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Retention Strategies for Oil and Gas Industry Managers

Faye Gerard
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Faye Gerard

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Dr. Dorothy Hanson, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Laura Thompson, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Rocky Dwyer, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

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Abstract

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by

Faye Gerard

MBA, University of Phoenix, 1999

BS, Tuskegee University, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

The turnover cost of specialized employees in the oil and gas industry can exceed 400% of an employee's annual salary. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore successful strategies that oil and gas company managers used to retain specialized employees. The specific population for the study was 8 managers from 4 oil and gas companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, which included 5 hiring managers and 3 engineering managers who had demonstrated success in retaining specialized employees. The conceptual lens used in this research study was the job embeddedness theory. Study data were collected through semistructured interviews, observations of participants' nonverbal cues, a review of company documents, and organizational websites. The interview data were analyzed using Yin's 5 steps for qualitative data analysis. The analysis resulted in 3 themes: (a) leadership engagement improved specialized employee retention, (b) flexibility through work–life balance improved specialized employee retention, and (c) monitoring and assessing retention through research tools and data analysis improved specialized employee retention. The implications of this study for positive social change include the potential to provide successful strategies for oil and gas company managers to retain specialized employees, which may contribute to improving promotion from within the oil and gas industry, reducing the study location area unemployment rates, and improving local job economies.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my soul mate, my children, and my family. Through God, all things are possible.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The turnover of specialized employees in the oil and gas industry is a significant problem (Ajmal, Shamim, Saleh, & Malik, 2016). Industry leaders are increasingly interested in developing strategies to improve employee retention because of the excessive costs of talent and resources lost that are associated with turnover (Harhara, Singh, & Hussain, 2015). The objective in this study was to explore strategies that oil and gas company managers use to retain specialized employees. In the first section of this study, I provide the foundation for the study, detailing the problem, purpose, nature, research questions, and framework. Finally, I define operational terms; present assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; and discuss the significance of this research.

Background of the Problem

One characteristic of the oil and gas industry is its failure to retain talented employees. New employee training in the oil and gas industry can be expensive and time consuming, and replacing highly specialized workers lost because of employee turnover is often difficult (Harhara et al., 2015). Leaders of oil and gas companies are investing in new projects, but growth is slowed because of the diminished talent pool and an aging industry workforce (Al-Musali & Ku Ismail, 2016). The diminishing talent pool and an aging industry workforce create a problem in the oil and gas industry in which companies fail to retain specialized employees. My contention in this study was that managers must develop and employ strategies to retain specialized employees.

Problem Statement

The voluntary departure of specialized employees is a significant challenge in the oil and gas industry (Ajmal et al., 2016). Replacement costs for high-level or highly specialized employees are as much as 400% of employees' annual salaries (Bose, 2016). The general business problem was the high level of employee turnover in the oil and gas industry. The specific problem was some oil and gas company managers lack strategies to retain specialized employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies that oil and gas company managers use to retain specialized employees. The specific population for the study was eight managers from four oil and gas companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, which included five hiring managers and three engineering managers who had demonstrated success in retaining specialized employees. The implications for social change include catalyzing increased awareness to local people on the evolving elements surrounding their jobs, thereby improving career and financial stability and providing opportunities for growth within the oil and gas industry for the specialized employees in a metropolitan city in the southern United States. If specialized employees stayed instead of leaving for a different industry, leaders may improve promotion from within the oil and gas industry, reduce a metropolitan city in the southern United States unemployment rates, and improve local job economies. When the local economy improves, local governments increase their tax base, resulting in more tax revenue that could be used to make improvements in the local community.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods for conducting research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Researchers employ the qualitative research method to explore phenomena and processes that cannot be examined via quantitative methods (Gutmann, 2014), making the qualitative method an appropriate fit for my study. Researchers employ the quantitative research method to examine the relationships or differences between variables (Venkatesh et al., 2013), making the quantitative method unsuitable for my study. In this study, I explored various strategies to retain specialized employees and did not examine relationships or differences between variables. Researchers employ the mixed-method approach when using qualitative results to inform the evaluation and interpretation of quantitative data (Sekhobo et al., 2017), making the mixed method unsuitable for my study. I explored strategies that oil and gas managers use to retain specialized employees and did not test a hypothesis or collect and evaluate quantitative data.

The qualitative research designs I considered for this study were case study, phenomenology, and ethnography. The phenomenological design allows researchers to focus on human experiences, while ethnographic researchers focus on culture and society (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). As a concept, phenomenology aids a researcher in understanding a phenomenon of interest and how the study participants derive meaning from the experiences, whereas ethnography is employed to explore the structure and function of participants' experiences within a cultural perspective (Rodriguez, 2016). I did not select the phenomenological or ethnographic design for my study because I did

not concentrate on the human experience or culture to research strategies some oil and gas company managers employ to retain specialized employees.

The qualitative multiple case study design was most suitable for my study because I explored four companies in the oil and gas industry. The multiple qualitative case study approach entails an empirical investigation of a simultaneous occurrence in real life while using multiple sources of evidence to understand a phenomenon (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). I used a multiple qualitative case study design to address the research question because it enabled the exploration and understanding of the strategies to retain specialized employees within the context of different companies' dynamics.

Research Question

What strategies do oil and gas company managers employ to retain specialized employees?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you employ to retain specialized employees?

2. What specific strategies do you employ to retain specialized employees?

3. What strategies do you find worked best to retain specialized employees?

4. What strategies, in your opinion, did not work to retain specialized employees?

5. How do you monitor, update, or modify specialized employee retention strategies?

6. How did you assess the effectiveness of the strategies for retaining specialized employees?

7. What other information would you like to share regarding strategies that contribute to the sŭccessful retention of specialized employees?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research study was based on Holtom, Mitchell, and Lee's (2006) job embeddedness theory. The job embeddedness theory was useful for examining retention strategies for specialized employees because it helped determine an employee's fit with an organization based on personal values, career goals, and future. Holtom et al. proposed that the stronger employees fit with an organization, the more likely they are to be committed to it. Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001) employed job embeddedness theory to explain why some employees stayed at companies and provided additional context into why others leave. In this study, I expected that the use of the theory would allow me to explore strategies and insights regarding job embeddedness theory characteristics as they related to the retention of specialized employees in the oil and gas industry.

Operational Definitions

Intent to stay: The intention an individual will remain with their current employer (Yarbrough, Martin, Alfred, & McNeill, 2017). Individuals can stay employed in their current work environments if they believe they are receiving the benefits they seek from the position (Yarbrough et al., 2017).

Job embeddedness: A range of psychological, social, and financial factors that influence employee retention (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2015b).

Retention: When an employee stays with an organization for an extended period (Johennesse & Chou, 2017).

Specialized employee: Highly trained individuals who possess task-sensitive skills (Castro-Palaganas et al., 2017).

Turnover: The involuntary and voluntary separation of employees from their employers (Woodworth, 2016).

Work–life balance: The state by which an employee is capable of balancing between work and nonwork commitments (Hofmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are things that cannot be proven using unverified data or unexamined related information but must be assumed true to investigate (Odetunde & Ufodiama, 2017). Three assumptions were inherent to this study. First, I assumed all participants would provide open and truthful responses to all interview questions. Another assumption was that retention strategies are important to leaders in the oil and gas industry in a metropolitan city in the southern United States. Finally, I assumed hiring or engineering managers would participate in the study.

Limitations

Limitations are potential confines of a study that are beyond a researcher's control (Dowling, Lloyd, & Suchet-Pearson, 2016). Several limitations were innate in this study. The first limitation was the small sample size since the study was focused in a metropolitan city in the southern United States. Another limitation was the research

findings were limited to the oil and gas companies from which the sample was drawn; employees in other geographic locations or those working with other organizations could provide different data. Several nonwork factors that influence employee retention, such as personal finances or family relationships, and examination of these elements was beyond the scope of this study. Finally, the short time duration of the study was a study limitation.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors a researcher perceives as limiting the scope of findings (Dowling et al., 2016). One delimitation of my study was the sample only consisted of oil and gas managers employed by companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States; therefore, the results were not generalizable to wider industries and locations. Another delimitation was the selected geographical scope, which was limited to a metropolitan city in the southern United States. A final delimitation of this study was interviewing individuals only having experience in both the development and implementation of employee retention policies and the exclusion of individuals with experience in either the development or implementation of employee retention policies.

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Significance of the Study

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Oil and gas company leaders incur a high turnover cost from the attrition of specialized employees (Li, Lee, Mitchell, Hom, & Griffeth, 2016). To remain competitive, managers must address the turnover issue (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Barney, 1995), making the implementation of an effective retention strategy for specialized employees a necessity. The costs of employing new employees are both direct

and indirect (Duffield, Roche, Homer, Buchan, & Dimitrelis, 2014). Oil and gas managers spend time training and developing specialized employees, which amount to substantial costs (Li et al., 2016). Through the results of this study, I provide strategies to oil and gas company managers on retaining specialized employees in the oil and gas industry, which could add value to a business by reducing the costs related to turnover. The findings and recommendations from this study could be used to encourage oil and gas company managers to develop employee retention strategies to retain specialized knowledge and increase operational performance for a company to remain competitive.

The identification of effective retention strategies for company managers could result in a positive social change by increasing local jobs, reducing employee turnover, reducing company turnover costs, and the associated costs of replacement hiring (Newell & Raimi, 2018). The leaders could use company cost savings to provide salary increases to specialized employees and might provide additional financial investment into the local community, which could improve the quality of life of employees and stakeholders. Other implications for positive social change for specialized employees include employment longevity, financial security, employment stability, family stability, and improvements for well-being.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Retention is a common challenge in the oil and gas industry (Newell & Raimi, 2018). Oil and gas company managers could improve employee retention by developing successful retention strategies. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies that oil and gas company managers use to retain

specialized employees. This section begins with a discussion of the oil and gas industry, including its history, its economic effects, and its demand for highly skilled employees. Next, I discuss job embeddedness theory, including a review of shortcomings of the job embeddedness theory, application of the job embeddedness theory, other theories considered as the conceptual framework for this study, three tenets of job embeddedness, and predictors and effects of job embeddedness. A significant portion of this discussion is also dedicated to a review of the literature on retention, especially its predictors. Research about retention issues in general and those faced by the oil and gas industry specifically, follows. The section closes with a summary and transition.

I located the information in this literature review in scholarly articles, primarily retrieved from academic, peer-reviewed journals. The search terms to locate these articles included: *retention*, *strategies*, *turnover*, *job*, *embeddedness*, *employee*, *community*, *fit*, *culture*, *engineering manager*, *hiring manager*, *cost of turnover*, and *specialized employee*. I searched several databases, including Google Scholar, Emerald Management, SAGE Premier, Science Direct, ProQuest Central, Walden Library, EBSCOhost, and Thoreau: Search Multiple Databases Thoreau Multi-Database Search. Additional sources of literature included books, dissertations, and government publications. I included 232 references in this review, of which 210 (or 91%) were published within 5 years (i.e., 2015–2019) of my completion date or expected year of chief academic officer approval. Additionally, 224 (or 97%) of the references were also peer reviewed. I included 208 (or 90%) references that were peer reviewed and published between 2015 and 2019.

Brief History of the Nature of the Oil and Gas Industry

The global economy is expanding various fields, including oil and gas (Rony & Suki, 2017). In 2014, oil prices were more than $100 per barrel, which made the oil and gas industry appear to be stable (Motilewa et al., 2018). One challenge for the oil and gas industry leaders was recruiting specialized employees when the oil prices were high (Motilewa et al., 2018). In late 2015, the oil price plummeted to a 6-year low, which was below $50 per barrel (Motilewa et al., 2018). With the low oil prices, Motilewa et al. (2018) indicated that a new challenge existed in the oil and gas industry and that was retaining skilled, innovative employees. Because of global economic instability, many employees in the industry feared layoff (Rony & Suki, 2017). Employee retention techniques during economic downturns can include engagement, creative employee development, employee training, and open communication (Motilewa et al., 2018). Motilewa et al. suggested that employee training can improve retention via increased morale, productivity, and profitability.

Leaders in the oil and gas industry performing employee projections have indicated a considerable demand for gas and oil professionals through 2025; leaders in this sector need to focus on attracting and retaining the skilled employees needed to support current and future operations and growth (Harhara et al., 2015). Employees leave organizations when they are not satisfied with the company or industry, which can result in increased turnover rates and increased company costs (Rony & Suki, 2017). With the specialization of oil and gas industry jobs, many company leaders in this sector are struggling to foster retention and dissuade workers from pursuing opportunities with

competitors (Rony & Suki, 2017; Sarmad, Ajmal, Shamim, Saleh, & Malik, 2016). The oil and gas industry is cyclic (Motilewa et al., 2018). With oil prices plummeting to a 6-year low, Motilewa et al. (2018) stated that the oil and gas industry must contend with the challenge of retaining highly skilled, innovative employees.

Economic Effects

Newell and Raimi (2018) reported oil and gas production in the United States has increased in the past 10 years. The economic effect to local governments related to oil and gas regions of eight states (i.e., Alaska, California, Kansas, Ohio, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Utah, and West Virginia) was significant (Newell & Raimi, 2018). Newell and Raimi found most local governments have a positive effect on local public finances with new revenues coming from many sources, such as property taxes on oil and gas, property and sales taxes driven by the oil and gas workforce, and contributions from oil and gas companies to support local services. The positive effects could vary substantially though because of the diverse local factors and policy matters (Newell & Raimi, 2018). Newell and Raimi stated some local governments, specifically in rural regions, experienced increases in growth and employee retention and noted the social effects from oil and gas production included increases in public finances and local jobs.

Demand for Highly Skilled Employees

Job instability because of plummeting oil prices is a concern for many oil and gas managers (Harhara et al., 2015). Leaders stated employee turnover, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, causes organizations to experience losses in knowledge and human capital, reducing competitive advantage (Sumbal, Tsui, See-to, & Barendrecht, 2017). Oil

and gas industry leaders will experience a substantial deficiency of technical people through 2028 because of employees retiring (Sumbal et al., 2017). Employee retention is essential to the maintenance of competitive advantage (Ajmal et al., 2016); companies that retain specialized human capital can realize innovation and competitive advantage.

According to Rony, Suki, and Chowdhury (2017), increases in oil and gas production since 2007 have led to increases in demands for the specialized employees needed to run oil and gas businesses. Some local governments, especially those in rural regions, experienced increases in employment and employee retention because of oil and gas production, which has positive social effects regarding improving local job economies (Newell & Raimi, 2018), maintaining a healthy workforce, and keeping the oil and gas industry competitive and profitable (Rony et al., 2017). Employee retention can have several positive social and economic effects, including new revenue sources from property and sales taxes driven by the oil and gas workforce (Newell & Raimi, 2018).

Oil and gas company leaders face internal and external challenges regarding employee retention (Craig, 2015). Memon, Salleh, and Baharom (2016) stated that approximately 90% of the top international oil and gas companies face a talent shortage crisis and trouble retaining existing employees for extended periods. Most company leaders struggle with uncontrolled turnover among new employees (Ertas, 2015). Memon et al. confirmed that oil and gas companies face other problems, such as unstable global financial markets balance of supply and demands.

Oil and gas industry leaders should endeavor to retain talented workers (Jauhar, Ting, Rahim, & Fareen, 2017). According to Benton (2016), leaders experiencing poor

employee retention may experience obstacles to the future workforce supply, forcing employers to seek alternative approaches to employee recruitment and retention. Benton and Nica (2016) further asserted that the solution does not lie in simply focusing on monetary rewards because paying employees' high salaries does not guarantee they will remain in the organization longer. Benton and Nica explained that although monetary compensation is a strong performance motivator, it is less effective for retention. According to Jauhar et al. (2017), the global demand for energy workers continues to grow as experienced workers retire with only an inadequate pipeline of skilled employees available to replace them.

Employees need performance feedback to appraise and regulate their performance considering an organization's strategic goals and objectives (Lu, Lu, Gursoy, & Neale, 2016). Lu, Lu, et al. (2016) posited feedback calls for managers to set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely objectives. Managers should provide timely employee evaluations to allow workers to adjust their performance and behaviors to meet expectations (Lu, Lu, et al., 2016). Managers should provide employees with realistic and meaningful feedback while instilling a sense of obligation toward performance improvements and participation in organizational and individual goals, which can lead to increased employee retention (Lu, Lu, et al., 2016). Company leaders should use best practices regarding performance appraisals and feedback to retain employees (Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, & Pemberton-Jones, 2015). Leaders revealed a shortage of labor skills materializing in the oil and gas industry because companies have lost many of their employees to other companies (Clark, Sommerville, & Heron, 2017).

Job dissatisfaction can cause turnover (Li et al., 2016). Organizational leaders are continuously trying to develop strategies to reduce employee turnover (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Krøtel and Villadsen (2016) noted human resource managers are tasked with the recruitment, retention, and development of quality employees. Many organizational leaders do not focus on retention needs but concentrate mainly on business performance (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Organizational leaders supporting poor working conditions and limited opportunities for advancement usually experience high employee turnover (Benton, 2016).

Benton (2016) suggested the effectiveness of retention strategies often depends on the managers' abilities to provide initiatives. Clark et al. (2017) noted that managers should empower employees to succeed and grow rather than solely emphasizing performance with an emphasis on individual success and growth to drive employee retention. Experts have recommended that managers should also be accessible to employees and integrate employee feedback and ideas across organizations (Benton, 2016; Clark et al., 2017). Managers using such management actions can increase employee satisfaction and retention (Clark et al., 2017).

Voluntary Turnover

Researchers have suggested that current literature regarding voluntary turnover emanates from ideas about employees' desires and perceptions of the ease with which they can leave their jobs (Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee, & Mitchell, 2018; Waldman, Carter, & Hom, 2015). Employees may perceive voluntary turnover as a practicable opportunity for growth and happiness (Waldman et al., 2015). The ease of movement is the acuity of

an individual's perceptions of alternative, more satisfying employment options (Lu, Sun, et al., 2016). When employees are not happy at work, they might pursue alternatives (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Boswell, Gardner, and Wang (2017) indicated that disgruntled workers often seek alternative employment, compare alternative jobs to their present jobs, and leave on the condition that alternative positions are better than their current positions. Managers can predict turnover intentions using individuals' job attitudes combined with alternatives (Collini, Guidroz, & Perez, 2015).

An employee's attitude can determine if the employee stays or leaves a company (Boswell et al., 2017). Professional development opportunities can entice employees to stay (Mitchell et al., 2001). Human resource managers across various organizations seek and use theoretical propositions to guide professional development (Sparrow & Makram, 2015). Organizational leaders do not want to lose skilled employees familiar with the organization's operations or who might join other competitors and negatively affect a company's competitive advantage (Agarwal, Gambardella, & Olson, 2016). Shin and Konrad (2017) indicated that losing employees will increase the company's turnover rate. Organizational leaders can incur high employee turnover costs associated with recruiting, selecting, and training new employees (Newell & Raimi, 2018). In addition, a reduction in organizational performance and the loss of customers who formed relationships with departing employees can occur (Shin & Konrad, 2017).

Leaders are faced with voluntary turnover stemming from the notion that leaving a job is prestigious and easy (Rubenstein, Eberly et al., 2018). According to Mobley (1977), the cycle of turnover begins with unhappy employees deciding to explore new

professional opportunities, assessing and comparing those opportunities to their current positions, and leaving their current positions if they perceive the other opportunities as an improvement. Mobley revealed that the decision to quit is the start of the process followed by an evaluation of a position. In contrast, researchers have posited that the unfolding model shows that job evaluation occurs before an individual decides to leave a position (Hussain & Deery, 2018; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999). Lee and Mitchell (1994) introduced the unfolding model revealing that employees leaving their jobs may experience shock that contributes to their decision to quit; such shocks can be positive (i.e., promotion to a position with more responsibilities) or negative (i.e., demotion or punishment; Hussain & Deery, 2018).

According to Li et al. (2016), many employees choose to leave their jobs for distinct reasons. People often leave their positions for reasons unrelated to their jobs (Jang, Zippay, & Park, 2016). Company leaders can lose valuable employees if retention strategies are absent (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017).

Mitchell et al. (2001) stated that many approaches to the study of employee retention exist that address diverse aspects of intentional employee retention activities. Leaders must explore the causes of turnover to retain employees (Collini et al., 2015). An organizational leader should provide employees with rewards, training, and incentives to earn employee commitment (Zhang, Zhang, Song, & Gong, 2016).

Other researchers have investigated the effects of individual influence on turnover (Collini et al., 2015; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). For example, researchers found that employees' withdrawal paradigms might predict organizational commitment and job

embeddedness (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015; Nafei, 2015). Nafei (2015) discovered a holistic approach to assessing employee attitudes relative to job embeddedness.

Job Embeddedness Theory

Job embeddedness theory is an increasingly important concept to explain or predict the relationship between employees and their workplaces, along with the probability of employees leaving their positions for other opportunities (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2015a). According to Mitchell et al. (2001), the job embeddedness theory is the rationale for why employees remain in their roles at work. The earliest known theorists for the job embeddedness theory in 2001 were Mitchell et al.

Mitchell et al. (2001) researched the dynamics surrounding voluntary turnover. *Voluntary turnover* is a term human resource experts use to describe the type of staffing alterations that occur when employees leave their positions without abnormal external pressures (Woodworth, 2016). By introducing the job embeddedness theory, Mitchell et al. strived to provide an enhancement of previously proposed worker turnover models. The construct's earliest theorists proposed three facets through which job embeddedness occurs to an employee and the factors that influence the relationship between individuals and their employers (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Pioneers of the job embeddedness theory explain three dimensions under the concept, which are links to people, teams, and groups; fit with job, organization, and community perceptions; and sacrifice if an employee leaves the job (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchell et al. (2001) explained the various ways to measure the intent to leave a job position and voluntary turnover. The philosophers stated the job embeddedness

theory can provide reliable and varying results compared to what other theories produced (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchell et al. described some common parameters used to weigh an individual's probability to voluntarily leave a role, including available job options, role satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job search.

Lewin (1951) posited the embeddedness part of the concept applies two research-associated ideas: the field theory and embedded figures. First, the field theory is a mechanism to promote the thinking of human perceptual life space whereby elements of their lives connect and are characterized (Lewin, 1951; Mitchell et al., 2001). Lewin professed the identified connections could vary widely in quantity and intensity. Second, Lewin suggested embedded figures are images applied in psychological tests in which the images are fixed behind the scenes and then blend with the surroundings. Mitchell et al. (2001) professed the use of field theory and the embedded images translate into a portrayal of job embeddedness as a web or net in which individuals can find themselves stuck. Mitchell et al. revealed the web or net is what keeps people stuck to their jobs, depending on the number of links present or how tight or loose the connections are to the individual or one another.

The pioneers of the job embeddedness theory show a person strongly anchored to a job has multiple closely bound links not broadly differentiated (Mitchell et al., 2001). According to Mitchell et al. (2001), the constitution of the links can range significantly, which shows many ways of enmeshment. The job embeddedness theory formulators, Mitchell et al., focused on the aggregate degree of embeddedness, but not its singular aspects.

Mitchell et al. (2001) introduced the three dominant tenets of embeddedness as: links, fit, and sacrifice. Mitchell et al. posited job embeddedness theory included elements relevant both in and outside the workplace. The job embeddedness theory construct can be represented by a 2 by 3 matrix (Mitchell et al., 2001). The matrix originates from the three tenets and the two conditions of relevance on and off work.

Three Tenets of Job Embeddedness Theory

Managers can use the job embeddedness theory to reduce employee turnover (Mitchell et al., 2001). According to Mitchell et al. (2001), job embeddedness theory is based on three tenets, including fit, links, and sacrifice. Researchers stated the job embeddedness tenets affect employees on and off the job, such that they can influence both the employee and the organization, the employee, and the immediate community (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2015a).

According to Mitchell et al. (2001), job embeddedness is comprised of two aspects (work and nonwork) and three tenets (fit, links, and sacrifice), creating a six-dimensional model comprised of work fit, work links, work sacrifice (organizational embeddedness) and nonwork fit, nonwork links, and nonwork sacrifice (community embeddedness). Mitchell et al. posited employees become embedded in their positions when they develop multiple links within an organization and its surrounding community. The more links employees create, the more embedded they become and the more likely they are to stay in their positions (Mitchell et al., 2001). The three job embeddedness tenets are discussed below.

Fit. Fit describes employees' perceptions of compatibility and comfort with their employing organizations (Marasi, Cox, & Bennett, 2016). Hom, Lee, Shaw, and Hausknecht (2017) noted that the multiple and essential aspects of fit include employees' values, career goals, knowledge of present job, abilities, skills, demands, and successes with their employing organizations. An individual's fit with an environment depends on aspects of employee-community fit, such as location, current political climate, weather, amenities, and access to entertainment outlets (Hom et al., 2017). A better fit between employees and their organizations creates more job embeddedness (Rubenstein, Kammeyer-Mueller, Wang, & Thundiyil, 2018).

Links. Links describe the informal and formal connections employees develop or have access to within their organizations and extended communities (Kiazad, Holtom, Hom, & Newman, 2015). Further, direct organizational links include connections to significant colleagues, teams, and groups within an organization (Brown, 2015). Community links are broader and can consist of employees' nonprofessional relationships with social institutions, relatives, nonwork mates, and physical environments (Rubenstein, Kammeyer-Mueller, et al., 2018). As employees increase their links with organizations and surrounding communities, they become profoundly embedded in those organizations (Rubenstein, Kammeyer-Mueller, et al., 2018).

Leaders should enhance employees' professional skills to improve human capital within an organization, increasing employee embeddedness via links (Rubenstein, Kammeyer-Mueller, et al., 2018). Exploring how job embeddedness affects human capital expansion behaviors is important. For example, individuals who invest in their

communities might have less energy and time to invest in human capital development (Lu, Sun, et al., 2016). Lu, Sun, et al. (2016) posited human capital development requires considerable energy and time.

Sacrifice. The sacrifice tenet of job embeddedness theory refers to the psychological and material losses employees perceive they will experience if they break links with organizations and communities (Marasi et al., 2016). Employees who leave their jobs can sacrifice relationships with long-term colleagues, job-related benefits, and experience working on worthwhile projects (Marasi et al., 2016). Marasi et al. (2016) stated additional costs could include moving expenses and the loss of possible job advancement or stability.

From the community side, employees who leave their positions might have to leave attractive homes, safe and desirable neighborhoods, short work commutes, and connections with local friends (Castro-Palaganas et al., 2017). When employees believe that leaving a position will require them to relocate out of desirable homes and communities, employees can become more embedded in their current jobs and communities (Kiazad et al., 2015). The more an employee must give up when leaving a job, the harder it can be for that individual to separate from the company (Allen, Peltokorpi, & Rubenstein, 2016).

Often, managers consider job fit, links, and sacrifices components of job embeddedness theory (Holtom et al., 2006) within and outside of organizational settings (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; Barney, 1995). While company leaders might control the components within an organizational setting to ensure employees develop high levels of

job satisfaction, the failure to understand how aspects outside the organization affect employees' embeddedness can jeopardize employee retention efforts (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015). At a time when oil and gas company managers face challenges to recruit and retain skilled employees, managers whose operations affect many stakeholders, including those in the immediate community surrounding an organization, can leverage job embeddedness theory to manage employees and increase retention rates (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015).

The fundamental concept of job embeddedness includes factors that affect employee retention (Odetunde & Ufodiama, 2017). According to Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness theory, deeply embedded employees have multiple, close connections with a company and are more likely to remain in their current position than those with fewer connections. In summary, job embeddedness theory is essential to the assessment of strategies used by managers of oil and gas companies to retain specialized employees (Odetunde & Ufodiama, 2017).

Lee, Burch, and Mitchell (2014) noted job embeddedness enlightens the explanations that motivate individuals to work for a time in an organization. Lee et al. posited the level employees sense embeddedness includes three tenets. Lee et al. revealed the first tenet as the degree to which employees think related to other individuals and activities, denoted as links. Lee et al. suggested the number of committees and teams an employee participates on and the number of coworker's interactions along with the employment duration in their current position, define the standard of connections. Lee et al. introduced the second tenet as the degree of congruence, or fit, between other facets of

life and their jobs. Lee et al. stated that the level to which the job makes use of the

employee's talents and skills resulting in the employee feeling appreciated determine the

degree of fit. Finally, Lee et al. introduced the sacrifice tenet as when an employee gives

up something after leaving the company and loses the connection with other employees.

According to Robinson, Kralj, Solnet, Goh, and Callan (2014), leaders can use job

embeddedness to project employee turnover as customary approach variables. Robinson

et al. defined the concept of job embeddedness to forecast the employee's routine and

discovered that embeddedness had an important influence on staff performance.

Robinson et al. revealed that surveys showed employees with a high degree of job

engagement remain often connected with an abundance of societal capital stock.

Robinson et al. specified the connection between fluctuations in employee performance

and job embeddedness advancement. Employees with a high degree of job involvement

could proactively increase work performance by increasing salaries and decreasing

redundancy (Robinson et al., 2014). Robinson et al. demonstrated job embeddedness

connects to a positive influence on the innovation of research and development

employees in technology companies.

D'Costa (2017) presented empirical research to support the theory of job

embeddedness by revealing job embeddedness can predict turnover over, job search, and

job alternatives. According to D'Costa, perceived measures may include organizational

commitment and job satisfaction. The job embeddedness theory was meaningful to

predict turnover and the development of turnover models (D'Costa, 2017).

Felps et al. (2009) tested a model of turnover using job embeddedness and job search behaviors to reveal an employees' decisions to quit based on the influence of the coworker's behaviors. Felps et al. determined that an employees' decisions to quit, or voluntary turnover, could be influenced by coworkers' job embeddedness and job search behaviors. Components of the job embeddedness theory were applied by Felps et al. to explain why employees quit their jobs and that coworkers' behaviors related to job embeddedness and job search play perilous roles in the decision to quit.

Greene, Mero, and Werner (2018) described the job embeddedness theory in sociological literature as the course through which the social relations affect financial actions. Further related to the job embeddedness theory, Thunnissen (2016) used focus groups to explore varieties of economic actions that foster retention. Managers who integrate and expand the employee job embeddedness approach should realize it is a multifoci model (Kiazad et al., 2015).

Drawing on research from Kiazad et al. (2015), managers use multiple antecedents to job embeddedness foci in promoting retention. Such antecedents can include tangible resources such as money, or intangible resources such as time and energy (Kiazad et al., 2015). Individual resources can include an individual's hardiness and resilience or resources from the social contexts, such as family or organizational human resource management systems that facilitate embeddedness (Kiazad et al., 2015). Job embeddedness can relate to the conservation of resources (COR) theory in a sense that employees desire to acquire and protect resources, helping to explain why they tend to embed in a position (Hobfoll, 1989; van Woerkom, Bakker, & Nishii, 2016).

Criticism of Job Embeddedness Theory

Lee et al. (2014) expanded the application of job embeddedness theory beyond organizational and community confines. Lee et al. considered whether job embeddedness theory was predictively valid, noting a critical characteristic of casual indicator models is predictive validity. The original job embeddedness theory, as conceived by Mitchell et al. (2001), was based on voluntary employee turnover; therefore, the most immediate test of the theory should be an actual prediction of subsequent outcomes. Lee et al. noted some researchers separated job embeddedness tenets into two different dimensions, including organizational (on-the-job) and community (off-the-job) embeddedness. Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, and Mitchell (2012) and Choi and Kim (2015) found clerical, community embeddedness, job alternatives, effective loyalty, and occupation satisfaction were unique predictors of employee turnover. Comparatively, Lee et al. suggested organizational and community variables both contribute meaningfully to an understanding of employee turnover, making job embeddedness theory a predictively valid construct.

Lee et al. (2014) maintained a promising expansion of research related to job embeddedness and turnover. To be more specific, Lee et al. stated the job embeddedness theory has resonated with professionals in organizational psychology and behavior, via the theory's theoretical and empirical expansion. Numerous researchers have pushed the theoretical limits for the effects of employee job embeddedness regarding turnover (Lee et al., 1999; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Lee et al. (2014) posited job embeddedness theory had been expanded to understand national, familial, and cultural influences. For example, Ramesh and Gelfand (2010) documented how the analytical strength of job embeddedness theory could provide both broad and distinctive views of collectivistic and individualistic societies, from India to the United States. Also, Ramesh and Gelfand studied whether the predictive outcomes of the three subdimensions of job embeddedness differed in India and the United States positing the predictive validity of job embeddedness theory was stronger in the United States than in India, with the links measurement being a superior predictor in India. Ramesh and Gelfand found the predictive validity of employee job embeddedness across cultures and nations.

Misapplication of Job Embeddedness Theory

Ng and Feldman (2012) revealed new applications of the job embeddedness theory, demonstrating the impact on innovation and career growth. Similarly, Coetzer, Inma, Poisat, Redmond, and Standing (2018) posited employee job embeddedness could foster innovation among employees who are in more advanced stages of their careers, because of increased organizational and community embeddedness that nurtures a willingness to share and implement innovative ideas. Also, Ramesh and Gelfand (2010) expanded the job embeddedness theory to the assessment of work-family conflict, finding positive associations between conflict and organizational or society embeddedness. Employees with individualist values are more likely to experience embeddedness than those with collectivist values (Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010).

Although employee job embeddedness has largely been viewed as a positive attribute, some researchers have noted a "dark side" to the theory. Ng and Feldman (2012) argued previous researchers failed to consider the negative outcomes of employee job embeddedness. Ng and Feldman argued increased embeddedness leads declines in the human and social capital over time, which may be the case with organizations that have strongly embedded, low-performing employees. In conclusion, positive and negative views of the job embeddedness theory may contribute knowledge that managers in oil and gas companies can use to reduce the potentially negative outcomes of increased organizational and community embeddedness to improve employee retention (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

Employee job embeddedness has shown positive results in the management of the employee workforce (Mitchell et al., 2001). Ng and Feldman (2012) emphasized the need to better understand the negative effects of employee job embeddedness. More studies about employee job embeddedness are needed to explore the potentially negative effects of embeddedness (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

Application of Job Embeddedness Theory

Researchers examined job embeddedness theory in various studies to determine the extent of retention and turnover. For example, Ampofo, Coetzer, and Poisat (2017) employed the job embeddedness theory to examine the relationship between job embeddedness and job satisfaction. Ampofo et al. used an internet survey to gather the background information and the responses to the various scales such as job satisfaction, job embeddedness, business commitment, and the intent to stay. The researchers

determined employee job embeddedness significantly correlated with the unique variance (Ampofo et al., 2017).

The concept and theory of job embeddedness was prominent in research related to employees. Afsar, Shahjehan, and Shah (2018) examined work engagement, turnover intentions, and job performance via the lens of job embeddedness theory. Similarly, Sender, Rutishauser, and Staffelbach (2018) conducted a quantitative investigation of the relationship between job embeddedness and turnover intentions, using job embeddedness theory. Thakur and Bhatnagar (2017) investigated the mediators of job embeddedness, particularly focusing on social factors that influence individuals' professional embeddedness. Finally, Fatima, Shafique, Qadeer, and Ahmad (2015) conducted a regression analysis to explore the relationship between job embeddedness and performance. The authors revealed a common finding of job embeddedness reduced the likelihood of turnover intention (Afsar et al., 2018; Fatima et al., 2015; Sender et al., 2018; Thakur & Bhatnagar, 2017).

Other Theories Considered

I reviewed and considered several other theories, including conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the Mobley model (Mobley, 1977), and the employee adaptation to work theory (Lyu & Zhu, 2017) before selecting job embeddedness theory for the research. I was able to determine that job embeddedness theory was best aligned for my study by comparing these three other theories. As follows, I provided a brief description of each of the theories I did not select for this research.

Conservation of resources theory. Hobfoll (1989) provided COR theory as an effective framework for examining how the availability of resources affects job embeddedness over time. Allen et al. (2016) stated that the job embeddedness tenet relates to COR in the sense that employees desire to acquire and protect resources, helping to explain why employees tend to embed in positions where resources are abundant. Hobfoll and Kiazad et al. (2015) posited through the COR theory that employees leave organizations to join others who turned over to maintain close ties and access to social resources.

Retention strategies can prevent turnover. When employees enjoy work and become embedded in the workplace, employees might stay. According to Hobfoll's (1989) COR, people strived to build resources to have rewarding and enjoyable lives. Hobfoll posited when people have excess resources, they experience happiness. When resources are threatened, people become unhappy or experience stress (Hobfoll, 1989). Retention strategies can include preventing the depletion of excess resources (Hobfoll, 1989). I did not use the conservation of resources theory because Hobfoll focused primarily on resources, which is not the primary focus of the research.

Mobley model. I also considered the Mobley (1977) model as a potential foundation for the proposed study. Mobley posited that employee dissatisfaction evolves into turnover and constructs a withdrawal decision process. Mobley theorized and develop a sequence of events that often lead to turnover, including dissatisfaction (which results in thoughts of quitting), job search and costs of quitting (which results in search intentions), evaluation of alternatives (which results in comparison of current and

alternative), and quit intentions (resulting in quitting). In conclusion, Mobley presented a model to prevent people from quitting with a focus on turnover. When managers have successful retention strategies, employees might stay. I did not use the Mobley model because Mobley focused primarily on quitting intentions and not on retention.

Employee adaptation to work theory. The final theory I considered was the employee adaptation to work theory (Lyu & Zhu, 2017). Lyu and Zhu (2017) developed a model of employee adaptation to work by investigating how job-related relations affect a variety of behaviors. The researchers found that several factors, including intentions to quit, turnover, and attempts to change the job, negatively correlated with job satisfaction (Lyu & Zhu, 2017). Lyu and Zhu posited employees that do not adapt to a job might experience dissatisfaction that results in turnover. In summary, managers employing retention strategies might help employees adapt to work and prevent turnover. I did not use the adaptation to work theory because Lyu and Zhu focused on how employees can acclimate within the company to prevent turnover and did not focus on retention.

Predictors of Job Embeddedness

Employee-community fit. Off-the-job characteristics, such as physical closeness to extended family, link to professional communities, and community characteristics, can affect employee job embeddedness (Boon & Biron, 2016). Boon and Biron (2016) postulated proximity to extended families could provide individuals with the support needed to manage conflicts and work demands that impede work–life balance. Having family in close physical proximity can promote job embeddedness via frequent contact, emotional intensity, and increases interdependency (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017).

Having an entire family in close physical proximity, including in-laws, might increase an individual's positive community-related experiences, promoting employee job embeddedness (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). Eddleston and Mulki (2017) suggested that community characteristics might provide resources to staff and their immediate families. For example, a town, city, and neighborhood with vast resources, such as public transportation and good elementary schools, can bind employees and families to residential locales (Kiazad et al., 2015).

Kiazad et al. (2015) professed local professional communities might offer individuals diverse career opportunities. Employees use professional communities to garner career support, gain specialized knowledge, and develop their careers (Kiazad et al., 2015). Employees having access to online and virtual communities can also increase job embeddedness by providing individuals with opportunities to collaborate with other professionals and disseminate and access expertise (Kiazad et al., 2015).

A situation might occur in some companies that make employees more likely to stay. According to Lee et al. (2014), the extent to which a company creates positive community environments can influence employees to stay. For example, efforts by executives and managers to provide staff with resources that embed them in a community might include providing office locations near high-quality schools and in cities with pleasant weather; facilitating access to community attractions; and providing opportunities for staff to become involved in the local community (Lee et al., 2014). Further, when companies foster employee job embeddedness, employees are more likely to stay in their positions (Lee et al., 2014). When managers and executives offer

resources that embed employees in their communities and organizations via competitive benefits packages and mentoring opportunities, employees are less like to turn over (Lee et al., 2014).

Culture. In collectivistic cultures, an individual's desire to leave a job might be the result of pressures from family members to meet specific needs. Such familial pressures can result in the desire to leave or stay with a company to meet family needs (Darrat, Amyx, & Bennett, 2017). According to Darrat et al. (2017), embeddedness is more common in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures, and embeddedness is more predominant in communities than in individual organizations. Darrat et al. indicated that higher levels of community embeddedness do not necessarily predict voluntary turnover, but embeddedness is predictive of the voluntary turnover for some employees.

Language is also important to employee job embeddedness (Nguyen, Taylor, & Bergiel, 2017). Ramesh and Gelfand (2010) stated that in collectivistic cultures, speaking the local, national language in an organization where a different language is primarily spoken, might contribute to increased employee job embeddedness without consideration of people who speak the fluent language. Mitchell et al. (2001) stated that although the effects of cultural differences on employee job embeddedness have been widely documented, significant knowledge gaps remain. In conclusion, cross-cultural investigations are needed to increase the generalizability of the research findings (Nguyen et al., 2017).

Future researchers should consider longitudinal strategies to assess how resource-context fit underpins fluctuations in employee job embeddedness, over time. The issue of time has not been properly considered in employee job embeddedness. Nguyen et al. (2017) revealed that time issues had been analyzed based on the results of the effects of employee job embeddedness at the various stages of an individual's career. Allen et al. (2016) suggested conservation of resources would be effective to consider the testing of the 'resources applicability' in capturing the various changes in employee job embeddedness over a given period.

Nonwork factors. Cucina, Byle, Martin, Peyton, and Gast (2018) indicated the assumptions derived from the empirical studies reveal several off-the-job aspects are important for embeddedness. *Nonwork factors* are mentioned in the original turnover models as influences that include conflicts between work and family responsibilities or attachments (Cucina et al., 2018). Cucina et al. indicated family attachments and individual's work–life responsibilities are related and reported that nonwork factors were directly related to the job attachment and attitudes.

Effects of Job Embeddedness

Kumar and Kavitha (2016) posited rigorous hiring criteria, tuition reimbursement, and socialization can increase employees' organizational embeddedness. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2017) suggested opportunity-enhancing work practices can increase employees' abilities to contribute to organizational objectives. Further, Nguyen et al. suggested opportunity-enhancing work practices might involve autonomous teamwork that expands individuals' decision-making authority and allows employees to come up

with solutions to problems. Kumar and Kavitha postulated such practices could promote employee embeddedness and retention by demonstrating job stability and an employers' understanding of employees' needs.

Darrat et al. (2017) suggested employee job embeddedness may significantly affect turnover even when active commitment and job satisfaction are present. Jauhar et al. (2017) revealed employee job embeddedness accounts for the increase in the variance of actual turnover as well as turnover intention. Rodriguez (2016) discovered poor job embeddedness could spread among employees and result in the turnover. Researchers concluded that evidence exists that several professional and nonprofessional factors might affect employee embeddedness, differently (Darrat et al., 2017; Jauhar et al., 2017). Nonprofessional factors could negatively affect employee job embeddedness and contribute to absenteeism and withdrawal when employees who are occupied by nonwork responsibilities have less time available for work-related tasks (Mansour & Tremblay, 2016). Leaders might use job embeddedness tenets related to professional factors to predict organizational citizenship behaviors and job performance.

Predictors of Retention

The job investment model is derived from the study of the relationship between job commitment and employee retention. Kim and Kang (2015) suggested commitment might predict job turnover, as commitment factors including the quality of available alternative jobs, job rewards, and job investments. Theoretically, the aspects of job investment include factors such as training, retirement programs, years of service, and resources related to the job, such as friends and accommodations (Kim & Kang, 2015).

Person-organization fit. An individual's fit with a job or organization can also predict retention. Boon and Biron (2016) suggested the ideas of person-organization fit and person-job-fit provide a framework for understanding the constructs of employee job embeddedness. Further, Boon and Biron stated the constructs from the capability perception align the values and personality traits of an individual with an organization's strategic goals, culture, and values. Person-organization fit is based on the degree of similarity that exists between an organization's values and those of an individual worker (Boon & Biron, 2016). The dimension of person-organization fit is also used to consider how closely individuals perceive themselves to fit in with coworkers, the culture of their organization, and their workplace (Boon & Biron, 2016).

Boon and Biron (2016) suggested the concept of constituency commitment also aligns with employee job embeddedness in the sense that it assumes the fundamentals of individuals begin by considering the legal framework. Constituency commitment could be described as the process of identification with the objectives of the various constituents (Boon & Biron, 2016). The emerging question that Boon and Biron presented was, how attached are individuals to their corporate leaders and workmates? To conceptualize the idea of links-organization, the focus is on attachments that are fundamentally the development of time on the job to the embedded individual (Boon & Biron, 2016). Finally, Boon and Biron summarized the links-organization concept involves the assessment of the length of time an individual is working for a given organization along with coworkers and teams the person is involved.

Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and leadership. Three

commonly examined constructs in job retention are job satisfaction, organizational

commitment, and leadership. Leaders could use job satisfaction to predict retention via

the creation of a sense of professional stability among employees, fostering a preference

to remain in partnership with present employers (Manz, 2015). The personal happiness of

employees may result from engagement with meaningful work. The oil and gas industry

is integral to the global economy. Rony and Suki (2017) stated the economic turmoil

characteristic of the oil and gas industry creates a sense of job instability among

employees that can significantly hamper satisfaction. Managers using clear internal

communications might also affect job satisfaction among oil and gas industry employees

(Rony & Suki, 2017). Internal marketing practices that include clear communications

might help companies retain highly valued employees.

Like satisfaction, leaders many use organizational commitment to predict

retention. Often, managers do not strategically use organizational commitment to their

advantage (Manz, 2015). Factors in employee job embeddedness are organizational

commitment (Kim & Kang, 2015) and retention (Hassan, Hassan, Din Khan, & Naseem,

2011). Hassan et al. (2011) found that organizational commitment was an important

indicator of turnover intention, suggesting that retention works best when employees had

clarity of the company's values, received encouragement, trusted management, no

favoritism is showed, received flexible work hours, established a personal development

plan, and operated safely.

In contrast, a committed employee might remain with a company through good and tough times and will protect the company's assets and shares, with time they also improve their performance (Sarmad et al., 2016). Employee commitment might foster improved relationships with subordinates and managers. Any steps that organizational leaders take to improve employee retention is achievable if employees are supportive (Sarmad et al., 2016).

Leadership is also a strong predictor of employee retention as observed by Popli and Rizvi (2016). Popli and Rizvi (2016) revealed that leadership styles and strategies could affect retention. Training and development are important aspects of employee retention. Popli and Rizvi summarized retention methods as including productive orientation, informative training sessions, motivation, encouraging leadership, fostering employee engagement, and implementing employee feedback. Researchers suggested that managers who demonstrate an effective leadership style can guide employees and provide support for desired goals while monitoring employee work (Hayward, Bungay, Wolff, & MacDonald, 2016; Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Popli and Rizvi stated that leadership activities play a significant role in improving employee retention. Similarly, Hayward et al. posited that positive leadership could promote retention.

Organizational fit and social capital. Organizational fit and social capital are two social-related constructs that may influence an employee's job embeddedness. The degree to which an employee feels supported by an employing organization can also influence retention (Darrat et al., 2017). Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, and Martinez (2015) examined how employers define overqualification and mismatched qualifications, and

whether they considered hiring applicants who did not possess the education and experience required for a position. The researchers reported that hiring managers were willing to interview and hire individuals with less education or experience if they possessed sufficient compensatory experience (Kulkarni et al., 2015). However, Kulkarni et al. stated that ensuring individuals possess necessary education and experience before hiring them will lead to improvements in retention, as it will foster greater growth and upward mobility among internal employees, lessening the likelihood of leaving to seek advancement opportunities with other firms.

The loss of social capital can also predict turnover and retention (Gutmann, 2014). Gutmann (2014) suggested individuals are more likely to quit if their friends quit because they suffer from psychic costs without their friends. Accordingly, the conservation of resources theory suggests that employees might leave an organization to re-join colleagues who also left in other organizations to maintain close ties and access to social resources (Kiazad et al., 2015). Leaders should evaluate employee job embeddedness in conjunction with other concepts of social relationships.

Career development. Ertas (2015) defined career development, a fundamental aspect of a career journey, as the process of enriching knowledge, skills and adding value during the process of creating a career path. Benton (2016) posited that career development is an effective employee retention strategy. This statement is supported by Cloutier et al. (2015) and Hanaysha (2016), who described career development and employee training as essential to employee retention. When organizational leaders encourage employee career development, organizations and employees might both

benefit. The acquisition of new skills might also help employees feel accepted and valued by their employers. For employers, Hanaysha suggested career development opportunities can assist in the identification of new talent.

Leaders may use opportunities for professional development and career progression as influencers for an employee's decision to stay with a company. According to Lee et al. (2014), employees tend to perceive their company as valuing them if the company helps them develop skills in areas such as leadership and career advancement and offer job security, which are factors that increase retention. Conversely, employees consider themselves devalued when they lack mentoring and training opportunities in the company (Charlier, Guay, & Zimmerman, 2016). According to Charlier et al. (2016), training and development that promote embeddedness must be broad in scope. Human resource managers should not just settle for two or three workshops each year or focus on new employee orientation (Cloutier et al., 2015). Instead, the company leader should have a holistic training policy that promotes development programs throughout the year (Charlier et al., 2016). Leaders using mature coaching systems that create a strong link between supervisors and employees, and trainers and staff, can provide direction and a foundation for a complete training system (Cloutier et al., 2015). Charlier et al. posited training curriculum should have a strong business case and validation for the employees to feel motivated by the skill development necessary for current or expected future jobs. Leaders should incorporate scientific planning to guide the methods, coursework, and content of development programs and well-selected, incentivized, and supervised full-time internal trainers should be implemented (Cloutier et al., 2015).

Incentives. Company leaders may use motivation-enhancing work practices to direct, energize, and sustain employees' efforts related to work objectives as suggested by Kiazad et al. (2015). Company leaders might use incentives, such as performance pay, to fuel motivation and demonstrate value for, and acknowledgment of, employees' efforts and accomplishments (Craig, 2015). Kiazad et al. stated such incentives can improve employee job embeddedness and retention. Efforts to involve employees in the organization, such as linking employees to multiple company members, offering recruitment packages and benefits, and strengthening job fit, are likely to increase retention (Lee et al., 2014). As employees become more embedded, employees might enjoy other benefits from employing organizations, such as increased social capital, citizen behaviors, and performance.

Benefits and compensation. Organizational leaders who provide employees with competitive salaries and benefits packages can experience increased employee loyalty and organizational commitment because these factors significantly affect employees' decision to remain with an organization (Bibi, Pangil, Johari, & Ahmad, 2017). Employers need to balance benefits to attract and retain high-quality employees (Craig, 2015). Kanfer, Frese, and Johnson (2017) observed that money was the most dominant source of motivation and a strong tool for attracting and retaining talented personnel. However, leaders providing workers with more money might not directly contribute to retention; leaders developing comprehensive compensation strategies that reward employees is essential to retention (Craig, 2015).

Compensation and benefits are the major strategies for employee retention in oil and gas companies (Benton, 2016). Through compensation and benefits strategies, the company leader creates a suitable environment to cater to various employee needs to extend their employment (Benton, 2016). Ajmal et al. (2016) professed compensation and benefit strategies to suit individuals are good strategies for retaining highly skilled professionals. Money is a powerful source of motivation for almost every human being. Leaders offering competitive salaries, pensions, and other benefits can improve employee loyalty and commitment. The researchers recommended strategies to help the leaders of oil and gas selling organizations model effective compensation policies and practices (Ajmal et al., 2016). Ajmal et al. studied the effects of compensation and motivation on employee retention in the public-sector oil and gas organizations in Pakistan and found motivation levels and practical handling of compensation might improve retention.

Work–life balance and work environment. According to Timms et al. (2015), work–life balance contributes significantly to the recruitment and retention of specialized and high-profile employees. The benefits of work–life balance can foster a friendly workplace culture that encourages the retention of high-performing employees (Deery & Jago, 2015). Hofmann and Stokburger-Sauer (2017) defined work–life balance as the state by which an employee is capable of balancing between work and nonwork commitments. Employees with greater job flexibility, which fosters work–life balance, report higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Benton, 2016).

Work environment describes the settings in which employees learn and work (Benton, 2016). Benton observed that a positive work environment could foster job

satisfaction, productivity, and retention. Managers can create positive work environments where employees are happy, satisfied, and treated equally. Human resource managers are essential to the creation of positive workplace environments (Deery & Jago, 2015). Hassan et al. (2011) stated flexible work hours foster positive and safe working environments in the oil and gas sector.

Other organizational predictors. Sekhobo et al. (2017) suggested other factors empirically associated with employee retention are organizational. Collaborating on projects can create a sense of commitment to a coworker and organization that might not occur when working in silos (Sekhobo et al., 2017). Many company leaders are leveraging team settings to foster commitment and embeddedness (Kiazad et al., 2015).

Retention in the Oil and Gas Industry

Leaders should understand and learn more about the various, and often personal, reasons for the turnover of highly specialized employees (Timms et al., 2015). Some workers might leave a position after finding a more attractive job elsewhere or because they are dissatisfied with the current workplaces. Consequently, managers must understand these factors to retain employees and maintain a strong flow of skilled (Timms et al., 2015). Managers who fail to retain a skilled workforce can adversely affect individual organizations, as well as the oil and gas industry (Lu, Sun, et al., 2016). Managers should identify and apply effective retention strategies to reduce employee turnover.

Benton (2016) indicated that work–life balance, work environment, compensation and benefits, and career advancement and opportunities are the most significant

contributors to employee retention. Timms et al. (2015) supported this statement by concurring that employee retention is crucial for organizational survival. The engagement and retention of high-profile employees are significant challenges to organizations particularly during times of high turnover (Lu, Lu, et al., 2016). Leaders have recognized the general skills shortage has dominated the market, causing challenges for many organizations related to hiring and retaining the best talent (Memon et al., 2016). Employees are the backbone of an organization; therefore, organizations should invest in employee retention (Memon et al., 2016). Managers can contribute to high employee turnover rates, particularly within the oil and gas industry, by failing to design and implement employee retention strategies (Harhara et al., 2015).

Cost of turnover. Employee retention is a common challenge; effective employee retention strategies can be used to minimize turnover (Odetunde & Ufodiama, 2017). Employee turnover broadly costs many business organizations (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Almost 80% of turnover is the result of avoidable recruiting mistakes (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). High employee turnover resulted in expenses to business owners in the form of lost time and productivity (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Company leaders who retained high performers, even during disruptive periods of organizational change, experienced competitive advantage (Kumar & Kavitha, 2016). Organizational leaders can maintain a stable workforce, reduce turnover rates, and increase cost-savings by employing retention strategies such as increasing employee benefits (Odetunde & Ufodiama, 2017). Retaining skilled workers also produced significant economic value in the form of human capital (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017).

Organizational leaders lose human investments when employees leave (Premalatha, 2016). Premalatha (2016) identified the direct and administration costs related to turnover, such as (a) advertisement, (b) processes of recruitment and selection, (c) external recruitment agency fees, (d) costs of psychometric tests and assessments, (d) background investigations, (e) orientation programs, (f) initial learning programs, (g) on-the-job training, (h) employee referral bonuses, (i) joining bonuses, (j) accommodation and facilities provided to the employees, (k) relocation allowances, (l) redundancy pay, (m) benefits and services offered, (n) payroll administration, (o) mentoring and coaching, (p) medical examinations, and (q) other training programs. Premalatha explained that organizations benefit from retaining employees and may lose the benefits when employees leave.

Premalatha (2016) stated the cost of termination, replacement, vacancy, and learning curve productivity are equivalent of at least 6 months of a nonexempt employee's pay and benefits, or 1 year for a professional or a manager. Selden and Sowa (2015) posited the combination of pay, benefits, contingents, absence, and turnover produces a total cost of human capital for the organization. The costs associated with retention can create declines in organizational performance (Lu, Sun, et al., 2016).

Reasons for high turnover. Reducing employees' turnover intentions is an ongoing goal of many companies (Kim & Fernandez, 2017). Harhara et al. (2015) predicted the reasons for employee turnover in the oil and gas industry in the United Arab Emirates. Harhara et al. described the rationale on the measurement of turnover intentions as a predictor of turnover, as well as a predecessor of actual employee turnover.

Researchers revealed employee empowerment has negative direct and indirect effects on

turnover intentions (Kim & Fernandez, 2017). Individual employee characteristics,

employee attitudes, organizational conditions, and managerial practices might influence

employees' intentions to leave a position, as well as an organization's actual turnover

rates (Premalatha, 2016). Leaders using formal managerial policies might reduce

employee turnover intention (Afsar et al., 2018). Harhara et al. aligned with study

findings carried out by other theorists on the multiple methods used to predict turnover,

such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work stress. Harhara et al.

acknowledged that further testing by both academics and practitioners is needed to be

effectively used industrywide.

Sumbal et al. (2017) suggested that the knowledge retention actions were

inconsistent with many oil and gas companies, and gaps were found in knowledge loss

from aging employees because of the plummeting oil prices and layoffs. Sumbal et al.

found that oil prices were a significant influence in the oil and gas industry concerning

workforce and knowledge retention issues. Researchers stated political conditions and the

geographical locations of companies could affect knowledge retention actions (Sumbal et

al., 2017).

Expatriation and repatriation. The nature of oil and gas companies' is different

from many other industries because the location of the oil and gas fields determine the

mode of employment for many workers. Specifically, exploration, drilling, production,

refining, transportation, and the lack of skilled workforce overseas mean that a

multinational corporation must place numerous employees in different continents from

the country where companies recruit the skilled workers (Sluyterman, 2017). Leaders managing expatriate professionals working in other countries can become complex because of the different contexts of providing the organizational, career, and community embeddedness (Andresen, 2015). Sluyterman (2017) suggested expatriates often express concerns over the loss of close relationships with families and friends in the host-country and increased dissatisfaction can lead to high turnover and delay or failure of overseas investment. Andresen posited any intention to leave the job could present exorbitant costs to a company because of the time and money required to recruit, train, and place an expatriate. Employee job embeddedness is a critical determinant of how managers can focus on availability or lack thereof of necessary fit and links overseas and the impact on the employees' willingness to stay as an expatriate (Andresen, 2015).

Although expatriation can be exciting for employees, managers revealed difficulty in expatriation preventing turnover among expatriated workers because of the challenges associated with working overseas (Sluyterman, 2017). To be more specific, living in new countries can bring a new way of life from drinks, food, rituals, and habits that can excite an employee; however, not all experiences will be positive, and expat problems might arise. Common difficulties with expatriate roles are cultural differences, loneliness, cost of living, finding optimum health care, learning a new language, finding proper schools for the kids, and relationship problems (Andresen, 2015). Some employees underestimated challenges faced by expatriates can involve running away from the challenges back at home, inadequate preparation, and inability to choose the right friends in the host country (Hussain & Deery, 2018).

Another important aspect that may influence job embeddedness is culture shock. Zhu, Wanberg, Harrison, and Diehn (2016) argued that a considerable number of expatriates could express concerns of shock from the inability to adjust to the culture in the new country. Culture shock can have direct effects on employee dissatisfaction and those who experience shock might fail to fully embed because of the increased cultural demands and the need for proactive tactics for adjustment (Bose, 2016). For example, the struggle of learning the new language is often a burden, and the realities of cultural changes can create an unexpected shock for expatriates (Zhu et al., 2016). Employees experiencing shock may develop psychological problems that affect their health and ability to adjust (Bose, 2016). Conversely, some expatriate roles including oil exploration, can exist for years which means that employees must adopt the norms, values, and cultures of the host country (Zhu et al., 2016). Bose (2016) suggested employees with new roles could lead to a cycle of moving across continents which can become a concern and cause family problems from differences in religion, values, and norms and the need to adjust every 5 to 10 years.

Managers should hire employees who express flexibility, and train employees before, during, and after placement (Durrani & Rajagopal, 2016). Hiring managers can also train employees on processes to ease adjustment (Durrani & Rajagopal, 2016). The provision of local content, such as television programs, listening to the radio, and living with locals, can help expatriates adjust (Zhu et al., 2016). Hiring managers can implement a wide range of resources to facilitate a faster adjustment (Durrani & Rajagopal, 2016).

The loss of close and significant relationships has remained a number one challenge for all expatriates (Lee et al., 2014). Andresen (2015) postulated the loss of a persons' support network could be emotionally overwhelming for young expatriates who are single or raising young children. Even employees who move with a spouse can experience problems if a partner's family is unhappy or if the partner struggles to adjust (Andresen, 2015).

Expat employees should have a community support system and embed themselves in the community. Lee et al. (2014) argued that expatriated community embeddedness is often associated with individuals' interactions with their significant others, those that create an international identity in their present place of work, or those working in other companies in the host country. Lee et al. stated job embeddedness might never occur because of the cultural distance between the host country and home, different international assignments, and the length of the assignment last.

Challenges. Benton (2016) highlighted age-related factors cause experienced employees to work for shorter periods of approximately 5 to 10 years. Fewer skilled professionals are in the pipeline to replace aging workers (Benton, 2016). Employee retention is a critical challenge facing human resource managers of oil and gas organizations around the world as stated by Sarmad et al. (2016). Many oil and gas leaders continue to have an ongoing shortage of highly skilled employees and worker shortages remain significant concerns (Timms et al., 2015).

During a study on employee retention in the Malaysian energy industry, Sarmad et al. (2016) found that gaining employee commitment and internal promotion were the

strongest predictors of retention. Leaders who fail to manage employee retention may see negative effects on productivity, profitability, and growth (Sarmad et al., 2016). In the oil and gas industry, leaders should improve employee retention strategies to ensure that existing skilled employees stay in their positions to carry out organizational operations (Timms et al., 2015). Oil and gas industry leaders are dependent on resources that frequently fluctuate in costs, making it difficult to offer consistent increases in salaries (Sarmad et al., 2016).

Hassan et al. (2011) suggested that employee retention is fundamental to the long-term health of organizations. Hassan et al. posited that resources must be maximized to create competitive advantage, and employees must be retained to foster organizational efficiency. When talented employees leave an organization, innovation, customer satisfaction, historical knowledge, and profitability are negatively affected because of the employee replacement costs the organization must absorb (Hassan et al., 2011).

Job Embeddedness in the Oil and Gas Industry

Successful oil and gas industry leaders require a skilled workforce of scientists and engineers; the potential human capital shortage from the retirement of aging workers and the lack of available talent for its replacement pose a threat to industry survival and expansion (Sumbal et al., 2017). Oil and gas industry leaders have emphasized strategies to increase employee job embeddedness. Sumbal et al. (2017) observed how the emphasis on job fit directed leaders from oil and gas companies to perceive value in graduate recruitment over midcareer hiring. Managers view new graduate recruits as more critical

business drivers than midcareer prospects, which offer unsustainable, short-term solutions (Fulgence, 2015).

Leaders using a structured recruitment process may recruit employees with strong job fit (Woodworth, 2016). Company leaders use recruitment agencies to fill open job positions. Often, such recruitment agency leaders are not compatible with the company's needs (Porter, Woo, & Campion, 2016); because the way a company leader specifies employee characteristics, recruitment and selection processes, and the job offer proposed to selected employees can predict employee embeddedness (Porter et al., 2016).

Recruitment is a unique aspect of employee job embeddedness, because organizational leaders can use hiring criteria to target individuals who possess the characteristics most likely to foster embeddedness (Woodworth, 2016). Hiring managers who set high hiring standard can determine the worth of an applicant before, during, and after an interview (Porter et al., 2016). Setting unwavering hiring standards allow company leaders to onboard personnel who organize exceed employers' expectations (Dai & Liu, 2015). Mazzei, Flynn, and Haynie (2016) suggested the company's hiring managers search for job candidates. Leaders must use successful efforts to discover the right talent and employee fit including using social platforms and connecting with professional associations to attract applicants who are most likely to fit with an organization (Dai & Liu, 2015). Leaders should offer future employees a reason to join the company by providing role clarity and the salary, inclusion with other teams, and interaction with other people can assure the company of high employee job

embeddedness (Krøtel & Villadsen, 2016). A company leader can encourage increased job embeddedness by adopting a well-grounded retention strategy.

Bermiss and Greenbaum (2016) used social embeddedness to explore the inconsistent role that individual level embedded relationships have on employee retention. Dai and Liu (2015) concluded that employees would stay at a company rather than follow a manager that leaves to go to another company. Leaders use embeddedness to predict employees leaving when managers stay but lose predictability advantage when managers leave to go to another company (Bermiss & Greenbaum, 2016).

Summary

Managers can use job embeddedness theory tenets to enhance the feeling of employee commitment. Managerial use of job embeddedness tenets can reduce the negative effects of a challenging work environment (Duffield et al., 2014), resulting in improved employee retention. Leaders may use employee job embeddedness to play an important role in retention, adapting to the negative behaviors, and preserving the benefits achieved. Yarbrough et al. (2017) suggested job embeddedness theory tenets can be used as an effective framework to enhance relationships between workers and corporate leaders, resulting in improved employee job embeddedness. Leaders should increase the focus on the dimensions of employee job embeddedness and employee commitment.

Leaders might use organizational culture to encourage employee job embeddedness. Leaders who improve organizational culture can be achieved through supporting the mutual trust between organizational leaders and the leadership of the

employees, as higher levels of employee job embeddedness can reduce impacts to the work environment (Cloutier et al., 2015). Yarbrough et al. (2017) postulated organizational culture could be achieved by increasing the capacity of employee job embeddedness by developing relationships with other stakeholders within and outside of the organization.

I provided a way to understand how employees become part of the organization to increase or decrease the motivation to leave through the job embeddedness theory. I explained the three tenets of the job embeddedness theory including links, fit, and sacrifice. I applied the organizational and community contexts to demonstrate how managers in oil and gas companies develop strategies to motivate employees to stay. Lee et al. (2014) postulated employee job embeddedness could apply to various settings, including individuals working in domestic or international places. The stronger the tenets across the two contexts, the higher the potential of retaining employees (Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2015a). Researchers indicated a shortcoming of the job embeddedness theory emphasizing that the theory can have a negative impact on social and human capital development after employees have remained in the organization for an extended time (Marasi et al., 2016).

Transition

In Section 1, I provided an overview of employee retention, particularly the issues and problems challenging businesses developing employee retention strategies. Leaders in businesses, such as oil and gas companies, develop employee retention strategies for many reasons producing different results. Replacement costs for high-level or highly

specialized employees are as much as 400% of employees' annual salaries (Bose, 2016). I conducted a multiple qualitative case study of five hiring managers and three engineering managers from four oil and gas companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, to explore strategies to retain specialized employees. A multiple qualitative case study was the most appropriate method for answering the research question of what strategies do oil and gas company managers employ to retain specialized employees? The job embeddedness theory as offered by Mitchell et al. (2001) provided a way to understand how employees become part of the organization and encounter less or more motivation to leave. Oil and gas company managers who understand the potential associated costs of employee turnover can develop improved strategies for retaining specialized employees to reduce turnover costs.

Section 2 includes details of the research procedure and explanation of the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization technique, data analysis, and how to assure reliability and validity. In Section 3, I include the presentation of the findings from the study, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, personal reflections, summary, and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I provide details of this study beginning with a review of the purpose of the study, followed by a discussion of the role of the researcher, a description of the participants, and a presentation of the research method and design. I detail the population and sampling strategies, ethical procedures, and the strategies for data collection and analysis. The reliability of data, referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research, is also outlined. The section concludes with a transition to Section 3.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies that oil and gas company managers use to retain specialized employees. The specific population for the study was eight managers from four oil and gas companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, which included five hiring managers and three engineering managers who had demonstrated success in retaining specialized employees. The implications for social change include catalyzing increased awareness to local people on the evolving elements surrounding their jobs, thereby improving their career and financial stability and providing opportunities for growth within the oil and gas industry for the specialized employees in a metropolitan city in the southern United States. If specialized employees stay in their roles instead of leaving for a different industry, leaders may improve promotion from within the oil and gas industry, reduce a metropolitan city in the southern United States area's unemployment rates, and improve local job economies. When the local economy improves, local governments increase their

tax base, resulting in more tax revenue that could be used to make improvements in the local community.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher includes securing qualified participants, planning and undertaking a study ethically, interpreting topic knowledge through interviews, developing study conclusions, and being an intuitive listener (Thorpe et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). I collected and analyzed data objectively to employ the strategies used by Mitchell et al. (2001) for establishing the reasons for employee retention in the oil and gas industry. McCurdy and Uldam (2014) suggested being unbiased when collecting and analyzing participant data. As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument and received, understood, and inferred the data as described by other scholars (i.e., Hoogland et al., 2016; Johnston, 2017; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Ranney et al., 2015). I concentrated on identifying supporting study evidence and themes using open-ended interview questions to gather data, adding richness and depth to my study. Palinkas et al. (2015) discussed using open-ended interview questions as a data gathering tool to contribute richness and depth in quantitative studies. I obtained and reviewed supplementary data sources, such as company documentation or materials, and observations regarding the participants' nonverbal cues. Yin (2018); Mayer (2015); and Sykes, Verma, and Hancock (2018) suggested acquiring and reviewing multiple data sources.

I used business card contact information obtained at professional networking conferences for oil and gas practitioners and referrals from oil and gas hiring and

engineering managers in my professional network to gain access to qualified study

participants. A study invitation and consent form were used to request participant

participation. I performed the interview, recorded and transcribed interview data,

examined and inferred the data for themes, and validated saturation using the process

outlined in this study.

My connection with the study subject regarding strategies that oil and gas

company managers use to retain specialized employees stemmed from working in the oil

and gas industry for almost 30 years in chemical engineering leadership roles. I had some

knowledge about retaining specialized employees. I did not include any participants with

whom I have current or former relationships to maintain the integrity of study data. As

Way, Kanak Zwier, and Tracy (2015) cautioned, difficulties exist with interviewing

participants with whom researchers have ongoing or preexisting relationships. I was

mindful of personal experiences in retaining specialized employees and employed an

impartial perspective throughout the research process to minimize researcher bias. As

suggested by McCurdy and Uldam (2014), researchers must endeavor to be as objective

as possible, and such objectivity is easier to achieve if the researcher is not a part of the

participating organizations.

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical

and Behavioral Research (1978) developed *The Belmont Report*, which is comprised of

compulsory guidelines for researchers to ensure all study procedures are ethical and

comply with the three fundamental ethical standards. The three fundamental ethical

standards in *The Belmont Report* are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice

(National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, 1978). Respect is the provision and assurance of autonomy

(National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, 1978), which I ensured through obtaining informed consent and

assuring subjects that study participation was completely voluntary. Beneficence is a

researcher's attempt to provide the most study benefits to participants while minimizing

risks (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, 1978). The justice principle is the guidelines researchers use to

ensure all study procedures are just, fair, and beneficial (National Commission for the

Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). I obtained

approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before I started the

data collection process. The role of the IRB is ensuring all study procedures are ethical

and comply with the three fundamental ethical standards laid out in *The Belmont Report*

(National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and

Behavioral Research, 1978). I adhered to all principles of *The Belmont Report* throughout

the duration of this study.

Many biases, assumptions, and attitudes can influence a doctoral study (Schwarz,

2014). When researchers fail to take measures to eliminate personal biases, unintended

bias might influence study results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). I

conducted semistructured interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix),

interpreted the data, and shared the interpreted data with the participant as my member

checking process to mitigate bias and avoid viewing data from a personal perspective.

Member checking is a process for improving the trustworthiness of qualitative data that involves confirmation of the researcher's interpretation of participants' responses to interview questions (Birt et al., 2016).

Researchers use interview protocols to guarantee solid concentration on the recorded interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Researchers also use interview protocols to help develop trustworthy and dependable case studies (Connelly, 2016). Roulston (2018) suggested that open-ended interview questions encourage interviewees to share information and perspectives with few restrictions. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) as a guide and ensured all interviews were consistent. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions.

Participants

I began the process of participant recruitment upon receiving approval from the IRB by first setting the participant eligibility criteria. Wessels and Visagie (2017) posited that an important eligibility criterion for study participants is experience within the selected topic. The eligibility requirements for my study participants were that participants must have (a) been a hiring manager or engineering manager at the time of the study, (b) possessed a management position in an oil and gas company in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, within the last 5 years, (c) held responsibilities associated with employee recruitment and management, and (d) participated in the development and implementation of successful employee retention policies. Eligibility requirements and criteria for study participants can vary from study to study (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016; Wessels & Visagie, 2017).

I used purposeful sampling to develop new measures or strategies by ensuring managers possessed comprehensive knowledge of successful retention strategies for specialized employees at their organizations. Palinkas et al. (2015) posited purposeful sampling might result in new strategies. I increased the trustworthiness of study data by engaging participants from several organizations. Birt et al. (2016) suggested interview participants from multiple organizations increase study trustworthiness. I interviewed five hiring managers and three engineering managers employed by four oil and gas companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, to help improve the quality of my research on retention strategies for specialized employees in the oil and gas industry.

Wells, Kolek, Williams, and Saunders (2015) suggested strategies used to gain access to study participants include familiarity with the industry, use of existing contacts and established credibility, clear articulation of the research purpose, and identification of possible benefits to participants. Furthermore, researchers use the following strategies to access participants: discussions in person with participants for full transparency, making all research documents available to participants, providing the ethics approval letter to participants, and providing the participants with updates and regular communication on the study (Tatebe, 2015). Researchers can develop a collaborative relationship with participants by being enthusiastic and confident, and this can aid in participants being willing to participate in research (Cleary, Sayers, & Watson, 2016). To gain access to study participants, I used referrals from oil and gas hiring and engineering managers in my professional network. I also used business card contact information obtained at professional networking conferences for oil and gas practitioners held in a metropolitan

city in the southern United States. Over 300 business cards from oil and gas practitioners were in my possession from such conferences. I sent an introductory e-mail explaining the purpose of my study to prospective study participants.

The participant-researcher relationship is essential to ensure study progress (Hershkowitz, Lamb, Katz, & Malloy, 2015). Researchers use interview protocols to convey trust (McIntosh & Morse, 2015), which may result in establishing a working relationship with participants. I used an interview protocol including open-ended interview questions for study participants (see Appendix) to maintain consistency and to build mutual trust. Roulston (2018) posited open-ended interview questions encourage interviewees to share information and perspectives with few restrictions, which may aid in building mutual trust.

Researchers use several methods to build relationships with and to gain the trust of study participants, including providing a study audit trail, triangulation by the observer, study debriefing, use of member checking, and frequent communication, as suggested by Thomas (2017) and Roulston (2018). I regularly communicated with the study participants to build rapport. Curnin Owen, Paton, Trist, and Parsons (2015) and Hershkowitz et al. (2015) suggested regular communication with study participants builds mutual trust and rapport. I provided all participants with the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, their participant rights, and the opportunity to revoke participation from the study at any stage.

A researcher can establish alignment between the overarching research question and the participants by employing a suitable research design (Johnston, 2017). Selecting

participants with topic experience and knowledge is important for a successful study (Wessels & Visagie, 2017). Yin (2018) explained the researcher could answer the overarching research question by ensuring study participant eligibility criteria is satisfied. I selected study participants exhibiting successful experience and knowledge in retaining specialized employees in the oil and gas industry to ensure alignment with the overarching research question.

<div align="center">**Research Method and Design**</div>

Research Method

Scholars posited that qualitative research supports the understanding of the participants' ideas, observations, feelings, and justifications serving as a data source for research (Johnston, 2017; Mayer, 2015). Qualitative research is useful for reviewing factors that shape processes not accessible through quantitative methods (Gutmann, 2014). I used the qualitative research method for this study to explore the successful strategies that oil and gas company managers use to retain specialized employees.

Quantitative research methods are appropriate for examining the relationship between variables (Venkatesh et al., 2013). A quantitative research method was unsuitable because the aim of this study was not to assess relationships between predetermined variables but to explore the constructs surrounding the phenomenon of strategies to retain specialized employees in the oil and gas industry. Researchers can also follow the mixed-method research methodology in which qualitative data are used to inform, evaluate, and interpret quantitative data (Sekhobo et al., 2017). The mixed

method research methodology was unsuitable because I did not intend to use any quantitative data.

Research Design

A researcher may use the case study design as a method of obtaining evidence from organizations, groups, or individuals (Johnston, 2017; Yin, 2018). De Massis and Kotlar (2014) posited qualitative multiple case studies might provide a solid foundation for organizing and presenting empirical evidence. I used a multiple case study for this study to explore strategies oil and gas company managers employ to retain specialized employees. A case study design is appropriate when exploring detailed views (Johnston, 2017).

Other qualitative research designs are the phenomenological design, grounded theory, and ethnographic design. Researchers focus on human experiences using the phenomenological design, on forming theories based on the participants' perspectives using the grounded theory, and on culture and society using the ethnographic design (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Researchers use phenomenology as a concept to understand a phenomenon of interest and how the study participants derive meaning from the experiences (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014). Researchers use ethnography to explore the structure and function of participants' experiences within a cultural perspective (Cincotta, 2015; Rodriguez, 2016). The three designs were not suitable for this study because I did not intend to focus on the human experience, theory formation, or cultural experiences. I used a qualitative multiple case study design to address the research question and explore strategies oil and gas company managers employ to retain specialized employees.

Saturation describes the point at which no new information emerges from the data (Saunders et al., 2018; Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017; Yin, 2018). The sample size is determined by saturation in qualitative research (Blaikie, 2018). Fusch and Ness (2015) posited that a researcher's failure to reach data saturation is a failure to meet study validity. I continued to collect data via semistructured interviews until no new themes emerged to reach data saturation.

Population and Sampling

I used a purposeful sampling strategy to recruit eight participants for this study and to ensure managers possessed comprehensive knowledge of successful retention strategies for specialized employees at their organizations. Researchers use purposeful sampling to ensure that participants recruited for a study possess the qualities necessary to provide interview data required to answer research questions (Gentles & Vilches, 2017). Although findings from purposeful samples cannot be generalized to larger populations, researchers use the findings to provide rich, in-depth data (Etikan, 2016).

Wells et al. (2015) recommended articulating the purpose of the research to prospective study participants to identify the benefits of participation. I articulated the purpose of my study to prospective study participants and articulated the eligibility requirements to participate in my study. Engaging a wide range of participants increases the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Birt et al., 2016). I used a study sample size consisting of five hiring managers and three engineering managers from four oil and gas companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States area. Boddy (2016) and Blaikie (2018) recommended having qualitative study sample sizes between six and eight

participants. The sample size is determined by saturation or the point at which no new information emerges from study data in qualitative research (Blaikie, 2018).

Saturation is when no new evidence or themes result from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Varpio et al., 2017). Researchers should attain data saturation upon the completion of the study (Saunders et al., 2018). Malterud et al. (2016) suggested saturation is the driver for sample size in qualitative studies. Malterud et al. stated ample sample size is when exhaustive saturation is reached by the researcher linking consecutively added information until relationships or themes are revealed during data collection. Wessels and Visagie (2017) suggested establishing the criteria for participants. I established the participants' criteria for my study to include five hiring managers and three engineering managers employed by four oil and gas companies in a metropolitan city in the southern United States. I continued collecting data via semistructured interviews until no new themes emerge and data saturation. I repeated interviews with participants until I reached data saturation. Yin (2018) recommended repeating study participant interviews until saturation occurs.

Eligibility requirements and criteria for study participants can vary between studies (Malterud et al., 2016; Wessels & Visagie, 2017). The eligibility requirements for my study participants were that participants must (a) be a hiring manager or engineering manager, (b) have possessed a management position in an oil and gas company in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, within the last 5 years, (c) have held responsibilities associated with employee recruitment and management, and (d) have participated in the development and implementation of successful employee retention

policies. I selected eligible participants and conducted 45-minute, face-to-face, semistructured interviews using a protocol at a location recommended by the participant. The interview location was the choice of the interviewee. Dikko (2016) recommended interview locations be free of distractions. I ensured the interview location was comfortable and private with no distractions.

Ethical Research

Artal and Rubenfeld (2017) suggested that researchers consider ethical issues, such as maintaining confidentiality, protecting participants from harm, and obtaining informed consent. Further, Artal and Rubenfeld stated that such ethical considerations arose from organized efforts to create standardized procedures to ensure the ethical treatment of human participants. Researchers should endeavor to reduce all risks while maximizing benefits to participants when involving human subjects, as recommended by Artal and Rubenfeld. I employed ethical principles to ensure the protection of all study participants. I followed the guidelines contained in *The Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978) designed to guide researchers on ethical practices for research that involves human subjects. *The Belmont Report* outlines three guiding principles for research that involves human subjects, which are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Bell, Bracken-Roche, Macdonald, & Racine, 2017). I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB, which is responsible for ensuring researchers follow ethical principles and procedures, before starting the data collection process. The Walden IRB

approval number for my study is 04-23-190671644, and the expiration date is February 22, 2020.

Artal and Rubenfeld (2017) suggested that consent is an ethical issue to consider and postulated that participants should be fully briefed on the purpose of the study before being involved in a study. Participants should be fully informed about how and why any recordings will take place and how the information will be used (Artal & Rubenfeld, 2017; Drake et al., 2017; Grady et al., 2017; Paquette & Ross, 2018). I informed participants of the purpose, means of information gathering, and use of the material in a study invitation to prospective participants. I informed all participants of their rights regarding answering none, some, or all the interview questions. In compliance with Walden University's IRB requirements, I e-mailed all study participants my contact information, copies of the informed consent form to sign and return, detailed the purpose of the study and the participant's rights, and provided contact information for the Walden University's representative.

I sent a study invitation to prospective participants, which explained the study purpose. I e-mailed participants copies of the informed consent form to e-mail 'I consent' and return, via e-mail. In keeping with the recommendations of Bhupathi and Ravi (2017) and Doerr et al. (2017), participants may withdraw at any time from a study even after consenting to participate. My informed consent form detailing the voluntary nature of participation addressed the right of participants to withdraw at any point. Participants could have notified me via e-mail or phone if they wished to withdraw, and I would have removed all their study data from analysis.

Researchers have noted providing financial incentives to participants is problematic and may influence the participants to answer the questions in a biased manner (Gleibs, 2017; Largent & Lynch, 2017). I did not provide compensation to participants for study involvement. I will provide a copy of the study results in summary format to the participants. Individuals might be motivated to participate in the study by the opportunity to be a part of research that can improve retention among oil and gas workers, thereby improving professional stability and the ability to provide for their families.

As Artal and Rubenfeld (2017) have emphasized, researchers must consider a range of ethical issues, such as maintaining confidentiality and protecting participants from harm. Researchers should endeavor to reduce all risks while maximizing benefits to participants when involving human subjects (Artal & Rubenfeld, 2017; Grinnell, Sadler, McNamara, Senetar, & Reisch, 2017; Resnik, 2017). Compliance to all ethical standards applied to the completion of this study. I employed ethical principles to ensure the protection of all study participants by following the guidelines contained in *The Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). I obtained approval before starting the data collection process from Walden University's IRB. I ensured that my final doctoral manuscript lists agreement documents in both the appendices and table of contents.

Allen and Wiles (2015) stated no identifying information of any type should be published to protect the confidentiality of all participants. Rai and Srivastava (2017) recommended pseudonymization to further protect participant data. Wilkinson and

Wilkinson (2017) posited researchers allow participants to choose their pseudonyms

resulting in increased participation. In keeping with these findings, I protected the

identities of all participants in my study and study site organizations via a pseudonym. I

did not retain a link between participants' pseudonyms and the participants' actual names

so that confidentiality was maintained. I have planned to store all study data on my

password-protected computer for 5 years, as required by Walden University. I have

planned to hire a company to destroy all study data after 5 years.

Data Collection Instruments

Researchers use study instruments to provide systematic ways to collect and

assess data from a variety of sources (Rimando et al., 2015; Schoenherr, Ellram, & Tate,

2015). As the primary data collection instrument, the researcher receives, understands,

and infers the data (Ranney et al., 2015; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2017). Accordingly, I was

the primary data collection instrument during the research. I used face-to-face,

semistructured interviews with open-ended questions following my interview protocol

(see Appendix) as the primary data collection instrument. The objective is to have

multiple sources of evidence to support study findings (Sykes et al., 2018). I included

participants' nonverbal cues as observations collected in an observation journal and

company documents or materials as tertiary data collection instruments.

According to Yin (2018), researchers should format interviews for qualitative

research in a semistructured manner, so interviews contain a predetermined set of

questions and provide the interviewer with opportunities to ask additional probing

questions. Varying the structure and formality of interview protocols allows the

interviewer to gather richer, more in-depth responses (Babb, Birk, & Carfagna, 2017;

Thy, Asano, & Finlayson, 2015). I allowed participants' responses to protocol questions

to guide probing, follow-up questions. Since observations by the interviewer document

the thick, rich contextual descriptions of the interview as data (Finlay & Bowman, 2017;

Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018), I used my observation journal to record information about

the setting, time flow, and behavior during the interviews. Sykes et al. (2018)

recommended requesting organizational documentation from study participants to

support data collected from participants. Researchers repeatedly read company

documents to interpret the meaning and identify relevancy and alignment based on other

collected documents (Elias, Hendlin, & Ling, 2018). I asked participants if they had

company materials to support responses to interview questions as evidence to bolster

study findings. Leung (2015) stated reliability involves following analytical procedures. I

followed the interview protocol (see Appendix) when conducting participant interviews

to ensure consistency and reliability.

Verification is critical to evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Yin,

2018). While observing participants' nonverbal cues as they respond to interview

questions is a primary data source, reviewing company documents or materials is a

secondary data source (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). I used both an observation journal and

company documents or materials to achieve triangulation.

Birt et al. (2016) posited the participant validation technique of member checking

involves providing participants with copies of preliminary analysis to ensure that it agrees

with the ideas and sentiments participants intended to convey during their interviews.

Member checking is useful for obtaining participants' approval for useful quotations, case studies, or when anonymity cannot be guaranteed (Thomas, 2017). Marshall and Rossman (2016) prescribed allowing participants to review interview data summaries to ensure accuracy and dependability. I conducted a member checking interview to validate the interview data. I provided my interpretation of participants' answers to interview questions to participants and asked participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretation of their answers.

Data Collection Technique

The use of an interview protocol improves the focus and consistency of participant interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Heydon & Powell, 2018). Researchers using interview protocols help improve the trustworthiness of qualitative data to create dependable case studies (Connelly, 2016). I used an interview protocol for answering the research question of what strategies do oil and gas company managers employ to retain specialized employees? I began the process of identifying participant meeting study requirements upon approval from the IRB. I started the process by using a study invitation and delivering an informed consent form. I conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix). I used the same interview protocol for each participant to preserve the quality of data and ensure a consistent, systematic approach to data collection. My interview protocol contained details of the processes that I followed during interviews, including (a) explaining the purpose of the study, (b) obtaining a signed participant consent form, (c) interview set up and testing the recording device, (d) assigning participant code in observation journal, (e) asking the

interview questions, (f) documenting participants' nonverbal cues in a journal, (g) asking

the follow-up questions, and (h) closing and scheduling member checking interview.

Standardized questions via one-on-one interviews help prevent bias and allow the

researcher to ask clarifying questions (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Thy et al., 2015).

Participants' responses to the seven standardized interview questions served as the

primary study data.

As recommended by Neal, Neal, VanDyke, and Kornbluh (2015), audio recording

enables researchers capture rich detail and maintain precise details of the interview for

data analysis. Researchers using recording devices in qualitative studies receive unbiased

and factual data for future analysis (Nordstrom, 2015). Further, researchers may use a

journal for documenting observations regarding the participants' or notes on the

interview environment, actions, and nonverbal prompts not captured while audio

recording thus supplementing the audio interviews (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I used the

Sony ICD-PX370 digital recording device to record interviews. The voice recorder

application on my iPhone served as a backup recording device. I set-up and tested the

equipment and used the voice recorder application on my iPhone as a backup recording

device. I exported audio recordings to my Mac computer using the dictation feature on

the computer and using the Mac computer transcription application to transcribe

interviews, verbatim. I captured observations regarding the participants' nonverbal cues

data before and during interviews in my observation journal to document nonverbal and

nonauditory data. I used the data captured in my observation journal, along with company

materials and documents, to aid in triangulation and interpretation.

Ranney et al. (2015) and Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, and Manning (2016) argued that noticeable advantages of qualitative data collection techniques are fostering rapport between researchers and participants and helping researchers to understand participants' attitudes, perceptions, and motivations. Accordingly, I endeavored to establish a trusting rapport with each participant to comprehend responses to the interview questions. A disadvantage of the data collection technique involving semistructured interviews includes potential changes in questions and procedures during the research process (Tetnowski, 2015). While disadvantages of qualitative data collection exist, such as the possibility that participants might not be open and honest in their responses (Hershberger & Kavanaugh, 2017), I improved the likelihood of open, honest responses by being transparent, maintaining confidentiality, and projecting a confident, friendly demeanor with the study participants. I followed the interview protocol during all interviews.

Researchers may reach triangulation in a study by obtaining data evidence from sources, including internal and external organizational documents (Fischer & Van de Bovenkamp, 2019). The goal is to have many sources of evidence to support study findings (Sykes et al., 2018). Fahad and Yafooz (2017) suggested the disadvantages of reviewing organizational documents include information that has not been updated due to a company's lack of data management processes. I retrieved documents related to employee retention in the oil and gas industry from the company website to aid in the interpretation of collected data. When participants provided company materials to support responses to interview questions, I verified that the document provided was the current

version available. The goal is to have many sources of evidence to support study findings (Sykes et al., 2018).

During data collection, participants may tell stories during an interview that they see differently later, might deny such stories, and want them removed from the data (Birt et al., 2016; Iivari, 2018). I used member checking to improve the trustworthiness and credibility of the study data. Member checking is useful for obtaining participants' approval for quotations, case studies, or when anonymity cannot be guaranteed, allowing participants to review and finalize data, and serve as coresearchers in the process (Thomas, 2017). I gave my interpretation of participants' answers to interview questions back to the participants and asked participants to verify that my interpretations of their answers were accurate and discussed their findings with them to deepen my understanding of the data.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization technique is categorizing and labeling study data (Annink, 2017; Wolf et al., 2015). The data organization technique for this study included creating a system to track and secure the collected data. I used multiple systems to organize data collected from my research. As recommended by Allen and Wiles (2015) and Stuckey (2015), the identities of all participants should remain confidential via self-selected pseudonyms. I used Microsoft Word to type participants responses and participants observation notes on nonverbal cues. I used alphanumeric codes to protect the identities of the participants. Lahman et al. (2015) suggested using alphanumeric codes to protect participant identities. I assigned each participant an identifying number from 1 to 8,

preceded by the letter EMP (for engineering Manager Participant) or HMP (for hiring

Manager Participant). I ended the participant identifier by assigning a lower-case letter

from *a* to *d* (for each company).

Transcripts must first be prepared from the audio recordings to move from raw

interviews to evidence-based interpretations (Bokhove & Downey, 2018; Fitt, 2015). I

saved the transcription in Microsoft Word files and have planned to store and organize

the data on a password-protected computer and hard drive. I organized the paper data and

plan to store in a locked file cabinet for 5 years as required by Walden University. I plan

to destroy all study data after the 5 years.

Data Analysis

The four types of triangulation are data, investigator, theory, and methodological,

as explained by Marshall and Rossman (2016). Methodological triangulation is using and

associating several data types (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Joslin & Müller, 2016). I used

methodological triangulation to support the data analysis process for case study. I used

multiple data sources to achieve triangulation, including conducting semistructured

interviews, making observations of participants' nonverbal cues, and reviewing company

documents or materials. Marshall and Rossman suggested using multiple sources of data

to achieve triangulation.

Rogers and Carrier (2017) stated an examination of interview data initiates the

data analysis process. The data analysis process includes organizing, reviewing, coding,

and developing themes (Johnston, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yin (2018)

recommended five steps for qualitative data analysis, including (a) preparing and

organizing the data, (b) reducing the data into a manageable set of themes via coding and condensing, (c) reassembling data by representing the data in figures, tables, or discussions, (d) interpreting data, and (e) concluding data by determining finding explanations. I followed Yin's steps in sequential order, beginning with organizing and examining the data from participant interviews, observations, and company documents. I analyzed all data to determine if saturation has occurred. I followed with coding and condensing the audio transcriptions and correlating the coded and condensed data from the observation journal and company materials. I reassembled the data so that the data could be visualized and understood. I interpreted and triangulated data before theorizing and developing explanations.

Müller, Schmiedel, Gorbacheva, and Vom Brocke (2016) and Stuckey (2015) proposed the use of manual coding to identify keywords during data analysis. Ose (2016) suggested the use of Microsoft Excel to assemble qualitative data and identify themes. I manually coded and condensed all the qualifying data, including interviews, observation journal, and company materials, by identifying key words and ideas based on the word use frequency using Microsoft Excel. I manually analyzed data using Microsoft Excel to categorize and cluster key words into groups and sequences so that I could identify emergent themes. I correlated the data with literature and the conceptual framework of job embeddedness theory developed by Mitchell et al. (2001), by recognizing patterns or repeated words. Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015) and Cook, Lee, and Majumder (2016) suggested connecting study data using pattern recognition and literature. I included new studies published since writing this proposal in the primary theme

correlating process and prepared a report with an explanation and summary of study

findings and conclusions.

Reliability and Validity

The rigor of qualitative research is based on the strategies of trustworthiness,

including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Leung, 2015).

The quality of data is determined by reliability and validity in qualitative investigations

(Spiers, Morse, Olson, Mayan, & Barrett, 2018). According to Yin (2018), research

studies should use at least 2 of the 8 strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of

findings, which include (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (b)

triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarification of

researcher bias (reflexivity), (f) member checking, (g) thick descriptions, and (h) external

audits.

Reliability

According to Leung (2015), reliability refers to the consistency of analytical

procedures. I followed the interview protocol when conducting participant interviews and

produced a rich audit trail to ensure consistency of results. I reviewed transcripts of

interviews against the audio recordings for accuracy. The use of themes and coding

during the study data analysis addressed the reliability of my final study. Yin (2018)

suggested using at least 2 of the 8 strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of findings

in research studies. I used triangulation and member checking of data interpretation in my

study. Methodological triangulation ensures the trustworthiness of findings by using

multiple data sources like semistructured interviews, observations regarding participants'

nonverbal cues, and company documents or materials (Denzin, 2017). Marshall and

Rossman (2016) prescribed member checking to allow participants to review interview

data summaries to ensure accuracy and dependability.

Validity

Validity describes the accuracy of the findings (Leung, 2015). Member checking

is a suitable tool for researchers to validate a study and is based on the participants'

contributions (Thomas, 2017). Participants are provided copies of the preliminary

analysis for ensuring agreement with the ideas and sentiments expressed during

interviews to validate member checking (Birt et al., 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I

used member checking to validate the collected data and to improve the trustworthiness

and credibility of the study. I gave participants my interpretation of their responses to

interview questions and ask participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations.

Verification is critical to evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Yin, 2018). I used

member checking to validate the collected data, which improved the trustworthiness and

credibility of the study.

Credibility. The credibility of a study refers to how closely findings align with

the description of phenomena provided by participants (Stewart, Gapp, & Harwood,

2017). Credibility is the accuracy of the study findings and interpretations from the

participants' original data (Morse, 2015). Researchers can employ several strategies to

improve the credibility of qualitative findings, including triangulation, member checking,

structural coherence, peer examination, triangulation, and varied field experience (Morse,

2015). I used member checking and triangulation to ensure the credibility of findings

from the research. I asked participants to review my interpretations of their answers to interview questions to ensure I had captured their ideas with accuracy. I encouraged participants to express thoughts and feelings about the findings.

Transferability. Transferability describes how strongly results from an investigation can transfer to other contexts (Birt et al., 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Morse, 2015). Transferability is the ability to apply research findings and conclusions beyond the study confines to others who did not participate in the study (Hadi & Closs, 2016) by adhering to the data collection and analysis methods as outlined previously in this study. Researchers may employ strategies to improve transferability in qualitative research to acquire validity by providing thick and rich descriptions as suggested by Hadi and Closs (2016). I provided rich descriptions of the research context, findings, and conclusions to progress transferability of my study. I used an interview protocol, triangulation, member checking, and data saturation to support improved transferability of findings and conclusions resulting from this study. I kept a detailed audit trail of all study procedures to ensure validity and transferability.

Confirmability. According to Morse (2015), confirmability describes how data results could be corroborated by other researchers. Confirmability may be improved via study audit trails and following a documented research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) and may prevent researcher bias. Hays, Wood, Dahl, and Kirk-Jenkins (2016) suggested researchers provide data transcripts to participants for review to support the study. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for improving the credibility of study results (Birt et al., 2016). I followed my

documented research process by using the interview protocol for each participant. I improved confirmability using member checking by asking study participants to review transcription data and my interpretation of study findings and conclusions for accuracy. I verified confirmability by ensuring my interpretation of study findings and conclusions corroborated with other researchers. According to Berger (2015), employing strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, and dependability, improves the confirmability of study findings. I adhered to standards of credibility, transferability, and dependability.

Data Saturation. Data saturation describes the point at which no new information emerges from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018). The sample size can determine data saturation in qualitative research (Blaikie, 2018). Collecting adequate data to research the study problem is critical to data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I attained data saturation through the triangulation and analysis of data from various sources, including participant interviews, member checking, observations of participants' nonverbal cues, and company documents or materials. I asked participants the same questions as outlined in my interview protocol (see Appendix) until I reached saturation. If I had not attained saturation after the initial interviews, I would have continued to interview participants from the study until saturation was reached.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement, explained the role of the researcher, participants, and research method and design. I discussed the population and sampling process, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization technique, and how to assure reliability and validity through data saturation. I described

the study implementation plan. In Section 3, I include the presentation of the findings

from the study, applications to professional practice, implications for social change,

recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, reflections, and

conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In Section 3, I provide an overview of the purpose of the study, state the research question, and present the findings. I include applications of my study research to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and reflections. Finally, in the conclusion section, I provide the closing statement for the study.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies that oil and gas company managers use to retain specialized employees. I conducted semistructured, face-to-face interviews to explore the perspectives of eight participants who (a) were a hiring manager or an engineering manager, (b) possessed a management position in an oil and gas company in a metropolitan city in the southern United States, within the last 5 years, (c) had responsibilities associated with employee recruitment and management, and (d) had participated in the development and implementation of successful employee retention policies. Other data sources in my study included observations of participants' nonverbal cues and review of company documents or materials. Three main themes emerged from data analysis of specialized employee retention in the oil and gas industry: leadership engagement improved specialized employee retention, flexibility through work–life balance improved specialized employee retention, and monitoring and assessing retention through research tools and data analysis improved specialized employee retention.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this qualitative multiple case study was:

What strategies do oil and gas company managers employ to retain specialized

employees?

Theme 1: Leadership Engagement Improved Specialized Employee Retention

The first main theme that emerged from my data analysis of the interview

transcripts highlighted how leadership engagement improved specialized employee

retention. The theme of leadership engagement included leader behavior and practices

involving the employee. My data analysis revealed leadership style is a determinant of

the employee staying or leaving the company. From the analysis of the interview data, I

documented three notable leadership engagement strategies associated with specialized

employee retention. All eight Manager Participants communicated their experience of

how these three conspicuous leadership engagement strategies improved specialized

employee retention. The three leadership engagement strategies were making the

employee feel valued and appreciated, communicating effectively with the employee, and

providing opportunities for the employee's professional development.

Feeling valued and appreciated. Making the employee feel valued and

appreciated are leadership engagement strategies that improved specialized employee

retention as articulated by Manager Participants in the interviews. The Manager

Participants agreed that employees are more likely to remain employed at the

organization if employees feel appreciated, valued, included in the company, and

recognized for accomplishments. All Manager Participants noted the strategies that they

use for improving specialized employee retention through leadership engagement make employees feel valued and appreciated. If an employee feels valued by the company, feels their importance is valued, or feels their contributions are valued, the employee is more likely to stay employed. Some Manager Participants (i.e., 3HMPb, 4HMPb, 6EMPa, 7HMPd, and 8EMPb) described effective leadership engagement strategies as providing encouragement for growth or showing employee appreciation through gift cards, bonuses, or exposure to leadership opportunities. The Manager Participants' retention strategy approach of providing encouragement or showing appreciation to employees resulted in improved retention for specialized employees as described in the data transcripts.

Several Manager Participants (i.e., 3HMPb, 4HMPb, 6EMPa, 7HMPd, and 8EMPb) described how recognition programs are effective in showing specialized employees that they are valued and appreciated, which contributes to successful retention. One Manager Participant (i.e., 4HMPb) suggested, "each [recognition] situation is different and may be unique, but having a consistent approach is important." One example of a manager's retention strategy to show appreciation for specialized employees is to give them awards based on a point system with a monetary value. Another Manager Participant (i.e., 1EMPa) stated, "they [employees] leave because of not being appreciated" and provided an example of giving specialized employees handwritten appreciation notes with a gift card to show appreciation. Bhowal and Saini (2019) found that employees will stay at companies when hard work is recognized and

appreciated. Rebull (2019) noted employees are inclined to stay longer at a company if appreciation is shown by leaders.

One Manager Participant (i.e., 5HMPb) specified that including the employee in the company plan encourages employees to feel valued and embedded in the company. Another Manager Participant (i.e., 1EMPa) explained, "if an employee feels valued by the company, they're going to want to stay." A third Manager Participant (i.e., 2HMPb) stated, "when people feel comfortable and valued and understand their role, how the role adds value, and how they add value, I think that they are more likely to stay with a line manager and with a company." Manager Participant 2HMPb also provided a detailed example of facilitating continuous conversations with specialized employees to emphasize how their expertise adds value to the company. Manager Participant 5HMPc supported value as a key aspect of retaining specialized employees by communicating to employees the importance of their work being significant and recognized, specifically saying, "one of the most important things I think for any employee is to know they're working on the projects that are important to the company."

Many Manager Participants (i.e., 3HMPb, 5HMPc, 6EMPa, and 8EMPb) suggested another retention strategy to make specialized employees feel valued consists of identifying what the employee desires as incentives, then aligning those incentives with company culture to show value and appreciation. Armstrong-Stassen, Cameron, Rajacich, and Freeman (2014) inferred experienced professionals will stay at companies that create a sense of belonging by making the employees feel that their contributions are valued. Researchers have posited to retain strong performing employees, leaders must

understand the importance of valuing and respecting the employees (Yu, Yen, Barnes, & Huang, 2019).

After reviewing company documents located on the company website, I was able to understand the significance of leadership engagement strategies in making specialized employees feel appreciated and valued. Specifically, I reviewed company sustainability reports of Manager Participants and observed that most Manager Participants' companies had processes in place that make the employee feel valued and appreciated. All four Manager Participant companies (i.e., a, b, c, and d) have processes in place for treating employees respectfully and ensuring processes are transparent. Two of the 4 Manager Participants' companies (i.e., a and b) encourage employees to publicly recognize their colleagues to demonstrate employee appreciation and value. Finally, 3 of the 4 Manager Participants' companies (i.e., a, b, and c) have leadership lead employee resource networks as a resource for attracting and retaining talent.

Study participant observations from the journal that I used to record information about the setting, time flow, and participant behavior during the interviews documented passion exhibited by all Manager Participants. Joy (2018) inferred that active leadership engagement plays a key role when specialized employees are deciding whether to stay with a company or leave. Additionally, Okafor, Ede, Kinuthia, and Satcher (2018) emphasized that leadership engagement is crucial for improving retention programs. It was evident that leadership engagement strategies that recognize employee value and appreciation align with existing literature and knowledge on the topic of specialized employee retention.

Communication. Managers using effective communication techniques was another leadership engagement strategy that Manager Participants articulated improved specialized employee retention. All Manager Participants agreed communication with specialized employees improved retention rates. Most Manager Participants expressed effective communication strategies contributing to the improvement of specialized employee retention included conversations between managers and employees and listening to the employees' wants and needs. Manager Participants described many communication techniques that are used to improve specialized employee retention, such as reducing employee frustration through communication (i.e., 2HMPb and 8EMPb); listening and talking to employees by having one-on-one conversations to understand how they are doing both personally and professionally (i.e., 1EMPa, 3HMPb, 7HMPd, and 8EMPb); constant and consistent messaging (i.e., 2HMPb, 4HMPb, 5HMPc, and 6EMPa); and connecting with employees to build trust (i.e., 1EMPa, 3HMPb, 4HMPb, 7HMPd, and 8EMPb).

Manager Participants used specific communication-related retention strategy techniques. For example, "getting to know individuals" (8EMPb) and "really listening" (1EMPa) show that "we [managers] do care for them [employees]" (7HMPd). One Manager Participant (i.e., 4HMPb) suggested using communication messaging, such as "we value your contribution and we know that you have skills and we want to retain you," when speaking to specialized employees to improve specialized employee retention. Another Manager Participant (i.e., 1EMPa) used communication techniques, such as talking to specialized employees "about what's going on in their world, both

personally and professionally" to "building trust with those individuals" and "following

through on promises and commitments" to improve specialized employee retention.

Meng and Berger (2019) posited that the communication style of a manager correlates

with strong leadership in practice and aids in increasing leadership engagement and trust.

Communication is the key in retaining specialized employees in the oil and gas industry

because of safety and productivity (Neal & Neal, 2019).

After reviewing company documents located on the company website, I was able

to understand the significance of leadership engagement strategies through effective

communication. Specifically, I reviewed the company websites of Manager

Participants and observed that most Manager Participants' companies had robust

communication efforts to retain specialized employees. Three of the 4 Manager

Participants' companies (i.e., a, b, and c) hold leadership town halls, forums, or meetings

to engage with employees on a wide variety of topics. Also, all Manager Participants'

company websites included information on the processes used to make time to listen to

employees and have open and honest conversations, including having one-to-one

meetings with managers.

I used study participant observations from my journal to record information about

the setting, time flow, and participant behavior during the interviews. In the journal, I

noted certain Manager Participants (i.e., 1EMPa, 3HMPb, 4HMPb, and 7HMPd)

repeating and reinforcing interview responses related to communication methods used on

specialized employees to improve retention rates. The Manager Participants' technique of

repeating and reinforcing interview responses related to communication methods used to

ensure that specialized employees feel connected suggested how important

communication is in terms of employee retention. Rony and Suki (2017) posited that

managers using effective communication strategies with employees increase job

satisfaction among oil and gas industry employees. The more an employee feels

connected to the company through the line manager and communications, the more likely

the employee will stay (Bauer & Lim, 2019).

Professional development. All Manager Participants shared that providing

professional development opportunities improved specialized employee retention. A

common factor identified in my data resulting in employee turnover was a lack of growth

within the industry and having insufficient opportunities to move forward in their current

roles. This factor was discovered by Manager Participants from reviewing employee data,

such as exit interviews. Manager Participant 2HMPb described an employee retention

strategy to "include having the work experience/opportunity or the environment in which

people work in, is more important to the employee."

All Manager Participants deduced specialized employees will remain satisfied,

embedded in the company culture, and thus retained when they are provided

opportunities for professional growth and development. Examples of employee

development identified in the interviews included the company providing professional

training (1EMPa, 2HMPb, 6EMPa, and 7HMPd), having developmental conversations

with leadership/managers (1EMPa, 2HMPb, 3HMPb, 4HMPb, 5HMPc, 6EMPa, and

8EMPb), and the company providing developmental programs as well as educational

reimbursement programs (1EMPa, 4HMPb, 6EMPa, 7HMPd, and 8EMPb). One Manager

Participant (1EMPa) provided an example of how the company provides employees with opportunities for professional development by "giving two weeks per employee of training per year, which can be e-learning, or it could be live courses." Other examples of professional development strategies were provided in the Manager Participant interviews, such as the specialized rotation and development programs (6EMPa) and educational reimbursement programs for advanced degrees (5HMPc, 6EMPa, and 7HMPd). Researchers have confirmed that managers face a vital challenge in retaining specialized employees, and that managers should support professional development experiences as part of a pragmatic employee retention strategy (Nafeesa Begum & Brindha, 2019). Taib, Krauss, and Ismail (2019) posited professional development programs can motivate specialized employees to stay and continue to grow within the company.

After reviewing company documents located on company websites, I was able to understand the significance of leadership engagement strategies through professional development. Specifically, I reviewed company sustainability reports of Manager Participants, and I observed that all Manager Participant companies have employee professional development programs. Examples of employee development programs that I found on company websites include online and classroom-based courses and resources, a wide range of on-the-job learning, mentoring programs, and performance discussions with annual developmental objectives.

Study participant observations from my observation journal used to record information about the setting, time flow, and participant behavior during the interviews documented hesitation exhibited by three Manager Participants (2HMPb, 6EMPa, and

7HMPd) when referencing professional development. The hesitation in the Manager Participant responses was followed by rich, detailed information on professional development. This observed hesitation aligns with the literature noting that pausing and hesitation in interview question responses allows interviewees time to think about the topic and provide their own interpretation of ways to solve the challenges discussed (Råheim et al., 2016).

Correlation to the literature. The findings from my data regarding retention strategies for specialized employee retention are robustly supported by existing literature. One of the study themes that aligned with the existing literature was leadership engagement as a strategy used to retain specialized employees. Leadership engagement strategy is a strong predictor of improved specialized employee retention, as observed by Popli and Rizvi (2016) and Hayward et al. (2016).

The retention of the employees is strongly linked with the theme of leadership engagement through communication and professional development. This finding from my study extends existing research, in which communication plays an important role in improving the relationship between managers and employees, thus improving employee retention (Raufflet, Cruz, & Bres, 2014). Popli and Rizvi (2016) summarized retention methods as including productive orientation, informative training sessions, motivation, encouraging leadership, fostering employee engagement, and implementing employee feedback. These methods influence employee retention by impacting employee satisfaction, growth opportunity, commitment, leadership style, working conditions, flexibility, and security (Obeidat, Al-Khateeb, Abdallah, & Masa'deh, 2019). It is evident

that the findings from my study appropriately correlate to the existing literature since my study found that leadership engagement strategies, including making the employee feel valued and appreciated, effective communication with the employee, and providing opportunities for the employee's professional development, are important factors and effective strategies in employee retention.

Correlation to the conceptual framework. The leadership engagement theme from my research correlates with job embeddedness theory as communicated by Manager Participants who assess an employee's fit and link with an organization based on the employee's personal values and career goals (Holtom et al., 2006). Embedded employees fit in the company and do not have the intention to leave their employment (Obeidat et al., 2019). An employee's attitude toward the company and the degree to which the employee is embedded can determine if the employee stays or leaves a company (Boswell et al., 2017). As posited by Chhabra (2015), leadership engagement strategies provide managers and employees with the opportunity to develop trust and improve employee retention, resulting in employee fit within the company and job embeddedness.

Matching employee interests with the development of desired skills is a key factor associated with improved specialized employee retention. Professional development creates links and fit between the employees and the company that make them to stay longer with the company (Taib et al., 2019). Employees who are thinking of quitting their jobs can be enticed to stay if they are offered professional development opportunities (Mitchell et al., 2001). Professional development is the connection that links and fit the

employees and the company, resulting in improved employee retention (Taib et al., 2019).

Theme 2: Flexibility Through Work–Life Balance Improved Specialized Employee Retention

Employees experiencing job flexibility through work–life balance are inclined to be satisfied at work. "Leaders should give employees flexibility and that may help with retention," as noted by Manager Participant 3HMPb, who further stated that "employees do not have to be at the office every day from 9 to 5, bankers' hours." Manager Participants introduced flexibility through work–life balance programs as part of a successful specialized employee retention strategy.

Six Manager Participants (1EMPa, 2HMPb, 3HMPb, 5EMPc, 6EMPa, and 8EMPb) agreed that offering employees flexible hours and work–life balance improve retention. The six Manager Participants detailed that flexible work hours offered to specialized employees encouraged work–life balance and helped to retain specialized employees. Manager Participants 2HMPb, 3HMPb, 5EMPc, and 6EMPa stressed that in order to remain competitive, companies must keep up with the times and include flexible retention strategies through work–life balance programs. One Manager Participant (6EMPa) stated, "we're seeing a bigger driver for being competitive on flexible work schedules, and how that pertains to work–life balance" but added, "if an employee's not happy with the work that they're doing, I think that's what leads employees to start to look elsewhere."

Seven out of 8 Manager Participants (1EMPa, 2HMPb, 3HMPb, 4HMPb, 5EMPc, 6EMPa, and 8EMPb) argued in favor of flexible work experiences and for a positive, appreciative environment in the organization. Another Manager Participant (1EMPa) described an effective retention strategy as, "a very flexible work schedule" that includes "2 weeks of vacation when they start, [then] they can purchase an additional 2 weeks of vacation every year." Also, Manager Participant 1EMPa defined a flexible work experience as "the 9/80 program where they get every other Friday off, so they work 80 hours in 9 days [which is] an additional 26 days a year, it's long weekends" as an effective retention strategy resulting in "employees [who] feel, you know, that's a strategy, that's a place that they want to work." One Manager Participant (6EMPa) supported the flexible work schedule retention strategy based on experience as "talking with employees that have left our company," stating "a lot of times they've [employees] said that when they were looking for another company or considering other companies, they were making sure that other companies had 9/80 or 4/10 schedules." Other Manager Participants (4HMPb, 5EMPc) supported the 9/80 work schedule as a successful specialized employee retention strategy.

Manager Participants suggested other specialized employee retention strategies that offer flexibility through work–life balance included encouraging employees to give back to society through volunteerism in the local communities. One Manager Participant (6EMPa) explained that this program "enhanced our number of volunteer days where people get paid to take time off to volunteer for activities [that] they like doing." Another retention strategy used by Manager Participants 6EMPa and 8EMPb offers flexibility

through work–life balance for specialized employees by expanding the parental leave days for males and females, resulting in an enhanced employee benefit program. Manager Participant 3HMPb presented a specialized employee retention strategy that fosters work–life balance by allowing employees to wear casual clothing like jeans to work to create a relaxed work environment. Manager Participants 2HMPb, 3HMPb, and 8EMPb offered another specialized employee retention strategy that provides flexibility through work–life balance by allowing employees to work from home or leaving work early.

After reviewing company documents located on the company websites, I was able to understand the significance of flexibility through work–life balance on specialized employee retention. Specifically, I examined the company websites of Manager Participants, and I observed that all Manager Participant companies have some flexibility through work–life balance programs. Examples of work–life balance programs include flexible working practices that encourage employees to take part in community projects, employee interest networks, and flexible working schedules.

Study participant observations from my observation journal used to record information about the setting, time flow, and participant behavior during the interviews documented long responses, passion in Manager Participant voices, and hand movements when describing successful retention strategies related to flexibility through work–life balance. Niebuhr and Michalsky (2019) and Kratzke (2018) professed that the voice was a strong indicator of the opinions and actions of individuals. These findings align with the notes in my observation journal in which the enthusiastic voice of Manager Participants

correlated with their stated position on the importance of flexibility through work–life balance in retaining specialized employees.

Correlation to the literature. Recognizing flexibility through work–life balance encourages specialized employees to remain in the company for long periods of time. Harhara et al. (2015) attributed the issues of job turnover in the oil and gas sector to the environment, culture, flexibility, and work–life balance resulting in high turnover and poor retention strategies. Timms et al. (2015) and Cucina et al. (2018) posited work–life balance contributes significantly to the recruitment and retention of specialized and high-profile employees. Companies that encourage their employees' social responsibilities by giving them flexibility to perform roles in their communities are in a better position to attract and retain employees (Obeidat et al., 2019). Employees that are satisfied with work–life balance are likely to be retained (Giauque, Anderfuhren-Biget, & Varone, 2019).

Correlation to the conceptual framework. Holtom et al. (2006) posited job embeddedness theory allows for the development of retention strategies that enable employees to fit and embed in an organization, thus improving specialized employee retention. Having family in close physical proximity can promote job embeddedness via frequent contact, emotional intensity, and increases interdependency (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). The flexibility though work–life balance theme correlates with job embeddedness theory as proposed by Holtom et al. (2006), in that employees who trust in the company feel connected to the company culture and embed in their jobs, and are therefore likely to

be retained. Managers can use the job embeddedness theory to reduce employee turnover by improving employee fit and link to the company as stated by Mitchell et al. (2001).

Theme 3: Monitoring and Assessing Retention Through Research Tools and Data Analysis

Data monitoring may be one of the keys to assessing job turnover patterns among specialized employees. All eight Manager Participants emphasized the need for collecting, analyzing, and monitoring data to improve retention. Four Manager Participants (1EMPa, 2HMPb, 6EMPa, and 8EMPb) suggested performing exit interviews of specialized employees at the time of leaving the organization to better understand the reasons for leaving. Seven out of 8 Manager Participants (1EMPa, 2HMPb, 3HMPb, 5EMPc, 6EMPa, 7HMPd, and 8EMPb) concluded that employee research and surveying specialized employees are important for learning more about successful employee retention. They emphasized that managers should conduct surveys to understand employees' feelings about the company. One Manager Participant (2HMPb) underscored how important employee feedback is by noting that, in addition to exit surveys and interviews, "we also have group-wide anonymous surveys, the poll surveys, that rate people's satisfaction." The Manager Participant continued, "feedback that we solicit, whether that be on anonymous surveys [or in exit surveys and interviews] is the feedback we get from employees themselves." Another Manager Participant (4HMPb) affirmed the relevance of retention data by asserting that, "monitoring the effectiveness of retention can be done by looking at data and see[ing] what was effective, [and] by looking at how many specialized employees stayed and how many left."

Manager Participants review data for the causes of job turnover and strive to develop successful solutions and strategies to retain specialized employees.

Although managers value employee feedback, I discovered that assessment tools are not as quantifiable as they can be. My data revealed that some of these assessment tools, while useful in understanding retention, are not quantifiable. Feedback may be anecdotal or discussed in meetings with employees, and therefore is not verifiable. Employee surveys may be the best way to collect quantifiable evidence for analysis.

Employee retention strategies can be assessed in the larger context of retention data collected within a set interval of time. Six respondents, including 3HMPb, 4HMPb, 5EMPc, 6EMPa, 7HMPd, and 8EMPb, concluded that retention data and analysis are useful for estimating specialized employee retention, and policies should be analyzed in terms of promotion intervals. Manager Participant 4HMPb commented on the retention data by asserting, "monitoring the effectiveness of retention can be done by looking at data and see what was effective; by looking at how many specialized employees stayed and how many left." In contrast, many Manager Participants (3HMPb, 5EMPc, and 6EMPa) suggested the immense challenge for data analysis is that the data set is large, thus requiring leaders to look at data in different ways to see which method is most effective. "Leaders must draw conclusions on employee retention data to create strategies," as acknowledged by Manager Participant 4HMPb.

Assessment of retention data as professed by all eight respondents is the preferred method to monitor and gain evidence-based insights about the job retention rate of specialized employees in the company. Assessment methods used to assess retention data

included assessment tools, key performance indicators, career development plans, training plans, and succession plans. For example, Manager Participant 1EMPa stated that "we monitor ... we have these career development plans, where the employee talks about their jobs, and we're giving feedback to the employees on what we see as their strengths and weaknesses." Managers should follow up and monitor the outcome of the career development plan discussions to develop employee trust and include lessons learned in the company retention strategy.

After reviewing company documents located on the company websites, I was able to understand the significance of monitoring and assessing retention strategies through research tools and data analysis on employee retention. Specifically, I reviewed company sustainability reports of Manager Participants, and I determined that 3 of the 4 (a, b, and c) Manager Participant companies have employee retention monitoring and assessing programs. Examples of monitoring and assessment include frequent employee surveys, exit interviews, and anonymous ways to receive employee feedback.

Study participant observations from my observation journal were used to record information about the setting, time flow, and participant behavior during the interviews documented four Manager Participants (3HMPb, 4HMPb, 5EMPc, and 6EMPa) participants smiling when discussing the employee retention data analysis process due to the large data sets. Smiling gestures exhibit positive energy, motivation, and reinforcement (Gueguen, Eyssartier, & Meineri, 2016), suggesting that these Manager Participants were enthusiastic about gathering and assessing data.

Correlation to the literature. My findings correlate to existing knowledge regarding retention research methods to improve specialized employee retention. Anis, Nasir, and Safwan, (2011) examined employee retention and development, and suggested that the development of employees with specific skills may increase employee retention rates. Barker and Jones (2013) proposed that employee behavior and employee retention patterns in the oil and gas industry are linked to the culture and environment of the company and can be improved through employee feedback. Analyzing and assessing employee retention data through exit interviews, surveys, and key performance indicators are successful specialized employee retention strategies (Boštjančič & Slana, 2018).

Correlation to the conceptual framework. According to Holtom et al. (2006), job embeddedness theory, the fit between an employee's needs and company requirements, can be assessed through data collection tools, including employee surveys and retention data. Holtom et al. suggested gathering exit interview data to improve future retention. Finally, Allen and Shanock (2013) posited company employee data collection on specific retention drivers could reduce turnover rates and improve retention.

Applications to Professional Practice

Employers should recognize their human capital is a significant resource and as a competitive advantage for their organizations (Alias, Nokman, Ismail, Koe, & Othman, 2018). The higher the employee retention level, the lower the replacement costs and most importantly this will sustain the operations and production of a company (Alias et al., 2018). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the successful strategies that oil and gas company managers use to retain specialized employees. I

identified three themes that influenced specialized employee retention in the oil and gas industry. My study results revealed the factors managers should use for developing successful specialized employee retention strategies, including leadership engagement that encourages employees to feel valued and appreciated, effective communication with the employee, and providing opportunities for the employee's professional development; providing employee flexibility though cultivating work–life balance; and monitoring and assessing retention strategies through research tools and data analysis. Since it takes years for specialized employees to become experts, it is very important to keep the highly talented employees who possess unique skills and knowledge (Taib et al., 2019).

The participants in this study, also, posited that developing successful specialized employee retention strategies to include leadership engagement through employees feeling valued and appreciated, effective communication with the employee, and providing opportunities for the employee's professional development improved the retention of specialized employees. Leadership engagement can be used to predict employee retention (Popli & Rizvi, 2016). Managers should engage with specialized employees through effective communications and by providing development opportunities in recognition of their unique talents to improve retention.

The participants in this study posited that providing employee flexibility though cultivating work–life balance improved the retention of specialized employees. Flexibility and listening to the employees are factors that reduce the turnover rate of a company (Sypniewska, 2014) resulting in improved specialized employee retention.

Managers should allow specialized employees flexibility resulting in work–life balance to improve retention.

Finally, the participants in this study posited that monitoring and assessing retention strategies through research tools and data analysis improved the retention of specialized employees. Leaders can analyze and assess employee exit interviews and employee survey data as successful employee retention strategies (Boštjančič & Slana, 2018). Managers should review and analyze employee survey and exit interview data to understand why employees quit a company to improve employee retention.

According to the research findings of my study, the retention of specialized employees can be achieved if my study observations and conclusions are mobilized and employed. Based on this study, managers can use leadership engagement through employees feeling valued and appreciated, effective communication with the employee, and employee professional development; providing employee flexibility though cultivating work–life balance; and monitoring and assessing retention strategies through research tools and data analysis as successful retention strategies to retain specialized employees and implement them as professional practice. My study findings can inform oil and gas industry policies, frameworks, and strategies that positively contribute to successful employee retention for specialized employees.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study hold many implications for social change, including potential change for individuals, communities, and institutions. Existing literature shows that the identification of effective retention strategies for company managers could result

in positive social change by increasing local job opportunities, reducing employee turnover, reducing company turnover costs, and reducing the associated costs of replacement hiring (Newell & Raimi, 2018). These outcomes may be possible if the findings of this study are shared among leaders in oil and gas or similar industries. If specialized employees remain at the organization instead of leaving the industry, leaders may improve promotion efforts from within the oil and gas industry, reduce a metropolitan city in the southern United States area's unemployment rates, and improve local job economies. Wasilowski (2018) reasoned that high turnover rates in companies result in reduced economic growth because increases in the unemployment rate in communities leads to decreased tax collections. Implementing successful, evidence-based employee retention strategies can counter the negative effect of reduced economic growth due to high turnover rates.

Retention of specialized employees within oil and gas companies is vital for successful growth and financial stability. The implications for social change that may emerge from the findings of this study include leadership awareness to improve specialized employee retention resulting in employees being content and staying with the company, thus reducing the unemployment rate within a community. Batt and Colvin (2011) deduced that employee retention can reduce the unemployment rate within a community. Another implication for social change in the community includes improved financial stability in the community by improving specialized employee retention in companies. Financial stability could result in increased employment and increased tax income to the community (Van Looy & Shafagatova, 2016). The successful employee

retention strategies gleaned from this study can be shared with leadership in the oil and gas industries to improve employee retention strategies resulting in employees feeling valued and appreciated so that they may opt to stay at the company, thus contributing to positive change in local communities.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the findings from this study, I recommend that managers of oil and gas companies learn from these evidence-based practices and consider implementing such retention strategies to improve the retention rates of specialized employees, or to review and revise existing retention strategies for specialized employees. My study findings can inform an organization's current retention strategies. Using evidence-based findings to inform existing practices is a reliable and effective method to improve business practices (Schuler, 2015). I recommend that current and future managers review these findings to understand the importance of how leadership engagement strategies, flexibility through work–life balance, and assessing and analyzing employee data improves specialized employee retention. I recommend that oil and gas managers develop and begin training to implement successful employee retention strategies by attending conferences on employee retention, updating and implementing employee retention policies, and executing managerial training on employee retention. Managers implementing retention strategies for experienced employees reduce company expenses (Akhtar, Humphreys, & Furnham, 2015). I intend to share the findings of this study with the participating managers by publishing the study and by writing a book on the effectiveness and implementation of retention strategies.

Recommendations for Further Research

The information in this study contributes to the literature available on strategies for improving specialized employee retention. One limitation of my study was the small sample size. A recommendation for further research would be to include employees as participants to increase the sample size. A larger sample size to include employees spread out over a broader geographical location would be useful for discovering successful retention strategies. The geographical areas could include other cities in the southern United States or other states, which could uncover evidence that the emerging themes in this study may be universal. While the qualitative approach used in this study constituted an appropriate methodology for this research, combining qualitative with quantitative methods could address the sample size limitation. In addition to working with a larger participant size, the quantitative method could include collecting more specific data, such as demographics and chart-rating scales. Another limitation was that research findings were limited to oil and gas companies. A recommendation for further research would be to include participants working in other industries, which could potentially provide different data. Finally, several nonwork factors that influence employee retention, such as personal finances or family relationships, were beyond the scope of this current research study. A recommendation for further research would be to include and examine nonwork factors that influence employee retention, which could result in additional evidence-based retention strategies for specialized employees.

Reflections

Completing the doctoral study process was humbling, challenging, and fulfilling in many ways. The challenge was working full time, studying full time, being a mother full time, and being a wife full time. The fulfillment I found was in keeping everything together through the power of prayer. The humility I experienced was from receiving feedback, developing the perseverance to correct and understand each phase of learning, and continuing to conquer the next mountains as they came into view.

The doctoral study process enabled me to understand how to use open-ended questions in interviews and how to engage in active listening without responding during interviews. I was able to reach data saturation by encouraging the participants to share information and perspectives with few restrictions, and I was able to correlate the collected data to existing literature. The literature review helped me expand my knowledge on employee retention strategies and establish a deeper understanding on this topic, and how my study is relevant and useful to this field. Further, the literature review helped me curtail researcher bias by minimizing preconceived ideas and perceptions on retention strategies for specialized employees. I interviewed study participants that I had not previously met, and I used member checking to minimize researcher bias. The personal interview responses from the hiring and engineering managers in this study helped to shift my bias because this was objective data collected face-to-face. Finally, the findings from my study revealed successful retention strategies that could be used in the oil and gas industry, as well as unsuccessful practices that may lead to employee turnover. I feel satisfied with my study process and the fact that the findings of this

research can be mobilized for professional practice, social change, and actions for improving business practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study presents several successful retention strategies in the findings, which may be apt and essential in helping companies to retain specialized employees and reduce turnover rates. Managers face the challenge of retaining specialized employees (Nafeesa Begum & Brindha, 2019). Employers should recognize their human capital is a significant resource and contributes to the competitive advantage of their organizations (Alias et al., 2018). The higher the employee retention level, the lower the replacement costs, which aids in sustaining the operations and production of a company (Alias et al., 2018).

Retention strategies are a powerful recruitment tool (Nafeesa Begum & Brindha, 2019). The strategies identified in my study were successful and made a significant difference to the oil companies presented in terms of the retention of specialized employees in a metropolitan city in the southern United States area. Strategies that improved specialized employee retention include leadership engagement through making the employee feel valued and appreciated, effective communication with the employee, and providing opportunities for the employee's professional development; flexibility through work–life balance; and monitoring and assessing retention strategies through research tools and data analysis. Managers may be successful in the retention of specialized employees in oil and gas companies if these strategies are implemented. The employee retention strategies resulting from this study could result in positive social

implications that improve the company's financial stability by reducing the

unemployment rate within a community. These findings can inform industry policies,

existing retention strategies, and leadership practices in efforts to improve employee

retention and reduce employee turnover in the oil and gas industry.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date: _____ **Location:** _____
Interviewer: _____ **Participant:** _____

Process:
☐ Introduction.
☐ Explain the interview protocol and purpose of the study to the participant.
☐ Obtain participant signature of the consent document to ensure confidentiality.
☐ Set up and test recording device and back up recording device.
☐ Assign participant code in observation journal; write code at the top of the sheet.
☐ Observe non-verbal ques.
☐ Write observations in a journal.
☐ Ask interview questions.
☐ Ask follow-up or probing questions to obtain more detailed responses, as needed.

Opening script: Thank you for your time to participate in this interview. Please confirm that I have your approval to record the interview and to take notes, as discussed. I will ask seven questions along with follow up questions based on the answers that you provide. All question will be based on strategies you employ to retain specialized employees. Shall we get started?

Interview questions:
1. What strategies do you employ to retain specialized employees?
2. What specific strategies do you employ to retain specialized employees?
3. What strategies do you find worked best to retain specialized employees?
4. What strategies, in your opinion, did not work to retain specialized employees?
5. How do you monitor, update, or modify specialized employee retention strategies?
6. How did you assess the effectiveness of the strategies for retaining specialized employees?
7. What other information would you like to share regarding strategies that contribute to the successful retention of specialized employees?

Wrap up interview script:
Thank you for your time and candid answers to the questions.

Schedule follow-up member checking interview script:
I would like to schedule a follow up meeting or telephone discussion with you to verify, check and confirm that I have accurately captured all the answers you provided to the questions asked. When is a convenient time to follow up?