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## **Strategies for Retaining Employees in the Global Healthcare Industry**

Tanisha L. Smith  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Tanisha L. Smith

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2026

Abstract

Strategies for Retaining Employees in the Global Healthcare Industry

by

Tanisha L. Smith

MS, Webster University, 2015

BS, Norfolk State University, 2011

Qualitative Pragmatic Inquiry Business Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

February 2026

## Abstract

High healthcare employee turnover rates pose a significant threat to organizational productivity, workforce stability, and patient outcomes. Healthcare leaders are concerned with high employee turnover because it contributes to rising operational costs, employee burnout, and a decline in the quality of patient care. Grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation, this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry identified and explored effective strategies that healthcare leaders use to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. Data were collected from nine healthcare leaders in the United States using semistructured interviews and publicly available documents. Through thematic analysis with triangulation and member checking to ensure trustworthiness, five themes were identified: (a) fulfilling employees' intrinsic motivation enhancement and psychological needs, (b) prioritizing relational trust building and organizational advocacy, (c) providing personalized professional development and trajectory advancement, (d) fostering an inclusive organizational culture and decision-making dynamics, and (e) implementing adaptive organizational structures and integrated employee well-being. A key recommendation is to foster authentic and transparent leadership through clear communication, ethical decision-making, and open team engagement. The implications for positive social change include the potential to improve workforce stability, reduce burnout, and enhance patient care in healthcare settings. This social change may specifically benefit healthcare leaders through greater employee well-being and retention, patients through higher-quality care, and underserved communities through more reliable access to healthcare services.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral project to God, my family, and my friends, who have consistently supported me in embracing my authentic self on this journey of self-discovery. Your unwavering moral, spiritual, and emotional support has been immeasurable. Thank you for patiently listening when I needed to vent and for helping me stay on track when I considered giving up. You have been both my motivators and my anchors of trust.

To my siblings, nieces, nephews, godchildren, and all those who look to me for guidance and mentorship, know that anything is possible if you apply yourself. I cherish each of you for inspiring me to become a better version of myself.

Lastly, a special expression of love and gratitude to my husband, Cortez Smith. For over 15 years, you have been my center of gravity and my true north. Your unwavering love and support have made all things possible. I could not have navigated life or this milestone without you. I love you deeply.

## Acknowledgments

I want to extend a special thank you to my chair, Dr. Denise Land, whose encouragement and support not only reignited my desire to continue pursuing this degree when I was ready to give up, but also guided me back to my first career path passion and opened my eyes to the meaningful contribution I could make within the field. Your diligent guidance and leadership pushed me beyond my comfort zone and encouraged me to explore charted territory with fresh perspectives. I am deeply grateful for your mentorship and unwavering belief in my potential. I also want to acknowledge all my academic advisors for being my academic partner on this journey and providing invaluable resources.

Last, but not least in my life, I want to honor the significant people who paved the foundation for my right of passage. Thank you to my “golden girl circle,” my sister Sheanell Scott, uncles, aunts, cousins, and in-laws for believing in me during my most vulnerable moments. Although my grandmother, Mildred Duncan, and my aunt, Elouise Grant, are no longer with us, I know they are celebrating this milestone with me in heaven. My entire family, including my in-laws, taught me to overcome obstacles, value who I am, and trust my abilities. This achievement would not have been possible without my incredible support system. While my academic journey has not been easy, it has strengthened me, and I am humbled to say with joy and pride that I FINALLY DID IT!!!

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## Section 1: Project Foundation

### **Background of the Problem**

Healthcare organizational leaders are experiencing a critical employee retention crisis that threatens operational sustainability and quality of patient care. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), in 2023, the healthcare and social assistance sector experienced a turnover rate of 5.7%, substantially higher than the national average of 3.6% across all industries. The elevated turnover identifies persistent challenges in workforce retention within healthcare, particularly among nurses, physicians, and support staff. High turnover rates have challenged the nursing profession, with national average turnover rates ranging from 8.8% to 37% depending on geographic location and nursing specialty (Haddad et al., 2023). More critically, constant employee turnover disrupted continuity of care, reduced team cohesion, and ultimately compromised patient safety and satisfaction outcomes (Cimiotti et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these challenges by reshaping the career priorities of healthcare workers, with professionals placing a greater emphasis on flexibility, work-life balance, and psychological safety (Poon et al., 2022). The financial implications extended beyond replacement costs to include overtime expenses for the remaining employees, temporary staffing fees, and potential revenue losses resulting from reduced capacity (NSI Nursing Solutions, 2024; Peng et al., 2023). Healthcare leaders need to address this multifaceted problem to maintain operational efficiency, ensure high-quality patient care, and sustain competitive advantage in an increasingly challenging market.

### **Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose**

The specific business problem is that some healthcare leaders lack effective strategies to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore effective strategies that healthcare leaders use to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. Selecting an appropriate pool of participants for this project was crucial in developing effective employee retention strategies. The target population consisted of a sample of nine healthcare leaders, selected through purposive and snowball sampling, from various organizations who had successfully used effective strategies to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. The participants included healthcare leaders in various roles, such as human resource managers, department supervisors, nurse leaders or charge nurses, training and development coordinators, and healthcare administrators or other individuals who met my eligibility requirements in the healthcare industry.

Eligible participants met the following criteria: (a) were 18 years of age or older at the time of participation, (b) were employed or previously employed in a healthcare organization in a clinical, non-clinical, or support capacity, (c) possessed at least 1 year of experience in a healthcare role, and (d) had direct experience successfully using effective strategies to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. I recruited participants through professional healthcare networks and contacts within healthcare leadership to ensure access to individuals with relevant expertise and experience in addressing retention challenges within their respective organizations.

A qualitative methodology was suitable for this study because employee retention involves complex personal, professional, and organizational factors that require an understanding beyond quantitative measures. Retention decisions are deeply individual, influenced by subjective experiences best captured through participants' voices. Healthcare environments vary significantly, and qualitative approaches accommodate these contextual differences, enabling the emergence of new insights into the post-pandemic workforce. The pragmatic inquiry design was useful in directly addressing the practical problem of healthcare employee retention, prioritizing actionable solutions over theoretical considerations. This design offers methodological flexibility, enabling the adaptation of data collection methods across various healthcare contexts. The emphasis on generating practical, transferable knowledge ensures findings are applicable to healthcare administrators, policymakers, and practitioners who need evidence-based retention strategies for real-world implementation.

I collected data from semistructured interviews and relevant publicly available documents. Analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, incorporating member checking, triangulation, and continued sampling until data saturation was reached to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

The conceptual framework that I used to guide this research project was Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959), which distinguishes between motivators (intrinsic factors) and hygiene factors (extrinsic factors) that influence employee satisfaction and workplace engagement.

## **Project Research Question**

What effective strategies do healthcare leaders use to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes?

## **Assumptions and Limitations**

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are foundational beliefs that researchers hold to be true without verification, serving as necessary preconditions for conducting meaningful research (Hancock et al., 2021). In qualitative research, assumptions represented the researcher's fundamental beliefs about participants' capabilities, motivations, and the research process itself, which had to be accepted as given for the study to proceed effectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The assumptions for this project were primarily related to participant characteristics and capabilities. First, I assumed that participants could articulate their experiences with employee retention strategies and the phenomena under investigation. This assumption was fundamental to the qualitative approach, as the project's success depended on participants' ability to verbalize their insights and experiences meaningfully. Second, I assumed that participants were honest and truthful in their descriptions of employee retention challenges and strategies, providing authentic accounts rather than socially desirable responses. This assumption necessarily encompassed the belief that participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions were sufficiently accurate and unbiased to support meaningful analysis, despite the inherent potential for subjective recollections to influence their interpretation of the effectiveness of retention strategies. Third, I assumed that participants engaged openly in the interview process, maintaining

candid dialogue throughout their interactions with me. Fourth, I assumed that as the researcher, I could capture, analyze, and understand participant responses effectively, bringing sufficient preparation and analytical skills to interpret the data appropriately. Finally, I assumed that meaningful patterns and themes emerged from participant responses that I could identify and categorize, enabling the development of substantive findings related to the research question. These assumptions collectively formed the foundation for believing that the qualitative methodology employed yielded valuable insights into employee retention strategies within the healthcare industry.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are constraints that could impact the project's outcome (Hancock et al., 2021). This project encountered several interconnected limitations that shaped both data collection and interpretation. The first limitation stemmed from geographical and organizational differences that could affect transferability and, therefore, the applicability of findings across diverse organizational contexts. These variations in organizational culture, regional healthcare policies, and local market conditions created potential barriers to generalizing results beyond the specific settings studied.

Building on this geographic challenge, the second limitation involved the transferability due to the small sample size, which made it difficult to capture the full diversity of experiences across different healthcare sectors, organizational sizes, and cultural contexts. The limited scope necessarily constrained the representativeness of the participant pool.

These geographic and sample size constraints directly contributed to the final limitation: the necessity of employing a mixed approach to interviews, combining both

teleconferencing platforms and in-person meetings to accommodate the geographically dispersed participants. While in-person interviews were conducted when feasible for locally accessible participants, the majority required virtual platforms to overcome distance barriers. The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated this approach by revealing significant generational differences in technological proficiency with virtual platforms and compatible electronics, which inhibited the full expression of experiences for some participants. Older participants, in particular, encountered technological barriers that could have limited their ability to communicate as naturally and comprehensively as they would have in face-to-face settings. The use of a virtual format eliminated important nonverbal cues and environmental context that could have enriched data collection. However, some participants expressed greater comfort and openness in virtual settings, suggesting that the use of mixed-methodology approach constrained and enhanced different aspects of data quality, depending on individual preferences and technological capabilities. Collectively, these limitations underscore the complex interplay between geographic accessibility, sample diversity, and methodological adaptability in qualitative research.

### **Business Project Ethics**

Using a qualitative research approach grants the researcher the opportunity to explore the project's nature by adequately addressing the research question. As the primary research instrument, I remained unbiased and impartial throughout the data collection process to ensure the project's intended outcome and reliability were not compromised. During the data collection process, I ensured the data were collected fairly,

and there was no conflict of interest. I also ensured the participants' confidentiality to avoid potential retaliation from employers or subordinates.

My interest in this research topic stems from my passion to enhance my knowledge and competency in strategies for recruiting and retaining employees in the healthcare field. As my research on effective employee retention practices has progressed, I have become aware of the complexities surrounding the challenges of workforce stability in the healthcare industry. I am excited by the opportunity to identify and explore effective strategies healthcare leaders use to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. Data collection included interview questions, which are in Appendix A.

My strategy for gaining access to participants involved sending invitation letters through my professional healthcare networks and contacts within healthcare leadership. My initial contact, following approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), was a letter of invitation sent via email. The invitation letter included an introduction to the research, a description of the project, and my contact details. The consent form was sent with the invitation letter to request voluntary participation. The consent form included sample questions. Participants were asked to declare their interest in participating in the project by responding to the email correspondence with the subject line "I consent." By combining rigorous ethical standards with empathetic communication, I was able to transform informed consent from a procedural hurdle into a strong foundation for a trusting research relationship. Informed consent is a procedure to support the ethical treatment of participants (Abrera et al., 2022). The informed consent form included information about the project's objective, protocols, nature, and privacy

concerns. Before conducting research or commencing a project, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) mandate that researchers gather permission from prospective participants and produce written consent in compliance with IRB criteria. I requested that the respondents submit consent documents to participate in the project as well as reaffirmed at the beginning of the interview. Additionally, personal communication, such as phone calls, emails, and personal visits, can build rapport and trust between participants and the researcher (Yin, 2018). To further establish a working relationship, I provided participants with a detailed explanation of the project's purpose.

The standards prescribed by Walden University's IRB and the principles outlined in *the Belmont Report* are used to ensure that research is conducted ethically. *The Belmont Report* authors outlined the ethical principles that each researcher should use as a guide, such as (a) respect for persons, honoring the requirements for consent, (b) beneficence, supporting risk and benefit assessments, and (c) justice, recognizing moral requirements for fair procedures and outcomes for participant selection (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

The researcher's ethical role is to protect respondents by safeguarding essential knowledge and documents, preserving dignity, confidentiality, and privacy (Yin, 2018). The procedures or protocols for addressing additional questions, consulting the researcher, and the option for participants to withdraw from the project were included in the consent form. Open-ended questions in a standard interview protocol allowed flexibility while guaranteeing that all participants covered all key topics (see Appendix B). Yin (2018) highlights interview protocols as a structured guide to conduct interviews, while researchers have the flexibility to explore emerging themes to enhance the

reliability. This approach facilitated the collection of both verbal and nonverbal data in a systematic manner, thereby enhancing dependability and reducing the risk of researcher bias (Abdalla et al., 2018). At any point during the project, participants could have withdrawn from the project by notifying me by email or a telephone call. No participants chose to withdraw. There were no monetary incentives for volunteering to participate in this research project, which alleviated the perception of coercion that may have devalued the project's validity.

Each participant's privacy and dignity were safeguarded in accordance with *the Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I assigned each volunteer an alphanumeric code, S1, S2, S3, and so on, to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. The personal or raw data were safeguarded in my secure filing cabinet, located within my home office, and accessible only to me. This data was also stored on a password-protected laptop computer and an external hard drive. All physical copies of the data (e.g., printed transcribed data, handbooks, and archived data used for analysis of the organization) are stored in a filing cabinet, accessible only by key. Participants must be protected by maintaining their confidentiality (Surmiak, 2018). To protect the confidentiality of the participants, the data and consent forms are stored digitally on an external hard drive and will remain in the same location for 5 years. I will shred and destroy the data after 5 years. My IRB approval number is 02-06-23-0663444.

### **Evidence-Based Integrative Review**

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies used by healthcare leaders to retain employees in order to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. In this evidence-based

integrative review, I explore the phenomenon of employee retention related to maintaining organizational performance and patient outcomes. I conduct an in-depth review of the literature to increase my understanding of the issues, present the background of the topic, and comment on current trends. Furthermore, I conduct an in-depth review of the information related to my research question to enhance the credibility of my research on employee retention.

This project's integrative literature review provides an overview of the strategies used by healthcare leaders to retain employees and maintain performance, as well as a discussion of the conceptual framework that can be applied to the project. The literature review opens with a brief discussion of the search strategies employed for the project. The following subsection provides a synthesis of the two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), the primary conceptual framework for this project. Following the critical analysis, I synthesize peer-reviewed sources related to job satisfaction, employee retention, organizational performance, and patient care. I conclude this subsection by focusing on the healthcare industry's culture and the factors that influence employee retention strategies.

My integrative literature review includes data retrieved from peer-reviewed journals, Google Scholar, and Walden University Library databases, such as ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Sage Publications. I also used a variety of books for information pertaining to the project. The relevant terms used as search criteria include *dual factor theory*, *employee*, *employee commitment*, *employee culture*, *employee turnover*, *employee turnover intentions*, *employees in healthcare*, *healthcare industry*, *Herzberg's two-factor theory*, *job dissatisfaction*, *motivation-*

*maintenance theory, performance, patient care, retention, retention strategies, and workplace environment.* The specific reference content for the project is presented in Table 1 below and comprises 141 references. Of the references, 107 were published from 2021 to 2025 (76%), and 109 (80%) were peer-reviewed.

**Table 1**

*References Content*

Reference type	Total	<5 Years	>5 Years	% Total <5 years
Peer-reviewed journals	109	87	22	80%
Dissertations	1	1	0	100%
Books	15	7	8	47%
Non-peer-reviewed sources	16	12	4	75%
Total	141	107	34	76%

**Application of the Applied Business Problem**

The global healthcare industry has employed various retention strategies to mitigate the staffing crisis. A systematic review by Pressley and Garside (2023) spanning 34 studies across multiple countries highlighted that environmental, relational, and individual factors such as supportive leadership, psychological safety, and work-life balance served as protective determinants of nurses' intention to stay, with generational differences informing tailored approaches. Parallel findings from a global review by Ejebu et al. (2024) identified pull factors, including workplace support, opportunities for career advancement, and fair treatment, while also emphasizing that some push-pull

factors were unique to different career stages in nursing. Effective retention strategies require an integrated approach that considers both systemic and human factors.

Recognizing that workforce stability depends on multiple dimensions, healthcare leaders can implement interventions that balance organizational and relational support.

Consistent with economic advancements and contemporary models of workforce management, opportunities for professional development are universally important.

Leaders' attention to generational and career stage differences reinforces the importance of a tailored employee retention approach, highlighting universal solutions are inadequate.

In small and mid-sized hospitals, Korean researchers used structural modeling to demonstrate that improving hygiene factors and delivering motivators significantly predicted retention intentions, consistent with Herzberg's model (Lee & Lee, 2022). The findings provide information that helps lead to the understanding that the prevention of dissatisfaction and the promotion of job satisfaction are necessary to enhance the retention intention within the healthcare career field, reinforcing the applicability of Herzberg's dual-factor theory. Moreover, a cross-sectional study at Mansoura University Hospital found that transformational leadership and work-life balance accounted for 23.4% of variance in nurse retention, underscoring the significant role of motivators in healthcare settings (AbdElhay et al., 2025). Leadership styles and organizational support are not only central to employee satisfaction but also function as critical motivators that directly influence nurses' decisions to remain in their positions, highlighting that relational factors are closely associated with structural interventions. Wardhani et al. (2023) reported that interventions encompassing improved staffing, leadership support,

and participative management were associated with retention in regional Indonesian hospitals. Inclusive leadership practices combined with organizational improvement address the practical and psychological needs of healthcare staffing. Collectively the studies indicate that structural and relational interventions are required in order to enhance nurse retention, while leadership and organizational support play vital roles in the workforce stability.

Another review of African health systems found that retention rates are alarmingly low, with success hinging on the combination of hygiene enhancements and motivation-driven interventions (Kiptulon et al., 2025). If structural and motivational components of work environment are not addressed, retention outcomes remain poor, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions to local healthcare facilities. In clinical lab settings in Oman, Alrawahi et al. (2024) found that addressing hygiene factors alongside motivators was key to improving job satisfaction and retention, reflecting Herzberg's dual-factor structure. Collectively, the research studies demonstrate that Herzberg's framework has universal applicability across multiple industries, not only within healthcare settings, showing that balancing dissatisfiers with motivators is required for workforce satisfaction, stability, and organizational performance. Evidence based strategies require integration of motivators and hygiene factors while leaders are adaptable to different cultural, organizational, and employee needs.

Overall, studies across North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East reveal consistent themes: (1) addressing hygiene factors alone prevents dissatisfaction, (2) implementing motivators like recognition, leadership inclusion, and career pathways fosters retention, and (3) retention success varies by context culture, workforce

demographics, and system size requiring tailored, evidence-based strategies (AbdElhay et al., 2025; Pressley & Garside, 2023). The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore retention strategies healthcare leaders used to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. The argument that Herzberg's two-factor theory is a necessity for establishing a comprehensive strategy that balances dissatisfiers and motivators to stabilize global retention in the healthcare industry while enhancing organizational performance and patient care is supported by several scholars. By integrating evidence from multiple global and regional healthcare organizations, the importance of a balanced approach that addresses motivators and dissatisfiers is essential.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for my research project was based on Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory, which explained the factors that contribute to employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Influenced by the foundation and principles of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, the model emphasized work environment factors that generated employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The theory consisted of two constructs: motivation and hygiene. Motivational factors are related to job satisfaction and positive job attitudes, whereas hygiene factors are related to job dissatisfaction (see Herzberg, 2003). Herzberg et al. suggested that employee retention within an industry was heavily dependent on employees' perceptions, which could influence their overall satisfaction with the organization. These perceptions were influenced by participants' interpretations of the organization's culture, particularly the climate of diversity and inclusion, reflecting the modern-day interpretation and application of Herzberg's theory

in addressing both motivators and hygiene factors (Blouch & Azeem, 2019).

Consequently, organizations were encouraged to foster environments in which employees developed positive perceptions of their workplace, as these perceptions directly influenced retention outcomes.

Building on this conceptual foundation, a consistent trend emerged in scholarly research examining the relationship between employee retention, organizational performance, and patient care through the application of Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory. A researcher applied this framework to measure the connection between employee retention and organizational performance (Soo-Yong & Nguyen, 2021), reinforcing the importance of understanding both motivation and hygiene factors. The findings of Matei and Abrudan's (2016) study demonstrated that motivational factors enhanced employee performance, while hygiene factors served as the foundation for dissatisfaction. Organizations should not only prevent dissatisfaction through adequate working conditions and policies but actively foster motivators to drive performance and retention. This distinction was critical, as Herzberg et al. argued that employee motivation could serve as a predictor of turnover, which, in turn, might negatively impact performance.

Employees' perception of motivation could reflect not only retention rates but also the organization's reputation. Organizational strategies such as integrating employees into the decision-making process and promoting professional development tended to bridge retention gaps, leading to improved productivity and goal attainment (Ozsoy, 2019). By directly connecting employee involvement to performance outcomes, Herzberg et al.'s (1959) theory offered a clear explanation for the reasons behind employee satisfaction

levels and demonstrated how motivational factors could alter perceptions of success, thereby improving satisfaction and retention. Nevertheless, the influence of these factors could be either beneficial or detrimental to organizational performance, depending on how they are managed. Overall, research grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory offered valuable insight into the distinction between motivational and hygiene factors. This understanding was essential for developing targeted strategies to reduce turnover intentions, strengthen organizational performance, and ultimately enhance patient care.

### ***Fostering Motivation through Recognition and Growth***

Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivation-hygiene theory model, or two-factor theory, comprises two aspects that a business can use to influence motivation in the workplace. These factors are motivators and hygiene. Motivators are those aspects that cause an employee to experience higher job satisfaction. Herzberg et al. theorized that higher job satisfaction leads to employees working harder and being more motivated to engage in the assigned work. Alshmemri et al. (2017) found that motivation factors impacting job satisfaction were more important to overall job satisfaction than hygiene factors related to the separate spectrum of job dissatisfaction. Motivating factors can be considered satisfiers, which are directly linked to intrinsic components of a job and result in satisfaction through factors such as advancement opportunities, recognition, and opportunities to be responsible (Alshmemri et al., 2017). The level of interaction and involvement that a business leader has with an employee positively influences the individual's performance, morale, organizational profitability, and overall efficiency of the organization (Shaikh et al., 2019). Motivating factors are associated with increasing job satisfaction but do not address possible issues related to job dissatisfaction resulting

from the presence or absence of hygiene factors. Motivators and hygiene factors must be addressed to maximize employee satisfaction and retention; however, focusing only on one component can limit organizational effectiveness. Herzberg's dual-factor theory establishes a framework for leaders to develop strategies that enhance motivation while preventing employee dissatisfaction, thereby supporting workforce stability and organizational performance.

### ***Hygiene Factors to Prevent Dissatisfaction***

Job environmental factors are related to hygiene factors and are associated with a decrease in job dissatisfaction (Alfayad & Arif, 2017). Hygiene factors refer to the components of a job, including organizational policy, administration, supervision, employee relationships, job security, salary, and working conditions (Ozsoy, 2019). Hygiene factors are related to employee dissatisfaction; therefore, preventing marginal conditions can help reduce this dissatisfaction (see Ozsoy, 2019). Choi et al. (2021) found that maintenance factors, also referred to as hygiene factors, encompass environmental or organizational elements implemented to maintain order and discipline that are outside the individual's perception of the job, organizational culture, or the specific job description. The existence of hygiene factors does not necessarily satisfy the individual, but the absence of certain factors is related to dissatisfaction. An organization's administration can enhance hygiene factors to create a positive work environment, but this does not equate to motivating employees (Herzberg et al., 1959). Creating a positive work environment can serve as a potential mitigation measure for job dissatisfaction. For example, Herzberg et al. (1959) conducted a study on the hygiene factor, salary, correlated with employee motivation and established that salary did not contribute to

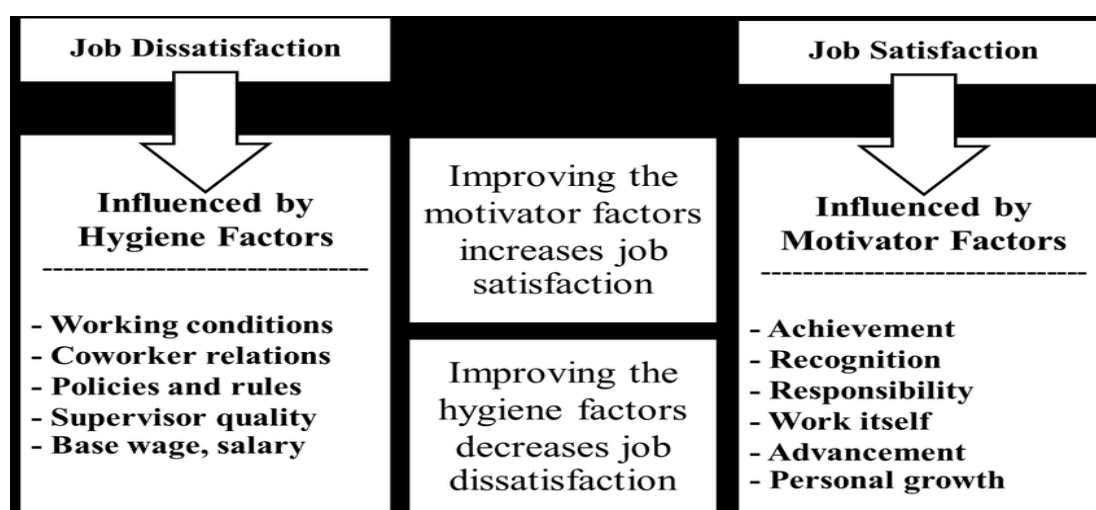
employee satisfaction. However, research indicates a direct relationship between low salaries and employee job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). The maintenance of hygiene factors is crucial for retaining employees and their perception of the work environment (Alshathry et al., 2017). Hygiene factors independently do not drive employee satisfaction; the factors serve as the foundation for preventing dissatisfaction and improving the work environment where motivation can be effective. Managers must acknowledge that neglecting key factors can lead to turnover and decrease morale, while maintaining hygiene factors creates a baseline condition required for appropriate employee engagement and retention. It is paramount for managers to use positive reinforcement to sustain enhanced hygiene factors, thereby lessening employee dissatisfaction and improving employee retention (Alfayad & Arif, 2017; Ozsoy, 2019).

In the context of the healthcare industry, researchers have applied this theory to investigate how both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence workforce stability and employee retention (Lukwago et al., 2014). Retention of healthcare professionals, including nurses, physicians, and support staff, is particularly critical due to the direct link between staff stability and quality of patient care and organizational performance. Herzberg et al. (1959) emphasized that when hygiene factors decline below acceptable levels, job dissatisfaction increases, which often leads to turnover. In high-stress healthcare environments, this can disrupt continuity of care, strain remaining employees, and compromise patient outcomes. This framework supports the exploration of how healthcare leaders design and implement retention strategies that balance both motivators and hygiene elements. The selection of Herzberg's two-factor theory aligns with the project's purpose of identifying and exploring effective strategies that healthcare leaders

use to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the individual personality and perception complexities that exist in relation to improving retention through generating job satisfaction and minimizing job dissatisfaction.

**Figure 1**

*Herzberg's Two-factor Model*



*Note.* From “Students’ Perceptions about Selected Career Benefits (Job Factors) in Tourism and Hospitality: Applying Herzberg's Two-Factor and Benefits-Satisfaction Models,” by M. Mustafa, S. A. Tayeh, and N. Khasaweh, 2021, *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences*, 48(4), 503.

(<https://archives.ju.edu.jo/index.php/hum/article/view/110827>). CC BY-NC 4.0.

### **Business Problem Scholarship Evidence**

Employee retention remains a critical challenge in healthcare organizations worldwide, with significant implications for organizational performance, patient care, and financial stability. Despite various retention strategies, many healthcare institutions

continue to experience high turnover rates, particularly among nursing staff. Employee retention remains a pressing challenge in the healthcare industry, as workforce stability has a direct impact on organizational performance and patient outcomes (Press Ganey, 2024). High turnover rates increase recruitment and training costs, disrupt workflow, and diminish care quality (Peng et al., 2023). Even with numerous retention initiatives, organizations struggle to maintain a stable, engaged workforce, underscoring the need for evidence-based strategies that address both structural and psychological factors (Shahzad et al., 2024). Persistent employee retention challenges highlight the need for strategies beyond surface-level incentives to focus on the underlying issues that influence employee satisfaction and engagement. Without addressing the core issues, healthcare organizations will remain at risk and workforce instability will continue to climb, which will compromise patient outcomes and long-term operational sustainability. Addressing all factors that impact retention strategies assist leaders with stabilizing the workforce, improving employee engagement and organizational performance.

Nurse turnover rates vary globally, with a meta-analysis reporting a combined global turnover rate of 16% across 14 countries, ranging from 8% to 36.6% (Ren et al., 2024). In the United States, the registered nurse turnover rate was 18.4% in 2023, according to the 2024 NSI report, a slight decrease from 22.5% in 2022, but turnover continues to decline, with 2025 data showing 16.4% (Gamble, 2025; NSI Nursing Solutions, 2024). The financial impact of nurse turnover remains substantial: the average cost of turnover for staff RN increased to \$61,110 in 2024, with hospitals losing significant revenue annually due to recruitment, training, and lost productivity (Gamble,

2025). These figures underscore the importance of strategic retention initiatives that effectively address both organizational and employee-level factors.

A key issue is that retention strategies often focus predominantly on hygiene factors such as salary, benefits, and work conditions. While essential to prevent dissatisfaction, these factors alone do not cultivate long-term commitment (Herzberg et al., 1959; Yamamoto et al., 2024). Intrinsic motivators, including recognition, meaningful work, and opportunities for professional development, are essential for sustaining engagement and loyalty. Employees who perceive a lack of intrinsic value in their work are more likely to leave for organizations that better meet these needs (Yamamoto et al., 2024). This demonstrates the necessity of dual-focused strategies integrating both hygiene and motivational factors, consistent with Herzberg's two-factor theory.

Employee perceptions of inclusion, recognition, and opportunities for advancement have a significant impact on retention. Research indicates that transformational leadership, career growth opportunities, work well-being, and work-life balance have a significant impact on nurses' intention to stay (AbdElhay et al., 2025; Pressley & Garside, 2023). The findings align with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory, which emphasized that intrinsic motivators and hygiene factors jointly shape employee satisfaction and engagement. Therefore, healthcare organizations must implement comprehensive retention strategies that address both structural support and intrinsic motivators, as the absence of either can result in dissatisfaction and turnover (Yamamoto et al., 2024). A dual-focus approach is particularly critical in the global healthcare industry, where diverse cultural, economic, and organizational contexts

demand adaptable, evidence-based strategies to stabilize the workforce and sustain care delivery across regions.

### ***Global Healthcare***

Retention challenges in the global healthcare industry represent a critical organizational issue, with widespread implications for both performance and patient care. Across diverse settings, research consistently highlights turnover rates as alarmingly high for nurses, ranging from 12.4% in South Korea to 27.65% in the United States, and shortages are projected to reach 10 million globally by 2030 (Bae, 2022; World Health Organization, 2023). Canada alone has seen a 219.8% increase in vacancies since 2017 (Robinson, 2022). Staffing instability and unsustainable workforce conditions are not confined to one region but reflect a widespread imbalance between workforce supply and organizational demands. These trends are frequently attributed to the imbalance between hygiene factors, such as low pay, heavy workloads, and inadequate staffing, and a lack of motivators, including recognition, growth opportunities, and involvement in decision-making (Herzberg et al., 1959; Ozsoy, 2019; Shah et al., 2016). The imbalance contributes to a cycle in which employee departures intensify workloads for those who remain, fueling exhaustion, frustration, and resignation.

Retention challenges are not confined to a single country; healthcare systems worldwide face widespread employee instability with profound consequences for patient care and organizational performance. In the United States, nurse turnover has shown improvement, decreasing from 22.5% in 2022 to 18.4% in 2023 and further to 16.4% in 2024 (Gamble, 2025; NSI Nursing Solutions, 2024). Global nursing shortages remain a concern, with the World Health Organization continuing to track workforce development

needs worldwide (WHO, 2024). Statistics imply that some progress has been made to assist with reducing turnover within certain regions, but persistent global shortages increase the need for innovative retention strategies.

Nursing retention is influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with poor work conditions, burnout, and inadequate support that influence high turnover rates globally. In the United Arab Emirates, 69.9% of nurses reported a high intent to leave due to poor work environments (Hedge et al., 2024). In Sweden, public hospital nurses cited lack of recovery time, poor communication, and feeling undervalued as key drivers of attrition (Duffield et al., 2020). Burnout and mandatory overtime intensified during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to drive dissatisfaction and exits, particularly in critical care units globally (De Vries, Boone, et al., 2023; Lee & Kim, 2024). Studies demonstrate that addressing hygiene factors alone, such as staffing ratios, compensation, and safety protocols, is insufficient for lasting retention. Integrating intrinsic motivators, such as career development, recognition, and meaningful engagement, is essential for retaining skilled staff (Yamamoto et al., 2024). Transformational leadership, career growth opportunities, work well-being, and work-life balance significantly impact nurses' intention to stay (AbdElhay et al., 2025; Ejebu et al., 2024). Structural and psychological factors must be balanced to implement effective retention strategies. Environmental improvements alone will not sustain organizational stability; instead, intrinsic motivators, supportive leadership and employee engagement, reduce turnover and enhance patient care outcome globally. Hospitals implementing dual-focused strategies that address both structural support and intrinsic motivation report improved retention rates and better patient outcomes, reinforcing the value of comprehensive retention initiatives.

Retention directly influences organizational outcome, with measurable consequences for both financial performance and patient care. Researchers demonstrated there is a direct correlation between staff replacement and patient care, including increased mortality, medication errors, reduced continuity of care, and substantial financial burdens (De Vries, Lavreysen, et al., 2023; Moriwaki et al., 2025). High turnover continues to challenge healthcare organizations, with one in five healthcare workers leaving annually and disengaged employees being twice as likely to turn over (Press Ganey, 2024). It carries measurable consequences for patient care, including increased mortality, medication errors, reduced continuity of care, and substantial financial burdens associated with staff replacement (De Vries, Lavreysen, et al., 2023; Milesky et al., 2025). Moreover, the financial burden of replacing clinical staff is estimated to be between 30% and 200% of the annual salary per nurse, further constraining organizational capacity and contributing to care quality erosion (Li & Jones, 2013). The patterns reinforce the strategic importance of retention as a lever for operational stability, workforce efficiency, and patient safety. Prioritizing retention, healthcare organizations can mitigate financial loss and clinical risk, reinforcing broader efforts to improve care delivery and organizational resilience.

Healthcare systems that neglect workforce retention face severe organizational and safety consequences, while those that invest in motivational and hygiene factors experience measurable improvements in outcomes. Mission Hospital in North Carolina, after a corporate acquisition, saw a 36% staff reduction that led to legal and safety issues (Dunn, 2024; M. A. Hall, 2025), while Albany Medical Center was cited for over 480 staffing violations, resulting in a record \$375,000 fine (Penman-Lomeli & Barnes, 2025).

Meanwhile, hospitals that invest in both hygiene and motivational factors, such as Canadian systems emphasizing anti-oppression and well-being, report improvements in retention and patient outcomes (Government of Canada, 2023). Research demonstrates that nurse staffing and turnover directly affect healthcare quality and patient outcomes, with unit-level analyses highlighting the relationship between nursing resources and care quality measures (J. Peng et al., 2023). Moreover, systematic reviews indicate that nurse turnover has both economic and noneconomic impacts on hospitals, influencing patient care delivery and organizational performance (Bae, 2022). Recent analysis shows that each percent change in RN turnover costs the average hospital approximately \$380,600 annually, underscoring the need for proactive retention strategies (NSI Nursing Solutions, 2024). These varied examples, spanning continents and healthcare models, reinforce the importance of a dual focus on preventing dissatisfaction and promoting intrinsic motivation. Collectively, these findings illustrate that retention is not merely a human resources concern but a strategic imperative shaping quality of care, financial sustainability, and institutional reputation. Literature across different regions, sample sizes, and healthcare structures converges on the same findings: retention in healthcare is not only a human resources issue, but also a strategic imperative that impacts care quality, financial stability, and institutional reputation.

## **Business Topic Scholarship**

### ***Hygiene Factors***

Many theorists support Herzberg's two-factor theory. Ioana and Cracsner (2021) corroborated Herzberg's two-factor theory perspective on hygienic factors used to eliminate health hazards from the environment of employees. De-la-Rosa et al. (2021)

also validated Herzberg's interpretation of the employee-supervisory relationships and the impact of working conditions that influence employee dissatisfaction. When the preventative measures (hygiene factors) deteriorate to an unsatisfactory level for the employee, job dissatisfaction is at the forefront (Herzberg et al., 1959; Koncar et al., 2022); therefore, considering hygiene factors is critical in regard to the purpose of this project and the relevant conceptual framework.

Alternatively, Sitompul et al. (2021) rejected Herzberg's claim of hygiene factors being critical preventative measures to explain employee dissatisfaction. Instead, Sitompul et al. (2021) and Muzakki and Hutabarat (2022) introduced the idea that individual necessities fluctuate, which render different satisfying or dissatisfaction gratifications per employee. While this is a useful analysis, it does not allow for any generalization to be made about which to best motivate employees. McClelland et al. (1980) suggested that motivation is more intrinsic, and that different individuals will have different factors that motivate them or cause them to succeed. Clearly there are different driving forces motivating human behavior, but some generalizations exist to better understand how to motivate employees.

An employee's satisfaction is contingent on motivators, and dissatisfaction can relate to and be affected by hygiene factors (Ahakwa et al., 2021). According to Herzberg et al. (1959), the fewer available chances for the motivators to appear, the higher the hygiene factors offered to employees must be for the work environment to be desirable. However, organizations must be prepared to address both sets of factors to increase the desire to stay. The implementation of programs geared toward employee engagement is necessary to stabilize industry strength and magnify the business reach (Herzberg, 2003;

Miller, 2021). A leader's ability to focus on employees' developmental opportunities demonstrates the overall investment in the employee. Therefore, the organization must build a leadership culture that promotes an understanding of how to best engage and motivate employees for long-term success through employee engagement and performance. While hygiene factors set the foundation for reducing dissatisfaction, true organizational stability requires going a step further by fostering employee engagement, where employees feel a deep sense of commitment and alignment with organizational values.

### ***Employee Engagement***

Employee engagement is an essential component in retaining employees and is a key factor in understanding how organizations foster commitment. Engagement reflects the level of obligation and contribution an employee feels toward the job and the connection they feel between the organization's values and their own (Inggamara et al., 2022). Employees that identify with the organizational values and culture are more likely to experience purpose in their work, which enhance the emotional attachment that may exist and reduce voluntary turnover. The amount of effort exerted by the employee is dependent on the satisfaction they feel with their job (Wang & Chen, 2020). Satisfaction is not only an outcome of engagement but mechanism that forces the sustainment of motivation and loyalty long-term.

It is the responsibility of organizational leaders to effectively communicate with employees to generate a relationship within the organization (Inggamara et al., 2022). When employees are aware of the organization's ideals and responsibilities, they are more devoted to the purpose of the business. Employee engagement can also be a

strategic goal because of its long-term effects on retention and enhancing employee performance. Engagement is defined as an employee's emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization (Fidyah & Setiawati, 2020).

Employees that are emotionally invested are more resilient to workforce stressors and less likely to disengage or seek employment opportunities outside of the organization. Engagement can be judged using the presence or absence of the following behaviors: (a) employees articulate their position to influence internal and external personnel about the organization, (b) employees demonstrate a desire and compassion to be an associate of the organization, and (c) employees contribute additional time and energy to enhance the success of the business (Tisu et al., 2020). Loyalty and discretionary efforts are positive signals employees exhibit, which translates to a strong indication that the employees would remain with an organization long-term. Employees who are engaged are more likely to be proud of their work, are motivated to work harder, and positively influence those around them (Inggamara et al., 2022; Rai & Maheshwari, 2020).

The effect strengthens team cohesion and organizational culture, that positively increases retention at both the individual and organizational levels. Narayanamma et al. (2022) argued that engagement with an employee is considered the phase before commitment to the organization and relies on building a common understanding around employers' attitudes towards the values, awareness of business context, and enhancement of the organization's effectiveness. Employee engagement is critical to long-term loyalty, instead of short-term morale boosters. The critical element affecting employee engagement is pride in the organization, outranking connectivity to immediate

supervisors and trust in leadership. When employees take pride in where they work, they are more likely to internalize the organization's vision mission, and goals, which contributes to higher job satisfaction and display organizational commitment.

Employee engagement is not only an emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization but also a driving force that fuels performance and strengthens long-term retention outcomes. The more engaged an employee is, the more loyal they are to the organization, as engagement fosters a strong sense of belonging, reinforces perceptions of being valued by leadership, and increases alignment between personal purpose and organizational goals, reducing turnover intentions. Therefore, fostering employee engagement is essential for organizations seeking to improve retention, enhance performance, and build sustainable commitment across the workforce.

### ***Employee Retention***

From an organizational perspective, employee retention is vital for maintaining organizational performance, minimizing expenses associated with recruitment, training, and development, as well as onboarding new employees, and conserving expertise. Employees who are satisfied with their roles tend to be more committed, productive, and invested in their organization's success (Ramapriya & Sudhamathi, 2020). Conversely, dissatisfaction rooted in factors such as burnout, poor communication, inadequate recognition, or ineffective leadership can drive employees to disengage or leave (Gregory, 2011). Scholars have identified various reasons why employees leave their positions, including limited career development opportunities, lack of work-life balance, poor leadership, and misalignment with organizational values (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Irabor & Okolie, 2019). Notably, 4.5 million Americans quit their jobs in November

2021, a record high, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). The data displayed the necessity for organizations across all industries to implement comprehensive strategies that address both organizational and personal drivers of turnover.

Herzberg's two-factor theory provided a valuable framework for understanding employee satisfaction and retention (Herzberg et al., 1959). According to this theory, workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction are driven by two different sets of factors: hygiene factors (supervision, salary, organizational policies, job security) and motivators (recognition, personal growth, achievement, and purpose). Effective retention strategies address both by reducing dissatisfaction and enhancing positive motivational drivers (Anitha, 2020; Fidyah & Setiawati, 2020). While retention strategies are often grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory, their success ultimately depends on how leadership brings these strategies to life. In high-pressure industries such as healthcare, leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the work environment, addressing employee needs, and creating opportunities that transform satisfaction into long-term commitment.

### ***Organization Leadership***

In healthcare, where employee burnout is prevalent and professional demands are high, employee motivation must go beyond compensation. Employees seek opportunities for growth, recognition, and meaningful engagement. Effective employee retention strategies include professional development, performance-based incentives, flexible scheduling, inclusive leadership, and frequent feedback channels (Salicru, 2020; Singh, 2019). In addition to promoting job satisfaction, these interventions help employees feel like valued members of the team. Increasing employee retention and morale is based on

leadership's authentic engagement with employees, as well as being intentional in their actions. Udod et al. (2020) noted that the leader's function in the organization is to consistently promote motivation and inspiration among employees.

There are two styles of leadership that can serve this purpose: transformational and inspirational leadership (Hagemann, 2022). Transformational leadership is a style that incorporates the needs and desires of all employees, from leadership to lower-level staff (Chiu et al., 2021). It also relies on management and leaders having a deep sense of organizational values, desire, and personal satisfaction to steward positive change (Bojovic & Jovanovic, 2020). When leaders are satisfied, they are stronger managers who can increase employee satisfaction and drive organizational trust (Purnomo et al., 2020). Trust in leadership has been found to be an integral part of job satisfaction (Awah & Ebelebe, 2021).

Related to retention, transformational leadership has been shown to create stronger relationships, more sensitivity, a higher quality of life, and more motivation in employees (Epstein, 2018). Transformational leaders prioritize their employees' needs, set an example for the organization's values, and strive to create a shared vision (Chiu et al., 2021; Epstein, 2018). These leaders foster a culture of support, build trust, and promote the well-being of their workforce. When employees perceive their leaders as empathetic, responsive, and committed to their success, they are more likely to remain engaged and loyal (Awah & Ebelebe, 2021; Purnomo et al., 2020). Transformational leadership is a critical mechanism that organizations can use to translate Herzberg's two factor theory into practical application for retention outcomes.

Emphasizing trust, shared values and individualized considerations, transformational leaders will positively influence the employee's psychological needs, key drivers of engagement and long-term commitment. Instead of relying on structural incentives, utilizing the leadership approach combines relational and motivational elements that ultimately enhance the employee's emotional attachment to the organization. Transformational leaders serve as a force stabilizer that enhances employee job satisfaction, reduces turnover intentions, and supports organizational performance and sustainability.

Retention strategies must also consider the diversity of employee engagement levels. Inggamara et al. (2022) suggested that there are three types of employees: those who consistently meet or exceed expectations, those who are reluctant participants and focus solely on fulfilling their obligations, and those who are unsatisfied and focus on their own misery over their role. Employers must identify where each employee fits within this range and implement retention strategies appropriate to each (Singh 2019; Singh et al., 2020). By understanding this range of dedication, organizations can employ strategies to maximize organizational commitment and reduce attrition.

Employee retention strategies must account for the varying needs of employees. Disengaged employees may benefit from feedback loops and personal development plans, while high performers may require recognition and leadership opportunities. Open communication and consistent feedback are central to retention success. Employees who feel heard and valued are more likely to remain with an organization (Tran et al., 2020). A leader's ability to implement various approaches to gather feedback from employees will

help address dissatisfaction early and prevent issues from eroding the organization's culture.

This aligns directly with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) emphasis on addressing hygiene issues and reinforcing motivational factors, demonstrating how tailored strategies can enhance engagement and retention. Therefore, adopting differentiated retention approaches ensures that all employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to stay. This strengthens organizational stability and performance.

However, even the most robust retention efforts cannot eliminate all causes of turnover. Employees may depart the organization due to external factors, such as relocation, career changes, retirement, or personal life events (Wang & Chen, 2020). As such, organizations must focus on what is within their control: fostering a positive work environment, promoting growth and recognition, ensuring fair compensation, and building a culture of trust and inclusion. In doing so, organizations can stabilize their workforce by mitigating preventable turnover while acknowledging the broader realities that influence employee decisions. This perspective reinforces Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory by demonstrating how both hygiene factors (i.e., fair compensation and supportive policies) and motivators (i.e., recognition and growth opportunities) must be balanced. Framing retention through this lens highlights why leadership approaches are central to the research purpose, as they directly influence both the reduction of dissatisfaction and the cultivation of long-term employee commitment.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory emphasizes the connection between motivation and an employee's attitude, which can influence their job satisfaction.

Hertzberg et al. stated that the foundation of the two-factor theory focuses on motivational-hygiene factors that create a fundamental difference between an individual's affective state and their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Job satisfaction levels are factors in the workforce that can influence malingering, increased training costs, and employee turnover (Singh & Onahring, 2019). Job satisfaction is crucial for enhancing employee performance and improving their overall perception of an organization (Patton, 2015). Job satisfaction depends on various factors such as pay practices, the relationship between the employee and management, and the work environment (Iqbal et al., 2017). Higher job satisfaction directly correlates with increased productivity, lower absenteeism, and reduced turnover. Job satisfaction is directly related to the work environment, leadership style, and organizational culture (Prayogi & Lesmana, 2021). Job satisfaction is a complex process and a reliable indicator of an employee's perception of the organization and the level of engagement they display.

An employee's perception of an organization will dictate their job satisfaction and motivation level. An organization's inability to retain competent professionals often leads employees to view the organization negatively, resulting in job dissatisfaction, which drastically hinders productivity and quality, and discourages employee motivation (Igbinoba et al., 2022). Inam et al. (2021) suggested that a manager willing to accept the risk of fostering creativity to enhance an employee's performance could increase the employee's job satisfaction and motivation. Patton (2015) examined employees' attitudes toward motivational practices and noted significant differences in study participants based on their demographic characteristics and demeanor towards the actual motivational approach. Patton distinguished between motivation and individual motivation by noting

the beneficial motives that influence employees' interests and determined that leadership styles dictate the level of employee motivation. Expectations for job satisfaction can shape the employee's capacity to recognize factors that alter their subjective perception of work-life quality.

Job satisfaction is a manipulation of the cognitive state of the employee by the employer to generate success, whether experienced through employee retention, productivity, or both. A manager's ability to use their emotional intelligence to foster rapport and trust with employees enhances the number of satisfied workers (Ingsih et al., 2020). Managers with high emotional intelligence can understand an employee's emotional state while possessing the ability to gauge the employee's emotions, thereby enhancing job satisfaction, increasing productivity, reducing turnover rates, and improving employee commitment levels (Dogru, 2022; Ingsih et al., 2020).

The intentional application of a manager's emotional intelligence serves as a strategic approach to cultivate trust and foster loyalty within the workforce. The manipulation of the employee's cognitive state enables the manager to utilize their position to creatively influence or motivate the employee (Patton, 2015). Leaders who are attuned to the empathy and needs of their employees can directly influence motivation, job satisfaction and performance. The establishment of interpersonal relationships within an organization, through the efforts of a manager, can influence the organizational culture and commitment to the organization's success (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021). Therefore, managers who attempt to positively influence employees may increase the probability of them staying with the company. Proactive engagement from leadership, support, and

management recognition can directly reduce turnover rates and strengthen organizational sustainability.

Motivation to perform well is considered the driving force or influence related to satisfying individual needs. Bason (2020) argued that job satisfaction is vital to employee retention if the employee's interpretation of physical and psychological contentedness is met, resulting in an increase in motivation. Alefari et al. (2020) highlighted the effects of motivation and attendance on organizational productivity to enhance the competitiveness of the organization. Motivation is not only a drive for individual performance but also an essential lever for organizational competitiveness, employee engagement and effective managerial practices.

Employee retention is negatively impacted by low job satisfaction; thus, a manager's knowledge and ability to engage employees dictate recruitment and retention strategies. A primary reason for employee retention is a manager's knowledge and ability to engage with all employees. Employee retention extends beyond the provision of benefits or incentives and is fundamentally contingent on leadership's ability to apply key principles to accurately identify, address, and strategically respond to the motivational needs of employees, exerting a direct influence on organizational performance and stability.

Applying the Herzberg et al. (1959) two-factor theory to the healthcare industry demonstrates that employee relationships, organizational culture, and compensation are the hygiene factors most closely associated with healthcare, while overall work obligations and career growth opportunities are the motivational factors most closely tied to the industry (More & Padmanabhan, 2017). Within the healthcare industry, hygiene

factors are often of a high-quality employees report satisfaction with their wages, their coworkers, and their overall company environment (More & Padmanabhan, 2017).

Adequate compensation and positive workplace relationships serve as the baseline for employee satisfaction, preventing dissatisfaction that can contribute to elevated turnover rates.

Motivational factors, too, are often of high quality, and employees are satisfied with their day-to-day work, growth opportunities, and personal satisfaction (More & Padmanabhan, 2017). Intrinsic factors align with employee engagement and long-term commitment to their personal values and goals with the organization's vision. In healthcare, effective employee retention requires both enhancing satisfaction through motivators and addressing dissatisfaction through hygiene factors. A dual-focused strategy that balances environmental support with opportunities for growth is key to retaining qualified healthcare professionals.

### ***Healthcare Industry***

The healthcare industry is a complex, interconnected system that delivers vital services, with a focus on maintaining and enhancing human health across diverse settings. Healthcare workers, including physicians, nurses, allied health professionals, and administrative staff, are crucial to the functioning of this system, which has a direct impact on public safety, community well-being, and national health outcomes (American Hospital Association, 2022). Retaining employees in the healthcare industry requires a multifaceted approach that addresses structural, hygiene factors, and motivational factors to optimize patient care. Industry employees operate under constant pressure, often facing

long hours, emotional labor, high patient loads, and evolving regulatory demands. All of these factors influence satisfaction and retention.

As the healthcare industry plays a vital role in society, its effectiveness is directly linked to the well-being and stability of its workforce. According to Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory, employee retention can be better understood by examining two categories of workplace factors: hygiene factors and motivators (Herzberg, 1966). Lack of schedule flexibility and low staffing levels are contributing factors to burnout and dissatisfaction, which need to be addressed to prevent turnover (Kelly et al., 2021). Environmental stressors are required to be addressed to mitigate burnout and dissatisfaction, which implies that the motivators are necessary to enhance job satisfaction and sustain long-term engagement.

Motivators that improve job satisfaction and long-term engagement include meaningful patient interactions, opportunities for professional development, and autonomy in clinical decision-making (Biaison, 2020; Biesta, 2020). The global healthcare industry has significant implications for public health and overall system efficiency. Low employee morale and high turnover among clinical staff can disrupt continuity of care, increase medical errors, and reduce patient satisfaction (Gandhi et al., 2021). Employee retention in healthcare is multifaceted; employees' well-being and retention are not isolated human resource concerns but are central to the overall effectiveness of healthcare delivery. When staff morale is low or declines significantly, ripple effects occur throughout the organization that extend beyond sustainability.

The retention of qualified healthcare professionals is not only hindering the patient's safety and care, but it is also a workforce issue. A stable and competent

healthcare workforce is necessary, as shortages and turnover rates increase the quality of patient care is compromised. The demand for healthcare workers is growing at an expeditious rate due to population aging, chronic illness prevalence, and healthcare personnel shortages, escalating the need for effective employee retention strategies (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). The healthcare industry requires specific training, certifications, and clinical expertise that are time-consuming and expensive, particularly when it comes to recruitment and the onboarding process. The high demand for skilled healthcare workers, combined with the significant investment resources required for training and onboarding, emphasizes the importance of retaining experienced staff. Therefore, the high turnover rate can strain the organization's financial and operational resources.

Given the size and importance of the U.S. healthcare workforce, which accounts for over 14% of total U.S. employment, the implications of employee dissatisfaction are far-reaching (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Additionally, global competition for healthcare talent has intensified, with countries offering attractive incentives to recruit nurses, doctors, and specialists. To remain competitive, U.S. healthcare systems must prioritize employee satisfaction by addressing both hygiene and motivation factors. For example, increasing nurse-to-patient ratios, improving compensation, offering leadership development programs, and recognizing employee contributions can help reduce turnover and improve engagement (Biaison, 2020; Biesta, 2020).

It is important to address the hygiene and motivational factors not just to reduce turnover but to sustain patient care and organizational performance. By being proactive rather than reactive, investing improvements and employee development within an

organization the healthcare leader can improve workforce stability, employee engagement, and assist with the competitive advantage within the global healthcare talent market within the economy.

Within the healthcare field, the alignment between employee values and their roles, which Herzberg would connect to intrinsic motivators, plays a critical role in job satisfaction. Nurses and physicians who find purpose in their work and feel they are making a difference often report higher levels of fulfillment and are more likely to remain in their roles (De Vries, Boone, et al., 2023). Conversely, when clinical autonomy is stifled or recognition is absent, even highly skilled professionals may seek employment elsewhere. According to Herzberg et al.'s (1959) theory, these motivational gaps must be addressed to create a thriving and committed workforce.

Employees who are engaged and emotionally invested in patient care are more likely to remain with healthcare organizations. Research has shown that healthcare professionals who feel appreciated and empowered are not only more productive but also report higher levels of pride and commitment to their organizations (Biaison, 2020; Biesta, 2020). This engagement is closely tied to Herzberg's motivator factors and directly contributes to improved patient care, reduced burnout, and stronger organizational performance. Therefore, applying Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory to the healthcare sector provides a valuable framework for designing retention strategies that balance the prevention of dissatisfaction with the promotion of meaningful work.

## Summary

In Section 1, I introduce the problem of healthcare leaders lacking effective strategies to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. I established the foundation for the project by presenting the problem statement, research purpose, research question, methodology, and design, while situating the investigation within Herzberg's two-factor theory as the primary framework. Herzberg's theory serves as the theoretical lens for understanding the dual nature of workplace factors: hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction and motivational factors that drive satisfaction and retention. In this section, I also addressed ethical considerations for the research methodology and established the theoretical foundation that guides the subsequent investigation into how organizational factors and leadership practices can be optimized to improve both employee retention and overall organizational performance. The section integrates this framework with elements of transformational and inspirational leadership theories, demonstrating how leadership approaches influence employee engagement and organizational commitment. I synthesized current research on employee retention challenges, examining the relationship between job satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, and organizational performance outcomes. Identified gaps in existing knowledge regarding the specific mechanisms through which different leadership styles impact retention rates, particularly in contemporary workplace environments.

## Section 2: Primary and Secondary Industry Data Analysis

### **Nature of the Project**

In this study, I used a qualitative research method with a pragmatic inquiry design to identify and explore effective strategies that healthcare leaders used to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. Qualitative research was suitable for capturing participants' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a pragmatic inquiry design, researchers focus on the research problem and promote flexibility, allowing the researcher to employ the most effective strategies for answering the research question (Morgan, 2022). To support project reliability, I employed strategies such as triangulation of data sources, maintaining an audit trail, conducting member checking, and applying consistent coding procedures to ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of the findings.

### **Method and Design**

Qualitative research involves investigating a topic or phenomenon by focusing on participants' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and thought processes (Atkinson & Sampson, 2019). Researchers employ qualitative approaches to gain an understanding of how, what, and why things occur by exploring emerging subjects and themes from the collected data (Hall, 2020; Yin, 2018). I used the qualitative approach to provide key rationale and insight from multiple perspectives (Bhatta, 2018). Through open-ended inquiries and interactions, researchers collect data and information from participants (Pilcher & Cortazzi, 2023; Purandare & Patil, 2023). I used a qualitative method to better understand the social phenomenon of participants' actions that led to their retention strategies.

Pragmatic inquiry researchers focus on solving real-world problems using context-driven, flexible methodologies (Yin, 2018). As a philosophical foundation, pragmatism is utilized to help frame the research problem around practical considerations rather than loyalty to a specific method, making it ideal for generating practical outcomes (Biesta, 2020; Morgan, 2022). I collected and analyzed data on effective strategies that healthcare leaders used to retain employees to maintain productivity and enhance patient outcomes. In pragmatic inquiry, methods and data sources are selected based on what best answered the research question, rather than traditional boundaries (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

Pragmatic inquiry researchers emphasize consequences, context, and results, aligning with a qualitative study focused on understanding how and why leaders implemented retention strategies (Feilzer, 2010; Shannon-Baker, 2016). Pragmatism is well-suited for complex environments like healthcare, where no single factor explained the phenomenon. I selected pragmatic inquiry because it aligned with the research's practical nature, supported flexibility, and produced relevant findings that directly addressed, practical, effective strategies in healthcare.

### **Reliability**

To ensure data reliability in this qualitative project, I used member checking, triangulation, and a structured interview protocol to ensure overall trustworthiness. Open-ended questions in a standard interview protocol allowed flexibility while guaranteeing that all participants covered all key topics. This approach facilitated the collection of both verbal and nonverbal data in a systematic manner, thereby enhancing dependability and reducing the risk of researcher bias (Abdalla et al., 2018). After each interview, I gave

participants a one- to two-page summary analysis of their responses to review and validate. The member checking process not only affirmed the credibility of the findings but also allowed participants to clarify any misinterpretations (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Thorne, 2020).

I used secondary resources, including historical documents, and publicly available sources, to achieve data triangulation (see Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). To ensure openness and facilitate replication, I maintained thorough records, including email correspondence, personal notes, and interview recordings. I assessed my project's reliability through transparency, unbiased findings, and the ability to produce similar results using the same data collection technique (see Ahmed, 2024). By reviewing the responses, researchers and participants can promote dependability and reliability and detect materializing themes through member checking (Smith & McGannon, 2018). I conducted a follow-up member checking session with the participants to ensure my interpretations of the interview were correct, and no biases were introduced (see Appendix B). Participants were provided the opportunity to review a summary of the interview, verify the accuracy of their statements, offer clarifications or additional insights, and approve the finalized information. Combining the listed strategies ensures that the project findings are not only credible and consistent but also transferable and grounded in the reality of participants.

### ***Data Saturation***

Data saturation was vital for endorsing the validity and reliability of my project. Researchers achieve data saturation when no new information or concepts emerge during the data collection process (Conlon et al., 2020). My due diligence in gathering sufficient data to address the research problem was a prelude to achieving data saturation with the

appropriate sample size. The confirmation that all relevant themes for the project were generated and verified through the member checking process, with critical elements of the project equates to proper data saturation; if I had not achieved this, I would have conducted additional interviews.

### **Population, Sampling, and Participants**

The participants were nine healthcare leaders across diverse healthcare settings (i.e., hospitals, outpatient clinics, long-term care facilities, and private practices), who had successfully used effective strategies to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes where retention challenges persist.

Pragmatism as a research paradigm emphasizes practical solutions to real-world problems and is utilized to encourage methodological flexibility to answer research questions effectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In line with this approach, participants were selected based on their ability to contribute actionable insights into retention practices, drawing on their direct experiences and expertise.

For research, sample size is crucial. A qualitative project's sample size should be representative of the population, who have information or experience about the phenomenon (Campbell et al., 2020). Following Wendt (2020), I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants who are well-positioned to provide relevant knowledge and experience into healthcare retention. Recruitment invitations were distributed via professional networks, social media platforms, and meetings. I also used snowball sampling to expand the participant network and reach individuals who may not have been accessible through initial recruitment channels.

My initial participants were asked to recommend colleagues or other professionals with relevant experience in healthcare retention that met my project requirements, allowing access to individuals that may not have been reachable through my primary recruitment channels. Snowball sampling is a recruitment method in which initial participants refer to other eligible individuals, enabling researchers to grow the sample through social networks (Hair et al., 2020). In pragmatic inquiry, the utility and relevance of the participant's insights into the project objectives outweigh the need for generalizability (Morgan, 2022). Nine participants were a sufficient sample size to achieve the depth in data and theoretical saturation, particularly given the focused nature of the research topic and the expertise of those selected (see Parker et al., 2019; Wendt, 2020).

Data saturation is a significant aspect of qualitative research (Campbell et al., 2020). Data saturation is supported by triangulation, which involves the use of multiple sources for cross-verification (Dobbins et al., 2021). Member checking, commonly referred to as participant validation, can lead to data saturation and improve the reliability and dependability of the project findings (Peterson & Stewart, 2020). I achieved data saturation through the sample size of nine participants. Participant selection depends on adequate experience within the field and valuable information that they can contribute to the project (Swaminathan & Mulvihill, 2019). The participants in the project must have met eligibility criteria (a) be 18 years of age or older at the time of participation, (b) be employed or previously employed in a healthcare organization in a clinical, nonclinical, or support capacity, (c) possess at least 1 year of experience in a healthcare role, and (d)

have direct experience successfully using effective strategies to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcome.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with the interview protocol (see Appendix B). I employed the same criteria to identify participants using purposeful and snowball sampling, which enabled the development of a professional connection and a degree of confidence for the interview. I adapted to the post-COVID-19 societal norms by utilizing a combination of virtual platforms and in-person interviews, depending on the participant's preference and health and safety considerations. I assured that the participants adhered to the prearranged scheduling terms, which included, but were not limited to, a comfortable, convenient, and distraction-free setting for them. I conducted in-person interviews to promote direct engagement, while virtual technology enabled participants to contribute to the project from any geographical location.

### **Data Collection Activities**

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry project took place by conducting virtual, semistructured interviews with nine healthcare leaders. According to Davis et al. (2019), semistructured interviews are commonly used during qualitative studies and are a successful data collection approach. Researchers use semistructured interviews to grasp an understanding of the participants' experiences and take notes of nonverbal cues during the interview (Hicks et al., 2021). The use of a qualitative interview protocol improves a project's reliability by eliminating bias (Davis et al., 2019; Yin, 2018).

The interview protocol began with a reiteration of informed consent and then continued with a discussion of confidentiality, background, and the purpose of the project. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to streamline the interview

process so that the verbal and nonverbal data collected from each participant was consistent. Each participant was asked the same questions in order; therefore, the data collected was comparable. I built trust with the participants by getting to know them prior to introducing the interview questions. I used open-ended interview questions that started with context-setting questions prior to moving to more in-depth questions (see Appendix A).

Virtual, semistructured interviews with audio recording were the primary data collection approach used for this project. Based on the participants' schedule, we met for a minimum of 45 minutes on a virtual platform with minimal interruptions to conduct the interview. During the semistructured interview, I took notes and recorded the session to analyze the transcripts and conduct member checking following the interviews. The interviews were transcribed by a computer software system and a tape recorder to corroborate the translations and my interpretation. A summary of the interview for member checking was generated by using the interview responses. I employed member checking and triangulation to minimize bias, verify the accuracy of the data, and enhance the project's reliability and validity. I used publicly available documents such as employee job descriptions, training materials, and retention-related plans support and confirm the findings.

### **Data Organization and Analysis Techniques**

To maintain systematic tracking of data and emerging understandings throughout the research process, I maintained a chronological digital research log using Microsoft Excel, documenting all data collection activities, participant interactions, methodological decisions, and preliminary observations. Following Meyer and Willis (2019), I used a

detailed notebook as a reference tool to clarify questions that arose throughout interview sessions, capturing interview specifics and reflecting on participant responses. I maintained a structured reflective journal to record notes and document emerging insights, methodological reflections, and analytical decision-making processes.

I organized all data using a digital filing system with standardized naming conventions on a password-protected laptop computer and external hard drive. Interview transcripts were stored in secure, password-protected folders accessible only to me. I maintained a master catalog spreadsheet that tracked all data files, their locations, transcription status, and analysis progress. Physical copies of data were stored in a secure filing cabinet accessible only by key within my home office.

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) framework served as the primary analytical approach. According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018), thematic analysis enables researchers to identify data patterns, indicating the depth and complexity of information gathered from participants. Ratnam (2019) and Braun and Clarke (2021) noted that data collection techniques focus on the credibility of findings, making thematic analysis particularly appropriate for this research design. The analysis followed Ranjbarian et al.'s (2018) approach for categorizing and reporting themes by code within the data.

My data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six-phase process: (1) data familiarization through verbatim transcription and multiple readings, (2) initial code generation through line-by-line coding using NVivo software, (3) theme development by collating codes into potential themes, (4) theme review and refinement for internal homogeneity, (5) theme definition and naming with clear descriptions, and (6) report

production with compelling examples and literature integration. Following Watkins (2017), I utilized NVivo software for data management, coding, and theme development to assist with effective and efficient processes. As Phillips and Lu (2018) demonstrated, NVivo helped me identify relationships within the data, determine and assign themes and categories, visualize results, and create reports. I classified answers from interview sessions into primary themes and subthemes by scanning for similar or frequently occurring words, and then assigned codes based on critical aspects and patterns within the interview data.

My analysis maintained constant dialogue between emerging themes and existing literature through systematic comparison of findings with the literature review. I reviewed how themes related to the selected conceptual framework and related academic publications, integrating recent literature published since the proposal development. I identified recurring patterns, concepts, and themes within the literature, then compared the findings with the framework to identify alignments or gaps. Using these methods helped me discover information that may not have been previously available or identified within the literature or interviews. Following Yin's (2018) framework, I employed methodological triangulation, utilizing multiple data sources to enhance the project's reliability and validity.

According to Abdalla et al. (2018), triangulation has a significant impact on project reliability and credibility in qualitative research designs. This approach involved corroborating participants' statements during interviews through gathering organizational information from public sources, including retention plans and historical documents. I

referenced material retrieved from public sources to provide more substance and validate my interpretation of the data.

I continued to collect data until I achieved data saturation, where data acquired from relevant and sufficient resources no longer produced new themes or insights. I conducted and analyzed interviews and related documents to identify common themes that emerged from the data, aiming to achieve data saturation while maintaining integrity and reliability. I achieved saturation when no new themes emerged from subsequent interviews, sufficient depth of understanding for each theme was achieved, and adequate variation in participant experiences was captured. I conducted member checking with participants to ensure the accuracy of my interpretation of the data. Participants were also invited to review their interview transcripts for accuracy and provide feedback on preliminary findings. This process validated my interpretations and ensured an authentic representation of their experiences (Birt et al., 2016).

All transcripts underwent accuracy checking through selective audio review. I maintained an audit trail documenting all analytical decisions, including coding decisions and theme development processes. I conducted regular peer debriefing sessions with my research project mentor to discuss analytical decisions and explore alternative perspectives. I maintained ongoing reflexive practices through regular journaling about the influence and bias of researchers.

To protect my privacy, as well as that of respondents and businesses, I designed techniques for collecting, organizing, maintaining, and storing data in accordance with Walden University's research handbook criteria. I safeguarded participants' data and records in a secure filing cabinet within my home office, accessible only to me, on a

password protected laptop computer and an external hard drive. All physical copies of the data were stored in a filing cabinet available only by key. I will maintain the information collected from the organization or participants, whether hard copy documents or digital files, for 5 years to protect respondents' confidentiality in a secure location at my home. After 5 years, I will shred and delete the data. I rigorously followed the research and data analysis criteria set forth in Walden University's research handbook for this project.

### **Summary**

As explained in this section, I approached the process of recruiting participants, collecting, managing, and analyzing data with care and intention to ensure the project was both trustworthy and ethically sound. I kept a digital research log, wrote regularly in a reflective journal, and used secure systems to organize and protect participant information. My analysis followed a structured, step-by-step method using thematic analysis, which allowed me to deeply explore the patterns and insights shared by participants. NVivo software was a valuable tool in helping me sort through the data, organize codes, and identify themes more clearly. Throughout the process, I stayed closely connected to the literature and conceptual framework, which helped keep my findings grounded and relevant. I continued collecting data until no new themes emerged and invited participants to review their transcripts to make sure my interpretations accurately reflected their experiences. I also engaged in regular reflection, sought feedback from peers, and documented each step to reduce bias and strengthen the credibility of my work.

### Section 3: Data and Professional Practice

#### **Project Results**

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore effective strategies healthcare leaders use to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes. The research question for this project was: What effective strategies do healthcare leaders use to retain employees to maintain organizational productivity and enhance patient outcomes? To answer this question, I gathered and analyzed data from multiple collection instruments, employing a systematic coding process to identify patterns and meanings. Methodical triangulation was used to support a comprehensive understanding of the data, and saturation was achieved when no new concepts or themes emerged.

I developed a physical mind map to organize recurring concepts into key categories and subcategories, while also highlighting the themes that consistently emerged, as illustrated in Table 2. This subsection summarizes the themes identified through critical analysis of the collected data. The extensive analysis allowed for the alignment of each theme with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory, which served as the conceptual framework. Herzberg's model emphasizes that employee retention requires attention to both motivating factors and hygiene factors. Together, these elements create an environment that fosters employee satisfaction and reduces turnover, demonstrating that both individual motivators and organizational conditions are essential for positive retention outcomes. The resulting themes were: (a) intrinsic motivation enhancement and psychological need fulfillment, (b) relational trust building and organizational advocacy, (c) personalized professional development and trajectory

advancement, (d) inclusive organizational culture and decision-making dynamics, and (e) adaptive organizational structures and integrated employee well-being.

**Table 2**

*Emerging Themes, Subcategories, and Frequencies*

Emerging theme	Subcategories	Data	
		Coding Total	Percentage of total
Fulfilling Employees' Intrinsic Motivation	Autonomy and empowerment/Belonging and purpose actualization	88	30%
Enhancement and Psychological Needs			
Prioritizing Relational Trust Building and Organizational Advocacy	Leader accessibility and approachability/Advocacy within organizational systems	65	23%
Providing Personalized Professional Development	Individualized learning pathways/Career Trajectory empowerment	54	19%

and Trajectory advancement			
Fostering an inclusive Organizational Culture and Decision-Making Dynamics	Diversity recognition and valuation/Collaborative governance structures	50	17%
Implementing Adaptive Organizational Structures and Integrated Employee Well-being	Structural flexibility and generational responsiveness/Holistic wellness integration	31	11%
Total		288	100%

*Note.* Data derived from qualitative coding analysis of interview transcripts.

### **Theme 1: Fulfilling Employees' Intrinsic Motivation Enhancement and Psychological Needs**

Healthcare leaders implement retention and engagement strategies that fulfill employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and purpose, which are essential for long-term commitment. Evidence from my project's participants shows that all nine participants emphasized intrinsic motivation as central to retention, highlighting practices such as empowering employees through ownership of their roles, recognizing achievements, fostering a family-like atmosphere, and creating satisfaction at the end of

the day. For example, S1 emphasized a “stay in your lane” strategy, focusing on problems rather than people, S6 highlighted transformational leadership and idiosyncratic engagement to meet individual employee needs, S5 stressed leading by example and modeling personal excellence, and S7 emphasized “offering flexibility and wellness support.” These strategies align with self-determination theory, which holds that intrinsic motivation increases when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Providing a foundation for structured engagement practices that operationalize theory into actionable strategies across organizations.

Building on this foundation, individualistic engagement practices are reinforced through the Office of Personnel Management’s Maximizing Employee Engagement strategies (2023), which include fostering pride in work, providing meaningful recognition, and offering opportunities to contribute to mission-driven goals. Organizations operate these strategies through staff appreciation events, flexible scheduling, and performance-based incentives. At the same time, programs like Black Nurses Rock and the Outreach Program connect professional roles to community impact, particularly among nurses serving underserved populations. These practices demonstrate that meeting psychological needs enhances intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

Empowerment, recognition, mentorship, and professional growth are critical drivers of employee loyalty, reducing turnover among healthcare staff (Huo et al., 2025; Yuan et al., 2024). The convergence of participant experiences and federal engagement frameworks underscores the importance of designing roles that are meaningful, supportive, and aligned with individual and organizational goals. Therefore, healthcare

leaders who intentionally integrate autonomy, purpose, recognition, and community connection into their engagement strategies are more likely to sustain a committed, motivated, and stable workforce.

## **Theme 2: Prioritizing Relational Trust Building and Organizational Advocacy**

Healthcare leaders strengthen retention by prioritizing relational trust and organizational advocacy, demonstrating that trust, open communication, and support for employee needs are central to sustaining engagement. The findings from this project suggest that when employees perceive leaders as accessible, accountable, and committed to the well-being of their employees, they are more likely to remain invested in the organization's mission and maintain long-term engagement. Participants emphasized the importance of leadership advocacy and relational support in fostering retention. S4 highlighted securing step increases and meritorious promotions as forms of advocacy that encouraged loyalty, while S1 noted the significance of maintaining an open-door policy and accessibility. S5 described a "healthy mistrust" approach, balancing trust-building with accountability through group activities, and S9 emphasized one-on-one rounding and engagement surveys to understand and support staff needs. S3 also described a culture where clear expectations and team-oriented practices encouraged mutual respect and collective commitment. S2, S4, and S6 similarly noted that open-door approaches and responsive leadership strengthened employee engagement and loyalty. Collectively, these responses illustrate how advocacy, accessibility, and relational leadership contribute to psychological safety, trust, and retention.

Publicly available documents reinforce these findings. Office of Personnel Management's M-15-04 Memorandum emphasizes leadership accountability and

employee voice as foundational to trust, while UnlockTalent.gov and the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey institutionalize feedback mechanisms that mirror the open-door practices reported by participants. WellMed and Optum implement transparent communication and team-based care models to strengthen engagement, and UnitedHealthcare promotes supervisor responsiveness and employee empowerment through structured leadership frameworks. Programs such as Black Nurses Rock and the Outreach Program further build trust by engaging staff in planning, supporting peer-led initiatives, and celebrating incremental successes, reducing resistance and enhancing buy-in, as highlighted by S7.

Integrating participant experiences with federal and organizational policies underscores a consistent theme: retention is strengthened when leaders advocate for employees, foster psychological safety, and maintain transparency and responsiveness. These practices not only promote collaboration but also encourage employees to invest in the organization's mission. Research confirms that trust and engagement are associated with higher job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and lower turnover (Conroy et al., 2023; Paul, 2023). By embedding advocacy, accountability, and recognition into daily leadership practices, healthcare organizations create an environment where employees feel supported, respected, and motivated to remain engaged.

### **Theme 3: Providing Personalized Professional Development and Trajectory Advancement**

Healthcare leaders enhance retention by providing personalized professional development and clear career advancement pathways. Participants emphasized the

importance of tailoring development opportunities to individual goals and strengths. For example, S2 stated, “We work with each employee to map out their career path and provide training that aligns with their aspirations,” and S7 shared mentorship and professional development programs. Evidence from the project participants indicates that mentorship and skill-building opportunities encourage long-term commitment by fostering a sense of value, purpose, and mastery. Large healthcare organizations such as Optum and UnitedHealth Group reflect similar strategies, offering tools for self-assessment, mentorship, skill-building programs, and formal learning pathways that allow employees to map out their career progression. Research indicates that employees who perceive meaningful professional growth tend to report higher job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions (AbdElhay et al., 2025; Gulo & Ardiansyah, 2025; Kellerer & Süß, 2025).

The participants’ emphasis on individualized development aligned with broader organizational practices in large healthcare systems, noting that recognition for motivation is not all inclusive but requires alignment with personal and professional goals. Although healthcare organizations vary in size and structure, they all implement elements of Herzberg’s two-factor theory to enable a work environment that supports employee retention, highlighting the relevance of modernized workforce management strategies. Investing in individualized development and career planning, therefore, motivates employees, enhances engagement, and supports organizational retention.

#### **Theme 4: Fostering an inclusive Organizational Culture and Decision-Making Dynamics**

Healthcare leaders strengthen retention by fostering an inclusive culture and engaging employees in decision-making. Participants emphasized practices such as soliciting staff input, promoting diverse perspectives, and ensuring equitable participation. For example, S3 stated, “We actively involve our team in shaping policies that affect their daily work; it makes them feel heard and respected.” Participants also noted that different generations are motivated by different factors, with S2 and S6 highlighting how these differences shape organizational culture and structure. Evidence indicates that inclusive decision-making enhances psychological safety, trust, and engagement, which are associated with higher job satisfaction and lower turnover (Kellerer & Süß, 2025; Mitterer & Mitterer, 2023; Siyal, 2023). By creating an environment where all voices are valued, healthcare leaders cultivate a sense of belonging and shared ownership, reinforcing employee loyalty and organizational commitment.

The findings reflect a powerful convergence between federal policy, organizational practice, and lived experience. Executive Order 14035 and the Office of Personnel Management’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility initiatives’ strategic plans do more than outline compliance; they set the tone for a cultural shift where inclusion becomes a strategic imperative. Organizations like WellMed, Optum, and UnitedHealthcare operationalize these values through leadership pipelines and collaborative decision making, while grassroots efforts from Black Nurses Rock and the Outreach Program demonstrate how community-driven inclusion can reshape health

systems from the inside out. Equally compelling is the alignment between OPM's wellness frameworks and the adaptive strategies described by participants. From flexible scheduling models to stress-sensitive leadership, organizations are reimagining how structure can serve well-being rather than constrain it.

Together, these insights affirm that inclusive culture and adaptive well-being are not isolated initiatives but interdependent pillars of sustainable engagement. The organizations and individuals represented here are not merely responding to policy they are embodying it, translating strategic frameworks into everyday practice. This synergy between public guidance and private innovation offers a replicable blueprint for leadership committed to equity, resilience, and retention.

### **Theme 5: Implementing Adaptive Organizational Structures and Integrated Employee Well-being**

Healthcare leaders enhance retention by implementing adaptive organizational structures and integrated well-being initiatives. Evidence from this project indicates that all nine participants emphasized flexible scheduling, cross-training, and holistic wellness programs tailored to meet the diverse needs of employees. For example, S5 stated, "We adjust workflows and provide resources so employees can maintain work-life balance and feel supported in all aspects of their work." Participants collectively highlighted that such initiatives help staff manage responsibilities, reduce stress, and feel supported across professional and personal domains. The adaptive structures and well-being initiatives function as hygiene factors in Herzberg's two factor theory, noting the essence of workplace conditions that mitigate dissatisfaction and turnover rates.

Simultaneously, personalized professional growth, mentorship and skill-building opportunities outlined by the participants act as motivators to generate satisfaction, employee engagement and long-term commitment. Research confirms that adaptive structures paired with well-being programs decrease burnout, improve engagement, and enhance retention in healthcare settings (Arslan et al., 2025; Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). By proactively adapting structures and integrating well-being initiatives, healthcare leaders not only reduce dissatisfaction and foster resilience, but modernize Herzberg's conceptual framework to align with generational shifts in values, engagement preferences and career expectations.

When organizations invest in personalized growth, they do more than shape careers; they cultivate commitment. From the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's structured Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and Executive Development Plans (EDPs) to WellMed's mentorship initiatives and UnitedHealthcare's internal mobility pipelines, the message is clear: tailored development is not a perk, it is a retention strategy. This convergence of federal policy, organizational practice, and lived experience underscores that professional development is most effective when it is personalized.

### **Data and Professional Practice**

The findings of my research project largely confirm existing knowledge on the importance of intrinsic motivation, leadership engagement, and psychological safety as critical factors influencing employee retention in the healthcare industry. Participants consistently emphasized the significance of autonomy, purpose, recognition, and relational trust in shaping retention outcomes. These findings aligned with Herzberg's et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory, which highlighted the need to balance hygiene factors and

motivators to maintain workforce stability. The findings also paralleled McAnally and Hagger (2024), who demonstrated that satisfying employees' psychological needs significantly enhanced engagement and reduced turnover.

Hui and Choi (2024) similarly concluded that transformational leadership and psychological safety improved job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Transformational leadership enhances these factors by creating a safe environment for innovation, which significantly improves job satisfaction and organizational commitment, ultimately leading to reduced turnover. My project results reinforced the notion that while financial compensation and workplace policies are necessary to prevent dissatisfaction, they do not guarantee retention. Instead, the consistent presence of motivators such as purpose-driven work, empowerment, and meaningful recognition created conditions in which employees chose to remain. Additionally, relational trust between leaders and staff was found to be a decisive factor, validating prior scholarship that identifies accessibility, transparency, and advocacy as foundational to retention. Confirming existing research strengthened the evidence base for business practitioners, demonstrating that retention strategies rooted in motivation and trust are not only theoretically sound but also highly effective in practice.

### **Extension of Existing Knowledge**

The findings of my research project extended existing literature by revealing the transformative impact of personalized professional development, structural adaptability, and inclusive decision-making on employee retention. Participants described individualized career pathways, mentorship initiatives, and flexible scheduling as strategies that significantly enhanced engagement and loyalty. These observations were

built on the work of Gulo and Ardiansyah (2025), who found that professional growth opportunities increased organizational commitment, and Tejano (2024), who identified structural adaptability as essential for workforce well-being. The findings illustrate that structured adaptability and workforce well-being are not standalone retention mechanisms but enablers for professional development and decision-making.

The flexibility in the organization structure allows employees to freely pursue career progression opportunities while actively contributing to organizational success. Moreover, this project highlighted the value of shared governance and inclusion, an emerging focus in retention research, echoing Siyal (2023) and Mitterer and Mitterer (2023), who connected inclusive leadership to heightened trust and engagement. Herzberg's two-factor theory implies that shared governance and inclusion align with motivational factors that enhancing intrinsic satisfaction through empowering employees, reaffirming their sense of purpose, and strengthening commitment surpassing the generic conditions addressed by hygiene factors. By emphasizing personalization and flexibility, the findings expanded traditional understandings of retention beyond static engagement models.

The research findings demonstrated that employees increasingly value workplaces that accommodate individual goals, generational preferences, and evolving work-life priorities. Furthermore, shared decision-making not only increased employees' sense of belonging but also fostered a culture of ownership and accountability, resulting in higher retention rates. These extensions provided business practitioners with actionable strategies that go beyond conventional retention approaches, offering a nuanced framework for building adaptive, inclusive, and employee-centered organizations.

### **Disconfirmation of Existing Knowledge**

The results of my pragmatic inquiry project challenge certain assumptions in literature, particularly the overemphasis on compensation and workload as primary drivers of retention. Despite acknowledging salary and workload management as essential hygiene factors consistent with Herzberg's two-factor theory, participants consistently emphasized that without intrinsic motivation, trust, and a sense of purpose, employees might still disengage or leave. My findings contrast with more traditional retention research of Suryathi et al. (2023), who often identified compensation and workload reduction as the most effective strategies for retention. Herzberg et al. (1959) introduced another intriguing perspective, emphasizing the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic factors, and identified intrinsic motivators as vital drivers of long-term engagement and employee retention.

Additionally, the prominence of organizational advocacy, such as policy reform, career advancement, and employee voice, emerged as a more significant determinant of retention than previously documented. These findings suggested that business practitioners should have viewed compensation and workload improvements as foundational, not final, components of a retention strategy. Sustainable retention depended on deeper organizational commitments, including leadership advocacy, transparent communication, and meaningful employee involvement in organizational change. This reorientation challenged practitioners to rethink retention as a multidimensional process rather than a transactional one. By highlighting these discrepancies, the project encouraged leaders to reassess their assumptions about what

truly drives workforce loyalty and to integrate more holistic, advocacy-based approaches into their retention planning.

### **Implications for Business Practitioners**

Collectively, the pragmatic inquiry findings provide a comprehensive roadmap for business practitioners seeking to strengthen workforce stability and organizational performance. Supporting evidence from studies revealed that the integration of motivation, trust, personalization, inclusion, and advocacy into organizational practices significantly reduces turnover and enhances engagement (Shinde, 2025a; Swen et al., 2025). Swen et al. suggested that organizations that practice trust-building and advocacy programs experience a decrease in turnover rates. Fostering trust within an organization not only alleviates some of the employee concerns regarding job security and fairness but also enhances the culture and climate of the organization. The alignment between these strategies and organizational initiatives, such as individual development plans and equity, inclusion, and accessibility frameworks, further underscores their applicability and effectiveness in real-world contexts (Zhao & Ren, 2025).

By prioritizing employee-centered leadership, designing tailored career pathways, embedding shared governance, and institutionalizing advocacy practices, business leaders were able to foster resilient and loyal workforces. Moreover, organizations that actively supported holistic well-being and structural flexibility were better positioned to attract and retain top talent amid shifting workforce demographics and competitive pressures. These implications not only validated the project's contribution to the field of business practice but also equipped healthcare leaders with evidence-based strategies that could be adapted to diverse organizational contexts and evolving workforce expectations.

## **Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice**

The findings of my project confirm a critical truth for healthcare and organizational leaders: employees are not merely transactional assets, but rather strategic drivers of innovation, resilience, and growth. When leaders invest in human-centered retention strategies, the returns are measurable, including higher productivity, stronger patient outcomes, and reduced turnover costs (Colosi, 2025). Viewed through a human-centered lens, employees embody lived experience, institutional knowledge, and adaptive capacity factors that shape not only operational outcomes but also organizational identity and long-term sustainability.

Retention is not simply a metric to be optimized, but a reflection of how deeply leadership and culture value and honor human experience at work. I identified five interrelated themes that, when integrated, form a sustainable retention ecosystem:

1. fulfill employees' intrinsic motivation enhancement and psychological needs,
2. prioritizing relational trust building and organizational advocacy,
3. providing personalized professional development and trajectory advancement,
4. inclusive organizational culture and decision-making dynamics, and
5. implementing adaptive organizational structures and integrated employee well-being.

The themes can provide leaders with actionable strategies to stabilize workforce engagement and strengthen organizational performance. The findings further reinforce that leadership and culture are not peripheral to retention; they are their foundation. Leaders who engage authentically, communicate transparently, and invest in continuous development create environments where individuals can thrive, while cultures that

prioritize inclusion, recognition, and growth signal that employees' presence, not just their performance, matters.

### **Evidence-based Recommendations for Practice**

Several recommendations emerge for business and healthcare leaders seeking to improve retention outcomes and practices. Each recommendation is grounded in specific project findings and supported by current research on organizational effectiveness, demonstrating that the strategies outlined in this project are both practical and evidence-based. First, authentic and transparent leadership revealed that employees prioritize leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence, provide clear communication, and create environments where concerns can be voiced without fear of retribution. Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that train managers in coaching skills, active listening, and building trust through vulnerability.

Psychological safety in leadership development through training in emotional intelligence and coaching skills fosters trust and autonomy, conditions that have been shown to significantly enhance retention (De Smet et al., 2021; Hashmi et al., 2024; Jindal et al., 2024). Implementation should include 360-degree feedback mechanisms, regular leadership assessments, and accountability structures that reward human-centered leadership behaviors. Organizations can measure success through employee engagement surveys, exit interview data, and leadership effectiveness scores tied to retention metrics.

Second, operationalizing inclusion and equity by involving employees in decision-making and recognizing diverse contributions fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, thereby strengthening organizational commitment (Liu et al., 2024; Ogu, 2024). Leaders should involve staff in decision-making processes related to workflow

design, policy development, strategic planning, and succession planning. Practical steps include establishing cross-functional committees or training, implementing suggestion systems with transparent follow-up, and creating recognition programs that celebrate diverse contributions beyond traditional performance metrics. Barriers may include hierarchical resistance and time constraints, which can be mitigated through phased implementation and executive sponsorship.

Third, designing personalized development plans, including structured mentorship and individualized growth opportunities, addresses intrinsic motivators and enhances engagement. At the same time, adapting organizational structures to support well-being through flexible work models and generationally responsive strategies can mitigate burnout and improve retention outcomes (Goens & Giannotti, 2024; Jung & Kim, 2024). Employees are more likely to remain when they perceive clear pathways for growth aligned with their individual aspirations. Leaders should move beyond one-size-fits-all training. Leaders should conduct annual development conversations, allocate budgets for continuing education, and track participation rates alongside career progression outcomes. Success can be measured through internal promotion rates, skill acquisition metrics, and longitudinal retention data comparing program participants to nonparticipants.

Fourth, the rigid work models and generationally unresponsive strategies contribute to burnout and attrition, particularly among younger and mid-career professionals. Leaders should implement flexible work arrangements, redesign schedules to prevent chronic overtime, and tailor engagement strategies to the distinct needs of different generational cohorts. Generationally responsive leadership has been shown to

improve both well-being and retention by acknowledging diverse values and work preferences (Goens & Giannotti, 2024; Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). Implementation challenges include operational coverage concerns and equity perceptions, which require clear policy frameworks and transparent communication about eligibility criteria. Metrics should include burnout assessments, absenteeism rates, and comparisons of generational cohort retention.

Finally, institutionalizing advocacy mechanisms that promote employee voice, implement feedback loops, and ensure transparent promotion pathways cultivates trust and reduces turnover intentions. Organizations should establish formal voice mechanisms such as town hall forums with guaranteed follow-up and transparent career advancement criteria. Leaders should publish action plans in response to survey results, conduct stay interviews to proactively understand retention factors and ensure that promotion processes are merit-based and clearly communicated. Success indicators include participation rates in voice mechanisms, response times to employee concerns, and changes in trust scores over time.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

These findings contribute to the scholarly discourse on human capital theory, organizational psychology, and healthcare leadership by reaffirming Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory as a viable and enduring framework for understanding retention in contemporary healthcare settings (Hynes et al., 2025; Shinde, 2025b). They extend traditional interpretations by demonstrating the interdependence of intrinsic motivators and hygiene factors, which operate synergistically rather than independently (Shinde, 2025b). When hygiene factors are deficient, even strong motivators fail to sustain

retention; conversely, when motivators are absent, adequate hygiene factors prevent dissatisfaction but do not inspire a sense of commitment. This interaction effect necessitates theoretical refinement and further inquiry into the complex, systemic relationships between motivators and hygiene factors across diverse healthcare contexts (Hynes et al., 2025). Thus, a more nuanced, context-aware approach is necessary to fully understand and apply motivational strategies in diverse healthcare settings, moving beyond the original theory's strict dichotomies.

### **Methodological and Empirical Contribution**

I employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach that privileged employee voice and lived experience, offering methodological insights for future workforce research. By centering narrative data and thematic analysis, the project captured nuanced, context-specific factors that quantitative models often overlook (Abou Hashish & Alnajjar, 2025; Jackson, 2025). The evidence identified that quantitative approaches value the broader trends of employee retention in healthcare but fail to account for the complexities that exist within the relational and cultural dimensions of employee experiences. Historically, relying on predictive analytics and survey data was monumental in the development of retention strategies for organizations. For example, focus groups or interviews within a qualitative study have the potential to reveal an in-depth understanding of workplace dynamics and employee motivational factors that could be obscured by aggregated survey data.

Analyzing the sources disclosed reasons for rapid employee turnover, such as interpersonal conflict or organizational culture, that have implications for the retention strategies. Future researchers can build on this methodology by incorporating mixed

methods designs that pair qualitative depth with longitudinal quantitative tracking, enabling both rich description and causal inference (Abou Hashish & Alnajjar, 2025; Jackson, 2025). Effective intervention is the priority, but the approach can also be used to address the gaps in practical implications for workforce management and social change.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings of my project revealed that employee retention in healthcare is not merely an operational concern but a strategic lever for quality, compassion, and sustainability in care delivery, benefiting patients, supporting families' needs, and strengthening communities. Throughout the research, participants consistently emphasized that intrinsic motivation, relational trust, psychological safety, and inclusive decision-making were decisive factors influencing employee retention outcomes (see Swen et al., 2025). This aligned with prior scholarly findings, which emphasized the importance of a positive workplace and its impact on employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

The findings were clear. When healthcare organizations view employees as strategic partners rather than transactional assets or replaceable resources, everyone benefits. Innovation flourishes, patients receive consistent care, and the entire organization becomes more stable. By creating environments built on trust, advocacy, and personalized professional development, healthcare leaders develop teams that possess both emotional resilience and adaptive excellence, qualities essential in a sector defined by constant change and human vulnerability. The human-centered or people-first approach to retention strengthens healthcare institutions internally, while extending the

impact of employees outward, positioning them as pillars in the community and modeling equity and empathy for others to emulate.

### **Tangible Outcomes for Healthcare Institutions and Communities**

Healthcare organizations that embrace human-centered retention strategies generate measurable benefits that extend to patients, staff, and the broader community. The project revealed that when leaders prioritize mentorship, flexible scheduling, and transparent communications, turnover declines, engagement rises, and patient satisfaction improves. The findings align with Colosi (2025) and Goens and Giannotti (2024), who demonstrated that psychologically safe environments and generationally responsive leadership reduce employee burnout and improve quality of care.

What emerges is a positive feedback loop; improvements create a cycle of mutual reinforcement: empowered caregivers deliver more compassionate care. When patients experience better outcomes, it reinforces professional purpose and institutional trust. As healthcare leaders model inclusion, advocacy, and transparency, these same principles extend beyond the organization, elevating community confidence and contributing to public health equity (Bhatt et al., 2025; Michener et al., 2025). Reinforcing the relationships between leadership behavior, caregiver empowerment, and patient outcomes demonstrates that organizational culture and leadership practices are not independent factors, but rather integral drivers of organizational transformation. By intentionally cultivating the listed values, global leaders can sustain long-term patient engagement, reduce employee turnover, and strengthen both internal morale and external credibility.

### **Application Across Other Industries**

While healthcare provided the focal point for this project, the evidence-based framework that emerged applies far beyond hospital walls and the healthcare industry. Any industry seeking to align human capital strategy with long-term sustainability. The integration of intrinsic motivation, inclusion, and relational trust has been shown to enhance retention and engagement in fields as diverse as education, technology, public administration, and manufacturing.

In education, psychological safety fosters collaboration and teacher retention; in technology, autonomy and trust inspire creativity and drive innovation; and in the public sector, transparent communication promotes civic accountability. The model derived from this project, anchored in motivation, trust, personalization, inclusion, and advocacy, provided a replicable blueprint for leaders ready to move beyond transactional retention practices towards culture-driven systems (Liu et al., 2025). Studies revealed that the drivers indicated prioritizing human-centered leadership practices will reap rewards far beyond the organizational sustainability efforts. Where people feel they truly belong and their work has purpose. The fact that this model works across sectors validates the project's theoretical foundation and demonstrates the broader societal relevance and adaptability, setting the stage for further scholarly exploration.

### **Contribution to Academic Research**

This project makes a meaningful contribution to our scholarly understanding of workforce retention, leadership engagement, and organizational psychology, offering both theoretical refinement and methodological innovation. Grounded in Herzberg's two-factor theory, the findings revealed that motivators and hygiene factors do not operate in

isolation but interdependently when embedded within a culture of trust and inclusivity. The pragmatic inquiry captured the lived experiences of employees, often overlooked in quantitative models, unveiling the emotional and relational dynamics that shape retention.

The research will advance human capital theory by reframing retention not as a social and cultural construct, but as a purely economic one, emphasizing the importance of leadership authenticity and advocacy as mediators of commitment. The interdependence of motivators and hygiene factors within an inclusive culture highlight how relational and emotional dynamics directly influence employee engagement and long-term retention outcomes. By revealing the connection between theory and practice, the project lays the groundwork for future inquiries that deepen understanding of the relationship between leadership behavior, organizational culture, and social outcomes, offering actionable insights for both scholars and practitioners.

### **Creating Social Change**

The implications of this project extend beyond organizational performance to the realm of genuine societal transformation, promoting equitable, inclusive, and resilient work environments. In healthcare, stable and motivated workforces directly improve access to care, continuity, and community well-being. Similarly, when other industries adopt human-centered practices, they contribute to broader social goals, reducing economic instability, promoting mental health, and advancing workforce equity (Liu et al., 2025). Emerging research enhances the scholarly arena by highlighting the impacts of organizational cultures, inclusion, and psychological safety on external factors, shaping the well-being of employees and stability from a societal perspective. This connection between workplace culture and social health revealed that retention strategies grounded

in intrinsic motivation and advocacy are not only effective for organizations but are also vital mechanisms of social change.

As leaders institutionalize shared governance, transparency, and psychological safety, they build ecosystems that reinforce dignity, trust, and empowerment within and beyond organizational boundaries. This redefinition of retention as a social responsibility bridges the gap between academic research and real-world impact, creating pathways for future leaders and scholars to co-construct more compassionate, sustainable, and human-centered systems of work. The implications presented in this project demonstrate that effective retention practices extend well beyond organizational borders; they represent a strategic investment in people, communities, and the social fabric of work itself.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Global healthcare continues to face a critical challenge in retaining skilled professionals amid workforce shortages, demographic shifts, and disparities in organizational resources. Retention challenges have intensified due to evolving workplace expectations, generational differences, and limited institutional capacity to provide supportive environments. Organizational factors, including leadership support, workload balance, and professional development opportunities, play a pivotal role in influencing recruitment and retention outcomes across healthcare organizations (Conroy et al., 2023). These concerns are particularly pronounced among younger generations, such as Generation Z, who report heightened dissatisfaction and stress in healthcare settings that often lack mentorship, psychological safety, and advancement pathways. Fostering trust, recognition, and professional growth opportunities has a stronger

influence on long-term engagement and retention than compensation alone (AbdElhay et al., 2025).

Moreover, intrinsic motivators such as belonging, mentorship, and transparent leadership communication are associated with improved commitment and reduced turnover (Goens & Giannotti, 2024). The meaningful connections that employees establish with leaders dictate the likelihood of them internalizing organizational values, investing in active leadership roles, and remaining within the organization. Retention is not heavily dependent on intrinsic or extrinsic factors but the relational and psychological environmental conditions that generate loyalty. These factors address core psychological needs and foster a deeper, more enduring connection between employees and their organization. However, existing studies remain limited in terms of geographic scope, participant diversity, and methodological consistency, which constrains the generalizability of their findings. As Marshall and Rossman (2025) emphasized, acknowledging and addressing such methodological limitations is crucial for ensuring credibility and applicability in qualitative research.

To strengthen future research and practice, future researchers should expand their geographic and organizational representation by including participants from a wider range of healthcare systems, institutional sizes, and regions, thereby reducing bias and enhancing the transferability of findings. Increasing sample size and participant diversity through stratified sampling methods can help capture broader workforce experiences and improve external validity (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2018). The identification of appropriate subgroups of a population is proportionally represented; stratified sampling can decrease the bias within the sampling and provide the researcher with the ability to

deduce a conclusion that can accurately reflect the entire workforce instead of a limited subset (Trochim & Donnelly, 2021).

Methodological innovation is also essential; integrating structured mixed-method or hybrid designs that combine virtual and in-person approaches can preserve the richness of qualitative data while promoting accessibility and inclusivity. Additionally, longitudinal designs that examine evolving engagement, leadership, and retention patterns over time can provide deeper insight into sustainable workforce strategies. Addressing these limitations through methodological refinement and inclusive sampling will strengthen the practical implications of healthcare workforce research, yielding actionable insights that inform leadership development, workforce stability, and the equitable delivery of high-quality care across global healthcare systems.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this research project demonstrate that effective employee retention strategies in healthcare are multidimensional, evidence-informed, and deeply rooted in human-centered leadership. Rather than existing as isolated initiatives, successful practices function as integrated systems that collectively meet employees' psychological, professional, and social needs. By addressing intrinsic motivation, fostering trust, offering personalized development opportunities, healthcare leaders create environments where employees feel valued, empowered, and connected to their organization's mission and purpose.

These approaches surpass traditional retention efforts focused solely on compensation or benefits. Instead, they represent a strategic cultural transformation that shifts the organizational focus from transactional employment relationships to purpose-

driven engagement. The alignment between federal policy and organizational practices underscores the potential of policy frameworks to shape inclusive, equitable, and sustainable workplaces. Similarly, the integration of individualized development plans, mentorship models, and leadership pipelines demonstrates how investment in employee growth serves as a powerful retention mechanism.

Moreover, this project highlights that retention is not merely an operational goal, but a strategic imperative directly linked to quality of care, workforce stability, and long-term organizational resilience. By embedding these principles into leadership models and everyday operations, healthcare organizations position themselves to navigate workforce shortages, demographic changes, and evolve more effectively in response to changing healthcare demands. Maintaining focus on transformational leadership fosters a culture of engagement and empowerment that enhances both employee satisfaction and patient outcomes.

Ultimately, the alignment of policy, practice, and lived experience uncovered in this project offers a replicable and scalable blueprint for healthcare leaders seeking to strengthen workforce engagement and sustainability. When organizations intentionally design systems that allow employees to thrive, they do more than retain talent; they cultivate enduring cultures of excellence, innovation, and impact that elevate both organizational performance and patient outcomes. The integrated approach not only redefines leadership effectiveness but also establishes a sustainable framework for advancing equity, resilience, and holistic well-being across healthcare systems.

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### Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. From your experience and expertise, what successful strategy have you implemented that was successful in retaining employees?
2. How have these strategies positively influenced the overall work environment and organization outcomes?
3. What challenges did you experience while implementing employee retention strategies?
4. How did you overcome the challenges of implementing employee retention strategies?
5. In your experience and expertise, what key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics did you monitor to assess the effectiveness of retention strategies in healthcare?
6. What more would you like to share about employee retention strategies?

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Action	Script
<p>Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee.</p>	<p>"Hello, thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. I appreciate the criticality you attach to the expected findings, and I hope to add to the literature that develops strategies to retain employees in the healthcare industry. I have been working on a degree for a Doctor of Business Administration for the past few years. In this project, I am exploring retention strategies healthcare leaders use to retain employees to maintain organization performance.</p> <p>"A few weeks ago, you agreed to sign an informed consent form. Do you verbally consent? Do you have any questions for me or any matter that requires my attention? This interview is confidential, and your identity and that of your organization shall remain anonymous and represented by codes."</p> <p>"I will collect data using semistructured interview questions. The idea is to allow you to explain any strategies, events, and memories that answer the interview questions. During your narration, I may prompt you for further explanation and details."</p> <p>"I will need to record your responses so that I do not miss anything."</p> <p>"Note that you may rescind your decision to participate in the research anytime."</p>
<p>Ask Interview Questions to get in-depth responses. Listen for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase as needed.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "From your experience and expertise, what successful strategy have you implemented that was successful in retaining employees?"</li> <li>2. "How have these strategies positively influenced the overall work environment and organization outcomes?"</li> <li>3. "What challenges did you experience while implementing employee retention strategies?"</li> <li>4. "How did you overcome the challenges of implementing employee retention strategies?"</li> </ol>

Action	Script
	<p>5. "In your experience and expertise, what key performance indicators (KPIs) or metrics did you monitor to assess the effectiveness of retention strategies in healthcare?"</p> <p>6. "What more would you like to share about employee retention strategies?"</p> <p>"In a few days, I will need your assistance in authenticating my understanding of your responses to the interview questions as part of the research process. You may adjust the script or add to your initial responses if needed. I will send the transcript by email, and we can discuss it by phone if you agree."</p>
Schedule transcript review either by phone or email.	"Thank you for agreeing to meet me today to finalize what I heard from you during the interview and the meaning I have provided for each response."
Introduce a member checking review and set the stage.	"Your contribution to this doctoral research has been most impressive, and I thank you very much for helping me to achieve the doctoral degree. I hope you will find the research findings beneficial to your organization and professional development."
Wrap up the interview by thanking participants.	