

IDENTIFY THE CAUSES OF VOLUNTARY ATTRITION
FOR HIGHLY VALUED TECHNOLOGY EMPLOYEES

BY

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A dissertation submitted to City University of Seattle
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

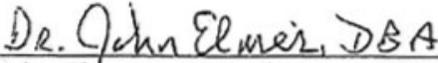
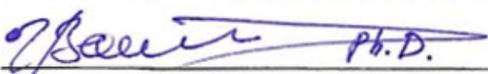
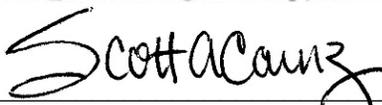
2021

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SIGNATURE PAGE

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DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Yusuf Kapadia and Nafisa Kapadia. My parents have been my biggest supporters and role models. I am forever in debt for the love and support they have made to help me achieve my goals. Thanks to my sister for all the unconditional love and support to reach this milestone in my life.

Second, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Sakina Kapadia, and my daughter Maria Kapadia. I thank them for the support and sacrifice made to achieve this goal. I would not have achieved this goal without their support and love.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank God for giving me the strength and support to complete the doctoral program. I want to offer special thanks to my parents, wife, daughter, and sister for their continued support and sacrifice during this journey. I want to thank my research committee chair Dr. John Elmer for his continuous guidance and support to complete my program. Also, I would like to thank all my committee members for their guidance to help me achieve my goal to complete the doctoral program.

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ABSTRACT

Growing competition and increased IT job opportunities have imposed organizations to reduce the attrition of their highly valued employees. Retaining employees will help organizations save money and time spent recruiting and training new employees. In this study, I sought to identify major causes of attrition for highly valued employees in IT companies in the United States.

Highly valued employees were defined as those with five or more years of experience working in the IT industry, including a minimum of three years as a subject matter expert (SME) in a computer programming language, and those who were promoted at their previous companies.

Phenomenology is a qualitative design within overall qualitative methodology. I used a phenomenological design to identify major causes of attrition for this studied population. I collected data via semistructured individual interviews with six participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. The six participants identified for this study met the defined criteria of highly valued employees. Herzberg's motivational theory is used as the conceptual framework for this study. Data gathered from the interview process were analyzed in three steps. Step one focused on developing and applying codes. In step two, themes were created based on coding. During step three, all the gathered data was interpreted, and themes were created to conclude with the findings of the study. Four causes of attrition were identified from data analysis. The findings of this study could lead to an increase in retention rates of highly valued employees due to a better understanding of causes triggering these employees to look for opportunities outside their company. Retention strategies were developed around the findings of this study to motivate and increase job satisfaction of highly valued employees. For further studies, the recommendation is to conduct research at IT companies outside the United States to validate if these findings apply to all global IT companies.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In this study, I sought to understand major causes of voluntary attrition of highly valued employees representing Information Technology (IT) companies in the United States. I defined highly valued employees as employees the company actively seeks to retain. Three criteria I used to identify highly valued employees were: five or more years of experience working in the IT industry, including a minimum of three years as a subject matter expert (SME) in a computer programming language, and promotion at the previous company. Voluntary attrition means employees freely choose to leave the job. Sood (2017) noted employees' voluntary attrition is concerning, and practitioners should urgently address this concern. Employee retention is the biggest challenge faced by human resources in the current market (Rath & Sahai, 2019).

Study Background

In such a highly competitive market amid unprecedented growth of technology, IT employees are in high demand. Due to the specialized skillsets required for high-tech jobs, it is hard to fill personnel gaps caused by attrition. Due to an imbalance of supply and demand for high-tech employees, the IT industry's turnover rate has increased (Malik et al., 2019). These factors have increased the turnover rate for highly valued technology employees who choose their employers based on leadership, culture, and work environment (Manroop, 2015).

Highly valued employees are critical to the success of an organization and it is important for companies to retain them. Due to the competitive market and high number of IT job opportunities, organizations have been forced to reexamine causes of attrition for their highly valued employees. In this study, I identified highly valued employees as those who meet three criteria: promoted a level up, have five or more years of IT experience, including a minimum of three years of programming experience.

The reason for selecting these criteria is that an employee promoted to a level up has demonstrated the value they bring to the company and are promoted to the next level. An employee with five or more years of IT experience, including three years of programming experience, has already demonstrated his or her expertise in a specific technology. Losing an IT employee impacts the company's growth as they take the system knowledge and specialize work skills that are difficult to replace (Tnay et al., 2013). IT employees with five or more years of experience, including a minimum of three years of programming experience, have gained enough system knowledge, which is hard to replace. Thus, employees with these criteria are considered highly valued employees in this study as they are hard to replace. This definition of highly valued employees is restricted to this study as no such description exists in the existing study as part of the literature.

Current State of the Field in which the Problem Exists

Technology is an integral part of an organization and plays a vital role in an organization's success. The IT industry is a rapidly growing industry and is heavily dependent on its employees (Langer & Yorks, 2018). Due to constant growth in the IT industry, organizations struggle to keep up with the pace at which technology is changing (Showry & Sayulu, 2017). Employees are job-hopping at alarming rates for better opportunities, making attrition a crucial issue for many organizations (Soto & Lugo, 2013; Wen et al., 2018). Employee attrition leads to tangible and intangible costs. Tangible costs include the cost to replace an employee. Intangible costs include the loss of intellectual capital and low employee morale (Singh et al., 2017). Due to high tangible and intangible costs, it is important for organizations to focus on the retention of their highly valued employees.

Historical Background

After the technology bubble of the late 1990s, demand for IT professionals has significantly increased. The voluntary attrition rate for IT employees increased due to an increase in demand across the businesses. Johnson (2018) found the causes of high turnover with tech professionals indicates that voluntary attrition in the US's IT sector has increased by 13.2%. This report includes full-time employees who left the organization and joined a new company in 2018. This report does not differentiate between IT programmers and other IT professionals. But IT programmers represent a majority of the population in an IT organization. Every attrition costs the company 1 to 1.2 times the leaving employee's annual salary (Marsden, 2016). This additional cost to the company causes a financial burden on the organization and is an important reason to retain employees. Companies focusing on identifying the cause of attrition for highly valued employees will save the attrition costs and avoid losing knowledge which goes with an employee leaving the company.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

The existing published studies focus on the causes of attrition in IT and non-IT sectors for all employees, and not just on highly valued employees. There were no search results displayed for attrition in IT for Highly Valued employees in the company. The definition of highly valued employee is specific to this study and is a sub-group of employees in a company. Studies outside the IT sector show that organizational politics, policies, peer support, and supervisor behavior cause employee attrition (Dhanapal et al., 2013; Narayan et al., 2018). Another study by Rath and Sahai (2019) identified three indicators for the cause of attrition in an organization: organizational politics, peer support, and rudeness of management. Narayan et al. (2018) sought to understand the cause of attrition on primary healthcare workers in Sierra

Leonne determined poor communication and job satisfaction as the primary reason for attrition. Existing studies outside the IT sector highlight the causes of attrition such as organizational politics, policies, peer support, supervisor behavior and poor communication style. All studies by Dhanapal et al. (2013), Narayan et al. (2018), and Rath and Sahai focused on understanding the cause of attrition outside the IT sector and not highly valued employees. Thus, the causes of attrition identified in this paragraph cannot be considered for understanding the causes of attrition for highly valued employees in the IT sector. Based on the existing published studies in the English language, there is no evidence that any research is done to understand the causes of attrition for highly valued employees in IT sector. Also, conducting a research study on the causes of attrition for highly valued employees will benefit IT organizations' leadership to potentially help retain their top talent.

Problem Statement

The IT sector relies on IT professionals to work in the company. In recent years, the IT industry has rapidly increased and has led to an increase in demand for hiring IT professionals (Langer & Yorks, 2018). According to Acemoglu and Restrepo (2018), 60 percent of the 50 million or so jobs added during this 35-year period from 1980 and 2015 are associated with the additional employment growth in occupations with new job titles in the IT sector. Due to constant growth in the IT industry, organizations struggle to keep up with the pace at which technology is changing (Showry & Sayulu, 2017). Hiring the right candidate to perform the job is a challenge in a fast-growing industry like IT (Malik et al., 2019). High attrition rate increases cost in training, effort invested in hiring the right person to do the job, and impacts project deliverables (Chowdhury & Md., 2017). Voluntary attrition leads to losing knowledge which

goes away with the employees leaving the company. Getting that knowledge back requires time and effort, which will eventually impact the ongoing projects in the organization.

IT being an employee-centric industry, the voluntary attrition of highly valued employees can impact the launch of technology products or support of existing technology. Retaining employees help the organization save recruiting and training costs and reduces the risk of project deliverables (Chowdhury & Md., 2017). Retaining high-performing employees decreases the operational cost and will maximize the productivity of an organization (George, 2015). Effective retention strategy helps the organization to be successful as their focus will be on future projects and not being worried on supporting the ongoing projects. Thus, it is important to understand the causes of attrition and reduce them by retaining the highly valued employees in the organization.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand some of the major causes of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees in IT companies in the United States. This study explored multiple causes of attrition as part of the research. After identifying major causes of attrition, I recommend ways to mitigate causes of attrition in the future.

Methodology and Design

The research question for this study was addressed using the qualitative method and a phenomenological research design to gather data. Combining qualitative method and phenomenological research helped to identify the cause of attrition in a specific group of people. Qualitative methodology is appropriate for researchers who need to develop greater insight related to complex situations or phenomena (Moustakas, 1995; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Therefore, it was suitable for responding to the stated research question.

Qualitative research methods focus on gathering data through open-ended and conversational communication. Qualitative research gives insight into specific information that triggers a highly valued employee to leave the organization. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding people's views on how they construct their worlds based on their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Conducting semistructured interviews provided information on what can be done to retain highly valued employees and prevent attrition. The informal method of gathering data helped understand root causes of attrition specific to individuals. Qualitative researchers also develop concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015).

Phenomenology is a study of people's experience in a real-life world. Phenomenology is one of the ways to study an idea or concept that holds a common meaning for a small group of individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The purpose of the phenomenological research as a method is to investigate human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as they meet in the lifeworld (Manen, 2017). Phenomenology provides information about unique individual experiences, offering a rich and complete description of human experiences and meanings. Phenomenological research is used to study areas where there is little knowledge (Guerrero-Castañeda et al., 2017). The purpose of this research was to gather data using perspectives of research participants about the phenomenon of leaving organization where they were considered highly valuable. As part of the research, I focused on a group of highly valued employees who have voluntarily exited from an IT company in the United States.

Research Question

A research question is necessary to justify the purpose of any research study. In this study, the research question sought to identify causes of voluntary attrition for highly valuable employees along with measures to reduce risks of attrition. The research question was: What are the different causes of attrition for highly valued employees in IT companies in the United States?

Significance of the Study

The current study contributes to organizations looking to explore strategies to retain top talent. It is important to invest in the workforce's energization to improve productivity and customer satisfaction (Taylor, 2019). Retaining employees is the biggest challenge faced by the Human Resource managers in the company (Gaan, 2011; James & Mathew, 2012; Rath & Sahai, 2019). Understanding causes of attrition in this study may also reduce the costs of hiring new talent in the company, as hiring requires additional recruiting and training overhead (George 2015; Marsden, 2016). Chowdhury and Md. (2017) found it was less expensive to retain employees than to recruit, train, and place new ones. Company leaders should learn about highly valued employees' expectations or motivations to stay in an organization for extended periods. The importance of this study is that it identifies the causes of attrition and helps to retain employees.

Definitions of Key Terms

Voluntary Attrition. Voluntary attrition means an individual willingly terminated employment with an organization (Johnson, 2018).

Highly Valued Employees. Highly valued employees in this study are employees the company seeks to retain. The three criteria needed for classification as a highly valued employee were: (1) minimum of three years' experience as a subject matter expert (SME) in a computer programming language, (2) promotion at one of the four companies identified for this study, and (3) five or more years of total experience working in the IT industry. As a researcher, I identified this criteria for highly valued employees and this definition is specific to this study. There is no existing study which defines criteria for a highly valued employee.

Subject Matter Expert. A person who is an expert in a particular topic or area. In the technology field, this person is considered an expert in a specific skillset that requires many years of experience (Whyte & Classen, 2012).

Information Technology (IT) Industry. Information Technology (IT) industry is comprised of organizations that develop software, hardware, or provide technology related services (Bär et al., 2018).

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study is aimed to identify causes of attrition for highly valued employees in U.S. IT organizations by interviewing six highly valued IT employees representing IT companies. As part of the study, highly valued employees are defined as those with five or more years of experience working in the IT industry, including a minimum of three years working on computer programming language, and who was promoted at their previous company. This study may help IT companies identify causes of attrition for highly valued employees and subsequently mitigate attrition risk. This research may also help organizations meet their highly valued employees' expectations and retain them for more extended periods.

Highly valued employees in an organization are an essential asset for the company's success and retaining them will catalyze faster growth. The study may help reduce the costs of hiring new employees and time invested in training them. Data were gathered using semistructured interviews, and themes were identified using coding. This study's main limitation is that my personal biases when interpreting interviews may have influenced outcomes. The study focuses on the research in the U.S. IT industry and interviewed participants who are employees of a U.S. organization. The results of the research cannot be extended outside the United States, as factors of attrition can vary based on location due to differences in work culture, economic conditions, and job opportunities. Reasons for attrition can also vary based on specific skills, locations, and experiences (Valluru, 2019). Therefore, my findings and results may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, locations, or future periods.

Chapter 2 focuses on a review of the literature which identifies past findings and theoretical contributions to causes of attrition in IT and non-IT sectors. Chapter 2 begins with a historical overview of the existing studies on attrition, importance of IT in an organization, shortage of IT skills, the importance of retention, and differences of attrition between IT and non-IT sectors. Chapter 2 then continues to explore causes of attrition in IT and non-IT sectors, and justify why those causes of attrition were not applicable to this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The research is intended to understand causes of voluntary attrition of highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States. In this study, I defined the term highly valued employee as people with five or more years of experience working in the IT industry, including a minimum of three years in a computer programming language and promotion at their previous company. This review of existing literature focuses on scholarship which frames the idea that it is crucial to understand the causes of attrition to retain highly valued employees.

Voluntary attrition is a growing concern across the industry as no company wants to lose its talent pool. Showry and Sayulu (2017) demonstrated employees' voluntary attrition and the importance of addressing this concern. Companies are spending significant time controlling attrition that will save time and money on backfilling the top talent. Maheshwari et al. (2017) highlighted employee retention is the biggest challenge faced by human resource (HR) employees in the current market. This study helps to understand the importance of retaining employees and the seriousness considered by the organizations. Another reason for employees leaving the organization is due to better career opportunities outside their current organization. Rath and Sahai (2019) highlighted employees in the IT job market hop at an alarming rate for better career opportunities, making attrition a crucial issue for many organizations. Thus, findings from Rath and Sahai helped broaden understanding of the importance to retain highly valued employees due to growing competition and a major reason why HR departments face a challenge to retain their top talent. Employee attrition is not specific to any field or industry, as the competition is growing consistently across all the industries. Shaw et al. (2009) noted employee attrition is a problem across all fields and industries and should be addressed for the smooth functioning of an organization.

Retaining high-performing employees decreases the operational cost and maximizes the productivity of an organization. Retaining employees will help the organization save the cost of recruiting and training and reduce the risk of project deliverables. Sangeetha (2010) stressed the importance of employees and cost associate to backfill them. Backfilling an organization's top talent is a time-consuming process because it takes significant time to interview, ramp-up on the product and technology, and have them be productive. Hunter et al. (2008) found the cost to backfill an employee in the IT company can range from 25% to 100% salary of an employee. The cost mentioned by Hunter et al. justifies attempts to retaining retain valuable employees, as that money can be saved by the company by implementing suitable measures to control attrition.

Although many general studies have been conducted on attrition, no research has yet been conducted to identify causes of attrition for highly valued employees in the IT sector. As such, the literature review is divided into five sections. In the 1st section, it is determined that Herzberg's motivational theory to be the best theoretical guideline to apply to this study. In the 2nd section, the focus is on the literature review highlighting the importance of IT in an organization. Then, examine the literature highlighting the shortage of employees in the IT sector and analyze possible reasons behind this shortage. In the 3rd section, the focus is on searching for what makes employees in the IT sector different from other employees. In the 4th section, the focus is on the literature review detailing the importance of controlling attrition in the IT sector. The 5th section synthesizes the literature focusing on causes of attrition in the IT and non-IT sectors.

Theoretical Framework

Theory is described as "a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among

variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena” (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 9). Herzberg’s motivational theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study, as it served well to identify causes of attrition. Herzberg’s motivational theory model was developed to understand the causes of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg’s motivational theory model identifies motivators as intrinsic and hygiene factors as extrinsic. The two-factor theory was developed from data collected by Herzberg from interviews with 203 engineers and accountants in the Pittsburgh area. From analyzing these interviews, he found that job characteristics related to what an individual does, to the nature of the work one, performs apparently have the capacity to gratify such needs as achievement, competency, status, personal worth, and self-realization, thus making him happy and satisfied. In 1968 Herzberg stated that his two-factor theory study had already been replicated 16 times in a wide variety of populations including some in Communist countries, and confirmed with studies using different procedures that agreed with his original findings regarding intrinsic employee motivation making it one of the most widely replicated studies on job attitudes. According to Herzberg et al. (1959), hygiene factors cause dissatisfaction and motivational factors to increase job satisfaction. The theory identified intrinsic factors as challenging work, recognition, responsibility, and growth (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Herzberg et al., 1959). The theory identified hygiene factors like salary, work conditions, job security, and work-life balance (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg’s motivational theory recommended eliminating hygiene factors and increase the focus on motivational factors to increase job satisfaction. Herzberg’s motivational theory model elements apply to the IT industry because of high attrition and lack of skillsets (Mohlala et al., 2012). Thus, the Herzberg theory model was used as the theoretical framework to understand the causes of attrition in the IT sector.

The literature review identifies that Herzberg's motivational theory model extrinsic elements such as organizational politics, policies, peer support, and supervisor rudeness cause employee attrition (Akintola & Chikoko, 2016; Dhanapal et al., 2013; Narayan et al., 2018; Rath & Sahai, 2019). However, the literature lacks studies specific to intrinsic factors such as challenging work, recognition and growth opportunities to increase the retention of highly valued employees. Using the same theory, it is validated if eliminating extrinsic factors such as salary, management, and working conditions prevent work dissatisfaction for highly valued employees. Pai et al. (2012) concluded intrinsic factors are stronger in IT employees than other employees in other job roles. This makes a strong case for using Herzberg's theory to study highly valued IT organization employees. Herzberg's theory is appropriate because it identified hygiene factors leading to job dissatisfaction and eventual attrition. The motivational factors helped to increase job satisfaction and reduce the attrition risk.

Importance of IT Sector

Information technology (IT) is the use of computers to manage information using computer technology. Jacks and Palvia (2014) referred to IT as computing-related workforce employees. Computers were first introduced in 1941 by Konrad Zuse (Weiss, 1996). Years earlier, countries used computers to perform complex operations that required days of manual effort. The technology used in computers evolved over the years and made it consumable by ordinary people and organizations.

Moreover, in 1970, personal computers were invented, leading to the emergence of information technology in the organization (Fitzgerald, 2000). The invention of personal computers resulted in having an information technology department in the organization. The goal of this organization is to manage all the computer-related work required to run an organization.

The workforce of IT organizations requires experts skilled in computers, such as programmers, analysts, technicians, quality assurance engineers, and IT managers. Owens and Hekman (2012) highlighted employees in the IT sector are a specialized workforce with expertise in the application field of IT.

IT department is consistently growing in the companies, and their goal is to focus on automation and help the companies to scale their global presence. As more and more companies realize the benefits of computer technology in their organization, growth in the IT sector is rapidly increasing. Drnevich and Croson (2013) highlighted how IT has become an integral part of an organization's business-level strategy to be successful. Following the introduction of personal computers and emergence of IT departments, companies have focused on growing their businesses by using technology. Another study by Abou et al. (2015) highlighted IT has been widely used in global business environments in the past two decades, especially with the rapid changes in customer needs and the urge to cope with competitors in providing a timely, better quality service at lower costs. Computers are used to improve efficiency and increase performance in an organization. IT department is responsible for improving efficiency and security as they have experts who are skilled in using computers. The study by Abou et al. (2015) found growth of IT departments in organizations is largely due to companies looking to improve efficiency and increase performance using automation.

Additionally, Abou et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of IT in improving productivity, efficiency, security, globalization, and competition. The researchers conducted a quantitative method by sharing 20 survey questions to four large and eight medium-sized audit companies in Egypt. The researchers concluded IT is crucial to automate processes in audit firms

to improve efficiency. Findings by Abou et al. (2015) helped to understand why IT is growing and its benefits for the growth of an organization.

IT has consistently grown and has become an integral part of organizational growth. With increased IT growth, there has been a spike in job opportunities, and the competition to retain IT employees has become an important area for organizations to focus on. Retaining IT skills has been companies' primary goal due to its dependency on the businesses Kettinger et al. (2011). Kettinger et al. (2011) found if attrition in the IT sector is not addressed, it could significantly impact finances. In this study, the researchers used quantitative methodology and concluded IT plays a critical role in the success of an organization.

This section summarized existing studies by Abou et al. (2015), Drnevich and Croson (2013), and Kettinger et al. (2011) and highlighted the importance of the IT sector for success of organizations in the global world. Considering growth and competition in the IT sector, organizations should take essential steps to retain their top talent. Based on the studies highlighted in this section, it is fair to say it is required to retain IT employees for the smooth functioning of the company. As the IT sector comprises IT employees, it is essential to retain IT employees as they play critical drivers in the IT sector.

Shortage of Employees in IT

IT is growing at a rapid change due to rapid increase in technology and security concerns. Durney and Donnelly (2015) mentioned due to change in technology, the IT skills required to support the new technology are also evolving rapidly. The two primary reasons for the shortage of employees in the IT sector are a spike in IT jobs and a lack of IT skills. Due to constant growth in the IT sector, there has been a high demand to hire IT employees, which has led to an

increase in job opportunities in the IT sector. As technology is proliferating, the skills required to perform the job in the IT sector are rapidly changing, and thus it is not easy to find and hire the right candidate who is well versed with the most updated technology in the market. Kappelman et al. (2014) noted shortage of IT skills was a concern in 2013 and 2014 as the top three areas of concern. Being on the list of top three concerns for two years in a row makes it essential to understand the reasons for the shortage of IT skills and organizations to increase the employees in the IT sector.

Increase in IT Job Opportunities

The IT sector is consistently growing as the leadership in the companies understand the value of technology in their organizations. With the increase in the demand for the IT department, the demand to hire IT employees is overgrowing. Studies by Abou et al. (2015) and Drnevich and Croson (2013) highlighted growth of the IT sector across all the fields of business. This increase in demand has caused multiple job opportunities with IT skills. Malik et al. (2019) found there is an inadequate supply of IT employees when postured against the current market demand. Similarly, Wen et al. (2018) highlighted employees with IT skills are changing jobs rapidly due to increased job opportunities and high demand. Thus, this has led to a shortage of employees in the IT sector, and retaining existing IT employees has been crucial for the organizations to avoid the competition of backfilling IT employees.

Lack of IT Skills

The employees in the IT sector need to keep their skills upgraded at the pace at which technology is evolving. Employers need to continuously provide training to the IT workforce to keep their skills upgraded as per the latest technology. The cost to provide training is expensive,

and not every organization can keep up with the pace at which technology is growing. Due to the employers' lack of training, there is a gap in the existing skills, which is leading to a shortage of employees in the IT sector (Mohlala et al., 2012). Mohala et al. (2012) highlighted employees would not leave the organization if they were provided with the opportunity to learn new technology and be updated with the most recent technology. Employees in the IT sector prefers to keeps their skills updated due to constant change in the technology. Two separate studies from Rahman and Fazal (2018) and Kapur and Janakiram (2015) found employees in the IT sector leave the organization due to a lack of training and opportunity to work on new technology. Rahman and Fazal used a qualitative method and interviewed senior IT managers and directors, asking them to identify the most common reasons for IT employee turnover. The significant cause of attrition identified was lack of opportunities to grow and be competitive with the latest technology. Thus, the organization needs to invest in their employees and give them opportunities to learn new technology to retain them to better the company.

There is a shortage of IT employees as not everyone wants to be part of the IT sector due to certain stereotypes that this sector is male-dominated. The study by Orser et al. (2012) highlights that certain stereotypes, such as the unwelcome working environment for women in the IT sector, are another reason for the shortage of employees in the IT sector. This study highlights that organizations should work to remove such stereotypes and focus on hiring diverse candidates. Hiring diverse candidates will help bring stereotypes and bridge the gap to fill in the shortage of IT employees.

This section highlights the importance of retaining IT employees due to the skills shortage in the IT sector. The two topics discussed in this section that are identified as the reasons for the shortage of employees in the IT sector are increased job opportunities and lack of

IT skills. The lack of a retention strategy makes it difficult for leadership to identify crucial skills that must be retained (Rahman & Fazal, 2018). The studies by Orser et al. (2012), Mohlala et al. (2012), and Rahman and Fazal (2018) highlighted importance of retention to mitigate the risk of a shortage of employees in the IT sector. The IT sector shortage has increased the IT employee demand, and the organizational leadership must retain their talent pool of IT employees. Thus, the organizational leader needs to identify the causes of attrition for highly valued employees and develop a strategy to retain them.

IT Culture – Why is IT Different?

The current study focuses on voluntary attrition for highly valued employees in the IT organization. The studies identified in the literature review for causes of attrition in the non-IT sector may not apply to IT organizations. To make this argument, the writer considers IT professionals separate from non-IT professionals. This section focuses on the understanding difference in personality between IT and non-IT employees and the cultural difference between IT and non-IT organizations. According to Schein (2017), culture is a set of basic assumptions defined to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various situations. The difference in culture highlighted the understanding that the study of one culture can apply to another culture. This comparison helped understand that the causes of attrition identified for non-IT employees may not be applicable to identify the causes of attrition for IT employees.

This paragraph focuses on understanding the personality differences between IT and non-IT employees. The section highlights how job skills and the nature of work required to perform duties in IT and non-IT sectors vary employee personality. IT and non-IT employees are considered different due to the difference in skills required to perform each job. Tnay et al.

(2013) found IT employees are highly skilled employees who are experts in computer technology. Lounsbury et al. (2014) concluded IT employees have common personalities and are often considered introverts, tough-mindedness, and lower levels of emotional stability than non-IT employees. The most significant difference identified between IT and non-IT employees in the study by Lounsbury et al. was tough-mindedness. IT employees scored higher than other occupations on this trait. The primary reason behind this difference between non-IT and IT employees is that the job duties required to be performed as an IT employee include high logic, rational analysis, and problem-solving. Another trait identified in the study by Lounsbury et al. was IT employees are introverts. The primary reason behind IT employees being introverted is the lack of communication required as part of the job responsibility. IT employees spend most of their time working on computers, and there is little to no interaction between them and other humans. Another study by Eckhardt et al. (2016) highlights that IT employees with programming backgrounds are considered introverts due to the nature of the work. Thus, it is fair to say that the personalities between IT and non-IT employees are different due to their nature of work.

This paragraph focuses on understanding the organizational culture between IT and non-IT employees. IT and non-IT cultures are different due to the difference in organizational culture. Wang and Kaarst-Brown (2014) concluded IT culture is different and requires a different leadership approach than non-IT culture. Wang and Kaarst-Brown (2014) concluded IT culture is different from non-IT culture due to the required technical knowledge, unusual work demands and hours, and IT employees' globally valuable resource. These characteristics make the IT culture different than the non-IT sector. Non-IT sector culture does not require employees to have high technical knowledge and usually have defined working hours.

Additionally, Uruthirapathy and Grant (2015) concluded employees intentions for leaving an organization differ between IT and non-IT employees because the skillsets required to perform the work are different. As the skillsets required to perform a job are different, the causes of attrition vary based on the organizational culture and work setting. Kapur and Janakiram (2015) also highlighted cultural intelligence, overseas negotiation, employee communication, and training and development are more critical for IT employees than non-IT employees. Kapur and Janakiram findings helps to understand that work expectations from IT and non-IT employees are different and thus the motivation to be retained in a company will vary as well. Uruthirapathy and Grant, and Kapur and Janakiram used quantitative methodology in their studies and found that IT and non-IT employees are different and require different perspectives when managing them. The studies mentioned in this section highlight that employees in IT and non-IT sectors require different strategies for working with their workforce and reducing attrition due to the nature of work and the skills required to work.

Existing studies by Kapur and Janakiram (2015), Lounsbury et al. (2014), Uruthirapathy and Grant (2015), and Wang and Kaarst-Brown (2014) highlighted IT culture is unique in several ways, and studies conducted on non-IT employees may not apply to IT employees. These findings highlight a gap that all the studies related to attrition in the non-IT sector may not necessarily apply to the IT sector due to differences in skills and culture. Thus, it was essential to conduct a study focusing on IT employees to identify sector-specific attrition causes.

Why is it Important to Control Attrition?

Phillips and Connell (2011) highlighted the concept of employer-of-choice has intensified in the last few years and companies are trying to become employer-of-choice to acquire the best talent. To become an employer-of-choice, the company needs to motivate employees to improve

performance and keep them satisfied and loyal by providing development opportunities (Fitzenz, 2009). This will help employees to grow skills and retain them. The study by Mulligan and Taylor (2019) highlighted the importance of investing in the workforce's energization to improve productivity and customer satisfaction. Employee retention is the biggest challenge faced by Human Resource (HR) employees in the current market (Gaan, 2011; James & Mathew, 2012; Rath & Sahai, 2019). The number one priority on the HR agenda is attracting and retaining key talent (Frank et al., 2004). Retaining key talent will help the organizations save costs to back an employee. Marsden (2016) found the cost of attrition on the U.S. economy is estimated at \$27 billion. Retaining employees will help the U.S. economy to save \$27 billion a year. Organizations focus on involuntary attrition over voluntary turnover as companies monitor voluntary turnover as it involves high costs (Frank et al., 2004). Thus, retaining employees will save organizations high costs associated to back fill them.

Chowdhury and Md. (2017) research highlight the importance of retaining employees and cost associate to backfill them. According to Chowdhury and Md. (2017), the cost to backfill an employee includes direct and indirect costs. Direct costs are referred to as costs such as expenses on recruitment and training for the new employees (Chowdhury & Md., 2017). Indirect costs are referred to as spending on education, condensed self-confidence, stress on the existing worker, and social capital collapse (Chowdhury & Md., 2017). Moreover, high employee turnover will put at risk of reaching the organizational goal.

Studies by Frank et al. (2004), Gaan (2011), James and Mathew (2012), Chowdhury and Md. (2017), and Rath and Sahai (2019) highlighted retaining employees and avoiding voluntary attrition will help the organization save money to the company. These studies justify the need to

identify the causes of attrition for highly valued employees. The typical gap in all these studies is that no studies focus on the significance of losing highly valued employees in the organization.

Causes of Attrition in IT and Non-IT Sector

Multiple factors influence an employee to leave an organization. The researcher examined several literature sources and identified common causes of employee attrition. The literature review highlights the cause of attrition in the IT and non-IT sectors.

Causes of Attrition in Non-IT Organizations

Studies show that organizational politics, policies, peer support, and supervisor rudeness cause employee attrition (Akintola & Chikoko, 2016; Dhanapal et al., 2013; Narayan et al., 2018; Rath & Sahai, 2019). All the studies mentioned above focused on non-IT employees. Rath and Sahai (2019) used a quantitative research method using voluntary and involuntary attrition as different variables to find research results. The research was for all the employees and not specific to highly valued employees. The gap found in the studies by Rath & Sahai (2019), Narayan et al. (2018), Akintola & Chikoko (2016), and Dhanapal et al. (2013) is they all focused on causes of attrition for the non-IT sector and does not focus on attrition for voluntary attrition for highly valued employees.

Some studies demonstrate that unethical leadership causes employee attrition (Bonner et al., 2016; Cialdini et al., 2019; Pierce & Snyder, 2015). The research fails to identify if highly valued employees voluntarily left the organization due to unethical leadership. There is no data which states that highly valued employees prefer an ethical leader versus an unethical leader. This makes a strong argument that further research should be conducted to identify if unethical leadership can cause voluntary attrition for highly valued employees.

Sriram et al. (2019) concluded employees in the manufacturing firm leave the organization due to HR policies that are not employee-friendly. The research also highlights a few other reasons for attrition, such as lower salary and unpleasant working atmosphere. The study focuses on all employees in the manufacturing firm and not highly valued employees. Thus, Sriram et al.'s (2019) findings may not be applicable to identify the causes of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees.

Kim and Park (2017) found longer commute is a cause of attrition in the non-IT sector. The research highlighted that organizations that have better transport have a lower attrition rate. A shorter commute may not be a cause of attrition in the IT sector, as employees in the IT sector do not require to be physically available in the office to perform their duties (Prasad et al., 2020). Thus, this cause of attrition may not apply to the current study.

This highlights that the above research's causes may not be applicable to identify the causes of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees in the IT sector. Many studies have shown why employees leave an organization. This review includes several of the most common reasons: unethical leadership, poor HR policies, peer support, and long commutes. None of the literature explicitly covers highly valued employees or employees working in the IT sector.

Causes of Attrition in IT Organizations

James and Mathew (2012) concluded organizational culture and personal satisfaction are causes of attrition in the IT industry. Cook (2015) identified components that lead to the development of stress, which leads to burnout in IT professionals. Figure 1 provides an overview of employment components leading to stress and burnout.

Figure 1

Components Lead to Development of Stress Factors and Burnout

Components That Lead to Stress Factors and Burnout	<u>Too much work under time pressure</u>
	<u>Lack of participation in decision-making</u>
	<u>Working with offshore team members</u>
	<u>Managers do not understand IT work</u>
	<u>Know someone who was laid off – job insecurity</u>
	<u>Have to be “on call”</u>
	<u>Insufficient training on new technologies</u>
	<u>Poor promotion prospects</u>
	<u>“Menial tasks” distract from “real” work</u>
	<u>Work must be prioritized – not everything should be an “emergency”</u>
	<u>Work must be challenging enough/be mentally stimulating</u>
	<u>Insufficient reward</u>
	<u>Insufficient recognition/respect</u>
	<u>Organizational politics</u>
<u>Expected to connect and work from home on evenings and weekends</u>	

Cook (2015) found significant causes of stress included role conflict, role ambiguity, and interference from organizational politics (Cook, 2015). Studies by Armstrong et al. (2015) and Cook (2015) identified stress as a cause of attrition, but there was no evidence stress could be a leading cause of attrition for highly valued employees. These studies had a gap where they did not focus on highly valued employees who voluntarily exited the company due to stress. Thus, stress and components leading to stress could not be considered as reasons for voluntary attrition of highly valued employees in IT organizations.

Wei (2015) concluded human resources should play an important role in hiring employees who are the right cultural fit. Additionally, human resources policies should be defined in a way that retains existing employees. Wei also used quantitative methods to conduct

this study and gathered data from 456 engineers from multiple high-tech companies in Taiwan. Wei focused on gleaning data from engineers and their managers, some of whom were potentially non-technical. I could not apply findings of Wei's study to this study, as the target audience was outside the United States and involved non-IT workers. Another gap in Wei's study was the study was generalized for all employees in the IT company and not just highly valued employees. Thus, human resources policies cannot be considered a main cause of attrition when it comes to voluntary attrition of highly valued employees in the IT sector.

Dash and Muthyala (2016) focused on gathering data to identify the cause of attrition in the IT industry for all the company employees. The researchers concluded a lack of employee engagement as the cause of attrition in the IT industry. The research produced no recommendations on how to resolve the attrition causes and retain highly valued employees. A quantitative method was conducted to gather data, but collected data were influenced by employee perceptions of the causes of leaving the organization. The study was generic for all the employees in the company and not specific to highly valued employees. The data collected for the research was from employees in different companies, so that there may be a high degree of heterogeneity in employee engagement processes across the samples. Thus, this study's findings was not fully applicable as a cause of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees.

Showry and Sayulu (2017) focused on core self-evaluation and discuss its role in attrition in the IT industry. This research excluded factors outside self-evaluation as causes of attrition. Still, this study had a notable gap; the researchers preselected causes of attrition as self-evaluation without considering other causes of attrition. There was no compelling reason to support the study of why self-evaluation is identified as the cause of attrition. The study focuses on identifying the cause of attrition for all the employees and not specific to highly valued

employees. Thus, this finding cannot be used as a cause of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees due to a lack of evidence that this cause of attrition impacts highly valued employees' decision to leave the organization.

Naqvi and Bashir (2015) concluded a lower salary and training and development of skills are the causes of attrition in the IT sector in Pakistan. The researchers conducted quantitative research with nine IT organizations in Pakistan. The study findings concluded that compensation and better training can influence the decision to leave the organization but may not be the only drivers to leave the organization. Another two studies by Grissom and Mitani (2016) and Zin (2017) highlighted increasing salaries might help retain employees from leaving the organization. However; salary could not be identified as a cause of attrition for highly valued employees, as these studies were not focused in the United States, nor were they focused on highly valued employees. Typically, highly valued employees in a company are paid higher than the rest of the talent in the company. Thus, salary was not one main cause of attrition for highly valued employees. Additionally, as there was no study specifically targeted to understanding causes of attrition for highly valued employees in the U.S. IT sector, it was impossible to conclude findings identified in this section applied to this study.

Summary

The literature review concludes that no existing study identifies the causes of attrition for highly valued employees in IT organizations. The causes of attrition for non-IT organizations are identified by existing literature as organizational politics, policies, peer support, supervisor rudeness, and unethical leadership. The causes of attrition for IT organizations determined by existing literature are corporate culture, stress, core self-evaluation, and HR policies. There is no existing literature review that defines highly valued employees as an employee who has

promoted a level up and has five or more years of IT experience, including a minimum of three years of programming experience. The literature highlights the gap in the data used to identify the cause of the attrition for highly valued employees. The literature highlights no study conducted to determine the cause of attrition for a subcategory of highly valued employees in the company. The literature review highlights another essential aspect that causes attrition for non-IT organizations that are unnecessary for IT organizations due to the difference in the culture. Conducting qualitative research may explain why a highly valued employee is looking for a change. The literature review highlights that the existing studies' findings may not apply to the identified audience part of the proposed research. This gap in the existing research data gives an opportunity to research the causes of attrition for highly valued IT organizations' employees.

Conducting a research study on the causes of attrition for highly valued employees will benefit the IT organizations. The purpose of this study is to help the IT organization to retain highly valued employees and reduce the impact of attrition. The proposed research focuses on highly valued employees in the IT industry and identify the cause of attrition for these employees. The study's goal is to prevent highly valued employees' attrition by identifying the cause of attrition and then avoiding it.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology and design in this study. Chapter 3 also highlights why qualitative method was employed and refrained from using other methodologies. Finally, in Chapter 3, the methods and instruments used to conduct interviews, validate data, and analyze data gathered to conclude with findings of the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 highlights the research methodology and design used in this study. This section justifies the research design for this study and shares details about my choice of methodology. Information on instrumentation, participants, data analysis methods, limitations, and delimitations of the study are shared. The research method and design are critical aspects of any study, as they affect results and determine researchers' conclusions (Lampropoulou & Myers, 2013). In this study, central research question is used to address the initial problem statement through the theoretical lens of Herzberg's motivational theory model.

Research Method

This section focuses on the research method, research design and justification of it. The qualitative method is more applicable for this study because it addresses the research question, as it requires the researcher to empathize with the participants and understand the causes of attrition as that may be personal reasons (Taylor et al., 2015). Qualitative methodology is appropriate for researchers who need to develop greater insight related to complex situations or phenomena (Moustakas, 1995). A qualitative method was identified instead of quantitative because those methods are limited to defined questions used to collect the data (Bailey, 2014; McClelland, 2017). Other types of research such as Quantitative research and Mixed Methods research are also not appropriate for this study. The quantitative method prevents the researcher from understanding the participants' situation deeper to understand the root cause of a situation (Moustakas, 1995; Park & Park, 2016). Quantitative research requires the researcher to analyze data that is countable. Quantitative research seeks to answer what and not why. We could understand how many highly valued employees leave their organization, but not why they leave. Mixed methods are used to collect, analyze, and mix qualitative and quantitative data in a study

to understand the research problem (Denzin, 2017). It also can answer the what but not the why highly valued IT employees leave their organization. Researchers use mixed-method as a rigorous approach to exploring the breadth and depth of the study (Shaw et al., 2014). The current study has no intention of increasing the breadth of the study by extending it outside the IT organization, and thus Mixed method is not the appropriate method for this study.

The qualitative research method is used by the researcher to respond to the research question by gathering and analyzing data using a phenomenological research design. The qualitative research method's strength is its ability to elaborate textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. The qualitative research assisted the researcher to give insight into specific information that triggers a highly valued employee to leave the organization. Qualitative researchers empathize and identify with the people they study to understand how they see things (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Taylor et al., 2015). Conducting semistructured interviews may provide information about what can be done to retain an employee and prevent attrition. The informal method of gathering data helped to understand the cause of attrition, specific to an individual and not generic. Qualitative researchers develop concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Taylor et al., 2015). The data gathered during these semistructured interviews was classified for specific characteristics that point to reasons why highly valued employee leave an organization.

Research Design

Phenomenology design is appropriate for this study because it is used to get the real experiences and feelings from the participants who left the organizations (Marshall & Rossman,

2011, Moustakas, 1995). This design provides the author with in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon.

Other research designs associated with the qualitative research methodology, such as grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study, were considered but were not appropriate for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). An ethnographic study involves understanding culture and typical patterns that develop over time (Lambert et al., 2011). The ethnographer is most interested in common patterns as a group interacts over time (Murthy, 2013). The ethnographic method is not appropriate for this study as it expects observing the group's behavior to come to a typical pattern, and in this study, it is not possible to observe the behavior to conclude the findings as it requires real interaction with the participants. Grounded theory analysis is a constant comparison where the statement is compared with the statement, story with a story, a participant with a participant, theme with the theme (Lingard, 2014). Grounded theory was not appropriate for this study as the study intends to investigate individual experiences and not compare one experience with another. The case study focuses on an in-depth analysis of a single event or multiple occurrences over some time (Yin, 2014). A case study was not appropriate for this research as the purpose of this study is to delve into the experience of several individuals rather than focusing on an individual or a group.

Phenomenology is a way to study an idea or concept that holds an ordinary meaning for a small group of individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Moustakas, 1995). The purpose of phenomenological research is to investigate human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as they meet in the lifeworld (Manen, 2017). Phenomenology provides information about unique individual experiences, offering a detailed and complete description of human experiences and meanings. Phenomenology research is used to study areas with little knowledge

(Guerrero-Castañeda et al., 2017). In this research, it is aimed to gather data using perspectives of research participants about the phenomenon of leaving organizations where they were considered highly valuable. As part of this research, the focus was on a group of highly valued employees who voluntarily exited from IT companies in the United States.

Instruments

Primary data collection method was conducted, including interviews. Semistructured interviews was used to gather data as part of the study and included open-ended questions to collect data from participants. Verification was completed using a member-checking strategy (Chronister et al., 2014).

11 open-ended questions were developed to identify major causes of attrition (see Appendix B). This list of questions was prepared based on findings from the literature review. The interview questions focused on exploring reasons why participants decided to leave their companies. The interview questions also sought to gather information on what companies could have done to help retain these participants. The interview questions also helped to understand if the participants were given enough opportunities not to leave the organization. The information gathered from interviews helped develop an understanding of why highly valued employees start searching for a new job and what they could have done to retain them. Interview Questions 1–2 focused on understanding the causes of attrition. Interview Questions 3–6 focused on understanding the effort spent by leadership to retain employees. Questions 7 focused on understanding primary reasons for job searching. Interview Questions 8–9 focused on understanding if any participants would change organizations if they were internally transferred. These questions sought to understand if the attrition was team-related or organizationally

influenced. Interview Question 10 focused on understanding the new organizations' work culture to understand if that culture is better than the previous organization.

These interview questions focused on understanding causes of employee attrition and what can be done to retain valuable employees. The answers received from these interview questions helped conclude my findings in the study and proposed strong solutions to reduce organizational attrition.

Data Collection

Data collection is the process of setting boundaries for the study and collecting information through observations, documents, and establishing protocol for recording information. (Yuliarsih, 2016). Three steps were engaged as part of the data collection process.

During Step one, data collection, multiple software engineers were reached out using LinkedIn or email; these engineers were identified as those having previously worked at an IT company in the United States which was included in this study. Snowball sampling methods was employed to identify participants. Snowball sampling uses a referral method to identify participants for interviews. Interviews were requested using a network of software engineers who have previously worked at IT companies in the United States (see Appendix A). LinkedIn referrals were used to identify participants who had worked at these IT companies. These software engineers were selected based on their previous tenure and promotion in the identified companies shortlisted for this study. Upon accepting the invitation email, a consent form was sent for participation in the study. The consent form confirmed participants' willingness to be interviewed and protected their confidentiality rights (Covell et al., 2012).

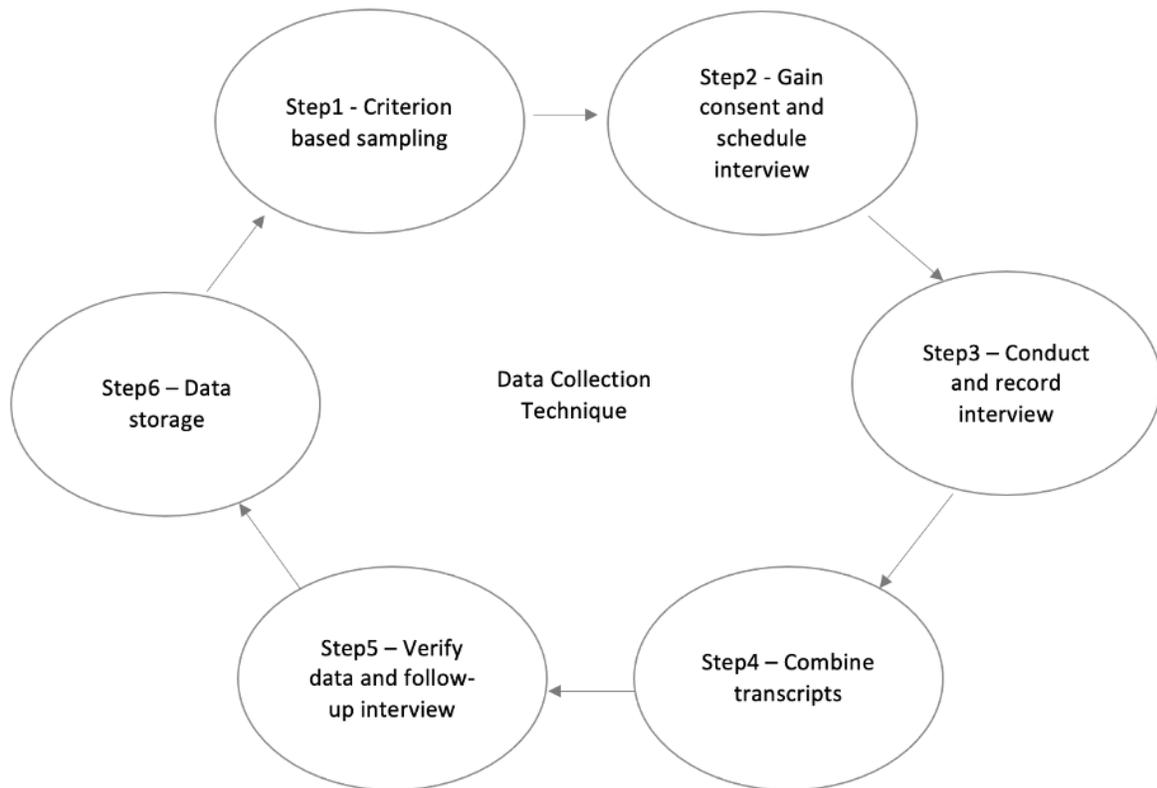
Step two involved finalizing six participants who qualified as highly valued employees. Six participants were selected who met the criteria of being highly valued at their previous

organizations. The criteria included: participants had to have been promoted at their previous company and have five or more years of IT experience, including a minimum of three years of programming experience. Each participant was requested to confirm if they met the above criteria to qualify as research participants. If the participants confirmed they did not meet the criteria defined for highly valued employees, then step one was followed again. Steps one and two were performed until all six participants confirmed they met the criteria of being highly valued as defined in the study and accepted invitations to be interviewed. Once participants confirmed they are met the criteria, their willingness was validated to participate in interviews. After receiving the consent form from the final six participants, multiple video call interviews were set up with these participants. One interview session was conducted with all the participants to gather all the information needed for the research.

Six participants were selected to interview for this qualitative study as the focus was on repeatedly interviewing a small number of participants to gain a deeper understanding of the problem statement (Hennink et al., 2019). Information gathered from multiple interviews was sufficient to understand the major causes of employee attrition. A small number of participants was intentionally chosen because of the expected material volume to gather at each interview, along with constraints on time and resource availability (Gardner & Harmon, 2002). Data gathered from six participants were sufficient to understand the causes of attrition and conclude with salient findings due to the interview questions' depth. Figure 2 provides an overview of my data collection technique.

Figure 2

Illustration of Data Collection Technique



Data Analysis Method

Data analysis was conducted in three steps. Step one focused on developing and applying codes from data gathered during the interview. Coding is the process of organizing data in a structured way and developing codes representing a few statements gathered during interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). To begin with the coding process, interview transcripts were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Then Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis was used for data coding and analysis to expedite the coding process (Iskandarsyah et al., 2014). As part of

using Atlas.ti software, interview transcripts were converted to a Microsoft Word document to store this information for future references. After that process, a combination of auto and manual coding technique was used to code sections of the transcripts, and engaged in a continual process of refining the codes until no new unique codes were identified. Once the interview process reached a saturation point where no new codes were identified, themes were created.

In Step two, themes were created based on coding. Using the emergent design, themes and sub-themes were created based on common elements identified as part of the coding process. Key themes were identified using Atlas.ti software to address central research question of the study (Iskandarsyah et al., 2014). These themes helped identify patterns and relationships from data gathered during interviews. In Step three, all data was summarized and concluded with findings based on this study.

The final step in data analysis involved interpreting findings from the interviews to identify causes of attrition in the IT sector. Williams and Moser (2019) described coding as a process to assemble, categorize, and thematically sort data and construct meaning of data gathered during the interview. Member checking was used to validate accuracy of the data interpreted during the interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interview transcripts were shared with participants and asked them to check the transcripts for data accuracy (Birt et al., 2016, Street & Ward, 2012). This process enabled participants to reconstruct their narrative by modifying transcripts. This method of member checking was also important to claim the data's accuracy, as all data were reviewed by participants prior to analysis.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the process of reporting the content analysis correctly (Elo et al., 2014). Trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry aims to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Trustworthiness is usually considered using three components, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Therefore, these components were observed in the proposed study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the data's truth or the participant's views and the researcher's interpretation and representation (Polit & Beck, 2012). To verify the findings' accuracy, the member check strategy was used (Chronister et al., 2014). Member checking is a means of enhancing the accuracy of interpretations of the qualitative research phenomena (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As part of the member check strategy, the research analysis was shared with the participants and take their confirmation before proceeding with the research conclusion. This strategy eliminated any misinterpretation during the interview process. The data verification was done via email, which helped store participants' confirmation for future references.

Transferability

Transferability refers to findings that can be applied to other situations or groups (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). To deal with transferability, an in-depth description and sufficient information on the participants was provided to extend the study to other organizations.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the process of ensuring the study findings are consistent and could be repeated (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability is used to demonstrate the research data represents the participants' response and not the researcher's view (Cope, 2014). The confirmability was verified by the data saturation method. Data saturation is achieved when repetitive information is generated during the interview process (Habersack & Luschin, 2013; Vogl, 2013). To ensure the findings of the study are consistent, the same interview questions were provided to all the participants during the interview process. Using this approach, similar data points were used to gather information from all the participants.

Limitations

Limitations are potential gaps or weaknesses in a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Pezalla et al., 2012). I identified two potential limitations for this study. The first limitation is that this study is limited to participants from only four organizations related to IT, and thus this might be a problem for transferability. For transferability, it is essential to have the findings applied to other settings or groups (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). Considering data were gathered from one organization, the probability of transferring the findings to other groups was limited.

The second limitation involved validation and authentication of information provided by participants. To be eligible to participate in the study, the participants should be identified as highly valued employees for their previous organization before moving to the new company. One criterion to qualify as a highly valued employee involved promotion at the previous company; other criteria included five or more years of experience working at an IT company, and a minimum of three years of programming experience. In this study, participants'

information was used to confirm if they were promoted at the last company. The rest of the information was easily validated by referring to their work resumes and professional social media sites, such as LinkedIn. Promotion information is considered a piece of confidential information (Greer & Stevens, 2015). As promotion information is confidential and internal to a company, it was not feasible for me to validate such information from the previous organizations due to HR policies. This might impact on the study's findings as it is crucial to understand the cause of attrition for highly valued employees compared to any other employees in the company.

Delimitations

In this study, the focus is on identifying causes of attrition for highly valuable employees in IT companies in the United States. The study is delimited to highly valued employees promoted with the previous company in their tenure of five or more years working in IT companies in the United States. Delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope of a study or define its boundaries (Simons, 2014). There are three delimitations identified as part of the study. The first delimitation is that all the participants are from four technology companies. This criterion helps to get consistent findings across the participants.

The second delimitation identified is interviewing participants who have a minimum of three years of experience working as a programmer and have five or more years of total IT experience. Having these criteria helps to understand the causes of attrition from participants with similar experiences as employees with different years of work experience may have a different working experience in an organization.

The third delimitation of the study is that six participants were considered part of the study, which might be another concern with transferability. According to Hennink et al. (2019),

six participants are adequate for a qualitative study, and thus the writer decided to interview six participants. Interviewing and analyzing the data from six participants is an acceptable research criterion, but these participants' findings may not be transferable to other businesses due to limited participants.

Summary

In this qualitative phenomenology study, the aim was to identify causes of attrition for highly valued IT employees by interviewing six highly valued employees in IT companies in the United States. This study can help the IT companies identify causes of attrition for highly valued employees and mitigate the attrition risk. The study used Herzberg's motivational theory to help organizations meet their highly valued employees' expectations and retain them for a more extended period. Highly valued employees in an organization are an essential asset for the company's success, and retaining them helped companies grow faster. The study can help reduce costs of hiring new employees and time invested in training them. Data was gathered using semistructured interviews, and identified themes using coding. The study's limitation is that the interviewers' biased responses would influence the outcome of the study. The research focuses on the U.S. IT industry, so it was not possible to extend it to other sectors. Therefore, findings and results may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, locations, or future periods.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter 4 consists of the presentation of the findings and discussion of the themes. In addition, I discuss different themes identified as part of the data gathering process. In Chapter 4, I also share information about the sample description. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand causes of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States. My interview questions explored multiple causes of attrition as part of the research. The targeted population consisted of six software engineers from IT companies in the United States. During semistructured interviews, participants shared experiences which caused them to leave their previous organizations. I also used Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software to analyze recorded interviews and transcripts. My findings revealed five themes explaining causes of attrition for highly valued employees.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question of this study was: What are the different causes of attrition for highly valued employees in the IT companies in the United States? As part of the research, I identified six participants who met eligibility criteria for participation in this study. Participants represented four IT companies: Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Microsoft. I conducted semistructured interviews using Zoom video conferencing to understand major causes of attrition.

The interviews lasted for 45–60 minutes, and were recorded as per the data storage policy. I used member checking to validate the accuracy of data gleaned from the interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure credibility and accuracy of my data interpretation, I sent a follow-up email to all participants, summarizing the interview and requesting they make

corrections if anything was misinterpreted in the email. During the interview, participants shared experiences that caused them to leave their previous organizations. Each participant's interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed into themes using Herzberg's motivational theory. I used Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software to analyze the recorded interviews and transcripts. I used Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software to develop themes for the data collected. The study revealed five themes explaining causes of attrition for highly valued employees. The five themes developed are (1) work–life balance, (2) work growth opportunities, (3) leadership, (4) compensation, and (5) organizational culture.

Sample Description

Participants in this study are software engineers who worked in IT companies in the United States. The six participants were from Amazon, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft. The participants have worked in one of these companies in the past and are currently working at one of these four companies. To ensure the privacy of the six participants, the identities of the participants were concealed using the codes as identifiers. The six interviewees are coded as P1 through P6. All participants for the study met the eligibility criteria of:

- A total of five or more years of experience working in IT,
- At least three years of programming experience, and
- At least one promotion in the previous company.

Also, to ensure the employers' privacy for which the participants were working in the past or currently, the companies' identities were concealed using the codes as identifiers. I identified the four companies represented by the six participants as C1 through C4 in no specific order. The participants involved had the following characteristics, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1*Sample Characteristics*

Participants	Total Years of Experience	Past Company	Current Company	Promoted in Past Company
P1	12	C1	C3	Yes
P2	5	C1	C2	Yes
P3	5	C1	C2	Yes
P4	16	C4	C1	Yes
P5	10	C1	C2	Yes
P6	18	C2	C1	Yes

Thematic Findings

As part of the data analyzing process, there were five themes which are identified. These themes include (a) work-life balance, (b) work growth opportunities, (c) leadership, (d) compensation, and organizational culture.

Theme 1: Work–Life Balance

The 1st theme that developed from data analysis was having a balanced work–life. According to Hussain and Saleem (2014) and Viswanathan and Kumaran (2013), work–life balance refers to maintaining satisfying professional and personal lives without compromising expectations in either role.

All participants indicated they had a stressed work–life at some point in their previous jobs, which impacted their personal lives. Participants who had previously worked for C1 and C4 realized their current company, C2, had better work–life balance and more allotted personal time. Wang et al. (2012) highlighted employees stay longer with companies that provide work–life

balance. Participants P2 and P5 stated company C2 has more tenured employees due to work–life balance encouraged as part of company culture. Participants P1 and P3 acknowledged how happy they were after changing jobs, as they had more time to spend with their families.

Participants P4 and P6 expressed their current company, C1, has been better than their previous companies in terms of having work–life balance, but they would be happier if their work–life balance would improve even more.

Theme 2: Work Growth Opportunities

The 2nd theme developed from the data analysis was growth opportunities provided at work. Showry and Sayulu (2017) found IT employees change jobs to learn new technologies. Another study by Yoon et al. (2015) highlighted IT employees prefer to work on cutting-edge technology to be knowledgeable about the new technologies in the industry. IT employees are looking for opportunities to learn something new and develop products that impact their company.

This theme came out from the question related to what triggered the reason to look for a job. All the participants stated the importance of working on a technology which they are passionate about developing. A sub-theme that emerged out of work growth opportunity is the trajectory of being promoted to the next level. All the participants highlighted that having a better growth opportunity to work on a new technology or a product would lead to their promotion to the next level. All the participants stated that they would be happy if their managers shared the growth trajectory to the next level by giving them opportunities to work on projects they were excited to work on. Participants P1 and P4 started looking for a job outside because they were not happy with the technology used in their current project.

Participants P3 and P5 stated they were unhappy because their promotions were effectively blocked, as they never worked on a project which demonstrated their ability to work on new technology. Thus, they could not demonstrate this skillset because their team had no such project to allow them to work on new technology. Participants noted they would have remained in the company if their managers had allowed them to work on a new technology or a challenging project that would have helped them be promoted to the next level.

Theme 3: Leadership

The 3rd theme developed from data analysis was leadership. Mardanov et al. (2008) emphasized the role of leadership to improve employees' attitudes toward their organization. Thus, the literature review supported this theme as a common cause of attrition for IT and non-IT employees (Bonner et al., 2016; Cialdini et al., 2019; Pierce & Snyder, 2015).

Leadership emerged as a common element from Interview Questions 1, 2, and 7. Participants P4 and P6 started searching for a job because their leadership was not transparent about their feedback until the annual ratings were shared. Participant P5 stated that their leadership did not give them the right opportunity to grow in their career, resulting in a lack of growth opportunities. Participants P2 and P3 shared their leadership was not fully invested in the growth of their careers.

The leadership theme was closely tied with the work–life balance and growth opportunities at work. Participants P2, P3, and P5 stated their team leadership drove limited work–life balance and lack of growth opportunities. With different leadership, they would not have left their previous organizations. Participants P1, P2, P3, and P5 stated they were happy with their current employer leadership compared to their previous organization. They each

highlighted their current leadership focuses on career growth and emphasizes having work–life balance.

Theme 4: Compensation

The 4th theme developed from data analysis was compensation. Studies by Mitani (2016), Naqvi and Bashir (2015), and Zin (2017), and Naqvi and Bashir (2015) highlighted compensation as a factor in job changes. Thus, existing literature aligned well with this theme. This theme was not identified as a cause of attrition but was an essential factor in joining a new company.

The compensation theme was identified from Interview Questions 4–6. Participants P1 and P5 stated their company, C1, tried to match their new compensation offered by companies C3 and C2 but could not match it. Compensation emerged as a way to retain talent by leadership. Participant P1 mentioned they would have appreciated if their previous company would have tried to pay higher upfront and not simply as part of a retention strategy. Participant P4 mentioned it is better to change jobs every three years to increase salary, as new companies always pays more than the previous one. All participants expressed they were happy with their current compensation and were making more money than at their previous companies. Participant P6 stated they did not get a significant change in compensation as part of joining their new company, but due to a location change from California to Seattle, they saved more money by saving on state tax and cost of living.

Theme 5: Organizational Culture

The 5th theme that emerged from data analysis was organization culture. Lee and Jang (2020) found organizational culture has indirect effects on turnover intention through job stress

and fatigue. Organizational culture refers to concepts that bind employees of the organization, such as principles, beliefs, and behaviors. (Glaser et al., 1987; Yom et al., 2013). Organizational culture is further divided into subthemes: (1) employee incentives and (2) decision making.

Employee Incentives

This subtheme emerged from Interview Question 10. Participants P1 and P5 emphasized their company, C1, was frugal about giving small incentives, such as proper peripherals to do their day-to-day jobs. Participant P1 stated their new company, C3, gave 4 weeks of time off to support family members impacted during the COVID-19 global pandemic. According to participant P1, this policy demonstrated the new company supported their employees and their families during this challenging time. Participant P2 stated their new company, C2, gives them 1 month of free time to learn and focus on personal growth. This time allows them to learn and be successful at their job and career. Participants P3 and P5 stated their new company culture is more relaxing and focuses on building products faster using latest technologies. This subtheme focused on the importance of nonmonetary incentives that define organizational culture and make employees feel aligned with their companies.

Decision Making

The subtheme of decision making emerged from Interview Questions 1, 3, and 10. Participants P4 and P6 stated their current company culture at C1 allows them to contribute to decision making for the future of their product, thus making them feel involved. Participants P1 and P5 stated their previous company's decision making was top-down driven and had no opportunity to define the future of the product. They felt they were not contributing to the company's success and were not motivated in their previous job. Supanti et al. (2015) found

employee involvement in decision making helps create a sense of belonging to the company and builds a strong working environment.

According to Herzberg's motivational theory, motivation factors, such as responsibility and belonging, lead to job satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Herzberg et al., 1959). Companies that focus on providing nonmonetary incentives and empowering employees to participate in decision making leads to job satisfaction.

Summary

Chapter 4 summarized data analysis, which I gathered during a semistructured interview process. I conducted semistructured interviews to focus on identifying causes of attrition for highly valued employees in the IT sector in the United States. Six participants took part in interviews, and they represented four tech companies. To preserve confidentiality of the participants, I assigned codes to participants and their companies. From data analysis, five themes emerged, and each theme correlated with Herzberg's motivational theory. I developed these themes based on codes created using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. Themes such as work growth opportunity and organizational culture represent the intrinsic factor of Herzberg's motivational theory. Themes such as work-life balance, leadership, and compensation represent the extrinsic factor of Herzberg's motivation theory. Focusing on improving intrinsic factors and eliminating extrinsic factors can improve job satisfaction levels in employees (Herzberg et al., 1959). In Chapter 5, I focus on discussing findings and applying these findings to the original problem statement. I also provide recommendations for organizational actions to retain employees based on findings of this study. In addition, I identify

limitations of the study and recommend further research areas based on these limitations.

Chapter 5 concludes with final reflections based on findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 consists of discussions about the findings and application of the findings to the original problem statement. In this chapter, I share information about application of these findings to the business sector. This section of the study highlights actions and recommended areas for further research. I also summarize my findings and conclude by identifying causes of attrition for highly valued employees in the U.S. IT sector.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the causes of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees in IT companies in the United States. In addition, I explained the importance of retaining highly valued employees in the previous chapters. As part of this study, highly valued employees are described as someone with five or more years of experience working in the IT industry, including a minimum of three years as a subject matter expert (SME) in a computer programming language, and promoted a level up in the previous company.

Due to the growth of technology, high-tech employees working for a technology company are in high demand. There is an imbalance in supply and demand for high-tech employees, leading to an increase in the turnover rate (Malik et al., 2019). Thus, it is essential to retain existing employees and understand the causes of attrition. The researcher focused on highly valued employees for this study because they have proven that they are valuable to the organization as they were promoted a level up sometime in their career with the previous company before leaving them.

Considering the importance of retaining highly valued employees, it was important to understand the causes of attrition and then identify areas to improve retention for the highly valued employees. Given this premise, the researcher conducted an in-depth literature review to understand the causes of attrition within IT and non-IT companies in the United States. As part

of the research, the researcher conducted qualitative research using a phenomenological research design. There were six participants identified who met the highly valued criteria as mentioned earlier. These participants are coded as P1 to P6 to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. These participants represented four tech companies considered part of the IT companies in the United States. The participants represented these four companies: Amazon, Google, Facebook, and Microsoft. These companies are coded as C1 to C4 in no specific order to hide their identity. The researcher conducted 1-hour meetings via Zoom video conferencing and recorded data for future reference. I analyzed data using Atlas.ti software, and five themes emerged from this analysis. In the next section, I discuss findings and insights from the study.

Discussion of Findings

This section focuses on major findings I identified as part of the interview process and initial research questions. In this study, I discovered five themes explaining causes of attrition for highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States. The five emergent themes were: (1) work–life balance, (2) work growth opportunities, (3) leadership, (4) compensation, and (5) organizational culture.

Theme 1: Work–Life Balance

The 1st theme developed from data analysis involved work–life balance. All participants in the study mentioned they had stressful work–life balance in their previous roles and had better work–life balance at their current companies. Interview Questions 1 and 10 gave insights the participants mentioned they were not happy with their work–life balance, but that was not the trigger point for leaving the company. They realized the importance of work–life balance after they joined the new company. In their previous company, no participants realized that they did not have a work–life balance as they considered the work–life stress to be expected across the

companies. After joining the new company, the participants realized the importance of having a balanced work–life and its impact on their personal and professional lives. All the participants mentioned that they are happy with their current work–life balance and will consider that as a factor if they decide to leave the company in the future. Participant P2 described how the new company work culture is helping to have a balanced work-life:

Managers in the old company would work late hours and message at 12 am, or 2 am, which would create stress for other team members. Moreover, they feel compelled to work late hours because their manager is working late hours. The manager in the new company turns on the do not disturb button at 4:59 pm until the following day and sets up an example to not work beyond 5 pm. The manager is leading as an example to not work after office hours. Post that if anyone wants to work, then it is up to an individual.

Participant P3 stated that the new company C2 has a slow-paced development cycle and helps to have a balanced work-life:

We have a month of no code deployment in the production, and that month is focused on personal growth opportunities. You can take any pieces of training during that time for your career growth.

According to findings from the literature review, employees stay longer with the companies that provide a work–life balance (Wang et al., 2012). Companies use this as a strategy to retain their employees by providing them a balanced work–life. As per Herzberg et al. (1959), hygiene factors, such as work–life balance, can prevent employees from leaving their companies. A balanced work–life culture can help retain highly valued employees and reduce stress at work in this study.

Theme 2: Work Growth Opportunities

The 2nd theme developed from the data analysis was growth opportunities provided at work. All the participants mentioned that they started looking for a new job when they felt that there were not enough opportunities to grow their skillsets. Participants mentioned that having work growth opportunities is important because it is tied to their promotion to the next level and remains competitive in the fast-moving industry such as IT. The study by Yoon et al. (2015) highlighted IT employees prefer to work on cutting-edge technology to be knowledgeable about the new technologies in the industry. Participants P2, P4 and P5 mentioned that they would not seek other opportunities outside their company if their previous company could have given them opportunities to grow in their careers. Participant P5 stated that:

I had a proposal to work on a technology that was denied to me but was later given to another engineer to work. That person worked on that project and was promoted, but my project was not considered for promotion. The idea that would have helped me be promoted was given to someone else, and I was not given new opportunities to be successful in my career. I noticed that my previous company C1 was consistent with developing software that is not designed to scale as they are expected to be developed faster. I was not happy with that approach as it was not exciting for my career growth. After this incident, I decided to look for opportunities outside the company and work on developing software in a scalable way.

Participant P2 highlighted that there weren't enough opportunities to go to the next level in the company C1:

In company C1, it is essential to work on a big-size project to be promoted, but it is always hard to find a new project that can be developed from scratch. There were not enough opportunities in the current team that would have to help me to be promoted, and thus I started looking for a job outside the company.

Participant P4 stated:

The previous company C4 restricted them to work on a new idea if their manager wasn't aligned with it. As an engineer, I had no say in developing software, which restricted him from growing in their career.

Work growth opportunity theme came out as the primary event which triggered participants to look for opportunities outside their company. This theme is an outcome of Interview Question 1, which focused on events triggering the idea of leaving the company.

Findings from the literature review demonstrated employees leave their companies to learn new technologies, as IT employees prefer to work with cutting-edge technologies (Showry & Sayulu, 2017; Yoon et al., 2015). A new finding identified as part of this study was working on new technologies helped employees advance in their careers. Moreover, this is another reason for IT employees to work on cutting-edge technologies. According to Herzberg's motivational theory model, challenging work and growth opportunities increase the retention of highly valued employees (Herzberg et al., 1959). According to this study, providing growth opportunities would help retain the highly valued employees to keep them motivated and provide growth opportunities in their careers.

Theme 3: Leadership

The 3rd theme developed from the data analysis was leadership. As part of the study, five of the six participants stated that leadership was one of the reasons which triggered them to leave their previous company. Participants stated that there was a lack of growth opportunities due to poor leadership. Thus Themes 2 and 3 are closely tied to each other and are the outcome of Interview Question one, which focused on specific events triggering the idea of leaving the company. Interview Questions two and seven also focused on events triggering employees to leave their companies to identify causes of this attrition. All the participants stated in the interview that the leadership and lack of growth opportunities were primary causes of attrition. Leaders focusing on the career growth of their employees would lead to retention of employees as that would provide the participants with growth opportunities to be successful in their careers. Participant P2 stated that their manager in the new company is focusing on the growth of their employees:

In company C2 there is a system named “Per” which tracks their work and the path to the next level. In this company, the manager is not responsible for tech work but focuses more on employee growth. I went through two feedback cycles, and I know what needs to be achieved to go to the next level. This helps me to stay focus on my growth to the next level.

Participant P1 stated that the leaders in current company C3 are more approachable and focus on the relationship between manager and employee. Participant P6 mentioned that their manager in the current company C1 is providing consistent opportunities for growth in the current team, and that’s motivating to be part of the company.

The findings in the literature review demonstrate that leadership plays a vital role in the attrition and retention of employees in the IT and non-IT companies (Bonner et al., 2016; Cialdini et al., 2019; Pierce & Snyder, 2015). Using Herzberg's motivational theory, it can be validated that reducing the influence of bad leadership increased the retention of employees in a company (Herzberg et al., 1959). Leadership focusing on employee growth reduced the attrition rate as the employees would not look for opportunities outside their company.

Theme 4: Compensation

The 4th theme developed from the data analysis was compensation. None of the participants in the study mentioned that compensation was the trigger or the cause of leaving their previous company. Compensation is identified as a theme because all the participants mentioned that they were happy to change company as the new employer offered better pay. Three participants mentioned that better compensation could have retained them from moving to the new company. Few of the participants mentioned that their previous employees tried to offer them better compensation, but they could not match the new compensation offered by the new employer. A better compensation led to an increase in their motivation working for the new company but was not the primary cause of leaving their jobs. The participant P1 and P4 mentioned that they were content with their compensation at their previous companies, as they were competitive. Also, participants P2 and P4 stated as they were promoted in their previous company, they were compensated fairly and were never concerned about compensation. Participant P4 stated that they were happy with the compensation offered by the old company and was not the reason to search for a new job:

I was happy with the current compensation offered by company C4, and that was never the reason to look for an opportunity outside company C4. After looking for a job outside

the company, I realized that I could be paid higher, but compensation was never why I quit the company.

This theme was identified as part of Interview Questions four–six as these questions focused on the retention strategy used by their leadership. However, the study’s findings say that compensation did not help retain their employees because they had lost trust in their leadership, and compensation was not the cause of attrition. Participant P1 stated that they lost trust in their leadership and was not looking for higher compensation:

I was not happy with the manager and raised that concern to my skip manager, but they didn’t take any action against that manager. They took action after a long time against that manager, but that manager was asked to move out of the team instead of correcting the behavior. I lost trust in the leadership at that time and made my decision to leave company C1. I was offered revised compensation to match company C3 but had no trust in the leadership. I would not have even accepted higher compensation offered by company C1 as I had already made up my mind.

Thus, it is fair to say that the leadership focused on retaining the highly valued employees by something that was not the cause of attrition.

Findings in the literature review highlight compensation as a factor to change the job (Mitani, 2016; Naqvi & Bashir, 2015; Zin, 2017). However, as per the findings of this study, the literature review findings do not support the findings of this study specific for highly valued employees. According to Herzberg’s motivational theory model, eliminating salary would prevent work dissatisfaction for highly valued employees. The findings of this study do support

that better compensation prevents dissatisfaction as the participants are happy with their current job due to better compensation.

Theme 5: Organizational Culture

The 5th theme that emerged from the data analysis was organizational culture. All the participants in the study stated that they are happy with their current organization as they focus on taking care of their employees and making them feel empowered in making decisions for the company's growth. This theme has emerged from Interview Questions one, three, and ten, which focused on events triggering employees to leave their previous companies. These questions also focused on differences of culture between the previous and new companies. Findings associated with this theme demonstrated highly valued employees would like to be part of a company that helps them be involved in decision-making processes for the future of technology. Another finding was participants prefer an employee-friendly company that gives them nonmonetary incentives, such as unlimited time off and better equipment for their jobs. Participant P3 stated that the peers are more respectful in company C2 as compared to company C1. According to participant P3, peer friendly culture of the company helps to be motivated and excited to work in company C2. Participant P2 stated that the company C2 provides small incentives which are beyond employee expectation and helps to retain top talent:

Company C2 pays additional money for working on 24* 7 support (Oncall support), and the previous company C1 would not pay anything. Additional compensation paid by the company is not much money, but that helps keep the employees motivated and retain them in the long run. This small act by the company demonstrates that their employer cares for their employees.

Participant P1 stated that the new company culture is widely different between C3 and C1:

In the previous company C1, there were layers of approvals for basic peripherals needed to do the job. There were approvals required to buy a book or attend training. There is no approval required in the new company C3 to buy any peripherals or attend any training. As an employee, I have a card that I can use to buy such things and do not need approvals. In addition, the current company C3 puts their employees first, and the previous company C1 would put their customers first. For example, during covid, employees are given ten weeks of vacation to take care of their family and full coverage to set up a home office. They also support working from your home country and be close to your family.

The literature review also highlighted organizational culture has indirect effects on turnover intention based on organizational principles, beliefs, and behaviors (Glaser et al., 1987; Lee & Jang, 2020; Yom et al., 2013). This research foundation aligned with findings of this study, as participants stated organizational culture was not the primary cause to leave their organization, but indirectly impacted their decision to leave the organization. In the list of Herzberg's theory intrinsic factors, giving responsibility to employees was found to lead to retention (Herzberg et al., 1959). In the list of Herzberg extrinsic factors, proper work conditions would increase job satisfaction of highly valued employees (Herzberg et al., 1959). The findings of this study are aligned with the literature review and Herzberg's motivational theory.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

The IT industry has grown rapidly and depends on its employees for companies' success (Langer & Yorks, 2018). Such constant growth in the IT industry has led organizations to retain

their employees. Additionally, employees change jobs at an alarming rate for better opportunities, making retention an essential opportunity for many organizations (Soto & Lugo, 2013; Wen et al., 2018). Thus, retaining employees can reduce operational costs associated with training new employees and maximize organizational productivity (George, 2015). Having an effective retention strategy can also help organizations prevent loss of highly valued employees and avoid voluntary attrition. To retain highly valued employees, it is vital to understand root causes of attrition and create strategies to address attrition.

Results of this study help further understanding of attrition for highly valued employees. Five themes emerged as part of data analysis and can help with understanding various causes of attrition for highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States. From the five themes, I identified major causes of attrition as: (1) lack of growth opportunities, (2) poor leadership, (3) lack of work–life balance, (4) organizational culture about being employee friendly and empowering employees. These causes of attrition are the major reasons of attrition for highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States.

Mitigating these causes of attrition identified in this study could have prevented highly valued employees from leaving their organizations and avoided attrition at IT companies in the United States. Based on the causes of attrition I identified in this study, employers should focus on how to avoid causes of workplace trigger, which could lead to attrition for highly valued employees. Employers should create retention strategies focusing on the causes of attrition identified in this study. These strategies would reduce the attrition of highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States.

Application to Business

The purpose of this study was to identify causes of attrition for highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States. The findings of this study, along with a literature review analysis and Herzberg's motivational theory as the conceptual framework, provided a detailed academic framework for future organizational practices. Major causes of attrition identified in this study may be applicable to organizational leadership practices and help those organizations retain their highly valued employees. Organizational leaders can also create effective strategies to retain their highly valued employees based on findings of this study. I identified causes of attrition based on five emergent themes from data analysis: (1) lack of growth opportunities, (2) poor leadership, (3) lack of work-life balance, (4) organizational culture being employee friendly and empowering employees.

Findings of this study could lead to increased retention rates of highly valued employees due to better alignment and understanding of causes triggering highly valued employees to look for opportunities outside their company. Organizations should develop strategies to reduce attrition for highly valued employees based on causes of attrition identified in this study. Moreover, I developed retention strategies around findings of this study to motivate and increase job satisfaction of highly valued employees. Publishing results of this study could provide organizations to understand causes of attrition for highly valued employees and help them develop retention strategies around these findings.

Recommendations for Action

Results of this study could help the IT companies in the United States implement retention strategies based on root causes of attrition I identified. In this study, I found a common retention strategy used by employers involved offering higher compensation to retain employees

who had already secured a new job with a better salary. This strategy is not effective, as no participant accepted higher compensation offered by their previous organization. None of the participants actually started to look for a new job for higher pay, as they were content with their salaries. As such, current retention strategies offered by these organizations should be changed, as they are not related to actual causes of attrition. Retention strategies should instead develop around four major causes of attrition I identified in this study.

More Growth Opportunities

As findings revealed, lack of growth opportunities was the most common cause of trigger events for participants to look for new job openings outside the company. Participants P3, P4, P5, and P6 found a lack of opportunities in the previous company to be successful in their careers. I recommend organizations focus on employee growth and work with their employees to understand opportunities they are looking to gain in the company. Organizational leaders should look for opportunities for employee growth and ensure their highly valued employees are satisfied with quality of the work assigned to them. One finding I identified in this study was the participants often looked for opportunities to work on new technology because doing so was necessary for promotion. Organizational leadership should communicate their promotion expectations with employees and share a clear trajectory with employees to ensure highly valued employees can grow in their careers. Providing growth opportunities to succeed in their careers may help to retain highly valued employees.

Leadership Training

Another finding revealed leadership style was also a cause of attrition. All the participants stated they were not happy with their managers, as they had no clear path to

promotion and received surprise feedback during their annual performance reviews. I recommend organizations invest in training their leadership by sharing continuous feedback to their employees about their performance and work on a formal plan explaining clear criteria required for promotion to the next levels. Improving leadership style could have a positive effect on retaining employees (Mahal, 2012). Changes in leadership style may also help reduce attrition and retain highly valued employees.

Improve Work–Life Balance

One cause of attrition identified as part of the study was lack of work–life balance. Organizations should focus on improving work–life balance to retain their highly valued employees. Existing studies have demonstrated improving work–life balance encourages IT employees to remain at their companies for a longer time (Viswanathan & Kumaran, 2013). I encourage the organization to hire more employees and distribute work evenly among all employees to ensure their employees have a balanced work–life. Timelines to complete a project should be driven by employees and not by management to reduce stress of working extended hours to meet unrealistic timelines.

Organizational Culture

Another cause of attrition involved organizational culture being employee friendly and empowering employees to perform their duties. I recommend organizations focus on improving relationships with their employees. Leadership should conduct surveys to understand what employees look for to improve their satisfaction in current roles. They should change their policies to adapt to employees' request. Leadership action to consider employees request would increase loyalty and help retain employees. Another area to take action is to engage employees

and empower them to efficiently perform their job duties. The organization should prioritize independence and trust their employees' abilities to make decisions for the company's betterment. This prioritization would help employees feel empowered and creative; thereby able to efficiently perform their job duties (Supanti et al., 2015). In general, this study may be beneficial to myriad organizations and employees. I intend to share results of this study with research participants via email and to business leaders of my company and other companies via conferences and training seminars.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to explore causes of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees at IT companies in the United States. After the literature review, I found most research has focused on identifying major causes of attrition for all company employees, rather than focusing on voluntary attrition. Due to limited qualitative research focusing on highly valued employees of the company and causes of voluntary attrition, I recommend researchers conduct more qualitative studies to understand causes of attrition for highly valued employees and formulate strategies to retain them.

The main limitation of this study involved transferability. Results of this study cannot be transferred to IT companies outside the United States. For transferability, it is essential to have findings applied to other settings or groups (Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). In this study, I focused on the IT companies in the United States, and thus there were no data to support findings of this study would apply to IT companies outside the United States. I recommend further studies be conducted at IT companies outside the United States to validate if these findings apply to all global IT companies.

The second limitation of this study is the sample size for the study was limited to six participants identified as highly valued employees. My criteria for status of a highly valued employee included: (1) promoted in the previous company, (2) have five or more years of experience working in the IT company, and (3) minimum of three years of experience as a subject matter expert (SME) in a computer programming language. I recommend studying a larger sample size, as more themes can be identified based on data gathered from a larger sample size. Conducting a larger scale study may also help organizations conceptualize strategies to increase IT employee retention by understanding root causes of attrition.

Conclusion

IT is an employee-centric industry, and voluntary attrition of highly valued employees can impact companies' growth. Retaining employees would help organizations save on recruiting and training costs and reduce the risk of missing project deliverables (Chowdhury & Md., 2017). The cost to replace an IT employee is 1 to 1.2 times the departing employee's annual salary (Marsden, 2016).

Five themes emerged from this study, and the most common causes of attrition were lack of growth opportunities and unhappiness with leadership. Other causes of attrition were identified as lack of work-life balance or a lack of an employee friendly and empowering organizational culture. Compensation was not identified as a major cause of attrition, but was used as a retention strategy by employers.

Findings from this study are consistent with the literature review and conceptual framework by Herzberg's motivational theory. According to Herzberg et al. (1959), hygiene factors cause dissatisfaction and motivational factors increase job satisfaction. The findings of

this study also support earlier research by Rahman and Fazal (2018), which identified lack of growth opportunities as a typical reason for IT employee turnover.

These findings may contribute to improving social factors of retaining employees by improving their work–life balance, which ultimately helps their families, the economy, and the organization. A higher retention rate would help leadership focus on innovation in their business ideas and give growth opportunities to all employees.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Interview Invitation

Subject: Interviews Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear [Name]:

My name is Husain Kapadia, and I am currently a doctoral student in Business Administration at City University of Seattle. You are invited to voluntarily take part in a research study that focus on identifying the causes of voluntary attrition for highly valued employees in the Information Technology sector. I am looking for participants who have a total of five or more years of experience working in IT including at least three years of programming experience, and have received at least one promotion in your previous company. If you agree to be one of the study participants, I would interview you over the phone or using a web conference tool such as Zoom. As participant of the study, your name or any other information that could personally identify you will not be included in any reports of study.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please refer to the attached consent form. This document provides detailed information to help you understand the study conduct procedures and better assist you in your own personal decision. After reviewing the attached consent form, if you are agreeable to participate in this research please reply to this e-mail doing so, you are agreeing to voluntarily participate in the study. Please feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions or would like additional information. Please respond at your earliest convenience indicating your decision. I appreciate your time!

Sincerely,

Husain Kapadia

APPENDIX B

Participant Interview Questions

1. What events triggered the idea of leaving your previous organization?
2. What was the primary cause for you to leave your organization?
3. What kind of opportunities did your leadership give you to advance in your career?
4. What did your leadership do to retain you?
5. Why did that not help to retain you?
6. What could have been done differently to retain you?
7. Why did you start to look out for a change outside your organization?
8. Did you have an option to change teams or departments?
9. If you had an option to change teams or departments, then would you still have changed the organization?
10. How different is your new company's culture and leadership compared to your previous organization?
11. What else would you like to add that might be applicable which we did not cover?