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Strategies for Retaining Life Insurance Sales Agents

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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MBAF, Ottawa University, 2012

BSBAF, Ottawa University, 2009

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

The total number of life insurance sales agents has decreased from 535,000 in 1990 to 323,700 in 2014, averaging a total of 8,829 life insurance sales agents leaving the life insurance industry annually. Effective retention strategies of life insurance sales agents may provide a sustainable workforce in the life insurance industry. Guided by Ambler and Barrow's employer branding theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies branch managers used to retain life insurance sales agents. The 6 participants in the study implemented effective retention strategies to retain life insurance sales agents within 2 life insurance organizations. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with the participants and artifacts. A descriptive data analysis was used to analyze the data. Three primary themes emerged: organizational brand marketing, compensation and benefits, and psychological benefits. The implications for positive social change include the potential for an increase in the retention of life insurance sales agents, which could increase the total number of people employed and could potentially contribute to the economic well-being of the community.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate my study to my parents and to my wife, who have instilled in me the value of hard work and integrity as well as educated me on always having the courage to pursue all that we want in life and to believe that all is possible. To my parents, thank you for believing in me and for teaching me about family and having a hard work ethic. I thank you for mentoring me and for leading by example on the embodiment of hard work and determination.

To my loving wife, Maria Dolores, thank you for being my best friend and my loving partner. You are terrific, and it is through your strength and daily encouragement that I was able to complete this journey. Thank you for instilling in me and teaching me the value of faith in God, attention to detail, and organization.

Acknowledgments

At the forefront of my journey stood God. I thank God for providing me the strength to persevere for me to complete my mission. My faith in God was my guiding light that made this journey possible; without this faith, this journey would never have been possible.

My family and friends were an important pillar that stood by me and always uplifted me and encouraged me at my lowest points. There were many times when I could not be a part of special family moments, and I thank you for your understanding and acceptance. I especially want to thank my wife, Maria Dolores, for your continual words of wisdom, your patience, your smiles, and, most of all, your unconditional LOVE.

I want to thank my outstanding Chair, Dr. Janie Mayo. I admire your tireless work with students; you always make time to answer all of our needs. Thank you for your relentless drive to helping students complete their journeys. I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Beverly Muhammad and Dr. Janet Booker, for the feedback and commitment they showed in improving my quality of work. Dr. Mayo, Dr. Muhammad, and Dr. Booker, I will always be grateful for the valuable lessons I learned from you and for making this journey possible for me.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

A life insurance company must sustain growth to remain profitable. The retention of life insurance sales agents has become a challenge in the life insurance industry (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2018). A key component for life insurance companies to maintain growth and remain profitable is the management of life insurance sales agents' retention (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Some life insurance companies have effectively overcome retention challenges, as evidenced by their growth and number of long-term life insurance agents. The concepts of employer branding theories may align with the research continuum of strategic retention strategies of life insurance sales agents. Life insurance companies that are less successful may adopt the retention strategies identified by branch agency managers who have used them successfully.

Background of the Problem

In 2014, there were 830 life insurance companies in the United States, while the number had peaked in 1988 at 2,343 (American Council of Life Insurers, (2015). Government data identified that the number of life insurance sales agents totaled 323,700 at the end of 2014, declining from a total of 535,600 in 1990 BLS (2018). Organizations have experienced setbacks when their employees have preferred other options as better places to work for (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Tanwar and Prasad (2016) stated that the loss of experienced and skilled employees to a competitor brings severe consequences; these include the demoralization of the current workforce and reduced productivity. One of the significant impacts on an organization is the loss of intellectual and human capital (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

Approximately 18,580 life insurance sales agents will need to be replaced annually from the total projected employment because of agents leaving the industry and the projected growth rate between 2014 and 2024 (BLS, 2018). Joshi, Farooquie, and Chawla (2016) founded that life insurance companies face two principle challenges: the struggle to retain their customer base and the struggle for knowledge loss resulting from employee turnover. Anbumathi and Sivasubramanian (2016) argued that knowledge is the new capital, and for knowledge to be valuable, it needs to be accessible, communicated, and enhanced. Knowledge needs to be managed; knowledge management (KM) is defined as the organized, systematic process of selecting, generating, distilling, disseminating, and deploying knowledge to create value that enables organizations to achieve a competitive advantage in its marketplace chosen (Anbumathi & Sivasubramanian, 2016). In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored the strategies life insurance branch agency managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Problem Statement

The total number of life insurance sales agents has decreased from 535,000 in 1990 to 323,700 in 2014, averaging a total of 8,829 life insurance sales agents leaving the life insurance industry annually (BLS, 2018). Factoring in the number of life insurance sales agents leaving the life insurance industry and the projected growth rate from 2014 to 2024, the estimated number of life insurance sales agents to be replaced annually is 18,580 (BLS, 2018). The general business problem was that some life insurance agencies are unable to retain a sufficient number of life insurance sales agents to sustain full

employment in the life insurance industry. The specific business problem was that some life insurance agency managers lack retention strategies to retain life insurance sales agents.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies life insurance branch agency managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participants in this study were six life insurance branch agency managers from two life insurance agencies who had applied successful agent retention strategies in a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. The findings indicated branch agency managers might be able to promote and increase the motivation of life insurance sales agents and improve work performance for successful retention. The data collected indicated a possible positive social impact on the life insurance industry by providing branch agency managers motivational strategies to increase their employees' work performance and managerial strategies for their retention challenges. Using the results of this study, I also identified how life insurance agents might be able to afford life insurance solutions to consumers by expanding into new product and service offerings. The implications for positive social change included an increase in the retention of life insurance sales agents, which could increase the total number of people employed, which may contribute to the economic well-being in the community and region. An additional possible positive social change implication would be educating new life insurance prospects on how beneficial new products and services might be for them and how these products and services address their life insurance needs.

Nature of the Study

McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) stated that in quantitative research, researchers are required to collect and use objective numerical data to develop hypotheses. I did not develop hypotheses in this study and only gathered nonnumerical data; therefore, quantitative research was not appropriate for this study. Through mixed-method research, researchers are required to use the application of hypotheses and numerical data (McKim, 2015). I did not apply hypotheses or use numerical data; therefore, a mixed-method approach was not appropriate for this study. In qualitative research, researchers use a systematic, in-depth, holistic exploration of the phenomenon in natural settings with participants' voices and from their lived experiences (Leko, 2014). Case study research scientifically explores the real-life phenomenon in depth and within its environmental context (Ridder, 2017). A qualitative multiple case study was most suitable for this study because it enabled me to explore the strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Biography, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study are possible qualitative research designs (Awasthy, 2015). Biography, ethnography, and phenomenology were not appropriate for this study. In a biographical study, a particular person or entity is studied (Awasthy, 2015). In this study, I did not study a specific person or entity. Ethnography is a type of study where the researcher studies groups of peoples' cultures and spends a significant amount of time living with the people under investigation (Awasthy, 2015). I did not study peoples' cultures. Researchers study a phenomenon through the participants' meanings and experiences with the phenomenon in a

phenomenological study (Awasthy, 2015). In this type of study, the phenomenon most relevant to an individual or group of individuals is not able to be identified (Awasthy, 2015). In this study, I explored the retention strategies used to retain life insurance sales agents. Yin (2018) suggested researchers use a case study design to explore the contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-world context. The case study design was appropriate for this study because it provided me with an understanding of the retention strategies for life insurance sales agents.

Research Question

What strategies do life insurance agency managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents?

Interview Questions

1. What retention strategies do you apply to increase the retention of agents?

2. What motivational strategies do you use to retain life insurance agents?

3. What strategies do you use to improve agents' organizational commitment?

4. Based on your experience, how does awareness of the organizational structure affect agent retention?

5. What leadership style do you use to increase the retention of agents?

6. What resources do you and the agency provide for the agents' work-life balance needs to improve retention?

7. What strategies for agent retention have you used that have shown to be the most effective?

8. What additional information on agent retention strategies would you like to
    share?

Conceptual Framework

I used the theory of employer branding as the conceptual framework of this study.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) were the first to propose the term *employer branding*, and

they suggested that there is significant synergy between brand marketing and human

resources (HR). Ambler and Barrow defined employer branding as a package of

functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified

by the employing company. Employer branding contains the premise that employee

motivation will lead to improved employee performance, which in turn, will lead to

improved customer relationships that will then strengthen brand equity and have an

impact on motivation (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Organizations have applied employer

branding as a long-term strategy to retain and motivate employees (Tanwar & Prasad,

2016). Contributions to the theory of employer branding have been made, such as those

of Tanwar and Prasad (2016) who suggested that employer branding consists of four

fundamental tenets: (a) corporate social responsibility (CSR), (b) work-life balance

(WLB), (c) training and development (T&D), and (d) work environment (WE). Tanwar

and Prasad identified five key possible outcomes created by employer branding: job

satisfaction, psychological contract, productivity, organizational commitment, and brand

advocacy. The framework suggested by Tanwar and Prasad depicts CSR, WLB, T&D,

and WE as having impacts on employer branding, and employer branding then impacts

job satisfaction and psychological contract, which in turn, affect the retention of

employees. Tanwar and Prasad concluded their description of employee branding by suggesting the retention of employees impacts productivity, where employer branding contributes to organizational commitment, which leads to the creation of brand advocacy. I applied the principles of employer branding in this study to help me identify and understand the strategies necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Operational Definitions

Competitive advantage: An implementation of a value-creating strategy not implemented by current or potential competitors (Popadiuk, Rivera, & Bataglia, 2014)

Corporate social performance: The result of net income in reference to total net life insurance premium written (Federal Insurance Office, 2015).

Employer branding: A package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified by the employing company (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

High-performance work systems (HPWS): A group of separate but interconnected HR practices that are designed to enhance employees' skills, knowledge, and efforts (Garg & Lal, 2016).

Human capital management: The management of human capital and the volatility of the labor market (Kwon, 2014).

Human resources (HR): The intrinsic capital that supports the entire functional areas of insurance organizations (Kwon, 2014).

Intangible assets: The rate of return on investment and what the effects are on the retention of life insurance sales agents (Popadiuk et al., 2014).

Knowledge management: A critical driver in new knowledge and new idea generation and is a concept for effective long-term strategy (Joshi et al., 2016).

Vocational training: A combination of both career and technical education (Torraco, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Some assumptions I made in this study were outside of my control, and I expected them to probably be correct. Kisely and Kendall (2011) believed that every study has some limitations. The boundaries of this study were the scope of the study and its delimitation errors. The concepts considered were those that apply to retention strategies of life insurance sales agents. The assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that may affect this study are presented in the following subsections.

Assumptions

Marshall and Rossman (2018) stated that assumptions are beliefs of statements to be true and are inferences that have not been examined critically. Researchers need to provide a clear description of their research, including their choice of method, design, concept, participants, and data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2018). It is essential that assumptions are made explicit and that the number of assumptions is sufficient to describe the phenomenon that is addressed in the study (Nkwake, 2013).

A key underlying assumption in this study was that participating life insurance industry managers had made a conscious effort to develop and implement strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. A general assumption I made was that the current level of low retention led to a shrinkage of labor in the life insurance industry.

Another assumption was that life insurance managers have a choice on the selection of retention strategies to use. The following assumptions were also made for this study: (a) a qualitative multicase study was best suited for this study, (b) the branch agency managers participating would answer the interview questions truthfully, (c) a full understanding of the responses as the participating branch agency managers intended would be gained, and (d) themes and patterns in the lived experiences of the participating branch agency managers concerning their retention strategy decision-making process would be uncovered.

Limitations

Welsh (2013) defined the limitations of a study as the potential weaknesses in the conditions and restrictions that are identified in the study. One limitation experienced in my study was that some of the life insurance agencies that participated had only one or two branch agency managers that oversaw life insurance sales agents, and these branch agency managers had limited experience in the retention of life insurance sales agents. Branch agency managers with vast experience in managing life insurance sales agents in retention did not recall specific strategies used for life insurance sales agent retention.

A second limitation was that participating branch agency managers were not willing to be flexible in scheduling individual interviews. There was the potential that branch agency managers were unwilling to participate in my study because the study might have exposed shortcomings in their managerial approaches. Branch agency managers not willing to participate in my research limited the availability of data and the sample size.

Delimitations

Marshall and Rossman (2016) defined delimitations as research design parameters that are within the researcher's control. One delimitation in my study was that participating branch agency managers and the life insurance branches they represent were located in a metropolitan region in the southwestern United States. A second delimitation was branch agency managers that participated in providing data, manage branches with low numbers of insurance sales agents in management, and limit their contribution of data on the growth of agents. This delimitation allowed for the collection of data directly related to retention strategies of life insurance sales agents.

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Significance of the Study

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The results of this study may be of value to businesses because life insurance agencies have not been able to maintain a stable agent workforce as a result of the significant amount of life insurance sales agents leaving the occupation. The retention of life insurance sales agents has posed a significant challenge to life insurance agency managers. The American Council of Life Insurers (2015) suggested life insurance agents' organizational commitment is at an all-time low, as has been shown by the significant amount of life insurance sales agents leaving the occupation annually. In this study, I used the conceptual framework of employer branding to explore the strategies life insurance branch agency managers use to retain life insurance sales agents.

Contribution to Business Practice

The findings from this study may provide insights for branch agency managers in a metropolitan area in the southwest United States as well as strategies for increasing the

number of life insurance sales agents by increasing the retention of life insurance sales

agents. Branch agency managers may gain a better understanding of how to position and

employ tactical implementations that promote the effectiveness of the retention strategies

for life insurance sales agents. The current agency capital expenditures that are now used

for recruiting may yield higher returns in the form of increasing the number of life

insurance sales agents through increased retention of life insurance sales agents.

Implications for Social Change

The data collected from this study may have a positive social impact on the

retention efforts of life insurance agencies in the metropolitan region in the southwestern

United States. The findings may provide other branch agency managers with strategies

for surmounting the retention challenges concerning life insurance sales agents. The

increased retention of life insurance sales agents may increase the ability of life insurance

agencies to improve local employment and contribute to their local communities by

providing sustainable employment. The possible implications for positive social change

are serving the public by increasing the number of life insurance sales agents employed

and increasing the number of people employed in the region. Local educational

institutions may be able to apply the findings to develop a curriculum to train interested

students on the four fundamental tenets of employer branding. The tenets may be

promoted by the local life insurance agencies to attract students into the life insurance

agency workforce.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In this qualitative multicase study, I drew the participants from two life insurance agencies in a metropolitan area of the southwestern United States to explore what strategies branch agency managers are applying to retain life insurance sales agents. There was an ample amount of branch agency managers in the region that had applied strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Factors, such as human capital management, HR assets, capital management, skills supply, existing workforce, nontraditional strategies, training and development, development strategies of industry leaders, sustainability, employee engagement, sustainability challenges in a workforce, and psychological contract, have been associated with the retention of life insurance sales agents (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). This review of the literature was designed to answer the question: What strategies do life insurance agency managers use in the retention of life insurance sales agents?

The literature reviewed included concepts that have helped researchers understand the theory of human motivators created by Barrow and Ambler. I categorized the sources used in the literature review into the following 12 subheadings: (a) Amber and Barrow's employer branding theory, (b) state of the insurance industry in current economic environment, (c) human capital management, (d) HR assets and capital management, (e) skills supply and existing workforce, (f) nontraditional strategies of training and development, (g) psychological contract, (h) development strategies of industry leaders, (i) sustainability and employee engagement, (j) sustainability challenges in a workforce, and (k) global state of the life insurance industry. I located and reviewed peer-reviewed

business reports and business journal sources to evaluate if the business issue merited a

doctoral-level study. The key search words used to locate articles while compiling this

literature review were *employer branding, state of the insurance industry in current*

economic environment, human capital management, human resources assets and capital

management, skills supply and existing workforce, nontraditional strategies of training

and development, psychological contract, development strategies of industry leaders,

sustainability and employee engagement, sustainability challenges in a workforce, and

global state in the life insurance industry, My search included a combination of these

terms together using the *and* Boolean operator. I found limited peer-reviewed sources

that were specific to strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents; however, I

found literature related to business practices providing vast references to the phenomena

in this study from multiple points of view. Searching for peer-reviewed sources from

noninsurance industries showed that literature concerning these industries provided

significant coverage on the topic of business growth strategies by promoting employee

retention, but for the life insurance industry, there is a definite gap in the literature on this

topic.

Critical Analysis and Synthesis of the Literature

In this study, I explored the challenges branch agency managers face in the

retention of life insurance sales agents. I used a variety of search engines and databases

to aid in retrieving sources for the study. The articles used came from peer-reviewed

journals as well as scholarly and professional books. A minimum of 85% of these

sources had publication dates within 3–5 years of my expected graduation date to meet the Walden program requirements for the study.

Research Review

I reviewed peer-reviewed articles and journals, books, dissertations, websites, and corporate and government reports with a methodology of maintaining a systematic examination of themes. This review enabled the scope of the problem to be identified as well as for a determination of how the stated problem affects all members of the organizations, industry, and micro- and macro environments. Themes within different industries, such as accounting, banking, and finance, were researched to learn how people in these industries approached the same problem.

I reviewed relevant literature related to strategies for the retention of life insurance agents through the exploration of the real-life phenomenon. The search strategy employed ensured the exploration of original materials as well as the current landscape of the phenomenon for depth in research. I used search terms with Boolean logic and synonym tools to maximize the relevance of the results of the study. I summarized the materials by synthesizing only materials relevant to the topic and research design.

Search Strategy

The topics included in the search strategy were (a) insurance industry and workforce challenges; (b) recruitment, training, and development; (c) life insurance sales agent retention in life insurance companies; (d) employer branding theory; (e) strategies in the development of life insurance sales agents; (f) hiring strategies; and (g) life

insurance sales agent turnover. I retrieved the literature from scholarly books and

journals through completing an iterative search using the same keywords in Google

Scholar, EBSCOhost, SAGE, and ProQuest databases. The key word search terms

included *recruiting, turnover, challenges, employment, hire, training, development,*

career opportunities, brain drain, difficulties, psychological contract, attrition, retention,

and *strategy*.

I used the results of the search in the development of the study, the problem

statement, and determining the magnitude of the problem. The literature review contains

essential information from the completed research in areas related to the business

problem identified in this study. The ability to build on previous research, specifically on

the limitations of such research and the identified recommendations for future studies,

will lead to other areas of research. The information gathered in this literature review

clarifies the theories and opinions of prior scholars on issues affecting the retention of life

insurance sales agents. I was also able to develop similar and contrasting methods from

the literature review and create themes that aligned with my conceptual framework. The

literature review improved my understanding of various vantage points among authors on

the same issues and how practitioners have either solved the problems for their

organization or identified methods that do not work.

Organization of the Literature Review

Peer-reviewed literature in the life insurance industry is scarce, so I conducted a

thorough review of each identified journal in its entirety to unveil other relevant

references that may not have been retrieved using keyword, Boolean, or synonym search

terms. Using the literature, I evaluated how other industries have managed challenges in

the retention of employees to understand the complexities surrounding the topic and how

they may apply in the life insurance industry. I reviewed literature from accounting,

banking, finance, and other professions within the financial trades for relevance. The

theories about employee retention in other industries helped me determine which of those

were relevant to the life insurance industry. The scope of the literature review focused on

U.S. markets with one section devoted to the phenomena in other countries.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The discovery of solutions to business challenges in business practices will, many

times, happen through trial and error. Studies should be evidence-based, and the

evidence identified should be based on long histories of review and success (Goodman,

Gary, & Wood, 2014). In this study, I used peer-reviewed sources for the teaching and

study of the strategies used in the retention of life insurance sales agents that are

evidence-based. I reviewed relevant literature from business as well as scientific and

theoretical perspectives. Using a bibliographic search of academic literature, I located

the best available evidence applicable to the strategies life insurance agency managers

use for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Importance of the Study

The business problem identified was challenges in the retention of life insurance

sales agents. There have been few peer-reviewed studies completed on this topic. The

study topic merited evaluation to identify the source, cause, and possible solutions. The

business problem is chronic, and it affects all aspects of work in the life insurance

industry. The business problem has been discussed by numerous industry leaders in industry publications, in discussion topics at industry conferences, and various other industry events. Several organizations have successfully managed this business issue, as evidenced by organizations that are in the top 10 in sales growth and the percentage of market share. The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies that life insurance agency managers from two of these top 10 organizations were using for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participants were six agency managers from two life insurance agencies in a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States that had used successful life insurance sales agent retention strategies. The Southwest region had a significant amount of life insurance agencies from which to draw agency managers to participate. The ample amount of branch agency managers from which to draw from allowed for the protection of the managers' confidentiality within the study.

Conceptual Perspective of Sales Agents' Retention

In my study, I focused on the association between the research design and the underlying research theory. One area of exploration was determining what negative impacts exist concerning employer branding theory on strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The negative correlations between organizational performance and substantial investment in the retention of life insurance sales agents needed to be identified. Research data found negative relationships between organizational performance and significant investment in the retention of life insurance sales agents. Substantial organizational investment in the retention of life insurance sales agents needs to be studied to understand if it leads to positive gains or losses in human capital. Human

capital resources include training, experience, judgmental capacity, intelligence, social relationships, and the insights of managers and employees (Popadiuk et al., 2014). In this study, I focused on gaining an understanding of how organizational investment in the retention of life insurance sales agents affects human capital in the life insurance industry. Human capital results are also affected by the labor market environment; a rigid market environment will yield many different results as those results yielded from more flexible markets (Popadiuk et al., 2014).

Employer Branding

Various theories, such as Herzberg's motivator-hygiene theory, the resource-based view, and the contingency theory, have been proposed to study the challenges in the retention of life insurance sales agents in the life insurance industry. These theories have been tested for applicability and based on universalistic, configurational, and contingency performance predictors (Delery & Doty, 1996). One of the three performance predictors is the basis for the analysis of the strategic phenomenon of study (Delery & Doty, 1996). Universalistic prediction states that one method works for all members, configurational perspectives incorporate idealistic and theoretical constructs, and contingency predictions are contingent upon an organization's strategy (Delery & Doty, 1996). In this study, I used the employer branding theory. The employer branding theory was more appropriate for this study because I explored the branch agency managers' application of strategies in the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) were the first to propose the term employer branding; they suggested that there is significant synergy between brand marketing and HR.

Ambler and Barrow defined employer branding as a package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified by the employing company. They argued that employer branding leads to improved employee motivation, which in turn, will lead to improved customer relationships. Improved employee motivation and enhanced customer relationships will then strengthen brand equity and have an impact on life insurance sales agents' motivation, completing a virtuous circle (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Tanwar and Prasad (2016) suggested organizations have used employer branding as a long-term strategy to retain and motivate employees. Tanwar and Prasad contributed to the theory of employer branding by indicating that employer branding consists of four fundamental tenets: (a) CSR, (b) WLB, (c) T&D, and (d) WE. They also identified five possible critical outcomes created by employer branding: (a) job satisfaction, (b) psychological contract, (c) productivity, (d) organizational commitment, and (e) brand advocacy. The framework suggested by Tanwar and Prasad depicted CSR, WLB, T&D, and WE as well as how the tenets impact employer branding, stating that employer branding affects job satisfaction and psychological contract, which in turn, affects the retention of employees. They concluded by suggesting that employees impact productivity and that employer branding contributes to organizational commitment, which leads to the creation of brand advocacy.

Popadiuk et al. (2014) stated that organizations create a competitive advantage when they can implement a value-creating strategy not implemented by current or potential competitors. Popadiuk et al. posited that organizations maintain a sustained

competitive advantage when their created competitive advantage exists after efforts by

competitors to duplicate that advantage have ceased. I used the employer branding

theory as the lens through which to view strategies applied in managing the challenges

experienced in the retention of life insurance sales agents.

State of the Insurance Industry in the Current Economic Environment

In the life insurance industry, risks and programs are evaluated to control and

finance risks (Kwon, 2014) effectively. Life insurance companies manage the risks of

individuals to balance their current and future consumption of wealth better (Kwon,

2014). The life insurance industry is a key pillar in the economic environment. The U.S.

life insurance industry has consistently reported consecutive years of sound financial

performance and has sustained itself in sound financial condition (FIO, 2015). The life

insurance industry is a key participant in the U.S. capital markets; the insurance industry

successfully raised $8 billion in new equity capital in 2014, and it was able to sell an

aggregate of $37 billion in new debt (FIO, 2015). The life insurance industry saw a

decline in the number of mergers and acquisitions in 2014; the total value of mergers and

acquisitions was an aggregate $14 billion, and in terms of value, it was a 79% increase

over the 2013 level (FIO, 2015). The life insurance industry profoundly impacts business

investment and economic activity; the industry is the largest institutional investor in

corporate bonds, and it is a source of funding applied by business to finance growth

(Schwarcz & Schwarcz, 2014).

The life insurance industry recorded increases in total net written premiums in

2014 (FIO, 2015). Growth in the U.S. economy drove growth in total written premiums

(FIO, 2015). The total net premium written drove the life insurance industry to be

profitable in 2014; the higher written premium did not result in increased net income, on

the contrary, the total net income declined from the record levels the life insurance

industry recorded in 2013 (FIO, 2015). The life insurance industry's revenues

experienced slower growth than did total expenses and resulted in a 23% decline in

pretax income compared to 2013 levels (FIO, 2015). The life insurance industry serves

as a vital role in our economic environment; without this insurance service, no

government, individual, or business would sustain economic development and growth

(Kwon, 2014).

Human Capital Management

The life insurance industry is currently experiencing material issues in human

capital management (Kwon, 2014). The U.S. life insurance industry experienced human

capital growth at a rate lower than the national average during a measured 12-month

period ending in October 2012 (Kwon, 2014). Between 1990 and 2011, the life insurance

industry lost 30% of its workforce and human capital management issues in the United

States was noted as having a fast decrease in its markets with high volatility in its labor

market (Kwon, 2014). The supply of talent with a passion for risk management and

insurance is a critical vantage point for life insurance organizations of all sizes (Kwon,

2014). The life insurance industry treats HR as an intrinsic capital that supports the entire

functional areas of life insurance organizations (Kwon, 2014). The life insurance

industry is experiencing a "brain drain," the industry is experiencing the departure of

high-performing talent that has resulted in life insurance organizations experiencing a critical human capital risk (Kwon, 2014).

The life insurance industry is facing an acute human capital attraction and retention challenges due to the effects of social, demographic, economic, and industry-specific factors (Kwon, 2014). Younger generations have limited knowledge about life insurance; the life insurance industry is not the career of choice for these younger generations and reflects on the number of workers entering the industry (Kwon, 2014). The life insurance industry is viewed as an expenditure and not as financing for current and future wealth preservation; together with the pedagogical trends in tertiary business education and human capital obsolescence, it exacerbates the life insurance industry's human capital management problems (Kwon, 2014).

Human Resources Assets and Capital Management

Human capital challenges in the retention of life insurance sales agents have grown because of the effects of demographic, social, economic, and market-specific factors (Kwon, 2014). Bloom and Kamm (2014) stated that management in this industry understands the importance and the value that high-performing employees provide to a life insurance organization, especially when human capital is scarce. Bloom and Kamm founded that, for the most part, organizations do not capitalize the cost of employees in the organizational financial statements. A strong correlation exists at high-performing organizations between human capital and superior financial returns (Bloom & Kamm, 2014). Garg and Lal (2016) studied high-performance work systems (HPWS), and from their examination from a critical perspective, they found that there are far-reaching

benefits for both the organization and for the employees with the use of HPWS. Garg and Lal defined HPWS as a group of separate but interconnected HR practices that are designed to enhance employees' skills, knowledge, and efforts.

Chahal, Jyoti, and Rani (2016) examined the effects of perceived high-performance HR practices of extensive (a) training, (b) performance (c) management, (d) performance (e) appraisal, (f) performance-based compensation, (g) empowerment, and (h) competency development on business performance of employees. Chahal et al. cited that bundled high-performance HR practices affect business performance to a higher degree as compared to individual high-performance HR practices. Bundled HR practices are known as HPWS and have a correlation that HPWS promotes the value, uniqueness, and inimitability of employees' knowledge and skills (Chahal et al., 2016). In high-performance HR practices, there exists bundled HR practices that result in superior business performance (Chahal et al., 2016). Employer branding is a long-term HR strategy that is used to attract and retain talented employees (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Employer branding enhances the retention, motivation, and engagement of employees that results in increased productivity that results in a more significant organizational competitive advantage (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016).

Organizations meet success when they successfully manage their resources such as (a) labor, (b) machinery, (c) material, (d) target markets, (e) capital resources, and (f) processes (Maheshwari, Gunesh, Lodorfos, & Konstantopoulou, 2017). The economic environment is highly competitive, and retaining a talented and skillful labor force is now a vital strategic competitive advantage for organizations (Maheshwari et al., 2017).

Organizations that experience the loss of experienced and skilled labor lose intellectual

capital and face the risk of losing the ability to compete in their chosen markets

(Maheshwari et al., 2017). The completion of recent studies has uncovered findings that

point out how employer branding affects (a) the retention, (b) the motivation, and (c) the

motivation of employees and on how these affect their increased productivity

(Maheshwari et al., 2017).

Maheshwari et al. (2017) suggested employer branding affects and combines the

concepts of marketing and HR. They opined employer branding is a focus of research

due to (a) brand power, (b) credibility, (c) employee engagement, and (d) labor market

conditions. Kashyap and Verma (2018) stated employee brand building included making

the organization as the organization of choice for employees to want to work. They listed

(a) mutual trust, (b) enjoyment, (c) camaraderie, (d) attractive pay, (e) benefits package,

(f) flexible working arrangements, (g) sincerity, (h) competence, and (i) prestige as the

pillars that build employer branding. Employer branding contributes to organizations'

successful recruitment and retention of talent (Kashyap & Verma, 2018). The result of

successful recruitment and retention of expertise may lead to a decrease in absenteeism,

which may improve organizational performance and long-term business success

(Kashyap & Verma, 2018).

Skills Supply and Existing Workforce

Capelli (2015) stated that a series of reports had been published by employer-

associated organizations and government sources, making claims on concerns of the lack

of the supply of skills in the U.S. labor force. Capelli founded that overwhelming

findings have been provided by employers who have consistently reported difficulties

hiring the kind of employees they need. Capelli posed the question of what are practices,

such as job applicant abilities assessment, training employees for current jobs, developing

employees and securing the skills they need for future roles, and the traditional practices

for job skills development (Capelli, 2015).

MacDonald, Kelly, and Christen (2014) investigated what the types of rapport are

in the workplace through communication such as interpersonal solidarity. MacDonald et

al. described interpersonal solidarity as both the perceived synchronicity and closeness

established through communication in a relationship. MacDonald et al. suggested that

the lack of closeness and unsupportiveness from a supervisor to an employee results in

employees remaining silent. The lack of closeness and unsupportiveness results in that

employees anticipate negative outcomes and build on the premise of not building

solidarity (MacDonald et al., 2014). Solidarity symbolizes the psychological and social

closeness between people that is built on trust and self-disclosure (MacDonald et al.,

2014). The levels of solidarity are defined by the organizational culture, and it is more

effective when the leaders of the organization promote informal communication and

invest in employees for the long term of the organization (MacDonald et al., 2014).

Crowley (2014) argued that social classes influence every domain of life, and this

is especially in the workplace. The workplace reflects interactions between occupational

divisions, relative power, and it places assumptions on the abilities and entitlements of

employees within the organization (Crowley, 2014). Some controls and arrangements

enable the structures of these dynamics that shape interactions through their influences

(Crowley, 2014). These influences affect the organization and the social-psychological

processes that are associated with inequalities and constraints (Crowley, 2014). Control

techniques in labor processes influence workplace relationships where relational

processes mediate and intensify the negative impacts of coercive control (Crowley,

2014). Professionals and sectors of manual and service workgroups are associated with

less abusive, hostile, and conflict-laden work relationships, a result of the persuasive

control structures they are confronted with (Crowley, 2014). Contrastly, coercive

controls are more profound in manual and service sector jobs that result in the abuse that

promotes shame, generates hostility toward management, and reflects the conflicts among

coworkers (Crowley, 2014).

Nontraditional Strategies for Training and Development

Training and development in the United States resulted from the United States'

involvement in World War II (Torraco, 2016). World War II placed a significant demand

for trained workers as a result of the expanding wartime economy and technological

innovations (Torraco, 2016). U.S. labor significantly rose during this period and

contributed to the growth of employee training and development (Torraco, 2016). The

most popular forms of training during this period of rising labor were classroom training

and on-the-job training (Torraco, 2016). Vocational training is a career and technical

education borne from the initial classroom training and on-the-job training (Torraco,

2016). Human capital theory and economic value of training hold the basis that training

is an investment in employees and productivity and not a cost (Torraco, 2016).

The theory of training provides various depictions of former depictions of training effectiveness (Sitzmann & Weinhardt, 2015). These depictions are of the constructs of employees embedded in organizations or workgroups, and of processes that emphasize that macro processes and processes within a person are not static phenomena (Sitzmann & Weinhardt, 2015). Training is one of the most potent methods for enhancing the productivity and performance of employees (Sitzmann & Weinhardt, 2015). Training is a learning function; Panda, Karve, and Mohapatra (2014) suggested that learning functions and business needs to be aligned. Panda et al. stated that the alignment of the learning function and business assesses the level of organizational capabilities with what the current need is and in the future to remain competitive and create competitive advantages. Panda et al. defined learning and development as a strategy for competitive advantage that provides a framework to (a) assess, (b) enhance, (c) develop the knowledge, (d) skills, and (e) abilities of employees. Panda et al. identified documented evidence that supports that training activities result in a positive impact on the performance of individuals and teams. Panda et al. showed that organizations with active learning cultures are 60% more likely to be first to market, and nearly 20% more likely to be the market share leader. Panda et al. found that on-the-job training results in more significant innovation and acquisition of tacit skills that lead to a more substantial influence on organizational performance.

Rentsch, Delise, Mello, and Staniewicz (2014) researched (a) information sharing, (b) expertise, (c) collaborative learning, (d) computer mediation, and (e) knowledge objects to provide the theoretical framework for the study of team, knowledge building,

and training strategy. Rentsch et al. referred to integrative team knowledge and building training strategy as a training integrated to support technology in the simultaneous use of schema-enriched communication, and knowledge object creation to support team knowledge building. Rentsch et al. argued that knowledge objects represent visual representations of cognitive structures; these structures support memory and are the conduit to integrate knowledge across diverse areas or domains. Rentsch et al. defined schema-enriched communication as a method where participants share their knowledge by (a) conveying structure, (b) organization, (c) assumptions, (d) meaning, (e) rationale, and (f) interpretations. Rentsch et al. argued that the use of schema-enriched communication enables participants to enrich their communication with in-depth structure knowledge. Participants can enhance their communication by acquiring the knowledge to articulate explicitly the information and meaning contained in their schemas (Rentsch et al., 2014).

Jackson (2015) explored the development and transfer of entrepreneurship training in tertiary education. Jackson accepted that there is a real need to promote an entrepreneurial focus on how educational institutions deliver their services. Jackson founded that the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge generate innovations that lead to the creation of business opportunities. Jackson found that the government has placed a greater emphasis on the capacity of tertiary education in its potential to stimulate business formation through its delivery of student teaching. Jackson identified that students who actively participated in campus enterprises were able to acquire greater

business-related knowledge, skills, and competencies than students who only participated in formal academic programs.

Psychological Contract

O'Leary-Kelly, Henderson, Anand, and Ashforth (2014) described the psychological contract as the beliefs held by employers and employees about their reciprocal obligations and entitlements. O'Leary-Kelly et al. opined that this employee-employer relationship that fundamentally defines the expectations each expects of each other is the critical lens of how employee experiences are filtered and understood, resulting in as a key to understanding employee attitudes and behaviors. O'Leary-Kelly et al. argued that research on the psychological contract has grown at impressive rates on predominantly white, upper-middle-class males who graduate from top-tier Master Business Administration programs, and who move into large prestigious corporations. A major concern has been the *invisible workers*; these workers have been less often studied in psychological contract research (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014). This primary concern has brought into focus the contingent workers; this concern suggests the need to study contingent workers (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014). Contingent workers do not have either an implicit or explicit understanding that employment will be continuous or ongoing (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014). Contingent workers include (a) temporary workers, (b) independent contractors, (c) leased workers, and (d) transnational workers (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014).

O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2014) suggested that conceptual frameworks of psychological contracts of contingent workers are narrower with fewer obligations, more

tangible and more clearly defined, and less socioemotional than psychological contracts

for permanent employees. Research on employment contracts of contingent workers has

been found to hold points of ambiguity; a tendency has been to study contingent workers

as a homogeneous set (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014). Contingent workers hold many

differences in their employment experiences and environments; they hold limited insights

into the deeper level experiences and environments of each unique type of contingent

worker (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014). Contingent workers are (a) temporary workers, (b)

direct-hire temporary workers, (c) independent contractors, (d) leased workers, (e)

transnational workers, and (f) undocumented immigrant labor who work in a broad range

of industries (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2014).

Sherman and Morley (2015) suggested that much is known about the

consequences of psychological contracts, while very little is understood about how

psychological contracts are formed. Significant gaps in the knowledge of psychological

contract formation have been found and have resulted in mostly unknowing how

psychological contracts are created (Sherman & Morley, 2015). These are gaps of

significant concern; individual and organizational outcomes associated with the

fulfillment or breach and violation of psychological contracts (Sherman & Morley, 2015).

Addressing psychological contracts at the creation stage, organizations can enhance the

likelihood of desired outcomes such as organizational commitment and perceived person-

environment fit (Sherman & Morley, 2015).

Rayton, Brammer, and Millington (2015) investigated how corporate social

performance (CSP) promotes improved firm-stakeholder relationships through the

psychological contract. Researchers explored the relationship between employee

perceptions of CSP and dimensions of employee attitudes and behaviors; significant

research on the relationship between CSP and the psychological contract is not

completed, and as a result, little is known about the conceived relationship (Rayton et al.,

2015). The creation of psychological contracts has traditionally focused on exchanges

between employees and organizations; analysis has shown an empirical link between

contract breach and a wide array of work-related outcomes such as (a) job satisfaction,

(b) organizational commitment, (c) turnover, and (d) organizational citizenship (Rayton

et al., 2015). There are links between the socially responsible performance of

organizations and the psychological contract of employees. There are also implications

these links have and on CSP for contract breach. Rayton et al. provided two significant

contributions; first the role of CSP within the psychological contract by analyzing

employees' expectations of the organization's CSP on forming their responses; second,

the analysis of the psychological contract that considers the implications of exchanges

with third parties, and on how it affects the psychological contract between the

organization and the employee within the context of CSP.

Low, Bordia, and Bordia (2016) opined that employees' psychological contracts

entail what their beliefs are about and what the contribution requirements are to the

organization. These beliefs and the contribution requirements are what define what

employees believe what inducements they should receive in return (Low et al., 2016).

An approach to attract and retain employees is to create psychological contracts that

promote contributions from employees in a desirable way and deliver attractive

inducements (Low et al., 2016). There are preferred psychological contract elements that are ideal psychological contracts from the employees' point of view (Low et al., 2016). They are psychological contracts that enhance the shared understanding between employers and employees and can improve the organization's ability to attract employees and improve retention (Low et al., 2016).

Employees display specific attitudes towards employment relationships at varying stages of their careers (Low et al., 2016). There are two key characteristics of employees' career-stage-relevant attitudes; one, the responsibility they hold to the organization, and two, their needs and aspirations at the particular career stage level (Low et al., 2016). Organizations can benefit from understanding employees' varying expectations of contributions and inducements at their different career stages, where a one-size-fits-all approach to motivate employees does not work (Low et al., 2016). The most effective method to motivate employees is to focus on employees' evolving aspirations and needs by customizing compensation practices to employees' psychological contract preferences in relation to their career stages (Low et al., 2016).

Ruchika and Prasad (2017) founded employees, before having any contact with an organization, form a mental version of the organization in the form of anticipatory psychological contract (APC). The definition of APC is what expectations and beliefs prospective employees have about the potential organization (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017). Employer branding affects what expectations and beliefs prospective employees form about likely organizations of whom to work for (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017). The hopes

and beliefs potential employees form about the organization formed from information

prospective employees receive from various sources (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017).

Employee perceived value, from the awareness of employer branding, contribute

to the formation of APC from perceived value dimensions (a) social value, (b)

development value, (c) application value, (e) interest value, (f) economic value, (g)

market value, (h) cooperation value, (i) psychological value, (j) ethical value, and (k)

innovation value (Ronda, Valor, & Abril, 2018). Perceived value dimensions are

personal preferences experiences of employees (Ronda et al., 2018). Employee benefits

play an important role in the creation of employee perceived value as perceived by

employees from their awareness of employer branding (Ronda et al., 2018). Employee

perceived values form from an employer branding construct and serve as a guide for the

development of employer brand strategies (Ronda et al., 2018). Development of

employer brand strategies through the formation of APC may help organizations create

effective strategies and become the organization of choice (Ronda et al., 2018).

Development Strategies of Industry Leaders

Joshi et al. (2016) opined that both public and private life insurance companies

face two main challenges; one is the challenge to retain their customer base, and second,

the challenge of knowledge loss as a result of agent turnover. The efficient management

of customer and employee knowledge and the application of this knowledge in designing

products and services is a key element for an organization's survival (Joshi et al., 2016).

KM is a key driver in new knowledge and new idea generation and is a concept for

effective long-term strategy (Joshi et al., 2016). In larger organizations, KM takes longer

to prosper and show measurable benefits (Joshi et al., 2016). The growth of benefits that result from KM is dependant on (a) organizational culture, (b) capabilities, (c) leadership, and (d) the workforce (Joshi et al., 2016). Managers align KM initiatives with enhancing organizational performance; these initiatives and the enhancement of organizational performance may be aligned by creating metrics specifically designed to track progress (Joshi et al., 2016). Culture and leadership in the creation of knowledge are essential, including the ability to share and application behavior (Joshi et al., 2016).

Sustainability and Employee Engagement

Jepsen and Grob (2015) defined sustainable development as the development able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations meeting their own needs. Sustainable development includes three key factors; (a) environmental, (b) societal and economic measures, or (c) people, planet, and profits (Jepsen & Grob, 2015). The development of HR sustainability has not been able to produce a framework on how to teach, educate and integrate these three key factors, or otherwise sustainable processes, into an organization's recruitment and selection processes (Jepsen & Grob, 2015). Sustainability and sustainable development refer to the macro environment and society, and it advocates for large-scale change(Jepsen & Grob, 2015). The ability to embrace sustainability promotes the creation of community alliances between corporations, people, and governments (Jepsen & Grob, 2015). These key alliances are the pillars of an integrated plan that includes (a) strategic HR management, (b) organizational change, (c) ecological sustainability, (d) social responsibility, and (e) effective leadership (Jepsen & Grob, 2015). HR sustainability is a

process of an integrated long-term employee management approach that results in

sustained business performance and employee benefits (Jepsen & Grob, 2015).

The economic environment has faced an economic recession and economic

instability and has made retention one of the most significant challenges in the corporate

world (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). In this volatile economic environment, employee

engagement is critical for economic recovery (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Employee

engagement promotes discretionary employee effort in their behavior towards the

organization (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Employee behavior is critical for organizational

success during a recession and stagnation for rapid corporate growth (Gupta & Sharma,

2016). Organizational success in a volatile economic market is dependant on a

knowledgeable, capable, and flexible workforce that can work in tandem with innovative

management capable of retaining a pool of a developed and talented workforce (Gupta &

Sharma, 2016). Employee engagement is a factor that organizations can leverage for (a)

higher employee retention, (b) greater customer satisfaction, (c) improved financial

performance, and (d) an overall organization performance (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

Gupta and Sharma founded that organizations with the highest employee engagement

levels have a 4-year average total shareholder return of 20% or higher, which is 300%

higher than organizations with lower levels of employee engagement. It has been

established that employee engagement is a vital predictor of an anticipated outcome,

outcomes such as (a) profitability, (b) productivity, (c) retention, and (d) customer

satisfaction (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Employee engagement is a critical factor in

employee retention. The findings indicated 85% of engaged employees would remain

employed at the current place of employment, whereas only 27% of disengaged employees will demonstrate the same results (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

Findings in recent studies have indicated a strong relevance between business models for business performance and corporate sustainability (Schaltegger, Ludeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2016). Business organizations are the core cause of many environmental and social problems; business organizations are the key drivers of sustainability concerns (Schaltegger et al., 2016). There are leading companies that are driving sustainable development; innovative sustainable entrepreneurs are driving many of these leading companies (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Innovative sustainable entrepreneurs provide relevant contributions to sustainable development by creating core business models that are sustainability-oriented (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Innovative sustainable entrepreneurs are able to create sustainability-oriented business models by describing what value an organization proposes to existing and potential clients; how the business is organized to create value; what resources to use and what infrastructure to create, and how the organizations gain financial value; all from the perspective of sustainability (Schaltegger et al., 2016). Organizational leaders develop innovations that drive sustainable development, and sustainable innovations are at the core of life insurance organizations' business models for sustainable development (Schaltegger et al., 2016).

Maheshwari et al. (2017) opined employer branding needs to be a function of both HR management and the organization's marketing strategies. Employer branding and marketing strategies aligned may enable organizations to (a) attract and engage high-

potential employees, and (b) retain talent for the sustainability of its labor force
(Maheshwari et al., 2017). HR need to (a) implement a channel to communicate internal
branding strategies, and (b) direct focus to the areas that affect employee retention and
employee relations (Maheshwari et al., 2017). Employer branding is a function that
reflects an organization's identity, culture, image, and reputation, which places the
organization as an employer of choice and affects worker sustainability and engagement
(Maheshwari et al., 2017).

Sustainability Challenges in a Workforce

Policy advisers and practitioners have placed a significant focus on employer
motives for employee voice systems (Dundon et al., 2015). Employee voice systems as a
variety of workplace structures and processes that empower and enable employees to,
directly and indirectly, contribute to decision-making in an organization (Dundon et al.,
2015). Employee voice systems using the parallel use of union and non-union processes
are known as double-breasting (Dundon et al., 2015). Double-breasting voice systems
are processes used in multi-plant organizations where it recognizes trade unions in some
locations, and at the same time implementing non-union practices at other sites (Dundon
et al., 2015). Double-breasting practices have had an increasing propensity among
multinational companies. Dundon et al. argued that the durability of double-breasting
might be contingent on the dynamics of employee relations such as wage relatives, where
comparisons with like-groups have resulted in conflict as a result of non-unionized
employees feeling disadvantaged. The dissatisfaction of relatives impairs the
sustainability of a workforce, and it results in employee turnover (Dundon et al., 2015).

Dundon et al. advanced the understanding of the motives and rationales of employers when utilizing double-breasting. Dundon et al. proposed that these motives and rationales provide support to the emergence through expansion proposition. Development through expansion suggests that organizations pursue organizational growth through first-order concerns of profitability and second or third-order concerns through union status and employment relations (Dundon et al., 2015).

Chao, Jou, Liao, and Kuo (2015) explored what the causes were that resulted in a workforce shortage in healthcare in Taiwan. Chao et al. found that an insufficient supply of workers was not a contributing driver that resulted in the workforce shortage. Chao et al. argued that the main problem related to the shortage of healthcare workers in Taiwan is the unequal healthcare worker distribution geographically. Chao et al. defined turnover as the individual movement across membership boundaries of an organization, and turnover intention as the probability an individual will change jobs within a specified period. Chao et al. argued that there is a high significance on turnover intention in an employee's actual turnover behavior. It was found that in Canadian rural nurses turnover intention was higher if the nurse was (a) a male, (b) that there was higher perceived stress, (c) that they did not have dependent children or relatives, (d) that they had a higher education, (e) that they were employed by their primary agency for a shorter time, (f) that they had lower community satisfaction, (g) that they had greater dissatisfaction with job scheduling, (h) that they had lower satisfaction with their autonomy in the workplace, (i) that they were required to be on call, (j) that they performed advanced decisions or practice, and (k) that they worked in a remote setting (Chao et al., 2015).

Workplace stress is a common condition that leads to turnover and deconditioning (Chao et al., 2015). Conditions such as (a) workplace stress, (b) turnover intention, (c) job performance, and (d) job satisfaction as the most frequently discussed concerns in issues that concern HR (Chao et al., 2015). As an example of workplace stress; factors that contribute to stress in regional physiotherapists were found to be (a) high caseloads, (b) periods of increased activity, and (c) staff shortages (Chao et al., 2015). In the health care workforce, to prevent employees from leaving their current positions, HR departments need to implement appropriate policies to decrease workplace stress and turnover rate (Chao et al., 2015).

Franca and Pahor (2014) pointed out that HR management, corporate governance, and labor law stresses the significance of including employees as a stakeholder group in the organization. A primary driver is to provide employees the ability to participate and collaborate in management decision-making. Franca and Pahor described employee participation as giving employees the entrance to authority in the operations of management, where it decreases management's ability to make decisions unilaterally without the consultation and views of the employees. Franca and Pahor founded that there's a significant positive link between informing employees and consulting with them and the organization's performance.

Risher (2014) pointed out that one of the essential HR functions, salary management, has not undergone any significant change as has other work and management functions. A development that affected salary systems was the recession from 2007 to 2009; unemployment in the United States climbed from 5% in 2007 to a

peak of 10% in 2009 (Risher, 2014). The growth of wages is a key measurement; before the recession, the growth of wages was averaging 3.5%+, and in the middle of the recession, the growth of salaries averaged 1.3%; currently, the growth of wages are averaging at or below 3% (Risher, 2014). Success in the area of employee compensation and salary management in the future will require a change in the mindset of practitioners. Risher identified that many of the processes and approaches were created in a different era where the circumstances and demands were different. Risher argues that the HR function of salary management cannot be tweaked and, at the same time, redeploy the processes and approaches of the past.

HR is not directed to design and manage compensation plans; HR is directed to influence the organization's knowledge base (Risher, 2014). HR influences the organization's knowledge base by managing and controlling how the talent pool is constituted; by managing the pool's choices and behaviors and the pool's alignment with the organization's conditions and priorities, all about driving the organization's success (Risher, 2014). These demands have made it a requirement to return to the fundamentals and recreating the approach of how employees are paid (Risher, 2014). The organization's desired behaviors and results from its employees reach the desired outcome by managing and delivering value as experienced and perceived by employees through a combination of pay, feedback, and career opportunity (Risher, 2014). The tools required for HR to successfully deliver value as perceived by employees will need to shift from the static models of today to fluid, more predictive models based on market dynamics and career decisions as perceived by employees (Risher, 2014).

Stobbeleir et al. (2016) suggested (a) the current aging workforce, (b) the increased mobility of talent, and (c) the need of multi-skilled, self-managed workers has created the need for organizations to align their public image and employer branding strategies for the retention of employees. Stobbeleir et al. (2016) stated public image and employer branding strategies of organizations lead to a positive congruence between internal and external employer brand images, which will result in less absenteeism in employees. Stobbeleir et al. showed when positive inner job characteristics exist; the result is reduced absenteeism. Internal employer brand image has less impact than external employer brand image in employee absenteeism, regardless of internal employer brand image, absenteeism rates in an organization with positive external employer branding are lower (Stobbeleir et al., 2016).

Global State in the Life Insurance Industry

The Internet is a platform for communication and sharing of information between people; the Internet has been the key driver in transforming many aspects of life and has contributed to transforming the world into a global village (Hinson, Zyl, & Agbleze, 2014). The Internet is linked to the promotion and delivery of services, services that do not require the transfer of ownership of tangible products but do require consumer participation (Hinson et al., 2014). The application of websites through the Internet is a significant relationship building and management tool for service organizations, organizations such as the life insurance industry (Hinson et al., 2014).

The insurance industry in Africa is in its infancy stage, and within the 53 countries on the continent, it varies in market structure from monopolies to competitive

markets (Hinson et al., 2014). The life insurance market is currently the fastest-growing insurance sector in Africa (Hinson et al., 2014). Online brand management can promote differentiation when there are strong similarities in product and service offerings (Hinson et al., 2014). Africa lacks an understanding of the importance of life insurance to the financial security of Africans; it lacks an understanding of how to employ information communications technology (Hinson et al., 2014). An effective information communications technology application such as the Internet can enhance and improve the life insurance sector in Ghana and Africa as a whole (Hinson et al., 2014).

In the past decade, there have been numerous new private life insurance companies that have entered the insurance market in India (Sinha, 2015). The numerous life insurance companies that have entered the insurance market in India has resulted in a deepening of the market; the deepening of the market has led the life insurance sector in India to experience a crisis in a variety of internal and external factors (Sinha, 2015). Deregulation played a role in India's growth of life insurance companies; between 2000 and 2012, the number of organizations grew from 1 to 24 (Sinha, 2015). Although the total number of organizations grew from 1 to 24, the real growth in premium was a negative 8.5%; real growth in premium globally was a negative 2.7% (Sinha, 2015). In this same time frame, the number of life insurance offices operating in India decreased from 12,018 to 11,167 (Sinha, 2015).

Joshi et al. (2016) pointed out that the life insurance business is highly competitive globally and specifically in the Asian subcontinent. In the last decade, the insurance industry in India has experienced significant growth and competition (Joshi et

al., 2016). Life insurance organizations, both in the public and private sector, are experiencing two main challenges, the struggle to retain their customer base and knowledge loss as a result of significant employee turnover (Joshi et al., 2016). Leaders in India's life insurance organizations now understand efficient customer management and employee knowledge in designing insurance products and services; leaders now realize they are essential for organizational success (Joshi et al., 2016).

Transition

The life insurance industry is facing an urgent need to identify the strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The data available is not enough to identify the strategies that may improve the retention of life insurance sales agents. The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study is to explore the strategies agency managers are using to retain life insurance sales agents. I explored the topic from the conceptual perspective of employer branding. In Section I, I presented the introductory and background information on what the problem is, and it represents. In Section 2, I will present the specific plan to (a) conduct the inquiry, (b) solicit participants, (c) conduct the interviews, and (d) ensure ethical standards for the research methodology and design. In Section 3, I will (a) present and interpret the data results, (b) the conclusions, (c) the application to professional practice, (d) the implications for social change, and (d) future recommendations.

Section 2: The Project

The total number of life insurance sales agents decreased from 535,000 in 1990 to 323,700 in 2014, averaging a total of 8,829 life insurance sales agents leaving the life insurance industry annually (BLS, 2018). The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies used for the retention of life insurance sales agents. In Section 2, I provide information from my qualitative research on how branch agency managers can use retention strategies as a tool to retain life insurance sales agents. This section also includes the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, and population sampling. Additional important subsections include ethical research, data collection instrument, data technique, data organization and analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies life insurance branch agency managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participants were six life insurance branch agency managers from two life insurance agencies who had applied successful agent retention strategies in a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. The findings indicated branch agency managers might be able to promote and increase the motivation of life insurance sales agents and improve work performance for successful retention. The data collected indicated a possible positive social impact on the life insurance industry by providing branch agency managers motivational strategies to increase their employees' work performance and managerial strategies for their retention challenges. Using the findings of this study, I

also identified how life insurance agents might be able to provide life insurance solutions

to consumers by expanding their knowledge of new product and service offerings. The

implications for positive social change included an increase in the retention of life

insurance sales agents, which could increase the total number of people employed, which

may contribute to the economic well-being in the community and region. An additional

possible positive social change implication would be educating new life insurance

prospects on how beneficial new products and services might be for them and how the

products and services address their life insurance needs.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative methodology, researchers work from new paradigm approaches and

need to be explicit about their subject positions and points of view while being able to

manage these through reflexive practices (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). My role as a

researcher in this study entailed learning how to apply qualitative methods and

understanding how various concepts are debated and discussed in the literature as well as

my ability to develop the ability to join that conversation. My role was to collect data

and identify the themes to provide a framework to determine the components of the case

study design. I conducted semistructured interviews, administered the questionnaires,

and interpreted and analyzed the participant responses adopting (a) philosophical, (b)

strategic, and (c) integrative stances to finally verify and report the findings.

The focus of my research was to explore strategies life insurance agency

managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents. A social constructivist

worldview helped me develop the subjective complexities of these agency managers'

experiences. I conducted this study through the lens of the employer branding theory.

The data and information came from managers at life insurance agencies in a

metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. My role in the life insurance

industry is that of a financial services strategist and consultant; this role did not relate to

the agency managers and did not influence their participation or their responses in any

manner. The topic was of personal interest to me as it relates to the same business

environment I presently play a role in, and from a foundationalist epistemology view, I

was able to (a) remain neutral, (b) objective, and (c) impartial (see Roulston & Shelton,

2015).

One of the founding principles of research ethics is that people need to be treated

equally (Brody, Migueles, & Wendler, 2015). To ensure that I understood how to (a)

maintain respect for people, (b) protect the welfare of the research subjects, (c) apply

justice, and (d) comply with the other protocols indicated in *The Belmont Report*, I

completed a training course by the National Institutes of Health, earning a certificate. I

developed an informed consent form and provided it to all the individuals who

participated in the study. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure a

consistent interview process for each participant. Before administering the

questionnaires to the participants for data collection, I also included an explanation, both

verbal and written, of their rights as participants as well as a list of the questionnaire

questions. For participants who I contacted via telephone, I drafted a phone script (see

Appendix B) to use.

Participants

The application of qualitative research generates insights from industry participants (Lin, 2017). I conducted the study through the lens of the employer branding theory and collected the data by scientifically exploring a real-life phenomenon in-depth and within its environmental context by conducting semistructured interviews. The participant population was branch agency managers from two life insurance organizations operating in a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. These agency managers had used strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents, and, therefore, were qualified to answer the interview questions needed to address the central research question. I completed an interpretive analysis of the data collected through the interviews from the agency managers, and their perspectives helped me understand what the challenges are in the retention of life insurance sales agents (see Moonaghi, Ranjbar, Heydari, & Scurlock-Evans, 2015).

Eligibility of Participants

The class of the population with whom I conducted semistructured interviews was not specially protected. I included individuals in management positions who had experience in the retention of life insurance sales agents in a metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. Mole, North, and Baldock (2016) reported that competitive benefits result from seeking and employing external business assistance. The retention strategies studied were identified from the participation of agency managers of life insurance organizations. Participants in positions of management better explained what

strategies and courses of action they applied to manage the internal and external

contingencies to meet the challenges in the management of sales agent retention.

Dassler (2016) argued that organizations are a broad set of resources. For

strategies, organizations need to look within themselves for effectiveness (Dassler, 2016).

The application of employer branding is the search for the answer to the question of what

is a competitive advantage and how it is achieved (Dassler, 2016). The participants in

this study included individuals from a larger representative population who were most

suited for the study. The selected participants showed they were best suited to explain

the competitive advantage of the firm's resources used to manage a business problem,

and how and why resources create value from the employer branding perspective.

Strategies for Establishing a Working Relationship with Participants

All procedures begin with the researcher's awareness of the value of

confidentiality, which in turn becomes an integral part of enhancing the quality of the

study (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2016). The essential points associated with

confidentiality include autonomy, privacy, and commitment (Petrova et al., 2016). I

gained access to the participants by contacting them directly through (a) e-mail, (b) the

phone, and (c) in person at participating life insurance organizations. Via e-mail,

participants received consent forms that provided valuable information for them to be

able to decide whether to participate in the study (see Petrova et al., 2016) I ensured

confidentiality by assigning identifiers, such as P1, P2, etc., to each participant and by

showing professional attributes, such as honesty and respectfulness, to the participants

(see Petrova et al., 2016). I contacted each participant to introduce myself and explain

the purpose of the study. I also assured each participant that their identity would be

protected and not revealed and asked if they had any questions about the process or the

study itself. The assignment of identifiers ensured confidentiality for each participant,

and the interview content and supporting documentation provided by the participants are

not traceable to any particular participant (see Petrova et al., 2016). I will store all

original documentation in a safe place for five years, and participants may request access

to the notes and transcripts of the interview at any time within these five years.

Research Method

I employed the qualitative research method, which I conducted through

administering a questionnaire with volunteering participants. Leko (2014) proposed that

the qualitative study methodology applies interviews, archives, and direct observations

that enable answering the exploratory nature of the research question. Semistructured

interviews are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer, and they provide qualitative

data that can be used in descriptive and inferential statistical analyses as well as allow for

the measuring of subjective data in an objective way (Leko, 2014). McCusker and

Gunaydin (2015) asserted that quantitative research requires researchers to know in

advance what is being looked for in the study and what is best suited for the later phases

of the investigation as well as having the data aspects designed before data are collected

and the questionnaires or data collection equipment needed to collect numerical data in

the form of numbers and statistics. Quantitative research results are achieved by

analyzing data from multiple perspectives, and they limit the exploration of subjective

data (Babones, 2015). Quantitative research was not suitable for the research I intended

to complete. Conducting a qualitative study with life insurance agency managers may help other agency managers understand the strategies used to improve the retention of life insurance sales agents. Mixed-method research requires an added level of researcher expertise, both in quantitative and qualitative research, additional time to collect and analyze different types of data, and other funding (McKim, 2015). As a result, mixed-method research was not appropriate for this study because I did not hold the added level of researcher expertise, or could I meet the requirement for additional time and resources.

Research Design

Dasgupta (2015) described a research design as a plan that aids the researcher in the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting observations. The research design provides the researcher with a model of proof to draw inferences about causal relationships between the variables under exploration (Dasgupta, 2015). Qualitative studies are designed to enable the understanding of a phenomenon from the participant's perspective and not from the researcher's point of view (Estrada, Mejia, & Hufana, 2016). By conducting this qualitative study, I was able to gain a greater understanding of strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. A single case study is appropriate when studying a stated theory or a specific or unique case (Dasgupta, 2015); however, these conditions did not apply to my research. I chose a multiple case study design for my research study because the design provided a strong base for my theme building and a thorough comparison of the theoretical properties that are necessary to further the development of emergent themes (see Dasgupta, 2015). The exploratory multiple case study design also enabled me to conduct an empirical inquiry and explore

the phenomenon in-depth in its real-life context. Rule and John (2015) proposed that to

conduct an empirical study and explore the phenomenon in-depth in its real-life context,

an exploratory multiple case study design is appropriate. In this study, I was able to

benefit from the prior development of theoretical positions and the guidelines for data

collection and analysis.

Population and Sampling

In this study, I employed a qualitative multiple case study design, conducting

semistructured interviews with volunteering participants. Leko (2014) proposed that the

qualitative study methodology applies questionnaires, rating scales, and direct

observations, which enables answering the exploratory nature of the research question.

Semistructured interviews are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer.

Semistructured interviews provide qualitative data that can be used in descriptive and

inferential statistical analyses, and they allow for the measuring of subjective data in an

objective way (Leko, 2014). McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) claimed that quantitative

research requires researchers to know in advance: (a) what is being looked for in the

study, (b) what is best suited for the later phases of the research, (c) the data aspects

design before data were collected, and (d) that questionnaires or data collection

equipment collect numerical data in the form of numbers and statistics. Quantitative

research results are achieved by analyzing these data from multiple perspectives, and they

limit the exploration of subjective data (Babones, 2015); therefore, this approach was not

suitable for the research I intended to complete. Conducting a qualitative study with life

insurance agency managers helped me understand the strategies used for the retention of

life insurance sales agents. Mixed-methods research requires an added level of researcher expertise, both in quantitative and qualitative research, additional time to collect and analyze different types of data, and other funding (McKim, 2015). As a result, mixed-methods research was not suited for my study because I did not hold the added level of researcher expertise, or could I meet the requirement for additional time and resources.

I recruited volunteer participants for this study by providing them (a) with information on the nature of the study, (b) the anticipated time taken to complete the questionnaire, and (c) the assurance of protecting their anonymity. I protected their confidentiality by ensuring autonomy and privacy, including practicing professional attributes, such as honesty and respectfulness, with the participants. Petrova et al. (2016) stated autonomy, privacy, honesty, and respectfulness protect the confidentiality of participants. Petrova et al. opined building a trustful relationship with the participants is an essential value in qualitative research. I created a trusting relationship with the participants. Petrova et al. found gaining participants' trust and acceptance will lead them to open up freely. Gaining acceptance in the participants' lifeworld predisposed the participants to open up to me freely and share their experiences. I ensured participants were comfortable with volunteering their time and that they read, signed, and thoroughly understood the consent form. After the completion of these steps, I conducted the semistructured interviews.

Ethical Research

The implementation of strategies founded from research studies has become an essential scientific tool in the development of (a) organizational growth, (b) profitability, and (c) sustainability. Laage et al. (2017) opined that participants agreeing to participate in research studies make sacrifices on behalf of advancing the goals of the phenomenon under study. Consent of the participants is a research necessity that aligns ethical norms with the protection of the participants (Perrault & Nazione, 2016). Researchers are responsible for exercising the highest standards of vigilance in ensuring compliance with the highest ethical standards; this also includes U.S. federal regulations.

The creation of *The Belmont Report* was as a result of gross misconduct by researchers (Perrault & Nazione, 2016). *The Belmont Report* led to federal regulations; regulations that resulted in the creation of locally managed Internal Review Boards (IRBs) at research institutions that oversee human subjects research (Perrault & Nazione, 2016). A key function of IRBs is to review informed consent procedures (Perrault & Nazione, 2016). Informed consent from participants is vital in research studies; they are important in that it ensures participants understand what the studies are about, that they know and understand the potential risks they may encounter, and what the researcher plans to do with the information collected after the studies are completed (Perrault & Nazione, 2016). Perrault and Nazione (2016) cited the informed consent explains to participants that their participation is voluntary and provides information on who to contact if participants have concerns about any aspects of the study. I ensured participants received consent forms and that I exercised the highest standards of vigilance

in ensuring compliance with the highest ethical standards; to include U.S. federal regulations.

The U.S. Code of Federal Regulations requires that IRBs ensure participants understand procedures for withdrawing from a study, whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury (Underhill, 2014). I ensured research participants understood the procedures for withdrawing from the study, whom to contact for answers pertinent to the research, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury. Underhill (2014) asserted that the voluntary nature of participation in research requires participants to understand that they may discontinue participation in an ongoing research study without any repercussions. I ensured participants knew that they might terminate involvement in the ongoing research without any consequences.

Ethical protection of participants is initiated in maintaining confidentiality during the process of ethical approval for the study (Petrova et al., 2016). I ensured that any potential benefits to the participants and the importance of the knowledge gained outweigh the risk of harm to the participants. I evaluated if a risk assessment would be a useful action to complement the ethical processes. All of the participants were treated as unique individuals and equally, irrespective of their age, gender, religious beliefs, political orientation, or other factors, and the values of confidentiality were always highly respected throughout the research process. Participants were not approached until ethical clearance was obtained, and once ethical approval was achieved, participants were invited to participate in the study by providing them an invitation letter.

The participants were life insurance branch agency managers recruited from two life insurance organizations that are operating in the Southwest United States. The participants from these two life insurance organizations received recruitment letters. All the questions about the study were reviewed and answered. I screened potential participants for eligibility by using the telephone script in Appendix B and via face-to-face meetings. I ensured the confidentiality of the participants and the life insurance organizations by assigning an alphanumeric identifier to both; the participating agency managers and the two life insurance organizations. As a researcher, I am committed to maintaining the data in a locked file cabinet for 5 years to protect the rights of the participants with full access to the participants. I will ensure I achieve the 5-year protocol with subsequent destruction of the records after the aforementioned 5-year statue.

Data Collection Instruments

I am the researcher and served as the data collection instrument for my research study. I administered a questionnaire with open-ended questions using formal and informal processes to elicit answers to the research question. Leko (2014) suggested using formal and informal methods to elicit responses to the research question using open-ended questions. Life insurance agency managers from two life insurance agencies in the Southwest United States that have used life insurance sales agent retention strategies participated in providing the answers through the data they provided. Recruitment letters were provided to the branch agency managers from these two life insurance organizations, and responses given to questions they had about the study,

whereby the potential participants were screened for eligibility via telephone and via face to face meetings. Ceballos et al. (2014) proposed to test participants for eligibility via phone and face to face meetings.

I acquired volunteer participants by providing them the information on the nature of the study, the anticipated time taken to complete the questionnaire, and the assurance of protecting their anonymity. I strategically selected cases that were information-rich that provided specific knowledge on the issues of central importance to the purpose of the study and answered the research question. I enhanced the reliability and the validity of the data by including participants based on a diversity of sample characteristics and experiences, where both supported these; the stories shared with rich information and the identification of common patterns of lived experiences. I conducted a pilot test of the semistructured interview to test the question order and wording before providing the participants the instrument for final data collection.

The data collection instrument contained the questions to answer the research question. Tellado, Lopez-Calvo, and Alonso-Olea (2014) stated past research could create knowledge of the phenomenon of study. The data gathering instrument created an understanding of the phenomenon of study by conducting an exhaustive search in the literature review. The informed consent form from participants is vital in research studies; they are essential in that it ensures participants know what the studies are about; that they know and understand the potential risks they may encounter, and what the researcher plans to do with the information collected after the studies are completed

(Perrault & Nazione, 2016). I provided the informed consent form and the questions for the semistructured interview.

Data Collection Technique

Valipoor and Pati (2016) have argued that output data can be easily transferred to electronic spreadsheets and facilitate in-depth statistical analysis, and they added that automatic data transferred to spreadsheets and statistical applications will aid in the reduction of errors that originate from manual input of data. The purposeful sampling for data collection using participants with large information power will allow for smaller samples (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). The participants that were qualified were provided access to the confidentiality notice, the informed consent form, and the ability to preview sample questions listed in the informed consent form to ensure that they did not have any objections to any of the questions in the interview.

The success of an exploratory case study is achieved by including participants from within the same setting of the phenomenon being studied; the semistructured interviews were administered to life insurance agency managers that have applied strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents (Yin, 2018). I explained and understood the strategies for life insurance sales agent retention. I explained the development of the semistructured interviews with open-ended questions with the answers provided directly from the participants. The semistructured interview data collection technique poses a challenge in creating data, but it gives a distinct advantage in capturing data (White & Drew, 2011).

To explore the phenomenon in my research study, I first conducted a pilot test and addressed the strategies used for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Nolte, Shauver, and Chung (2015) showed data comes from a representation of the general participant population of the phenomenon researched. Receipt of an IRB approved listing, and the collection of normative data allowed me to create an accurate representation of the general participant population-based on retention of life insurance sales agents. The participants included life insurance managers operating in the Southwest United States that have been responsible for the retention of life insurance sales agents in their respective organizations. The retention growth rates of sales agents determined the eligibility criteria. The participants came from the top 10 agencies in terms of agent retention rates. After receiving IRB approval, I identified branch agency managers responsible for sales agent retention from these top 10 organizations. Stakeholders were also an area of emphasis for evaluations as part of the pilot study; these stakeholders included the participants, agents, and the local population.

Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) founded that member checking is a means of enhancing rigor in qualitative research; they proposed that to ensure credibility, the accurate description and interpretations of the phenomenon under study. Member checking was used to maintain transparency in what I intended to achieve by applying the study methodology. Member checking included a range of functions; it included returning the completed questionnaires to participants, a member check question and answer using the interpreted data, a member checks focus group, and returning analyzed synthesized data. To enhance the rigor of my research study, I used member

checking, applying the interpreted data in a question and answer interview of the participants.

Data Organization Techniques

NVivo is software that supports qualitative research, and it's designed to help organize, analyze, and find insights into qualitative data. MAXQDA is also software that is used to manage research projects. MAXQDA aids in allowing importing text documents and organize material in groups. It allows maintaining projects flexibly and for the expansion and refinement of the identifier code system. I utilized this type of software and electronic data saving devices to help keep notes, documents, questionnaires administered, and other materials organized. I also assembled a descriptive analysis by (a) identifying significant data answers related to strategies for life insurance sales agent retention, (b) equally considering each answer provided and its meaning, (c) grouping significant statements into larger meaning units and themes, (d) developing textural and structural descriptions focused on the "what' and the "how" of life insurance sales agent retention strategies, and (e) articulating a descriptive synthesis that reflects the core and or the essence of life insurance sales agent retention strategies. I ensured I met the criteria for excellence in qualitative research, as well as member checking, triangulation, and respondent validation to assist in eliminating factors that threaten the trustworthiness of my study. The criterion are (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence (Plamondon, Bottorff, & Cole, 2015). As per case study methodologies guidelines, I collected each questionnaire and read the answers to gain an overall view of

the data collected; then, I reread the answers to identify relevant data and organize it into themes. I developed identifier codes to represent the themes identified to create an overall thematic matrix, and I organized these themes into final themes and characteristics identified as having effects on sales agent retention strategies. I ensured the data were coded throughout the study and applied a multilevel coding scheme such as participant, study, and context to identify themes and characteristics. I established dependability in my qualitative research by seeking informant feedback, such as other researchers who are experts in qualitative research.

Data Analysis

Estrada et al. (2016) recommended using the procedures for assembling descriptive analysis for data analysis. My approach consisted of identifying significant statements related to life insurance sales agent retention strategies; equally considering each statement and its meaning; grouping significant statements into larger meaning units and themes; developing textural and structural descriptions focused on the what and the how of life insurance sales agent retention strategies, and articulating a descriptive synthesis that reflects the core of sales agent retention strategies. Kern (2016) suggested data triangulation for the validity of the inference of data. I used data triangulation as a strategy to increase the validity of the inference in my study by combining varieties of data. The value of triangulation in the creation of strategies, technology, and sales agent retention in the applied human factors literature has not been directly addressed (Papautsky, Crandall, Grome, & Greenberg, 2015).

Papautsky et al. (2015) posited researchers use methods for the content analysis of qualitative data to analyze data. I examined the data using methods for the content analysis of qualitative data. The focus of the data analysis was to identify themes across roles within each design role, where I applied an iterative process of data review and structuring. I conducted a content analysis in three stages; (a) data review, (b) category coding and data extraction, and (c) synthesis and integration of findings. I did not use preconceived codes. I created codes as data were collected and deductively sorted into smaller meaningful sections (Osterman, 2014). I subdivided these sections into three primary themes: (a) organizational brand marketing, (b) compensation and benefits, and (c) psychological benefits as I repeatedly read the data to codify it further.

NVivo and MAXQDA is software that supports qualitative research and is designed to organize, analyze, and find insights into qualitative data. I used NVivo in the analysis of the data for cross-referencing and look for similarities in the data (Osterman, 2014). I tested the strategies used by branch agency managers for the retention of life insurance sales agents using data triangulation. To maximize the benefit from data triangulation, I triangulated the sources using the same conceptual construct. The use of qualitative software such as NVivo and MAXQDA will facilitate my analysis of significant amounts of data and will aid in the coding, the cross-references, identifying themes, and identifying the similarities of data (Osterman, 2014). Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, and Casey (2015) suggested the use of software identifies vital themes of research data. I used NVivo software to focus on the key themes of my study and correlate them

to the key themes in the literature by allowing me to detail how I analyzed the data within the context of the conceptual framework.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) suggested that dependability is the gauge of neutrality and consistency of a study. I used a research design that was able to aid me in the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting observations. Dasgupta (2015) argued research designs are critical for the identification of inferences between causal relations and the variables under study. My research design provided a model of proof that produced conclusions about causal links between the variables under investigation. Birt et al. (2016) stated that member checking is a means of enhancing rigor in a research study. Scholars ensure credibility with the accurate description and interpretations of the phenomenon under study (Birt et al., 2016). To ensure dependability, I used member checking to share my interpretations of the data with participants.

Validity

I assessed and critiqued my study by its (a) dependability, (b) creditability, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability. I ensured credibility in my research by assembling a descriptive analysis. The descriptive analysis included the identification of significant data answers related to strategies for life insurance sales agent retention, the grouping of significant statements into larger meaning units and themes, the development of textural and structural descriptions focused on the "what" and the "how" of life insurance sales agent retention strategies, and the articulation of a descriptive synthesis that reflects the

core and or the essence of life insurance sales agent retention strategies. I enhanced the dependability of my study by seeking informant feedback, such as other researchers who are experts in qualitative research.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested that the researcher's responsibility does not include the methods of how the study findings and additional studies are shared. Transferability is the concept of how future researchers will apply the data found in a study in future studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Within the data in my research, I uncovered findings that could potentially enable life insurance agency managers to identify the retention strategies to retain life insurance sales agents.

Confirmability is the concept of ensuring the accuracy and neutrality of the data (Houghton et al., 2015). I used software such as NVivo to ensure the confirmability of the data collected in my study. NVivo software allowed me to import text documents and organize material in groups. It allowed me to maintain projects flexibly and allow expansion and refinement of the code system. I collected the questionnaires and read the answers to gain an overall view of the data collected; then, I reread the responses to identify relevant data and organize it into themes. I developed codes to represent the themes identified to create an overall thematic matrix, and I assembled it into final issues and characteristics identified as having effects on life insurance sales agents' retention strategies.

Transition and Summary

I conducted an in-depth exploratory, multiple case study to analyze the strategies that are used by life insurance agency managers in the retention of life insurance sales

agents in the Southwest United States. In Section 2 of my study, I have included a

purpose statement that details the description regarding (a) the purpose of my research,

(b) the role of the researcher, (c) the participants of the study, (d) the research method, (e)

the research design, (f) the population, and (f) ethical research. Section 2 included (a) the

data collection instrument and the plan for data collection, (b) the organization and

analysis, and (c) an explanation of reliability and validity limitations that relate to this

study.

 In Section 3, I included the following sections: (a) the introduction, (b) a

presentation of the findings, (c) the application to professional practice, (d) the

implication for social change, (e) the recommendations for action, (f) the

recommendations for further research and (g) study, reflections and conclusion. In

Section 3, the main focus was, and the majority of the section was the discussion of the

findings of the study. The analysis of the data collected from the interview questions

presents literature to show new knowledge. In the final section of section 3, I described

(a) how the findings are linked to current professional practice, (b) what the potential

implications are for social change, and (c) what the recommendations are for further

study opportunities and personal reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies life insurance agency managers use to retain life insurance sales agents. I conducted semistructured interviews with six life insurance managers from two life insurance agencies who had successfully applied agent retention strategies in a metropolitan area in the southwest United States. The participants' experience ranged from a minimum of 10 years to 25 years; each participant managed 20 life insurance sales agents or more. The participants shared their personal, real-life experiences as they related to the strategies used to retain life insurance sales agents.

I reviewed the participant responses from the semistructured interviews, reflective journals, industry studies, and newsletters to triangulate and validate the data. Each semistructured interview took 45 minutes to complete and was conducted individually at the participants' location in private room settings. After the data analysis, I identified three primary themes: (a) organizational brand marketing, (b) compensation and benefits, and (c) psychological benefits. The emergent themes were the strategies the participants used for the retention of life insurance sales agents as described from their experiences.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do life insurance agency managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents? The primary source for data collection was the interview responses of six life insurance branch managers. Through the completion of semistructured interviews with the

participants, I collected data that provided me an understanding of the strategies used by life insurance branch agency managers for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The semistructured interviews were completed in private room settings at the participants' organizations to enable the participants the comfort necessary to provide detailed responses to the interview questions.

I applied a conceptual framework in my research to focus on exploring the dimensions and outcomes of employer branding. Ambler and Barrow (1996) were the first to propose the term employer branding. Ambler and Barrow suggested a significant synergy exists between brand marketing and HR. From the results, I found an understanding of the strategies life insurance branch managers use to retain life insurance sales agents. I used alphanumeric codes (i.e., P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6) to identify the participants after the interviews. The responses from the participants supported the Ambler and Barrow's Employer Branding Theory (EBT). The evidence from the literature review was supported and coincided with themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected. In the following subsections, I review and discuss the three emergent primary themes: (a) organizational brand marketing, (b) compensation and benefits, and (c) psychological benefits.

Emergent Theme 1: Organization Brand Marketing

Analysis of the participants' responses showed that organization brand marketing resulted in the retention of life insurance sales agents. All the participants stated the importance of organization brand marketing in motivating life insurance sales agents to remain with the organization. Reformat-Bilinska and Stanczyk (2018) suggested that

employer branding can provide a competitive asset to organizations. The application of employer branding can potentially enable business organizations to gain employees with the required skills and competence as well as retain employees within the organization (Reformat-Bilinska & Stanczyk, 2018). The branch agency managers that participated pointed out the importance of implementing an employer branding strategy in the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participants indicated that employer branding led to improved sales agent motivation and job satisfaction. Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined employer branding as a package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified by the employing company. P1 stated, "Having a well-oiled organization structure is necessary for agent retention. If agents don't feel comfortable or are unsure of who or what they need to be doing, they will leave and go to someone else that is." Brand marketing is a critical component that was identified by the participants for the motivation of life insurance sales agents to remain with the organization, and in turn, for the practical application of employer branding.

Life insurance organizations have used employer branding as a long-term strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Tanwar and Prasad (2016) suggested organizations have used employer branding as a long-term strategy to retain and motivate employees. Tanwar and Prasad contributed to the theory of employer branding by suggesting employer branding consists of four key tenets: (a) CSR, (b) WLB, (c) T&D, and (d) WE. There are five vital possible outcomes created by employer branding: (a) job satisfaction, (b) psychological contract, (c) productivity, (d) organizational

commitment, and (e) brand advocacy (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Through the data

analysis, I found that the employer branding theme aligns with the existing literature.

The findings in the literature review showed that (a) job satisfaction, (b) psychological

contract, (c) productivity, and (d) organizational commitment, which are four of the

possible outcomes of employer branding, impact the retention of employees. Employer

branding is an effective long-term strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

P4 provided the following statement,

> Strategies we are implementing to achieve agent retention are providing a family
>
> culture for the agents. Getting agents off to a great start by doing joint fieldwork
>
> and ample in-office training early with the agent. We provide our life insurance
>
> sales agents back end systems to help them keep busy with constant clients to see,
>
> and we made our annual company trip obtainable to all employees that are
>
> working full time with us and just making extras on the trip harder to obtain.

P6 stated,

> Our retention strategies are all predicated on production levels, and production
>
> potential and are designed on the strategy of providing expert services in a
>
> personalized manner that aligns with producers' business model: (a) high touch
>
> service/personalized service: Custom case design, one-on-one education, and case
>
> design discussion, concierge administration support depending on production
>
> levels; (b) marketing support: custom marketing pieces/campaign set up where
>
> agent is responsible for execution and lead generation; (c) commission overrides:
>
> typically payout at maximum level allowed by carrier regardless of production

level, and then depending on production volume pay a portion of agency override

as bonus to selling agent/agency; and (d) Expert on staff underwriting: On-site

staff experience underwriter to help place difficult cases.

Park and Yun (2017) cited the importance of understanding the different motivational

efforts and their relationship to the desired outcomes for leaders to create effective

motivational supporting interventions.

The perceived organizational image is the driver for employees to see and believe

that the organization is a unique place to work in and is appealing as an employer

(Hoppe, 2018). An organization differentiates itself from its competitors through its

perceived image and highlighting the uniqueness of their employment offerings (Hoppe,

2018). Employer brand and person-organization fit is a fit between the employee's

beliefs, values, and culture and the organization's image (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019).

P6 offered the following comment,

We continuously work with agents on having a positive mental attitude. A

positive mental attitude is the cornerstone of the type of family culture that we

cultivate inside of the company. We do this by constantly talking to the agents

about having a positive mental attitude and by coaching our manager to talk to

their employees about this. We provide videos and literature to agents as well.

The employer branding theme identified by the data collected aligns with other

scholars' findings of the dimensions and outcomes of employer branding of (a) job

satisfaction, (b) productivity, (c) organizational commitment, and (d) brand advocacy.

Employer branding practices within the organization are a critical business practice and

also aligns with the literature. P4 provided answers concerning the employer branding theme and broadened the understanding of retention strategies of life insurance sales agents. The participants' responses demonstrated that the retention of life insurance sales agents affects organizational productivity. The building of a positive mental attitude with the application of employer branding may lead to motivated sales agents and may result in more significant organizational commitment, which can potentially lead to the creation of brand advocacy.

The employer branding theme and the participants' responses aligned with the conceptual framework of Ambler and Barrow's employer branding theory. Ambler and Barrow (1996) theorized that employer branding leads to improved employee motivation and enhances customer relationships, which could strengthen brand equity and have an effect on life insurance sales agents' motivation, completing a virtuous circle. P5 stated,

> The strategies we pursue for the retention of agents are that we continuously train on the company products and how we add value to our clients. We provide a work environment that allows a work and family balance. We train and promote feedback from our life insurance sales agents on what CSR should be.

The branch agency managers that participated in this study used employer branding to motivate the life insurance sales agents and as a strategy for their retention. The responses provided by all participants indicated employer branding was a successful strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Emergent Theme 2: Compensation and Benefits

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was that compensation and

benefits programs are necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The

compensation and benefits theme aligned with the assertions of Kwon (2014) and Bloom

and Kamm (2014) that human capital challenges in the retention of life insurance sales

agents have grown because of the effects of demographic, social, economic, and market-

specific factors. Bloom and Kamm stated that management in this industry understands

the importance and value that high-performing employees provide to a life insurance

organization, especially when human capital is scarce. The participants provided answers

that acknowledged and supported the importance of effective compensation and benefits

programs for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

P2 discussed the importance of effective compensation and benefits programs as a

strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents, stating,

> We use weekly tracking reports to ensure that the agents are getting paid correctly
>
> and so that we can predict future compensations and trends inside individuals'
>
> practice and the company as a whole. We closely track the costs of sales agents
>
> in relationship to our organizational costs. Human capital costs are something we
>
> track very closely and monitor using performance work systems.

The findings concerning compensation and benefits management aligned with the

assertions of Bloom and Kamm's and Garg and Lal's (2016). A strong correlation exists

at high-performing organizations between human capital and superior financial returns

(Bloom & Kamm, 2014). Garg and Lal studied HPWS and found there are far-reaching

benefits for both the organization and for the employees with the use of HPWS. Garg and Lal defined HPWS as a group of separate, but interconnected, HR practices that are designed to enhance employees' skills, knowledge, and efforts.

P4 offered the following,

> HR is key in promoting the value and building the knowledge and skills of our sales agents. HR holds the responsibility of developing work performance systems that are focused on the training, development, and performance of our sales agents. Training is the single best practice to enhance the productivity and performance of our sales agents. Training is the one activity that will always impact the performance of our agents.

Chahal et al. (2016)'s findings align with the HR practices of developing work performance systems focusing on promoting the value, uniqueness, and inimitability of life insurance sales agents' knowledge and skills. Chahal et al. examined the effects of the perceived high-performance HR practices of extensive training, performance management, performance appraisal, performance-based compensation, empowerment, and competency development on the business performance of employees. Chahal et al. found that bundled high-performance HR practices affect business performance to a higher degree as compared to individual high-performance HR practices.

The second theme of a compensation and benefits program aligned with the conceptual framework of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) EBT. Ambler and Barrow were the first to propose the term employer branding, and they suggested that there is significant synergy between brand marketing and HR. Employer branding supports that

employer branding is a long-term HR strategy that is used to attract and retain talented

employees (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Bloom and Kamm (2014) stated that management

in this industry understands the importance and the value that high-performing employees

provide to a life insurance organization, especially when human capital is scarce. Based

on the answers provided by the participating branch agency managers, the compensation

and benefits strategy was a successful strategy used for the retention of life insurance

sales agents.

The responses provided by the participating branch agency managers aligned with

Bloom and Kamm (2014) and Kwon's (2014) assertion that human capital challenges in

the retention of life insurance sales agents have grown because of the effects of

demographic, social, economic, and market-specific factors. Chahal et al. (2016)

examined the impact of perceived high-performance HR practices of extensive training,

performance management, performance appraisal, performance-based compensation,

empowerment, and competency development on the business performance of employees.

The participating branch agency managers observed that HR practices that include

extensive training, performance management, performance appraisal, performance-based

compensation, empowerment, and competency affect the development of the business

performance of life insurance sales agents.

Emergent Theme 3: Psychological Benefits

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis was psychological benefits.

Psychological benefits are vital pillars for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

The participating branch agency managers' responses overwhelmingly acknowledged

how psychological benefits were necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The consensus from the branch agency managers who participated was that psychological benefits describe the obligations and entitlements an organization has toward its life insurance sales agents, and the obligations and rights life insurance sales agents have towards the organization. O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2014) described psychological benefits as the beliefs held by employers and employees about their reciprocal obligations and entitlements. O'Leary-Kelly et al. stated employee-employer relationships could fundamentally define the expectations each assumes of each other. The key lens of how employee experiences are filtered and understood is key to understanding employee attitudes and behaviors.

P1 discussed the following, "psychological benefits affect job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and sales agent turnover." P3 offered that the expectations between the organization and the sales agents are at the creation of psychological benefits. P5 stated that creating psychological benefits at the onboarding stage increases the likelihood that life insurance sales agent organizational commitment and perceived sales agent organizational fit is reached.

P2 noted the following,

> When we first hire and onboard our sales agents, we have them read and sign an "employment agreement." The agreement will state all that the organization expects from the sales agent, this will include all personal goals to be achieved and timeframes for achievement, and in turn, the agreement will list all that the

organization will provide to the sales agent in terms of compensation and support

for the sales agent to achieve the stated goals.

P4 provided the following,

Our focus is to meet with our sales agents regularly and discuss how their goals

have changed, if any, as their career has advanced. We try to learn from our sales

agents how their psychological contract preferences have evolved or changed.

Our next step is to adapt to these changes and work on customizing the

psychological contract to these preferences.

Psychological fulfillment increases the costs to employees when leaving the

organization resulting in increased motivation to perform extraordinarily (Kiazad,

Kraimer, & Seibert, 2019). The psychological benefits theme for the retention of life

insurance sales agents and the participating branch agency managers' responses aligned

with the conceptual framework of Ambler and Barrow's employer branding theory.

Psychological benefits affect job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and sales agent

turnover, and in turn, may be necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Using the Most Effective Strategy For The Retention Of Life Insurance Agents

The most effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents that

emerged was (a) family culture, (b) compensation, and (c) support. The data collected

uncovered life insurance sales agents' performance adheres to achievement goals. The

main achievement goal that is used by life insurance sales agents in the life insurance

industry in the most effective strategy is a mastery goal. Wang, Shim, and Wolters,

(2017) defined mastery goal as a goal that places the focus on (a) learning competencies, (b) understanding competencies, and (c) developing competencies.

P1 discussed the following,

> Life insurance sales agents that have demonstrated higher sales performance have consistently sought further knowledge of the products and the organization. These agents place high importance on learning how the products add value to the consumer and seek to understand how these products work. The importance agents place on learning blends to their sense of family culture. Agents have shown that when they feel they have a purpose and that those around them care about their personal growth and success, they become engaged with the organization. It all becomes a full circle. The agents learn the skills necessary for success, they demonstrate a great understanding of the products, and their sales performance increases, leading to increased compensation levels. The agents show a level of comfortability and blends to their satisfaction of a family culture". Chahal et al. (2016) assertion aligns with this retention strategy of developing work performance systems focusing on promoting the value, uniqueness, and inimitability of life insurance sales agents' knowledge and skills. Chahal et al. cited that the practices of extensive training, performance management, performance appraisal, performance-based compensation, empowerment, and competency development result in high marks of the business performance of employees.

P5 provided the following,

I have found in our organization that the most effective strategy is training that

leads to our agents being comfortable with our product offerings and the value we

create to our clients. The training feeds into the family culture we strive to create.

Our compensation triggers that lead to higher payouts and bonuses promote a

higher satisfaction within our agents. The compensation levels blend in with the

support we afford our agents. We make sure our agents understand there is

support availability 24/7/365, whether on-line or in person. We hold training on a

breadth of carriers and product lines available to them at top payouts. We also

include training on how these product lines provide life insurance solutions to all

our clients. Overall, our agents quickly learn we have the systems tailored for

their success. They quickly get a sense of belongingness. Our compensation

models, training, and support promote a model where the agent is the single most

important asset in a family-oriented setting.

A strong correlation exists at high-performing organizations between human

capital and superior financial returns (Bloom & Kamm, 2014). Garg and Lal (2016)

studied HPWS and found there are far-reaching benefits for both the organization and for

the employees with the use of HPWS. Garg and Lal defined HPWS as a group of

separate but interconnected HR practices that are designed to enhance employees' skills,

knowledge, and efforts.

The theme of the most effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales

agents was (a) family culture, (b) compensation, and (c) support aligned with the

conceptual framework of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) EBT. Baum and Uberschaer

(2018) suggested employer awards have a positive influence on employees' intentions.

Baum and Uberschaer further stated the awards by the employer need to be well-known

and have a high level of awareness to the employee group. Awards to employees that are

well defined and that promote employee well-being are capable of providing a positive

image of the firm, and these awards are capable of creating a strong brand on their own

(Baum & Uberschaer, 2018). Based on the answers provided by the participants, the

most effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents is (a) family culture,

(b) compensation, and (c) support was a successful strategy used for the retention of life

insurance sales agents.

The participating branch agency managers' responses aligned with Bloom and

Kamm, (2014) and Kwon's' (2014) assertion that human capital challenges in the

retention of life insurance sales agents have grown because of the effects of demographic,

social, economic, and market-specific factors. Moskovich and Achouch (2017) explained

the organizational family culture raises the organizational commitment and job

satisfaction. Mosckovich and Achouch further explained the organizational family

culture promotes organizational solidarity and increases employee retention. The key

pillars of (a) family culture, (b) compensation, and (c) support showed to be the drivers

for the most effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Applications to Professional Practice

Life insurance branch agency managers in the life insurance industry use best

practices found in research studies to create and implement retention strategies for the

retention of life insurance sales agents. The research completed in this study applies to the retention challenges faced by life insurance organizations in the life insurance industry. The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies life insurance agency managers use to retain life insurance sales agents.   Branch agency managers who can understand the pillars and factors that affect sales agent retention will be able to place their agencies and organizations in a position to succeed.

Branch agency managers experience fierce competition toward a strategic business challenge, which is a war for talent (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Organizations are struggling to find better-qualified (HR) capital to be able to better compete in today's competitive environment and gain a competitive advantage (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). A better-qualified HR can provide life insurance agency managers a competitive advantage for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Biswas and Suar (2016) stated employer branding impacts the retention of employees, where employer branding affects the nonfinancial and financial performance of organizations.

The implementation of the retention strategies of life insurance sales agents identified in this study is advantageous for life insurance agency managers to thrive in their competitive environment. The findings in this study may help life insurance agency managers increase the count of employed life insurance sales agents through the retention of life insurance sales agents. Branch agency managers may implement the recommendations from this study to create the necessary strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Branch agency managers may apply the findings of this study of organization brand marketing for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Branch agency managers who understand the importance of organization brand marketing in motivating life insurance sales agents to remain with the organization could be positioned for the retention challenges. The application of employer branding enables business organizations to gain employees with the required skills, competence, and to include, retain employees within the organization (Reformat-Bilinska & Stanczyk, 2018).

A high employer branding focuses on highlighting the image the organization portrays as the organization of choice for employment and leads to favorable attitudes in employees (Aldousari, Robertson, Yajid, & Ahmed, 2017). Brand marketing is a component for the motivation of life insurance sales agents to remain with the organization, and in turn, for the application of employer branding. Based on my findings within my research in my study, employer branding is a successful strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Branch agency managers may apply the findings of this study of HR and capital management programs for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Kwon (2014) and Bloom and Kamm (2014) asserted that human capital challenges in the retention of life insurance sales agents have grown because of the effects of demographic, social, economic, and market-specific factors. Evidence found within this research acknowledged and supported the importance of HR and capital management programs for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Garg and Lal (2016) studied HPWS and found there are far-reaching benefits for both the organization and for the employees with the use of HPWS. From within this study, I found that HR practices of extensive training, performance management, performance appraisal, performance-based compensation, empowerment, and competency affect the development of the business performance of employees. Based on my findings within the research of my study, I found that HR and capital management programs for the retention of life insurance sales agents are a successful strategy used for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Branch agency managers may apply the findings of this study about psychological contracts. Psychological contracts are vital pillars for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The results in the study overwhelmingly acknowledged how psychological contracts were necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

The findings identified that psychological contracts describe the obligations and entitlements an organization has toward its life insurance sales agents, and the obligations and entitlements life insurance sales agents have towards the organization. O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2014) described the psychological contract as the beliefs held by employers and employees about their reciprocal obligations and entitlements. Kiazad et al. (2019) stated psychological contracts allowed the expression and gratification between employees and employers, where if employers respect and keep the promises within the agreement, employees will work productively.

Psychological fulfillment increases the costs to employees when leaving the organization resulting in increased motivation to perform extraordinarily (Kiazad et al.,

2019). Employees who have their expectations met with their understanding of the

psychological contract are more likely to stay with the organization. Based on my

findings within my research study, the psychological contract is a strategy necessary for

the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Branch agency managers may apply the findings of this study about the most

effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The most effective

strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents that emerged was (a) family

culture, (b) compensation, and (c) support. Awards to employees that are well defined

and that promote employee well-being are capable of providing a positive image of the

firm, and these awards are capable of creating a strong brand on their own (Baum &

Uberschaer, 2018).

Mosckovich and Achouch (2017) further explained the organizational family

culture promotes organizational solidarity and increases employee retention. Baum and

Uberschaer (2018) suggested employer awards have a positive influence on employees'

intentions. Baum and Uberschaer further stated the awards by the employer need to be

well-known and have a high level of awareness to the employee group.

The findings within the study showed that overall, life insurance sales agents

quickly learn organizations have the systems tailored for their success. The findings

showed life insurance sales agents promptly get a sense of belongingness within the

organization. The results showed the compensation models, training, and support

provided by the organizations promote a model where the agent is the most critical asset

in a family-oriented setting. The key pillars of (a) family culture, (b) compensation, and

(c) support showed to be the drivers for the most effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Based on the findings within my research study, the most effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents was (a) family culture, (b) compensation, and (c) support and was applied successfully for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The application of the findings from within this study could enhance the current levels of life insurance sales agents employed. Life insurance branch agency managers may implement life insurance sales agent retention strategies to increase the number of life insurance sales agents used in the life insurance industry. Life insurance organizations that have experienced less success in the retention of life insurance sales agents may adopt the retention strategies identified by life insurance agency managers that have used them successfully.

The detailed and intensive analysis of the branch agency managers that have effectively managed this problem might help explain the phenomenon within its real-life context. Branch agency managers who are seeking and exploring retention strategies for life insurance sales agents may apply the strategies identified in this study. Branch agency managers can use the findings in this study and implement the strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents to retain the top talent within the life insurance industry.

The number of life insurance sales agents in the life insurance industry experienced a deep decline. Tanwar and Prasad (2016) found organizations have experienced setbacks when their employees have preferred other options as better places

to work. Life insurance branch agency managers who successfully implement successful retention strategies for life insurance sales agents can potentially improve employment rates.

Implications for Social Change

The retention of life insurance sales agents could potentially improve the number of life insurance sales agents employed in the life insurance industry, as well as the ability of life insurance organizations to protect better and serve the life insurance needs of the consumer. The decrease of the total amount of life insurance sales agents shows retention of life insurance sales agents is a challenge in the life insurance industry (BLS, 2018). Conversely, some life insurance companies have effectively overcome retention challenges, as evidenced by their growth and number of long-term life insurance agents.

Tanwar and Prasad (2016) stated that the loss of experienced and skilled employees to a competitor brings severe consequences; these include the demoralization of the current workforce and reduced productivity. Tanwar and Prasad further stated one of the significant impacts on an organization is the loss of intellectual and human capital. Through the data collected, I found life insurance companies face two principle challenges, the struggle to retain their customer base and the battle for knowledge loss resulting from employee turnover. Branch agency managers who can retain life insurance sales agents can improve the quality of life for both the life insurance sales agents and the life insurance organizations' consumers that.

The implications for social change are serving the public by increasing the number of life insurance sales agents employed and increasing the number of people

employed in the Southwest United States. Kwon (2014) and Bloom and Kamm (2014)

asserted that human capital challenges in the retention of life insurance sales agents have

grown because of the effects of demographic, social, economic, and market-specific

factors. Evidence found within this research acknowledged and supported the importance

of adequate HR and capital management programs for the retention of life insurance sales

agents. The findings of this study may have a positive effect on life insurance agency

managers who need to identify competitive advantages in the life insurance industry.

The application and implementation of the recommendations in this study may

affect the success of life insurance organizations. Local educational institutions may be

able to apply the findings to develop a curriculum to train interested students on the four

tenets of employer branding. The tenets may be promoted by the local life insurance

agencies to attract students into the life insurance agencies' agent workforce.

Communities may benefit socially and economically (a) it may increase the number of

people employed, (b) it may improve the populations' standard of living, and (c) it may

contribute to the stability of the local economy.

<h3 align="center">Recommendations for Action</h3>

The recommendations for action are from the research of successful sales agent

retention strategies used by life branch agency managers. I completed the research

through the concepts of employer branding theories that aligned with the research

continuum of strategic retention strategies of life insurance sales agents. Within the

study, I identified three primary themes: (a) organizational brand marketing, (b)

compensation and benefits, and (c) psychological benefits. Moskovich and Achouch

(2017) explained the organizational family culture raises the organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Mosckovich and Achouch further explained the organizational family culture promotes organizational solidarity and increases employee retention. The key pillars of (a) family culture, (b) compensation, and (c) support were the drivers for the most effective strategy for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

I recommend life insurance branch agency managers create and develop organization brand marketing strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. All participants stated the importance of organization brand marketing in motivating life insurance sales agents to remain with the organization and as strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The application of employer branding enables business organizations to gain employees with the required skills, competence, and to include, retain employees within the organization (Reformat-Bilinska & Stanczyk, 2018). The participants who participated pointed out the importance of implementing an employer branding strategy in the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participating branch agency managers indicated that employer branding led to improved sales agent motivation and job satisfaction.

P2 stated,

> Having a well-oiled organization structure is necessary for agent retention. Brand marketing is a component that was identified by the participants for the motivation of life insurance sales agents to remain with the organization, and in turn, for the application of employer branding.

I recommend life insurance branch agency managers create and develop HR and capital management programs necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Human capital challenges in the retention of life insurance sales agents have grown because of the effects of demographic, social, economic, and market-specific factors. A strong correlation exists at high-performing organizations between human capital and superior financial returns (Bloom & Kamm, 2014). Garg and Lal (2016) studied HPWS and found there are far-reaching benefits for both the organization and for the employees with the use of HPWS. Within the study, I discovered participating life insurance branch sales managers supported the importance of HR and capital management programs for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participating life insurance branch sales managers observed that HR practices of extensive training, performance management, performance appraisal, performance-based compensation, empowerment, and competency affect the development of the business performance of employees. I recommend that life insurance branch agency managers develop and create HR and capital management programs necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents. All life insurance branch sales managers that participated in this study expressed these systems were essential for the retention of life insurance sales agents and the success of the organization.

My final recommendation is that branch agency managers need to create and develop psychological contracts, that are the key pillars for the retention of life insurance sales agents. O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2014) described the psychological contract as the beliefs held by employers and employees about their reciprocal obligations and

entitlements. O'Leary-Kelly et al. stated that this employee-employer relationship

fundamentally defines the expectations each expects of each other, and are the critical

lens of how employee experiences are filtered and understood resulting as a key to

understanding employee attitudes and behaviors. The participating branch sales

managers' responses overwhelmingly acknowledged how psychological contracts were

necessary for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The consensus from all the

branch agency manager who participated was that psychological contracts describe the

obligations and entitlements an organization has toward its life insurance sales agents,

and the obligations and the entitlements life insurance sales agents have towards the

organization. All of the participants in this study expressed the importance of the

psychological contract. The participants stated the agreement they complete will indicate

all that the organization expects from the sales agent, it includes all personal goals to be

achieved and timeframes for achievement, and in turn, the agreement will list all that the

organization will provide to the sales agent in terms of compensation and support for the

sales agent to achieve the stated goals. All branch agency managers who participated in

this study expressed well prepared psychological contracts were necessary for the

retention of life insurance sales agents.

The implementation and adaptation of the retention strategies for the retention of

life insurance sales agents identified could contribute to the life insurance industry, and it

may increase the number of life insurance sales agents employed in the life insurance

industry. Organizations using employer branding found that employee motivation will

lead to improved employee performance, and in turn, it will lead to improved customer

relationships, which then will strengthen brand equity and will have an impact on motivation (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Some organizations have applied employer branding as a long-term strategy to retain and motivate employees (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). I recommend that branch agency managers use Ambler and Barrow's EBT as the conceptual concept to develop strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Fussy (2018) stated a research study is not considered complete until the study findings have been disseminated to the appropriate target audience. Findings dissemination is the transfer and sharing of research findings to promote research-based knowledge in policy, practice, and service development (Fussy, 2018). Life insurance branch agency managers can access the results of this study through ProQuest/UMI dissertation database. I will also disseminate the study findings via seminars, conferences, and business publications. I will network with life insurance agency professionals to share training and development techniques as it relates to strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies branch agency managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents in the Southwest United States. The targeted population who participated in this study were six life insurance managers from two life insurance agencies who applied successful agent retention strategies in the Southwest United States. Through the findings, I may be able to promote how to increase the motivation of life insurance sales agents and improve work performance for successful retention. The results of this study were limited to six

participants' knowledge and experience in strategies for the retention of life insurance

sales agents. The data collected were obtained from all six participants who were

purposefully selected. All participants pointed out strategies for the retention of life

insurance sales agents that life insurance agency managers may consider using and

implementing in the life insurance industry. For future research consideration, I

recommend increasing the number of participants to enrich the findings. Future research

with a higher number of participants combined with the findings of this study will yield

results that are more holistic to identifying strategies for the retention of life insurance

sales agents. A higher number of participants will mitigate (a) scheduling challenges, (b)

the unwillingness of participants to participate, and (c) the collection of more abundant

data.

Reflections

The Walden University Doctor of Business Administration doctoral study was

intense, challenging, and complex. I was challenged and found the doctoral process

enriching. In the program, I was challenged to balance work, family, and academic

requirements. Throughout the journey, I experienced many emotional peaks and valleys.

The residencies were overwhelming by the quantity of information provided and what the

doctoral journey would entail. The support I received from my chair, mentor, family,

friends, colleagues, and support groups were very instrumental in helping me remain

focused.

My doctoral journey challenged me to learn what the qualitative case study

process demanded. I have held positions in management and completed project

management tasks, and this journey, my skills were quickly challenged. I encountered many challenges throughout the journey, and the more profound problem was the data collection. When I contacted life insurance agency managers to schedule the interviews, I learned their work schedules were a complicated obstacle to overcome. I overcame the challenge by widening the invitations to participate.

The retention of life insurance sales agents was a business problem I saw firsthand and quickly emerged to me as the primary business problem in which to conduct my study. I have participated in the life insurance industry and found it was important I prevent my personal bias from influencing the results of the research. In the data collection process, I asked the approved interview questions and placed care to ensure the results of the study were the perspectives of the participants. The participants were willing to share their experiences, showed interest, and provided sufficient data to complete the study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies life insurance branch agency managers use to retain life insurance sales agents. The central research question for this study was, what retention strategies do life insurance agency managers use for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participants who opted to participate in the study were life insurance agency managers who had used strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The participants came from life insurance organizations with proven strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents and that have shown growth in the number of life insurance sales agents

employed. I identified three primary themes: (a) organizational brand marketing, (b)

compensation and benefits, and (c) psychological benefits that were the critical drivers

for the strategies for the retention of life insurance sales agents. Life insurance agency

managers should create and implement the recommendations in this study in their

organizations for the retention of life insurance sales agents. The results of this study

aligned with the existing literature that is related to the retention strategies of life

insurance sales agents. The results of this study also aligned with Ambler and Morrow's

(1996) EBT.

Sales agent retention is a critical component for the sustainability of the life

insurance industry. The strategies presented for the retention of life insurance sales

agents may be helpful for life insurance agency managers to increase the number of life

insurance sales agents employed. In conclusion, I recommend life insurance agency

managers, educational leaders, and scholars use the results and recommendations of this

study to understand and gain knowledge of the strategies for the retention of life

insurance sales agents.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol Form

Project: Strategies for Retaining Life Insurance Sales Agents

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Interviewer _____

Interviewee _____

Release form signed? _____

Notes to the interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow the knowledge of retention strategies of life insurance sales agents. The confidentiality of responses is guaranteed.

Approximate length of interview: 30 minutes, eight major questions

Purpose of the research:

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the strategies life insurance agency managers use to retain life insurance sales agents.

Methods of disseminating results:

1. What retention strategies do you apply to increase the retention of agents?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

2. What motivational strategies do you use to retain life insurance agents?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

3. What strategies do you use to improve agents' organizational commitment?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

4. Based on your experience, how does awareness of the organizational structure affect agent retention?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

5. What leadership style do you use to increase the retention of agents?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

6. What resources do you and the agency provide for the agents' work-life?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

7. What strategies for agent retention have you used that have shown to be the most effective?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

8. What additional information on agent retention strategies would you like to share?

Response from Interviewee:

Reflection by Interviewer

Reflection by Interviewer

- Closure
    - Thank you to the interviewee
    - Reassure confidentiality\
    - Ask permission to follow-up _____

Appendix B: Telephone Script

You are invited to take part in a research study about what strategies branch agency managers use to retain life insurance sales agents. The researcher is asking life insurance agency managers to be in the study. I obtained your name/contact info via the company list information. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Jose Pablo Pescador, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as a Vice President Regional Leader, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies life insurance agency managers use to retain life insurance sales agents.

Procedures:

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

Provide answers to questions in a questionnaire.

The questionnaire will consist of 8 to 10 questions.

The questionnaire will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

You may be asked to provide answers to follow on questions.

The follow-on questions, if necessary, will take approximately 15 minutes.

Here are some sample questions:

What retention strategies do you apply to increase the retention of agents?

What leadership style do you use to increase the retention of agents?

What strategies do you use to improve agents' organizational commitment?

May I email you a consent form for your review and approval?