximately 41% of private sector employment in the United States alone (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Their ability to sustain growth and remain competitive depends heavily on retaining skilled and committed employees who support daily operations and long-term strategic goals.

Despite their importance, MSMEs often face resource constraints, limited managerial capacity, and less structured human resource systems, making them particularly vulnerable to turnover-related challenges (Magnavita et al., 2020). When business owners fail to effectively address turnover or understand its root causes, organizations experience decreased productivity, increased operational disruptions, and higher operational costs, all of which threaten their survival in competitive markets. Addressing employee turnover has therefore become an essential priority for MSME business owners to enhance performance, support organizational stability, and promote sustainable growth.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

Employee turnover has detrimental effects on organizational performance. The costs associated with employee turnover range from 32% to 114% of an employee's annual salary (Singh & Bisht, 2020). The general business problem is that MSME business owners who fail to develop and implement effective strategies to minimize employee turnover see a consistent decline in profitability. The specific business problem is that some MSME business owners lack effective strategies for minimizing employee turnover, which hinders their ability to enhance profitability. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry is to explore the effective strategies that business owners of MSMEs use to minimize employee turnover and enhance their profitability.

This qualitative, pragmatic inquiry employed purposive sampling to select MSME business owners whose experiences directly aligned with the specific business problem and purpose of the study. The targeted population consisted of MSME business owners operating in Kilifi County, Kenya, and a sample of at least six participants was established to support data saturation. Eligibility criteria required participants to be business owners who had operated their enterprises for at least 5 years and possessed direct responsibility for managing employees, ensuring they could provide meaningful insights into employee turnover and retention strategies. Access to participants was facilitated through the Kilifi County MSME Directory, from which invitation emails were distributed to potential business owners, and participants were selected based on their confirmation of eligibility. The regional focus on Kilifi County allowed the study to capture the contextual realities of MSMEs within this geographic setting. Semistructured

interviews served as a primary data source, providing rich, descriptive data aligned with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved procedures for data collection. The study was grounded in social exchange theory (SET) as the conceptual framework, drawing from foundational contributions by Homans (1958), Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Gouldner (1960), and Blau (1964), whose work collectively explains how reciprocal relationships, perceived fairness, and mutual obligations shape workplace interactions and influence employee retention. This alignment ensured that the selected participants, research design, and analytical lens directly addressed the specific business problem and supported the overall purpose of the study.

Research Question

What effective strategies do MSME business owners use to mitigate employee turnover and enhance profitability?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are unverified information that researchers accept as true (Jackson & Brown, 2020). Researchers incorporate these unconfirmed facts as assumptions, shaping how they interpret and analyze the gathered data. For this study, self-reflection and beliefs were defined and established as boundaries to guide the study. This step formed the foundational basis for conducting this study. The study was based on two assumptions. The first assumption was that MSME business owners bear responsibility for employee retention strategies. The second assumption was that the participants would respond to the questions objectively, sincerely, and accurately.

Limitations

Limitations represent possible shortcomings in the study that the researcher had limited control over (Akanle et al., 2020). Within a study, limitations hinder efforts to make informed judgments (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). In this study, the first limitation that may have arisen was the reliance on participants' responses, as the accuracy of the study's outcomes depended on the information provided by participants (Akanle et al., 2020). The reliability and authenticity of the data could be improved with more honest and accurate responses from participants. A second limitation stemmed from the confidential nature of some MSMEs, which may have caused participants to hesitate to share certain necessary information. The third limitation was the small sample size, as the perspectives of the selected MSME business owners might not have accurately reflected those of the broader study population, nor had they extended to opinions beyond it.

Transition

Section 1 established the foundation of the study by outlining the background of the business problem, the purpose of the project, the guiding research question, and the assumptions and limitations that shaped the scope of the inquiry. The section emphasized that employee turnover presents a significant challenge for MSME business owners, with implications for profitability and sustainability. Building on this context, Section 2 provides a review of the scholarly literature related to employee turnover and retention, offering the theoretical and empirical basis for the study. Additionally, a detailed examination of the theoretical foundation of SET is conducted, connecting it to organizational behavior and retention practices. The literature review further analyzes

prior studies to identify key themes, knowledge gaps, and relevant variables influencing employee retention and business performance. Section 3 describes the methodology used to collect and analyze the data, while Section 4 presents the findings derived from the analysis. Together, these sections create a logical progression for understanding how employee retention influences MSME organizational performance.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry was to explore the effective strategies that MSME business owners use to minimize employee turnover and enhance profitability. The literature review begins with a critical examination and synthesis of the theoretical framework that informed the study: SET. The review further incorporates relevant literature on employee retention, retention strategies, causes and types of employee turnover, the cost of the turnover, and the associated risks that employee turnover poses to MSMEs. Databases such as EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Emerald, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, IEEE Xplore, books, and JSTOR were utilized to locate relevant scholarly sources. The search included keywords such as *employee retention, employee attrition, MSMEs, small business owners, conceptual frameworks, qualitative studies on employee retention, MSMEs, employee retention strategies, Generation Z, and employee motivation*. The literature is organized into subheadings beginning with the theoretical framework, SET, followed by sections on employee retention, employee turnover, employee attrition, causes of employee turnover and attrition in MSMEs, and employee retention strategies. Ninety percent of the documents reviewed were published within 5 years of the study's expected completion date, and 85% were drawn from peer-reviewed journals.

SET

SET, rooted in diverse fields such as anthropology, sociology, and social psychology, has evolved into a foundational model for understanding workplace

behavior. In this literature review, SET was explored within the context of social psychology and sociology, drawing on seminal works by Homans (1958), Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Gouldner (1960), and Blau (1964), which laid the foundation for its development. Emerson (1976) concurred with theorists that a sequence of interactions producing obligations was a form of social exchange. SET interactions are generally seen as mutually dependent and reliant on the behavior of another individual (Blau, 1964). SET provides insights into workplace dynamics by highlighting the reciprocal nature of interactions and obligations in shaping behavior. MSME business owners can utilize it to foster positive employee relations, which in turn promotes a positive work environment and enhances organizational effectiveness.

Positive SET emphasizes the evolution of relationships into trusting, loyal, and mutually beneficial commitments, in which parties adhere to exchange rules to foster trust and loyalty. According to Shin et al. (2022), positive SET emphasized the development of trusting and loyal relationships and required adherence to exchange rules. Blau (1964) offered an economic perspective on SET, concentrating on reciprocal interactions between parties. From a financial perspective, Homans (1958) focused on the reciprocal interaction between parties, whereas Homans centered on behavioral psychology (Anwar et al., 2023). Zeb et al. (2022), Akkermans et al. (2023), and Zhao and Detlor (2023) highlighted the significance of the diverse contributions of seminal authors in understanding exchange relationships in business contexts. LeCounte (2023) noted that Blau further explored SET from a technical and economic stance, while Sukumaran and Lanke (2020) delineated that Blau also focused on unequal power

dynamics and hierarchical positions among individuals that arose from differences in status and privilege. Blau's economic interpretation of SET offered valuable insights into exchange relationships within a business context. The SET approach provides MSME business owners with an understanding of exchange dynamics and their implications for organizational behavior and performance by focusing on imbalanced power dynamics and status disparities.

Scholars have contested the conventional understanding of SET by highlighting the transformation of workplace culture and relationship frameworks since its inception, emphasizing the complexity of contemporary workplace relationships. Cooper-Thomas and Morrison (2019) argued that the culture and relationship frameworks in today's workplace significantly diverged from those prevalent during the seminal SET. Theorists such as Homans (1958), Thibaut and Kelley (1959), Gouldner (1960), Blau (1964), Emerson (1976), and Cappelli et al. (2020) affirmed that contemporary workplace relationships are more intricate and multifaceted than straightforward exchanges of equal value. Hsiao et al. (2023) proposed that remote work settings could influence peer-to-peer or supervisor-to-subordinate relationships and transactions, especially within larger organizations or those with distinct configurations. Kurdy et al. (2023) noted that remote project teams had limited opportunities to build relationships, deviating from traditional SET principles. Wang and Liao (2023) highlighted that long-term exchange relationships in business were less common today compared to when Blau first developed SET. The absence of enduring exchange relationships did not imply that fundamental principles of SET ceased to exist; it reflected a shift in researchers' perspectives on the evolution of

social exchange relationships (Boccoli et al., 2023). The evidence suggested a shift in workplace dynamics and relationship structures, challenging traditional interpretations of SET. Changes such as remote work and evolving organizational structures re-evaluated how exchange relationships were formed and maintained in modern-day contexts. In summary, while the basic principles of SET persisted, MSME business owners needed to adapt their understanding to reflect the evolving nature of workplace relationships. By understanding these changes, MSME business owners were able to develop more nuanced interpretations of the SET and its applicability in contemporary organizational settings.

Social Exchange Relationships in the Workplace

Workplace-specific social exchanges, as outlined within the framework of SET, emphasized the development of mutually beneficial relationships formed through reciprocal exchanges. Blau (1964) posited that workplace social exchange relationships yielded mutually beneficial results when employees treated each other with respect and equity. Blau's research focused on personal emotions, such as obligations, gratitude, and trust, in workplace relationships, contrasting them with economic exchanges that invoked personal sentiments. His utilitarian approach centered on anticipating rewards for reciprocity, which aligned closely with this study's focus on technical-economic exploration. Homans (1958) emphasized that instrumental behavior in social interaction shared similarities with Blau's perspective, although their intentions differed; Blau concentrated on the simplicity of anticipated outcomes (Li et al., 2022). SET offered a lens for understanding workplace relationships, emphasizing the significance of

reciprocal exchanges and personal sentiments in achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. Blau's and Homans' perspectives offered insight into the psychological and economic aspects of social exchange, enriching the understanding of workplace dynamics and motivations. In summary, applying SET to study workplace relationships enhanced the comprehension of the dynamics between employers and employees in MSMEs. By considering the emotional and economic dimensions of social exchanges, MSME business owners stood to gain a deeper understanding of workplace dynamics and motivations.

After revolutionary works on SET, researchers expanded its framework, particularly focusing on its modern application in the workplace. Studies by Davlembayeva et al. (2021), Gersel and Johnsen (2020), Moilanen and Ikäheimo (2019), and Wei et al. (2019) contributed to the modern understanding of SET in organizational contexts. Gersel and Johnsen (2020) and Krishnan et al. (2021) emphasized the expectation that output equaled input effort, a key principle of SET. Moilanen and Ikäheimo (2019) and Wei et al. (2019) investigated the development of trust, individual goals, and behavioral influences on productivity, highlighting the significance of SET in shaping workplace dynamics. The studies explored aspects such as effort-reward imbalance, trust development, and behavioral influences on productivity, highlighting the relevance of SET in understanding workplace dynamics in MSMEs. By investigating diverse organizational phenomena through the framework of SET, MSME business owners continued to gain insights into the mechanisms that drove workplace relationships and productivity.

Some studies investigated the connections between occupational stress, happiness, and organizational support, utilizing SET, spillover theory, and conservation of resources theory, to highlight the effects of both positive and negative social interactions on employee well-being and productivity. Saad and Rabou (2023) observed that positive social exchanges within organizations fostered mutually beneficial outcomes and positive organizational support, which, in turn, correlated with lower occupational stress and increased happiness. Conversely, negative exchanges led to perceived one-sidedness, unfairness, conflicts, and counterproductive performance (Xuecheng et al., 2022). Lee et al. (2022) found that positive social interactions had a positive impact on employee productivity. Akgunduz et al. (2022) observed that positive social exchanges correlated with organizational support, happiness, and reduced stress. Zhou et al. (2022) identified that negative reciprocity beliefs hindered trust and motivation within organizations. M. Nguyen et al. (2023) reported that by adopting a SET framework, business owners developed strategies to reduce occupational stress and enhance efficiency. The evidence pointed out the significant impact of social exchange on employee well-being and productivity. Positive exchanges contributed to positive organizational support, reduced stress, and increased happiness, while negative exchanges led to counterproductive performance and compromised integrity. Understanding these dynamics through a SET framework enabled MSME business owners to develop strategies to mitigate occupational stress and enhance productivity. By fostering positive exchanges and addressing negative reciprocity beliefs, MSMEs were able to cultivate a supportive work environment conducive to employee happiness and high performance.

Employee Retention

Effective employee retention strategies had a profound impact on organizational success, influenced performance, and significantly contributed to achieving organizational objectives. Singh (2019) described employee retention as the tendency of individuals to remain within an organization for an extended period, supported by organizational efforts. Vui-Yee and Paggy (2020) identified the broader repercussions of employee turnover, noting the deficit of organizational knowledge, expertise, and financial benefits. Kumar and Reddy (2019) indicated that retaining seasoned and high-performing individuals helped mitigate these losses and provided a competitive advantage to the organization. The evidence emphasized the importance of employee retention strategies in conserving organizational resources and sustaining competitiveness in MSMEs. Practical retention efforts not only reduced turnover costs but also ensured continuity of knowledge and skills within MSMEs, ultimately contributing to improved performance and goal attainment. Prioritizing employee retention through strategic initiatives had a significant impact on organizational success in MSMEs. Organizations were able to preserve valuable resources, maintain competitive advantage, and enhance performance by implementing effective retention strategies.

Employee retention strategies preserved valuable contributions to an organization's competitive edge. Kurdi et al. (2020) and Sawaneh and Kamara (2019) confirmed that organizations designed employee retention strategies to retain individuals who had significantly contributed to the organization's competitive edge. These strategies often involved collaboration with employees to identify factors that fostered retention and

methods that motivated them to prolong their tenure. Retaining individuals who enhanced the organization's attractiveness strengthened its competitiveness and reduced the financial burden of hiring and onboarding new employees (Kurdi et al., 2020). Given firms' inherent difficulty in retaining employees, Hussein et al. (2021) and Kurdi et al. (2020) emphasized that human resources operations should be geared towards established mechanisms and focused on retaining talented individuals. They highlighted the importance of employee retention strategies in preserving valuable talent and maintaining competitive advantage. By actively engaging with the employees and implementing effective retention mechanisms, MSMEs were able to reduce turnover costs and enhance continuity in their workforce, ultimately improving their ability to compete in the market. Considering the inherent challenges in retaining employees, business owners in MSMEs prioritized establishing effective retention mechanisms. By strategically retaining talented individuals, MSME business owners safeguarded their competitive edge and minimized the financial impact of turnover.

Organizations encountered multiple challenges in retaining personnel, including competition from rival entities that offered elevated incentives and the migration of talented employees seeking better opportunities abroad. Hussein et al. (2021) and Singh (2019) highlighted the allure of being poached by competing entities and the promise of enhanced incentives as factors that contributed to employee turnover. The migration of talented employees seeking better opportunities abroad further exacerbates the challenges of retaining them. This mass movement or relocation of skilled employees for financial reasons adversely affected organizational success, leading to increased costs and brain

drain that hindered the timely replacement of aging talent (Hussein et al., 2021; Singh, 2019). They highlighted the significant impact of external factors, such as competitive offers and global opportunities, on employee retention. The mass migration of talented individuals escalated costs for organizations and resulted in the loss of valuable knowledge, proficiency, and hindered organizational success and growth in MSMEs. The concentration of experienced and bright individuals within MSMEs at the same level or cohort exacerbated the challenge of retaining personnel. MSME business owners had to develop effective strategies to counter external pressures and retain their talented workforce, ensuring continued success and sustainability.

Employee Turnover

Employee turnover, characterized by employees leaving their positions for various reasons, had a substantial impact on organizational performance and effectiveness. Amah and Oyetuunde (2020) and Park et al. (2019b) highlighted the increasing frequency of employee turnover as a concerning trend. This phenomenon posed operational challenges for organizations and had repercussions for customer relationships. Customers hesitated to engage replacements of departed employees, leading to diminished organizational performance. They demonstrated the pervasive impact of employee turnover on organizational effectiveness. High turnover rates disrupted operations, negatively impacted customer relationships, and hindered overall organizational performance. Addressing employee turnover maintained stability and continuity within MSMEs. Employee turnover posed significant challenges for business owners of MSMEs, affecting their operational efficiency and customer interactions.

MSME Business owners had to develop strategies aimed at reducing turnover and retaining talent, which they had to adopt to sustain organizational effectiveness and success in MSMEs.

Organizations that experienced high employee turnover often encountered adverse outcomes, including a reduced appeal to skilled candidates and prospective employees. Research by Chiat and Panatik (2019) and Park et al. (2019b) highlighted the adverse outcomes of employee turnover, including increased operational costs, reduced productivity, lowered morale, decreased appeal to prospective hires, and a negative impact on customer relations. The consequences compounded the adverse effects, as recruiting and training required a significant amount of time and resources. Chiat and Panatik and Park et al. noted that departed employees disseminated proprietary knowledge to competitors, exacerbating organizational challenges. The multifaceted impact of employee turnover in MSMEs encompassed financial, productivity, morale, and reputational aspects. High turnover rates not only strained MSME resources but also eroded competitive advantage and undermined long-term sustainability. The detrimental effects of employee turnover extended beyond immediate operational challenges, impacting the competitiveness and long-term viability of MSMEs. Addressing employee turnover required strategic measures to retain talent and foster a supportive work atmosphere, promoting employee engagement and retention in MSMEs.

Various factors, including distrust in leadership, interpersonal conflicts, dissatisfaction with working conditions, and the pursuit of better opportunities, influenced employee turnover within MSMEs. Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) and Park et al.

(2019b) identified several reasons for employee departure in MSMEs, such as lack of trust in leadership, interpersonal conflicts, dissatisfaction with working conditions, and the allure of superior opportunities elsewhere. They highlighted the diverse components that contributed to employee turnover in MSMEs and emphasized the importance of addressing these issues to mitigate turnover rates. While it was unrealistic to purge employee departures completely, MSMEs were to take proactive measures to minimize turnover and its associated negative impacts. By understanding the root causes of employee turnover in MSMEs and implementing strategies to address them, MSME business owners strove to reduce turnover rates and foster a more stable and productive workforce.

Types of Employee Turnover

Employee turnover, categorized into voluntary and involuntary categories, could have varying effects on organizational dynamics, with voluntary turnover potentially leading to benefits in organizational performance. Rombaut and Guerry (2020) emphasized the importance of retaining top-performing employees, as their contributions contributed to sustained organizational excellence. They further explained that voluntary turnover, including transfers, resignations, or retirements, differed from involuntary turnover, which resulted from the termination of employment. The distinction between voluntary and involuntary turnover relied on the initiator of the process, whether it was the employer or the employee. The evidence demonstrated that various forms of turnover, such as seeking opportunities in different departments or locations within the MSMEs, had diverse impacts. For example, voluntary turnover through transfers positively

impacted organizational performance if the employee excelled in their new role. While employee turnover affected organizational performance, MSMEs needed to recognize the nuanced effects of voluntary and involuntary turnover. Embracing voluntary turnover, particularly when employees enhanced their skills or sought new challenges within the MSME, contributed positively to organizational success.

Conversely, involuntary turnover, initiated by employers through actions such as layoffs, differed from voluntary turnover and was prompted by factors such as a perceived lack of value of the employee or organizational restructuring. Scholars such as An (2019) and Stritch et al. (2020) discussed how layoffs occurred due to employees no longer adding value or organizational restructuring. Factors like challenging goal settings, financial constraints, or organizational mergers contributed to involuntary turnover (An, 2019; Stritch et al., 2020). Involuntary turnover removed unproductive employees and created opportunities for individuals with enhanced skills. Organizations enhanced their resilience by comprehensively addressing turnover issues, paving the way to sustained success.

Employee Attrition

Employee attrition, distinct from turnover, examined the natural ways employees left organizations and was influenced by leadership skills, particularly in creating environments conducive to growth and retention. Hoffman and Tadelis (2021) discussed how leadership skills, particularly interpersonal skills, impacted employee commitment and retention. Employees sought environments where they could grow personally and professionally; leaders who enabled such environments tended to retain employees.

Leadership qualities such as creating conducive environments for growth and expression influenced employee retention. Leaders who facilitated personal and professional development are more likely to retain their employees. Understanding the impact of leadership skills on employee attrition in organizations was crucial for retaining talent and fostering a positive work environment. By focusing on leadership development and creating environments conducive to growth, MSME business owners mitigated attrition and promoted employee retention.

Employee departure could be either voluntary or involuntary, depending on whether it was made by personal choice or at the discretion of management. Misalignment of values between employees and organizations was a driver of voluntary attrition. Olubiyi et al. (2019) emphasized the role of values misalignment in driving voluntary attrition and highlighted that employees decided to leave the organization due to perceived misalignment. Frye et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of comprehensive employee information for effective management of employee attrition. Voluntary turnover, influenced by value discrepancies, indicated a mismatch between the employee and the organizational position, aligning with the notion of person-organization fit (P-O fit). This categorization of attrition, whether voluntary or involuntary, depended on the decision-makers behind the departure. Maintaining detailed employee information enabled MSMEs to anticipate and mitigate the negative impacts of attrition by strategically planning recruitment efforts. Understanding the drivers of voluntary attrition, such as values misalignment, and implementing strategies to address them in MSMEs helped retain talent and maintain stability. By prioritizing values alignment and

comprehensive record-keeping, MSME business owners proactively managed attrition and fostered a work environment conducive to employee retention and organizational success.

Causes of Employee Attrition in MSMEs

MSMEs encountered significant challenges in managing attrition due to resource limitations, resulting in difficulties in attracting and retaining top talent. Srivastava and Tiwari (2020) pointed out that the absence of robust retention and job rotation policies contributed to employee demotivation and dissatisfaction and led to increased attrition rates in MSMEs. The reasons identified for attrition included lack of career growth opportunities, insufficient compensation and recognition, and poor communication within organizations. MSMEs operated under resource constraints, making it challenging to implement effective retention strategies and provide attractive career advancement opportunities. Inadequate compensation, recognition, and poor communication contributed to employee dissatisfaction, leading to higher turnover rates. To address attrition challenges, MSMEs prioritized the development of robust retention policies, offered chances for career growth, ensured fair compensation and recognition, and improved communication channels. By addressing these factors, MSMEs enhanced their ability to attract and retain top talent, fostered organizational growth, and enhanced profitability.

Attrition in organizations stemmed from various factors, including limited career growth opportunities, retirement, sudden events such as death or mergers, and personal choices. Hoffman and Tadelis (2021) highlighted that the lack of career progression and

role monotony drove individuals to seek change and leave organizations. Retirements led to mass attrition, while sudden events, such as death or mergers, contributed to involuntary attrition. Organizations faced challenges in planning for staff replacement in cases of sudden attrition. The evidence showed that proactive MSME business owners helped minimize the adverse effects of attrition by creating pathways for career advancement, planning for retirement, and adapting to unforeseen circumstances. By understanding the diverse factors that contributed to attrition and implementing effective human resources management strategies, MSMEs enhanced their ability to retain talent and maintain an established, beneficial workforce. This proactive approach to addressing attrition contributed to organizational stability and long-term success in MSMEs.

Employee Retention Strategies

Proficient employees actively sought optimal opportunities, prompting employers to prioritize retaining top skills to maintain industry relevance. Naz et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of employers making concerted efforts to possess exceptional skills, attract top talent, and establish themselves as industry leaders. Employee retention strategies were designed to manage human resources effectively, with a primary focus on retaining exceptional skills over the long term. This evidence showed that MSMEs ensured continuity and competitiveness in their respective industries. Recognizing the value of proficient employees and implementing effective retention strategies not only helped attract and retain top talent but also positioned MSMEs as leaders in their industries. This proactive approach significantly contributed to organizational success and sustainability.

Providing a work environment that fostered encouragement and satisfaction retained talented employees. Naz et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of creating conducive environments that motivated employees to stay, while also acknowledging the negative impact of employee turnover on the loss of valuable talent. MSME business owners, who recognized the importance of retaining top talent to achieve organizational goals, developed and implemented diverse strategies tailored to employee retention. These strategies aimed to cultivate a favorable work environment that fostered employee satisfaction and loyalty. By creating supportive work environments and applying effective retention strategies, MSMEs reduced the adverse effects of employee turnover and retained a skilled workforce.

Training and Development

Providing training and development opportunities retained employees and fostered their loyalty to the organization. Akther and Tariq (2020) highlighted the positive impact of training and development initiatives on employee retention, particularly among younger employees who valued opportunities for skill enhancement. C. Nguyen (2020) opined that organizations complemented these initiatives with supportive systems, such as retention policies or strategies, that fostered employee loyalty. Employees who remained in a role for extended periods often experienced a decline in motivation and sought opportunities for growth. Lack of training and development options prompted them to seek more challenging opportunities elsewhere. MSMEs recognized the importance of financing training and development to retain talent. Complementing training and development initiatives with employee support

systems, such as retention strategies or policies, enhanced employee loyalty and contributed to organizational success.

Training and development initiatives, combined with organizational support, enhanced employee performance, productivity, and reduced employee attrition. Alrazehi et al. (2021) and Manzoor U. et al. (2021) emphasized the connection between training and organizational support, noting that employees who felt undervalued or unsupported looked for opportunities elsewhere. Comprehensive retention strategies included both training opportunities and a supportive environment. Creating a strong system that included advancement opportunities after training encouraged employees to remain with the MSME, as it provided opportunities for growth and recognition. This strategy helped retain talent and fostered a culture of continuous improvement and loyalty within MSMEs.

Training and Development in MSMEs

MSMEs' business owners invested in training and development in their organizations despite budgetary constraints. C. Nguyen (2020) emphasized the significance of training and development in MSMEs, highlighting the long-term benefits for organizational innovation and business performance. Akther and Tariq (2020) recommended that MSMEs that chose training options prudently, considered budget limitations, achieved the greatest benefit, and significantly enhanced employee retention. Despite budgetary constraints, MSMEs achieved substantial long-term benefits by prioritizing training and development, including enhanced innovation and improved performance. MSMEs strategically selected training options with the highest impact on

employee retention within their budget constraints. By prioritizing training and development initiatives that aligned with their budget and focused on enhancing employee retention, MSMEs effectively nurtured talent, drove innovation, and improved overall business outcomes despite resource limitations.

Despite the reluctance of MSME owners to invest in training, effective recommendations and strategies existed to address this issue. C. Nguyen (2020) pointed out the reluctance among MSME owners in China to allocate resources to employee training, primarily because they struggled to recognize the intangible advantages, such as heightened motivation and improved retention rates, that such investments brought. Park et al. (2019a) suggested knowledge-oriented training for MSMEs, emphasizing the importance of organizational climate and managerial interactions. Putra and Cho (2019) emphasized the necessity of functional training in small financial planning firms, which covered business creation, operations, and marketing. MSMEs in China faced challenges in recognizing the intangible benefits of training. Knowledge-based training focused on organizational climate, and functional training covered various business aspects that enhanced employee skills and contributed to organizational success in MSMEs. By adopting recommended training strategies tailored to their specific needs, MSMEs overcame reluctance to invest in employee development, leading to enhanced organizational performance and competitiveness in the market.

Training and development programs in MSMEs enhanced performance and reduced turnover costs and fostered employee loyalty and engagement. Putra and Cho (2019) discovered that well-managed training in small restaurant businesses improved

performance and reduced training costs. Basnyat and Chi Sio (2019) argued that, despite initial high costs, training ultimately mitigated expenses associated with voluntary turnover. Mendi (2021) emphasized the value of training for employee loyalty and engagement in SMEs. Loufrani-Fedida and Aldebert (2021) suggested contemplating individual, collective, and organizational competencies for competency development in MSMEs. The evidence highlighted the multifaceted benefits of training and development in MSMEs, including improved performance, cost reduction, enhanced employee loyalty, and the development of competencies at various levels. MSME business owners who prioritized investing in comprehensive training programs to develop skills, reduced turnover costs, and cultivated a more skilled and engaged workforce, ultimately bolstering the organization's overall success and competitiveness.

Management and Leadership Style

Effective leadership is crucial to organizational success and employee retention, as employees may leave toxic work environments or those with ineffective leadership. Ohunakin et al. (2019) emphasized that authoritarian leaders often lack empathy and fail to create a conducive environment for employees to develop and flourish, thereby contributing to turnover. Employees' decisions to stay or leave were influenced by their leader's or supervisor's leadership style. The evidence highlighted that authoritarian leaders often lacked empathy and failed to create a conducive environment for employees to develop and flourish. Leaders who fail to create supportive environments may contribute to turnover, while effective leadership can foster employee satisfaction and retention. MSME business owners must prioritize developing the appropriate leadership

skills to create positive work environments, nurture employee talent, and retain valuable employees, ultimately contributing to the organization's success.

Effective leadership styles have a significant impact on employee retention, with leaders who prioritize employee well-being and development being more successful in retaining talent. Research by Ohunakin et al. (2019) and Yamin (2020) emphasized the importance of leaders prioritizing individual employee development and job satisfaction, which, in turn, influenced retention rates. The evidence clarified the role of leadership in fostering a positive work environment and promoting employee engagement. Leaders who prioritized employee well-being and development were more likely to create a supportive workplace culture that fostered retention. MSME business owners that cultivated leadership skills and prioritized employee well-being, developed, and engaged to enhance retention rates and contributed to long-term organizational success and competitiveness.

Employee Engagement

Effective employee retention hinged on organizations with robust engagement, strategies that adopted an optimistic work environment, and promoted employee commitment. Lee et al. (2022) emphasized the significant impact of employee engagement on organizational performance. Similarly, studies by Bhasin et al. (2019) and Quek et al. (2021) supported the effectiveness of various engagement initiatives, which included comprehensive orientation, role alignment, shared leadership, and recognition programs, which enhanced employee retention. These findings showcased the importance of actively engaging employees to cultivate loyalty and motivation. Strategies such as

aligning roles with strengths and involving employees in decision-making empowered them, while recognition reinforced their sense of value within the organization. MSME business owners who implemented engagement strategies as part of their retention efforts created a supportive work environment that valued employees and inspired them to stay, thereby contributing to organizational success.

Employee engagement, whether with their work or the organization, was pivotal in fostering commitment and retention within MSMEs. Bhasin et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of matching employee talents to their roles, which led to increased performance and enthusiasm. Engaged employees were more likely to contribute willingly toward organizational goals, whether in their specific roles or as stakeholders. They indicated that employees who felt connected to their work or the organization were more committed and inclined to stay. When individuals found meaning and satisfaction in their role and felt invested in the organization's mission, they were more likely to remain loyal. Organizations that prioritized fostering employee engagement by aligning roles, providing meaningful work, and involving employees in organizational decision-making enhanced retention rates and promoted long-term success.

Work Flexibility

Employee satisfaction, performance, and contemporary factors such as work flexibility in MSMEs played a significant role in organizational success. Research by Arrighetti et al. (2021) and Davidescu et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of work flexibility in employee satisfaction and performance. Ma (2018) indicated that work flexibility enabled freedom to choose working hours and locations. These findings

suggested that MSMEs that adapted to changing employee preferences and offered flexible work arrangements enhanced satisfaction and performance. As a result, promoting work flexibility improved employee morale, productivity, and retention, thereby significantly enhancing the overall performance and success of MSMEs.

Working flexibility, a component of human resource management (HRM) strategies, exerted a significant influence on an organization's employer brand and its capacity to attract top talent. Research by Austin-Egole et al. (2020) and Singh (2019) highlighted the importance of work flexibility in shaping an organization's attractiveness to potential employers. Organizations that incorporated work flexibility into their HRM strategies were better positioned to attract top talent, enhanced their employer brand, and gained a competitive advantage in the talent market. The increasing dissatisfaction among employees due to the lack of work flexibility highlighted its growing significance in the modern employment landscape, underscoring the need for MSME business owners to prioritize and implement flexible work arrangements to remain competitive.

Job Embeddedness

The quality of human resources had a significant impact on the performance of MSMEs, with employee retention strategies, such as job embeddedness, playing a crucial role in retaining talent. Safavi and Karatepe (2019) and Coetzer et al. (2019) emphasized the significance of job embeddedness in employee retention, highlighting factors such as compatibility, connections, and commitment within the work community. Employees in MSMEs who felt connected to their work community were more likely to stay with the organization, especially if they had strong relationships, enjoyed their role, and had

progressed within the organization's hierarchy. Understanding and implementing job embeddedness strategies helped MSME business owners retain valued talent and ensured continuity and stability in their operations while fostering a constructive work environment for employees.

The attachment employees felt toward their jobs significantly influenced their decisions about whether to stay in or leave organizations. Khairunisa and Muafi (2022) emphasized the importance of recruiting individuals who shared the organization's values and goals. Ghani et al. (2022) highlighted the concept of job embeddedness, wherein employees with a strong connection to the organization were more likely to stay. Practical onboarding activities and integration processes ensured that employees established a sense of connection to the organization and their work community. Highly embedded employees were more likely to remain committed, while those with fewer connections lacked the motivation to stay. Job embeddedness emerged as a strategy for MSME business owners to retain employees by nurturing an enabling environment that fostered strong connections and commitment among employees.

Organizational Culture and Commitment

Organizational culture played a role in shaping employee behavior, attitudes, and decision-making processes. A positive and cohesive culture was required for organizations seeking to attract, retain, and motivate top talent while driving sustained performance and success. Akpa et al. (2021) observed that employees who identified with and embraced the organization's culture were more likely to advocate for it internally and contribute to its overall reputation and success. Erik (2021) and Tahir et al. (2019)

highlighted a clear correlation between a positive organizational culture and improved employee morale, productivity, and financial performance, and that organizations with strong, inclusive, and values-driven cultures were better equipped to attract and retain top talent, leading to sustained competitive advantage in the marketplace. In the context of MSMEs, a strong organizational culture that provided employees with a clear understanding of expectations and helped them assess the alignment of corporate values independently. When organizational culture aligned with employee values, their commitment to the organization was likely to be sustained in MSMEs. Understanding and nurturing a positive organizational culture was required for business owners in MSMEs to enhance employee commitment and drive organizational performance. MSMEs that fostered a culture that aligned with employees' values and encouraged commitment created a more engaged and productive workforce.

Organizational culture had a significant influence on employee behavior, attitudes, and performance. Research has indicated that organizational culture is shaped by leadership and employee experiences, which in turn impact employee engagement and commitment (Erik, 2021; Tahir et al., 2019). A strong organizational culture fosters trust, enhances performance, and promotes a positive work environment. Understanding the dynamic nature of organizational culture allowed MSMEs to proactively shape their culture to align with their values and goals. By prioritizing a positive culture, MSMEs enhanced employee engagement, retention, and overall performance. The evidence highlighted the importance of organizational culture in shaping employee behavior and

organizational outcomes, aligning with the key idea that fostered a positive and cohesive culture that was crucial to achieving organizational success in MSMEs.

Work- Life Balance

Work-life balance fostered employee satisfaction and retention, ultimately enhancing organizational success in MSMEs. Pasamar (2020) identified the affirmative association between work-life balance and diverse facets of employee well-being, including job satisfaction, performance, and commitment. Employees who felt supported in balancing their work responsibilities with personal life commitments were more likely to remain engaged and productive. Slowiak and DeLongchamp (2022) and Yu et al. (2022) emphasized the role of organizational policies in promoting work-life balance. These policies, which included flexible working hours, telecommuting options, and opportunities for leisure activities, proved instrumental in averting burnout and mitigating stress among employees. MSMEs that prioritized work-life balance demonstrated their commitment to employee welfare, thereby fostering a positive organizational culture. By implementing policies that endorsed non-work-related activities and promoted time away from work, MSMEs created an environment where employees felt valued and supported. Consequently, this led to increased loyalty, enhanced job satisfaction, and ultimately, improved retention rates in MSMEs. A healthy work-life balance enhanced employee morale and productivity and ultimately contributed to the overall success of MSMEs. The evidence pointed out the importance of work-life balance in influencing employee satisfaction and retention. By harmonizing organizational policies with employee well-

being, MSMEs that cultivated a supportive work environment, one that nurtured loyalty and commitment, ultimately drove organizational success.

The increased workload and decreased leisure time resulting from factors such as employee departures and workforce reductions had detrimental effects on employee motivation, performance, and retention in MSMEs. Vinberg and Danielsson (2021) suggested that an increased workload led to reduced leisure time, which demotivated employees and adversely affected their performance. This situation often arose because of employee departures or reductions in the workforce. The evidence highlighted the adverse effects of an increased workload on employee well-being and organizational performance. When employees were burdened with excessive workloads and had limited leisure time, they experienced demotivation, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction in MSMEs. Consequently, this led to lower productivity, reduced morale, and increased turnover rates within MSMEs. The evidence emphasized the importance of effectively managing workload to sustain employee motivation, performance, and retention. MSMEs considered the impact of workload changes on employee well-being and implemented strategies to mitigate the adverse effects. These strategies included workload redistribution, resource allocation, and task prioritization in MSMEs. By addressing workload-related challenges, MSME business owners fostered a healthier and more productive work environment, ultimately enhancing employee satisfaction and organizational success.

Recognition and Rewards

Recognizing the contributions of employees within an organization acts as a powerful catalyst for motivation in MSMEs. It fosters loyalty, enhances performance, and boosts employee satisfaction and retention. Rombaut and Guerry (2020) found that acknowledging exceptional employee performances served as a motivational catalyst, inspiring individuals to excel in their roles. Extending recognition to entire teams incentivized collective efforts, enhancing employee satisfaction and retention (Rombaut & Guerry, 2020). The positive impact of recognition on employee morale, motivation, and performance contributed to employees feeling valued and appreciated for their contributions to MSMEs. When this occurred, they were more likely to remain loyal to the organization and strive for continued excellence. Recognizing both individual and team achievements created a positive work culture that fostered collaboration, engagement, and overall job satisfaction in MSMEs. Business owners implemented effective recognition programs within MSMEs to boost employee morale, performance, and retention. By acknowledging and rewarding employee contributions, MSMEs cultivated a supportive and rewarding work environment that promoted long-term employee engagement and loyalty. This, in turn, led to higher productivity levels, improved job satisfaction, and reduced turnover rates, ultimately contributing to organizational success in MSMEs.

Recognizing employees' performance was a powerful motivator, contributing to job satisfaction and influencing employee retention. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene factor theory emphasized the recognition of achievement as a key factor in contributing to

employee job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1965). Younies (2020) emphasized the importance of a well-organized system for performance recognition and rewards, which attracted qualified workers and contributed to employee retention. This suggested that recognizing employee achievements motivated employees and enhanced their job satisfaction. When employees felt appreciated for their contributions to MSMEs, they are more likely to be satisfied with their work and remain committed to the organization. Herzberg's theory emphasized the significance of recognition systems contributing to organizational employee retention and highlighted the importance of implementing effective recognition programs within MSMEs to motivate employees and enhance job satisfaction, ultimately influencing employee retention. By recognizing and rewarding employee achievements, MSMEs created a positive work environment that fostered employee engagement and loyalty. This, in turn, led to increased retention of qualified employees, contributing to MSME's success and effectiveness.

Employee Participation and Engagement

Involving employees in decision-making processes within organizations fostered commitment and enhanced retention. Sahni (2021) highlighted that employees who are engaged in organizational processes were more likely to remain committed to the organization. They noted that involving employees in decision-making enhanced their sense of ownership and commitment to the organization. In MSMEs, when employees perceived that their voices were heard and their opinions were valued, they were more likely to feel invested in the organization's success and remain loyal to it. By actively involving employees in decision-making processes, MSMEs could cultivate a culture of

engagement and ownership, increasing retention rates. Empowering employees in MSMEs to participate in decision-making not only strengthened their commitment to the organization but also fostered a sense of belonging and loyalty, ultimately contributing to the organization's success.

Granting employees a role in decision-making imparted a sense of ownership and motivated their continued association with the organization. Sahni (2021) suggested that involving employees in decision-making processes facilitated the establishment of personal goals and fostered commitment to both their assignments and the organization. It implied that when employees are actively involved in decision-making, they felt a greater sense of ownership over their work and were more motivated to contribute to organizational success. By empowering employees to participate in decision-making processes, MSMEs could leverage their skills and expertise, fostering a deeper commitment to the organization's success. When they embraced a culture of employee participation in decision-making, MSMEs cultivated a more engaged and committed workforce. In MSMEs, this sense of ownership and involvement could lead to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and ultimately higher retention rates. MSMEs could have benefited from actively involving employees in shaping their work environment and contributing to the organization's success.

Incorporating employees in organizational decisions fostered a deeper sense of commitment and engagement, ultimately enhancing motivation and retention rates. Sahni (2021) suggested that millennial workers exhibited heightened commitment and engagement when consulted in decision-making processes. This implied that involving

employees in decision-making increased dedication to their work and organization. By valuing employees' input and allowing them to contribute to decision-making, MSMEs fostered a sense of ownership and empowerment among their employees, which positively impacted their motivation and retention. Embracing employee involvement in the decision-making process could lead to a more engaged and committed workforce in MSMEs. MSMEs that prioritized employee input and participation tended to experience higher levels of motivation, job satisfaction, and employee retention. MSMEs that integrated employees into decision-making processes adopted a strategic approach to enhance organizational performance and employee well-being.

Role of Rewards and Benefits

Rewards and benefits retained and motivated employees in organizations. Bussin et al. (2019a) emphasized that effective management of employee rewards was a key strategy for retaining individuals. Zala and Rajani (2021) found a direct and positive correlation between total compensation and employees' organizational commitment, which influenced the retention of high-potential employees. They suggested that offering competitive rewards and benefits enhanced organizational commitment and employee retention. When employees in MSMEs are compensated for their efforts, they were more likely to remain loyal to the organization and stayed motivated to perform at their best. MSMEs enhanced employee satisfaction, commitment, and retention by prioritizing effective management of rewards and benefits. Investing in competitive compensation packages and other incentives helped MSMEs attract and retain top talent, ultimately contributing to their long-term success and market competitiveness.

Creativity was a paramount factor, granting a competitive edge to any MSME. Bussin et al. (2019a) found a direct relationship between employee creativity and reward strategy, suggesting that a robust reward system motivated employees to generate more innovative solutions. Zala and Rajani (2021) asserted that an attractive remuneration package with diverse benefits contributed to an organization's competitive edge. A well-designed reward system stimulated employee creativity and led to innovative ideas and solutions. Offering competitive remuneration packages and diverse benefits enhanced MSME's attractiveness to potential employees and contributed to its competitive advantage in the market. By implementing effective reward strategies and providing attractive remuneration packages, MSMEs fostered a culture of creativity, attracted top talent, and maintained a competitive edge in their respective industries. MSME business owners who aligned reward systems with the goals of MSMEs promoted innovation and drove success.

Employee rewards and benefits formed components of business goals and retention strategies. Bussin et al. (2019a) found that tailoring reward frameworks to the preferences of Generation Y employees added significant value in retaining this demographic. Bussin et al. highlighted the importance of considering the reward preferences of different generations and indicated the need for organizations to adapt their reward strategies accordingly. Organizations were required to customize their reward strategies to meet the preferences of different employee generations, particularly Generation Y. The strategies employed by MSME business owners included factors such as career development, retirement options, and work-life balance, tailored to each

generation's preferences. When workplace policies were flexible in MSMEs, employers and employees experienced enhanced productivity and satisfaction. In MSMEs, implementing a well-structured total reward strategy that aligned with the preferences of different employee generations demonstrated the organization's commitment to attracting, motivating, and retaining employees. By adapting reward strategies that met the diverse needs of employees, MSMEs could enhance employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention, ultimately contributing to the quality and capacity of the organization.

The challenges in employee retention necessitated the implementation of structured compensation and reward strategies in MSMEs. Zala and Rajani (2021) emphasized the importance of structured compensation and reward strategies, particularly in industries such as banking. Bussin et al. (2019a) emphasized that good rewards enhanced organizational citizenship behavior, leading to voluntary commitment beyond contractual obligations. Employee retention challenges often stemmed from inadequate compensation and reward strategies within organizations. Regular evaluations of employee benefits ensured continued employee appreciation and satisfaction, contributing to retention efforts within MSMEs. In MSMEs, those that had adopted flexible benefit schemes customized to individual employee needs were preferred over top-down approaches, as they catered to deliver employee preferences. High operating costs due to competition may have hindered MSMEs' ability to offer competitive employee benefits, resulting in high voluntary turnover rates. Implementing structured

compensation and reward strategies aligned with employees' preferences could mitigate these challenges and improve retention rates in MSMEs.

Monetary and Nonmonetary Benefits

Both monetary and nonmonetary benefits were components of effective reward strategies within MSMEs. Naveed et al. (2021) distinguished between tangible and intangible benefits, highlighting the attractiveness of intangible benefits to employees. They emphasized that non-cash rewards were favored for visibility and shareability (Naveed et al., 2021). Effective reward strategies encompassed both monetary and nonmonetary benefits to cater to the diverse preferences of employees. While financial rewards, such as salaries, met basic needs and motivated employees to achieve organizational objectives, nonmonetary benefits, including empowering work environments, influenced career decisions and enhanced employee satisfaction in MSMEs. By offering monetary and nonmonetary benefits tailored to employees' preferences, MSME business owners created rewarding work environments that supported employee retention and satisfaction across diverse cultural contexts and job roles.

Effective employee benefits fostered loyalty, productivity, and retention in MSMEs. Naveed et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of employee benefits, including superannuation schemes, in contributing to loyalty and productivity. They also emphasized the importance of work-life balance, regular pay structure benchmarking, respect, and recognition in the workplace for enhancing employee motivation and organizational success (Naveed et al., 2021). Offering competitive employee benefits,

such as superannuation schemes, contributed to employee loyalty and productivity by demonstrating the MSMEs' commitment to employee well-being. Regular benchmarking of pay structures against the market helped ensure that employees are well-compensated, reducing the likelihood of staff turnover in MSMEs. A culture of respect and recognition in the MSMEs promoted employee motivation and contributed to overall organizational success. Business owners in MSMEs prioritized maintaining open communication channels to gather feedback on benefit plans and ensured they aligned with employee needs and expectations. By continuously assessing and adapting employee benefits, MSME business owners could effectively support employee retention and satisfaction while driving productivity and success.

Rewards and Benefits in MSMEs

In MSMEs, those with a well-defined employee benefits strategy experienced a lower impact on voluntary employee turnover. Park et al. (2019b) emphasized the importance of addressing voluntary turnover in MSMEs, as these organizations often have limited resources and small workforces. They highlighted the role of individual productivity in MSMEs, where each employee contributed to organizational success (Park et al., 2019a). Voluntary turnover could disproportionately impact MSMEs compared to larger organizations. Given their limited resources and reliance on individual productivity, MSMEs implemented effective employee benefits strategies to retain talent and minimize turnover costs. By investing in employee benefits strategies tailored to their workforce's needs, MSMEs could enhance employee satisfaction, loyalty, and

productivity, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance and sustainability.

A comprehensive reward program in MSMEs could attract suitable talent and accelerate organizational success. Nanjundeswaraswamy et al. (2020) emphasized the strong correlation between employee job satisfaction and recognition. Park et al. (2019a) emphasized the importance of effective retention policies in motivating employees in SMEs, resulting in increased voluntary efforts that contributed to organizational sustainability. A comprehensive reward program and effective retention policies could enhance employee job satisfaction, motivation, and voluntary efforts in MSMEs. These factors attracted suitable talent and drove organizational success in smaller enterprises. By prioritizing professional training and implementing robust reward and retention policies, MSMEs could create an attractive work environment that fostered employee satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity, ultimately leading to organizational growth and sustainability.

A well-structured reward system in MSMEs contributed to employee commitment, loyalty, and retention, positively impacting organizational sustainability. Matloob et al. (2021) found that a robust rewards system in SMEs in the pharmaceutical industry in Indonesia enhanced employee commitment and loyalty and positively impacted retention. Yuen et al. (2021) identified nonmonetary factors such as role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity, and interpersonal relationships as influential in employee performance, suggesting the need for careful consideration beyond monetary rewards. While financial rewards play a significant role, nonmonetary factors influenced

employee performance and retention in MSMEs. Business owners in MSMEs who considered both types of rewards and addressed non-monetary factors, such as role clarity and interpersonal relationships, improved retention and overall organizational performance. By implementing a well-structured reward system that considered monetary and non-monetary factors, MSMEs could enhance their employee commitment, loyalty, and retention, ultimately leading to organizational sustainability and success.

Employer Branding

Employer branding attracted and retained top talent and guided employees in selecting organizations aligned with their career aspirations. Acar and Yildirim (2019) emphasized that employer branding influenced employee career decisions by encompassing an organization's reputation, values, and working environment. Shanmuga and UmaRaman (2021) deduced that employer branding encompassed an organization's reputation, values, and working environment. Strong employer branding was associated with reduced voluntary employee turnover (Ghielen et al., 2021). Unique employer brands enhanced attractiveness to potential employees (Carlini et al., 2019). There was a significant impact of employer branding on employee retention and recruitment. MSMEs actively managed their employer brand to attract and retain talent effectively, and considered factors such as reputation, values, and working environment. By strategically developing and evolving their employer branding strategies, MSMEs enhanced their attractiveness to potential employees, reduced turnover, and created a positive work environment aligned with employees' career aspirations.

Employer branding strategies effectively attracted and retained top talent, contributing to the growth, sustainability, and profitability of MSMEs. Bussin and Mouton (2019b) highlighted the importance of considering diverse employee experiences and backgrounds in employer branding strategies. Kupper et al. (2019) emphasized the need for innovative approaches to employer branding due to digitization in organizations. Effective employer branding strategies were grounded in a deep understanding of the organization's culture, core values, and the diverse backgrounds of its employees in MSMEs. These strategies were designed to adapt to changing market trends and utilize digital platforms to effectively engage potential candidates for hire in MSMEs. By implementing well-defined and innovative employer branding strategies, MSMEs could enhance their reputation, attract top talent, and foster a positive work environment conducive to growth and profitability while ensuring alignment with employee expectations and market dynamics. Regular review and refinement of these strategies in MSMEs maintained competitiveness and relevance in the evolving business landscape.

Talent Management

Talent management in MSMEs was beneficial for recruiting, retaining, and nurturing talented individuals, driving innovation, profitability, and sustainability. Tlaiss (2021) highlighted that talent management was a cornerstone of the retention strategy and emphasized its role in driving innovations, profitability, and sustainability. Ali and Mehreen (2019) opined that ongoing training and development were necessary in enhancing retention rates. Organizations that prioritized talent management, invested in recruiting top talent, provided ongoing training and development opportunities, and

created a supportive work environment had better retention rates. By doing so, MSMEs could retain high-performing individuals, drive innovation, and ensure long-term success. Through effective talent management practices, MSMEs that fostered a culture of continuous learning and development led to improved retention rates, increased innovation, and sustainable growth. This proposed integrating talent management into the overall MSME strategy by MSME business owners to achieve long-term success.

Effective talent management strategies contributed significantly to organizational sustainability by fostering a positive attitude among employees towards their work. Nicolene and Bongekile (2021) emphasized the positive impact of talent management strategies on employee attitudes and organizational sustainability. Ali and Mehreen (2019) highlighted the importance of succession planning, a key component of talent Management, in providing employees with career development opportunities and reducing turnover intentions. Talent management strategies, which included succession planning, offering employees clear career paths, and job security, led to higher job satisfaction and reduced turnover. By investing in talent management, MSMEs created a positive work environment, enhanced employee retention, and ultimately, contributed to organizational sustainability. Integrating effective talent management strategies, such as succession planning, into organizational practices could led to improved employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, and enhanced organizational performance, ultimately contributed to long-term sustainability and success in MSMEs.

Transition

In Section 2, the literature relevant to the study was comprehensively reviewed, including strategies employed by MSME business owners to reduce employee turnover and enhance profitability, framed through SET. The review identified key themes, highlighted gaps in current research, and established the theoretical foundation of the study.

Building on this foundation, Section 3 presents the research methodology, detailing the qualitative pragmatic inquiry design, ethical considerations, population, sampling procedures, and participant selection. Additionally, data collection methods, interview protocol, data organization, and analytic techniques used to address the research question and ensure the trustworthiness of the study findings are discussed.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Section 3 presents the research methodology used in the study, including the role of the primary data collector and the procedures that guided the inquiry. In this section, I discuss project ethics, project nature, population, sampling strategy, participant selection, data collection procedures, interview questions, and the techniques used for data organization and analysis. The methodology also addresses considerations related to reliability and validity to ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study.

Project Ethics

Ethical considerations and the mitigation of researcher bias were crucial in ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry. As the primary data collector, I followed procedures designed to reduce the influence of personal experiences and subjective interpretations. Researcher bias can occur when personal beliefs influence participants' responses or the interpretation of data (Broesch et al., 2020). To minimize this, open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to describe their experiences freely (Facca et al., 2020), and active listening was employed to facilitate accurate transcription and interpretation of participants' perspectives. An impartial analytical approach was applied by considering all data, including responses that conflicted with prior assumptions.

I had prior experience operating a small business, which created awareness of potential bias related to the topic. To safeguard the integrity of the inquiry, interview protocols were strictly followed, and interpretations were grounded exclusively in

participants' viewpoints, rather than in the researchers' prior knowledge. This approach supported a faithful representation of participants' lived experiences.

Ethical conduct throughout the study was guided by the Belmont Report principles of respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (see Drolet et al., 2022). Respect for persons was upheld through the informed consent process, which ensured that participation was voluntary, based on full disclosure, and free from coercion. Beneficence and nonmaleficence were addressed by minimizing risks, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting participants from harm. It was maintained by applying uniform eligibility criteria and ensuring that all participants received the same information and identical questions.

The informed consent process involved emailing potential participants an invitation letter and the consent form. The letter described the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature. Participants confirmed their agreement to participate by replying with the phrase "I consent." After receiving consent, I contacted participants to answer questions and schedule interviews over the telephone or Microsoft Teams. No incentives were offered. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by notifying me.

Several measures were taken to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Identities and organization affiliations were masked using numerical codes (e.g., Participant 01). All identifying information was removed from transcripts; no organizational names were reported. Access to participants was limited to those meeting

the study criteria, and all data were handled in accordance with Walden University's ethical guidelines.

Data security procedures were aligned with institutional requirements. Audio files, transcripts, and related documents were stored on a password-protected external hard drive kept in a secure location. The data will be retained for 5 years and then permanently destroyed. Walden University's IRB approved the study under the number IRB# 10-07-25-0985219.

Nature of the Project

A qualitative research method was suitable for this project because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of MSME business owners with employee turnover and the strategies employed to mitigate its impact on profitability. Qualitative methods emphasize meaning-making, context, and subjective interpretations, which are essential when examining behaviors and experiences rather than numerical relationships (Saunders et al., 2019). A pragmatic inquiry design further supported the purpose of this study by focusing on practical problem-solving and real-world applicability, allowing the findings to be grounded in the actual challenges and decision-making processes of MSME business owners (see Morgan & Nica, 2020). This qualitative, pragmatic approach aligns with the study's goal of generating actionable insights into how turnover affects business performance and what strategies may help mitigate its negative impact.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

This qualitative study, grounded in a pragmatic inquiry research design, focused on examining the experiences of MSME business owners in Kilifi County, Kenya. The study population consisted of MSME business owners with a minimum of 5 years of management experience, as this level of expertise aligned with the study's purpose of exploring factors influencing employee turnover and business performance. Purposive sampling was used to select six information-rich participants who possessed the relevant knowledge and lived experience necessary to provide deep and meaningful insights into the research problem. This sampling approach enabled the deliberate inclusion of qualified individuals whose contributions strengthened the study's credibility and relevance.

Data saturation guided the determination of the final sample size, with interviews continuing until no new themes and insights emerged. Applying saturation ensured that the data collected were sufficiently rich, complete, and trustworthy, consistent with the standards of qualitative research. Participants were identified and accessed through personal contacts, professional referrals, social and business networks, and publicly available records of MSMEs at the county level. Eligibility criteria included active ownership or management of an MSME within Kilifi County and a minimum of 5 years of managerial responsibility.

Data for the study were collected through in-depth, semistructured interviews and supplemented with relevant public documents from participating MSMEs. Participants were informed that they would receive transcript summaries of their interviews and the

overall research findings, a practice that encouraged openness and supported member checking. This systematic approach to population selection, sampling, and data collection ensured a robust foundation for exploring the underlying factors contributing to employee turnover in the MSME sector.

This study received IRB approval from Walden University under the approval number IRB# 10-07-25-0985219, confirming that all research procedures complied with ethical standards for protecting human participants.

Data Collection Activities

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I served as the primary data collection instrument, responsible for engaging participants, conducting interviews, and ensuring accurate representation of their experiences (see Nassaji, 2020). Data were collected through semistructured face-to-face interviews and supplemented with publicly available organizational documents. Semistructured interviews were selected because they provide flexibility to explore participants' perspectives in depth while maintaining a consistent framework across interviews, thereby supporting both the credibility and comparability of the data (FitzPatrick, 2019; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). An interview protocol was developed to guide each session, ensuring alignment with the research questions and maintaining consistency and rigor (see Appendix).

The data collection followed a step-by-step procedure. First, eligible MSME business owners were contacted via email to introduce the study, provide the informed consent form, and schedule interviews at a location and time convenient to the participant. Second, the consent process was confirmed both by email and at the start of

each interview. Third, interviews were conducted using open-ended questions from the semi-structured protocol, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences while enabling follow-up probing as needed. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant permission, and field notes were taken to capture nonverbal cues and contextual observations. Fourth, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcript summaries were provided to participants for review and verification, supporting accuracy and trustworthiness through member checking.

Publicly available documents from participating MSMEs, such as company reports and performance summaries, were reviewed to supplement and triangulate the interview data. This combination of sources strengthened the credibility and depth of the findings. Reliability and validity were further enhanced through systematic coding, an audit trail that included field notes and memos, and consistency in applying the interview protocol across all participants (see Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Campbell et al., 2020; Magaldi & Berler, 2020).

The abridged interview protocol, including all interview questions and procedures, is provided in the Appendix, which is listed in the Table of Contents. By integrating structured guidance with flexible participant-centered data collection methods, this approach ensured comprehensive, credible, and actionable insights into the experience of MSMEs' business owners regarding turnover and its impact on business performance

Interview Questions

1. In managing employee turnover events that impact profitability, what specific strategies have you implemented?
2. From your experience, which strategies proved to be the most effective in reducing employee turnover events that influence profitability?
3. How did you evaluate the success of the strategies employed to minimize employee turnover events that have an impact on profitability?
4. What significant obstacles have you faced in the implementation of strategies aimed at decreasing employee turnover and enhancing profitability?
5. What measures were taken to overcome the key barriers hindering the implementation of strategies to reduce employee turnover and its impact on profitability?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your organization's effective strategies to minimize employee turnover and enhance profitability?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Effective data organization is essential for ensuring the quality and credibility of qualitative research. In this study, all data, including interview recordings, transcripts, and reflective journals, were systematically cataloged and labeled using unique participant identifiers (e.g., Participant 01; Participant 02) to protect confidentiality and facilitate tracking. Reflective journals and research logs were maintained to document observations, emerging insights, and methodological decisions throughout the study (see Whitehouse et al., 2021). Nvivo 11 software was employed to organize and code the data

systematically, enhancing transparency, traceability, and the rigor of the analysis process (see Elliot-Mainwaring, 2021). Together, these data management strategies provided a solid foundation for accurate and meaningful analyses aligned with the study's objectives.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, guided by the constant comparative method, to identify patterns and themes within the qualitative data (see Alam, 2020; Braun & Clark, 2006). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and preliminary coding was conducted in NVivo, followed by manual review to ensure accuracy, remove duplicates, and identify emerging themes. Codes were then organized into broader categories, which informed the development of key themes. Publicly available MSME documents were integrated into the analysis to triangulate findings, supporting the credibility and validity of the study (see Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021; H. Morgan, 2022).

Triangulation was employed through multiple strategies, including methodological triangulation of interviews and archival data, to minimize potential bias and provide a comprehensive understanding of employee turnover and retention strategies. This approach ensured that findings were grounded in multiple sources and aligned with the study's conceptual framework, SET, as well as current literature published since the proposal stage (see Furlong, 2023). NVivo software facilitated both automated and manual coding, enabling systematic identification of themes, visualization of relationships among codes, and organization of data to support interpretive rigor. Throughout the analysis, attention was given to maintaining neutrality, avoiding research bias and interpreting participant perspectives accurately. Open-ended interview questions,

structured interview protocols (see Appendix) and reflective journaling supported consistent, credible and ethically sound analysis. Themes derived from the data were continuously compared to the literature and the conceptual framework to ensure theoretical alignment and practical relevance.

All raw data, including audio recording transcripts, field notes, and reflective journals, will be securely stored on an encrypted external hard drive for 5 years, in compliance with Walden University's data retention policies, before being securely destroyed. This procedure ensures the confidentiality, integrity, and ethical management of all participant information while supporting the study's overall methodological rigor.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency, trustworthiness, and dependability of the findings produced through the research process. O'Connor and Joffe (2020) described reliability as the degree to which research results remain consistent and dependable over time, while Megheirkouni and Moir (2023) emphasized the value of transparency in data collection, processing, and analysis to strengthen dependability and Stahl and King (2020) emphasized the importance of data and results reliability, asserting that it is an aspect impacting every research endeavor. These scholarly perspectives highlighted the importance of clarity in documenting research procedures to support consistent interpretation. Reliability served as a foundational pillar of research quality because it ensured that readers could trace how data were obtained, processed, and interpreted, thereby enhancing confidence in the findings. This focus on transparent and

systematic procedures reinforced the role of reliability as an essential component of rigorous qualitative inquiry.

Ensuring reliability in qualitative research was essential because it strengthened the coherence and credibility of the conclusions drawn from participant experiences. (Ramanadhan et al., 2021) asserted that reliability enhances the overall validity and consistency of qualitative results. Rezapour Nasrabad (2020) noted that researchers used various instruments and procedures to support repeatability and strengthen dependability in qualitative settings. These contributions demonstrated how methodological rigor, including the use of stable instruments, structured protocols, and consistent procedures, promoted reliable outcomes. Schäfer and Schwarz (2019) further explained that reliability aimed to reduce bias, minimize errors, and ensure stability in the data across different stages of the research process. By reducing inconsistencies and promoting dependable data handling, reliability directly contributed to achieving broader goals of qualitative research, ensuring that findings were both credible and trustworthy.

Member checking was a strategy that was used to enhance the reliability and credibility of qualitative research findings. Motulsky (2021) emphasized that member checks participants required to critically evaluate and validate the accuracy and relevance of the data collected, thereby supporting the rationale for conducting additional interviews when necessary. Bearman (2019) further explained that member checking involved verifying participants' viewpoints and observations based on the researcher's interpretation of their responses during the interview process. These scholarly perspectives illustrated how participant involvement in verifying data strengthened the

accuracy and integrity of the emerging insights. By incorporating feedback directly from participants, member checking contributed to a more comprehensive and trustworthy interpretation of the data, thereby reinforcing the overall reliability of the study.

Efficient data management was crucial for ensuring reliability, and the integration of NVivo software significantly contributed to the systematic organization and analysis of qualitative data. Alam (2020) noted that NVivo enhanced the coding, organizing, and categorizing of data into coherent thematic structures, supporting methodological rigor. However, Elliott-Mainwaring (2021) acknowledged that while NVivo improved precision and efficiency, it still presented limitations that required supplementary verification. This recognition underscored the importance of striking a balance between technological tools and my judgment that ensured comprehensive and accurate analysis. To address potential gaps and ensure the inclusion of all relevant data, a manual review of the coded material was incorporated to strengthen the reliability and completeness of the findings.

The effectiveness of qualitative research relied heavily on two core components: identifying themes and applying codes. According to H. Morgan (2022), the identification of themes revealed significant patterns and trends, allowing researchers to develop a coherent understanding of the data. Complementing this, Rezapour Nasrabad (2020) emphasized that coding provided an organized structure for analyzing information, ensuring that the study remained aligned with its specific research focus. Together, these scholarly insights demonstrated that thematic development and systematic coding worked in tandem to enhance the rigor and clarity of qualitative

inquiry. By integrating both elements, researchers strengthened the overall analytical process, thereby reinforcing the depth and reliability of qualitative research findings.

Validity

Ensuring research validity was essential for producing reliable and credible outcomes. Validity in qualitative studies required assessing the honesty, authenticity, and credibility of the data as well as the alignment between the methodology procedure and research objectives (Bearman, 2019). Low and Pandya (2019) further emphasized that credibility depended on the integrity, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of conclusions drawn from data. These principles were reinforced by Prinsloo and Maroun (2020), who argued that research findings must be grounded in verifiable statements and robust analytical processes. Together, these perspectives highlighted the importance of systematically reviewing and evaluating data to ensure that the study met established criteria of validity and reliability. This foundation supported the rigor of the investigation and strengthened the trustworthiness of the final research outcomes.

Achieving data saturation was a critical strategy for enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research. Guest et al. (2020) defined data saturation as the point at which the addition of data no longer yielded new insights, making further coding unnecessary. To support this, Drolet et al. (2020) noted that the use of secondary sources, such as document reviews and publicly accessible organizational records, could increase the likelihood of reaching saturation. In this study, interviews, combined with information from the firm's website and organizational documents, served as the primary sources of data, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the research topic. This combined

approach strengthened the depth and breadth of data collected, reinforcing the confidence and credibility of the findings. Interviews continued until no new information emerged, and participant summaries were shared for member checking to validate accuracy and uphold methodological rigor.

Credibility was a core pillar of qualitative research, reflecting the degree to which findings were perceived as truthful, believable, and aligned with participants' realities. Stenfors et al. (2020) described credibility as the perceived accuracy and acceptability of research outcomes, while Rose and Johnson (2020) emphasized the importance of ensuring that results genuinely represented participant viewpoints. In this study, participants reviewed and evaluated the analysis of interpretations to confirm that findings accurately reflected their lived experiences. This process strengthened the authenticity of the research and ensured that participant perspectives remained central to the interpretation of results. Credibility, therefore, became a function of both methodological rigor and participant validation.

Triangulation further reinforced credibility by integrating diverse perspectives and multiple data sources, corroborating the findings. Johnson et al. (2020) defined triangulation as the use of varied ideas, sources, or procedures to strengthen the evidence base. FitzPatrick (2020) noted that combining data from several sources enhanced the robustness of qualitative inquiry. Verd (2022) opined that methodological triangulation and member checks together strengthened the validity of qualitative research. Applying triangulation and member checks together strengthened the validity of qualitative research. Applying triangulation and member validation in this qualitative, pragmatic

inquiry ensured that interpretations were grounded in convergent evidence and remained free from bias from a single source. This integrated approach underscored the study's commitment to methodological integrity and the production of trustworthy results.

Transferability was ensured through rich, contextual descriptions of MSME experiences in organizational settings, as well as detailed descriptions of participant characteristics. Detailed documentation of the data collection and analysis processes allows future researchers or practitioners to assess whether the findings are applicable to similar contexts or settings, supporting broader relevance and practical utility.

Confirmability ensured that the findings accurately reflected participants' perspectives, rather than being influenced by the researcher's bias or preconceived assumptions. According to Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021) and Guest et al. (2020), confirmability was achieved when the interpretation clearly diverged from participant-generated data. The use of methodological triangulation and NVivo software enhanced objectivity by systematically organizing coding and verifying data patterns against multiple sources. These strategies supported the neutrality of the analysis, reinforcing the reliability, transferability, and validity of the study outcomes. Confirmability thus served as a safeguard ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the data collected.

Dependability was related to the stability and consistency of the research findings over time. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) explained that dependability required clear documentation of the research process, while H. Morgan (2022) emphasized that meticulous record-keeping, including field notes, reflective notes, and personal journals, formed a critical audit trail. This documentation supported transparency by illustrating

how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Maintaining a comprehensive audit trail strengthened dependability and ensured that findings could be traced, reviewed, and verified. This structured process enhanced the study's defensibility and methodological rigor.

Maintaining confirmability also required reflective awareness and unbiased presentation of findings. Schäfer and Schwarz (2019) highlighted that researchers ensured conclusions were grounded in evidence rather than personal assumptions (as cited in Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Emphasized that confirmability was achieved when interpretations directly reflected collected data. The use of audit trails, triangulations, and reflexive practices ensured that analytical decisions were transparent and replicable. These measures collectively reinforced the study's neutrality and support the credibility of its interpretations. As a result, confirmability contributed to a rigorous and trustworthy research process.

Member verification strengthened the accuracy and quality of the collected data by comparing analytic interpretations with participants' original responses. Low and Pandya (2019) noted that member checking involved validating data against participant feedback. Stenfors et al. (2020) further deduced that prolonged engagement with participant responses supported consistency over time. An audit trail further established verifiability by documenting methodological decisions and changes throughout the study. This combination of member validation and systematic documentation reinforced dependability and ensured that the analysis remained temporally consistent. Together, these processes contributed to a transparent and replicable research design.

Reliability in qualitative research was enhanced through systematic documentation and verification of data. Obermayer et al. (2022) emphasized that detailed records, such as journals containing personal reflections, field notes, and interview observations, helped preserve the accuracy of participants' ideas and experiences. Providing interview transcripts for members to check further validated the interpretation of participants' responses. These strategies ensured precision in data capture and strengthened the consistency of the research findings. Maintaining reliability contributed to the broader trustworthiness and integrity of the qualitative process.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies that MSME business owners use to minimize employee turnover and enhance their profitability. Section 3 provided a comprehensive overview of the foundational components of the study, including the researchers' roles, the nature of the project, participant selection, research method and design, population and sampling strategies, and associated elements. The section further examined data collection and processing procedures, ethical considerations, and the measures implemented to ensure the credibility and reliability of qualitative research. Additionally, it addressed key issues such as dependability, transferability, and credibility to support the study's methodological rigor. Transferability was addressed by ensuring that the findings were discussed. The discussion also included strategies for mitigating researcher bias, ensuring consistent use of the interview protocol, and establishing clear eligibility criteria aligned

with the research topic. These methodological foundations collectively strengthened the study's capacity to generate trustworthy and meaningful insights.

In Section 4 of the project, the study's findings are presented and analyzed to demonstrate their relevance to professional practice and their potential implications for fostering positive societal change. These results show how they can inform organizational decision-making, strengthen the workforce strategies, and support broader efforts aimed at improving MSME sustainability. By examining the challenges associated with the research problem, the analysis also highlights existing gaps and contextual factors that influenced the applicability of the findings. These insights inform the identification of new avenues for further research and guide recommendations for actions that practitioners and stakeholders could adopt in the future. This transition sets the stage for a detailed interpretation of the study's outcome and its practical significance.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore the effective strategies that MSME business owners used to minimize employee turnover and enhance profitability. Employee turnover presents a persistent challenge to the stability and growth of MSMEs, particularly in Kenya's competitive and resource-constrained business environment. This study aimed to identify practical and evidence-based approaches that MSME leaders implemented to retain employees, maintain operational continuity, and improve profitability.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with six MSME business owners through MS Teams, and each participant responded to six open-ended questions designed to capture their experiences and retention strategies. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and verified through member checking to ensure accuracy and credibility. Data saturation was achieved after six interviews, and each participant was assigned a unique identifier (Participant 01-Participant 06) to ensure confidentiality.

Presentation of the Findings

This section presents the overarching research question that guided the study, the themes that emerged from the online semistructured interviews with six MSME business owners, and how the findings confirmed, disconfirmed, and extended existing knowledge in the discipline. The findings are discussed in relation to peer-reviewed literature from the literature review, including recent studies published after the proposal was completed.

Each theme is also interpreted using the conceptual framework. SET and connected to relevant business practice literature.

The overarching research question guiding this inquiry was as follows: What effective strategies do MSME business owners use to minimize employee turnover and enhance profitability? This section introduces the major findings generated from the analysis of the interview data. The findings are organized around the key themes identified from participant responses, and each theme is discussed in relation to SET and current scholarly literature. According to SET (Blau, 1964), organizational relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges in which employees respond to organizational support, recognition, and fairness with loyalty, commitment, and sustained performance. This theoretical lens provided a foundation for interpreting how MSME owners cultivate trust, reward effort, and maintain mutually beneficial exchanges, thereby reducing turnover and improving profitability.

Data Analysis Process

The data collection, documentation, and thematic analysis process followed the systematic procedures outlined by Miles et al. (2014). The analytic process involved several steps. First, the data were thoroughly reviewed by reading each transcript multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. During the initial coding phase, they highlighted significant statements and assigned descriptive codes that captured patterns related to employee retention and profitability.

Next, the codes were grouped into broader categories to identify relationships and recurring ideas among participants. In the theme development stage, these categories were synthesized into major themes that aligned with the overarching research question. During the validation stage, member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of interpretations, and emerging themes were compared across all six transcripts to ensure consistency and reliability. Through this systematic process, five overarching themes emerged that represented the collective strategies used by MSME owners to minimize turnover and enhance profitability. Table 1 shows the summary of the emergent themes.

Table 1

Summary of the Emergent Themes

Theme	No of participants	Frequency
Employee support systems and incentives	6	32
Continuous learning and development	6	27
Feedback, communication, and participation	6	25
Organizational structure and role clarity	5	20
Leadership and relationship- based retention	6	29

The findings indicated that MSME leaders employ a combination of financial, relational, developmental, and structural strategies to reduce employee turnover. The analysis suggested that effective retention practices were grounded in principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit, consistent with the core propositions of SET. The themes that follow provide deeper insight into how MSME business owners create supportive organizational environments that foster employee loyalty, enhance workforce stability, and contribute to overall profitability.

Theme 1: Regular Feedback and Open Communication

The first major theme that emerged from the data was the importance of regular feedback and open communication. All six participants emphasized that consistent communication between business owners and employees was essential in reducing turnover and improving productivity and profitability. Participants described holding informal meetings during lunch breaks, at the end of the workday, or at scheduled intervals, which provided employees with a platform to express their views, share ideas, and raise concerns.

Participant 06 stated, “We hold meetings every two weeks during lunch breaks, where we sit together and have open conversations. Employees share their thoughts, ideas, and any issues they are facing. Through these meetings, I learned what makes them happy or unhappy and found ways to address their concerns.” Similarly, Participant 02 explained, “The open-door policy helps staff come to me whenever they have issues. I prefer to listen before reacting. That has helped maintain employees because they feel heard.” Participant 04 shared a comparable practice: “Every Monday morning, we have a brief meeting to talk about the previous week’s performance and any challenges. People feel free to speak, and it keeps the team united.”

These accounts reveal that feedback mechanisms extended beyond formal performance reviews. They fostered psychological safety and trust, creating an environment where employees felt valued, listened to, and included in decision-making processes. Such relational engagement boosted morale, reduced frustration, and discouraged abrupt resignations or absenteeism.

The findings under this theme align with SET (Blau, 1964), which highlights the reciprocal nature of workplace relations. When employees perceive fairness, respect, and open communication from management, they are more likely to reciprocate with loyalty, commitment, and increased effort. In this study, participants who practiced regular two-way communication reported higher employee retention and more stable business operations. These relational practices served as informal psychological contracts, reinforcing mutual trust and strengthening the social bonds essential for retention.

Theme 1, therefore, demonstrates that open, consistent, and transparent communication plays a central role in fostering employee trust, accountability, and long-term commitment, key factors in reducing turnover within MSMEs. These findings support prior research that identifies organizational satisfaction and trust as strong predictors of retention (Ali et al., 2021), aligning with SET-based perspectives that emphasize reciprocal communication and mutual commitment (Asiamah & Frimpong, 2022). Nguyen et al. (2022) similarly found that employee voice mechanisms increase engagement and reduce turnover in MSMEs.

Building on this foundational dynamic of relational communication, the next theme examines how leadership styles and supportive practices further influence employee loyalty and profitable retention outcomes.

Theme 2: Leadership and Support Systems

Leadership emerged as a central factor influencing employee retention and organizational profitability. Participants emphasized that effective leadership behaviors, such as empathy, recognition, accessibility, and consistent support, created a work

environment where employees felt valued and motivated to remain with the organization. Leaders described intentionally cultivating supportive relationships through mentorship, participatory decision-making, and responsiveness to staff concerns. Participant 03 explained, “When employees feel the leader is walking with them, listening and providing support, they stay committed even when challenges arise.” Similarly, Participant 05 noted, “We do not only focus on performance targets but also on the people behind them; ensuring they are supported and recognized reduces exits.” These accounts illustrate how relational leadership behaviors contribute to lower turnover and stronger productivity. Through the lens of SET (Blau, 1964), employees reciprocate positive treatment from leaders with loyalty, effort, and commitment. Supportive leadership represents a social investment that reinforces trust and strengthens the psychological contract between employer and employee.

The findings align with and extend previous research. Chinomona and Dhurup (2019) found that leader-member exchange quality has a significant influence on employee retention and satisfaction in small enterprises. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2020) demonstrated that transformational leadership behaviors, particularly individualized consideration and inspirational motivation, reduce turnover intention by fostering a sense of belonging and purpose. This study further revealed that leadership support in MSMEs extended beyond supervision to encompass capacity building, emotional encouragement, and open-door communication. Participant 02 stated, “We may not pay the highest salaries, but our leaders are always available and understanding. That’s what keeps people here.” This highlights the critical role of relational leadership as a non-financial

retention tool, particularly in resource-constrained MSMEs (Nawaz et al., 2021). Unlike larger organizations, where formal incentives dominate, people-centered leadership in smaller enterprises can significantly enhance employee loyalty and profitability.

Overall, the findings confirm and extend existing knowledge by illustrating how context-specific, supportive leadership strategies in MSMEs drive retention and organizational effectiveness. Leadership behaviors that prioritize empathy, recognition, and accessibility create a culture of trust and reciprocity, reinforcing the social exchange dynamics that underpin long-term employee commitment. This theme sets the stage for examining additional retention strategies

Theme 3. Employee Development and Growth Opportunities

Another significant theme that emerged from the data was the emphasis on employee development and growth opportunities as a key strategy to minimize turnover and enhance profitability. Participants consistently described how training, mentorship, and structured career pathways contributed to employee loyalty and sustained performance. Participant 01 explained, “We invest in developing our staff through short courses and coaching. When people see growth, they stay because they feel valued.” Similarly, Participant 06 noted, “Even if we can't promote everyone immediately, we ensure they are learning something new and preparing for the next level.” These perspectives highlight that MSME leaders view professional development not only as a productivity tool but also as a deliberate strategy for retention.

From the lens of SET, Blau (1964) views these growth opportunities as a form of reciprocal exchange. When employees perceive that their employer invests in their skills

and future, they respond with increased commitment, engagement, and reduced intentions to turnover. This exchange of value reinforces trust, psychological attachment, and long-term affiliation between employees and the organization, sustaining business continuity and profitability.

The findings confirm and extend prior research linking learning opportunities to employee retention. Mensah et al. (2020) found that career development practices significantly reduce turnover intentions in SMEs by fostering psychological attachment. Similarly, Kossivi et al (2019) highlighted that training and professional development serve as influential non-financial retention tools, particularly in smaller enterprises where compensation may be less competitive.

Participants also connected employee growth initiatives to performance outcomes. Participant 04 emphasized, “Skilled employees make fewer mistakes and improve product quality, which directly impacts our bottom line.” This aligns with findings by Weng and McElroy (2021b), who reported that employee learning enhances organizational performance by boosting competence, motivation and operational effectiveness. In MSMEs, where agility and multitasking are essential, training initiative also builds operational flexibility, helping businesses adapt to staff shortages or changing demands. However, participants acknowledged challenges in sustaining development programs. Participant05 noted, “Sometimes, after we train staff, competitors try to poach them because they see the skills we have built.” This reflects a tension noted in the literature, where MSMEs risk losing trained employees to larger firms offering higher pay (Mabaso & Dlamini, 2018). Nevertheless, most leaders viewed this as a necessary

investment. As Participant 04 stated, “Retention improves when people feel they are growing, even if a few eventually leave.”

In summary, Theme 3 demonstrates that employee development and growth opportunities foster a culture of continuous learning, engagement, and loyalty. By investing in skills mentorship and career progression, MSMEs encourage employees to reciprocate through commitment and improved performance, confirming the exchange dynamics proposed in SET. Even in a resource-constrained environment, prioritizing learning opportunities contributes to retention, organizational stability and long-term profitability.

Theme 4: Reward, Recognition, and Retention Incentives

The fourth theme that emerged from the study was the critical role of reward, recognition, and retention incentives in minimizing employee turnover and enhancing profitability. All six participants emphasized that both financial and non-financial rewards were key motivators for employees' loyalty, engagement, and alignment with organizational goals. Participants described a variety of mechanisms, ranging from bonuses and meal allowances to public appreciation and flexible scheduling, demonstrating a multifaceted approach to retaining staff. Participant 02 explained, “We make sure employees are appreciated not only through salaries but through bonuses, lunch allowances, and recognition for good work.” Similarly, Participant 05 explained, “Providing small loans or bonuses after projects motivates staff to deliver quality work and stay committed.”

Participants highlighted that rewards serve as a reinforcement mechanism, encouraging desired behaviors. According to SET (Blau, 1964), these tangible and intangible expressions of appreciation foster a reciprocal relationship: when employees perceive fairness and value in their work environment, they reciprocate through loyalty, commitment, and sustained performance. The findings also revealed that rewards do not always need to be monetary. Participant 03 stated, “Sometimes, a simple thank you, a day off, or public appreciation is enough to keep staff motivated.” This insight aligns with research by Nelson and Spitzer (2019), who found that recognition satisfies intrinsic needs for appreciation and belonging, often generating higher engagement than financial rewards alone. Osibanjo et al. (2020) further emphasized that flexible and personalized incentives are especially effective in small, close-knit organizations, supporting the creativity and contextual adaptability observed in the MSMEs studied.

Additionally, participants highlighted the direct connection between recognition and organizational performance. Participant 01 noted, “When employees feel seen and rewarded, they put more effort, which reduces mistakes and customer complaints.” This supports the findings of Kuranchi-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2016), who reported that reward and recognition systems have a significant impact on both employee satisfaction and organizational performance. However, participants acknowledged that reward programs must be equitable and consistent to remain effective. Participant 04 cautioned, “When some employees feel that others are favored, it can create tension.” This finding aligns with Manzoor, F. et al. (2021), who demonstrated that intrinsic rewards such as recognition significantly improve employee motivation and performance

and that fair and transparent reward systems are critical to sustaining engagement and reducing turnover.

Collectively, these findings confirm and extend prior research by demonstrating how MSME leaders leverage both financial and non-financial incentives as low-cost but high-impact retention strategies. While previous studies primarily focused on larger organizations, this study highlights the contextual adaptation of reward systems in resource-constrained MSMEs. Specifically, creative non-monetary recognition, participatory acknowledgement, and flexible incentives strategies represent practical context-specific extensions of existing knowledge in employee retention and organizational profitability.

Theme 4 demonstrates that rewards, recognition, and retention incentives serve as mechanisms of social exchange, reinforcing employee loyalty, commitment, and performance. Effective leaders in MSMEs strike a balance between fairness, transparency, and creativity in their incentive practices, thereby fostering a sense of belonging that directly contributes to employee retention and business sustainability. These strategies, grounded in SET and supported by empirical literature, demonstrate that even resource-limited organizations can achieve high retention and profitability through intentional people-centered practices.

Theme 5: Leadership and Relationship-Based Retention

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was the influence of leadership and relationship-based retention practices on employee loyalty and business profitability. Participants emphasized that leadership styles characterized by visibility, empathy, trust,

and open communication helped employees feel valued and emotionally connected to the organization. Participant 04 explained, “When employees feel that you, as the leaders, care about them and understand their struggles, they give their best.” Similarly, Participant 06 stated, “It’s important to know your employees personally and make them feel like family, appreciation, and teamwork go a long way in small businesses.”

These accounts demonstrate that effective leadership in MSMEs extends beyond supervision; it involves fostering interpersonal relationships and cultivating a culture of belonging. According to the SET (Blau, 1964), leadership behaviors that demonstrate care, fairness, and support create a foundation for mutual trust and reciprocity. Employees perceive these relational investments and respond with loyalty, commitment, and enhanced effort.

This finding aligns with Kasekende et al. (2021) and Eisenberger et al. (2020), who found that relational leadership promotes psychological safety and a sense of belonging, both of which are crucial for retention in small organizations. Participants highlighted that visible and supportive leadership allowed for real-time feedback, early problem detection and reinforcement of shared purpose. Participant 01 explained, “I try to be present, talk to them daily, join them during breaks, and check on their progress. Those connections help me identify issues early before they escalate.” Likewise, Participant 05 shared, “Employees want to be led by someone who listens, appreciates them, and treats them fairly. When you do that, they hardly leave.”

These findings support Albrecht et al. (2018), who argued that leaders who establish high-quality relationships with subordinates promote trust and engagement and

lower voluntary turnover. Conversely, participants observed that poor leadership, particularly micromanagement or distant supervision, contributed to frustration and disengagement. Participant 02 reflected, “I learned that too much control pushes employees away. Giving them room to make decisions makes them more responsible and satisfied.” This aligns with Breevaart and Bakker (2018), who reported that empowering leadership enhances employees' autonomy and intrinsic motivation, thereby improving retention outcomes.

In MSMEs, where financial resources are often constrained, relational and visible leadership can serve as a low-cost but highly effective retention strategy. MSME owners can implement practices such as daily check-ins, mentorship programs, open-door policies, and participatory decision-making to cultivate loyalty, trust, and productivity.

While relational leadership clearly promotes retention in MSMEs, the literature indicates that its impact may vary in larger organizations, where structural complexity and formal systems limit direct interpersonal interactions (Zhang et al., 2020). This reiterates the contextual nature of leadership strategies and underscores the need for tailored approaches that are based on an organization's size, resources, and culture.

Theme 5, leadership and relationship-based retention, emerged as a key determinant of employee stability and organizational profitability. Leaders who demonstrate relational care, visibility, and emotional intelligence foster loyalty, engagement, and trust, aligning with SET. In contrast, transactional or controlling leadership styles undermined trust and increased turnover risk. Effective leadership in

MSMEs requires striking a balance between authority and empathy, supporting both employee welfare and organizational performance objectives.

Application to Professional Practice

The findings of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry provide actionable insights for leaders of MSMEs seeking to minimize employee turnover and enhance profitability. The strategies identified, employee support systems and incentives, continuous learning and development, feedback and communication, organizational structure and role clarity, and relationship-based leadership reflect the mutual exchange of value between employers and employees, a principle central to SET (Blau, 1964). According to SET, employees reciprocate the resources, trust, and investment offered by their organization with loyalty, engagement, and performance-enhancing behaviors, which directly contribute to business sustainability and profitability.

Theme 1: employee support systems and incentives highlighted that financial and non-financial incentives, such as meal allowances, bonuses, and medical support, were identified as key to employee retention. This aligns with Cropanzano and Mitchell's (2005) and recent studies, which show that tangible and symbolic rewards foster fairness perceptions and strengthen reciprocal relationships between employers and employees (Hansen et al., 2023). When MSME leaders provide visible and consistent support, employees feel valued, resulting in lower turnover and increased organizational stability.

Theme 2, continuous learning and development, emphasized the importance of continuous learning opportunities such as short courses, mentorship, coaching, and internships as critical to capability building and retention. Investing in professional

development signals an organization's commitment, which in turn increases loyalty and productivity. These findings are supported by recent studies that demonstrate how training and learning opportunities reduce turnover intentions in SMEs (Mensah & Adomako, 2020; Tessema et al., 2023; Weng & McElroy, 2021a). Additionally, organizational learning cultures have been shown to enhance retention by fostering growth and long-term engagement (Wu & Cao, 2022).

Theme 3: feedback, communication, and participation emphasized that effective communication and participatory engagement emerged as vital components of trust, psychological safety, and retention. Participants described how regular feedback, open dialogue, and inclusive decision-making improve employee morale and strengthen commitment. These insights align with recent research demonstrating that high-quality internal communication enhances employee trust and engagement (Kang & Sung, 2021) and that participatory mechanisms reduce turnover intentions by fostering voice empowerment (Lee & Kim, 2023; Luu, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2022). Strong communication practices, therefore, serve as a strategic retention tool, especially in resource-constrained MSMEs where relational structures matter.

Theme 4, organizational structure and role clarity, revealed that organizational structure and role clarity were critical to accountability and stability. Clear reporting structures, defined job roles, and standard operating procedures were found to reduce confusion, conflict, and inefficiencies. Participants emphasized that ambiguity in roles contributed to turnover and frustration. This is consistent with recent work showing that employee withdrawal behaviors in small enterprises (Memon et al., 2019)

Theme 5: leadership and relationship-based retention, leadership styles played a critical role in determining employee loyalty. Participants described relational, empathetic, and accessible leadership as more effective than authoritarian approaches. These findings extend SET by showing how relational leadership can compensate for resource limitations in MSMEs. Recent literature also confirmed that relational and supportive leadership enhances commitment, engagement, and retention (Albrecht et al., 2018; Kasekende et al., 2021).

This study makes a significant contribution to both professional and scholarly domains. For business leaders, it provides a framework of low-cost, evidence-based retention strategies that can be applied in resource-limited MSMEs. These practices collectively enhance employee loyalty, engagement, and performance, directly impacting profitability and long-term sustainability. For the research-scholar community, the study extends SET by demonstrating how reciprocal employer-employee dynamics operate in small enterprise contexts, where relational and non-financial strategies can be as impactful as material incentives.

MSME leaders and HR practitioners are encouraged to implement a holistic retention approach integrating financial and non-financial rewards, learning opportunities, feedback systems, clear roles, and relational leadership. By operationalizing these strategies, organizations can cultivate cycles of trust, commitment, and productivity, ultimately contributing to sustainable growth, increased employee satisfaction, and a competitive edge in dynamic environments.

Implication for Social Change

The findings of this study demonstrate that effective employee retention strategies within MSMEs have the potential to generate meaningful and sustainable social change at individual, Organizational, and community levels. MSMEs constitute a major source of employment in Kenya, and improving retention practices directly enhances job stability, income security, and employee well-being. Research shows that fair compensation, supportive leadership, and opportunities for professional development enhance employee commitment and reduce turnover (Oladapo, 2021; Park & Johnson, 2019a). When employees experience stability and respect in the workplace, they are better equipped to support their families, invest in education, and fully participate in local economic activities.

The results of this study align with Kim and Fernandez (2017), who found that workplace cultures grounded in trust, recognition, and open communication foster higher job satisfaction and stronger organizational loyalty. The International Labor Organization (2022) further emphasized that MSMEs that prioritize decent work practices contribute to improved household welfare and reduced vulnerability among lower-income workers. By implementing strategies such as employee support systems, continuous learning opportunities, participatory communication structures, clear role expectations, and relational leadership, MSMEs can not only strengthen their internal performance but also enhance the social and economic fabric of the communities they serve.

At a broader societal level, the adoption of fair and ethical retention practices contributes to reducing unemployment, strengthening Labor Market participation and

supporting livelihoods, key priorities identified by the World Bank (2021). MSMEs that model transparent leadership, equitable rewards, and inclusive workplace practices may influence industry norms and encourage similar transformations across the sector. Such shifts can help reduce socioeconomic disparities and promote greater equity, especially in resource-constrained and rural contexts such as Kilifi County.

Overall, the implications of this study extend beyond the realm of organizational profitability. By fostering stable employment, empowering workers through development opportunities, and cultivating supportive work environments, MSMEs contribute to long-term community resilience and social advancement. These outcomes reflect the potential of ethical business practices to stimulate broader social change, enhance human dignity, and promote inclusive economic growth.

Recommendations for Action

The study's findings suggest several actionable strategies that MSME leaders, policy, and human resource professionals can implement to reduce employee turnover and strengthen organizational performance. Research has indicated that transparent and competitive compensation structures are crucial for retaining employees and promoting equity within small business environments (Adekoya & Allen, 2023). Leadership development, particularly in areas such as communication, empathy, and participatory management, enhances trust and organizational commitment (Hassan & Hatmaker, 2021). Additionally, offering structured career development pathways, including training, mentorship, and advancement opportunities, has a significant influence on employee engagement and retention (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2020). Recognition and feedback

mechanisms have also been shown to increase motivation and reduce turnover by reinforcing employees' sense of value within the workplace (Raza et al, 2021). Finally, cultivating a supportive and inclusive organizational culture promotes teamwork, psychological safety, and a stronger sense of belonging, all of which contribute to reduced turnover intentions (Wong & Laschinger, 2020). Integrating these strategies into MSME operations can create a more stable, committed workforce that supports productivity and profitability. Competitive compensation strengthens perceptions of fairness, while leadership development enhances the quality of interactions between supervisors and staff, fostering mutual respect and trust. Career advancement opportunities encourage long-term employee investment, and recognition systems reinforce positive behaviors and performance. A supportive culture serves as the foundation that ties these elements together, enabling MSMEs to better adapt to challenges and retain skilled talent. Disseminating these recommendations through professional associations, entrepreneurship workshops, business forums, publishing summaries in business journals or HR practice newsletters, and academic platforms can further amplify their impact, increasing adoption across the wider MSME sector. By implementing these recommended actions, MSME leaders can cultivate more resilient, engaged, and productive workplaces. Such improvements contribute not only to organizational success but also to broader economic development and social stability. The findings from this study therefore provide practical evidence-based guidance to strengthen MSME performance and support sustainable growth within local and national economies.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research is essential to deepen the understanding of employee retention within MSMEs and to strengthen the transferability of the findings. First, expanding the sample size across different regions and sectors would allow future researchers to capture the diversity of MSME environments and improve the generalizability of the results. Broader sampling enables comparison across cultural, economic, and industrial contexts, offering a more comprehensive understanding of turnover dynamics. Studies with larger, more diverse samples would therefore contribute to more representative and widely applicable insights into retention strategies.

In addition, incorporating longitudinal research designs would provide valuable insights into how employee retention strategies evolve over time. Longitudinal studies enable researchers to observe changes in organizational practices, employee behavior, and profitability outcomes in real time, allowing for a deeper understanding of causal relationships. Examining long-term trends can clarify whether observed improvements in retention are sustained and how economic shifts or organizational growth influence retention practices.

Future research should also explore employee perspectives alongside managerial viewpoints to strengthen the balance and accuracy of findings. Including employees' lived experiences offers a more comprehensive view of turnover drivers and enhances understanding of workplace challenges and motivational factors. Studies incorporating multidimensional perspectives can reveal divergences or alignments between managerial

assumptions and employee realities, thereby enriching both theoretical and practical understandings of retention.

Another recommendation is to investigate the role of technological and digital innovation, such as HR analytics, virtual engagement tools, and digital performance management systems, in reducing turnover. As MSMEs increasingly adopt technology to streamline operations, research on digital solutions can reveal how these tools support decision-making, improve communication, and foster employee engagement.

Understanding how technology influences modern retention strategies can provide actionable insights for businesses adapting to an evolving digital landscape.

Finally, future studies should address the geographic and sectoral limitations noted in Section 1 by examining MSMEs across diverse business contexts, ownership models, and regulatory environments. Cross-context research can highlight how varying organizational structures, cultural expectations, or policy frameworks influence retention outcomes. Such insights would help refine retention strategies to suit different business environments.

Collectively, these recommendations would advance the scholarship on employee retention in MSMEs by broadening empirical evidence, integrating multiple perspectives that incorporate technology, and enhancing contextual diversity. This expanded body of research would contribute to stronger organizational sustainability and improved human resource development practices globally.

Reflections

Conducting this qualitative pragmatic inquiry has been a deeply transformative experience, shaping both scholarly and professional perspectives on employee retention within MSMEs. At the onset, the assumption was that financial incentives were the primary drivers of retention; however, immersion in the research process revealed a more complex and relational dynamic grounded in trust, recognition, development opportunities, and supportive leadership. The findings reinforced the understanding that human behavior in organizations is shaped by multidimensional social changes, a realization that significantly broadened the researchers' conceptual lens. This intellectual shift reflects the meaningful learning that occurs when preconceived notions are challenged by empirical evidence.

The research also highlighted the essential role of reflexivity in qualitative inquiry. Engaging with participant experiences required sustained awareness of personal assumptions, potential biases, and the researcher's positionality in interpretation. Through disciplined application of triangulation, consistent documentation, and the constant comparative method. The study strengthened methodological rigor and analytical depth. Using tools such as NVivo enhanced the ability to systematically identify themes, cross-reference perspectives, and align emergent findings with conceptual frameworks and existing scholarship. These processes sharpened the researchers' analytical capacity and contributed to a more credible, grounded interpretation of the data.

Simultaneously, the doctoral experience at Walden University offered opportunities for personal growth, academic discipline, and the development of a

researcher identity. Transitioning from a practitioner mindset to a scholarly one required embracing evidence-based reasoning, critical inquiry, and theoretical alignment. The coursework committee guidance and iterative refinement of the study cultivated resilience, patience, and a heightened commitment to ethical research practices. Balancing academic demands with professional responsibility further depended on the researcher's capacity for perseverance and interpersonal time management, demonstrating the transformative nature of doctoral-level scholarship.

This combined professional and academic journey has reinforced a long-term commitment to positive social change and evidence-driven human resource practice. By listening deeply to MSME leaders, understanding their challenges, and interpreting their strategies with scholarly rigor, the researcher gained insights that will continue to inform future organizational development work. The experience has strengthened a sense of responsibility to apply research knowledge in ways that support fair, developmental, and people-centered workplaces. Ultimately, this study represents not only the culmination of a significant academic milestone but also the beginning of a more reflective research-informed approach to leadership, scholarship, and social impact.

Conclusion

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry explored the strategies that MSME business owners use to reduce employee turnover and enhance profitability. A challenge consistently identified across developing economies (Guchait et al., 2021; Nzulwa et al., 2023). Guided by SET (Blau, 1964), the study examined how leaders create reciprocal relationships that motivate employees to remain committed to their organizations. Data

were collected through semistructured interviews, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach. This rigorous process produced five interconnected themes: competitive compensation, leadership support, employee development, recognition and rewards, and organizational culture.

The findings revealed that although competitive compensation remains foundational, the most influential retention strategies are relational and developmental in nature. Leaders who demonstrate authentic support, provide growth opportunities, and foster a positive work climate strengthen employees' affective commitment, confirming the central tenets of SET and aligning with prior research (see Cropanzano et al., 2017; Eisenberger et al., 2020). Recognition and reward systems further elevated employee motivation and organizational attachment, consistent with findings that acknowledgment and appreciation significantly predict treatment and performance (Chaurasia & Shukla, 2022).

For MSMEs, these insights have direct implications for practice. When leaders invest in employee skills, communicate transparently, and embed fairness and respect into their daily interactions, they create conditions that reduce turnover, strengthen loyalty, and enhance operational stability (Park & Shaw, 2013; Saridakis et al., 2020). Because MSMEs often operate with limited resources, strengthening human-centered leadership becomes not only a retention strategy but also a competitive advantage. This study, therefore, contributes to business practice by demonstrating that profitability and retention are not separate pursuits but mutually reinforcing outcomes of supporting and value-driven leadership.

In summary, this research underscores that effective retention strategies in MSMEs extend far beyond financial incentives. Instead, they are anchored in trust, development, and meaningful social exchange between leaders and employees. These findings enrich the scholarly discourse by linking theory to practice, offering MSME leaders a clear roadmap for building sustainable, resilient, and high-performing organizations. Ultimately, this study affirms a powerful truth: when leaders internationally invest in people, they do not just reduce turnover; they ignite the transformative potential that propels organizations, communications, and entire economies forward.

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Appendix: Invitation Email

Invitation Template for email, social media, and flyer formats**Invitation text:**

Subject line: interviewing MSME business owners and leaders

Email message;

Dear

There is a new study about how MSME Business owners use strategies to reduce employee turnover and enhance profitability that could help business leaders better understand the benefits of implementing strategies to reduce employee turnover and enhance profitability. For this study, you are invited to describe the strategies you have used as an MSME to reduce employee turnover and how this has affected your profitability.

About the study:

- One 30-60 minute zoom, google meet or face to face interview that will be audiorecorded (no videorecording)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Business Owner or leader
- Have been in business for a minimum of 5 years
- Working within an MSME in Kilifi

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Nyambura Mbugua, a DBA student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during September 2024

Please reach out to XXX@waldenu.edu to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.