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Effective Strategies Used by Small U.S. Technology Business Leaders to Reduce Turnover and Improve Productivity

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College of Management and Human Potential

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Iesha Hayes

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

Effective Strategies Used by Small U.S. Technology Business Leaders to Reduce
Turnover and Improve Productivity

by

Iesha Hayes

MS, American Public University, 2022

BS, South University, 2018

Qualitative Pragmatic Inquiry Business Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2026

Abstract

High employee turnover in small U.S. technology firms undermines productivity and disrupts workforce stability. Small U.S. technology business leaders are concerned with employee turnover because persistent workforce attrition weakens operational continuity, increases organizational strain, and limits the ability to sustain a stable and effective workforce. Grounded in psychological capital (PsyCap) theory, this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore leadership strategies used by small U.S. technology business leaders in North Carolina to mitigate negative employee experiences that contribute to turnover and reduced productivity. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and publicly available organizational documents. Using thematic analysis, three themes emerged: (a) people-centered leadership grounded in empathy and communication, (b) work–life integration and flexibility as retention strategies, and (c) resilience and optimism to support motivation and trust. A key recommendation is for business leaders to implement structured leadership development initiatives that intentionally integrate psychological capital practices, such as coaching for resilience, recognition systems, and supportive communication routines, to improve employee engagement and reduce turnover. The implications for positive social change include the potential for business leaders to improve employee retention, enhance employee well-being, and support workforce stability within their organizations and communities.

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Section 1: Project Foundation

Background of the Problem

The general business problem is that ineffective leadership practices among small U.S. technology business leaders contribute to elevated employee turnover and reduced organizational productivity (Lin & Huang, 2021; Mahdia, 2024). In the technology sector, turnover rates often exceed national averages, increasing the risk of knowledge loss, reduced workforce stability, and diminished organizational performance (Horst et al., 2023; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2024). Small technology firms are particularly vulnerable to these challenges because they rely on a stable, skilled workforce to sustain performance and innovation.

Scholars have linked persistent turnover to dissatisfaction with workplace culture and ineffective leadership behaviors. Researchers (e.g., Lee, 2021; Lin & Huang, 2021) indicated that leadership practices that promote organizational support and psychological safety are critical to stabilizing the workforce. When leaders fail to address employee experiences, disengagement and turnover may increase, resulting in reduced productivity and organizational effectiveness. Unrealistic productivity expectations and limited professional development support further contribute to workforce instability (Büchler et al., 2020; Mahdia, 2024).

These leadership challenges negatively affect organizational performance, workforce stability, and long-term sustainability in small U.S. technology firms. Addressing ineffective leadership practices is essential to improving employee retention and productivity.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some small U.S. technology business leaders lack effective strategies to mitigate negative employee experiences that contribute to high turnover and reduced productivity. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to explore leadership strategies used by small U.S. technology business leaders in North Carolina to mitigate negative employee experiences that contribute to high turnover and reduced productivity, through semistructured interviews and a review of publicly available organizational documents.

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit six small U.S. technology business leaders who met the established eligibility criteria. Snowball sampling was used as a supplementary recruitment strategy to identify additional eligible participants. Eligibility criteria included a minimum of 5 years of leadership experience in a small U.S. technology firm, direct responsibility for managing employees, and experience addressing employee turnover or engagement challenges. Participants were recruited through professional networks and industry contacts associated with North Carolina technology organizations.

A qualitative methodology was appropriate to explore participants' perspectives and experiences regarding leadership strategies used to address turnover and productivity challenges. This approach allowed for the collection of rich, detailed data reflecting participants' perspectives and the meaning leaders assign to workplace strategies and employee interactions. A pragmatic inquiry design was appropriate because it supported the identification of practical, real-world solutions to an applied business problem. The

pragmatic design aligns with the expectations of the Doctor of Business Administration by emphasizing actionable findings that can directly inform leadership practice in small technology firms.

Data were collected through semistructured interviews and publicly available organizational documents to support triangulation. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, and trustworthiness was supported through member checking and triangulation. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached. The conceptual framework for this project was the psychological capital (PsyCap) theory developed by Luthans et al. (2006), which includes the constructs of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism grounded the research project and provided the conceptual lens for exploring leadership behaviors associated with hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism.

Project Research Question

What effective leadership strategies do small U.S. technology business leaders use to mitigate negative employee experiences that contribute to high turnover and reduced productivity?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are conditions believed to be true but not empirically verified within the project (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). One assumption was that participants would provide honest and accurate responses during interviews. Another assumption was that participants had sufficient experience to describe leadership strategies related to

employee turnover. A third assumption was that access to eligible participants would be sufficient to achieve data saturation. These assumptions framed the conditions under which the data were collected and interpreted.

Limitations

This project has several limitations related to sample scope, data sources, and qualitative interpretation. Limitations are potential weaknesses of a project that are beyond the researcher's control and may affect the interpretation or transferability of the findings (Levitt et al., 2018). One limitation of this project was the use of a small purposive sample of technology business leaders from North Carolina. As a result, the findings may not be broadly transferable to other industries or geographic regions. A second limitation was the reliance on self-reported interview data, which may have been influenced by participant bias or social desirability bias, even when confidentiality was emphasized.

A third limitation was that recruitment through professional platforms may have limited the diversity of participant perspectives. Another limitation was that thematic analysis required researcher interpretation, making some subjectivity unavoidable (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Business Project Ethics

To maintain ethical rigor throughout this project, I adhered to established qualitative research and human-subject protections. As the primary researcher, I recruited participants, obtained informed consent, collected data through semi-structured interviews, reviewed documents, and analyzed the data using thematic analysis. I

maintained ethical research standards by adhering to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements and the principles outlined in the *Belmont Report* (Ajemba & Arene, 2022). I followed the Belmont Report principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice throughout the project.

As the sole researcher, I performed all roles associated with qualitative data collection and analysis and prioritized transparency throughout the project. Researchers who provide a transparent account of their assumptions, potential biases, and relationships to the research may strengthen the objectivity of the data collection and analysis process (Bosma & Granger, 2022). While I have not worked in the technology industry, I regularly interact with technology employees. One component of my job involved issuing equipment, including computers, monitors, and phones, which frequently required me to converse with employees in the technology department. In my organization, I observed that many employees in the technology department were dissatisfied with their jobs, and some left to seek more professional workplace environments and opportunities for growth. My observations sparked an interest in understanding how technology shapes workplace dynamics and how business leaders can foster a positive work environment.

To reduce the influence of personal assumptions, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations were particularly important in this PsyCap-informed project, as principles of trust, respect, and psychological safety aligned with the framework's emphasis on optimism, resilience, and positive leader-employee relationships. Maintaining ethical rigor was essential to

protecting participant trust and ensuring the credibility of findings in this leadership-focused project.

Participant Selection and Protection

I established credibility and rapport through deliberate participant selection, ethical engagement, and systematic analytic practices. Participants were recruited from outside my supervisory authority and outside my immediate professional network to minimize coercion, power differentials, and bias. Rapport was supported through transparent communication of the project's purpose, voluntary participation, and respect for participant autonomy throughout the interview process. Analytic objectivity was further strengthened through consistent use of the interview protocol, reflexive journaling, and triangulation across interview and document data sources. Together, these measures supported trustworthy data collection and interpretation.

Informed Consent and Withdrawal

Informed consent is an important component of ethical research, as it provides participants with information about a project, including its benefits and risks, to help them decide whether to participate (Spellecy & Busse, 2021). During the informed consent process, researchers provide potential participants with a form delineating the research information, such as time commitments, benefits, and risks associated with participation, and the measures to protect participant confidentiality for them to make an informed decision (Bromley et al., 2020). Participants were recruited using purposive sampling and provided informed consent in accordance with Walden University IRB requirements. The semistructured interview questions used as the primary data collection

instrument are included in Appendix A and were reviewed as part of the IRB approval process. The informed consent form asked participants to reply to the email with the words “I consent” to indicate their voluntary participation in the project. The informed consent process ensured that participants understood the project purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their voluntary right to participate.

Respecting participants’ autonomy entails honoring their right to withdraw from a project. The *Belmont Report* explained that research subjects have the right to withdraw from a project at any time, for any reason, without repercussions (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time by email without penalty or adverse consequence.

No incentives were offered for participation in this project. Some researchers provide small monetary incentives to encourage participation in research projects, as these can increase interest in the project and show respect for participants’ time in completing the project activities (Abdelazeem et al., 2022). However, Roehl and Harland (2022) found that advertising incentives to complete a project can attract impostor participants lacking the requisite qualifications.

Confidentiality and Data Security

Participant confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of all project data. I protected the participants’ confidentiality both during and after the project's completion. Participants can incur reputational harm if they express viewpoints that run counter to organizational or industry norms (McKibbin et al., 2021).

Researchers should have strict data security measures to protect participants' confidentiality (Di Minin et al., 2021). After receiving informed consent, participants were assigned pseudonyms, and their responses were encrypted and stored on a secure cloud platform accessible only to the researcher. Potential sensitivities related to workplace dynamics were addressed by fostering an open, nonjudgmental interview environment.

Following the interview protocol (see Appendix B), I instructed the participants to change their Zoom screen names to their pseudonyms. I saved the audio recordings and summaries from each participant's interview, using their assigned pseudonyms, to a password-protected, encrypted cloud drive. I also presented the participants' data using pseudonyms in the written report. All project data will be stored securely for 5 years in a password-protected encrypted location.

The Belmont Report Ethical Framework

The ethical standards governing human research are found in the *Belmont Report*, which identifies respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as foundational ethical principles (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Respect for persons entails treating individuals as autonomous agents who can choose whether to participate in or forgo research projects (Spellecy & Busse, 2021). I showed respect for persons by soliciting informed consent from participants and respecting their decisions regarding participation in the project.

In addition to respect for persons, researchers should minimize project risks in line with the principle of beneficence (Venczel et al., 2024). Researchers demonstrate

beneficence by maximizing the project's benefits to society while actively minimizing potential harm to participants (Pritchard, 2021). I demonstrated beneficence by strictly protecting participants' confidentiality to minimize reputational harm and by publishing the project's findings, enabling business technology leaders seeking strategies to mitigate negative employee experiences to apply them in their organizations.

Justice involves equitably distributing the benefits and burdens of research and deliberately selecting participants rather than conveniently (Strauss et al., 2021). I upheld the principle of justice by establishing appropriate participant eligibility criteria that addressed the project's purpose and central research question. By consciously considering respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, I ensured that the project adhered to ethical research standards. The Walden IRB approval number for the project is 07-03-25-1217415.

Evidence-Based Integrative Review

The literature indicates that leadership behaviors influencing psychological safety, employee engagement, and emotional resilience play a critical role in employee retention and productivity in small U.S. technology firms. This evidence-based integrative review is organized into three sections: (a) conceptual framework, (b) business problem scholarship evidence, and (c) business topic scholarship. The purpose of this review is to synthesize current literature related to leadership strategies that may mitigate negative employee experiences contributing to turnover and reduced productivity.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using databases including ProQuest, EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar. Search terms

included employee engagement, psychological capital, organizational culture, employee turnover, burnout, resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, leadership strategies, small technology firms, and productivity. A total of 135 sources were reviewed, including approximately 112 peer-reviewed journal articles, with most sources published between 2021 and 2025.

This review establishes psychological capital (PsyCap) theory, developed by Luthans et al. (2006), as the conceptual framework for the project. PsyCap includes the constructs of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, which are associated with employee well-being, engagement, and performance outcomes. The literature further suggests that leadership strategies aligned with these constructs may improve employee experiences and reduce turnover in small technology firms.

The review focuses on three interrelated areas of scholarship. First, leadership development and psychological safety influence employee engagement and retention by shaping workplace experiences. Second, organizational culture and employee empowerment support long-term workforce stability and productivity. Third, strategic human resource practices reinforce leadership effectiveness and provide structural support for retention. Collectively, these areas demonstrate that leadership behaviors and organizational systems operate together to influence employee outcomes in small U.S. technology firms.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The applied business problem was that some small U.S. technology business leaders lack effective strategies to mitigate negative employee experiences that contribute

to high turnover and reduced productivity. The literature reviewed in this section provides practical guidance on leadership strategies that small U.S. technology business leaders may use to address this problem. First, leaders may strengthen people-centered leadership behaviors to help reduce disengagement and build trust. Researchers emphasized that employees are more likely to remain in organizations where leaders communicate clearly, listen consistently, and demonstrate empathy during high-pressure periods (Chen et al., 2021). For small firms, these practices may reduce frustration and uncertainty, both of which have been associated with turnover intentions (Chen et al., 2021).

Second, leaders can support work–life integration by setting realistic workload expectations and establishing boundaries that may reduce burnout. The literature links turnover in technology environments to sustained stress, constant expectations of availability, and unclear priorities (Bialek & Hagen, 2022; Chompukum & Vanichbuncha, 2025). Small technology business leaders can respond by prioritizing workload planning, normalizing recovery time, and offering flexible scheduling where feasible (Bialek & Hagen, 2022). These practices may help support productivity by addressing burnout-related strain and lowering the risk of voluntary turnover.

Third, leaders can focus on building psychological safety and trust, particularly in small teams, where leadership behavior can quickly shape workplace culture. The literature suggested that employees may be more likely to remain when they feel secure speaking up, asking for help, and sharing concerns without fear of retribution or blame (Chen et al., 2021). Leader behaviors such as inviting feedback, reframing mistakes as

learning opportunities, and responding to concerns with fairness and consistency may reduce hidden dissatisfaction and improve collaboration, thereby supporting sustained performance (Chen et al., 2021).

Fourth, leaders can strengthen engagement through empowerment, especially because small firms rely heavily on individual contributions. The research shows that employees are more engaged when they have meaningful autonomy, understand how their work connects to organizational goals, and receive timely feedback (Chompukum & Vanichbuncha, 2025). Leaders can delegate decision-making where appropriate, provide employees with access to the information they need to succeed, and recognize contributions in ways that reinforce employees' value.

Finally, leaders can reinforce these strategies through a basic but consistent HR infrastructure that may support retention. The literature suggested that even simple systems, such as structured onboarding, clear role expectations, regular performance conversations, and internal growth pathways, help stabilize teams and reduce turnover risk (Bialek & Hagen, 2022). In small technology firms with limited resources, leaders can implement lightweight processes that maintain consistency without creating an administrative burden (Kaliannan et al., 2023). Leaders who invest in employees' psychological development may strengthen retention and sustain productivity. While Chen et al. (2021) highlighted leadership communication and empathy as key drivers of retention, Bialek and Hagen (2022) and Kaliannan et al. (2023) emphasized the role of organizational systems and workload structures, suggesting that both leadership behaviors and structural factors contribute to turnover outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

PsyCap offered the most suitable framework for exploring how leadership behaviors impact employee retention and productivity in small U.S. technology firms (Luthans et al., 2006). PsyCap is defined as an individual's positive psychological state of development, consisting of four core constructs: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2006). Luthans et al. (2006) explained how each construct supports an individual's ability to cope with adversity, pursue goals, and maintain a positive outlook. Hope reflects goal-directed energy and the ability to identify alternative pathways when obstacles arise. Self-efficacy refers to confidence in one's capacity to execute tasks successfully. Resilience involves recovering from setbacks and maintaining stability under pressure. Optimism supports realistic expectations and persistence toward positive outcomes. These constructs align with the conditions of small U.S. technology firms, where leaders often face decision fatigue, emotional strain, and ongoing adaptability in dynamic environments (Deep, 2023).

Since its introduction, PsyCap has been widely applied in leadership, employee engagement, and organizational behavior research. Recent studies have extended its relevance to high-pressure and technology-driven environments, where leaders must remain focused, emotionally grounded, and future-oriented (Chen et al., 2021). In this project, PsyCap provided a framework for understanding how leadership behaviors may address negative employee experiences associated with disengagement, turnover, and reduced productivity. Prior research has applied PsyCap to examine leadership

effectiveness, employee engagement, and retention across organizational settings (Gan et al., 2023; Pharris et al., 2022; Salina, 2023; Ye et al., 2024).

Hope as a Strategic Resource in High-Turnover Environments

Hope is the first construct in PsyCap and reflects goal-directed energy and the ability to generate alternative pathways to achieve desired outcomes (Luthans et al., 2006; M. Sun et al., 2022). Individuals with high levels of hope demonstrate persistence, adaptability, and motivation when encountering obstacles (Corrigan & Schutte, 2023). This construct is particularly relevant in dynamic work environments where employees must navigate uncertainty while maintaining focus on performance goals.

In organizational settings, hope has been associated with sustained focus, resilience, and reduced disengagement during periods of uncertainty (Pharris et al., 2022). It functions as a stabilizing psychological resource that supports motivation and goal commitment (Sari & Dudija, 2024; Soelistya et al., 2024). Research suggests that hope can serve as a strategic leadership resource rather than solely an individual trait, helping employees sustain engagement in dynamic work environments (Corrigan & Schutte, 2023).

In small U.S. technology firms, employees often operate under conditions of limited resources, shifting priorities, and high expectations for independent problem-solving (Grözinger et al., 2022; Nasrin, 2025). These conditions increase the risk of disengagement and voluntary turnover when employees lack internal psychological resources (Sari & Dudija, 2024). In this context, hope supports mental adaptability and sustained effort despite uncertainty. Leaders who reinforce goal clarity and adaptive

problem-solving may strengthen intrinsic motivation, reduce vulnerability to turnover, and maintain productivity during periods of instability (Pharris et al., 2022).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the second core construct in PsyCap and reflects an individual's confidence in their ability to mobilize motivation, cognitive resources, and actions necessary to achieve specific goals (Luthans et al., 2006). Employees with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist through challenges and maintain confidence in their ability to influence outcomes (Gan et al., 2023). This construct is particularly important in work environments that require independent decision-making and sustained performance under uncertainty.

In small technology firms, where employees are often required to work independently and adapt quickly to evolving demands, self-efficacy becomes a critical driver of sustained performance. When employees believe they can successfully navigate complex tasks, they are less likely to disengage in response to pressure or ambiguity. Leaders who build self-efficacy through clear expectations, skill development, and constructive feedback may strengthen persistence, reduce withdrawal behaviors, and mitigate turnover risk (Gan et al., 2023).

Self-efficacy also supports innovation and problem-solving in environments with limited structure (Ye et al., 2024). Employees who are confident in their capabilities are more likely to take initiative and sustain performance during periods of change. By reinforcing competence through autonomy and feedback, leaders may reduce frustration-

driven disengagement and support consistent productivity in small U.S. technology firms (Wut et al., 2022).

Resilience

Resilience is the third construct of PsyCap and refers to the capacity to recover, adapt, and grow from adversity, stress, or failure (Luthans et al., 2006). Employees with high resilience are less likely to become disengaged when facing workplace challenges such as tight deadlines, project failures, or organizational change (de Souza Santos et al., 2023). This construct reflects an individual's ability to maintain stability and continue functioning effectively despite ongoing workplace pressures.

In high-pressure technology environments, resilience enables individuals and teams to remain productive and focused despite uncertainty (de Souza Santos et al., 2023). Leaders who foster resilience can create psychologically safe environments where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities rather than threats (Salina, 2023). This approach supports continuous improvement and sustained performance.

In small U.S. technology firms, where resource constraints and rapid change can intensify stress, resilience may reduce the likelihood that temporary setbacks lead to long-term disengagement or turnover. Leaders who model adaptive coping behaviors and normalize learning from failure may strengthen employee commitment and protect productivity during periods of instability (Salina, 2023). In this context, resilience supports sustained engagement by helping employees remain focused and adaptable in unpredictable work conditions.

Optimism

Optimism is the fourth construct of PsyCap and reflects a tendency to make positive attributions about current and future success (Luthans et al., 2006). Optimistic individuals interpret setbacks as temporary and manageable rather than permanent or personal. This mindset supports persistence and motivation by reinforcing the belief that challenges can be overcome. In small technology firms, where uncertainty related to product development, funding, or market conditions is common, optimism can buffer against fear-based reactions and employee withdrawal (Salina, 2023).

Leaders who model optimism may foster confidence and reinforce a shared belief in the organization's direction and resilience. Over time, leader modeling of optimism can contribute to a workplace culture characterized by persistence, adaptability, and forward momentum. This perspective supports employee morale and sustained engagement, even in the face of ongoing challenges. In this way, optimism reinforces long-term workforce stability by shaping how employees interpret and respond to uncertainty.

Application of Psychological Capital to Small Technology Firms

Applying PsyCap theory to small technology firms demonstrates how leadership-driven hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism may mitigate burnout and stabilize performance. Small technology firms frequently operate in high-stakes environments where rapid growth expectations, demands for innovation, and lean staffing create organizational stress and instability (Xue et al., 2022). When employees feel unsupported or emotionally drained, engagement may decline, increasing the likelihood of turnover.

PsyCap offers a human-centered approach to addressing these challenges by focusing on internal psychological resources that influence how employees think, feel, and behave at work (Luthans et al., 2006).

Hope and optimism play a central role in sustaining motivation in uncertain environments. Employees with higher levels of hope remain focused on goals, while those with greater optimism are more likely to interpret setbacks as manageable rather than discouraging (Gan et al., 2023). These psychological resources may help counteract disillusionment that can emerge during funding challenges, project delays, or shifting organizational priorities. As a result, employees may maintain engagement and persistence even when external conditions are unpredictable.

Resilience is particularly important in small technology firms, where employees often face long hours, tight deadlines, and evolving responsibilities (de Souza Santos et al., 2023). In these environments, individuals frequently assume multiple roles and must adapt quickly to changing demands, increasing the risk of burnout (Xue et al., 2022). Resilience enables employees to recover from stress, maintain performance, and remain engaged despite ongoing challenges (Cabrera-Aguilar et al., 2023). Leaders who cultivate resilience through realistic expectations, supportive feedback, and the normalization of recovery behaviors may strengthen workforce stability and protect productivity during periods of instability.

Self-efficacy also contributes to employee commitment and performance by strengthening confidence in the ability to complete complex tasks (Gan et al., 2023). Employees who believe in their capabilities are more likely to take initiative, engage in

problem-solving, and contribute innovative ideas. In small technology firms, where autonomy and adaptability are often required, self-efficacy may reduce hesitation, increase persistence, and support sustained performance.

Collectively, PsyCap influences not only individual behavior but also the broader organizational climate. A work environment characterized by psychological safety, mutual support, and shared confidence may enhance collaboration, creativity, and long-term engagement (Upadhyay & Singh, 2024). Prior research suggests that hope, resilience, and optimism function as protective factors against disengagement by helping employees maintain focus and persistence in high-pressure environments (Pharris et al., 2022; Sari & Dudija, 2024; Soelistya et al., 2024). In small technology firms, these psychological resources may contribute to reduced turnover and improved productivity by strengthening employees' capacity to navigate uncertainty and sustain performance over time.

Business Problem Scholarship Evidence

The purpose of this section is to provide comprehensive evidence that high turnover and reduced productivity in small U.S. technology firms, stemming from ineffective technology business leaders' practices, represent a current and significant business problem warranting scholarly investigation. Recent empirical and industry evidence suggests that leadership deficiencies in small U.S. technology firms are associated with employee turnover and reduced productivity. This literature review synthesizes government reports, industry white papers, and peer-reviewed studies from

the last 5 years to demonstrate the scope, persistence, and urgency of leadership-driven workforce challenges in small technology organizations.

The evidence reveals four converging areas that collectively establish the reality and impact of the business problem: (a) escalating turnover trends specific to small technology firms, (b) systematic leadership skill deficiencies, (c) psychological strain amplified by ineffective leadership, and (d) strategic organizational risks that threaten long-term viability. Persistent challenges such as inadequate emotional support, poor alignment of vision, and limited adaptability among leaders continue to drive disengagement and turnover in these firms. These patterns indicate the need for targeted, evidence-based leadership strategies grounded in psychological and strategic competencies.

Turnover Trends in Small U.S. Technology Firms

Turnover trends in small U.S. technology firms demonstrate that ineffective leadership and negative employee experiences represent significant business challenges. Government and industry data indicate that employee turnover in small technology firms exceeds national averages, creating operational and financial strain. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2024) reported that the overall turnover rate in the information sector averaged approximately 2.1% in May 2024, with job separations across all categories reaching about 4.7% during the same period.

Turnover rates vary by firm size, with small and mid-sized technology firms experiencing disproportionately higher separation rates than larger organizations. Firms with 50 to 99 employees reported annual separation rates between 6.5% and 7%,

exceeding those of firms with more than 1,000 employees by approximately 30%–40% (BLS, 2024). These findings suggest that smaller firms may experience turnover rates that are 1.3 to 1.4 times higher than larger organizations. Such elevated rates pose significant challenges to organizational growth, workforce stability, and long-term performance (BLS, 2024; Horst et al., 2023).

Industry research reinforces these patterns while highlighting sector-specific challenges. Horst et al. (2023) reported that technology firms face ongoing difficulties in retaining digital talent, with smaller firms experiencing increased vulnerability due to limited advancement opportunities and compensation constraints. These findings align with BLS (2024) data, which show higher separation rates among firms with fewer than 100 employees.

Gallup (2025) further reported that only 21% of employees worldwide were highly engaged, reflecting a decline from the previous year. Lower engagement levels were more pronounced in smaller organizations, where disengagement is closely linked to increased turnover risk. Similarly, CompTIA's (2024) workforce trends report indicated that 43% of small IT firms identified turnover as their primary workforce challenge, largely due to limited career progression and underdeveloped leadership capabilities. While government data establish the quantitative scope of the problem, industry research highlights the qualitative factors contributing to retention challenges in small technology firms (Kagerbauer & Magdolen, 2024).

Empirical research provides additional insight into the mechanisms underlying turnover trends. Studies indicate that ineffective leadership behaviors, rather than

compensation alone, significantly contribute to turnover in small technology firms (Lin & Huang, 2021; Mahdia, 2024). Ye et al. (2024) found that employees in IT startups with unresponsive leadership were 1.7 times more likely to leave within the first year. Similarly, Oh et al. (2023) identified poor communication and unclear expectations as primary predictors of turnover. These findings align with Collins and Stockton (2022), who demonstrated that leadership-related communication gaps contribute to disengagement and low morale. Collectively, government statistics, industry analysis, and empirical research suggest that turnover in small technology firms is a persistent leadership-related business problem with measurable economic consequences.

Leadership Skill Deficiencies in Small Technology Firms

Analysis of leadership development in small technology firms reveals pervasive skill gaps that contribute to employee disengagement and turnover. The U.S. Small Business Administration (2023) reported that many small firms lack structured leadership development programs and instead rely on informal mentoring or entrepreneurial training. These approaches are often less standardized than leadership development pipelines found in larger organizations.

Empirical evidence indicates that emotional intelligence is a critical leadership competency influencing employee engagement and retention. Research demonstrates that emotional intelligence in leaders significantly predicts employee engagement ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < .001$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that insufficient preparation in emotional intelligence limits leaders' ability to effectively manage human capital and foster productive work environments (Rodrigues et al., 2024).

Industry research supports these findings while identifying key competency gaps. Deloitte (2024) reported that talent management and leadership development are among the most pressing challenges facing technology leaders, cited by 46% of surveyed executives. Similarly, Trueman (2024) found that leaders in small firms scored lower on emotional intelligence assessments, particularly in empathy and social awareness. These deficiencies highlight a widespread gap in leadership capabilities that directly affects employee engagement and retention.

Empirical studies further demonstrate how these leadership deficiencies manifest in daily organizational practices. More than 60% of small technology firms rely on informal mentoring rather than structured training, resulting in inconsistent management practices and limited support for employee development. Collins and Stockton (2022) found that leaders in small firms often prioritize technical responsibilities over people management, contributing to communication breakdowns and low morale. Saeed and You (2022) extended this analysis by linking leadership quality directly to employee engagement and retention outcomes. Together, these findings indicate that leadership skill gaps represent a systemic challenge that undermines organizational effectiveness and workforce stability.

Psychological Capital and Workforce Stability

The interaction between ineffective leadership and high-pressure work environments contributes to increased psychological strain, which in turn affects employee retention and productivity. Gallup (2025) reported that 41% of employees experience high levels of stress during a typical workday, with smaller firms associated

with significantly higher stress levels. Only 23% of employees reported being highly engaged, suggesting a strong relationship between low engagement, psychological strain, and turnover.

Industry analysis indicates that leadership behaviors significantly influence employee well-being in technology environments. Deloitte (2024) reported that nearly 60% of employees experience frequent exhaustion, with leadership support identified as a key factor affecting well-being outcomes (Fisher et al., 2024). Gallup (2025) further found that employees in smaller firms are 1.5 times more likely to feel unsupported during periods of high stress, increasing the likelihood of burnout and disengagement.

Empirical research explains the mechanisms through which leadership behaviors influence psychological outcomes. Song et al. (2022) found that leadership behaviors lacking empathy and consistency were strongly associated with employee burnout, which predicted both disengagement and turnover. Similarly, Wut et al. (2022) argued that ineffective leadership weakens employee trust and adaptability, undermining organizational resilience. These findings suggest that leadership effectiveness plays a critical role in mitigating psychological strain and supporting workforce stability in small technology firms.

Organizational Culture and Employee Retention

Government data, industry analysis, and empirical research collectively demonstrate that ineffective leadership contributes to high turnover and reduced productivity in small U.S. technology firms. The four thematic areas turnover trends,

leadership skill gaps, psychological strain, and organizational risk establish both the scope and urgency of the problem.

Government statistics quantify the magnitude of turnover, while industry research identifies the leadership deficiencies driving these patterns. Empirical studies provide detailed insight into the psychological and organizational mechanisms through which ineffective leadership affects employee engagement, retention, and performance.

These findings indicate that leadership deficiencies represent a systemic and persistent challenge rather than a temporary workforce issue. The absence of effective leadership behaviors weakens employee engagement, increases turnover, and limits organizational adaptability. As a result, this business problem warrants further investigation using evidence-based leadership frameworks to identify practical strategies that support workforce stability and organizational performance in small technology firms (Ravesangar & Narayanan, 2024).

Business Topic Scholarship

Recent peer-reviewed scholarship suggests that ineffective leadership practices contribute significantly to high turnover and reduced productivity in small U.S. technology firms. As a result, evidence-based leadership strategies may offer practical pathways for improving retention and performance outcomes. This analysis is organized into five thematic areas: (a) leadership development and emotional intelligence, (b) psychological safety and trust-building, (c) employee engagement and empowerment strategies, (d) burnout prevention and stress management, and (e) strategic human resource (HR) infrastructure. Each area is examined within the context of small

technology firms, where leadership behavior is highly visible and organizational structures are lean. In these environments, even minor supervisory breakdowns may quickly influence employee engagement, retention, and productivity.

These five areas also connect directly to the project's objective of identifying leadership strategies that help small technology firms retain employees and improve productivity. They align with PsyCap as the project's theoretical lens, particularly through the constructs of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2006). For example, optimism may be reflected in future-focused encouragement during uncertainty, whereas resilience may be reflected in how leaders respond to setbacks and stress (Chen et al., 2021; Song et al., 2022). These patterns across the literature help support both the interview question development and the later coding and analysis of findings.

Technology Business Leaders' Development and Emotional Intelligence

Leadership development, particularly when integrated with emotional intelligence, is strongly associated with employee retention in small technology firms (Korakis & Poulaki, 2025). Mehler et al. (2024) noted that the absence of formal leadership development programs often results in inconsistent supervisory practices, which can contribute to employee turnover. In contrast, Halliwell et al. (2022) and Oh et al. (2023) found that leaders who demonstrate empathy and communicate clearly are more likely to build trust and sustain engagement. While Mehler et al. emphasized structural development gaps, Oh et al. and Halliwell et al. highlighted the interpersonal competencies required for effective leadership. Together, these findings indicate that

technical expertise alone is insufficient and must be complemented by emotional intelligence and people-centered leadership practices.

Technology leaders' development remains critical yet often underprioritized in small U.S. technology firms because leadership roles are frequently assigned based on technical expertise rather than interpersonal readiness. This misalignment contributes directly to employee disengagement and elevated turnover, which is a central concern of this project. Mehler et al. (2024) found that more than 60% of technology firms lacked formal leadership development programs, a gap that contributes to inconsistent supervisory practices and elevated turnover risk. Oh et al. (2023) emphasized the influence of leaders' authenticity and communication clarity on employee retention, suggesting that leadership readiness extends beyond technical skill to include emotional intelligence competencies.

The emotional intelligence dimension of leadership development is especially important in small technology firms, where interpersonal relationships directly affect climate and satisfaction. Collins and Stockton (2022) noted that leaders in small firms often prioritize technical tasks over human capital management, which creates communication gaps and contributes to low morale. Saeed and You (2022) extended this analysis by showing that leadership quality, particularly the ability to recognize and respond to employees' emotional needs, strongly influences engagement across technology-intensive small businesses. G. Ma et al. (2024) conceptualized emotional intelligence as the ability to manage and respond to emotional information within a team

context, while Amarnani et al. (2022) emphasized emotional regulation and empathy in high-pressure innovation teams.

In contrast to studies emphasizing structural interventions, Rodrigues et al. (2024) found that emotional intelligence training for leaders produced more immediate and reliable improvements in employee satisfaction than traditional management development programs. These different perspectives enrich the understanding of emotional intelligence as both a foundational competency gap and a practical intervention point. The literature suggests that emotional intelligence represents a high-leverage strategy for small technology firms seeking to improve leadership effectiveness and reduce turnover. The interview questions in this project were designed to explore how leaders recognized and responded to emotional cues and whether those practices helped reduce disengagement and turnover.

Implementing emotional intelligence development in small technology firms requires approaches that acknowledge resource constraints while maximizing impact. Amarnani et al. (2022) found that peer-coaching models for emotional intelligence development were more cost-effective and sustainable than external consulting while producing similar improvements in leaders' behaviors and employee satisfaction. Similarly, Mehler et al. (2024) reported that leaders who participated in emotional intelligence assessments and development planning showed significant improvement in empathy, social awareness, and conflict resolution within 6 months. Chen et al. (2021) cautioned, however, that emotional intelligence development without corresponding culture change may produce limited long-term results. Taken together, these studies

suggest that leadership development is most effective when it aligns individual growth with broader organizational culture evolution.

Psychological Safety and Trust-Building

Psychological safety plays a critical role in employee retention within small technology firms. Wut et al. (2022) found that employees who felt safe to speak up, particularly during uncertain conditions, were significantly less likely to leave their organizations. Carmeli et al. (2010) further demonstrated that psychologically safe environments support creativity and knowledge sharing. Additional research by Y. Ma et al. (2021) and Romão et al. (2022) showed that trust and safety can develop quickly in small teams when communication is open and leadership behavior is consistent. These findings suggest that psychological safety is not incidental but is actively shaped by leadership behavior.

Psychological safety has emerged as a fundamental prerequisite for effective leadership and employee retention in small technology firms. Jin and Peng (2024) defined psychological safety as employees' shared belief that they can take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences. Wut et al. (2022) demonstrated that organizations fostering psychological safety through supportive leadership behaviors experienced significantly lower turnover rates and higher adaptability during uncertainty. Carmeli et al. (2010) similarly found that psychological safety mediated the relationship between leadership behavior and innovation outcomes, suggesting that leaders' ability to create safe environments influences both employee satisfaction and organizational performance.

In small U.S. technology firms, where leadership visibility is high, even minor communication breakdowns may accelerate disengagement and voluntary turnover (Chen et al., 2021). Conversely, leaders who demonstrate openness, fairness, and responsiveness create stabilizing environments that encourage collaboration and sustained performance. Romão et al. (2022) found that the close-knit nature of small teams can either accelerate psychological safety through authentic relationships or undermine it through unclear boundaries and inconsistent leadership behavior. Oh et al. (2023) further showed that small firms with clearly articulated values and transparent communication practices developed psychological safety more rapidly than firms relying solely on informal relationship-building.

Trust-building represents a related but distinct leadership capability that also strongly influences employee retention and engagement. Costa et al. (2024) documented that trust between leaders and employees in small technology organizations predicted voluntary turnover more strongly than compensation or advancement opportunities. Akhlaq and Kiran (2022) also found that leaders who demonstrated competence, benevolence, and integrity created work environments where employees reported higher job satisfaction and lower stress. However, in distributed or hybrid teams, trust-building may be complicated by limited face-to-face interaction, which makes consistent leadership behavior even more important. Fyhn et al. (2023) cautioned that trust damage in small firms may have more severe and lasting consequences than in larger organizations.

The integration of psychological safety and trust-building appears to create synergistic effects that amplify positive employee experiences and organizational outcomes. Putra et al. (2025) found that small technology firms where leaders actively cultivated both trust and psychological safety experienced higher engagement, more innovation, and stronger resilience during organizational challenges. Ip et al. (2025) similarly demonstrated that leadership development programs addressing both areas produced more sustained improvements in employee satisfaction and retention than programs focusing on either area alone. Carmeli et al. (2010), Wut et al. (2022), and Chen et al. (2021) further indicated that psychologically safe environments increase trust and reduce fear of speaking up. Together, this body of research suggests that psychological safety and trust-building are interconnected leadership capabilities that help mitigate negative employee experiences contributing to turnover and reduced productivity.

Employee Engagement and Empowerment Strategies

Employee engagement and empowerment are consistently identified as critical drivers of retention. Oh et al. (2023) and Wang et al. (2023) found that employees are more likely to remain with organizations when leaders provide regular feedback, include them in decision-making, and communicate clear expectations. Chompukum and Vanichbuncha (2025) emphasized that both psychological factors, such as purpose and confidence, and structural elements, such as authority and access to resources, influence engagement. These findings suggest that engagement is shaped by both leadership behavior and organizational design.

Employee engagement emerges from the literature as a critical mediating factor between leadership effectiveness and organizational outcomes, particularly in small technology firms where individual employee contributions have amplified effects on performance (Hu et al., 2024). Oh et al. (2023) established that leadership behaviors such as clear expectations, regular feedback, and meaningful autonomy directly predicted engagement levels, which in turn affected turnover intentions and productivity. Wang et al. (2023) similarly showed that engagement in technology firms was especially sensitive to empowerment practices that granted employees authority, resources, and confidence to make decisions within their roles. Although both studies link leadership to engagement, Wang et al. placed greater emphasis on decision-making autonomy, whereas Oh et al. focused more on ongoing communication and leader accessibility.

Research also indicates that engagement and empowerment operate as interconnected drivers of retention rather than isolated practices (Oh et al., 2023; Smite et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Elamin et al. (2024) found that engaged employees in small technology firms were more likely to exhibit discretionary effort and collaborative problem-solving, both of which support agility and innovation capacity. Chompukum and Vanichbuncha (2025) found that psychological empowerment, including competence, self-determination, impact, and meaning, mediated the relationship between leadership behaviors and retention. AbuHazeem and Abloush (2024) extended this argument by showing that structural empowerment practices, such as delegating authority and providing access to resources, improved satisfaction and organizational commitment.

In contrast to approaches emphasizing individual empowerment, Siddiqui et al. (2023) argued that team-based empowerment strategies were more effective in small technology firms, where collaborative work and shared accountability better aligned with culture and operations. Although all three perspectives support empowerment as a retention strategy, they differ in emphasis. Chompukum and Vanichbuncha highlighted internal cognitive states, AbuHazeem and Albloush focused on system-level changes, and Siddiqui et al. advocated for collective empowerment as more scalable for small teams. This variation shows that empowerment can be adapted to different organizational structures while still supporting retention goals.

In small technology firms, empowerment strategies must align with lean structures and rapid decision-making processes. Oh et al. (2023) suggested that empowerment is a multifaceted leadership strategy that can be tailored to organizational context while still producing positive engagement outcomes. Unlike large organizations that may rely on layered hierarchies or formal innovation programs, small firms often use flatter structures and direct leader-employee communication. Research by Oh et al. (2023) and Okatta et al. (2024) suggests that empowerment in small technology firms is most effective when it is immediate, visible, and operationally relevant. As a result, empowerment strategies in small firms are most effective when embedded in daily leadership practice rather than treated as formal standalone initiatives.

Implementing engagement and empowerment strategies in small technology firms also requires acknowledging resource constraints. Research showed that firms achieving high engagement often used cost-effective strategies such as one-on-one meetings,

transparent goal setting, and skill development opportunities instead of expensive benefits or highly formalized programs (Okatta et al., 2024). Halliwell et al. (2022) cautioned, however, that empowerment without accountability structures may create confusion and stress, suggesting that leaders must balance autonomy with support and performance expectations. Sun and Ishak (2025) further noted that engagement and empowerment require ongoing attention from leaders, including measurement and adjustment over time. Ávila et al. (2024) similarly found that empowerment initiatives needed recalibration based on employee feedback and changing business requirements to remain effective.

Burnout Prevention and Organizational Stress Management

Burnout prevention represents another critical leadership responsibility in small technology firms. Song et al. (2022) and Alhammadi et al. (2026) found that leadership behaviors characterized by clarity, consistency, and empathy reduce burnout and its associated outcomes, including disengagement and turnover. Chen et al. (2021) further emphasized that proactive stress management strategies are more effective than reactive interventions. In small technology firms, where employees often manage multiple roles under tight deadlines, burnout is influenced by both individual and organizational factors. These conditions make leadership response especially important.

Burnout prevention has emerged as a core leadership responsibility because small technology firms often operate under intense work demands, limited resources, and high-pressure conditions. Song et al. (2022) documented that leadership behaviors lacking empathy and consistency were strongly associated with increased burnout, which directly

predicted disengagement and voluntary turnover. Alhammadi et al. (2026) expanded this analysis by finding that burnout resulted from interactions between individual stressors and organizational conditions, including unclear role expectations, insufficient resources, and limited recovery opportunities. These stressors are especially amplified in lean firms, where employees often absorb multiple responsibilities and experience chronic strain.

Effective leaders address burnout by managing workloads, clarifying expectations, and creating opportunities for recovery. Chen et al. (2021) demonstrated that proactive burnout prevention strategies implemented by leaders yielded stronger outcomes than reactive interventions. Trinkenreich et al. (2023) similarly found that small technology firms whose leaders actively monitored workload distribution and provided support during high-stress periods maintained lower turnover rates. These findings suggest that burnout in small technology firms is not merely an individual coping issue but a leadership-influenced organizational condition that directly affects retention and productivity.

The convergence of evidence across Song et al. (2022), Alhammadi et al. (2026), and Chen et al. (2021) suggests that leaders shape burnout trajectories through both daily interpersonal behaviors and structural workload decisions. In small firms, where role boundaries are fluid and staffing is limited, unmanaged strain can accumulate quickly and increase turnover risk. Proactive leadership strategies such as clarifying expectations, adjusting workload distribution, and normalizing recovery practices function as preventive retention mechanisms rather than wellness add-ons. When leaders fail to

address systemic stressors, burnout becomes embedded in the organizational climate and undermines engagement, resilience, and long-term performance.

Organizational stress management represents a broader challenge that extends beyond burnout prevention to include both individual support and systemic process refinement. Bes et al. (2023) argued that long-term stress reduction requires improved work processes, realistic deadline setting, and clear communication protocols. Taherdoost (2022) documented that stress management interventions combined with leadership training and organizational policy changes produced more sustained improvements in employee well-being than interventions targeting either area independently. However, Musheke and Phiri (2021) noted that small firms often face budget, staffing, or time limitations that constrain implementation, forcing leaders to rely on incremental process improvements and informal feedback.

The literature also suggests that stress management in small technology firms must be adapted to organizational context. Lin (2025) observed that burnout may appear differently across growth trajectories, with high-growth firms facing overload and constant demand, while firms experiencing slower development may see burnout linked to stagnation and ambiguity. Tisdelle (2024) argued that leaders in each context must tailor stress management accordingly, either by pacing work or by reengaging employees through purpose and development opportunities. Dannheim et al. (2023) found that successful stress management often involved leaders modeling healthy work behaviors and establishing clear boundaries around expectations rather than implementing costly formal wellness programs. Eva et al. (2024) similarly demonstrated that leaders who

communicated openly about workload concerns and provided flexibility created more sustainable work environments.

Research on burnout prevention and stress management indicates that these issues are interconnected leadership challenges that require ongoing and adaptive attention. Cañibano and Avgoustaki (2024) suggested that the sustainability of stress management initiatives depends on approaches that integrate individual support with organizational development and culture evolution. Trinkenreich et al. (2023) documented that small technology firms maintaining low burnout rates over time typically had leaders who regularly assessed and adjusted work processes, communication patterns, and performance expectations based on employee feedback and changing business conditions. Unjai et al. (2024) further supported this view by emphasizing that burnout prevention and stress management are not static policy initiatives but ongoing leadership responsibilities. In small U.S. technology firms, adaptive stress management functions as a strategic retention mechanism that protects productivity and long-term workforce stability.

Strategic Human Resource Infrastructure

Strategic HR infrastructure provides the foundation for consistent leadership practices and workforce stability. Mehler et al. (2024) and Kaliannan et al. (2023) found that structured onboarding, performance feedback, and succession planning improve retention and organizational consistency. These practices help leaders align employee development with organizational goals while maintaining clarity and accountability. In

small technology firms, these systems also support consistency in leadership practices across teams.

Strategic HR practices emerge from recent scholarship as foundational infrastructure that supports effective leadership and sustainable employee retention in small technology firms. Mehler et al. (2024) established that structured onboarding, regular performance feedback, and succession planning created stable conditions for leadership effectiveness by providing clear frameworks for employee development and organizational consistency. Kaliannan et al. (2023) further demonstrated that firms with systematic HR practices experienced lower turnover and higher satisfaction than firms relying solely on informal management approaches. Their analysis also showed that proactive HR strategies helped firms scale sustainably by integrating leadership development with ongoing talent management.

However, small technology firms often face challenges in implementing formal HR systems because of limited budgets, competing priorities, and a lack of specialized HR personnel. As a result, leaders frequently adopt simplified approaches such as informal feedback, mentorship, and basic performance tracking. Williams (2025) noted that informal but consistent feedback can be highly effective in smaller organizations. Guenther et al. (2024) similarly emphasized the importance of adaptability in performance management systems. These flexible approaches allow firms to balance effectiveness with feasibility while preserving trust and responsiveness.

Performance management and feedback systems represent especially important HR elements because they directly affect employee clarity, recognition, and

development. Medhn Desta and Mulie (2024) found that transparent performance management processes aligned employee experiences with organizational objectives and reduced turnover while increasing productivity. Williams (2025) demonstrated that regular feedback systems supporting both recognition and developmental guidance enabled leaders to maintain stronger relationships with employees while also encouraging continuous improvement. In contrast, Guenther et al. (2024) argued that informal but consistent feedback practices may be more effective than formal reviews in small firms, where rapid change and close relationships can make cumbersome systems counterproductive.

Although digital tools such as performance tracking platforms or HR information systems may improve efficiency, small firms often encounter budget limits or technical integration challenges when attempting to adopt them. As a result, many organizations must weigh ease of use, legal compliance, and scalability against initial costs. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that performance management infrastructure must be tailored to small-firm contexts while maintaining attention to communication, goal alignment, and developmental support. In small U.S. technology firms, performance management functions less as a compliance activity and more as a relational retention strategy. Leaders who provide consistent, transparent feedback reduce ambiguity-driven disengagement and strengthen employee commitment.

Succession planning and talent development further strengthen organizational resilience. Medhn Desta and Mulie (2024) found that firms with structured succession planning experienced greater stability during leadership transitions and higher employee

confidence. Trinkenreich et al. (2023) similarly reported that internal development pathways improved retention by providing employees with clear advancement opportunities. In small firms, these strategies often rely on mentorship and cross-training rather than formal programs, which reflects the need for flexible and cost-effective solutions (Mehler et al., 2024). Joo and Cruz (2023) also suggested that succession planning and talent development represent strategic HR investments that improve retention, reduce leadership risk, and enhance organizational resilience.

The integration of HR infrastructure with leadership practices and organizational culture amplifies positive outcomes. Salunkhe et al. (2024) found that firms aligning HR systems with leadership behaviors achieved higher engagement and lower turnover. Supporting this finding, Ávila et al. (2024) demonstrated that structured HR systems provide accountability and consistency, enabling sustained improvements over time. Together, these findings indicate that HR infrastructure serves as both a support mechanism and a strategic enabler of leadership effectiveness. In small technology firms, this integration is especially important because systems, relationships, and leader behavior are closely interconnected.

Summary

In Section 1, I presented the background of the business problem, the specific business problem, the project purpose, and the overarching research question. I also described the assumptions, limitations, and ethical procedures guiding the project. In addition, I provided an evidence-based integrative review of the literature, including the

conceptual framework and current scholarship related to leadership strategies, employee retention, and productivity in small U.S. technology firms.

Section 2: Primary and Secondary Industry Data Analysis

Nature of the Project

I selected a qualitative methodology with a pragmatic inquiry design to explore how technology business leaders in North Carolina developed and applied retention strategies within real-world organizational contexts. A qualitative methodology was appropriate to explore participants' experiences and perspectives related to leadership strategies (Levitt et al., 2018). A pragmatic inquiry design was appropriate because it supported the identification of practical, real-world solutions to an applied business problem (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020).

Method and Design

A qualitative pragmatic inquiry design was appropriate because it supported exploration of leadership strategies within real-world organizational settings. Semistructured interviews were used to collect rich, in-depth data that captured participants' experiences and leadership practices. The pragmatic inquiry design supported the development of practical, actionable knowledge relevant to business leaders by focusing on real-world solutions to an applied business problem (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020; Sim et al., 2024).

Reliability

To ensure reliability and rigor, I used data saturation, member checking, and triangulation. Data collection continued until no new codes or categories emerged across the dataset. Member checking allowed participants to verify the accuracy of their responses and interpretations. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from

semistructured interviews and publicly available organizational documents. I also maintained a reflexive journal to document decisions and minimize bias throughout the research process.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The target population for this project consisted of technology business leaders in small U.S. technology firms in North Carolina who had experience managing employee turnover or workforce engagement challenges. Participant eligibility criteria required that individuals (a) possess at least 5 years of leadership experience in a small U.S. technology firm, (b) have direct responsibility for supervising employees, and (c) have experience implementing strategies to address employee turnover or engagement challenges. Six participants were selected whose experience aligned with the project purpose. Access to participants was gained through professional networking platforms, including LinkedIn and industry-specific groups. I shared an IRB-approved invitation letter via LinkedIn and sent it directly to eligible professionals to invite participation. Recruitment occurred through neutral, publicly accessible professional platforms to ensure ethical engagement and voluntary participation.

Interested respondents received an electronic informed consent form and confirmed their participation by replying “I consent.” This digital consent process aligned with ethical best practices and ensured documentation of voluntary participation (Ajemba & Arene, 2022). Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for participants, supporting participant autonomy. No participants had any prior personal or professional relationship with me before recruitment or data collection.

Rapport was established to encourage open and honest responses. Before each interview, I explained the purpose of the project, data collection procedures, and confidentiality measures, including the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage. Participants were encouraged to ask clarifying questions and confirm their comfort with the process. Member checking of preliminary interpretations was used to enhance credibility and reduce the risk of misrepresentation (Amin et al., 2020). These practices supported the depth and trustworthiness of the data collected.

The sample reflected gender and ethnic diversity among technology business leaders, supporting transferability across organizational contexts. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants with direct knowledge and experience of the research phenomenon. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research because it allows for the selection of participants who can provide rich, relevant insights aligned with the research question (Levitt et al., 2018). Snowball sampling was also used as a secondary strategy, allowing participants to recommend other qualified leaders who met the eligibility criteria.

Six participants were sufficient for this qualitative pragmatic inquiry because smaller sample sizes support in-depth exploration of participant experiences and leadership practices. The selected participants provided rich, relevant data aligned with the project purpose. Data saturation was achieved during the data analysis phase after all six interviews were analyzed, at which point no new codes or categories emerged across the dataset. Saturation was not determined during individual interviews but through a

comprehensive review of all participant data, ensuring that patterns were fully developed and consistently represented across responses.

Data Collection Activities

The primary data collection instrument was semistructured interviews supported by an interview protocol, along with publicly available organizational documents. The data collection process followed a systematic, step-by-step procedure. First, I identified and recruited eligible participants using purposive sampling through professional networks and industry contacts. Second, I provided participants with an informed consent form outlining the project's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Third, upon receiving consent, I scheduled and conducted semistructured interviews using a standardized interview protocol to ensure consistency across participants (see Collins & Stockton, 2022).

The interview protocol is provided in Appendix B, and the interview questions are included in Appendix A. Each interview was conducted via Zoom, recorded with participant permission, and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. Fourth, I transcribed the interviews and reviewed them for accuracy. Fifth, I collected publicly available organizational documents to supplement interview data and support triangulation. Finally, all data were securely stored in a password-protected, encrypted cloud system and organized for analysis.

Member checking and triangulation were used to enhance trustworthiness. Interview summaries were shared with participants for verification. Triangulation was achieved by comparing interview data with publicly available organizational documents.

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

I used a structured data organization system to manage the interview and document data throughout the project. This system included labeled interview transcripts, coded summaries, a research log, a reflexive journal, and an electronic coding matrix. The research log was used to document procedural decisions, emerging observations, and analytic progress, while the reflexive journal was used to record assumptions, reactions, and potential sources of researcher bias. These tools supported transparency and helped maintain a clear connection between the raw data, coding decisions, and final interpretations.

I analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, which was appropriate for this qualitative pragmatic inquiry because it supported systematic identification and interpretation of patterns across participant perspectives. Thematic analysis aligned with the project purpose of exploring leadership strategies used by small U.S. technology business leaders to mitigate negative employee experiences contributing to turnover and reduced productivity. This analytic approach also supported practical interpretation of participant experiences in a way that was consistent with the applied nature of the project.

The analysis followed a logical and sequential process. In Phase 1, I reviewed the interview transcripts and publicly available organizational documents multiple times to become familiar with the data. During this phase, I documented preliminary observations related to leadership practices, employee experiences, and contextual factors. In Phase 2, I generated initial codes by identifying meaningful segments of data related to the

research question. In Phase 3, I grouped similar codes into broader categories and examined patterns across participants. In Phase 4, I reviewed and refined the candidate themes to ensure internal consistency and alignment with the full dataset. In Phase 5, I defined and named the final themes to accurately reflect the meanings represented in participant responses. In Phase 6, I developed the analytic narrative by explaining the significance of the themes in relation to the research question, current literature, and the PsyCap framework.

To support coding and theme development, I used Microsoft Excel as an electronic coding matrix to document transcript excerpts, initial codes, categories, and theme development across participants. This matrix allowed for systematic comparison of patterns across the six interviews and supported ongoing refinement of the analysis. I also used manual review and reflective memoing to track how codes developed into broader categories and how those categories informed final theme construction. This process functioned as a conceptual map for organizing data and identifying relationships among leadership strategies, employee experiences, and PsyCap-related constructs.

I focused on the key themes by examining repeated patterns across the full dataset and then comparing those patterns with the current scholarly and practitioner literature reviewed in Section 1. Themes were interpreted through the conceptual lens of PsyCap, with particular attention to how participant-described leadership strategies reflected hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. I also considered areas of alignment and divergence between participant perspectives and recent literature to strengthen

interpretation and ensure that the findings were grounded both in participant data and in the broader evidence base.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through several procedures. Transcript review was used to verify the accuracy and completeness of the transcribed interviews. Member checking was conducted through participant review of interview summaries and preliminary interpretations to confirm that their perspectives were accurately represented. Triangulation was achieved by comparing interview data with publicly available organizational documents. Reflexive journaling and the research log supported transparency and helped reduce the influence of researcher assumptions during analysis. Data saturation was achieved after analysis of all six participant interviews, at which point no new codes or categories emerged across the dataset. Consistent application of the same coding procedures across all transcripts further strengthened the dependability and credibility of the findings.

Summary

In Section 2, I described the qualitative pragmatic inquiry method and design used to explore leadership strategies in small U.S. technology firms. I outlined the population, sampling approach, and participant selection process. I also described the data collection procedures, including semistructured interviews and document review, and the data analysis process using thematic analysis. Finally, I explained the strategies used to ensure reliability and trustworthiness.

Section 3: Data and Professional Practice

Project Results

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore leadership strategies used by small U.S. technology business leaders in North Carolina to reduce turnover and improve productivity. The overarching research question guiding this inquiry was: What effective leadership strategies do small U.S. technology business leaders use to mitigate negative employee experiences that contribute to high turnover and reduced productivity?

Data were collected through six semistructured interviews with eligible small U.S. technology business leaders in North Carolina and were triangulated with publicly available organizational documents. Analysis of the full dataset resulted in three primary themes: (a) people-centered leadership grounded in empathy and communication, (b) work–life integration and flexibility, and (c) psychological capital and resilience. These themes directly addressed the research question by identifying leadership strategies that influenced employee experiences, engagement, retention, and productivity.

and productivity.

Context for Findings

Data were collected following IRB approval through semistructured interviews with six small U.S. technology business leaders in North Carolina who met the established eligibility criteria. Interviews were conducted virtually and lasted between 33 and 42 minutes. No participants withdrew from the project. Data saturation was achieved after analysis of all six participant interviews, at which point no new themes or patterns

emerged across the dataset. Participants were recruited through publicly accessible professional platforms and met criteria requiring at least 5 years of leadership experience and direct responsibility for managing employees. Publicly available organizational documents, including company websites and job postings, were also collected to support triangulation. All interview data were transcribed, reviewed for accuracy, and verified through member checking. These procedures ensured that the findings presented in this section were grounded in accurate and credible participant perspectives.

Recruitment and Eligibility

I recruited participants through publicly accessible professional platforms and referrals from neutral professional contacts. To qualify, each participant had to hold a technology business leader role in a small technology company and have at least 5 years of experience supervising employees. Once individuals expressed interest, I provided an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the project, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. This recruitment approach ensured that participants were well positioned to provide credible insights aligned with the research question.

Setting and Procedures

Between September 22 and October 7, 2025, I conducted six interviews using Zoom. Each interview lasted between 33 and 42 minutes. At the beginning of each session, I explained the purpose of the project, confirmed consent to record, and reminded participants of their right to withdraw at any time. All participants responded to the same set of semistructured interview questions and were asked follow-up questions to clarify or expand on their responses. I used probing techniques, such as requesting

examples or elaboration, to deepen the richness of the data. I also maintained brief reflexive notes during and immediately after each interview to capture initial impressions and contextual insights. The interview questions were aligned with the literature and the PsyCap framework, focusing on constructs such as hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. The full interview protocol is provided in Appendix B. All interviews were conducted virtually as planned, and no unusual conditions affected the data collection process.

Recording, Transcription, and Data Management

After each interview, I downloaded and transcribed the recording verbatim. I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audio to ensure accuracy and completeness. Member checking was conducted through participant review of concise interview summaries and preliminary interpretations. These summaries were shared with participants for verification and clarification to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented. All finalized data were stored securely in an encrypted, password-protected system and will be retained for 5 years in accordance with Walden IRB requirements. Identifying information was removed to maintain confidentiality. Following project completion, an aggregated summary of findings was shared with participants to promote transparency and knowledge sharing.

Analytic Preparation

Analytic preparation supported the transition from data collection to results by ensuring that all interview transcripts and supporting documents were organized, verified, and ready for analysis. Each interview was reviewed for accuracy through transcript

verification and participant member checking, ensuring that the data accurately reflected participant perspectives. I conducted repeated readings of the transcripts to achieve familiarity with the dataset and to identify initial patterns related to leadership strategies, employee experiences, and workplace dynamics.

This preparation phase ensured that the analysis presented in the following section reflects patterns grounded in participant data rather than procedural artifacts. Data saturation was confirmed across the full dataset after analysis of all six participant interviews, at which point no new codes or categories emerged.

Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore leadership strategies used by small U.S. technology business leaders in North Carolina to reduce turnover and improve productivity. The overarching research question guiding this inquiry was: What effective leadership strategies do small U.S. technology business leaders use to mitigate negative employee experiences that contribute to high turnover and reduced productivity?

Analysis of the full dataset resulted in three primary themes: (a) people-centered leadership grounded in empathy and communication, (b) work–life integration and flexibility, and (c) psychological capital and resilience. These themes represent consistent patterns across participant responses and explain how leadership strategies influenced employee experiences, engagement, retention, and productivity outcomes.

The findings presented in this section are grounded in systematic coding, category development, and theme refinement, supported by participant interview data and publicly available organizational documents used for triangulation.

Participant Overview

All six technology business leaders met the project criteria and came from different small technology companies. The credibility of the data collection instrument was supported through multiple steps before interviews. The interview guide was grounded in recent literature on technology business leaders and well-being and intentionally aligned with the four PsyCap constructs to ensure conceptual relevance. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants, including their roles, years of leadership experience, and geographic location. All participants met the eligibility criteria and provided perspectives relevant to leadership strategies in small U.S. technology firms.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Position	Years of leadership experience	Region
P1	IT manager	10	North Carolina
P2	Operations supervisor	12	North Carolina
P3	Technical director	8	North Carolina
P4	Project lead	15	North Carolina
P5	Department manager	11	North Carolina
P6	Senior systems analyst	9	North Carolina

Familiarization With the Data

Summary familiarization ensured accurate interpretation of participants' experiences prior to theme development. Sections requiring clarification were revisited and corrected to ensure the accuracy of the summary. Meaningful excerpts reflecting technology business leaders' responses to employee challenges, well-being concerns, and organizational pressures were highlighted. This process established a strong contextual understanding of participant experiences and informed subsequent coding and theme development.

Generation of Initial Codes

Initial coding involved a systematic, line-by-line review of each summary to identify words, phrases, and segments that reflect the behaviors and employee-related practices of technology business leaders. Codes captured actions such as supporting employees, communicating expectations, encouraging autonomy, and responding to challenges. An inductive approach was used, allowing codes to emerge from the data rather than relying on predetermined categories.

I generated a total of 378 initial codes across the six summaries. These codes were reviewed and refined through repeated comparison with the original data to ensure contextual accuracy. Overlapping and conceptually similar codes were consolidated into 24 broader categories. These categories were subsequently synthesized into three major themes with related subthemes. Table 2 presents a structured summary of refined codes, categories, and themes and illustrates their alignment with the PsyCap framework.

Search for Themes

During the theme development phase, I revisited summaries and coded excerpts to confirm alignment between codes, categories, and participant intent. Highlighted excerpts were compared across participants to identify shared patterns and distinguish unique perspectives. Codes were reorganized as necessary to ensure conceptual clarity and coherence. Through iterative review and refinement, the 24 categories were grouped into three major themes, each supported by multiple subthemes. This process ensured that the themes were grounded in participant data and remained closely aligned with the research question regarding technology business leaders' strategies that mitigate negative employee experiences in small technology firms.

Table 2 presents the alignment of the major themes with PsyCap constructs, illustrating how leadership strategies reflected hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism across participant responses.

Table 2

Alignment of Major Themes With Psychological Capital Constructs

Theme	Subtheme/key category	Associated PsyCap construct	Core insight
People-centered technology business leaders	Empathy and compassion; transparent communication; employee voice and inclusion	Hope and self-efficacy	Technology business leaders created belonging and trust through compassion, inclusion, and transparency, which fostered hope and confidence among employees.
Work-life integration and flexibility	Work-life balance; workplace flexibility; autonomy and empowerment	Resilience and self-efficacy	Technology business leaders supported employees' personal well-being and autonomy, helping them

			recover from stress and build confidence in their abilities.
Psychological capital and resilience	Building resilience; confidence and optimism; learning from setbacks	Resilience and optimism	Technology business leaders promoted adaptability and a positive outlook by reframing mistakes as learning opportunities and modeling perseverance.

Note. Each theme reflects one or more dimensions of the PsyCap framework: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. PsyCap = psychological capital.

To support triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings, publicly available organizational documents were compared with participant interview data. Table 3 presents participant-level alignment between interview responses and organizational documents, demonstrating consistency across data sources.

Table 3

Participant-Level Public Document Support Across Themes

Theme	Public Document Support
People-centered leadership grounded in empathy and communication	Company website and mission statements emphasized collaboration, inclusion, and team-based culture
	Organizational values and social media reflected empathy, employee support, and leadership responsiveness
	Job postings and company messaging emphasized transparency, recognition, and open communication
Work-life integration and flexibility	Job postings and company websites highlighted flexible schedules, remote work, and well-being initiatives
	Benefits pages and recruitment materials emphasized wellness programs, incentives, and workload support

	Recruitment materials and onboarding documents reflected structured integration and development practices
Psychological capital and resilience	Training materials and company websites emphasized growth, autonomy, and resilience development
	Organizational values and recruitment materials reflected adaptability, motivation, and performance culture
	Social media, job postings, and company messaging emphasized confidence, support, and employee empowerment

Note. This table shows participant-level alignment between interview data and publicly available organizational documents, demonstrating triangulation across data sources.

Theme 1: People-Centered Leadership Grounded in Empathy and Communication

Theme 1 indicates that people-centered leadership practices mitigated negative employee experiences by strengthening trust, psychological safety, and employee engagement. Analysis of the interview data revealed that participants consistently prioritized relational leadership behaviors, including active listening, empathy, and transparent communication, over formal policies or structured programs. These practices created an environment in which employees felt valued, supported, and included in organizational processes.

Participants described people-centered leadership as a series of intentional, everyday behaviors rather than formal initiatives. Codes such as active listening, regular check-ins, and explanations of decision-making processes were grouped into broader categories of empathy and transparent communication, which together formed this theme. These behaviors contributed to employees' sense of belonging and reinforced their connection to the organization.

Participant responses provided clear evidence of how these practices were implemented. Participants described involving employees in problem-solving, providing regular check-ins, and clearly explaining decisions. For example, Participant 1 explained that including junior technicians in solution development strengthened engagement and belonging. Participant 4 described responding to performance challenges with reassurance and coaching rather than criticism, and Participant 6 emphasized that learning personal details about employees improved trust and communication. Collectively, these examples demonstrate that people-centered leadership was

operationalized through consistent, relational interactions rather than formal systems.

From an interpretive perspective, these findings indicate that leadership effectiveness in small technology firms is strongly influenced by the consistency and quality of relational interactions between leaders and employees. Participants described leadership not as a formal structure but as a set of ongoing interpersonal behaviors that shaped trust, inclusion, and communication. When leaders demonstrated empathy, transparency, and active engagement, employees were more likely to feel valued and supported, which contributed to sustained engagement and reduced negative workplace experiences.

When interpreted through the PsyCap framework, people-centered leadership practices supported the development of hope, self-efficacy, and optimism. Leaders fostered hope by involving employees in goal-setting and decision-making processes, reinforced self-efficacy by encouraging participation and recognizing contributions, and promoted optimism through transparent and supportive communication. These findings suggest that leadership behaviors play a direct role in strengthening employees' psychological resources, which are essential for sustaining motivation and engagement.

The findings align with the existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of empathy, communication, and inclusion for leadership effectiveness. Prior studies have demonstrated that relational leadership behaviors contribute to increased employee engagement and retention (Baquero, 2023; Li & Tang, 2022). Additionally, Luthans et al. (2006) identified psychological capital as a key factor influencing employee well-being and performance.

Publicly available organizational documents supported this theme. Company websites and mission statements associated with Participant 1 emphasized collaboration, inclusion, and team-based culture. Organizational values and social media communications linked to Participant 4 reflected empathy, employee support, and leadership responsiveness. Job postings and external messaging connected to Participant 6 emphasized transparency, recognition, and open communication. Together, these documents confirmed that people-centered leadership was reflected in both leader accounts and formal organizational messaging.

These findings support existing research demonstrating that empathy, communication, and inclusion strengthen employee engagement and retention (Baquero, 2023; Li & Tang, 2022). The results extend current business-practice knowledge by illustrating how these leadership behaviors are implemented in small U.S. technology firms through consistent, everyday interactions rather than formalized programs. Interpreted through the PsyCap framework, this theme aligns most closely with hope, self-efficacy, and optimism, as leaders fostered confidence, participation, and positive expectations through relational leadership practices. As shown in Table 3, publicly available organizational documents supported this theme, confirming alignment between participant perspectives and organizational messaging.

Theme 2: Work–Life Integration and Flexibility

Theme 2 indicates that leadership practices promoting work–life integration and flexibility mitigated negative employee experiences by strengthening employee resilience, reducing burnout, and sustaining engagement during periods of high workload

and organizational pressure. Analysis of the interview data revealed that participants consistently emphasized flexibility as an embedded leadership practice rather than a formal organizational benefit.

Participants described work–life integration as a routine aspect of leadership behavior, reflected in actions such as flexible scheduling, remote work options, and the protection of personal time. Codes such as flexible hours, remote options, limiting after-hours communication, and protecting time off were grouped into broader categories of workplace flexibility, autonomy, and work–life balance, which collectively formed this theme. These practices demonstrated that leaders prioritized employee well-being as a preventative strategy rather than a reactive response to burnout.

Participants described flexibility as an everyday leadership practice rather than a formal benefit. Participant 3 described disabling employee access during leave so employees could fully disconnect and recover. Participant 6 explained that schedules were adjusted to accommodate personal responsibilities, and Participant 5 described encouraging breaks and offering small wellness supports. Together, these examples showed how leaders reduced stress and supported employee well-being through direct, consistent practices.

From an interpretive perspective, these findings indicate that flexibility functions as both a structural and relational leadership practice that shapes employee perceptions of trust, autonomy, and organizational support. Participants described flexibility not as a formal policy but as a consistent leadership behavior embedded in daily interactions. When leaders actively supported employees' ability to manage personal and professional

responsibilities, employees reported reduced stress, increased engagement, and stronger commitment to their roles. These findings suggest that leadership-driven flexibility serves as a proactive mechanism for mitigating negative employee experiences rather than a reactive response to burnout.

When interpreted through the psychological capital PsyCap framework, work–life integration and flexibility supported the development of resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy. Leaders reinforced resilience by encouraging recovery from stress and normalizing the need for rest, promoted optimism by fostering confidence in sustainable work practices, and strengthened self-efficacy by demonstrating trust in employees’ ability to manage their responsibilities. These findings indicate that leadership-driven flexibility plays a critical role in developing employees’ psychological capacity to manage workplace demands.

The findings align with the existing literature, which indicates that flexibility and autonomy contribute to reduced burnout and improved employee well-being (Chompukum & Vanichbuncha, 2025; Shapiro, 2023). Prior research has shown that leadership behaviors supporting work–life balance enhance organizational commitment and emotional health (Baquero, 2023). Publicly available organizational documents reinforced this theme. Job postings and company websites associated with Participant 3 highlighted flexible schedules, remote work options, and well-being initiatives. Benefits pages and recruitment materials linked to Participant 5 emphasized wellness programs, incentives, and workload support. Recruitment materials and onboarding documents associated with Participant 2 reflected structured integration and employee development

practices. These documents confirmed that flexibility and work–life integration were visible in both leader behavior and formal organizational communication.

These findings support existing research indicating that flexibility and autonomy contribute to reduced burnout and improved employee well-being (Chompukum & Vanichbuncha, 2025; Shapiro, 2023). The results extend current business-practice knowledge by demonstrating that, in small U.S. technology firms, flexibility is often implemented through direct leadership behaviors rather than formal organizational programs. Interpreted through the PsyCap framework, this theme aligns most strongly with resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy, as leaders supported recovery from stress, reinforced confidence in managing responsibilities, and encouraged sustainable work practices. As shown in Table 3, publicly available organizational documents supported this theme, confirming alignment between participant experiences and organizational messaging.

Theme 3: Psychological Capital and Resilience

Theme 3 indicates that leadership practices grounded in psychological capital and resilience mitigated negative employee experiences by strengthening confidence, adaptability, and sustained commitment within small technology firms. Participants described leadership approaches that encouraged employees to view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than failure. Codes such as learning from errors, coaching rather than punishing, providing second chances, and trusting employee judgment were grouped into broader categories of resilience-building, confidence development, and optimistic leadership, which together formed this theme. These practices reflected a

developmental leadership approach focused on long-term growth rather than short-term performance correction.

Participants described leadership practices that encouraged learning, trust, and adaptability. Participant 4 emphasized granting autonomy and reinforcing employee judgment. Participant 2 described responding to mistakes through reflection and learning rather than punishment. Participant 6 observed that trusted employees showed greater creativity and initiative. These responses illustrated how leaders fostered self-efficacy and resilience through supportive and developmental behaviors.

From an interpretive perspective, these findings indicate that leadership practices emphasizing trust, learning, and adaptability directly influence employees' confidence, motivation, and sustained engagement. Participants described leadership behaviors that normalized learning from mistakes, encouraged independent decision-making, and reinforced employee capability. These practices created an environment in which employees felt supported in taking initiative and navigating challenges, which strengthened their commitment to their roles. The findings suggest that resilience and confidence are actively developed through leadership behaviors rather than existing as fixed employee traits.

When interpreted through the PsyCap framework, these leadership practices directly supported the development of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Leaders fostered self-efficacy by reinforcing employee competence and encouraging independent decision-making, promoted hope through forward-looking communication about growth and potential, strengthened resilience by normalizing recovery from

setbacks, and supported optimism by framing challenges as opportunities for improvement. These findings demonstrate how leadership behaviors function as mechanisms for cultivating psychological resources that sustain employee performance and engagement.

The findings align with the existing literature, which indicates that autonomy, trust, and supportive leadership contribute to psychological safety and employee engagement (Hou & Cai, 2024; Li & Tang, 2022). Prior research has shown that leaders who encourage learning and provide constructive feedback enhance resilience and motivation (Baquero, 2023). Publicly available organizational documents also supported this theme. Training materials and company websites associated with Participant 2 emphasized growth, autonomy, and resilience development. Organizational values and recruitment materials linked to Participant 4 reflected adaptability, motivation, and performance culture. Social media, job postings, and company messaging connected to Participant 6 emphasized confidence, support, and empowerment. These documents aligned with participant responses, strengthening triangulation across data sources.

These findings support existing research indicating that autonomy, trust, and supportive leadership contribute to psychological safety and sustained employee engagement (Hou & Cai, 2024; Li & Tang, 2022). The results extend current business-practice knowledge by demonstrating how small U.S. technology business leaders intentionally cultivate psychological resources through coaching, trust-building, and learning-oriented leadership behaviors. Interpreted through the PsyCap framework, this theme aligns with hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism, as leaders reinforced

employee confidence, supported recovery from setbacks, and encouraged a forward-looking mindset. As shown in Table 3, publicly available organizational documents supported this theme, confirming alignment between participant experiences and organizational messaging.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

Business Contribution 1: People-Centered Technology Business Leaders

This contribution highlights how business leaders can improve employee retention and productivity by implementing leadership strategies grounded in empathy, communication, and psychological support. The leadership strategies directly address the research question by showing how technology business leaders in small technology firms eased negative employee experiences. Much of what improved employees' day-to-day work did not come from large initiatives but from simple choices that technology business leaders consistently made. When technology business leaders listened, followed through, and treated people fairly, employees felt respected and more likely to stay. Participants emphasized that small actions, such as regularly checking in, explaining decisions, and acknowledging effort, reduced frustration and helped employees feel valued rather than expendable.

These people-centered habits also brought a sense of steadiness to teams that often deal with shifting priorities and high pressure. Recent studies have found similar patterns, showing that when technology business leaders approach their teams with empathy, openness, and a sense of fairness, employees often experience less burnout and are more likely to remain in their roles (Baquero, 2023; Shapiro, 2023). Shifting priorities

and high pressure also connect to the PsyCap construct of self-efficacy, as employees tend to feel more confident in their work when technology business leaders offer clear guidance and consistent support. In practice, people-centered technology business leaders in this project meant technology business leaders were approachable, explained the *why* behind decisions, and made time to hear concerns before decisions escalated into disengagement or turnover.

Recommendation 1: Lead With Empathy (Hope and Optimism)

Luthans et al.'s (2006) PsyCap framework helped explain why empathy mattered so much in these findings, especially in relation to hope and optimism. Technology business leaders who communicated honestly and showed real concern for their teams helped create a sense of shared direction. Small adjustments, such as offering flexibility when needed, acknowledging strain, or giving people space to solve problems in their own way, helped employees recover motivation during busy or stressful periods. Technology business leaders can operationalize empathy-based PsyCap-aligned leadership practices by scheduling brief one-on-one check-ins, asking employees what support they need, and clearly communicating shared commitment during challenges, such as stating, "I want you to succeed here; let's figure this out together."

Other scholars have found that compassionate communication and recognition of emotional needs may strengthen engagement and are associated with lower withdrawal behaviors (Hu et al., 2024). These steady, everyday actions helped employees feel grounded and supported even when the organization was stretched thin. Scheduling brief one-on-one check-ins, asking employees what support they need, and clearly

communicating shared commitment during challenges may strengthen the hope and optimism components of PsyCap by helping employees envision a positive path forward and feel supported as leaders and employees work toward it together. When employees hear consistent, honest reassurance from technology business leaders and see follow-through on commitments, employees may be more likely to believe that problems are solvable and that their efforts contribute to a meaningful future with the organization.

Technology business leaders can build trust and follow through on commitments by scheduling a recurring 15-min one-on-one check-in with each direct report at least twice per month to identify concerns early and clarify expectations. Compassionate communication and recognition of emotional needs may help reduce turnover risk by addressing frustration before disengagement escalates and by supporting productivity through maintaining focus and psychological safety during high-pressure periods (Wut et al., 2022). Direct supervisors and technology business leaders in small firms can implement compassionate communication and recognition of emotional needs, particularly in environments with frequent workload changes or resource constraints, by integrating regular one-on-one check-ins and transparent communication into existing workflows.

Business Contribution 2: Work–Life Integration and Flexibility

This contribution highlights how business leaders can improve employee retention and productivity by implementing leadership strategies that support work–life integration and flexibility. Participants often talked about balance and autonomy as basic needs rather than something extra. A few mentioned that simply having their time

respected or being able to adjust their schedules when personal matters came up had a real influence on how they saw their roles. Many participants mentioned that simply being trusted to manage their own workload lifted their morale, sometimes more than anything else their technology business leaders did.

A few participants said that trust played a part in why employees decided to stay. Recent studies have reported similar findings, noting that when people have some flexibility and control over their schedules, they tend to feel less overwhelmed and more connected to their workplace (Baquero, 2023; Shapiro, 2023). Work–life integration and flexibility also align with the optimism and resilience elements of PsyCap, as flexibility often gives employees room to regain their footing and navigate stressful periods with greater confidence. In the context of small technology firms, this meant honoring time off, limiting unnecessary after-hours communication, and allowing reasonable control over when and how work was completed.

Recommendation 2: Support Work–Life Integration Through Flexible and Fair Practices

Leaders can support work–life integration by honoring time off, reducing unnecessary after-hours communication, and allowing reasonable flexibility in how work is completed. These practices may reduce burnout, improve trust, and strengthen employee commitment. In small technology firms, leaders can implement these strategies through simple actions such as adjusting schedules when personal needs arise, clarifying workload expectations, and protecting employees' recovery time.

Research by Hu et al. (2024) showed a similar pattern, finding that teams often become more willing to innovate and less guarded when mistakes are discussed openly and treated as part of the learning process. Employees in this project shared a comparable view, saying they felt more comfortable asking questions or trying new ideas because employees trusted they would not be penalized for making an honest mistake. Discussing mistakes openly may reinforce the resilience and self-efficacy components of PsyCap by encouraging employees to recover from mistakes with confidence and to see challenges as manageable. Over time, discussing mistakes helps create a culture where employees expect to learn and improve rather than fear punishment, which may reduce anxiety and support steady performance (Upadhyay & Singh, 2024). Supervisors can implement this practice by conducting a brief post-incident review immediately after errors occur, focusing on lessons learned and agreed-upon adjustments rather than assigning fault. The post-incident review may help reduce productivity loss by preventing repeated mistakes and lower turnover risk by reinforcing psychological safety and confidence following setbacks. Discussing mistakes openly should be implemented by team leads and managers after errors or performance issues, and it is most effective in settings that value learning and psychological safety over punitive responses, such as project-based or fast-changing technology environments.

Business Contribution 3: Psychological Capital and Resilience

This contribution highlights how business leaders can improve employee retention and productivity by implementing leadership strategies grounded in psychological capital, including hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Across the

interviews, a clear pattern emerged: when technology business leaders made an effort to build hope, confidence, resilience, and optimism within their teams, it benefited not only their employees but also them. Participants described a recurring pattern in which hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism reinforced one another over time. Some of the newer research lines up with what the participants expressed, though often in a more general way.

Researchers have found that when technology business leaders apply PsyCap principles in their day-to-day interactions, teams demonstrate higher engagement and adapt more effectively to change, particularly in smaller organizations (Baquero, 2023). As these psychological strengths build over time, employees often feel more settled in their jobs and less tempted to look elsewhere. That stability naturally indicates fewer staffing disruptions and a smoother rhythm in how the organization gets its work done. In this project, technology business leaders described the effects of applying PsyCap principles in their day-to-day interactions as gradual but noticeable. In addition, leaders noted that employees became more willing to speak up, take ownership of tasks, and stay through demanding project cycles because employees believed their efforts were recognized and supported.

Recommendation 3: Turn Mistakes Into Lessons to Build Resilience and Self-Efficacy

Technology business leaders can build PsyCap in simple, everyday ways rather than depending only on structured training programs. Some of the practices discussed in the project by Luthans et al., (2006), such as noticing small wins, helping employees set reachable goals, encouraging coworkers to support one another, or showing optimism

during tougher periods, naturally reinforce hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Practical steps might include starting team meetings by reviewing recent accomplishments, asking employees to identify one goal for the week and how employees plan to reach it, and modeling calm, solution-focused language during times of uncertainty. Researchers have found that teams exposed to these practices often perform better and experience less turnover because teams feel more capable of handling challenges (Hu et al., 2024; Shapiro, 2023). Over time, these habits tend to spread within the group, creating a work environment where people see challenges as something they can manage and learn from.

These practical steps support all four PsyCap constructs by fostering goal-directed thinking, confidence, adaptability, and a positive outlook across the team. Technology business leaders can embed PsyCap principles into daily routines by opening weekly team meetings with a brief review of recent successes and progress toward goals, reinforcing optimism and self-efficacy. These practical steps may support productivity and may reduce turnover by strengthening employees' belief in their ability to succeed within the organization. In this context, practical steps are most effective when implemented by technology business leaders and owners who have regular contact with their teams, particularly in small organizations, where brief, recurring practices such as weekly check-ins or goal reviews can be embedded into routine meetings.

Implications for Business Technology Business Leaders

For business technology business leaders, the value of these strategies shows up in very practical ways. Several participants noted that when their technology business

leaders made room for empathy, flexibility, and other PsyCap-based behaviors, their teams steadied out and were more likely to stay through busy or difficult periods. That stability matters, especially in small tech firms where the cost of recruiting and replacing employees can add up quickly. Technology business leaders who support fairness, autonomy, and psychological safety also tend to see stronger morale, and these practices help retain a wider range of talent, contributing to a more inclusive workplace culture. For example, reducing avoidable turnover, even by a small percentage, can lessen onboarding time, protect project continuity, and preserve institutional knowledge that would otherwise be lost when employees leave. When technology business leaders incorporate these habits into their routine, employees often respond with greater commitment and confidence, making it easier for the organization to navigate uncertain moments.

Summary

This project may contribute to professional practice by establishing that people-centered leadership grounded in empathy, flexibility, and PsyCap is not supplemental but foundational to employee retention and productivity in small U.S. technology firms. Leaders who consistently prioritize these strategies strengthen the team's stability, reduce turnover-related disruption, and improve day-to-day organizational functioning. The three contributions map directly onto the major themes of this project: (a) people-centered technology business leaders, (b) work–life integration and flexibility, and (c) PsyCap and resilience, demonstrating how PsyCap-informed strategies can be translated into daily technology business leaders' practice. The three contributions highlight how practical,

relationship-centered technology business leaders' habits can reduce avoidable turnover and strengthen overall organizational performance. These contributions align with the PsyCap framework by translating hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism into practical leadership actions.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include the potential for small U.S. technology business leaders to improve employee well-being, promote stable employment, and strengthen local economies. When leaders use empathy, flexibility, and psychologically informed leadership practices, employees may experience reduced stress, greater workplace stability, and stronger engagement. These outcomes may benefit families, organizations, and communities by supporting workforce continuity and more stable local employment.

In North Carolina's small-technology sector, retaining skilled employees may help stabilize regional innovation hubs and reduce disruptions associated with frequent rehiring. Consistent employment may strengthen family financial stability, support more predictable local spending patterns, and encourage civic participation. According to the BLS (2024), small businesses employ nearly 46% of the private workforce and generate about 63% of new jobs nationwide, underscoring their critical role in supporting economic stability and community well-being. When turnover slows and employment becomes more stable, employees and their families may experience greater stability. Prior research also suggests that employees working under empathetic and fair leadership often report higher psychological safety, fewer conflict-related incidents, and stronger

collaboration across teams. These workplace patterns may contribute to positive outcomes within organizations. Broader community-level effects are possible, but they should be understood as potential implications rather than direct findings of this project.

Several technology business leaders on the project shared examples illustrating how empathetic and fair leadership practices can influence community connections. For example, one small firm described donating refurbished computers to a nearby middle school after experiencing reduced turnover-related costs. Another organization expanded its internal mentoring program into a pathway for interns to transition into full-time roles, providing young adults in the community with potential entry points into technology careers. These examples represent participant experiences rather than outcomes directly measured in the project. They suggest that stable leadership practices may support community-oriented initiatives, potentially expanding digital access, increasing early-career opportunities, and strengthening local employer-community relationships.

When leaders consistently model these practices, they may help shift conversations about stress management, work–life balance, and the characteristics of effective leadership. If similar leadership behaviors are adopted across multiple small firms, these practices may influence workplace norms and expectations regarding employee treatment. Over time, such shifts could potentially shape organizational policies, leadership development priorities, and broader industry discussions about leadership effectiveness.

Within this context, each element of PsyCap may correspond to potential social outcomes. The following examples reflect participant-reported experiences rather than

outcomes directly measured in the project. Self-efficacy may support employees' confidence in contributing new ideas, leading projects, and addressing workplace challenges. Resilience may help employees manage stress and recover from setbacks, thereby potentially improving well-being. Optimism may encourage employees to remain engaged in workplace and community activities, including volunteering or mentoring others. When technology business leaders cultivate these psychological capacities within their teams, they may indirectly contribute to stronger and more adaptive workplace environments.

Overall, the findings suggest that leadership practices grounded in PsyCap may have ripple effects that extend beyond individual organizations. By supporting psychological resources such as confidence, resilience, and optimism, small-technology business leaders may contribute to healthier workplace environments and potentially support broader social well-being. Although the project focused on a small sample of technology leaders in North Carolina, these findings may offer insights into how leadership practices that emphasize respect, psychological safety, and employee development could contribute to more stable workplaces and communities.

Recommendations for Future Study

Future research should address the limitations identified in Section 1.4 by expanding the sample, including leaders from additional geographic regions, and incorporating multiple data sources. Future studies could include employee interviews, surveys, retention records, or performance indicators to reduce reliance on leader self-

report and strengthen triangulation. Researchers could also examine whether the strategies identified in this project apply in other industries or in firms of different sizes.

Strategies for Addressing Project Limitations

One clear limitation in this project was the narrow geographic focus. All interviews were conducted with small technology business leaders within one state. Because workplace culture often differs by region, future projects could reach out to technology business leaders in other states or even outside the country, so the findings are not limited to one area. Hearing from people in different places might show how local work habits or community expectations affect the way technology business leaders use hope, optimism, and resilience with their teams. Broadening the geographic scope by hearing from people in different places may help determine whether the PsyCap-informed strategies identified in this project for technology business leaders are context-specific or more widely applicable.

Another limitation was the small sample size that is typical of qualitative studies. The insights were deep but may not be broadly transferable. A larger project, possibly using a mixed-methods design, could directly address the small sample limitation by combining interviews with surveys or observational measures. The mixed-methods design would allow researchers to test whether the patterns found in the current project extend across a broader range of technology business leaders and to link personal experiences to measurable indicators such as retention or productivity. Using a mixed-methods approach would also allow future researchers to corroborate qualitative themes

with quantitative patterns, thereby strengthening the credibility and dependability of the results.

Future researchers could also use mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine how PsyCap-informed leadership practices develop over time and whether they are associated with measurable outcomes such as retention, engagement, or productivity. These approaches would strengthen understanding of how hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism function in changing organizational conditions. Additional research could examine how AI-enabled work environments, inclusive leadership practices, and team-level PsyCap influence retention and employee well-being in small technology firms. These lines of inquiry would extend both applied leadership knowledge and the practical capacity of small firms to build stable, people-centered workplaces.

Conclusion

This project explored leadership strategies used by small U.S. technology business leaders to reduce turnover and improve productivity. Data were collected through six semistructured interviews and publicly available organizational documents and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Three themes emerged: people-centered leadership grounded in empathy and communication, work–life integration and flexibility, and psychological capital and resilience. Together, these findings showed that leaders in small technology firms can strengthen retention and productivity through consistent, people-centered, and psychologically informed practices. The key message for practitioners is that employee stability is shaped not only by formal systems, but by the daily leadership behaviors that build trust, flexibility, confidence, and resilience.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe the technology business leaders' strategies you currently use to retain employees in your organization?
 - Probe: Can you give a specific example where this strategy led to improved retention?
 - Probe: How did you decide to implement this approach?
2. Tell me about a time when an employee was struggling with morale or disengagement. How did you respond as a leader?
 - Probe: What signals or feedback prompted you to take action?
 - Probe: How did the employee respond to your intervention?
3. In what ways do you intentionally build or promote psychological well-being such as optimism, hope, or resilience within your team?
 - Probe: Can you share an example of how optimism or resilience showed up in a recent challenge?
 - Probe: How did your team respond?
4. How do you assess whether your technology business leaders' strategies are having a positive impact on employee experiences?
 - Probe: What metrics, feedback, or observations do you rely on?
 - Probe: Have you adapted your strategies based on this feedback?
5. Describe a time when a technology business leaders strategy you used failed to reduce turnover or improve morale. What did you learn from that experience?
 - Probe: What would you do differently now?

- Probe: How did your team react during that time?
6. How do you foster self-efficacy (confidence in one's abilities) in your team members?
 - Probe: What behaviors or support mechanisms help your team feel capable?
 - Probe: Have you seen changes in performance or morale as a result?
 7. What role does psychological capital (hope, resilience, optimism, and confidence) play in your technology business leaders decision-making?
 - Probe: Do any of these concepts influence how you lead in times of change?
 - Probe: How have you developed these traits in yourself?
 8. Have any of your retention or morale-boosting strategies become long-term practices?
 - Probe: What made those strategies sustainable over time?
 - Probe: Were they influenced by specific feedback or events?
 9. How do you balance employee well-being with organizational performance goals in your technology business leaders decisions?
 - Probe: Has this ever created a conflict or dilemma?
 - Probe: How did you prioritize?
 10. What advice would you offer to another leader in the technology industry trying to reduce turnover and improve employee experience?
 - Probe: What strategies or lessons would you emphasize most?
 - Probe: What would you avoid or warn them about?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Action	Script
Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee.	"Hello, Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. My name is Iesha Hayes, and I am a Doctor of Business Administration student at Walden University."
Introduce the research question, the purpose of the project and answer initial questions the participant may have.	"The purpose of this project is to explore effective technology business leaders' strategies to reduce negative employee experiences that may lead to turnover and reduced productivity."
Review the informed consent form and answer any questions the participant may have.	"Before we continue, I need to verify that you have provided consent and understand the ethical standards for this interview. This interview is voluntary and confidential. Your name will not appear in any report or publication resulting from this research. The session will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. You may decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. All personal information, summaries and recordings will be stored electronically and may only be accessed by me via password. Raw data, such as field notes, will be kept locked in a file cabinet only accessible to myself. When the information from the interview is published in the final project, participant confidentiality will remain. Do you have questions about the consent form or any measures taken to preserve your confidentiality?" "Do you want to be interviewed for this project?"
Provide the participant with a copy of the informed consent for their personal records and review. Begin recording the interview.	"Instruction to participant: Please change your Zoom screen name to the respondent number 001- 007 you were assigned in the informed consent email to ensure you remain anonymous during this session." "I have emailed a copy of the informed consent form for your personal records and review."
Introduce the participant using their respondent	"Before we begin, do I have your permission to record this interview for transcription and analysis purposes? You may decline to be recorded or stop the interview at any time." "During this interview, I'm going to refer to you as respondent (insert respondent number). Today's date is

Action	Script
number, the date and time of the interview.	(insert todays date) and the time of the interview is (Insert todays time). “
Ask interview questions to get in-depth responses.	Can you describe the technology business leaders’ strategies you currently use to retain employees in your organization?
Listen for nonverbal cues.	Tell me about a time when an employee was struggling with morale or disengagement. How did you respond as a leader?
Paraphrase as needed.	In what ways do you intentionally build or promote psychological well-being such as optimism, hope, or resilience within your team?
	Describe a time when a technology business leaders strategy you used failed to reduce turnover or improve morale. What did you learn from that experience?
	How do you foster self-efficacy (confidence in one’s abilities) in your team members?
	What role does psychological capital (hope, resilience, optimism, and confidence) play in your technology business leaders decision-making?
	Have any of your retention or morale-boosting strategies become long-term practices?
	How do you balance employee well-being with organizational performance goals in your technology business leaders decisions?
	What advice would you offer to another leader in the technology industry trying to reduce turnover and improve employee experience?
Schedule summary review either by phone or email.	"We have reached the end of this interview. Thank you again for your participation. Your insights are incredibly valuable. As part of the project’s quality assurance, I will take the audio from these recordings and transcribe them verbatim. I will email you a summary of my interpretations to ensure your views are accurately captured within a week. This member checking process is part of ensuring the project’s credibility. If at any point you wish to withdraw from the project, please email me, and your data will be permanently deleted. If you would like to review your interview summaries, you may request a copy by email. Summaries will be shared upon request as a part of the member checking process. Do you have any questions about the interview and the research process? "

Action	Script
Introduce a member checking review and set the stage.	"Thank you for agreeing to meet me today to finalize what I heard from you during the interview and the meaning I have provided for each response."
Wrap up the interview by thanking participants.	"Your contribution to this doctoral research has been most impressive, and I thank you very much for helping me to achieve the doctoral degree. I hope you will find the research findings beneficial to your organization and professional development."
