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## HR Strategies Used to Reduce Employee Turnover and Employee Replacement Costs

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Karlita McClinton

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2026

Abstract

HR Strategies Used to Reduce Employee Turnover and Employee Replacement Costs

by

Karlita McClinton

MS, Central Michigan University, 2008

BS, Michigan State University, 2003

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2026

## Abstract

Ineffective employee well-being strategies can contribute to elevated levels of voluntary turnover, resulting in increased employee replacement costs, lost organizational knowledge, and operational disruption. Human resource (HR) leaders who do not successfully develop employee well-being strategies may find their organization facing operational disruptions as a result. Grounded in social sustainability and the European corporate sustainability frameworks, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to identify and explore effective employee well-being strategies used by HR leaders to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs. The participants were 10 HR leaders who had implemented effective employee well-being strategies. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and secondary data from publicly available sources. Using thematic analysis, six themes were identified: (a) work–life flexibility and sustainable work design, (b) well-being and psychological safety, (c) change enablement and communication, (d) talent growth and total rewards, (e) people-centered and inclusive leadership, and (f) data-driven feedback. A key recommendation is for HR leaders to position themselves as change enablers who align employee well-being initiatives with long-term organizational performance and social sustainability outcomes. The implications for positive social change include the potential for HR leaders to reinforce employee dignity, long-term employability, and economic security. The implications may also include career mobility, financial well-being, and inclusive economic participation, thereby advancing the economic prosperity of the inhabitants and the community.

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## Dedication

This doctoral project is first dedicated to God, who is the head of my life. I also dedicate this work to my parents, whose guidance, influence, and encouragement helped shape the person I have become. To my husband, I dedicate this achievement in gratitude for your unwavering love and support throughout this journey. To my children, thank you for your constant motivation and love.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
Section 1: Project Foundation.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	1
Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose .....	1
Project Research Question .....	3
Assumptions and Limitations .....	3
Assumptions.....	3
Limitations .....	3
Business Project Ethics.....	4
Evidence-Based Integrative Review .....	5
Application to the Applied Business Problem .....	7
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Business Problem Scholarship Evidence .....	13
Business Topic Scholarship .....	18
Summary .....	28
Section 2: Primary and Secondary Industry Data Analysis .....	30
Nature of the Project .....	30
Method and Design.....	30
Reliability.....	31
Population, Sampling, and Participants .....	31
Data Collection Activities.....	33

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques .....	36
Summary .....	39
Section 3: Data and Professional Practice .....	40
Project Results .....	40
Theme 1: Work–Life Flexibility and Sustainable Work Design .....	43
Theme 2: Well-Being and Psychological Safety .....	46
Theme 3: Change Enablement and Communication .....	50
Theme 4: Talent Growth and Total Rewards.....	54
Theme 5: People-Centered and Inclusive Leadership .....	58
Theme 6: Data-Driven Feedback .....	64
Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice .....	66
Advancing Work–Life Flexibility Through Sustainable Work Design .....	66
Fostering Psychological Safety as a Business Strategy .....	67
Driving Change Management and Buy-In.....	68
Aligning Talent Growth and Total Rewards.....	69
Advancing People-Centered and Inclusive Leadership .....	70
Leveraging Data-Driven Feedback.....	71
Implications for Social Change.....	71
Supporting Sustainable Work Design.....	72
Enhancing Leadership Behavior and Communication .....	72
Leveraging Employee Feedback and Talent Investment .....	73
Recommendations for Future Study .....	73

Conclusion .....	75
References.....	76
Appendix: Interview Protocol.....	98

List of Tables

Table 1. Major Interview Themes..... 42

## Section 1: Project Foundation

### **Background of the Problem**

Employee well-being represents a central component of social sustainability, as it directly influences employee engagement, retention, and productivity. Within organizations, ineffective or underdeveloped employee well-being strategies contribute to elevated levels of voluntary turnover, resulting in increased employee replacement costs, lost organizational knowledge, and operational disruption (Fosu, 2025). Despite growing recognition of the importance of employee well-being, some human resources (HR) leaders continue to struggle with identifying, implementing, and sustaining evidence-based well-being strategies that effectively mitigate turnover and associated costs.

How organizations approach employee well-being has significant implications for turnover, costs, and organizational resilience. Empirical research has indicated that organizations that prioritize employee well-being through structured, intentional strategies experience lower turnover rates and improved organizational outcomes (Prasad et al., 2025). Conversely, treating employee well-being as a peripheral or reactive concern increases turnover and replacement costs, weakening organizational resilience and sustainability.

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

The specific business problem was that some HR leaders lack effective employee well-being strategies to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research project was to

identify and explore effective employee well-being strategies used by some HR leaders to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs.

The project's specific population group was HR leaders. The sampling methods were purposive and snowball sampling. The sample comprised 10 HR leaders with at least 3 years of experience as HR professionals. I gained access to the participants through social media, LinkedIn, and professional networks.

I used a qualitative research method for the research project. A qualitative research methodology enabled me to broaden the exploratory process to understand the professional experiences and strategies of the HR professionals I interviewed. When a concept requires understanding due to limited research, a qualitative approach is conducive as the research method (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). I employed the pragmatic inquiry research design to understand the practical, real-time strategies adopted due to their effectiveness. The pragmatic inquiry research design was justified for this project, as it enabled a flexible, adaptive approach to understanding complex phenomena in real-world environments (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). This design aligned with the project's focus, emphasizing the insights that explain which strategies HR professionals use and how and why those strategies are effective in practice.

The data used for the research project comprised semistructured interviews on business-related low-risk topics, publicly available and relevant documents, and related artifacts. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step thematic analysis process. I used member checking to ensure that my interpretations of the participants' responses were accurate. Data saturation was used to ensure that there were no new data disclosed by the

participants, and methodological triangulation ensured that all of the data collected supported the themes that emerged. The conceptual framework was van Marrewijk and Hardjono's (2003) European corporate sustainability framework (ECSF) and Eizenberg and Jabareen's (2017) social sustainability theory.

### **Project Research Question**

What effective employee well-being strategies have some HR leaders used to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs?

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are foundational beliefs accepted as true without direct evidence, often subtly shaping how research is designed and interpreted (Nkwake, 2013). Three key assumptions guided this project. The first assumption was that effective employee well-being strategies reduce turnover and replacement costs by improving engagement and retention. The second assumption was that although HR leaders may recognize the importance of employee well-being, they may lack structured approaches to effectively implement it. The third assumption was that the interview participants would provide insights into practical, real-world strategies that align with social sustainability principles and address challenges related to employee turnover.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations refer to the inherent constraints of a project that may affect the accuracy, consistency, or generalizability of its findings (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Three limitations were acknowledged in this project. First, the narrow pool of HR

leaders would limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or organizational contexts. Second, the use of semistructured interviews would not capture all dimensions of employee well-being strategies. Third, participants may overstate the effectiveness of strategies or minimize challenges due to social desirability bias or concerns about organizational confidentiality.

### **Business Project Ethics**

My role as the researcher involved designing and implementing methodologically sound strategies to gather contextually grounded data aligned with my research objectives. I was responsible for defining the research topic, recruiting participants, establishing data collection methods, analyzing the data, and presenting the results and conclusions based on the findings. Furthermore, effective participant selection played a vital role in strengthening the quality of qualitative studies (Dahal et al., 2024). The selection of participants was based on whether they met the inclusion criteria. *The Belmont Report* identifies three core ethical principles that guide research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, protection of the participant's identity, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I adhered to *The Belmont Report's* ethical principles throughout my project.

The informed consent process was a required step designed to ensure that potential research participants fully understood the project, including its purpose, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. Researchers were required to complete all required steps and obtain all required documentation as part of the approval

process. The goal was to support individuals in making a voluntary, informed decision about participating in my research project, including the right to withdraw at any time. Participants could withdraw by notifying me via email or phone. No incentives were offered for participation. The semistructured interviews were conducted following an interview protocol (see Appendix). The interview questions are contained in the interview protocol.

I assigned generic identifiers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) to all documentation to protect participants' confidentiality and privacy. Additionally, all data will be securely stored for 5 years following the completion of my research to further safeguard participant confidentiality. The Walden Institutional Review Board approval number for the final project is 07-15-25-0268680.

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

To address the project's main research question, I compiled the literature review to examine relevant academic and professional sources to identify and explore effective employee well-being strategies that reduce employee turnover and associated employee replacement costs. The literature review conceptualizes employee well-being as a core organizational asset that supports long-term workforce stability, ethical labor practices, and economic viability (Vallance et al., 2011). From this perspective, organizations that invest in employee well-being foster socially sustainable work environments that mitigate voluntary turnover and the substantial financial costs associated with employee replacement by promoting fairness, inclusion, human capital development, and enduring employment relationships (Ehnert et al., 2016). For leaders, this highlights that investing

in well-being is a proactive workforce strategy that strengthens retention, reduces replacement costs, and supports long-term organizational stability rather than an optional approach.

According to Mukherjee (2025), literature reviews are crucial to academic research, as they help synthesize existing research, identify knowledge gaps, and inform future research directions. Consistent with this purpose, the integrative review involved a critical analysis and synthesis of sources retrieved from databases including EBSCO, Business Source Premier/Complete, ScienceDirect, SAGE, Emerald, and Google Scholar. These platforms were used to search for academic and professional literature pertinent to organizational leadership, human resource management (HRM), sustainability, and workforce retention. The search strategy incorporated the following keywords: *employee well-being, employee retention, employee turnover, employee replacement costs, cost of turnover, employee engagement, leadership strategies, sustainability, social sustainability, corporate sustainability, corporate social responsibility, environmental, social, and governance (ESG)*.

The literature review was systematically analyzed to identify key themes, dominant perspectives, and empirical evidence related to employee well-being and turnover reduction. This process enabled the examination of multiple viewpoints and clarified how the current project builds upon and extends prior research by explicitly linking employee well-being strategies to reduced turnover and lower employee replacement costs. Particular attention was given to leadership-driven well-being initiatives and organizational practices that influence employees' decisions to remain

with or leave an organization. This analytical approach supports the identification of evidence-based strategies that address both workforce sustainability and the financial implications of employee attrition.

The organization of the literature review consists of the following hierarchy: (a) conceptual frameworks of Eizenberg and Jabareen's social sustainability theory and van Marrewijk and Hardjono's European corporate sustainability framework considered in detail; (b) previous research supporting this project; (c) leadership and organizational culture; (d) flexible work arrangements; (e) professional development and career growth; (f) onboarding and engagement practices; (g) burnout prevention and workload equity and (h) gaps in literature. The specific business problem was that some HR leaders lack effective, structured employee well-being strategies. The research design addressed critical factors that may have led to employee retention or turnover, the impact of turnover, and the strategies successful HR leaders may have used to retain employees.

### **Application to the Applied Business Problem**

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry I aimed to identify and explore effective employee well-being strategies that reduce employee turnover and associated employee replacement costs. The goal was to identify evidence-based employee well-being strategies that reduce turnover and minimize the financial costs of employee replacement. In the project I explored this phenomenon through the lens of the social sustainability theory.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Employee turnover and the associated costs of replacing staff remain persistent challenges across industries. Voluntary turnover alone can cost organizations between 90% and 200% of an employee's annual salary, factoring in recruitment, onboarding, training, and lost productivity (Allen et al., 2010). Despite these costs, many HR leaders lack effective employee well-being strategies that enhance engagement, foster retention, and mitigate financial impact.

This conceptual framework integrated social sustainability theory (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017) and the ECSF (van Marrewijk & Hardjono, 2003) to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for addressing this problem. Social sustainability theory emphasizes equity, safety, inclusion, and supportive organizational structures to sustain human well-being, whereas ECSF offers strategic guidance for embedding these principles into actionable HR practices. Together, they support the design of socially sustainable and economically strategic employee well-being initiatives.

### ***Social Sustainability Theory***

Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017) defined social sustainability as a multidimensional construct aimed reducing social risk, enhancing quality of life, and promoting equitable participation. Originally applied to urban planning, the principles of social sustainability theory are highly relevant to organizational contexts, particularly HR practices. The framework identifies four core constructs: equity, safety and security, social responsibility, and supportive organizational forms.

Equity in organizations reflects fairness in resource allocation, recognition of employee contributions, and inclusive participation in decision-making processes, all of which shape employees' perceptions of fairness and organizational justice (Haines et al., 2024). This principle is demonstrated through fair compensation, transparent policies, and equitable access to professional development opportunities. By fostering such practices, equity not only enhances employee well-being but also reduces perceptions of unfairness, a key driver of voluntary turnover.

Safety and security emphasize protection against harmful conditions. Psychologically and physically safe workplaces reduce attrition and yield economic benefits. These benefits include lower absenteeism, fewer medical claims, and decreased turnover-related costs (May et al., 2024). Together, these outcomes demonstrate that investing in safety and security is both essential for workforce sustainability and a financially sound organizational strategy.

Social responsibility in organizations involves management practices that prioritize employee well-being alongside performance expectations. Initiatives such as flexible work arrangements (FWAs), wellness programs, and recognition systems enhance engagement and retention, especially when supported by positive organizational climates. Research shows that HR practices emphasizing well-being, such as flexible work and wellness initiatives, are strongly associated with higher levels of workplace engagement and satisfaction when reinforced by supportive organizational and supervisory environments (Chang & Hu, 2025). By addressing employees' needs

holistically, these practices foster engagement, increase job satisfaction, and improve retention outcomes.

Supportive organizational structures foster connection, collaboration, and a sense of belonging. Inclusive cultures strengthen employees' psychological safety and relational identification, which in turn increase job embeddedness and reduce employee turnover (Yang, 2025). When organizations intentionally build these structures, they create environments where employees feel valued and connected, reinforcing engagement and long-term commitment.

### ***The European Corporate Sustainability Framework***

Introduced by van Marrewijk and Hardjono in 2003, the ECSF is a strategic management framework designed to embed sustainability into organizational practices. Although initially corporate-focused, the framework's principles apply directly to HR challenges. ECSF emphasizes social sustainability through equity, inclusion, ethical practices, and stakeholder engagement, critical levers for workforce stability.

ECSF is supported by several interrelated theories: stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which recognizes employees as key stakeholders; institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which suggests adopting socially sustainable practices to gain legitimacy; and the triple bottom line approach (Elkington, 1998), which balances social outcomes alongside economic performance. Together, these theories provide HR leaders with a conceptual basis for designing well-being initiatives that improve engagement and reduce turnover.

### ***Integrating ECSF Principles With Social Sustainability Theory***

Combining ECSF with social sustainability theory provides a dual analytical lens for addressing employee well-being and turnover by aligning structured governance mechanisms with relational and equity-based principles. ECSF's emphasis on stakeholder engagement, particularly the inclusion of employees in policy development and organizational decision-making, parallels social sustainability theory's focus on equity and participation. This alignment strengthens employee voice, increases organizational commitment, and reduces turnover intentions (Obeng et al., 2021).

Equitable and transparent HR policies promoted by ECSF reflect ethical practices central to social sustainability theory, reducing perceptions of unfairness that often lead to voluntary turnover and lowering the financial burden of employee replacement. Furthermore, socially responsible HR practices such as FWAs, professional development opportunities, wellness programs, and recognition systems operationalize both frameworks by directly enhancing employee well-being while fostering job embeddedness and long-term retention. ECSF-guided leadership also supports organizational cultures characterized by belonging, collaboration, and ethical responsibility, elements social sustainability theory identifies as critical to social cohesion. When employees feel deeply embedded within such supportive structures, turnover rates decline, mitigating the substantial productivity and replacement costs associated with employee departures (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Aligning ECSF with social sustainability theory emphasizes the economic rationale for investing in employee well-being, given the substantial costs associated with

turnover, including recruitment, onboarding, training, and lost productivity (Allen et al., 2010). By applying ECSF principles alongside social sustainability constructs, organizations can implement evidence-based strategies that proactively address social risk, enhance engagement, and maintain workforce stability. Research consistently demonstrates that equitable and participatory HR practices increase perceptions of fairness, recognition, and employee voice, factors strongly associated with lower turnover intentions and higher organizational commitment (Nair et al., 2025). Similarly, safety-focused and supportive work environments reduce stress and burnout, leading to decreased absenteeism and lower health-related and productivity costs (Verma & Sinha, 2025). Socially responsible HR initiatives, such as inclusive work–life balance policies, wellness programs, and employee development opportunities, further strengthen engagement and embeddedness, reducing the likelihood of voluntary departure and its substantial financial burden on organizations (Casper et al., 2025). Collectively, this evidence demonstrates that socially sustainable HR practices are not only ethically grounded but also economically strategic, aligning employee well-being with organizational performance, retention, and long-term cost reduction objectives (Bai, 2025).

This integrated framework identifies equity, safety, inclusion, stakeholder engagement, and socially responsible HR practices as key mechanisms influencing engagement, commitment, and retention, while explaining why ineffective well-being strategies persist. Together, these principles provide HR leaders with a structured, evidence-based approach for embedding employee well-being into organizational

strategy, demonstrating how ECSF-aligned, socially sustainable practices enhance engagement, retain talent, and reduce turnover-related costs.

### **Business Problem Scholarship Evidence**

Employee turnover remains a persistent and costly challenge across industries, leading to lost productivity, increased recruitment and training expenses, and diminished organizational knowledge. Voluntary turnover is particularly problematic because it is often driven by preventable factors such as employee well-being, job design, leadership practices, and organizational culture (Alkaabi et al., 2024). Contemporary researchers emphasized that reducing turnover requires more than isolated interventions; instead, organizations need comprehensive, systemically implemented well-being strategies to achieve sustainable workforce stability. Evidence shows that organizations investing in digitally supported, multidimensional well-being initiatives experience improvements in engagement, psychological health, and retention over time (Boyce et al., 2024).

Comprehensive programs addressing multiple domains such as physical health, mental health, emotional resilience, and stress management are consistently more effective than narrow, single-topic initiatives. These integrated approaches recognize employees as whole individuals whose performance and retention are shaped by interconnected personal and organizational factors (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). When aligned with recognized standards and embedded in organizational strategy, such programs yield positive returns on investment through reduced healthcare costs, lower absenteeism, and improved productivity. A recent scoping review of economic evaluations confirms that workplace wellness programs consistently demonstrate positive return on investment,

particularly when they include healthcare and absenteeism outcomes (Unsal et al., 2021). From a retention perspective, these programs foster supportive work environments that signal organizational care and commitment, strengthening employee attachment and reducing turnover intentions.

As organizational leaders increasingly adopt comprehensive well-being strategies, digital solutions have become central to scaling mental health support across diverse workforces. Digital mental health interventions (DMHIs) have emerged as scalable, adaptable components of modern well-being strategies. Systematic reviews report consistent benefits across mental health outcomes, including reductions in anxiety, depression, and stress, alongside improvements in health behaviors and self-regulation (Amirabdollahian et al., 2025). Recent evidence has also highlighted impacts on absenteeism, burnout, and presenteeism which are key precursors of voluntary turnover. Since burnout and chronic stress strongly predict withdrawal behaviors, DMHIs provide a proactive mechanism for mitigating turnover risk by addressing psychological strain before it escalates.

Among DMHIs, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)–based applications and blended care models show particularly strong outcomes. These interventions enhance mental health, emotional regulation, and coping skills, thereby supporting sustained engagement and reducing turnover intentions. Cameron et al. (2025) found that CBT-based platforms incorporating personalized feedback, interactive features, and goal tracking significantly improve adherence and long-term effectiveness. Such features increase perceived relevance and autonomy, reinforcing well-being and motivation.

Organizations that integrate these tools into broader well-being strategies, and not as standalone resources, report measurable reductions in absenteeism and productivity gains, reinforcing their value as retention-focused investments (Stratton et al., 2025).

While digital interventions address psychological capacity, the structural design of work itself plays an equally critical role in shaping employee experiences and retention outcomes. Beyond well-being programs, job design and flexibility critically shape employee experiences and turnover outcomes. FWAs enhance well-being by increasing job control, autonomy, and work–life integration when intentionally designed. Poorly structured flexibility, however, can exacerbate role overload and work–family conflict. Research shows that FWAs embedded within job design, instead of being offered as ad hoc accommodations, are linked to stronger psychological well-being, higher job satisfaction, and greater organizational commitment, all of which reduce voluntary turnover (Çivilidağ & Durmaz, 2024). Aligning flexibility policies with workload expectations, performance norms, and managerial support is essential for sustainability.

In addition to flexibility, opportunities for growth and continuity further anchor employees to the organization. Career development structures further reinforce retention by strengthening employees' sense of fit, growth, and long-term connection to the organization. Career pathways, mentoring programs, and internal mobility initiatives signal organizational investment in employee growth, enhancing psychological well-being and perceived career sustainability. These mechanisms increase job embeddedness, to the extent to which employees feel connected to their work, colleagues, and organization. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that higher job embeddedness strongly

predicts lower turnover intentions across sectors and cultures (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2024). Internal mobility opportunities also buffer the negative effects of job stress and uncertainty, reducing the likelihood of employees seeking external alternatives during organizational change. Recent research confirms that internal transfers and promotions enhance job satisfaction and retention, even during periods of organizational transition (Ray, 2024). This evidence suggests that internal mobility serves as a stabilizing retention mechanism during periods of change.

Leadership behaviors provide the relational context through which these structural and developmental supports are experienced by employees. Psychological safety is a critical mechanism connecting leadership, employee well-being, and retention (Clarke et al., 2026). Inclusive, emotionally intelligent leaders foster psychological safety by creating environments where employees can speak up, seek help, and engage in learning without fear of negative consequences. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, fairness, and openness help employees feel valued and supported, strengthening their emotional attachment to the organization (Santana-Martins et al., 2022). Evidence shows that empathetic leadership, characterized by fairness and emotional responsiveness, correlates strongly with psychological safety, improved well-being, and lower turnover intentions (Muss et al., 2025). Similarly, inclusive leadership behaviors, such as openness and accessibility, promote psychological safety, empowering employees to voice concerns and participate in learning, thereby enhancing retention (Mohase et al., 2025). Research further indicates that psychological safety mediates the relationship between

transformational leadership and intent to leave, linking it to greater engagement, well-being, and reduced turnover (Sobaih et al., 2022).

Evidence from high-demand settings shows that psychologically safe environments where employees can voice concerns without fear and access resilience resources are associated with stronger retention intentions, especially among underrepresented groups (Clarke et al., 2026). These findings highlight the equity implications of psychological safety, as marginalized employees often face greater risks when speaking up. Embedding psychological safety into leadership development and organizational norms enhances well-being and learning while addressing structural drivers of turnover that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.

Taken together, these strands of evidence underscore the necessity of an integrated, sustainability-oriented retention strategy. Collectively, scholarly evidence indicates that reducing voluntary turnover requires a coordinated, sustainability-oriented approach to employee well-being (Qamar et al., 2024). Comprehensive programs, DMHIs, structured flexibility, career development systems, job embeddedness, and psychological safety work most effectively when implemented as interconnected components of organizational strategy rather than isolated initiatives (Sang, 2025). These approaches address both immediate well-being concerns and long-term retention drivers, contributing to organizational resilience, workforce stability, and sustained performance. For HR leaders, the challenge lies not in identifying effective practices but in integrating them systematically to create environments where employees can thrive and choose to stay.

## **Business Topic Scholarship**

### ***Leadership and Organizational Culture***

Employee well-being supported by inclusive leadership, trust, and shared governance, is critical for reducing turnover and minimizing replacement costs. When leaders neglect inclusivity, shared decision-making, trust, and investment in employee well-being, engagement suffers, turnover rises, and organizational performance declines (Bourke & Titus, 2020). Leadership behaviors shape the organizational climate and influence whether employees feel valued, respected, and supported. A culture that prioritizes well-being signals organizational care, which strengthens employee attachment and reduces turnover intentions.

Conversely, trust-based leadership strategies such as collaborative decision-making, professional autonomy, and recognition foster engagement and organizational commitment. These practices create a psychologically safe environment where employees feel empowered to contribute without fear of negative consequences. Psychological safety is strongly associated with improved well-being and retention outcomes, as it encourages open communication and problem-solving (Muss et al., 2025). Leaders who model empathy and openness reinforce trust and inclusion, building a foundation for sustainable workforce stability.

Employee well-being often mediates the relationship between leadership practices and retention outcomes, underscoring the need for leadership development that prioritizes empathy and support (Samad et al., 2022). Leadership training programs that emphasize emotional intelligence, active listening, and inclusive behaviors can significantly reduce

turnover by addressing root causes of disengagement (Zeng et al., 2023). Recognition and involvement in decision-making enhance employees' sense of purpose and belonging, which are critical drivers of retention.

Organizational culture functions as a reinforcing contextual mechanism. A culture that values transparency, collaboration, and shared governance promotes trust and psychological safety, reducing stress and uncertainty that often lead to voluntary turnover. When employees perceive alignment between organizational values and leadership behaviors, they are more likely to remain committed and engaged (Tourky et al., 2023). In contrast, cultures characterized by poor communication, inequitable workload distribution, and a lack of recognition contribute to burnout and attrition, increasing replacement costs and disrupting continuity (Wright, 2021). This highlights how deficient organizational culture operates as a liability by linking poor communication and inequity to burnout-induced turnover.

Ultimately, leadership and organizational culture are inseparable components of effective employee well-being strategies. By embedding trust-based practices, fostering psychological safety, and investing in leadership development, organizations can create environments where employees thrive. These strategies not only reduce turnover and associated costs but also enhance engagement, productivity, and long-term organizational resilience (Dzambic et al., 2025). These cultural and leadership dynamics also shape how organizational policies, particularly FWAs, are experienced and sustained in practice.

### *Flexible Work Arrangements*

Well-designed FWAs, which include hybrid schedules, flextime, and flexplace, are strongly associated with improvements in well-being, work–family integration, and retention. A comprehensive study found that FWAs are linked to higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, perceived autonomy, and better work–family outcomes; notably, arrangements combining both time flexibility (flextime) and location flexibility (flexplace) produced the most favorable effects, and even availability of FWAs was associated with positive employee outcomes, likely by signaling trust and organizational support (Harrop et al., 2025). Reinforcing the business case, a meta-analytic review reported that FWAs are associated with better physical health, reduced absenteeism, and fewer somatic symptoms, offering measurable savings in absence and health-related costs that compound retention benefits (Shifrin & Michel, 2021). This indicates that flexible work arrangements generate cost savings by improving employee health and reducing absenteeism, while also strengthening returns on investment for retention.

The effectiveness of flexible work arrangements in reducing turnover depends largely on how flexibility is structured. Flextime and overall flexibility have been shown to reduce turnover intentions by increasing job control and work engagement. When telecommuting is not properly managed, however, it can intensify work–family conflict, which indirectly raises turnover intentions (Haines et al., 2024). Evidence shows that hybrid work reduces burnout, with work autonomy partially mediating the effect, emphasizing that location flexibility should be paired with decision latitude over tasks, timing, and methods (Höcker et al., 2024). In addition, flextime improved work–life

balance and reduced fatigue; combining flextime with telework yielded the strongest well-being outcomes when boundaries and disconnection norms were explicit (Herrera-Ballesteros et al., 2025). A mini-review similarly concludes that FWAs, when integrated into job analysis and design rather than offered ad hoc, are positively associated with performance, job satisfaction, reduced stress, work–family harmony, and organizational commitment (Çivilidağ & Durmaz, 2024). The results demonstrate that FWAs deliver consistent performance and well-being benefits only when they are intentionally embedded into job design and role expectations.

Flexible work arrangements are most effective when they are intentionally designed to support role fit, autonomy, and boundary clarity. To translate these findings into practice, organizations should clarify eligibility and role fit, as effects are stronger when tasks permit autonomy and flexible sequencing (Harrop et al., 2025). They should also codify boundary norms, including quiet hours and meeting windows, to mitigate work–family conflict in telecommuting contexts (Haines et al., 2024). Enabling autonomy by design is critical, as decision latitude mediates well-being gains and reduces burnout in hybrid settings (Höcker et al., 2024). Finally, organizations should monitor health and absence as leading indicators of FWA effectiveness and sustainability (Shifrin & Michel, 2021). Such monitoring provides early signals of potential issues, enabling organizations to evaluate trends and determine appropriate next steps.

Measurement practices should complement implementation efforts. Tracking quarterly pulse metrics for work–life balance, work–family conflict, perceived autonomy, engagement, and turnover intention, as well as linking these to actual attrition provides

actionable insights. Stronger effects can be expected when FWAs are embedded in formal policy and reinforced consistently by managers, rather than offered as informal perks (Çivilidağ & Durmaz, 2024). While flexibility supports balance and autonomy, retention is further strengthened when employees see a clear pathway for development and advancement.

### ***Professional Development and Career Growth***

Employees are more likely to stay when they perceive a strong fit, opportunities for growth, and a clear future within the organization. Job embeddedness, defined as the extent to which employees experience fit with their role and organization, maintain relational links, and perceive a significant sacrifice if they leave, predicts lower turnover intentions and reduced actual turnover beyond traditional measures of satisfaction and commitment (Mitchell et al., 2001). Findings demonstrated that both on-the-job and off-the-job embeddedness negatively relate to turnover intention and actual quits, even after controlling for job attitudes and alternative opportunities. Mediation tests indicate that turnover intention and job search behavior fully or partially mediate the effects of embeddedness on actual turnover (Jiang et al., 2012). Strong negative associations between organizational and community embeddedness and quitting intentions were confirmed, with fit and sacrifice emerging as particularly significant influences (Setthakorn et al., 2024). Reviews and practice guides position embeddedness as a practical retention framework linked to performance and absenteeism, translating into actionable HR strategies such as enhancing role and career fit, fostering cross-functional links, and offering benefits that increase the perceived cost of leaving (Shah et al., 2020).

When these mechanisms are deliberately embedded within job design and talent systems, they deepen employees' organizational attachment, increase discretionary effort, and reduce withdrawal behaviors, aligning embeddedness to sustained retention and improved performance.

Building effective development systems with structured career pathways and internal mobility programs is supported by peer-reviewed research. For instance, Ahmed (2024) found that transparent career-path frameworks significantly reduce turnover intentions and foster higher engagement across organizations. An integrative review of 202 studies consolidates evidence on transfers and promotions, mapping the drivers and outcomes of internal mobility and offering a taxonomy to guide the design of equitable career pathways that support talent retention (Ray, 2024). Mentoring and sponsorship also play a critical role. High-quality, frequent mentoring, paired with strong local leadership, boosts organizational commitment. Multilevel analyses of mentoring quality show that biweekly mentor–mentee interactions with practice-focused content and engagement opportunities produce larger gains, while strong principal leadership mitigates risks when mentor access is uneven (Hong & Matsko, 2019). Development resources such as feedback, training, and coaching further strengthen engagement. Meta-analytic evidence from job demands–resources (JD-R) research demonstrates that development resources and personal resources have large associations with engagement, which in turn correlates strongly with satisfaction and commitment which are two proximal antecedents of retention (Mazzetti et al., 2023). This evidence supports

well-being strategies by demonstrating a clear method through which investments in development and personal resources reduce turnover.

To implement these strategies effectively, organizational leaders should map critical skills and roles through skills inventories, align learning pathways with internal job markets, institutionalize mentoring cadence and content quality, and actively elevate embeddedness levers. This includes fostering job fit through job crafting, strengthening relational links via peer networks and cross-functional projects, and increasing perceived sacrifice through meaningful benefits. These actions collectively reduce turnover intentions and actual attrition (Jiang et al., 2012). These development mechanisms are most effective when reinforced early in the employee lifecycle through intentional onboarding and engagement practices.

### ***Onboarding and Engagement Practices***

Onboarding serves as a critical retention lever by facilitating socialization into the role, team, and organizational culture, shaping identification, well-being, and long-term commitment. A systematic review concludes that formal onboarding programs emphasizing on-the-job training and social learning significantly improve socialization and reduce early turnover, consolidating evidence across diverse contexts and designs (Frögéli et al., 2023). Field studies further demonstrate that manager and coworker responses, combined with structured onboarding processes, enhance organizational identification and well-being, thereby lowering turnover intentions, which highlights the importance of early climate signals and relational integration (Mosquera & Soares, 2025).

Consistent managerial support and peer inclusion reinforce the manager–employee relationship, which further lowers turnover risk among new employees.

Effective onboarding design should prioritize the first 90 days, focusing on role clarity, structured feedback loops, and job-embedded practice. Approaches that integrate task mastery with social integration deliver stronger socialization and retention outcomes (Bauer et al., 2025). Activating managers is essential; manager-led welcome rituals such as kickoff meetings, buddy assignments, and regular check-ins strengthen identification, a proximal predictor of staying (Mosquera & Soares, 2025). Additionally, measuring identification and belonging during the initial months can help forecast turnover risk and enable targeted interventions, as early changes in organizational identification have been shown to predict voluntary turnover over time (Li et al., 2025). For HR leaders, this insight is strategically important because it supports proactive action before early disengagement escalates into employee exit.

Onboarding also provides an opportunity to reinforce engagement. Job resources such as feedback, training, and social support strongly predict engagement, which, in turn, is closely tied to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Crawford et al., 2010). Embedding feedback, mastery-based learning experiences, and social support into onboarding enhances newcomer adjustment and long-term integration. Specifically, proactive onboarding practices that support task mastery and social integration, such as encouraging sensemaking, positive framing, and relationship-building, lead to stronger role clarity and social bonds (Zhao et al., 2023). Additionally, supervisor autonomy support and structured socialization tactics fulfill newcomers' psychological needs for

autonomy, competence, and relatedness, further boosting commitment and reducing withdrawal, effectively amplifying engagement and retention outcomes (Chong et al., 2021). Nevertheless, even strong onboarding and development efforts can be undermined when workloads are inequitable, and recovery opportunities are insufficient.

### ***Addressing Burnout and Workload Equity***

Burnout, which is characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy, predicts turnover intentions and performance losses (Zambrano-Chumo & Guevara, 2024). JD-R theory explains burnout through the health impairment pathway, where high demands combined with low resources lead to strain and ultimately burnout. Remedies involve strengthening organizational resources, such as healthy leadership and supportive HR practices, alongside personal resources like emotional intelligence to help employees regulate fatigue and prevent progression from acute strain to enduring burnout (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Meta-analytic structural modeling showed that workplace constraints, such as bureaucracy and role overload, increase burnout, whereas resources like feedback, autonomy, and social support reduce burnout and promote engagement, thus clarifying where to intervene to lower attrition risk (Crawford et al., 2010). Cross-sector analyses confirm that JD-R relationships hold across healthcare, industry, services, and public sectors, supporting the generalizability of enterprise-wide interventions (Van den Broeck et al., 2017). This evidence indicates that aligning job demands with adequate resources consistently improves employee well-being and reduces burnout across industries.

Evidence consistently connects burnout to turnover. Empirical research in high-interaction service contexts shows that heavy workloads and weak supervisor support elevate emotional exhaustion, which significantly increases intention to leave and depresses service quality, directly impacting replacement costs (Grobelna, 2021). JD-R-based studies of educators demonstrate that burnout mediates the relationship between job demands/resources and turnover intention, validating burnout as a strategic target for reducing attrition through well-being investments (Russell et al., 2020). Daily diary evidence further links off-work affective shifts to next-day exhaustion and performance, reinforcing the value of recovery norms such as digital disconnection and quiet hours to prevent cumulative strain (Qu et al., 2021). This finding indicates that clear boundaries around non-working hours communication are not merely a cultural preference but a practical mechanism that helps sustain employee focus and performance over time.

To address workload equity and resource design, organizational leaders should audit demands of volume, variability, and bureaucratic friction, and rebalance workloads equitably. JD-R guidance emphasizes reducing hindrance demands while increasing resources such as autonomy, feedback, and support to curb burnout and turnover intentions (Crawford et al., 2010). Establishing explicit recovery norms, such as detachment windows and no-meeting blocks, is critical; inadequate detachment under high telecommuting intensity is associated with reduced well-being and elevated exhaustion (Cheng & Zhang, 2022). Finally, investing in healthy leadership capabilities to recognize strain signals and adjust demands and resources is essential, as leadership behaviors help employees regulate fatigue effectively and prevent escalation (Bakker &

de Vries, 2021). By strengthening leaders' capacity to adjust expectations, provide timely support, and actively reinforce sustainable work practices, organizations can disrupt patterns of work overload that drive burnout.

Reducing turnover and strengthening retention requires an integrated approach that aligns leadership practices, organizational culture, FWAs, career development, onboarding, and workload equity. Inclusive leadership and trust-based cultures foster psychological safety, engagement, and well-being, which are essential drivers of retention (Siyal, 2023). FWAs, when structured with autonomy and boundary norms, improve work–life balance, reduce burnout, and signal organizational support. Career growth strategies, including transparent pathways, mentoring, and embeddedness levers, enhance employees' sense of fit and future within the organization (Akkaya & Kazaishvili, 2022). Effective onboarding during the first 90 days builds identification and engagement through role clarity, feedback, and social integration. Finally, addressing burnout through workload equity, recovery norms, and healthy leadership mitigates attrition risks. Together, these evidence-based practices create a coherent system that not only reduces turnover and replacement costs but also strengthens engagement, performance, and organizational resilience.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective employee well-being strategies used by some HR leaders to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs. Section 1 provided a critical analysis and synthesis of a broad body of literature. In Section 1 I defined the background of the

problem, business problem, project purpose, research question, assumptions and limitations, the role of the researcher, participant criteria, and the evidence-based integrative review. The integrative, evidence-based review highlighted the scope and complexity of the topic and the synthesis of various sources, including journals, scholarly books, and other sources. Additionally, a comprehensive examination of the conceptual framework reinforced and supported the overall analysis.

## Section 2: Primary and Secondary Industry Data Analysis

### **Nature of the Project**

#### **Method and Design**

A qualitative research method was selected to identify and explore effective strategies for employee well-being, with the aim of reducing employee turnover and replacement costs. This approach aligns well with the project's exploratory nature, which seeks to understand complex, situationally influenced organizational dynamics, including leadership behaviors, organizational culture, and sustainability practices. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited to organizational studies that aim to uncover the nuanced, context-rich processes underlying complex phenomena (Pratt, 2025).

Employee well-being is a critical factor in reducing turnover and minimizing replacement costs. It reflects values, ethics, and human-centered practices that prioritize the holistic needs of employees, elements often difficult to measure quantitatively. To identify effective strategies for promoting well-being, qualitative approaches such as interviews and case studies are ideal, as they capture the depth and complexity of the methods leaders use (Allan et al., 2023).

To reinforce the project's practical orientation, a pragmatic inquiry research design was adopted. This design emphasizes the generation of real-world insights that can be directly applied within organizational settings. Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) described pragmatic inquiry as resting on three key methodological principles: (a) emphasizing actionable knowledge, (b) recognizing the interconnection between experience, knowing, and acting, and (c) approaching inquiry as an experiential process.

These principles closely align with the project's purpose. The integration of qualitative methods with pragmatic inquiry ensures that the project's findings are both academically rigorous and practically valuable, providing meaningful insights for addressing organizational challenges.

### **Reliability**

In research, reliability refers to the extent to which a process or measurement consistently produces accurate and dependable results across various contexts and conditions (Bonzio et al., 2021). To maintain research reliability, using multiple metrics tailored to the specific concept being measured and ensuring consistency in task design and sample size were recommended (Farkas et al., 2024). In addition, credibility and reliability should be assessed within the framework of a project's theoretical and methodological approach to ensure alignment with its overall research design (Yadav, 2022). Such alignment strengthens trustworthiness by ensuring that rigor is applied in ways that are theoretically grounded and methodologically appropriate.

To further support data reliability in this project, member checking was implemented to validate participants' responses. Each interview followed a standardized protocol, was transcribed accurately, and the recordings were summarized and reviewed for precision. Data triangulation was also utilized to strengthen the credibility of the findings by incorporating multiple sources and perspectives.

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

The participants in my project were HR leaders with at least 3 years of experience in HR. Each participant had experience implementing well-being strategies to reduce

employee turnover and replacement costs. This targeted selection ensured alignment with the research question and supports the project's focus.

Access to participants was facilitated through professional networks, including social media and LinkedIn connections, as well as snowball sampling. Once participants accepted the invitation to participate, screening questions were used to confirm that they met the eligibility criteria and accurately represented the project's target population. This step was essential for maintaining the integrity and relevance of the research sample.

To establish a professional rapport and encourage open dialogue, I engaged the participants in preliminary email conversations before the interviews to explain the project's purpose and address any questions. During the interviews, I fostered openness by using open-ended questions, active listening, and providing opportunities for the participants to clarify or expand on their responses.

The sampling method employed in this project was purposeful sampling, selected to intentionally identify HR leaders with direct experience implementing strategies to influence employee wellbeing and reduce employee turnover and replacement costs. This approach ensures that the data collected will be rich, detailed, and directly aligned with the project's objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). Additionally, purposeful sampling is efficient, requiring fewer resources and less time compared to traditional sampling methods (Stratton, 2024). This efficiency enabled me, as the researcher, to focus resources on in-depth data collection and analysis with knowledgeable participants, thereby enhancing analytical depth without compromising research integrity.

A total of 10 participants were included in this project. In focused qualitative studies with relatively homogeneous samples, core themes typically emerge by approximately six interviews, with additional interviews conducted to confirm thematic stability; therefore, including 10 participants ensures that no new themes develop beyond the anticipated saturation point (Guest et al., 2006). Data saturation was expected around the sixth interview, when no new information, themes, or insights were likely to arise. In qualitative research, saturation serves as a key criterion for establishing the credibility of purposive sampling and is reached when further data collection no longer contributes new understanding (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Once saturation was achieved, I concluded the interview process.

### **Data Collection Activities**

For this project, I used semistructured interviews as the primary data collection method to explore HR leaders' effective employee well-being strategies aimed at reducing employee turnover and replacement costs. Semistructured interviews are well-suited for qualitative research because they balance consistency across participants with the flexibility to probe more deeply into individual responses. Each interview included six open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences and decision-making processes. This approach allowed me to identify shared themes while also capturing individualized insights that contribute to a nuanced understanding of how well-being strategies support retention outcomes.

To ensure reliability and consistency across all interviews, I developed and followed a standardized interview protocol. The rationale for this protocol was to

maintain a uniform structure that guides each interview through a clear sequence: a greeting, informed consent, an overview of the research project, administration of the six interview questions, a closing statement, and a notification of the member checking process. Member checking involved sharing a summary of the interview with each participant to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. This step enhanced the credibility of the data and ensured that participants' statements were authentically represented. The interview questions and protocol were carefully developed to align with the project's research objective and to maintain research integrity. The full interview protocol, including the scripted sequence and interview questions, is provided in the Appendix (Interview Protocol), which is identified in the Table of Contents for ease of reference.

The interview instrument was used consistently across all participant interviews. Although the core questions remained identical across interviews, the semistructured format allowed me to pose follow-up questions or request clarification when necessary to deepen understanding or explore emerging insights. This flexibility ensured that the instrument captured the full complexity of participants' perspectives while remaining anchored to the project's research focus. Each interview was conducted virtually via the online meeting platform Zoom, which enables secure recording and facilitates accurate, verbatim transcription. Recording interviews is essential for accurate transcription and analysis (Archibald et al., 2019). Participants were informed about the recording process, confidentiality protections, and their rights regarding data usage before the interview

begins. All identifying information was removed during transcription to maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality.

Multiple techniques were used to collect data throughout the process. I recruited participants using purposive sampling and snowball sampling, drawing on LinkedIn, social media platforms, and professional networks to identify HR leaders with at least 3 years of HR experience. Interested individuals completed a screening process to verify eligibility before receiving a scheduling link to choose a convenient interview time. During the interviews, I took notes to supplement the recordings, and transcripts were produced to ensure accuracy and completeness. Additional strategies were implemented to enhance trustworthiness, including maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and analytic reflections, conducting member checks, and applying triangulation by comparing data across participants to identify consistent trends and variations. These methods contributed to the rigor, reliability, and validity of the research findings.

The appendix was organized to support transparency and replicability. The Appendix (Interview Protocol) contains the complete data collection instrument, including the scripted introduction, informed consent language, interview questions, probing instructions, and closing statements. This appendix is clearly identified in the Table of Contents, allowing readers to locate the full instrument used in the project. By providing the complete protocol, the project ensures that all components of the data collection process are accessible and thoroughly documented.

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

This project employed several systems to track data and emerging understandings, including research logs, reflective journals, and a cataloging and labeling system used to organize interview transcripts and analytic notes. Together, these tools support transparency by documenting analytic decisions, reflections, and connections across the dataset as they emerge during the research process (Leavy, 2020). For a qualitative research design that relies on semistructured interviews, thematic analysis is the most appropriate analytic approach because it allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and report patterns across participant responses, generating rich insights into their experiences, perceptions, and behaviors (Naeem et al., 2023). Thematic analysis aligns well with template analysis and analytic induction, both of which emphasize the systematic identification of patterns and the ongoing development and adjustment of codes and themes; template analysis provides a structured yet flexible coding framework that can be modified as new insights emerge, while analytic induction supports the continual testing of themes by examining both confirming and disconfirming cases (Brooks et al., 2015).

For the qualitative data analysis, Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I began by familiarizing myself with the data by reading and manually annotating each interview transcript. Next, the initial coding process was applied, which involved labeling data segments relevant to the research question. Through multiple iterative cycles of reflexive coding and code refinement, themes were developed and reviewed, resulting in 66 codes and six

overarching themes, each with supporting subthemes that explain the strategies HR leaders use to reduce employee turnover and replacement costs.

Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, reflexivity was actively maintained throughout the analytic process. My professional background in HR leadership informed my analytic sensibilities, shaping how I recognized and interpreted participants' descriptions of roles, strategies, and organizational processes. Through reflexive thematic analysis, I engaged in ongoing reflexive practice to critically examine how prior knowledge influenced interpretation, while ensuring that theme development remained grounded in participants' own words and meanings. Member checking helped solidify the process, in which participants reviewed summaries of their responses and clarified and/or verified the accuracy of the interpretations as needed. Through this iterative reflexive process, the analysis was strengthened by enhanced descriptive clarity and transparency.

The data analysis process followed a logical and sequential structure. All interview transcripts were cataloged, labeled, and imported into MAXQDA. Initial coding began using both inductive and deductive strategies. Inductive coding allowed themes to emerge naturally from the data and remain grounded in participants' authentic experiences, while deductive coding drew on the conceptual framework and recent literature to test alignment with established theories and empirical findings (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Coded segments were compared across participants to identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and unique insights. Preliminary themes were mapped, clustered, and refined using MAXQDA's visualization and mind-mapping tools. Finally, themes were interpreted in relation to the project's conceptual framework.

MAXQDA served as the primary software for coding, organizing, and analyzing the qualitative data. Its capabilities include coded text comparison, query functions, theme mapping, and visualization tools; support comprehensive analysis; provide a transparent audit trail of coding decisions; and enable systematic exploration of relationships between codes and themes, thereby facilitating complex theme development and pattern identification across interviews (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). The analysis focused on identifying key themes and correlating them with both the literature and the conceptual framework; inductive coding ensured that emergent findings reflect the genuine experiences of HR leaders, while deductive coding helped situate these findings within existing theoretical and empirical contexts, yielding themes that are both contextually meaningful and theoretically grounded (Prosek & Gibson, 2021).

To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection and analysis process, several strategies were employed, drawing on established and emerging best practices in qualitative inquiry. These strategies are designed to ensure the trustworthiness of the research, encompassing credibility and dependability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Saturation was monitored throughout data collection to ensure that interviews continue until no new insights or themes emerge (Bouncken et al., 2025); member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify accuracy and strengthen credibility (Motulsky, 2021); transcript review helped maintain the integrity and accuracy of the dataset (Hayashi et al., 2019); and triangulation was carried out by comparing themes across multiple participants and analytic sources to bolster consistency and dependability (Morgan, 2024). Together, these integrated strategies enhanced the

project's trustworthiness by ensuring credibility, dependability, and analytic consistency across the qualitative research process.

### **Summary**

In Section 2, I outlined the nature of the project, the population, sampling, and participants, systems used to track data and emerging insights, the rationale for thematic analysis, and the integration of template analysis and analytic induction within a structured, sequential plan; I also described thematic analysis and described MAXQDA's role in verifying the coding and theme development. I explained how key themes were aligned with the literature and the conceptual framework, and identified strategies to ensure reliability and validity, thereby supporting a clear, credible, and methodologically sound qualitative analysis.

### Section 3: Data and Professional Practice

#### **Project Results**

The purpose of this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry is to identify and explore effective employee well-being strategies used by HR leaders to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs. Through the thematic analysis of semistructured interviews with 10 HR leaders, along with the review of member checking, six major themes emerged: (a) work–life flexibility and sustainable work design, (b) well-being and psychological safety, (c) data-driven feedback, (d) change enablement and communication, (e) people-centered and inclusive leadership, and (f) talent growth and total rewards. Collectively, these themes and their corresponding subthemes demonstrate that effective employee well-being strategies must move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to meaningfully reduce employee turnover and associated replacement costs, as emphasized in social sustainability theory (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017) and reflected in the ECSF (van Marrewijk & Hardjono, 2003).

The overarching research question guiding this project was: What effective employee well-being strategies have HR leaders used to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs?

Primary and secondary data sources were used for this project. The primary data sources included interview transcripts and member-checking statements. The secondary data sources included practitioner and professional literature to complement peer-reviewed academic research. Audio-only semistructured interviews were conducted with the participants that explored the role of the HR leaders in creating effective well-being

strategies, what the effective strategies were in reducing employee turnover and employee replacement costs, challenges in the implementation of the strategies, mitigating factors used to address the impact of the challenges, and how the strategies were measured. I generated the transcripts of each interview using Microsoft Clipchamp. The interview transcripts generated rich, detailed data that provided insight into the practical knowledge HR leaders use when making decisions to reduce employee turnover and replacement costs. Participants received summaries of their interview responses and verified whether the interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives.

MAXQDA software was used to apply a structured coding scheme to the interview transcripts, resulting in 132 coded segments across 66 distinct codes. The resulting codes captured both the range and depth of concepts emerging from the data, including leadership behaviors, strategic considerations shaping employee well-being initiatives, barriers to effective implementation, and approaches to measuring employee feedback. Together, these coded segments reflect the key dimensions through which participants articulated their experiences and perspectives, forming the foundation for subsequent theme development.

To increase the credibility, validity, and depth of the findings, I incorporated multiple data sources on strategies used to reduce employee turnover and thus replacement costs into the analysis. These triangulation sources did not determine the themes; rather, they enhanced the analysis's interpretive depth by situating participants' insights within a broader body of evidence. By the sixth interview, the central patterns, particularly those related to the strategies employed, the challenges encountered, and the

approaches to data measurement, had become consistently evident. Subsequent interviews deepened and clarified existing concepts but did not generate additional ones. Analytic rigor was enhanced through the maintenance of an auditable coding trail, systematic theme construction, participant validation, and adherence to methodological guidance for reflexive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analytic process produced six overarching themes (see Table 1), each representing an interdependent dimension of how HR leaders approach reducing employee turnover and employee replacement costs.

**Table 1**

*Major Interview Themes*

Major themes	No. of participants who referenced theme	No. of references made to theme
Work–life flexibility and sustainable work design	7	10
Well-being and psychological safety	7	7
Change enablement and communication	8	18
Talent growth and total rewards	7	12
People-centered and inclusive leadership	8	9
Data-driven feedback	10	10

Analytic rigor was enhanced through the maintenance of an auditable coding trail, systematic theme construction, participant validation, and adherence to methodological guidance for reflexive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analytic process produced six overarching themes, each representing an interdependent dimension of how HR leaders approach reducing employee turnover and employee replacement costs. These themes embody a socially sustainable leadership model that balances performance with human well-being. Rather than treating retention as a standalone HR metric, leaders address the systemic conditions that influence why employees stay or leave. By fostering

trust, flexibility, inclusion, growth, and transparent decision-making, leaders reduce avoidable turnover, preserve institutional knowledge, and significantly mitigate the direct and indirect costs of employee replacement. The sections that follow explore these themes and subthemes in detail, integrating participant narratives with triangulated insights drawn from multiple data sources.

### **Theme 1: Work–Life Flexibility and Sustainable Work Design**

The first theme focused on HR leaders' approach to work-life flexibility and sustainable work design, enabling employees to better integrate work with personal demands, thereby decreasing burnout, improving well-being, and strengthening long-term organizational commitment. Participants outlined strategies to create an environment that encourages employee engagement, thereby reducing costly attrition. This theme is articulated through two interrelated and mutually reinforcing subthemes: work–life balance and workload sustainability.

#### ***Subtheme 1.1: Work–Life Balance***

Leaders consistently emphasized that work–life balance was an effective strategy for employee retention. HR leaders' emphasis on aligning work design with employee needs underscores work–life balance as a core well-being strategy. Participant 8 indicated that work–life balance is the highest-rated factor influencing employee retention within their organization.

Promoting work–life balance consistently emerges as a key strategy for enhancing employee engagement and retention. Leaders encourage staff to prioritize family responsibilities, take time off, and disconnect from work, recognizing that well-being is

vital to sustained performance. Participant 5 noted that using remote work has been their most effective strategy to date, adding that it is a very cost-effective tool. Sharma and Sinha (2025) found that work–life balance significantly influences employee performance, well-being, and job satisfaction, emphasizing that supportive policies and flexible practices are essential for reducing stress and fostering organizational commitment. Ferdous et al. (2023) found that flexible work practices reduce turnover intentions primarily by improving work–life balance, thereby enhancing employee well-being and retention.

Overall, these findings reinforce work–life balance as a central, cost-effective well-being strategy through which HR leaders can meaningfully influence employee retention. By intentionally aligning work design with employee needs, leaders foster engagement, reduce burnout, and strengthen organizational commitment. Both participant insights and prior research converge to demonstrate that supportive, flexible work practices not only enhance employee well-being but also serve as a sustainable mechanism for reducing turnover and associated replacement costs.

### ***Subtheme 1.2: Workload Sustainability***

Participants consistently described flexibility as a critical strategy for employee retention. Participant 1 explained that employee incentives were implemented through adjustments to vacation and holiday scheduling policies, as well as a more structured and effective management of overtime. Similarly, Participant 10 noted that “improving flexibility, safety, and support for work–life balance had a significant impact on reducing

burnout.” These accounts illustrate how intentional policy and scheduling changes can directly support employee well-being while mitigating fatigue and disengagement.

When roles, workloads, and schedules are deliberately designed to be adaptable and sustainable, employees are more likely to remain engaged and productive, thereby reducing costly attrition and the need for frequent recruitment and onboarding. de Jonge and Peeters (2025) further emphasized that prioritizing resource-rich roles that sustain employee energy, engagement, and capacity over time enables organizations to proactively reduce burnout-driven turnover and associated replacement costs. This perspective underscores a preventive approach where job design serves as a strategic plan to sustain well-being, stabilize retention, and mitigate long-term workforce costs.

Collectively, these findings underscore flexibility not merely as an employee benefit, but as a strategic workforce design approach that supports long-term organizational sustainability. By embedding flexibility into work structures and policies, HR leaders can address burnout at its source, strengthen employee commitment, and achieve meaningful reductions in turnover and replacement costs. This approach positions flexibility as a foundational element of effective employee well-being strategies rather than a reactive retention tool.

Overall, the findings from this theme align closely with social sustainability theory (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017) and the ECSF (van Marrewijk & Hardjono, 2003), both of which emphasized the long-term preservation of human capital through healthy, equitable, and supportive work systems. Social sustainability theory highlights the importance of designing work environments that safeguard employee well-being,

promote balance, and sustain individuals' capacity to contribute over time. Participants' emphasis on work–life balance and workload sustainability reflects this principle by prioritizing employee health, engagement, and continuity rather than short-term productivity gains. Similarly, the social dimension of the ECSF, particularly its focus on working conditions, work–life balance, and sustainable work organization, positions flexibility and responsible workload design as essential to organizational resilience and workforce stability.

## **Theme 2: Well-Being and Psychological Safety**

The second theme emphasizes how HR leaders consistently advocate a holistic, systems-level approach to employee well-being rather than isolated wellness initiatives. HR leaders identified well-being and psychological safety as proactive approaches to improving workplace culture, emphasizing their role in cultivating environments where employees feel safe, valued, and included. This theme is articulated through two interrelated subthemes: well-being support systems and sustainability of well-being programs.

### ***Subtheme 2.1: Well-being Support Systems***

Leaders consistently emphasized the importance of employee well-being programs and support systems within their organizations. Participants described a range of initiatives aimed at promoting employees' physical, mental, social, and psychological health. For instance, Participant 5 noted that their organization offers a broad and inclusive set of well-being programs, which has strengthened overall employee well-being and contributed meaningfully to employee retention. Similarly, Participant 1

described the expansion of employee assistance programs, particularly to support employees exposed to high-stress or critical work situations. This expansion reflected an awareness of the demanding nature of employees' roles and the need for targeted, accessible support.

The significance of these practices is further reinforced by scholarly literature linking structured well-being support to improved retention outcomes. Santoso (2024) identified employee wellness programs as a critical factor in strengthening employee retention across organizations. Similarly, Masood (2024) found that well-being support programs and systems are particularly influential in high-turnover contexts. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that embedded support mechanisms enhance psychological well-being and organizational commitment, thereby reducing turnover intentions and associated replacement costs.

### ***Subtheme 2.2: Sustainability of Well-being Programs***

Sustainability of well-being programs emerged as a key mechanism through which leaders described how employee well-being can be adaptively maintained over time. Participants widely identified well-being programs as an essential strategy for reducing employee turnover and associated replacement costs; however, they also noted that long-term sustainability is not always consistently supported. For example, Participant 1 emphasized the need to implement health and wellness initiatives organization-wide rather than limiting them to individual departments, highlighting the importance of equitable access across the institution. Similarly, Participant 4 observed that although several initiatives were initially piloted, the resulting gains were often

short-lived, with early improvements failing to be sustained over time. Participant 4 further noted that positive intelligence training supported sustained employee well-being by increasing self-awareness, strengthening interpersonal understanding, and equipping employees with practical tools to manage stress, reframe negative thinking, and consistently return to work with a more positive and productive mindset. As noted by Chamine (2012), positive intelligence aligns with the sustainability of well-being programs by strengthening individuals' capacity to interrupt self-sabotaging mental patterns and apply constructive responses consistently, thereby enabling well-being initiatives to be reinforced, embedded in daily behaviors, and maintained beyond initial implementation.

Regarding mental health, Participant 9 indicated that although it is a central pillar of employee well-being programs, many leaders fail to routinely revisit these initiatives to assess effectiveness, reinforce participation, or adapt them to evolving employee needs. Similarly, Participant 6 described efforts to foster an equitable workplace in which employees feel safe, underscoring the role of sustained well-being practices in promoting inclusion and psychological safety.

These participant perspectives align with prior research emphasizing the importance of structurally embedded and continuously evaluated well-being systems. Essien et al. (2025) emphasized that integrated, evaluative HR systems centered on burnout prevention and equitable reward structures are critical for long-term workforce retention and organizational resilience. Similarly, Qamar et al. (2024) found that sustainable HRM practices predict employee well-being most effectively when well-

being initiatives are institutionally embedded, routinely assessed, and supported through coherent HR systems rather than implemented as isolated or episodic interventions.

Together, these findings reinforce participants' assertions that well-being strategies must be maintained, reviewed, and equitably supported over time to meaningfully influence retention and organizational stability.

Overall, the sustainability of well-being programs functioned as a practical extension of the broader theme of well-being and psychological safety, underscoring that supportive initiatives must be sustained, not episodic, to meaningfully influence retention outcomes. Participants' emphasis on equitable access, ongoing evaluation, and responsiveness to employee needs reflects the conditions under which psychological safety is most likely to be reinforced: employees experience support as reliable, inclusive, and embedded in everyday practices rather than dependent on individual leaders or temporary priorities. When well-being strategies are consistently maintained, assessed, and improved, they strengthen employees' sense of security, trust, and belonging, key psychological safety mechanisms that can reduce burnout risk, increase engagement, and ultimately decrease turnover and associated replacement costs.

The alignment of this theme with social sustainability theory (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017) is evident in participants' emphasis on equity, inclusion, well-being, and long-term social resilience as core organizational responsibilities. Social sustainability theory positions well-being and psychological safety as foundational social conditions that enable individuals to thrive within institutions through fairness, participation, and supportive social infrastructures. This theme also aligns with the ECSF (van Marrewijk &

Hardjono, 2003), which emphasized values-driven, integrated sustainability approaches that extend beyond compliance to prioritize people-centered outcomes. Participants' focus on institutional embedding, continuous evaluation, and equitable access reflects an integrative sustainability orientation in which employee well-being is treated as a strategic and enduring organizational value. These findings illustrate how sustained well-being and psychological safety practices operate as socially sustainable mechanisms that reinforce trust, inclusion, and long-term organizational viability, ultimately supporting employee retention and reducing replacement costs.

### **Theme 3: Change Enablement and Communication**

The third theme highlights a consistent finding across interviews that effective employee well-being strategies require deliberate change enablement and communication. Change management, communication, and buy-in were described as interdependent elements functioning as a unified system rather than as separate processes. This theme is expressed through two interrelated subthemes that collectively illustrate its core dimensions: change management and effective communication and buy-in.

#### ***Subtheme 3.1: Change Management***

Leaders consistently described effective change management as a critical enabler of employee well-being initiatives, emphasizing the importance of structured employee involvement and sustained supportive resources throughout periods of transition. Participants noted that resistance to well-being strategies emerged at multiple levels, including from employees who were skeptical of change and from leaders who questioned the value or feasibility of such initiatives. To mitigate these challenges,

leaders described implementing formal change management mechanisms that embedded employee participation, leadership accountability, and ongoing well-being support into the change process, rather than treating well-being initiatives as isolated or short-term interventions.

Participants further highlighted that meaningful change required shifts in behavior and mindset, not merely the introduction of new programs. For example, Participant 6 emphasized that lasting change is reflected in observable changes in behavior and employees' perceptions of whether conditions are genuinely improving over time. In contrast, Participant 1 described their organization as highly reactive, often resisting proactive well-being strategies until issues became acute. To address this resistance, the participant engaged senior leadership in data-informed discussions that articulated the return on investment of well-being initiatives, reframing these strategies as essential components of organizational effectiveness rather than discretionary benefits.

These findings align with Khonjelwayo and Ellenson (2024), who demonstrated that integrating change management practices with active employee engagement can function as an effective organizational turnaround strategy by reducing resistance and strengthening retention and performance. Collectively, participants' accounts suggest that well-being initiatives are most effective when implemented through intentional change management processes that align organizational goals, leadership commitment, and employee experience, thereby supporting both individual well-being and long-term organizational sustainability.

### ***Subtheme 3.2: Effective Communication and Buy-in***

Leaders frequently emphasized the critical role of effective communication in the successful implementation of employee well-being strategies. Participants described communication as essential for building understanding, reducing resistance, and fostering trust throughout change processes. For example, Participant 4 highlighted that early and transparent communication, coupled with advanced socialization of impending changes, helped mitigate initial resistance by cultivating staff and leadership buy-in prior to implementation. Similarly, Participant 3 described intentionally encouraging employees to speak up and share feedback or suggestions to improve and streamline organizational processes. However, this participant also noted a recurring challenge in ensuring a shared understanding of appropriate manager–employee boundaries and in supporting employees in communicating feedback constructively and professionally to both peers and leadership.

Further reinforcing this perspective, Participant 8 indicated that effective change management requires clearly articulating the organizational “why,” explicitly linking actions to employee feedback, and consistently reinforcing a focus on employee well-being. This participant emphasized the importance of ongoing check-ins to ensure that changes are clearly understood, perceived as responsive to employee needs, and functioning as intended in practice. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of intentional, transparent, and bidirectional communication as a mechanism for sustaining employee well-being initiatives during periods of change.

These participant perspectives align with prior research demonstrating the central role of leadership communication in shaping employee responses to organizational change. Specifically, Nurhayati et al. (2024) found that leadership communication and employee well-being positively influence employee trust, which serves as a mediating mechanism, strengthening employee readiness for change and enhancing support for organizational change initiatives.

Taken together, these findings highlight communication and employee buy-in as foundational enablers of effective and sustainable well-being strategies. Leaders described how transparent, consistent, and bidirectional communication not only clarifies the purpose and intent of well-being initiatives but also fosters trust, psychological safety, and shared ownership of change. By actively engaging employees, linking actions to feedback, and reinforcing the organizational rationale for change, leaders strengthen employee buy-in and increase the likelihood that well-being strategies are understood, supported, and meaningfully integrated into day-to-day practice.

Moreover, this theme aligns closely with social sustainability theory, which emphasizes participatory processes, trust-building, and the creation of supportive institutional conditions that enable long-term human well-being (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). Leaders' emphasis on employee involvement, transparent communication, and behavioral change reflects the social sustainability principle that organizational systems must foster inclusion, voice, and shared responsibility to sustain positive social outcomes over time. Similarly, these findings align with the ECSF, which positions sustainability as an embedded organizational orientation rather than a set of discrete initiatives (van

Marrewijk & Hardjono, 2003). By integrating change management, communication, and buy-in into everyday practices, leaders operationalize a people-centered approach that balances organizational performance with employee well-being, reinforcing sustainability as a continuous, value-driven process. This theme demonstrates that sustained employee well-being is achieved when change enablement and communication are intentionally embedded within organizational culture, governance, and leadership practice, supporting both social sustainability and long-term organizational resilience.

#### **Theme 4: Talent Growth and Total Rewards**

The fourth theme highlights the importance of talent growth and total rewards as critical drivers in an organization's commitment to employees' values. Participants repeatedly stressed that strategies under this category represent the operational and strategic infrastructure that enable workforce effectiveness, retention, and equity. This theme contains two interrelated subthemes: professional development and budget stewardship.

##### ***Subtheme 4.1: Professional Development***

Professional development emerged as a consistent and significant topic among HR leaders when discussing employee well-being. Participants repeatedly emphasized that intentional investments in employee growth were closely linked to higher engagement, reduced turnover, and lower replacement costs. Leaders described professional development not only as a talent management strategy but also as a critical well-being support that fosters purpose, confidence, and long-term commitment to the organization.

Participant 3 highlighted a holistic approach to employee enrichment and advancement through continuous coaching, cross-training, and structured professional development opportunities. This approach enabled staff to expand their competencies beyond their current roles, increasing both adaptability and career satisfaction. By intentionally observing individual strengths and developmental needs, the leader tailored learning opportunities to align with employees' interests and organizational goals. The use of cross-training was also described as a mechanism for reducing burnout, increasing role clarity, and building resilience by allowing employees to diversify their skill sets and share workload demands.

Additionally, the participant noted leveraging the institution's professional development office to promote ongoing learning, collaboration, and team bonding. These efforts were framed as a means of elevating existing talents while creating a culture that values continuous growth and internal mobility. Leaders viewed such practices as reinforcing employees' sense of being valued and invested in, thereby strengthening retention by signaling long-term career viability within the organization.

Research supports these perspectives, consistently demonstrating that access to career development, skill-building opportunities, and clear advancement pathways enhances employee engagement and significantly reduces turnover intentions. By strengthening the psychological contract between employees and the organization, professional development initiatives contribute to sustained commitment, improved well-being, and reduced replacement costs (Sinisterra et al., 2024). In addition, a systematic review found that continuing professional training and development opportunities are

associated with higher intention to stay and lower intention to leave, with effects often operating through increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Shiri et al., 2023).

Viewed holistically, these findings underscore professional development as a foundational well-being strategy rather than a peripheral benefit. By embedding continuous learning, cross-training, and advancement opportunities into organizational practices, HR leaders foster a sense of long-term career viability, which directly supports employee well-being. Such investments strengthen engagement and organizational commitment while mitigating burnout and turnover, ultimately reducing replacement costs. As reflected in both participant insights and the supporting literature, professional development operates as a sustainable mechanism through which organizations can simultaneously advance talent and promote enduring retention outcomes.

#### ***Subtheme 4.2: Budget Stewardship***

Participants consistently reported that budget allocation challenges were prevalent across their organizations, particularly amid competing institutional priorities and limited financial flexibility. Several leaders noted that these constraints necessitated innovative, intentional approaches to maximize existing resources rather than rely on new funding streams. For example, Participant 2 emphasized a strong commitment to budget stewardship by strategically leveraging current resources, creatively integrating them within teams, and assessing staff interests to ensure that development opportunities delivered meaningful value within existing limitations. One such approach involved implementing horizontal training, which enabled organizations to build internal capacity,

promote skill diversification, and enhance role coverage without incurring high additional costs.

Similarly, Participant 5 indicated that, within current budget constraints, resources were prioritized to maintain salary equity across roles and functions, while limited capacity to address emerging market pressures remained an ongoing challenge that leadership continued to advocate for at a broader funding level. In addition, Participant 1 described creatively leveraging underutilized supports, such as already-funded employee assistance programs and no-cost community partnerships, to align employee well-being strategies with available financial resources.

Complementing these development-focused strategies, participants described comprehensive total rewards systems, including competitive compensation, benefits, recognition, and nonfinancial rewards, as critical mechanisms for reinforcing perceptions of fairness, appreciation, and organizational support. Prior research demonstrates that such perceptions are strongly associated with organizational commitment and employees' intent to stay (Figueiredo et al., 2025). When talent growth initiatives are intentionally aligned with total rewards strategies, organizations create a more holistic retention mechanism that addresses both intrinsic and extrinsic employee needs, thereby increasing the likelihood that employees will remain, perform, and grow within the organization (Rachman & Hamzah, 2023).

Collectively, these findings position budget stewardship as a strategic capability rather than a limiting condition. Leaders described stewarding limited resources through thoughtful prioritization, internal capacity building, and integrated reward systems that

extend the impact of existing investments. By aligning professional development and total rewards within financial constraints, organizations can sustain employee engagement and retention while demonstrating fiscal responsibility, underscoring the central role of effective budget stewardship in supporting long-term workforce stability and organizational performance.

The theme of talent growth and total rewards aligns strongly with social sustainability theory, which emphasizes equity, well-being, and long-term human development as foundational to sustainable organizations (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). By prioritizing professional development, equitable total rewards, and responsible budget stewardship, HR leaders operationalize social sustainability through investments that enhance employee capability, fairness, and quality of work life. Similarly, this theme reflects the ECSF's emphasis on people-centered value creation, internal cohesion, and the integration of economic and social objectives (van Marrewijk & Hardjono, 2003). By intentionally aligning talent development and total rewards, organizational leaders balance fiscal responsibility with sustained employee well-being, reinforcing workforce resilience and retention as core components of long-term organizational sustainability.

#### **Theme 5: People-Centered and Inclusive Leadership**

The fifth theme reflects leadership behaviors and cultural conditions that shape employee experience and engagement across the organization. Participants described actively prioritizing employee well-being by valuing diverse perspectives and implementing policies and practices that support employees' holistic needs and sustained performance. This theme aligns with social sustainability theory (Eizenberg & Jabareen,

2017) and the ECSF (van Marrewijk & Hardjono, 2003), illustrating how inclusive, people-centered leadership and supportive organizational cultures embed well-being, equity, and engagement into everyday practices that sustain human capital and organizational performance over time. This theme comprises three interrelated subthemes: employee belonging, employee engagement, and proactive employee relations.

### ***Subtheme 5.1: Employee Belonging***

Participants described intentionally embedding employee belonging within their well-being strategies, emphasizing its central role in supporting overall employee well-being. Participant 4 noted that creating structured opportunities for social connection allowed employees to step away from daily pressures and engage meaningfully with one another. These moments of togetherness fostered a stronger sense of belonging, reinforced interpersonal trust, and strengthened team relationships. Similarly, Participant 3 explained that leading a multigenerational team required using varied communication methods and transparent explanations of the “how” and “why” behind decisions, thereby reinforcing inclusive leadership practices and promoting employee belonging.

Participants consistently indicated that when employees felt socially connected and valued as part of a collective, morale and cohesion improved, contributing to a more supportive and psychologically healthy work environment.

Employee belonging has emerged as a critical organizational condition that supports employee well-being while simultaneously reducing turnover risk and associated replacement costs. Blau et al. (2023) indicated that when employees feel a

sense of belonging, they are more likely to feel psychologically safe and valued, which contributes to greater well-being and stronger organizational attachment. Similarly, Brown et al. (2025) found that a sense of belonging was positively associated with motivation and retention intentions, particularly in organizational environments perceived as equitable and inclusive. Their findings indicate that employees who feel they belong are less likely to disengage or seek alternative employment, thereby reducing voluntary turnover. Taken together, these studies suggest that fostering employee belonging functions as a preventive strategy that enhances well-being and mitigates the financial and operational costs associated with employee turnover and replacement by strengthening employees' commitment to remain with the organization.

Overall, the findings indicate that employee belonging is not a peripheral outcome of well-being initiatives but a deliberately embedded strategy that strengthens both individual and organizational outcomes. Participants' accounts demonstrate that inclusive leadership behaviors, intentional social connection, and transparent communication cultivate trust, cohesion, and psychological safety, all of which are foundational to employee well-being. When paired with empirical evidence linking belonging to enhanced motivation, retention intentions, and reduced turnover risk, these findings suggest that fostering belonging functions as a sustainable, preventive approach to workforce stability. By reinforcing employees' sense of value and collective identity, organizations can simultaneously support well-being and mitigate the financial and operational costs associated with employee disengagement and replacement.

### ***Subtheme 5.2: Employee Engagement***

For HR leaders, employee engagement plays a central role in advancing employee well-being by fostering a work environment where individuals feel supported and motivated to thrive. Participants described strategies such as focusing on employee engagement, understanding that reducing employee turnover and associated costs is a natural byproduct of those efforts. Participant 6 noted that leaders need to meet employees where they are, engaging in honest, humane conversations and applying flexible, creative, and employee-specific approaches that recognize different short- and long-term needs, understanding that equity requires responsiveness rather than uniformity. Similarly, Participant 9 emphasized a partnership-oriented model of employee engagement in which organizations and employees work collaboratively to balance responsibilities, provide practical support for daily work, and prioritize mental well-being to ease workload demands and sustain engagement.

Reward practices further reinforced the centrality of employee engagement as a mechanism through which well-being strategies influence retention and organizational performance. Across data sources, participants consistently emphasized that strategic reward and recognition systems play a critical role in sustaining engagement by fostering motivation, trust, and loyalty. When employees perceive recognition and rewards as equitable and aligned with their contributions, they are more likely to remain committed to the organization, thereby strengthening organizational social sustainability and long-term performance outcomes (Adesina & Egbuta, 2025; Saks, 2006). These findings

suggest that engagement-focused reward practices serve not only as retention tools but also as structural supports for socially sustainable organizations.

Across the evidence presented, these findings underscore employee engagement as a critical mechanism through which well-being initiatives translate into sustained employee retention. By emphasizing relational leadership, equitable recognition, and responsive support structures, HR leaders cultivate a sense of value, trust, and mutual commitment that strengthens employees' emotional and psychological attachment to the organization. Engagement, therefore, functions not merely as a motivational outcome but as a strategic retention method that mitigates turnover and employee replacement costs. As such, fostering meaningful and inclusive engagement emerges as a foundational element of socially sustainable organizations committed to long-term workforce stability and performance.

### ***Subtheme 5.3: Proactive Employee Relations***

Proactive employee relations is a strategic approach HR leaders use, centered on preventing workplace issues before they escalate by intentionally fostering trust, engagement, and positive working relationships among employees, leaders, and the organization. This strategy emphasizes early intervention, ongoing dialogue, and the continuous enhancement of the employee experience. Participant 7 observed that when individuals in similar roles join a team, peer collaboration becomes more effective, allowing team members to support one another. To reinforce this, the team implemented group retreats where challenges could be addressed collectively; when someone felt overwhelmed or lacked knowledge in a particular area, workshops or retreats were used

to answer questions and help individuals regain confidence and stay current. Participants described periodically checking in with employees to understand what keeps them with the organization. This approach reflects proactive employee relations by intentionally creating structured opportunities for peer support, early problem-solving, and shared learning to address workload concerns or knowledge gaps before they escalate.

Research further supports the role proactive employee relations plays. Yadav et al. (2024) defined employee relations as an ongoing, relational process shaped by trust, communication, fairness, and participatory mechanisms, and emphasized that preventive and relationship-centered practices foster long-term employment stability and commitment. Complementing this perspective, Shih and Nguyen (2023) provided pragmatic evidence that proactive employee behaviors enhance the quality of leader–member exchange (LMX) when organizations cultivate climates that view proactivity as constructive rather than disruptive. This finding suggests that proactivity produces relational value only when organizational norms recognize and support it.

Proactive employee relations emerged as a strategic, relationship-centered approach through which HR leaders prevent workplace challenges by fostering trust, peer collaboration, and ongoing dialogue. By intentionally creating structured opportunities such as retreats, workshops, and regular check-ins, leaders address workload concerns and skill gaps early, reinforcing employee confidence and sustained engagement. Both participant experiences and supporting scholarship demonstrate that preventive, participatory practices strengthen leader–employee relationships and contribute to

long-term commitment and employment stability, positioning proactive employee relations as a critical mechanism for organizational effectiveness and retention.

This theme illustrates how people-centered and inclusive leadership practices shape organizational cultures that actively support employee well-being, engagement, and sustained performance. Across the three subthemes, participants demonstrated that well-being is not treated as a standalone initiative but as a culturally embedded leadership practice reinforced through intentional connection, equitable recognition, responsive engagement, and preventive relationship management. By embedding well-being, equity, and engagement into everyday leadership and employee relations practices, HR leaders advance socially sustainable organizations that mitigate turnover risk while fostering a resilient, engaged, and high-performing workforce over time.

#### **Theme 6: Data-Driven Feedback**

The sixth theme reflects the most frequently cited item among leaders in measuring the effectiveness of well-being strategies to reduce employee turnover and replacement costs. Participants described using data-driven feedback mechanisms, including employee surveys, stay interviews, business scorecards, time-bound communications, and targeted marketing, tracking time-off utilization trends, and external benchmarking, to systematically assess what well-being strategies were effective or ineffective, enabling evidence-based adjustments aimed at reducing employee turnover and associated replacement costs. Participant 8 indicated that their organization has administered an anonymous survey through an external department to track year-over-year employee perceptions of engagement, satisfaction, leadership, team

dynamics, and organizational support, with the results informing the unit's strategic direction for the following year. In addition, Participant 10 noted that HR analytics, combined with employee feedback, were used to assess underlying patterns and trends influencing burnout, engagement, and retention, resulting in a reduction in voluntary turnover of 15%–22% and measurable decreases in employee replacement costs.

Research further reinforces the need for data-driven feedback to determine effective well-being strategies. Londhe et al. (2025) demonstrated that organizations using data-backed HR strategies are more effective at improving workplace satisfaction and reducing employee turnover, and that embedding workforce analytics into routine HR decision-making enables targeted well-being and engagement interventions that strengthen retention outcomes. Similarly, De Vos et al. (2024) demonstrated how HR analytics and data-backed decision-making improve organizations' ability to identify turnover risk and intervene proactively. Collectively, this evidence shows that integrating analytics into HR decision making enables organizations to target well-being interventions more precisely, strengthening retention while reducing avoidable turnover and replacement costs.

Theme 6 aligns closely with social sustainability theory, which emphasizes continuous evaluation, participatory feedback, and adaptive governance as mechanisms for sustaining human well-being within organizations (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). By systematically integrating employee voice, workforce analytics, and benchmarking into decision-making, HR leaders operationalize social sustainability through evidence-based practices that promote equity, resilience, and long-term workforce stability. Similarly,

this theme reflects the ECSF's emphasis on measurement, learning, and continuous improvement as essential to embedding sustainability into organizational strategy, demonstrating that data-driven well-being initiatives are not episodic interventions but enduring systems that support employee retention and organizational viability (van Marrewijk & Hardjono, 2003). This perspective underscores that when well-being metrics are systematically integrated into organizational learning and decision processes, they create feedback loops that strengthen strategic resilience, sustain employee commitment, and reduce long-term turnover and replacement costs.

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

The findings from this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry offer actionable guidance for HR leaders seeking to make informed, outcome-optimized, fiscally responsible, and equitable decisions about employee well-being strategies to reduce employee turnover and replacement costs. Interpreted together, the six themes point to a leadership model grounded in people-centered and inclusive leadership, characterized by proactive employee relations, intentional engagement, clear and transparent communication, and the strategic integration of well-being into organizational decision-making. This model emphasizes shared responsibility, trust-building, and sustainable work design, positioning HR leaders as change enablers who align employee well-being initiatives with long-term organizational performance and social sustainability outcomes.

### **Advancing Work–Life Flexibility Through Sustainable Work Design**

HR leaders should intentionally implement work-life flexibility and sustainable work design as a core employee well-being strategy by structuring work to support

balance, resilience, and long-term performance. Embedding flexibility into work structures advances socially sustainable practices that reduce burnout, strengthen organizational commitment, and mitigate employee turnover and replacement costs, positioning employee well-being as both a moral responsibility and a strategic sustainability imperative. Pragmatic evidence supports this recommendation. Wang et al. (2021) demonstrated that work design features such as job autonomy, supportive social structures, and manageable workloads reduce work–home interference and burnout while sustaining employee well-being and performance in FWAs. Similarly, Peretz (2024) found that sustainable HRM practices, particularly those emphasizing flexibility and employee-centered work structures, enhance employee engagement and performance across cultural contexts, reinforcing flexible work design as a socially sustainable strategy that supports long-term organizational commitment and reduced turnover.

### **Fostering Psychological Safety as a Business Strategy**

Organizational leaders should intentionally foster psychologically safe environments as a foundational strategy for supporting employee well-being and resilience. Leaders are encouraged to embed practices that promote open communication, trust, and support, enabling employees to voice concerns, seek assistance, and adapt without fear of negative consequences—particularly during periods of organizational change and uncertainty (Grum & Babnik, 2022). HR leaders should further implement supportive and inclusive HR practices that reinforce relational safety and equitable treatment, as these conditions have been shown to strengthen both employee and organizational resilience by enhancing trust, inclusion, and coping capacity (Aljuaid,

2025). Prioritizing mental health and psychological safety through sustainable HRM approaches positions organizations to reduce burnout, increase engagement, and improve long-term employee retention (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that fostering psychologically safe, supportive, and inclusive work environments is not only a well-being imperative but also a strategic lever for sustaining resilience, engagement, and retention during ongoing change.

### **Driving Change Management and Buy-In**

Effective change management is essential to the successful adoption and long-term sustainability of organizational initiatives, particularly employee well-being strategies intended to reduce turnover and associated replacement costs. Research consistently demonstrates that change efforts are more likely to succeed when leaders prioritize transparent, timely, and collaborative communication that builds trust and fosters employee buy-in (Hubbart, 2023). Clear communication enables employees to understand the rationale, benefits, and personal relevance of well-being initiatives, reducing uncertainty and resistance while strengthening psychological ownership and commitment. Research further indicates that employee buy-in is strongly influenced by trust in leadership and the quality of workplace relationships, underscoring the importance of inclusive and participatory change processes when implementing well-being interventions (Som & Chan, 2024). Organizational change research confirms that communication functions not merely as a support mechanism but as a central driver of engagement, readiness, and behavioral alignment, which are factors closely associated with sustained participation and retention (Taruchaín-Pozo et al., 2025). Accordingly, HR

leaders who embed structured change management practices, such as early stakeholder involvement, consistent messaging, and continuous feedback mechanisms, are more likely to achieve lasting well-being outcomes, strengthen employee commitment, and mitigate turnover and replacement costs.

### **Aligning Talent Growth and Total Rewards**

Aligning career development and total rewards strategies is a critical recommendation for sustaining employee well-being, long-term engagement, and organizational value while reducing employee turnover and replacement costs. Recent research on organizational career growth demonstrates that when employees perceive clear opportunities for skill development, role enrichment, and internal advancement, they exhibit stronger organizational commitment and lower turnover intentions, as career growth signals long-term investment in the employee–organization relationship (Wang & Abu Hasan, 2024). Complementing this, research on total rewards emphasizes that employees evaluate compensation, benefits, work–life supports, and developmental opportunities holistically rather than as isolated incentives; when these elements are aligned with career development, they reinforce perceived fairness, support, and well-being, which are central to retention (Fulmer & Li, 2022). Together, these findings suggest that organizations should intentionally integrate career pathways, learning investments, and comprehensive rewards systems to create a sustainable employment value proposition that supports employee well-being, enhances engagement, and mitigates the high financial and operational costs associated with voluntary turnover and talent replacement.

### **Advancing People-Centered and Inclusive Leadership**

Organizational leaders should intentionally advance inclusive, people-centered leadership practices that prioritize belonging, trust, and employee support as a core strategy to enhance well-being and reduce employee turnover and replacement costs. Leaders should be trained and held accountable for consistently demonstrating inclusive behaviors, such as open communication, accessibility, recognition of individual contributions, and support for diverse perspectives, which have been shown to significantly strengthen employee well-being and psychological safety (Liu et al., 2024). In addition, organizations should embed structured practices, including regular developmental feedback, inclusive decision-making, and manager-led well-being check-ins, to signal care, fairness, and respect, factors shown to enhance perceived inclusion and trust while lowering turnover intentions (Seck & Borchert, 2025). Leadership development programs should also explicitly link inclusive leadership competencies to well-being outcomes and retention metrics, ensuring leaders understand their role in mitigating the financial and operational costs of employee replacement. Collectively, this evidence reinforces that inclusive leadership indirectly reduces turnover by improving employee well-being, organizational identification, and leader–member exchange, thereby supporting workforce stability and long-term organizational sustainability (Li et al., 2025). Inclusive leadership functions as a critical mechanism that aligns people-centered leadership practices with retention outcomes by fostering stable, supportive, and resilient workplace relationships.

### **Leveraging Data-Driven Feedback**

Leaders should systematically leverage employee feedback (e.g., pulse surveys, stay interviews, open-text comments) and people analytics (e.g., absence trends, workload indicators, employee assistance program and benefits utilization, engagement and sentiment patterns) to design and continuously refine well-being strategies that proactively reduce turnover risk. When organizations connect employee data to workforce outcomes, leaders can identify specific well-being pain points that predict turnover intention, segment risk by role, unit, or manager, and deploy targeted interventions with the greatest impact. Research indicates that employee well-being is negatively associated with turnover intention and partially mediates the relationship between broader employee experience factors and quit intent, underscoring the importance of grounding well-being initiatives in continuous employee input rather than assumptions (Nair et al., 2025). In parallel, predictive turnover research demonstrates that advanced people analytics can explain and forecast turnover intention using large-scale survey data, identify the most influential risk drivers, and support earlier, more precise interventions before attrition occurs (Lazzari et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings strengthen the case for embedding analytics-informed well-being monitoring into routine talent and workforce governance.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The research findings of this project have meaningful implications for positive social change by addressing persistent gaps in how organizations identify and implement effective employee well-being strategies to reduce employee turnover and associated

replacement costs. Rather than treating well-being as a collection of isolated initiatives, HR leaders can see a sustainable impact occur when well-being is embedded across organizational systems, leadership practices, and decision-making processes.

### **Supporting Sustainable Work Design**

Integrating work-life flexibility and sustainable work design with well-being and psychological safety underscores the importance of creating work environments that support both functional and emotional sustainability. Researchers highlighted FWAs, manageable workloads, and psychologically safe cultures as foundational strategies for reducing burnout and voluntary turnover (Çivilidağ & Durmaz, 2024). These approaches address a critical limitation of traditional well-being strategies that emphasize individual resilience while overlooking structural and systemic conditions. From a social change perspective, embedding flexibility and psychological safety into organizational norms promotes more equitable access to sustainable employment, particularly for employees managing caregiving responsibilities, health concerns, or other life demands. Collectively, these practices contribute to broader societal outcomes by reinforcing employee dignity, long-term employability, and economic security.

### **Enhancing Leadership Behavior and Communication**

This research project highlighted the critical role of people-centered leadership in sustaining employee trust and engagement during organizational change. Researchers showed that leaders who prioritized empathy, inclusion, and consistent communication were instrumental in maintaining trust and engagement, particularly during periods of organizational change (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). These findings address a gap in

well-being approaches that overlook the psychological and relational impact of poorly managed change. By fostering inclusive leadership and strengthening change communication practices, organizations can reduce turnover driven by uncertainty and enhance employee commitment. The social change implication lies in shifting organizational cultures away from hierarchical, compliance-driven models toward more relational, participatory approaches that value employee voice, trust, and shared accountability.

### **Leveraging Employee Feedback and Talent Investment**

Leveraging employee feedback and analytics with talent growth and total rewards contributes to social change by identifying well-being risks and guiding targeted interventions. Coupled with equitable access to development opportunities, recognition, and competitive compensation, these practices address a key gap in well-being strategies that rely on assumptions rather than evidence. From a social change perspective, strengthening employee voice and investing in talent growth promotes fairness, transparency, and long-term workforce sustainability (Liao et al., 2022). These approaches not only reduce turnover and replacement costs but also contribute to broader societal outcomes by supporting career mobility, financial well-being, and inclusive economic participation.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Several limitations of this research project provide important direction for future inquiry. First, the research project relied on a narrow participant pool consisting solely of HR leaders within a specific organizational context. While this approach yielded in-depth

insights into HR perspectives, it limits the generalizability and transferability of the findings. Future research should include broader and more diverse samples across industries, organizational sizes, and sectors to enhance applicability. Incorporating perspectives from non-HR roles, supervisors, and frontline employees would also allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how employee well-being strategies are experienced and operationalized across organizational levels.

Second, the exclusive use of semistructured interviews may not have fully captured the breadth or complexity of employee well-being strategies in practice. Although interviews provided rich qualitative data, additional data sources could strengthen the robustness of findings. Future studies could incorporate surveys, document analysis, and other organizational documentation to better examine both formal and informal well-being practices and their integration into HR systems.

Third, the project's cross-sectional design limits the ability to examine changes in employee well-being strategies, engagement, turnover, and replacement costs over time. Longitudinal and mixed-methods research designs would enable researchers to more closely examine relationships among these variables and assess patterns, sustainability, and potential causal pathways. The inclusion of objective organizational metrics, alongside qualitative data would further strengthen explanatory power.

Finally, the potential for social desirability bias or constrained disclosure due to confidentiality considerations represents an additional limitation. Participants may have emphasized favorable practices or withheld critical details. Future research could mitigate this limitation by incorporating anonymous data collection methods, employee-reported

outcomes, and triangulation with organizational records to enhance credibility and reduce response bias. Addressing these limitations through expanded research designs, diverse participant groups, and multiple data sources may strengthen the rigor, depth, and applicability of future research on employee well-being strategies and their relationship to employee turnover and replacement costs.

### **Conclusion**

In this pragmatic qualitative inquiry I explored how HR leaders use employee well-being strategies to reduce employee turnover and replacement costs, using semistructured interviews with 10 participants and systematic thematic analysis. The analysis identified six interrelated themes: work-life flexibility and sustainable work design; well-being and psychological safety; data-driven feedback and HR analytics; change enablement and communication; inclusive people-centered leadership; and talent growth and total rewards. These themes aligned with the conceptual framework guiding the research, social sustainability theory, and ECSF. Findings indicate that proactive, data-informed, and contextually aligned well-being strategies strengthen engagement, trust, and workforce stability. HR leaders can meaningfully reduce turnover and associated costs by intentionally integrating flexible work structures, psychological safety, employee feedback mechanisms, transparent change communication, and aligned development and reward practices into a cohesive, organization-wide well-being strategy.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
<b>READ HERE FIRST</b> - Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project. Although I will not video record the interview, and our cameras will be turned off the duration of the interview, I would like to audio record this interview. Will you give your consent to be interviewed, please? Thank you.	
Introduce the interview and set the stage. Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview thereby setting the stage.	Hello, my name is Karlita McClinton. I am a Doctoral Candidate with Walden University. The purpose of this interview is to identify and explore effective employee well-being strategies used by HR leaders to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs. I am going to ask you six questions to which I would like your responses. Then, I will conclude the interview. Do you have any questions?
	Interview Questions:
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you describe your role in creating effective employee well-being strategies to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs?</li> <li>2. What effective employee well-being strategies have you used to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs?</li> <li>3. What challenges did you face in implementing the strategies?</li> <li>4. What did you do to mitigate the impact of the challenges?</li> <li>5. How did you measure the effectiveness of the strategies you implemented?</li> <li>6. What additional information regarding the effective employee well-being strategies used by HR leaders to reduce employee turnover and employee replacement costs that we have not already discussed?</li> </ol>
Listen for verbal cues. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth when necessary	
Wrap up the interview thanking participant.	Thank you for participating in the interview, an integral part of my research project.
Schedule a follow-up email to perform member checking with the participant.	I will email you in a week to review the accuracy of my interpretations of your interview responses.