

2019

# Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Employee Retention of IT Project Managers

Julie Ann Wiebell  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Julie Ann Wiebell

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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Perceptions of Factors that Contribute to Employee Retention of IT Project Managers

by

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MBA, Franklin University, 2004

BA, Ohio University, 1993

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Management

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

The low retention rate of information technology (IT) project managers from a region in the southeastern United States has increased an organization's operational costs and decreased the organization's global competitiveness. The conceptual foundation for this study was the resource-based theory of competitive advantage. This multiple case study explored IT project managers' perceptions of the factors that contributed to their retention. Participants in the study included 10 IT project managers with at least 5 years of experience who were also members of a chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI). Semistructured interviews were conducted via teleconference to collect data that were subjected to a thematic analysis. Three key themes emerged from the analysis: an understanding of project management, challenging work, and certification support. The results of the study might provide those individuals in charge of hiring IT project managers with criteria that define what these IT project managers require as well what benefits can be offered and what methods can be applied in retaining these IT Project Managers. Findings from the study have implications for positive social change by contributing to the project management body of knowledge, positioning companies competitively, and effectively engaging IT project managers.

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## Dedication

To all the strong women in my life.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family for making the journey possible, as well as my committee members for guiding me along the way.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the multiple case study, I explored the perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States in the multiple case study. The turnover of IT professionals is expensive for employers, especially when those employees are high performers (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2014). Replacing an employee can cost between 29% to 46% of the employee's annual salary, and retaining those employees can increase profitability, customer satisfaction, and productivity more than 35% (Rawat, 2013). The Society for Human Resource Management estimated the number even higher at 50% to 60% of the employee's annual salary (Vien, 2017). Project management competence retention (PMCR) can lead to increased project success, cost savings for the company, lower prices for the company's consumers, and help the organization be more competitive in the global marketplace (Ekrot, Kock, & Gemünden, 2016). Such competence can also be described as experience and the tacit knowledge that comes with it. Retaining competent IT project managers has many benefits to an organization. In Chapter 1, I addressed the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question, the conceptual framework for the study, the nature of the study, the definitions, the assumptions, the scope and delimitations, the limitations, and the significance of the study.

### **Background of the Study**

Project management competence retention (PMCR), which means retaining competent project managers, can lead to increased project success, cost savings for the company, lower prices for the company's consumers, and help the organization be more

competitive in the global marketplace (Ekrot et al., 2016). On the contrary, hiring a new IT project manager costs a company money and can lead to a higher percentage of project failures (Ekrot et al., 2016). According to the 2007 CHAOS report from the Standish Group (as cited in Cerpa & Verner, 2009), 19% of software projects fail and another 46% fail to meet schedule, budget, or requirements. When an employee making over \$100,000 annually leaves, the turnover cost to the employer could range from \$150,000 to \$250,000 (Wright & Bonett, 2007). Replacing an employee can cost between 29% to 46% of the employee's annual salary, and retaining those employees can increase profitability, customer satisfaction, and productivity more than 35% (Rawat, 2013). The cost savings of retaining employees is significant.

### **Problem Statement**

Companies can benefit financially from retaining IT project managers (Ekrot et al., 2016). There is literature describing successful strategies for retaining employees. Literature can also be found exploring avenues for retaining information technology employees. Strategies for retaining IT project managers has been added to the recent literature. Retaining human resource capital can lead to competitive advantages for the organization (Barney & Wright, 1998). For an organization to be successful, good employees must be retained (Anis, Ijaz-Ur-Rehman, & Safwan, 2011). The problem is that poor IT project manager retention can increase an organization's operational costs, increase product or service costs, and/or limit the capacity to compete (Ekrot et al., 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of the factors associated with employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. Findings from the study contributed to the project management body of knowledge. I conducted a qualitative multiple case study analysis to explore the perceptions of the factors effecting employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. I collected a rich and diverse amount of data from my research participants which, when coded and summarized, provided insight into retention strategies for IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States. Because no previous studies were conducted on the population, my results, conclusions, and suggestions for further research will go far in creating and helping to expand the literature in the area by attracting future researchers.

### **Research Question**

In the study, I addressed the following overarching research question:

What are a region in the southeastern United States IT project managers' perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The resource based view (RBV) of competitive advantage was the primary conceptual framework for the study. According to Barney and Wright (1998), for an organization to be competitive, three main resources were critical: a) physical capital, b) organizational capital, and c) human resource capital. The first two, physical and organizational capital, were often common points of comparison in the modern age of

technology, leveling the playing fields for most organizations. The third, human resource capital, was the real differentiator between companies and the most important of the three. Retaining good employees is crucial to the success of an organization (Anis et al., 2011). A company needs to do what it can to keep those good employees.

The literature review in Chapter 2 developed the concepts of employee retention. It also addressed current technology employee retention strategies, before addressing retention strategies specifically focused on IT project managers.

### **Nature of the Study**

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States by conducting face-to-face, semistructured interviews with a selection of IT project managers from an IT project management organization within a region in the southeastern United States. I chose a case study format for several reasons. First, case studies are a good choice when a researcher wants a clear understanding of real world situations including more in-depth, contextual information than a quantitative survey, for example, can provide (Yin, 2014). Second, qualitative studies do a better job of answering *why* and *how* questions and can explain, describe, illustrate, and enlighten (Yin, 2014) a topical research study which is a type of study that explores those *whys* and *hows* and *what consequences* (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I chose a qualitative method over a quantitative method for its ability to provide more in-depth information about the topical theme, employee retention of project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), a quantitative survey, for example, simply cannot provide the nuance that I was looking for



by personally speaking to these professionals in the field, asking a series of structured main questions and semistructured follow-up questions and probes.

### **Definitions**

Included below are the technical terms that required definitions in the study.

*Compensation:* Aligned with the company's goals, the total compensation including monetary, benefits, and recognition (Devi & Krishna, 2016).

*Employee turnover:* The ratio of the number of people leaving an organization to the number of current employees (Devi & Krishna, 2016).

*IT professionals:* Employees that work with computing technology (Tornack, Pilarski, & Schumann, 2014)

*IT project manager:* An employee whose job duties primarily involve managing information technology projects.

*Leader-member exchange (LMX):* When organizational commitment is increased when an employee feel supported by his supervisor, thus being happier at work(Windeler & Riemenschneider, 2016).

*Millennials:* Also called Generation Y, individuals born 1980 to the 1990s who will account for half of the United States workforce by 2022 (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

*Organizational culture:* An organization's values and unwritten rules (Devi & Krishna, 2016).

*Project Manager Competence Retention (PMCR)*: Retention of project managers is a project-focused business, which is crucial to maintaining competitive advantage (Ekrot et al., 2016).

*Resource-based view (RBV)*: Tacit knowledge which is an uncommon organizational asset that cannot be imitated or substituted and which contributes to a company's competitive advantage (Presbitero, Roxas, & Chadee, 2015).

*Work/Life balance*: Starting with Generation X, dividing work and personal life to find a clear balance between the two (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

*Training and development*: How humans resources instills employees with the capabilities needed to do the jobs needed to reach company goals (Devi & Krishna, 2016).

*Work/Life blending*: Predominantly Generation Y, switching between work and personal life 24/7 with the rise of mobile technology and knowledge work (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

Participants were able and willing to participate in individual interviews and assumedly answered questions accurately and honestly. I assumed that the sample of IT project managers from one southeastern United States chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI) is representative of all IT project managers in the southeastern United States geographical area. I also assumed that participants were available for transcript review as needed.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

I only interviewed IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States who were members of a chapter of the Project Management Institute and who had performed the project management function for at least 5 years.

### **Limitations**

I have experience as an IT project manager in a region in the southeastern United States. I have not worked in that capacity since 2008, which should alleviate bias. A voluntary sample of IT project managers who are current members of the Project Management Institute and who have performed the project management function for at least 5 years was used. I also used transcript review, to insure validity. Many Project Management Institute members did not respond to volunteer participant recruitment flyers, yet I was confident I collected a representative group based on the chapter membership census. Such a specific study will be transferable to future studies.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Significance to Practice**

Those individuals in charge of hiring IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States had a much better idea of what hiring managers wanted in a company, what benefits entice IT project managers, and how to retain IT project managers. The concept can be extrapolated to project managers outside of a region in the southeastern United States.

The IT project managers interviewed had a voice in the study, one that speaks to what hiring managers are looking for in an employee and what will ultimately make

employees happier working for an employer. Projects under their control could theoretically go smoother as employees: a) are happier in general, b) have more years' experience working for the same company, and c) are appropriately trained in their craft.

### **Significance to Theory**

Newly discovered perceptions of the factors contributing to employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States can be added to the project management body of knowledge. Findings from the study supported the resource-based view of competitive advantage.

### **Significance to Social Change**

The implications for positive social change related directly to the conceptual theory of the resource-based view. The resource-based view places human capital among the top three competitive advantages for a company. The study clearly pointed out that retaining IT project managers provided that competitive advantage, as indicated in the study results in Chapter 4. Companies that perform better and are sustainable have the opportunity to be good global corporate citizens, supporting corporate social responsibility.

### **Summary and Transition**

In Chapter 1, I addressed the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question, the conceptual framework for the study, the nature of the study, the definitions, the assumptions, the scope and delimitations, the limitations, and the significance of the study. In the literature review in Chapter 2, I will develop the concepts of employee retention. I will address current technology employee retention strategies, as well as retention strategies specifically focused on IT project managers.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Low retention of IT project managers can increase an organization's operational costs, increase product or service costs, and/or decrease global competitiveness. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of the factors associated with employee retention of IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States. Findings from the study contributed to the project management body of knowledge. I conducted a qualitative multiple case study analysis to explore the perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention of IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States.

Chapter 2 includes a description of the concepts of employee retention. In this chapter, I address current technology employee retention strategies, as well as retention strategies specifically focused on IT project managers.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Chapter 2 includes literature describing successful strategies for retaining employees. In Chapter 2 I explore peer-reviewed, published research regarding avenues for retaining information technology employees. Chapter 2 also includes strategies for retaining IT project managers. I explored the perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention of IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States.

I used Google Scholar and Walden University Library to search for the following terms with a focus on peer-reviewed literature published in the last 5 years: *employee retention, employee turnover, technology employee retention, technology employee turnover, IT employee retention, IT employee turnover, IT project manager employee*

*retention, IT project manager employee turnover, project manager employee retention, and project manager employee turnover.* When I found the search results becoming increasingly sparse, I solicited Walden University librarians to help come up with search terms and try to locate recent literature within the last 5 years about IT project manager retention. Walden University librarians were not able to locate any more recent literature, and the librarians confirmed a gap in the literature.

### **Conceptual Framework**

According to Barney and Wright (1998), for an organization to be competitive, three main resources are critical: a) physical capital, b) organizational capital, and c) human resource capital. These main resources were referred to as a resource based view (RBV) of competitive advantage. The first two were easily shared and copied in the modern age of technology, leveling the playing fields for most organizations. The authors identified the third, human resource capital, as the real differentiator between companies and the most important of the three (Barney & Wright, 1998). Retaining good employees is crucial to the success of an organization (Anis et al., 2011).

### **Literature Review**

#### **Traditional Human Resource Management Practices for Employee Retention**

##### **Training and development.**

Human resource management (HRM) practices can help decrease employee turnover (Tornack et al., 2014). Training and professional development are directly related to retention. Training is viewed as education that keeps an employee's current skills up-to-date and helps improve any weaknesses or lack of skills needed to perform

the current job. Professional development is training targeted at future positions where a need is forecasted by the organization. By training employees and having future advancement opportunities within the organization, turnover is reduced and job satisfaction and commitment is increased (Anis et al., 2011). Anis et al. (2011) determined, by a quantitative study of 330 banking and manufacturing employees that training is positively related to compensation. Their study also supported the hypothesis that compensation and a high quality work environment are both positively related to employee retention.

Succession management is another way to develop current employees and is a process whereby an employee is groomed for a higher position within the company, usually one being vacated by someone retiring or moving on to a new position within the company (Tornack et al., 2014). An organization may even lay out what are considered key positions that need filled and earmark certain employees for those jobs. By interviewing 24 HR professionals, the authors discovered that succession management can help in the career development and retention of IT professionals.

### **Well-being and job satisfaction.**

The concept of well-being has a wide and varied set of definitions. In simplest terms, it means being happy and healthy. According to Wright and Huang (2012), three things that contribute to the definition of a person's well-being include a person believing that he is happy and healthy, a person showing more optimism than pessimism, and the entire life of a person viewed as a mostly happy and healthy whole. Regardless of how it is defined, many organizational researchers believe that the lack of well-being of



employees can be a detriment to an organization (Wright & Huang, 2012). It makes sense to try to improve employee well-being.

There is a clear relationship between well-being and job satisfaction and financial costs to an organization when employees are not well and not satisfied. A few of the symptoms of unhappy and unhealthy employees include alcohol and/or drug abuse, depression, hypertension, and feelings of inadequacy. A common cause of hypertension is work-related stress. Even after controlling for other common cardiovascular health risks, Wright, Cropanzano, Bonett, and Diamond (2009) linked a higher pulse point, the difference between systolic and diastolic blood pressures, to a lower well-being. Not only that, but hypertension can lead to a stroke which is a potentially deadly event. As these issues rose, employee job satisfaction, performance, and retention declined (Wright & Huang, 2012). If an employee is unhappy, bored, or does not like the job, he will leave. Happiness matters, because people can spend up to a third of their lives at work (Vien, 2017). Happier, healthier employees save a company the cost of replacing employees, as employees will choose to stay.

### **Well-being and employee performance and retention.**

Studies conducted over the last 30 years have supported how well-being relates to employee performance and retention. Staw and Barsade (1993) conducted a study on college students. The authors showed that the higher the students' well-being, the better college students performed in school, the better decision-making skills college students had, and the better college students were at interpersonal communication. Wright et al.

(2009) found a significant relationship between employee well-being and supervisory performance.

Other organizational research illustrated the relationships between well-being and retention. When employees are not happy, they quit. Wright and Bonett (1992) found that as well-being and job satisfaction increased, turnover decreased. If employees were unhappy enough they might even decide to change career paths completely, as opposed to just changing employers (Wright & Bonett, 1992). When an employee making over \$100,000 annually leaves, the turnover cost to the employer could range from \$150,000 to \$250,000 (Wright & Bonett, 2007). As more employees leave, or withdraw, the organization's health is seen to diminish (Wright & Huang, 2012). Providing annual feedback is not enough to let employees know their performance. Employees need continuous feedback throughout the year, meaning HR must learn to be more nimble and able to help management achieve performance feedback more than once per year (Vien, 2017). An unhealthy organization is less competitive.

### **Supervision.**

Employees feel much more committed to an organization if they have supervisor support (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). Supervisor support includes shared values, particularly around the organizational culture. When the employee's values align with that of the company and their supervisor, they tend to be happier, more committed, and willing to stay. A good relationship between a supervisor and an employee increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover, while employees who were dissatisfied with their supervision tend to leave the organization (Tooksoon, 2011).

**Pay practices.**

To attract employees in the first place, organizations need to offer competitive pay. Once the employee is hired permanently the HRM pay practice must continue to be a focus in order to retain those employees. According to Tooksoon (2011), higher wages produced increased productivity along with lower turnover and lower costs of recruiting new employees. Employees expect to be paid a fair wage. Employees who are satisfied with their pay are more committed to the company and feel more secure in their own financial futures.

**Job training.**

Training and professional development provided by the organization to employees also increased job satisfaction and commitment (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). HRM practices that include job-related training reduced employee turnover and are especially important in times of economic downturn when insecurity and job uncertainty are evident (Tooksoon, 2011).

**Technology Employee Retention****IT professionals.**

Tornack et al. (2014) defined IT professionals as “employees of the computing related workforce” (p.2) who are divided into three main career paths. The first was technical jobs such as programmers, analysts, end-user support, administrators, and technicians. The second was technical jobs that lead to IT management positions. The third was technical jobs that lead out of IT to a non-IT job.

**Resource based view.**

According to the resource based view (RBV), “tacit knowledge forms part of an organization’s strategic assets and resources, which are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable on which firms build their core competences for competitive advantage” (Presbitero et al., 2015, p. 3), which identified retaining employees as a top priority. Presbitero et al. (2015) researched Philippine BPOs to find out how employee retention could be improved beyond the scope of typical HRM practices such as payment, career planning, and training and development. These traditional practices have not been working well enough, because the practices are too well known throughout the industry and easily replicable. Now knowledge workers are seen to be more than simply human resources. Knowledge workers are unique and valuable human assets.

A resource based view is also supported to help improve technology employee retention (Woodside, 2013). The better allocated an organization’s IT resources are, the more competitive the organization will be (Woodside, 2013). The best resource and staffing practices to aid in innovation growth are: a) establish a service catalog, b) optimize application services portfolio, c) align service oriented architecture, and d) identify emerging services and generate sustainability (Woodside, 2013). Despite such organized efforts to move a company forward in a time of economic downturn, management must focus on individual employees. Between 2009 and 2012, the median annual income of the United States dropped by 5%. Some employees were asked to take pay cuts, others were laid off, and yet others were forced to take on additional work (Woodside, 2013). An estimated 60% of employees considered seeking new jobs. Employees are key to a company’s success, and not a lot of trust exists between an

organization and its employees during recessionary times (Woodside, 2013). Shanmugam and Kalpana (2014) also stated that attrition has similar costs to an employer.

### **The growing number of and demand for knowledge workers.**

According to Esque (1999), the growth in technology led to a rise in knowledge workers, those employees who were able to interpret and manipulate information in order to create new information. In addition to an understanding of technology, networking, and information processing, knowledge workers were required to possess the soft skills necessary to make good communicators and often were involved in project work. Center to the importance of knowledge workers is the fact that knowledge workers are key to organization success, because the world is changing into a knowledge economy (Esque, 1999). Tornack et al. (2014) agreed that the increased value of information systems, rapid technological advancement, and quick expiration of relevant IT skills has led to an increase in the demand for IT workers and an ongoing need to develop existing workers.

Knowledge workers need to have their own independence and not be micromanaged. Usually well-educated knowledge workers prefer to determine their own tasks and deadlines in any project and take satisfaction from successful completion. Managing knowledge workers is different than managing manual laborers. (Esque, 1999). In other words, as opposed to command-and-control management styles, more supportive management styles have proven successful in managing knowledge workers (Esque, 1999). Increases in technology workers are fueled by advances in technology.

Presbitero et al. (2015) pointed out in their study that business processing outsourcing (BPO) firms have arisen as a direct result of the growth of technology and

the need for cost-effective knowledge workers. Advanced industrialized countries like the United States seek out these IT vendors in developing countries that pay their workers less. Despite the growing need, the offshore BPOs have high levels of employee turnover ranging from 30 to 80% in the Philippines, for example, which is 50% higher than other types of companies in the country. The workers tend to leave to earn more money elsewhere, whether that means going to an in-country competitor or physically moving to an industrialized country that pays more. When IT employees leave the company, the company loses tacit knowledge, business intelligence, and customer information those employees possess, and the global shortfall of skilled knowledge workers only grows (Presbitero et al., 2015). The authors wanted to know why traditional Human Resource Management (HRM) practices did not seem to be working for the Philippine BPOs, even when wages were increasing.

**Motivation, trust, and support.**

Motivating knowledge workers is very important. Knowledge workers need to feel intellectually challenged and valued by their organization and need to feel able to communicate any obstacles or roadblocks to their productivity to management. If knowledge workers feel underutilized or not given the proper work assignments to fit their often unique skill sets, frustration will set in, as well as detachment to company goals. The knowledge worker may even leave the organization (Esque, 1999).

Knowledge workers must also feel safe sharing information with their employers, a type of space safety often referred to as an employer-employee psychological contract. The safer a knowledge worker feels the more productive and innovative he can be.

Conversely, if the knowledge worker feels that trust is violated, his actions and attitudes will suffer along with his productivity and motivation (Esque, 1999). Trust and motivation are important.

Woodside (2013) agreed that technology workers need to feel valued, particularly during times of economic depression and job insecurity. Companies need to regain the trust of the employees by engagement, building better relationships, and providing professional development. By engaging the employees, organizations can learn better ways to provide a work-life balance with mentoring, training, flexible schedules, job sharing, or reduced hours. A two-way conversation between management and employees will help build trust and understanding of both the needs of the organization and the needs of the workers. Shanmugam and Kalpana (2014) also believed that making employees feel valued is the most important piece of retention and pushed for the I-I-I model, which stands for Introduce, Inculcate, and Involve. Introduce means introducing new employees to the organization, focusing on how employees are valued. Inculcate means everyone in the company is involved in retention, not just the Human Resources department. Involve means the employees know better than managers when it comes to retention planning. Involved means employees are motivated and trust employers (Shanmugam & Kalpana, 2014).

Trust and support also come into play to retain IT workers. Windeler and Riemenschneider (2016) studied 289 Fortune 500 company workers to see how leader support related to career success among IT employees. The authors defined leader support as mentoring and leader-member exchange (LMX) and career success as

organizational commitment and merit pay. The authors showed how leader support benefited both the employee and the organization.

First, globalization led to an increase in ethnic minority workers who could be used to fill the growing shortage of experienced IT workers (Windeler & Riemenschneider, 2016). In the US minorities will increase from a 37% in 2012 to 57% in 2060, but unfortunately only 14% of ethnic minorities are IT workers. Second, Windeler and Riemenschneider (2016) pointed out that a more diverse workforce increased organizational performance. To get that increased performance the employees needed to feel supported by their leader. This is where leader support came in.

Windeler and Riemenschneider (2016) explained that ethnic minorities face many challenges to enter the IT career path: Access to computers in early education, access to higher education, and socioeconomic status. Entering college in lower numbers than their white counterparts limits their ability to gain IT employment. Then, once employed in IT the challenges continue. One of the main retention challenges is cultural fit and difficulty finding mentors to help coach employees in their career.

The two types of mentoring Windeler and Riemenschneider (2016) see as crucial are psychosocial and career. Psychosocial mentoring focuses more on friendship and dealing with organizational culture navigation, whereas career mentoring focuses on coaching, career advancement, and sponsorship. The former helps reduce stress and makes for a happier employee by assisting companies in adopting organizational values and providing an ear to listen. The latter helps develop professional connections that can



advance an employee's career. According to the authors, both forms of mentoring lead to increased organizational commitment.

### **Work environment.**

When IT cut-backs occur during a time of economic recession, companies are forced to focus on supporting current IT users, infrastructure, and applications, as opposed to scaling for the future or focusing on innovation projects. Organizational management focuses more on the short-term. Any long-term initiatives are usually cost-constrained and move very slowly, only adding to the end-users' poor impression of technology in an organization (Woodside, 2013). According to Woodside (2013), IT is viewed as a cost center more in times of recession and specific strategies must be used to properly budget for innovation and growth.

### **Job burnout theory and work exhaustion.**

Much research has been done on job satisfaction and technology employee job satisfaction in particular. Shih, Jiang, Klein, and Wang (2013) stated that work exhaustion leading to job burnout was seminally presented in Moore's IT work exhaustion model and job burnout theory. The authors looked at the following IT jobs: programmers, system designers, system analysts, developers, IS engineers, and software engineers using the Maslach burnout inventory (MBI) and job diagnostic survey (JDS). An employee suffers work exhaustion when a combination of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion caused by being stretched too thin at work. In turn, exhausted employees have lower job satisfaction and higher turnover. Work exhaustion positively affects depersonalization and an employee's sense of accomplishment (Shih et al., 2013),

which leads to other issues such as poor work performance, absenteeism, and other poor behaviors on-the-job.

Shih et al. (2013) explained that job burnout theory is brought about by three separate syndromes: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. The first, emotional exhaustion is feeling that one has no emotional energy left. The employee is typically tense and frustrated. Depersonalization is when an employee begins to see people as objects. The employee becomes detached from others, a negative attribute for IT workers who are expected to be able to work with others. It is seen as a way the employee learns to cope with exhaustion. The more exhausted the employee is, the more he disconnects from others. Third, an employee who feels reduced feelings of personal accomplishment, which is shown to happen at the same time as depersonalization, starts to see themselves negatively as someone who is incompetent in his role. Of these three syndromes, emotional exhaustion tends to spawn the other two.

Tornack et al. (2014) adds to the work exhaustion dialog, noting that IT workers facing constant stress, lack of needed new skills, and low staffing can easily face work exhaustion and leave. The aforementioned increase in demand for IT workers makes it easier for IT workers to find employment elsewhere, increasing turnover at their previous employer.

#### **Path to retaining IT employees.**

The Society for Human Resource Management estimates the cost of replacing an employee at 50% to 60% of the employee's annual salary (Vien, 2017). Rawat (2013)

discovered that replacing an IT employee can cost between 29% to 46% of the employee's annual salary, and retaining those employees can increase profitability, customer satisfaction, and productivity more than 35%. He outlined a path to retaining IT employees that included eight focus areas. The first starts before recruitment: HRM practices should be used to hire the right people in the first place. Second, compensate employees fairly. Third, use rewards to motivate employees. Fourth, provide career growth and promotion opportunities. Fifth, provide autonomy. Sixth, implement retention programs that could involve organizational redesign, open work environments with little visible division between management and subordinates, and make sure everyone understands how their contributions support the company, how employees matter. Seventh, ask employees for their feedback and suggestions for improvement. Eighth, provide a work/life balance. As the author points out, a competitor will provide these benefits if the organization does not.

**Those responsible for retaining IT employees.**

Rawat (2013) raised the question of who is responsible to retaining IT workers: the immediate supervisor, the next level supervisor, and HR. Essentially, he referred to the entire management chain. He saw each level as equally responsible and stressed the importance of discovering why people leave through the use of Exit Interviews to collect the information. He mentioned Herzberg's hygiene factors, such as salary, being a reason to stay with an organization. It is the other motivating factors like recognition and work-life balance that can hold more sway. Pay is only a small part of retention according to Rawat (2013).

**Job hoppers in the IT sector.**

Job hoppers are permanent hires who quit within 2 years. Out of a survey of 3,022 employees and 2,138 hiring managers, CareerBuilder determined that job hopping has increased recently (Wolf, 2014). The IT Sector has the largest number of job hoppers, most of those being younger people who do not yet have an established career path. Some of the advantages included gaining experience in various industries, various companies, earning more money, and building a larger professional network. There are also disadvantages such as the notion that job hoppers cannot be relied upon, the employer will not gain long term value from job hoppers, and that job hoppers will not stay at a company long enough to learn a decent knowledge base to pursue a long term career path (Wolf, 2014). Each company must decide whether or not to tolerate job hoppers.

**Organizational commitment.**

Van Dyk and Coetzee (2012) studied retention factors in information technology services in South Africa and determined that there was a clear relationship between organizational commitment and retention. Some of the factors that positively influenced employees' commitment included professional development opportunities, training, and the chance to use new skills at work. Employees wanted opportunities for career development, competitive compensation, retirement, and a trust in continued employment which is referred to as job embeddedness. Satisfaction with the direct supervisor and job autonomy also played a role in organizational commitment. In summary, development and support on the job and for the future in the job made employees more committed.

## **IT Project Manager Retention**

### **The people factors of project failure.**

While many IT project managers will not admit to project failures due to the bureaucratic environment of their company, other team members such as software developers often tell a different tale (Cerpa & Verner, 2009). Not all project failure factors are within a project manager's control. A few examples based on Cerpa & Verner's quantitative study of 304 failed projects, in the eyes of the software developers, the main reasons for failure included the length of the development process itself, poor initial estimates, poor risk assessment and management, and lack of incentives for those team members who worked long hours. The latter are referred to as *people* factors.

According to Cerpa and Verner (2009), these *people* factors include four main demotivators. The first demotivator was a lack of incentives for team members who work long hours. The second was a bad experience which happens during the project. The third was too aggressive of a schedule. The final demotivator was a schedule detrimental to the personal lives of the team members. While there are many reasons for project failures, and there can be multiple reasons, the *people* factors are evident. Over 72 percent of those surveyed indicated the first two factors as reasons for project failure, and over 61 percent indicated that the last two factors contributed to project failures (Cerpa & Verner, 2009). People factors play a role in project failure.

### **Strategies to mitigate the effect of project failures on team members.**

According to Shepherd, Haynie, and Patzelt (2013), the negative emotions that pile up over time and multiple failed entrepreneurial projects have a lasting effect on

project team members, including project managers. The authors stressed that developing coping strategies can help increase motivation and reduce stress. Incentives such as balanced work tasks, assigning multiple projects at once instead of one at a time, and creating professional development training can help mitigate the negative emotions of multiple project failures.

When employees leave a company, and consequently the current project(s), project knowledge loss occurs called the theory of organizational forgetting (Pee, Kankanhalli, Tan, & Tham, 2014). Developing a way to continuously transfer tacit knowledge during a project can help reduce the effect. Project managers following guidelines such as the *Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK) will already be taking a step in the direction of knowledge documentation that facilitates easy transfer to another project manager. According to Pee et al. (2014), there were other ways to mitigate the effect that project team members and subsequently the company as a whole has when an IT project manager leaves the company. The first way included job enlargement which relates to the ongoing professional development of the employees by rotating their positions to absorb some of the tacit knowledge of others and make their roles less monotonous. The second way included an electronic knowledge repository that could be used to store not only the project manager's documentation, but also all of the documented tacit knowledge that would be sorely missed if the only employee having it left the company. The third way included succession planning which involved having a person in mind to take the place of everyone on the project team, including the project manager should he or she decide to leave. Succession planning goes hand in hand with

job enlargement (Pee et al., 2014). Since the impact of employee turnover is to be avoided as much as possible, companies would be wise to adopt these tactics to help mitigate the impact should it occur.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter 2 developed concepts of employee retention. It also addressed current technology employee retention strategies, as well as retention strategies specifically focused on IT project managers. I found a gap in the literature specifically regarding IT project manager retention in a region in the southeastern United States, and conducted a qualitative multiple case study of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States to fill that gap. Chapter 3 described the research method and design used in the study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. Findings from the study contributed to the project management body of knowledge. I conducted a qualitative multiple case study analysis to explore the perceptions of the factors associated with employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States.

Chapter 3 includes the research method used in the study, including the research design and rationale, which included the population, sampling and sampling procedures. It also includes the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; the instrumentation and operationalization of constructs; and threats to validity.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

In the study, I addressed the following overarching research question:

What are a region in the southeastern United States IT project managers' perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention?

I conducted a qualitative multiple case study of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States by conducting teleconference, semistructured interviews. I chose a case study format for several reasons. First, case studies are a good choice when a researcher wants a clear understanding of real world situations including more in-depth, contextual information than a quantitative survey, for example, can provide (Yin, 2014). Second, qualitative studies do a better job of answering *why* and *how* questions and can explain, describe, illustrate, and enlighten (Yin, 2014) a topical



research study which is a type of study that explores those *whys* and *hows* and *what consequences* (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

### **Role of the Researcher**

As a resident of the state where the study was conducted since 2008, a member of a southeastern United States chapter of the Project Management Institute since 2004, and a past chapter volunteer until 2011, I have a past personal familiarity with the some of the organizations and project managers in the area. I also worked as an IT project manager consultant in 2008 in the area. My experience helped me identify the research population and recruit participants from the members of the Project Management Institute, seek approval from each one to conduct the interviews, and keep each informed throughout the study.

I followed Yin's (2014) steps to perform a qualitative multiple case study to the point of saturation of project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. Saturation is defined as the point in qualitative interviewing when no new information is being discovered and the same themes are being repeated (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To avoid personal bias, I enlisted member checking by allowing participants to review written transcripts of the teleconference interviews and add any additional information or corrections. I used Microsoft Excel to help identify themes in the data collected, to determine the meaning of those themes, and to summarize my findings in a formal report which was shared with all participants.

My role as a researcher also fell midway between the etic and emic relationship between the participants in the study, meaning that neither did I watch participants from

afar, i.e. outside observer, nor was I one of those interviewed for my expertise (Salmons, 2015). I remained active as a member of the local southeastern United States chapter of the Project Management Institute attending monthly chapter meetings and annual Professional Development Days to stay up-to-date on the profession and current topics of interest to project managers. My professional development efforts and attendance insured that I was a familiar face and helped garner voluntary participation for the study.

### **Methodology**

I followed Yin's (2014) steps to perform a qualitative multiple case study to the point of saturation of project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. I conducted a topical study interviewing as many participants fitting the specific criteria of being project managers in a region in the southeastern United States who were active Project Management Institute members until saturation was obtained. I chose a qualitative method over a quantitative method for its ability to provide more in-depth information about the topical theme, employee retention of project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. A quantitative survey, for example, simply cannot provide the nuance that I was looking for by personally speaking to these professionals in the field, asking a series of structured main questions and semistructured follow-up questions and probes.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I selected the research population from the members of the Project Management Institute as determined by the membership of a chapter in the southeastern United States who have self-identified themselves as IT project managers or whose primary job duties

involve IT project management. Secondary requirements for selection favored those who have been in their current or similar positions with the same or different companies for at least 5 years. The reason for preferring more tenure is the likelihood that those individuals not only have more experience in their roles, but also have many years of firsthand knowledge and opinions of what works and does not work when it comes to IT project manager retention in a region in the southeastern United States companies. Interviews were conducted to the point of saturation.

### **Instrumentation**

I used an interview protocol (See Appendix A), written in advance so that it could be shared with participants if requested, as well as with the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB); a recruitment participation flyer (See Appendix B); a consent form; recorded phone interviews of participants; transcripts of the recorded phone interviews; and Microsoft Excel to house research data findings.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I collected the data from members of a southeastern United States chapter of the Project Management Institute. I recruited the participants using the participant recruitment flyer (See Appendix B) and the consent form. I collected the data using the interview protocol (See Appendix A). The frequency of data collection events depended on the availability of the participants. The duration of data collection events did not exceed 1 hour each. Focused case studies can take about an hour (Yin, 2014). Participants made interview appointments using the free service YouCanBook.Me. FreeConferenceCall.com, a free phone service, recorded the data. For a fee, REV.com

transcribed the interviews. The follow-up plan when recruitment resulted in too few participants was to distribute volunteer participant recruitment flyers at three consecutive, monthly Project Management Institute chapter meetings. Participants exited the study after completing the recorded phone interview, reviewing the written transcripts, and providing any additional information or clarification the participants or I desired by a predetermined time frame. Follow-up interviews were not needed.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

For each type of data collected, I thematically coded and matched them to the research question. I used Microsoft Excel to code, record, and store the data. I analyzed discrepant, or rival cases, coded them with the majority cases and included them in the data analysis and conclusions.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

I used appropriate strategies to establish credibility, such as member checks, saturation, and reflexivity to establish internal validity. Triangulation is collecting data from different participants to insure consistency (Yin, 2014). Participants in the study were project managers from various industries in a region in the southeastern United States. Giving the participants an opportunity to review their interview transcripts satisfied member checking requirements. I conducted interviews until the same information began appearing in interviewee answers over and over again, also known as saturation.

**Transferability**

Appropriate strategies to establish transferability, such as thick description and variation in participant selection were used to establish external validity. Participants in the study were IT project managers, or individuals in the role of IT project management, who were members of a southeastern United States Project Management Institute chapter and at least 18 years of age. There were five men and five women. The industries participants represented included the federal government, construction, education, consulting, and information technology.

**Dependability**

I used appropriate strategies to establish dependability, such as audit trails, to establish reliability, which according to Yin (2014) includes having research procedures, such as a protocol, that is repeatable. Also, maintaining a chain of evidence increases the reliability of the study. The reader of the study can trace the results back to the original data source. Records must be securely and logically stored for future reference. For example, Yin (2014) shows a similar chain of evidence: a) the case study findings are derived from the information system database, b) the information system database data comes from the coding of specific interview answers into broad topics, c) the broad topics are found in the study protocol, and d) the study protocol topics link to specific interview questions. Utilizing these thought processes I traced the findings back to specific interview questions.

**Confirmability**

I used appropriate strategies to establish confirmability, such as reflexivity. As the interviewer, I followed a research protocol being careful to avoid reflexivity, which is the *mutual and subtle influence* between the interviewer and interviewee that may result in clouding of the data or changing the direction of questioning (Yin, 2014). I confirmed with each participant by providing each one with a copy of the interview transcript that the data I was using for the study contained the actual answers that were provided.

**Ethical Procedures**

The following describes the treatment of human participants. The actual documents I included in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application included: a) institutional permissions, including IRB approvals that were needed; b) ethical concerns related to recruitment materials and processes and a plan to address such concerns; and c) ethical concerns related to data collection/intervention activities, including participants' refusing participation or early withdrawal from the study and response to any predictable adverse events and a plan to address such concerns. The data were anonymous and confidential to insure the privacy of the participants who openness to honestly shared their opinions during the interviews. Confidential data were protected on a password-protected laptop during the study and afterward. Walden University's MyDR Taskstream information system included drafts and final sections of the study prior to and including completion. All participants will have access to the published final study in ProQuest. I will destroy the data 5 years after the completed study is published in ProQuest. Only I,

my dissertation committee members, and the department program director had access to the dissertation draft before completion of the study.

Ethical issues that were not be a factor included doing a study within one's own work environment and conflict of interest or power differentials. The planned incentive for each study participant was a nominal \$10 Amazon gift card.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 included a description of the research method that I used in the study, including the research design and rationale, and the population, sampling and sampling procedures. It also included the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and the instrumentation and operationalization of constructs, as well as the threats to validity.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Purpose of the Study, Research Question, and Chapter Organization**

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of the factors associated with employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. Findings from the study contributed to the project management body of knowledge. I collected a rich and diverse amount of data from my research participants which, when coded and summarized, provided insight into retention strategies for IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States. Because no previous studies have been conducted on the population, my results, conclusions, and suggestions for further research will go far in creating and helping to expand the literature in the area by attracting future researchers.

In the study, I addressed the following overarching research question:

What are a region in the southeastern United States IT project managers' perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention?

The beginning of Chapter 4 includes a review of the research problem, research question, research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. The remainder of the chapter includes a presentation of the study results organized by themes, followed by a chapter summary.



### **Research Setting**

I was unaware of any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of study or that influenced interpretation of the study results. I collected all data via teleconference line, i.e. voice only.

### **Demographics**

Participants in the study were IT project managers, or individuals in the role of IT project management, who were members of a southeastern United States Project Management Institute chapter and at least 18 years of age. There were five men and five women. The industries participants represented included the federal government, construction, education, consulting, and information technology.

### **Data Collection**

I collected all data via a teleconference line provided by FreeConferenceCall.com. The service offered the ability to record and download an MP3 audio file of each recording which was used to create a written transcript of each interview by REV.com. At the time of Proposal writing, conference call or transcription services had not yet been chosen. It was only through thorough investigation and comparison that a selection was made, and it ended up working well. Each of the 10 interviews lasted approximately 20–50 minutes each.

### **Data Analysis**

I used Microsoft Excel to code the data into themes as follows: competitive advantage; understanding of project management; independence, authority trust, and relationships; challenging work; lack of information; direct supervisor; feeling values and

the work environment; internal professional development; external professional development; certification support; tuition reimbursement; flexible work schedules and telecommuting; generational differences; on-the-job experience; and other benefits. Discrepant cases were rare, but I mentioned them in the study results section of the chapter, so as not to leave out their importance.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

I used appropriate strategies to establish credibility, such as member checks, saturation, and reflexivity to establish internal validity. Triangulation is collecting data from different participants to insure consistency (Yin, 2014). Participants in the study were project managers from various industries in a region in the southeastern United States. Giving the participants an opportunity to review their interview transcripts satisfied member checking requirements. I conducted interviews until the same information began appearing in interviewee answers over and over again, also known as saturation.

#### **Transferability**

I used appropriate strategies to establish transferability, such as thick description and variation in participant selection were used to establish external validity. Participants in the study were IT project managers, or individuals in the role of IT project management, who were members of a southeastern United States Project Management Institute chapter and at least 18 years of age. There were five men and five women. The

industries participants represented included the federal government, construction, education, consulting, and information technology.

### **Dependability**

I used appropriate strategies to establish dependability, such as audit trails, to establish reliability, which according to Yin (2014) includes having research procedures, such as a protocol, that is repeatable. Maintaining a chain of evidence increases the reliability of the study. The reader of the study can trace the results back to the original data source. Records must be securely and logically stored for future reference. For example, Yin (2014) shows a similar chain of evidence: a) the case study findings are derived from the information system database, b) the information system database data comes from the coding of specific interview answers into broad topics, c) the broad topics are found in the study protocol, and d) the study protocol topics link to specific interview questions. By utilizing these thought processes, I traced the findings back to specific interview questions.

### **Confirmability**

I used appropriate strategies to establish confirmability, such as reflexivity. As the interviewer, I followed a research protocol being careful to avoid reflexivity, which is the *mutual and subtle influence* between the interviewer and interview that may result in clouding of the data or changing the direction of questioning (Yin, 2014). I confirmed with each participant by providing each one with a copy of the interview transcript that the data I was using for the study contained the actual answers that were provided.

## Study Results

The results of the study, organized by themes, follows.

### Competitive Advantage

All participants agreed that retaining IT project managers was a competitive advantage for a company. The knowledge that the person has about the company, the politics, the procedures, and the culture are oftentimes irreplaceable. Participant 6, in particular described his feelings:

The project managers a lot of times know where the skeletons are. They know how to navigate the organization, because they've been through it several times. As long as they're there, the more times they've been through it. There is that old thinking that you need to turn people over to get fresh ideas. I prefer to keep people who know how things work and why they work that way. I think they can make better change managers as long as they're flexible to make change happen, because they have a better understanding. They have trust, they build up trust and relationships through those projects that they've done. But, I feel like the project manager that has been there, who's got these relationships, so you can literally sit down with somebody who's struggling with the change. You got to be a good listener, it's a critical skill for project manager. You have to be able to good communicator, you got to be a really good empathetic listener. If they're an empathetic listener, they're able to sit there and listen to that person, tell them why, what's really bothering them about it, and to factor that in. If you've only been there 6 months, you don't have that relationship, you're basically another

contractor. They don't trust you yet. There is the downside of you get set in your ways and so forth, but I really think just the institutional knowledge that you have is extremely valuable. (personal communication, March 8, 2019)

Sometimes it is not the skill of the IT project manager at all that contributes to the competitive advantage. According to Participant 4, the person must first “absorb institutional knowledge” (personal communication, March 1, 2019). IT project managers are valuable “because they're assets....especially if [the company] put in any money to have them certified” (Participant 7, personal communication, March 9, 2019). Participant 9, stated his opinions:

Okay, so you can be the best project manager in the world and walk into a brand new company. And have to spend at least a couple of months before you're capable of navigating the political structure. And understanding all the resources that you can and cannot lean on, to get your work done. So you have to understand the playing field and the map, before you can successfully navigate a project. That's a huge learning curve. So if you hand me a huge project that's going to give you a competitive business advantage, and you want it done some form of efficiency. It is so much better if I already know the company. So yes, absolutely. Having a project manager there who knows your company when you start the project, and it isn't something they have to learn on the go, is a huge advantage. (personal communication, March 22, 2019)

Participant 10, in charge of hiring IT project managers, added,

The world for trying to hire IT project managers is extremely competitive right now and why I like to keep them is because they start to learn institutional knowledge of the company. So, absolutely I can go out and hire another IT project manager that has worked with different tools and whatever, but you've got institutional knowledge of the company. They understand our customer base and so it's a learning curve every single time I have to bring somebody new in. So to me there's a lot of benefits to retaining your staff, whether it's they're walking out the door with institutional knowledge and potentially a competitive edge to another competitor or the cost of hiring another person and getting them up to speed and training them. There's many, many reasons that it's beneficial to retain top talent when you identify it. (personal communication, April 11, 2019)

By retaining their people, companies are, “retaining experience...I think experience is worth a lot of money” (Participant 8, personal communication, March 14, 2019). That money and cost savings translate to a competitive advantage.

### **Understanding of Project Management**

Another theme uncovered during data analysis was whether or not the company has an understanding of the art of project management. One might assume that if companies have IT project managers on staff, then there is an understanding. That is not always the case. Participant 10 stayed 8 years at a company, because “they valued what we did. The company understood that IT project management was important and they valued it” (personal communication, April 11, 2019). Participant 1 pointed out the need for

...a better understanding in general of what project management is and how project management works so that they can understand my role and where I'm coming from when I ask them to support me...more internal training with the other groups within our company so that there's a better understanding of what project management is. (personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Participant 1 also described the idea of training lead by the project managers.

Participant 2 told a specific example about management:

I don't think she understands what it is and why it's important. She does, however, understand that it's a management job and not necessarily admin, because you're doing multiple things and you're making decisions that affect people and affect the profit and stuff like that all the time. But I don't think she understands what it is and she doesn't like to talk about it because I think she thinks it's silly. It's unneeded. She doesn't understand the benefits. I think the most important thing is make sure that...if you're wanting to have project management, you'd have to include that as one of the professions that are recognized in the company. They would need to, I think, have...some sort of semi-management position where they get access to information, general information about the company that they'd need because I think one of the jobs of a project manager is to shield the technical people from those things. (personal communication, February 1, 2019)

Participant 4 agreed that “a career ladder, a path to career development” is needed for project management to be recognized (personal communication, March 1, 2019), as do many of the other study participants. Participant 7 had extensive experience working

in an environment with a project management office (PMO) that laid down that foundation for project manager growth and understanding of the profession:

So I did work for a company for just about 10 years...and I was a project coordinator for the last 6 of those years, and I stayed because I worked in a PMO, and so I think that organization, and again, that authority being able to have camaraderie with other project managers, and have all that methodology and process down, that's what kept me there is the process and methodology. Having that PMO. So I believe that if you don't have a process and the methodology that you're gonna have these IT people that just say, "Hey, let's just start working on this," and not sticking to the schedule, not reviewing the budget, and, I mean, it's just a disaster. It's a recipe for disaster...some of those challenges are when other people, either technical managers or just worker bees that don't want to follow the process, or even managers that just don't believe in it, like your manager that doesn't believe in the process, and it's very, very ... It's like I said, a recipe for disaster. A failure. (personal communication, March 9, 2019)

Understanding project management was a win-win according to Participant 10.

What I kind of see in project management is that sometimes you feel like you're pushing a rope. People know they have to have it but maybe they don't buy into it. They don't value the information you bring or they're so focused on the technical components that they see project management as a bothersome task. I liked working with project teams and with customers that recognize that project management of IT projects is a win-win. It can help them with their bottom line.



It helps them with their delivery. It can help them with their customer satisfaction.  
(personal communication, April 11, 2019)

The benefits of the company having a clear understanding of project management and the value of their IT project managers were evident from the participant interviews. It led into the next theme.

### **Independence, Authority, Trust, and Relationships**

Even if the company has an understanding of what project management is and what their IT project managers do, the companies may not always enable IT project managers to do their jobs effectively. Participant 2 saw independence as the number one way to retain IT project managers.

I think the best way to retain IT project managers is...to give them independence so that they can run their own show because every project manager has their own methods, has their own way of working. Because I'm PM certified, so you have the methods and stuff that you learn when you're certified, which are pretty good, but still everyone has their own way of doing things and if someone is trying to control how you're working, it's really frustrating because it's sort of like how each individual project manager's own brain works, that's how they should be ... the methods they should be using if it works best for them. (personal communication, February 1, 2019)

Participant 7 agreed about the need for "...more authority placed on the project manager as well as just importance, how important it is to follow process, and methodology, and have a plan. And project managers, that's what they do" (personal communication, March

9, 2019). Participant 6 agreed about the need for freedom for the IT project managers to do their job and the need to trust IT project managers.

The short answer is flexibility. Being able to strike a balance between the things we have to do a certain way, which some of us might call bureaucracy. If you don't like it, you'll call it bureaucracy. If you think it's important, you'll call it best practices. I think it's striking a balance between ensuring everybody does the things we have to do, and does a well, and giving people the freedom to run a project the way they feel like it needs to be run to get the best outcomes. Give them the freedom to lead, that's what you hired them for, is to take the project and run with it. You can say all kinds of things, don't micro manage. That comes down to trust. Just trusting people to get the job done, get the work done, get the project done, get it done. To me, when you put a whole lot of bureaucracy and a whole lot of rigor in place, in a lot of ways that's saying, "I don't trust you to get this done, so I'm going to make you follow all of this. I want you to turn all these reports in, and all this stuff in so that I know you're doing the job." (personal communication, March 8, 2019)

Trust is vital to Participant 8, who stressed

If people trust you and they come to you and they hold your opinion high, then that makes you feel better. But if they just say you're a project manager and then they don't let you do your job, then that's not a situation I would want to be in. I don't want the title without the authority. (personal communication, March 14, 2019)

Participant 3 closely believed that trust and relationships ruled the list of IT project manager retention strategies:

I had a lot of work to do to get the team to relax, trust each other, be willing to talk openly about any issues. It's important to really build those relationships and have that comfort level to where your manager is going to be supportive of everything that you're trying to do. I think I always feel the secret to retaining your employees whether they're project managers or not is a good working relationship, a good work environment; knowing that you can have a level of trust between the employees and the managers and keeping them actively engaged in projects that they care about and providing them the support they need to complete those projects so that they're successful and you celebrate those successes together and you learn from any failures that you may have along the way. But I think overall the biggest thing for me is just the work environment and the working relationships with people. (personal communication, February 8, 2019)

So independence, authority, trust, and relationships were all needed to empower and consequently retain IT project managers

### **Challenging Work**

The idea of providing IT project managers with challenging work as a path to retention with the company came up a several times during interviews. Companies should want "to keep them and keep them as active, engaged employees...try to give them challenging projects that's going to help fulfill them and help support the areas that they

support" (Participant 3, personal communication, February 8, 2019). Participant 6 liked the fact the job provided "interesting work...It was the growth and the change" (personal communication, March 8, 2019). Participant 9 had strong feelings about the topic:

I think that the thing that really kind of kicked it for me as, as a project manager personally is having the opportunity to do those big, and complicated, and complex projects that are hard to do. Things that other people maybe new in the industry wouldn't be able to accomplish, that I can. It's the thing that everybody needs at a personal level to be able to go to bed at night and say, "I can do this and no one else can." Or, "Not everyone can." And this is a good reason to have personal value and take some kind of stock of my own personal value in the organization. So providing me those challenges is obviously a big one. (personal communication, March 22, 2019)

Even Participant 5 chimed in that giving IT project managers engaging and desirable projects was a way to keep IT project managers happy and working for the company (personal communication, March 1, 2019). So while not the top retention strategy, challenging work ranked very high.

### **Lack of Information**

Another retention strategy that came up a few times was the need to eliminate the lack of information provided to IT project managers, thereby making their jobs a little easier. Participant 1 thought the quickest way to lose an IT project manager is

Not giving me the information I need to do a project. Many times, I would get a project from sales that where they've closed the deal and they say they're ready for

me to take the opportunity and start my project. I won't have contact information. I won't have what did you sell them? It's basically blank, and then I have to go ask all those questions myself and run down the information that should be provided to me from day one. That's really frustrating. I'm given projects that aren't really ready, so it takes longer to start them. You kind of keep them longer, because you're always playing catch up trying to get everything...9 times out of 10, you probably don't even have half of it. (personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Participant 5 added, "The last reason I transferred to another organization within my company was because I was given unreasonable scope...with not enough time and budget. So I basically was put into a no win situation. So I decided it was better to leave the situation" (personal communication, March 1, 2019).

### **Direct Supervisor**

Usually the people who extend authority to IT project managers and assign the projects IT project managers work on were their direct supervisors. When asked if the direct supervisors have a role in IT project manager retention, the resounding answer was *yes*. "That support, that buy-in that what they're doing is important," Participant 7 stressed as the role of the supervisor (personal communication, March 9, 2019). The supervisor can help or hinder the employee. "Encouraging you and backing you up when there's problems. They need to give you the tools to work with and backing you up in your decisions, and luckily I've got that here" (Participant 8, personal communication, March 14, 2019). The opposite of support is "Micromanaging and scaring [IT project managers] into staying....Saying that there's not any jobs out there and they'll never find

anything...And that they aren't good at their job so they couldn't do it without you kind of thing” (Participant 8, personal communication, March 14, 2019). Participant 9 shared his personal experience:

Well, I've seen companies try to make people so busy they don't have time to look for other work. I've always said that, "Don't try to keep someone somewhere that's miserable. Make a place good enough that they want to stay.” Because you cannot keep people eventually they'll find a way out. But I've seen companies make it so difficult for people to have the time to look around for other opportunities. That they've stayed longer than maybe they would have liked to have stayed, simply because they didn't feel like I had the opportunity to go. And that's, that's probably my most glaring example of a bad strategy for retention that could think of. Well you've heard the old adage that you don't quit a company, you quit bosses, right? To be honest with you, I've got the best boss I ever had right now. And that's one of the reasons I'm not looking. I mean I give him a hard time about it. But to be honest, he and I are, we get along well. He fosters my career development. He listens to me when I tell him that I believe this, or I believe that. He takes my opinion and gives merit and weight to it. So I think it's a huge part of why I'm staying with [my company], because my manager is who he is. (personal communication, March 22, 2019)

While Participant 1 saw the direct supervisor as he or she that gives out pay increases and bonuses (personal communication, January 27, 2019), Participant 2 saw the direct supervisor as someone who helped only when needed, “I do demand independence

and I do demand in my job that I run it my show and I own it myself, so I also demand only helpful interference, otherwise there's an issue. So, they know that and I train them as much as I can to understand that that's what I need" (personal communication, February 1, 2019). Participant 3 added to the idea of needing supportive management.

It's keeping the employees engaged, giving them a good work environment to where they feel like they can ask questions, come to the manager if there's issues or if they need help in any way. I think it's really important to have a good working environment to help keep your good employees. It's up to him as the executive director to support, to be the executive level support for any projects that we have ongoing. It's critical that we have his support to go out and discuss projects with campus partners so that everybody's aware of what's going on that we have that executive level sponsorship. (personal communication, February 8, 2019)

Participant 4 likened the direct supervisor to a scrum master who blocked and tackled for their team.

Project managers get stuck all the time with being dead in the water because they're waiting on information or direction from somebody usually further up the food chain. So the director of a PMO or scrum master really needs to focus on what the people under them need to keep the ball rolling on their project and stay on schedule. (personal communication, March 1, 2019)

Obviously, direct supervisors played quite a role in retaining their IT project managers based on the study participants.

### **Feeling Valued and the Work Environment**

When discussing the influence of the direct supervisor on IT project manager retention, the themes of feeling valued and company culture surfaced. Since feeling valued and company culture extend beyond one person's influence in most cases, they deserved separate attention. Participant 1 added to the discussion about the lack of understanding of project management in general by stating, "I kind of feel like my role is not valued enough in my current employment" (personal communication, January 27, 2019). Participant 3 noted how it started with management but extended to the company work environment.

I think the worst strategies is not being a good manager. If you don't really care about your people and are not supportive of what they're trying to do, there's bad feelings or conflict that just creates a very negative work environment. That I think is the quickest way to drive people out, to have a really negative and stressful work environment. (personal communication, February 8, 2019)

When it came to a current job, Participant 4 said it was the work environment and company culture that cultivated the willingness to stay (personal communication, March 1, 2019). Participant 6 was passionate about the work environment.

The most important thing was the people. The main reason I stayed though was the people. I've been blessed to work with really good people and really positive environments where people are willing to work hard if necessary most of the time without getting snippy with each other. It was just things you could believe in.



Who can't believe in helping find cancer earlier and helping patient outcomes be better? (personal communication, March 8, 2019)

Sometimes, the work environment was too demanding. "If the company is a company that wants to work you to death and other things then no. It gives you a new opportunity to go find something else" (Participant 5, personal communication, March 1, 2019).

Participant 7 agreed that if the work culture is poor, employees will leave.

So I feel this is important for not just IT project managers, but really anybody, is the company culture. And it can be anything, but as long as the company has a culture of something they stick by, whether it's employees are our greatest asset, or ethically solving engineering problems, whatever the culture is, the company has to have a strong one, because otherwise, you're gonna lose your employees, and it does happen. (personal communication, March 9, 2019)

Feeling valued and being in a good work environment were both brought up in participant interviews as being important to IT project manager retention. While not the most important, feeling valued and company culture deserved mention.

### **Internal Professional Development**

Professional development was one of the most important IT project manager retention strategies, according to the study participants. It was broken into two categories, internal and external. Internal professional development section will be the focus here.

Participant 1 summarized it best by saying, "More of a promotion of personal development would be number one to keep who I currently have, and then having that part of an advertising to get new ones as well," and she also advocated on-the-job internal

training (personal communication, January 27, 2019). Participant 2 talked about a past employer. "We had in house PMP prep classes, for one, where they would have conference calls where people would go over each chapter throughout a period of time. They'd cover a chapter a week and that was really helpful" (personal communication, February 1, 2019). Participant 3 worked for a company that "offers a leadership courses and supervisor courses, they do offer project management training but that's handled slightly separately but it's important. So we try to do what we can in house" (personal communication, February 8, 2019). Participant 4 approved of internal professional development training, but only if it addresses a company need (personal communication, March 1, 2019). Participant 5 also agreed that internal training helps, but mostly for larger companies that have a PMO already. It kept people happy and happy people stayed (personal communication, March 1, 2019). Participant 9 also agreed with internal training, preferring setting up mentoring relationships for newer IT project managers and starting a project management community of practice (COP) (personal communication, March 22, 2019), while Participant 3 already worked for a company with a COP set up and running successfully (personal communication, February 8, 2019).

### **External Professional Development**

Professional development was one of the most important IT project manager retention strategies, according to the study participants. It can be broken into two categories, internal and external. External professional development will be the focus here. Possibly due to the cost, external professional development training was less common. As Participant 2 pointed out, "but there's not much here at [my company],

which is, I found a little bit disappointing because it just feels like it's not a respected profession here, or it's not that it's not respected" (personal communication, February 1, 2019). Participant 10 was clear that if there is not a business need for the training, the employees do not receive external training (personal communication, April 11, 2019).

Participant 3 worked for a more supportive company. "We'll send somebody to New Horizons or to some kind of online training or a conference or outside training as need be. So training is important especially in IT because things move so fast, it's important to try to stay caught up on emerging technologies" (personal communication, February 8, 2019). Participant 5 thought external training is especially important for smaller companies that may not have the know-how or bandwidth to do it in-house (personal communication, March 1, 2019). Participant 6 said the company always budgeted external development opportunities.

I don't remember anybody ever expressing any dissatisfaction anywhere with that because although we didn't do a tremendous amount of internal training, at any of those places, if someone came to me and said, "I'd like to go take this training, I'd like to go to this conference." I always budgeted for every individual to have money to do something like that. (personal correspondence, March 8, 2019)

Participant 7 said, "Of course I would go for the employer who did [offer external professional training], but it's so common that it's almost like a given, so it's super important but it's very, very common" (personal communication, March 9, 2019). "I

mean it's about the company supporting you, right? The company supports you, you support the company” (Participant 9, personal communication, March 22, 2019).

Both internal and external professional development training opportunities were directly linked to the next theme, certification support, as it is provided by both means.

### **Certification Support**

Certification support, while given through both internal and external professional development, extended beyond those two methods of delivery. It encompassed more than just training. The Project Management Institute is one of the largest, most world renowned certifiers of project managers, the premier certification being the Project Management Professional (PMP) certification. Here the study participants shared their experiences and why certification support was necessary, if a company wanted to retain IT project managers.

For Participant 1, it was the second most important retention strategy.

In my current position that I have now, they actually paid for me to get my PMP. I think that's very important for a company to encourage growth and development and support you with that. Obviously I did have to sign saying I'd have to stay for X number of years, but you know I would expect that...first place I would start is offering any current employees who don't have their PMP or other certifications in the different project management areas the ability to go get those. (personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Participant 2 agreed that certification support is important, but not everyone at the company understands it.

The other thing is if the company helps with ... Like if someone is not certified, helping them to be certified and as a PMP and help doing some financing for their certification and they understand how important it is, or the recertification. I guess it's more like it's not an acknowledged profession here, and they don't even have project manager as one of the ... The HR, you know, will have a set of roles or professions. They'll have program manager but they don't have project manager, so it's not even recognized by UT, and so ... Yeah. It doesn't help, because when I need to do recertification, things are ... I even discuss it. I get glazed looks by management, where they think, "Oh, that's that weird PM stuff," but if it was something that was sponsored or backed by the university as an actual profession, they wouldn't have that look. They would understand, "Oh yeah, he needs to be recertified," or, "he has to take some PM courses." (personal communication, February 1, 2019)

For Participant 2, it was the second most important retention strategy. Participant 10 explained in detail how the company handled certification support.

The employee is obviously getting the certification. In our particular company, we pay for the class to get the training of the certification and then we pay for the exam as long as they pass. If they fail, they pay for that because we feel like we've equipped them to succeed, and, you know, part of the skin in the game is that they're studying and preparing on their own time to partner with us. So that's what we set up and then we do expect them, as part of a consulting business, to participate in the local professional organizations, and so we recognize that takes

time out of their work life balance, and so we ask that they attend 50% of the meetings in a year and then we pay 100% of the fees. (personal communication, April 11, 2019)

Other participants saw it as a given, if companies wanted to retain IT project managers.

### **Tuition Reimbursement**

Whether or not a company provided tuition reimbursement for higher education classes was highly dependent on the person and where they were in their career. It was seen as important, but not necessary to retain IT project managers. Participant 8 stated that certification reimbursement was by far better than tuition reimbursement (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Participant 9 agreed.

Well, I think that's awesome. I don't think that that necessarily is the selling point for a lot of people. And I say that, because I look around and I see the occasional project manager going for their masters. But most of them come into the IT field with at least a bachelor's degree. And oftentimes when people start thinking about furthering your education, what they're really talking about, is a certification class or a specific class on risk management, or agile tactics and techniques. They're not talking about going back for traditional education like a doctorate or a masters or anything like that. (personal communication, March 22, 2019)

Other participants thought more positively about the benefit. Participant 2's company had the benefit, so if someone wanted to go back to school the person could (personal communication, February 1, 2019). Those working in higher education said it was really

expected that there be educational benefits such as tuition reimbursement and reduction.

One in particular mentioned,

That is another very critical reason why I stay, why many others do too. If you have kids in college, we have a 50 percent tuition discount to all state universities. So that's a critical benefit...and then as an employee, I believe we can take up to six hours a semester free, it's been a long time since I've tried to do that, but that is a side benefit as well. (Participant 3, personal communication, February 8, 2019)

When asked if it affected an IT project manager's motivation to stay, another added,

"Yeah, it does because that's how I got my bachelors and my masters, was because we had educational benefits here" (Participant 8, personal communication, March 14, 2019).

Participant 6 also saw it as a retention strategy, especially if the company requires reimbursement if someone left within a certain amount of time.

I think it can be either technical like more MIS computer science or business related or marketing related. It depends on what their IT projects tend to be a lot of. They may morph into something else other than a project manager eventually but they can be much more valuable if they understand the industry that they're trying to help support. Also when they're working on a degree, they tend to stay. So that is a good way to retain people. My employer requires you to agree to pay you back your tuition for the last 3 years if you leave. So that's a motivator to stay unless you can get the next company to pay that off. (personal communication, March 8, 2019)

Tuition reimbursement for higher education classes as a retention strategy was split about half and half among study participants. Being a benefit that can extend to the employee's family seemed to be a positive, as well as the need to stay or have to pay back the money the company has invested. On the other hand, it was seen as unnecessary for some IT Project Managers in different places in their careers.

### **Flexible Work Schedule and Telecommuting**

Seen as a very convincing reason to stay at a company, flexible work schedules and telecommute opportunities were both spoken of favorably by the study participants. Participant 8 did not get these benefits but has a friend that did "it sounds very enticing to me because she's at home...you don't have to pay the gas or your lunch...It helps a lot on a lot of other expenses. So yeah, when you look at all that it is definitely a benefit" (personal communication, March 14, 2019).

Participant 1 actually enjoyed the benefit, but cautioned that it could lead to overworking.

Well yeah and honestly I do have that. My current company, I work from home. The majority of my team for professional services are throughout the country because we do travel. There's travel involved. They're having to go to the different facilities. My position is completely remote so I have probably too much flexibility. Sometimes I work on the weekends when I shouldn't be. Yeah I definitely have flexibility. (personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Participant 5 thought it helped keep employees happy, especially when employees worked long hours.



Especially because with projects sometimes there are deadlines where you have to put a lot time in. So if you can flex that time and have a little bit of other time off or if you don't have to bother with the commute because you're working at home, those things are great. They really do make people happy versus the "butt in seat" mentality. (personal correspondence, March 1, 2019)

It could lead to employees working harder, but happier, a win-win.

The ability to telecommute and also if it's non-standard hours. The company I worked for that I did stay for almost 10 years was we did four days of nine hours, and then the last day we only worked four, so we had a very short Friday, and that was very exciting. It was almost the whole day off it felt like, so that was nice. So flexible schedules. I think it's super important in today's day and age. I mean, I think some places don't even have brick and mortar buildings. You can telecommute no matter what. And with technology today, you can absolutely do it and still be successful. Sometimes I worked harder when I just got up in the morning in my pajamas and sat down in front of the computer. I would work longer days sometimes. If you still have the flexibility to leave your desk and be right there at home to be able to do something you had to do. (Participant 7, personal communication, March 9, 2019)

Participant 2 would not take a job without it.

Once you do that in your life, it just seems silly not to do it. I don't know if ... like if I had more choices of where to work here, I don't think I would even consider a company that doesn't have flexible work hours and where they have remote

working and teleconferencing. I don't think I would take the job." "It would be horrible to have to come in at 8:00 and then leave at 5:00. It seems a bit primitive. (personal communication, February 1, 2019)

Participant 3 enjoyed a flexible work schedule, as did coworkers, along with occasional telecommuting.

My typical work hours are seven to four other people do nine to six and any kind of combination in between. So we tend to be pretty flexible on that. We do allow some telecommuting under certain circumstances. It depends on the level of work and the seniority status of the employee most likely and if it's something that needs to be done." "Yes it is. It's important. I've worked seven to four for so long, I'm not sure I could work any other schedule. Sometimes I end up staying up after 4:00. That's not unusual but most of the time if I'm out of here by four, that leaves me time to do other errands and stuff that I may need to do that I don't get to do during the course of the average day. (personal communication, February 8, 2019)

Participant 6 said the benefit is seated on trust and getting the work done and actually convinced an employee who was going to leave, to stay.

I think the other side of that is the opportunity is important, but it goes back to that flexibility, trust, and expecting a person, trusting the person to get the job done. We had an employee who'd been with the company 15 years, turned in her resignation, and the reason was that she was spending two hours of every day of her life, work day, 10 hours a week in the car commuting. We're like, "You can do most of this job from home." When we got looking at it when we said, "We

can give you 10 hours of your life, or at least 8 hours of your life back if you'll just come in on Wednesdays, just to be in the office and connect with people and get certain things done that need to be done here. The other 4 days you can work from home. She's still there. I think being flexible. I've had people work for me remotely my whole career. You have to know the person, you have to trust the person. You see the work getting done or not. I don't care if you're sitting around in your PJ's with your dog at your feet. If the work gets done, it gets done well, that's what I care about. (personal communication, March 8, 2019)

Participant 9 agreed with the idea that technology is changing the world and enabling companies to extend these benefits.

I think that's huge. I mean, I really do. The world is changing. There is opportunities to do things now that we never could do before. Now project management, I've always said you do that in person, always. But that said, I'm sitting in a, in a motorcycle shop right now and I am working from here. The fact that I'm allowed to do that, makes my life so much easier. And also it doesn't earn all my Saturdays sitting in a maintenance shop. So, I've got to tell you when it comes down to it, a flexible work schedule is a big retention factor. If you can give people that kind of fundamental freedom, as long as they're getting their work done, to come and go as they please and to do other things that they need. Then you're really giving them something that they'll prize, and they'll stay for that. (personal communication, March 22, 2019)

He mimicked the same ideas that others have, that flexible work schedules and telecommuting opportunities led to happier employees and retention.

Only one participant, admitted that it was probably due to his age, did not believe in telecommuting and stated, "I think flexible schedules would be a huge draw and would be way up there on the list for childbearing age women, and not quite as high on the list for men necessarily" (Participant 4, personal communication, March 1, 2019). Participant 10 partially agreed and after stating it makes IT project managers happy, added "I feel like sometimes there's a loss in the communication when you're not sitting elbow to elbow (personal communication, April 11, 2019). The statement just goes to enforce that many retention strategies held different weights for different IT project managers. More factors than simply the job role worked into whether a particular person could be swayed to stay by a particular benefit.

### **Generational Differences**

Age and sex were just mentioned as differentiating factors in whether or not telecommuting and flexible work schedules would be good IT project manager retention motivators. The idea of generational differences influencing whether or not an IT project manager will stay at a company was explored in the study.

Participant 3 felt strongly about the topics of age and sex.

I don't know that I would call it generational differences. We have a wide variety of ages here represented at the university and a lot of the people like me have been here a really long time... When you've been at a place so long you just want to stay and get your years in so that you can get your retirement up to where you

can live on a monthly basis once you don't work full time anymore. So I don't think there's any discrimination as far as age when hiring, of course you're not allowed to do that. It's not something that I see. For a long time, just from the personal perspective, there weren't a lot of women programmers here when I started some years ago, but now I think we're probably largely women. It's interesting. (personal communication, February 8, 2019)

Another participant felt it mattered but categorization did not. It was about younger and older people.

Yes, there are differences. But I've been to enough seminars of how to manage millennials to think that that's a load of crap, frankly. I think that people my age still suffer the illusion that there's such a thing as corporate loyalty. I think that younger people tend to be a lot more pragmatic about not getting emotionally invested in an employer because they're more realistic about the lack of emotional investment on the part of the employer in the employee, so. (Participant 4, personal communication, March 1, 2019)

It's just age, agreed Participant 5.

I think it's just age. If you're older and you've been in the company a long time you have a lot more invested in that company. I think that the more millennial view of things is that they'll never stay at a company forever. So they're more interested in ... I guess I would say in the gig. I mean I know some younger people and it's like, "So what are you moving to Oregon for?" "I felt like living in Oregon so I'll go find a job there." "What are you moving to Maine for?" "I felt

like living in Maine. I'll find a job there." So they almost change jobs for ... not what I'd say for experience ... It's not the experience in terms of talent. It's the experience of living in different places. Older people tend to be more sedentary. They got a house. It's hard to sell. Stuff like that. (personal communication, March 1, 2019)

Older IT project managers were just focused on different things in their career than younger IT project managers, such as retirement. "...retirement is a huge factor. It would take a lot for me to leave here because of that...But if you're recruiting younger people, the money is the more important thing" (Participant 8, personal communication, March 14, 2019). Younger IT project managers had different priorities.

Now I see people who are 10 years older than me looking at their retirement exit strategy. They want to stay with the company. So that's going to be a retention factor for them. Folks like me who are maybe at the top of their game, you know, and have at least 10, 15, 20 years before they retire. We're looking at it from a perspective of we want to build something, we want to stay. And I think that we would move on if the appropriate opportunity came along. But again, this is from a positive place where I'm not going to leave a situation because it's bad. I've got to go to something better. Millennials, on the other hand, they're still doing a lot of what I used to do when I was their age. And that is I'm trying to advance my career. I'm trying to find my place. So I think that it's harder to retain them, and I wouldn't expect to see them stay more than one or two, maybe 3 years at a company before moving onto their next employer. And the reason being is they're

gathering experience, they're gathering exposure to different techniques, types of projects, et cetera. I would actually expect them to move on, not because they're millennials but because that's how old they are. And when I was their age, it's what I did. (Participant 9, personal communication, March 22, 2019)

It turned out that the study participants thought that age mattered, but did not necessarily put titles on different generations of workers. It was simply a matter of younger and older IT project managers and where they were in their careers.

### **On-the-Job Experience**

On-the-job experience was more of an outlier, as it was only mentioned by one participant.

Every time I was frustrated by the politics and the salespeople selling ridiculous things to the customers that just will not work and then I have to go and make it work in a project, every time I was really frustrated, I just thought, "Oh my gosh, this is such good experience," so that's one of the reasons I stayed so long, because I was also ... Besides just the experience, I was just thinking, "This looks great on my resume" (Participant 2, personal communication, February 1, 2019).

It still deserved mention as a reason that an IT project manager would stay with a company. Building experience on-the-job was a form of professional development, although not as formal as internal or external training.

### **Other Benefits**

Other benefits, beyond salary, that make up the total compensation package were a focus of the study as these benefits pertained to retention of IT project managers.

Benefits like health insurance, flexible spending accounts, life and disability insurance, retirement savings, time off, childcare, eldercare, and perks like gym membership and shopping discounts were included.

Such benefits added to the job satisfaction of the employee.

Our company does have all of that. They also match our 401K up to 6% of our salary. If I put in 6%, they'll put in 6%. They cap it at 6%. I could put in more but they're only gonna go 6% but that's a lot of money. 12% of your pay if you both do it. I definitely think that the benefits make a huge difference. It's not just your hourly pay but you gotta look at it's everything in between too. They give us quite a variety of insurance companies and plans to pick from. It's not like just this is the one that you've got and everybody has to go with that one. We have multiple packages and multiple packages and businesses to choose from that best suit our needs. That's a very good reason to stay. (Participant 1, personal communication, January 27, 2019)

Participant 4 related these benefits to age, adding the monetary enticement as the real attraction. "I can buy my own gym membership for, you know, whatever you want to pay, a dollar a day or something. But, certainly health insurance and flexible spending and elder care where there's real money on the table, I think certainly those would be motivators" (personal communication, March 1, 2019). Participant 2, like many in the study, ranked health insurance as the highest of these other benefits. "I mean, when I think about the mindset of a project manager, the health, health, yeah, of course. If [my company] didn't offer that, I would be looking seriously for something else. They have to



have it" (personal communication, February 1, 2019). "I can tell you, I hear almost every single time, health insurance" (Participant 10, personal communication, April 11, 2019).

No one argued that the extra benefits hurt anyone.

One of the key factors here, I think at [my company] are the other benefits that we have are key to keeping people around, we have good insurance, we have good vacation and sick policies and things like that are very important to the employee. Yeah, we have great health insurance. We have annual and sick leave policies and we have ... the [company's] closed a week at Christmas, so we get a lot of holidays along with administrative closings occasionally. That's a real nice benefit. 401K plans, flex savings, medical savings, things like that are important to the employee. (Participant 3, personal communication, February 8, 2019)

Again health insurance rose to the top of the list, along with others dependent on the individual.

Yeah. The idea of good healthcare and flexible spending account or health savings account are definitely important. I think most people would much rather have good healthcare than bad healthcare. Life insurance, I think it's a benefit but I don't think it's one that people really factor in as much. Child and elder care, that depends on your point in life. So that one may or may not be. At least for me, I don't have any kids. So that's not any big deal for me. But the health insurance, flexible spending account is important. I do take good advantage of my life insurance here. But at the same time if I didn't have that I would just have to buy life insurance separately. Because I've had that [5 weeks of vacation] all my life

and it's great. I've been very fortunate. The reason for that is you're competing with a lot of other organizations for people. IT projects are always stressful. So the project manager is dealing with a lot of stress. Not that every other project isn't stressful either but IT ones tend to be very stressful because of the amount of change that goes on in an IT project during the execution of the project and sometimes you just have to get away. (Participant 5, personal communication, March 1, 2019)

Another participant weighed in.

Perks like the gym and stuff like that, they're nice, but they wouldn't keep me at a company I didn't want to be at. Insurance, of course it's something that's, that's actually legally required. So you have to have it. That's the thing. If the company doesn't have insurance, I wouldn't work for them in the first place, they certainly want to keep me. But I think that when you start talking about, you know, things like 401k, people who have that kind of a forward view of their financial strategy. That would mean something too. And then if you're talking about someone who has a family that they need daycare, or infant care, or maybe they have elder care issues where they have an elderly person that they're caring for that is single sole provider. Those things would only apply to certain niche people. But those folks with those issues, that might be the most important thing to them. (Participant 9, personal communication, March 22, 2019)

Health insurance was more of a monetary motivator depending on what portion the company paid.

So I think the standard ones, the health insurance, but it has to be good health insurance. The company I'm working for now, they actually pay our premiums and that's amazing. So that's like a pay raise right there. I think flexible spending accounts are very common now with insurance, so those go hand in hand.

Vacation is big, but I still think you can negotiate that, so I don't think it's as important. A gym membership would be awesome, but I don't think that it would make me stay because you can get your own gym membership if your pay is higher or what have you. (Participant 7, personal communication, March 9, 2019)

For others, these benefits were not deal breakers. "They were always good enough, they met my needs, and I would've never probably turned the job down because we didn't have exactly what I was looking for" (Participant 6, personal communication, March 8, 2019).

Participant 8 had a little different view. "Well, here the reason I stay is I get two annual days and a sick day, so that's 3 days a month. And the salary's not that great, but the benefits are pretty awesome...me personally...the health insurance of course [is number one]" (personal communication, March 14, 2019). Health insurance and other non-salary benefits were the top retention reason.

Essentially, most participants felt like these benefits should be a given at most companies who wanted to attract quality IT project managers, but these benefits were not the most important retention factors.

### **Summary**

The beginning of Chapter 4 reviewed the research problem, research question, research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of

trustworthiness. The remainder of Chapter 4 presented the study results organized by themes. The themes were competitive advantage; understanding of project management; independence, authority trust, and relationships; challenging work; lack of information; direct supervisor; feeling values and the work environment; internal professional development; external professional development; certification support; tuition reimbursement; flexible work schedules and telecommuting; generational differences; on-the-job experience; and other benefits. Three top themes emerged from the data as retention strategies for IT project managers. Microsoft Excel was used to thematically categorize the data and to store key insights derived from each theme. The top themes included understanding of project management, challenging work, and certification support. Every category did have an element of personal preference, something that would have been difficult to determine from a quantitative survey. The breadth of knowledge of the participants, as well as their honesty and willingness to share their experiences shed light on that which was most important in retaining IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States. Chapter 5 reviews the interpretation of these findings. It also presents the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, implications, and a conclusion to the study.

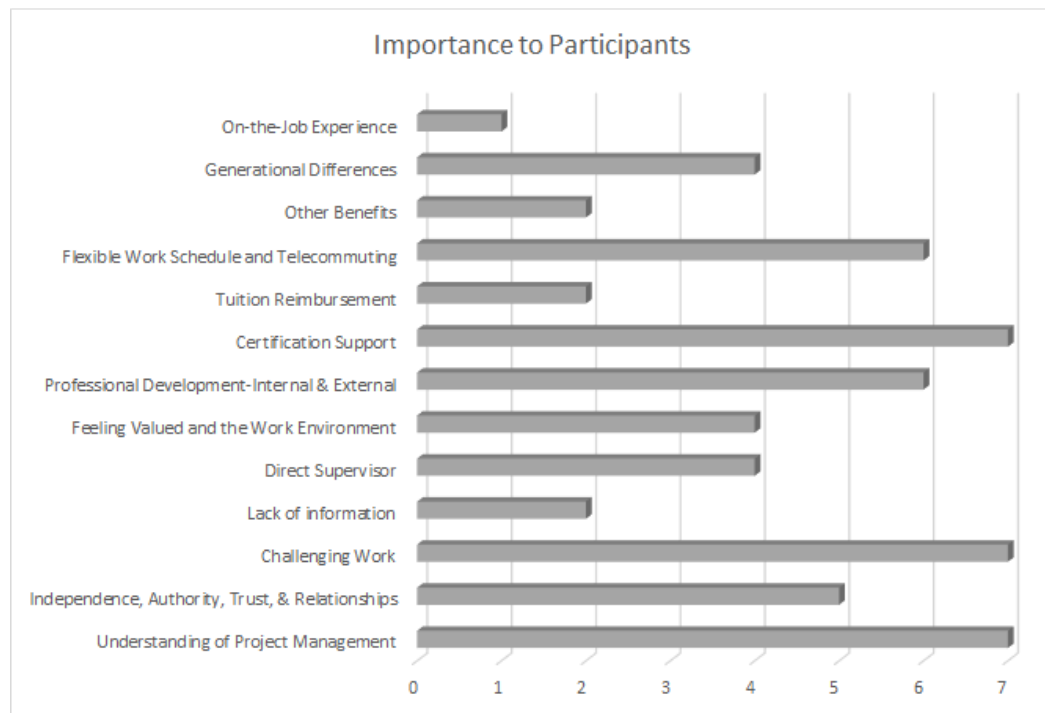
## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the perceptions of the factors associated with employee retention of IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States. Findings from the study contributed to the project management body of knowledge. I collected a rich and diverse amount of data from my research participants which, when coded and summarized, provided insight into retention strategies for IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The study results elicited the following themes: competitive advantage; understanding of project management; independence, authority trust, and relationships; challenging work; lack of information; direct supervisor; feeling values and the work environment; internal professional development; external professional development; certification support; tuition reimbursement; flexible work schedules and telecommuting; generational differences; on-the-job experience; and other benefits.

Three top themes emerged from the data as retention strategies for IT project managers. I used Microsoft Excel to thematically categorize the data and to store key insights derived from each theme. The top themes included understanding of project management, challenging work, and certification support. Figure 1 illustrates the themes.



*Figure 1.* Importance to Participants.

Again and again participants stressed the fact that their jobs were much more difficult and the participants experienced more frustrations on the job when management and the non-IT project managers the participants worked with did not understand project management. Participants left companies, because project management as a practice was not understood, and sometimes not accepted as a real job. Sometimes the projects assigned to the participants were not challenging enough to stretch their skillset and keep participants engaged with the company. Boredom set in, and IT project managers started looking externally for other, more challenging project management roles. Similar to many IT professions, maintaining industry certifications was a must to stay competitive as a potential employee. Participants mostly saw it as a given that companies supported certification as part of their professional development. Internal and external training for

certifications, attending local southeastern United States Project Management Institute chapter meetings, and the time off and funding to do those things that support collecting professional development units (PDUs) to maintain existing certifications were all included.

Retention, as illustrated in the literature review in Chapter 2, has benefits to an organization. One is a competitive advantage. According to Barney and Wright (1998), for an organization to be competitive, three main resources are critical: a) physical capital, b) organizational capital, and c) human resource capital. The three main resources are referred to as a resource based view of competitive advantage. The first two were easily shared and copied in the modern age of technology, leveling the playing fields for most organizations. The third, human resource capital, was the real differentiator between companies and the most important of the three. Retaining good employees was crucial to the success of an organization (Anis et al., 2011). A company needed to do what it could to keep those good employees. Study participants unanimously agreed that retaining IT project managers led to a competitive advantage for their organizations. The study illustrated what IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States saw as important in their jobs, what benefits were most important to IT project managers, and the strategies a company could use to retain IT project managers.

Every category did have an element of personal preference, something that would have been difficult to determine from a quantitative survey. The breadth of knowledge of the participants, as well as their honesty and willingness to share their experiences shed

light on that which is most important in retaining IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A few the limitations to trustworthiness arose from execution of the study. Even though the study was anonymous, meaning that participant names and organizations were not shared, some participants may have held back some information that could have been shared. Held back information is impossible to confirm. I also did not factor in sex as a differentiating factor. The topic of sex came up in the generational differences theme pulled from the study participants that comprised five men and five women. Another limitation was the manner of participant recruitment. The local southeastern United States Project Management Institute chapter leaders would not email the survey to close to 800 chapter members. I relied on paper participant recruitment flyers (see Appendix B) and consent forms physically brought to each of three Project Management Institute chapter meetings in January, February, and March 2019 to recruit volunteers. Chapter meetings usually consisted of approximately 50 attendees. Word of mouth also played into volunteer recruitment in the month of March, gaining the final two volunteer participants. There was limited time in which to conduct the study. Interviews were held over 4 months. Continuing to recruit past 4 months may have created a form of *flyer fatigue*, where potential participants tired of hearing about the study from the chapter leaders and of seeing the flyers in numerous, consecutive southeastern United States Project Management Institute chapter meetings.



### **Recommendations**

I have a few recommendations for further research that do not extend beyond the scope of the research study. The first is to incorporate a question into the interview protocol to determine if there are any differences in sex that determine whether or not an IT project manager would stay at a company. The topic briefly came up in the generation differences theme of the study. Second, the participants ranged in age from their 40s to 60s, so a large portion of younger IT project managers were not represented by the study. Granted, the southeastern United States chapter of the Project Management Institute seemed to be composed of older professionals, but future researchers could differentiate the data by age group to see if any interesting differences occurred. Third, future researchers could recruit more volunteer participants. I feel that saturation was reached with the current 10 participants. The insight and shared experiences of these individuals is so much more valuable to companies looking to retain IT project managers than a simple quantitative survey, that additional supporting stories would only further confirm the main themes. Finally, different researchers may be able to glean different information during the interview process, thus leading to additional themes that may not have been discovered in the study.

### **Implications**

The implications for positive social change related directly to the conceptual theory of the resource-based view. The resource-based view placed human capital among the top three competitive advantages for a company (Barney & Wright, 1998). The study clearly pointed out that retaining IT project managers provided that competitive

advantage, as indicated in the study results in Chapter 4. Companies that perform better and are sustainable have the opportunity to be good global corporate citizens, supporting corporate social responsibility.

Those individuals in charge of hiring IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States will have a much better idea of what IT project managers want in a company, what benefits entice IT project managers, and how to retain IT project managers. The concept could be extrapolated to project managers outside of a region in the southeastern United States.

IT project managers from a region in the southeastern United States now have a voice in the study, one that speaks to what IT project managers are looking for in an employer and what will ultimately make IT project managers happier working for an employer. Projects under IT project managers' control could theoretically go smoother as the IT project managers a) are happier in general, b) have more years' experience working for the same company, and c) are appropriately trained in their craft.

### **Conclusion**

I collected a rich and diverse amount of data from my research participants which, when thematically coded and summarized, provided insight into retention strategies for IT project managers in a region in the southeastern United States. The top three themes that emerged from the data as retention strategies for IT project managers included understanding of project management, challenging work, and certification support. Since no previous studies have been conducted on the population, my results, findings, and

suggestions for further research will go far in creating and helping to expand the literature in the area by attracting future researchers.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol

**Thank you, -----, for agreeing to volunteer for my research study on the perceptions of the factors that contribute to employee retention of IT project managers. This interview should not take more than an hour and you are free to end it at any time. Do you have any questions before we get started?**

#### **Main touring questions:**

- What do you consider to be the best strategies to retain IT project managers?
- What is the longest you have stayed with the same employer as an IT project manager, or performing the duties of an IT project manager, and what made you stay?
- If you were in charge of a new initiative to retain IT project managers, where would you start?
- Which retention strategy do you feel is the most important to keeping good IT project managers?
- What are the worst strategies for retaining employees that you have witnessed?
- What role does the direct supervisor have in retaining employees?
- Do you feel there are generational differences in why employees leave or stay at a company?
- Is there a competitive advantage for companies to retain their IT project managers? Why or why not?

#### **Specific strategy questions:**

- Does pay effect an employee's willingness to stay at a company? **Why or why not?**
- Does internal in-house professional development classes?
- Does external training, such as third party project management focused training?
- Does certification support, such as for a Project Management Institute (PMI) certification, sway an IT project manager to stay?
- Does tuition reimbursement?
- Does a flexible work schedule?
- Does the opportunity to telecommute?
- Do other benefits such as health insurance, flexible spending accounts, life and disability insurance, retirement savings, time off, childcare, eldercare, perks like gym membership and shopping discounts.



**Probing Questions:**

- Can you expand on that?
- Tell me more.
- Go on.
- You mentioned the following strategies----- Did I miss any?
- You talked about----- Why did you mention this?

**We have reached the end of our interview. Thank you so much for your time, -----  
-. As a next step, I will be emailing you a transcript of our conversation to review for accuracy and to see if you have anything else you would like to add. Once completed, I will mail you a small thank you gift of a \$10 Amazon gift card for your time today and your assistance. In the coming months, you will receive a summary of my findings via email and a link to the published study in ProQuest.**

## Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Flyer

### Factors that Contribute to Employee Retention of IT Project Managers

# Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

**Purpose of the research:** To investigate the factors that contribute to employee retention of IT project managers in ETPMI

**Eligibility criteria:** IT project managers 18 and over who are members of the East Tennessee Chapter of the Project Management Institute (ETPMI) and have at least 5 years of experience managing projects

**Benefits of participation in the study:**

Individual benefits of this study include access to the summarized results prior to publication. Benefits to the larger ETPMI community include having a better understanding of the factors that contribute to IT project manager retention in East Tennessee.

A \$10 Amazon gift card will be provided as a thank you gift for participation.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

Volunteer no more than an hour of your time for a phone interview to discuss employee retention strategies

Review a transcript of your interview to insure accuracy and add any additional comments you would like regarding employee retention

Here are some sample questions:

- What do you consider to be the main strategies to retain IT project managers?
- What is the longest you have stayed with the same employer as an IT project manager, or performing the duties of an IT project manager, and what made you stay?
- Which retention strategy do you feel is the most important to keeping good IT project managers?

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This research is conducted under the direction of Dr. David Bouvin, Contributing Faculty, College of Management and Technology, Walden University.