

A Generic Qualitative Inquiry: Reducing Employee Attrition in the U.S. Supply Chain Industry

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Abstract

Attrition significantly impacts the U.S. supply chain industry, causing logistics delays, staffing challenges, and financial losses. The researcher explored U.S. supply chain leaders' perspectives on effective leadership strategies to reduce attrition. Using a generic qualitative inquiry, 10 leaders were interviewed via semi-structured online sessions, and data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Four key themes emerged: work-life balance, communication, teamwork, and growth and development. The attrition-reducing best practices within each team provided actionable strategies for leaders to address attrition and its detrimental effects.

Keywords

Employee Attrition, Leadership Strategies, Supply Chain Industry, Retention Strategies, Attrition Impacts

1. Background

1.1. Attrition

Attrition has caused organizational leaders unprecedented challenges. Disruptions from attritions spiked in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in 16.3 million people changing jobs in the United States. This was the highest national employee turnover (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). COVID-19 also contributed to changes in employee behaviors (Childs et al., 2022). In 2022, as the pandemic began to subside, companies noticed that employees continued to leave their jobs (Joblist, 2023; Posel et al., 2021). The United States saw more than 50 million workers quit, with 35% leaving without having another job and

only 22% regretting quitting (Robinson, 2023; Van der Merwe, 2023). In 2023, 67% of employees advised that they planned to leave, with 34% not worried about finding another job first (Joblist, 2023). In 2024, 46% considered quitting (Smith, 2024). The supply chain industry was especially heavily hit by attrition (Straight, 2023).

1.2. Attrition Impacts

Attrition caused labor shortages in the global supply chain, permeating across industries (Wakefield, 2021). Many companies felt the impacts because of delays in the transportation of goods and subsequent rising prices (Austin, 2021; Kriewaldt, 2022). Small businesses were heavily impacted. In 2021, 61% of small businesses in the United States experienced supply chain disruptions, whereas 63% needed to change their supply chain to adjust. Nearly half of small businesses experienced difficulties meeting customer demands because of logistics delays (Cates, 2022).

Organizations suffered financially because of the costs of replacing workers (Eddy, 2021). Employee shortages contributed to moral issues for the remaining staff, lowering employee performance and negatively impacting the overall organization (Markovich, 2019). The quality of work also diminished. Understaffed and stressed employees contributed to more errors in their daily work (Koenemann, 2021).

2. Research Study

2.1. Problem, Purpose, and Project Question

The general business problem was the rise of attrition in the United States, resulting in adverse business impacts (McCann, 2022). The specific business problem was that, without effective leadership strategies, leaders in the U.S. supply chain industry could not reduce attrition rates, resulting in logistics delays and business performance issues related to work quality, staffing, and financials (Kriewaldt, 2022; Straight, 2023). The purpose of this qualitative inquiry project was to explore the perspectives of U.S. supply chain leaders regarding effective leadership strategies to reduce employee attrition, which could then further reduce logistics delays and improve business performance. The project question was, what are the perspectives of U.S. supply chain leaders regarding effective leadership strategies to reduce supply chain employee attrition, which can then subsequently reduce logistics delays and improve business performance related to work quality, staffing, and financials?

2.2. Gap in Practice

The gap in practice was that U.S. supply chain leaders lacked effective leadership strategies to reduce attrition rates, resulting in logistics delays and business performance issues related to work quality, staffing, and financials (McClung, 2023). Attrition reduction was critical for leaders, where 68% of executives revealed that staffing issues were a top concern given attrition's impacts on business performance

(Straight, 2023). However, leaders lacked the best practices needed to reduce attrition.

First, there was a lack of awareness of attrition-reducing best practices. Supply chain leaders were unaware of the effective leadership strategies necessary to reduce attrition strongly due to COVID-19's changes to the work environment (Childs et al., 2022; Dos Santos, 2023; McClung, 2023). Employees raised their expectations of leaders regarding clear communication, flexibility, support, engagement, respect, and psychological safety (Charlton, 2021; Moss, 2022). These increased expectations caused previously used tactics, such as performance reviews, engagement activity, and pay incentives, to have less effect on attrition reduction (Johnston, 2022; Mlakar, 2022).

Second, many supply chain leaders did not understand why employees left (Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022). Some leaders could not recognize the supply chain workforce changes (Nagle, 2022). Others said they did not know what attracted or repelled their employees (Johnston, 2022, 2023).

Third, formal education about attrition-reducing best practices was insufficient. McClung (2023) confirmed that half of the supply chain leaders they sought input from advised that they received nine hours of leadership training over 10 years. In addition, 57% of leaders in hybrid roles, who were expected to lead the team partially virtually, did not have enough training to lead the workforce well (McLain & Pendell, 2023). During COVID-19, many leaders reported becoming leaders or expanding their scope without effective leadership training (Rhyne, 2021).

2.3. Topic Significance

Exploring the topic was significant for reducing attrition. Bartrop-Sackey et al. (2022) and Castañeda-Navarrete et al. (2021) noted that studying attrition reduction was necessary since employee retention strategies were critical for sustainability, stability, and business performance. Reducing attrition was correlated with improving business performance (Mlakar, 2022; Singh et al., 2022). Additionally, attrition was noted to cause labor shortages that impacted logistics activities related to sourcing materials for goods production (Hovnanian et al., 2022) as well as transportation of goods (Hobson, 2022), with goods arriving at ports experiencing delays in unloading and distribution (Austin, 2021; Brinkley, 2022). Attrition reduction could likely improve logistics delays (Miller, 2022).

Given the importance of the supply chain industry, reducing attrition and its subsequent impacts could benefit consumers by reducing cascading adverse effects on the rest of the economy, which is often seen with supply disruptions and slower logistics transit times (Austin, 2021). Lastly, leaders outside the supply chain industry could benefit from the study by learning about leadership strategies that helped supply chain leaders reduce attrition, which could be replicated.

3. Literature Analysis

3.1. Themes

Most scholars agreed that attrition reduction centered on well-being, transformational leadership, and learning and growth.

Well-being was a powerful theme based on prior research showing it improved retention (Yakut & Kara, 2022), helped with mental health (Wigert & Agrawal, 2021), and contributed to psychological safety (Sasaki et al., 2020; Su et al., 2022). Well-being was initially composed of respect (Covey & Conant, 2016; Ibarra, 1999; Rogers et al., 2017) and fair treatment (Gilsdorf et al., 2017) but more prioritized by millennials and Generation Z (Fowler, 2021; Moore, 2022). Employees did not want mundane work (Nicol, 2022) while seeking better work-life balance, flexibility (Jung & Yoon, 2021), and manageable workloads (Dobroszek et al., 2023).

Transformational leadership was a powerful theme. Researchers saw it improve retention (Jordan & Troth, 2011), especially in the supply chain industry (Saad & Patel, 2006). It helped increase empowerment and the relationship between employee and employer, establishing trust (Ahuja et al., 2007; Alexandrov et al., 2007; Lawrence, 2006). Additionally, transformational leadership enhances personal and work life (Cascio, 2019). Through transformation leadership, leaders were able to strengthen relationships with employees (Kaleel et al., 2021; Khlystova et al., 2022) who felt safer at work, especially during crises like COVID-19 (Sobaih et al., 2022).

Learning and growth was a theme not widely covered in past research that was older than five years, but, when it was, it was mentioned that it sometimes overwhelmed employees (DeLong, 2015). However, more contemporary researchers showed that young generations expected learning opportunities (Emilisa et al., 2022), career growth (Badrinarayanan et al., 2021; Mallin, 2022), and a way to be ready for challenging work in the demanding supply chain industry (Rai et al., 2022). Initiatives for learning and growth helped employees stay longer (Li & Xie, 2022; Parker & Horowitz, 2022; Saraswati, 2022). Transformational leaders, who were found to strengthen employee relationships and improve job satisfaction, often had an easier time lowering attrition (Jordan & Troth, 2011; Kaleel et al., 2021). Younger generations also prioritized learning and growth, expecting leaders to provide training and development opportunities (Olenski, 2015; Saraswati, 2022).

3.2. Past Research Disagreements

Researchers disagreed on several topics related to attrition. Lambert et al. (2001) believed that addressing the root causes of attrition, such as job satisfaction, was crucial, while Davies (2001) as well as Lu and Gursoy (2016) considered job satisfaction a symptom rather than a cause. Butler and Waldroop (1999) and Olenski (2015) emphasized the importance of screening candidates to prevent attrition in the first place, while Maloni et al. (2017) believed attrition-reducing strategies should be catered to the situation, not universal.

Remote work was also debated. Jamal et al. (2021) saw it as improving job satisfaction and flexibility, while Wang et al. (2020) along with Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021) argued that it increased isolation and subsequently exacerbated attrition. Similarly, Law and Koh (2023) noted that remote work reduced face-to-face interactions, while Knardahl and Christensen (2022) highlighted the risk of burnout from constant availability enabled by remote work.

There were also disagreements about pay as a best practice. While Cappelli (2000) viewed it as an outdated motivator, Bersin (2013) and Willyerd (2014) saw it as relevant for retaining high performers. Likewise, Fisman and Luca (2018) maintained that pay remained a strong motivator. In relation to COVID-19, Sull et al. (2022) cited that pay was an attrition-reducing strategy, but Shuster (2022) felt that pay was not a primary motivator after the pandemic.

3.3. Past Research Limitations

From the articles analyzed during the research study, while articles focused on attrition impacting the supply chain industry, there were also articles exploring generic impacts of attrition across other industries, such as hospitality, sales, healthcare, and engineering. In the supply chain studies, trucking and warehousing often had limitations. Non-scholarly business practitioner sources offered less research and data analysis process transparency, more opinions, and were more challenging to access if published before 2019. Scholarly peer-reviewed sources were more reliable, but most researchers used self-reported quantitative surveys. Additionally, some frameworks suggesting attrition-reducing strategies offered too many steps or lacked clear guidance for leaders.

3.4. Past Research about Gap in Practice

3.4.1. Difficulties Reducing Attrition

Historically, managing attrition has always been challenging for leaders. There was minimal guidance on best practices during crises and changing work environments (Carucci, 2022; Collinson et al., 2018), in which leaders often misdiagnosed the root causes of attrition and lacked the necessary frameworks to reduce it (Gardner et al., 2020). Some researchers highlighted difficulties in addressing attrition due to shifting employee motivations (Bartrop-Sackey et al., 2022). A ManpowerGroup survey found that 69% of U.S. companies struggle with retention, driven by factors like COVID-19, correlated health concerns, and changing expectations of new generations entering the workforce (McFall, 2022; Segal, 2022). Leaders continued to be unprepared for these challenges (Kelly, 2021).

3.4.2. COVID-19

Some leaders blamed COVID-19, mentioning that traditional strategies, such as pay increases, were ineffective in reducing attrition because employees changed their priorities (Hertelendy et al., 2022; Johnston, 2022). Balancing these new work-life expectations became challenging for many leaders (Laker, 2022). They were having difficulties upskilling and adapting, which caused relationship and trust issues

between leaders and employees (Jacobs, 2020; Langabeer, 2023; Račaitė-Samušienė et al., 2021).

3.4.3. Old Strategies

Some leaders struggled to abandon outdated practices, such as micromanagement, which further fueled attrition (Forbes Expert Panel, 2023; Robinson, 2022), while others resisted adapting to new strategies that included prioritizing employee well-being and leadership education (Dennison, 2022). Some conservative leaders found it difficult to become more agile by altering tactics to satisfy employees (Mann, 2022).

3.4.4. Leadership Confusion

Some leaders were unclear on priorities, struggling to balance investing in employees that could prevent attrition versus cutting costs (River, 2022). Many prioritized financial metrics over employee well-being, which risked attrition and, ironically, financial impacts (Langabeer, 2023; Vet, 2021).

3.4.5. Fear

Some researchers found that fear contributed to poor attrition-reducing best practices, as some leaders feared unintended consequences from trying strategies (Althouse et al., 2020; Nardone, 2022). The supply chain industry was especially challenging (Ellinger & Ellinger, 2014; Gómez-Cedeño et al., 2015), with leaders lacking strategies to improve employee commitment, well-being, and subsequent retention.

3.4.6. Generational Challenges

Leaders faced challenges with multiple generations in the workforce, given that up to five generations could work simultaneously, each with different preferences (Koolhaas, 2023; Lee, 2023). Younger generations, especially Generation Z, wanted workplace culture changes, but leaders lacked experience and guidance in making that happen (Kislik, 2022; Staglin, 2022).

3.4.7. Remote Work Challenges

The shift toward hybrid work introduced the concept of e-leadership, which some leaders struggled to navigate effectively (Gutu & Medeleanu, 2023; Rotoli, 2022). Leaders faced challenges managing hybrid employees, with 57% of U.S. hybrid leaders reporting they lacked training in virtual leadership (McLain & Pendell, 2023). Leaders also did not provide employees with clear hybrid work guidelines (Tsipursky, 2023).

3.4.8. Lack of Prioritizing Learning

Many leaders lacked sufficient leadership training. Over the past decade, half of surveyed U.S. supply chain leaders have received less than nine hours of training (McClung, 2023). Some leaders felt unable to address attrition due to obstacles like excessive direct reports, while others believed that addressing attrition was impossible (Carucci, 2022). Confident leaders misjudged the root causes, viewing attrition

as simply a temporary generational issue or the responsibility of human resource departments (Carucci, 2022).

4. Method

4.1. Population and Recruitment

The target population was U.S.-based supply chain leaders. Ten participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and third-party sampling through the researcher's LinkedIn network and User Interviews. Candidates ranged in organizational level from team leader to senior director. All candidates were screened against inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusive criteria entailed participants being U.S. supply chain industry leaders currently employed in the industry, having direct reports, having managed direct reports for at least three years, having at least three years of experience in developing and implementing strategies to reduce employee attrition, and having experience and success in lowering attrition. Exclusion criteria included any participant who worked directly with or personally knew the researcher. Participants received study details, including benefits, risks, and confidentiality information, and were required to sign a participation consent form.

4.2. Design and Data Collection

The research method was a generic qualitative inquiry. Semi-structured virtual interviews, ranging from 45 to 60 minutes, were conducted via Zoom. Interview audio was recorded, and automatic text transcripts were generated.

The interviews included ten open-ended questions to explore participants' attrition-reduction experiences. The questions focused on challenges seen with attrition, employee well-being, learning and growth, attrition-reducing best practices, support needed from senior leaders, and perspectives on the resulting impacts of attrition, specifically logistic delays, financial issues, and staffing challenges.

Transcripts were shared with participants for review.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Thematic Analysis

Quotes from all participant transcripts were analyzed via thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2012) inductive approach, involving familiarization, coding, theme identification, and synthesis across participants. This included familiarization with the data, creating codes from each quote that then were grouped into categories, creating themes, reviewing themes across the dataset, defining and naming the themes, creating a final version of the themes, and visually presenting the information to show data interconnections as well as a final matrix of quotes, codes, categories, and themes (Byrne, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Percy et al., 2015).

5.2. Research Rigor

The researcher adhered to established principles and practices to ensure the rigor

of qualitative research. Reliability was maintained by aligning the study with the qualitative inquiry steps outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Credibility was enhanced through participant transcript reviews, as Rowlands (2021) recommended. Transferability was supported by providing detailed, thick data descriptions to facilitate contextual understanding. Dependability was ensured through peer debriefing, following the guidance of Stahl and King (2020). Lastly, conformability was achieved by openly acknowledging potential researcher biases, consistent with the approach suggested by Gill et al. (2018).

6. Results

From 230 quotes, 79 initial codes were identified. The codes ranged from one to several words and described the quote, often using keywords from the quotes. These initial codes were then further condensed into final codes by looking at the similarities between multiple initial codes and attempting to merge them. Through this process, 25 final codes were generated, which were moved to the final codebook and defined with a short description for each code. They are shown in Table 1. Two sample quotes were provided for each code.

Table 1. Codebook.

Final code	Definition	Sample quotes
Asking employees about needs	Asking what employees need.	<p>P8: [I say] take me through, that, like, what's going on or you, you know, you just, you deserve your free time, like where you don't even need to use your kids as an excuse."</p> <p>P10: "Well, well, you know, in our industry there can be, in the, well, like the container life cycle. So let's say, if it stays too long at the port, there'll be charges incurred, we had, in the instance where the employee quit suddenly. I would ask, if the team needs anything."</p>
Boundaries	Offering work-life balance by helping set schedule boundaries.	<p>P8: "If you don't, and I've I've had this conversation a lot of times with people and my team's, like, if you don't put up your own boundaries, I can't do it for you.</p> <p>P8: "Really unplug. I'm going on vacation. I really try to impart that on my own people. Be like, all right, you got your time off. Take it. You take it like I'm not gonna bother you, I mean, unless it's something truly an emergency. And hopefully, no one else is bothering you either. Set those boundaries for yourself."</p>
Check-in	Checking-in with employees for updates.	<p>P7: "[Check] if they're happy, well-heard, educated, informed."</p> <p>P9: "A lot of employee well-being revolves around their mental state. I'm doing constant check-ins on what the mental health of my team looks like, how they're feeling about the accounts that they're working for, what obstacles are they facing so that they can remain as engaged as as possible."</p>

Continued

Communicate support plans	Communicating ways the leadership is attempting to offer support.	<p>P6: "We need to let these people know that we're gonna open positions to hire, and that we can build them up and that they can get training, and that they can get a promotion. So I think it's it's having a full plan for those people and letting them understand that this is a temporary inconvenience."</p> <p>P10: "We just tell them the efforts that have been made to acquire more businesses or more customer to be able to at least get to that level where we have a justification, you know, for creating new, new roles, because we can't create a roles, or we can't promote people, when we don't have the financial annual basis. Right? So it's just an encouragement."</p>
		<p>P1: "Maintain good lines of communication so that you understand what their wants and needs are, so you have the best chance of providing that type of environment."</p>
Conversations	Talking, both about work and personal life.	<p>P7: "They're used to engagement. Good morning. How are you? How are the kids? How was your commute to work? Then? It's normal. The communication is normal. And so by us having a fluency of communication, fluency of dialogue, it makes, it would make the the employee more comfortable with sharing issues that they have even if they need support or just a listening ear, on personal matters as well."</p>
Empower to take initiative	Empowering employees with freedom to take decisions.	<p>P2: "The teams I worked with when you give, give them the independence and the trust, and they feel, like, empowered, it's the best. They do tend to stay longer."</p> <p>P10: "We need to give employees the room, in order to, the freedom to operate."</p>
Engage with employees	Engaging and getting involved to show support and connection.	<p>P3: "Engage with your employees and really get to know them. Get to know what they wanna do. Their strengths, the weaknesses, and not just, not just with their work, but actually showing interest and then they're definitely more likely to stay."</p> <p>P9: "I do find that being more engaged as a manager can sometimes help relieve them, that pressure and that stress that the employee's feeling."</p>
Flexibility	Offering work-life balance through flexibility.	<p>P8: "I'm willing to be flexible and, and support them, and, you know, do whatever I can to to try to make their lives a little easier, while at the same time, you know, satisfying the needs of the business."</p> <p>P10: "Make sure everybody gets to have some some time to unplug from work and get some rest so they can."</p> <p>P1: "Sitting down with each individual that reports up to me, and trying to get to know them a little bit."</p>
Get to know employees	Learning about employees.	<p>P4: "Every aspect of their lives with it, in a sense of, hey, I want you to bring your families in here. I want to meet your families. I want to interact with, you know, people that are important to you."</p>

Continued

Growth and development conversations	Talking about aspirations for growth.	P2: “[During attrition] attention to detail will drop significantly at times. I think those open conversations about career development, not over over promising, just really honest in regards to where they wanted to go, and seeing what I could do to make them get to whatever they wanted to do. That connection, like, human-to-human connection.”
Growth and development opportunities	Providing opportunities for growth and development to reach aspirations.	P8: “Tell me something that has you interested about, or has interested about, you know, my department, or whatever it is. And inevitably the answers were always about; I wanna grow. I wanna challenge myself. I wanna do this. I wanna do this. And it was very the person answering would often most of the time would answer that question very focused on them. What they benefit from it.”
Growth and development support	Supporting growth and development through reimbursement of education and dedicated time for learning.	P3: “Trying to give them opportunity and have them learn. Is really is the, the best thing, I think, is even better than money.” P10: “Encourage a lot of cross-training on the job that we do, so that we can build capacity, you know, for growth. Maybe the, there comes a promotion, and then we need to fill an opening that becomes available. At least we have somebody who has the experience.”
Involve in decisions	Let employees be part of the decision-making process and changes.	P6: “Block out on Monday mornings. So, in supply chain, you’re not allowed to have a meeting on a Monday morning before 10 o’clock, and then on Fridays after 3 o’clock. It’s time for yourself to either catch up or to do self development.” P10: “What we can do is to continue to encourage them and then share maybe what we see, at the leadership level, in terms of the future expansion. Although we don’t have openings, you know, for promotion yet, but then we keep assuring them and letting them know, that when, when whenever that opening becomes available, they will be the first to be considered.” P2: “They wanna do is be part of the change. They don’t want to communicate about the change.” P10: “For the few people that I’ve worked with. Yeah, once you give them that room to grow to take decision and also to make inputs when it comes to some of the decision making, they feel motivated and want to stay and continue to work here with the team.”
Listen to employees	Listening to what employees say.	P1: “Logistics delays. It’s a huge problem. [It] impacts the entire organization. It’s going to impact your ability to support deliveries. You need to get in there and address the issues and find out, you know, why do we have this problem here? You know what’s got everybody so upset? You know, what do you guys think needs to be done about it? Review this situation and and look at the bottlenecks.” P2: “Main impact is on resource allocation. So you’re already talking about like short staffed, like people are already like swamped with work, increasing their work like. I think it’s the worst part, like, just, you know, giving them more responsibility. And again, the responsibility is not always does not always come with compensation. They are absorbing a lot of work from people that left for new opportunities, in my, in my case, it’s it was really listening more.”

Continued

		P5: "Something simple, like bringing in donuts, or you know, something for the team. Try to make them feel included, to try to make them feel more comfortable."
Motivation through materialistic means	Motivating through rewards and tokens of appreciation, including pay.	P6: "I have had employees tell me that I'm like one of the only managers that they've ever seen do that. I've had people from other departments come up to me, and they're like, How are you doing that? I'm like dude, I went and spent \$40 on coffee like I did that myself. The company's not reimbursing me, but I know I just lost someone, and if 2 other people leave, forget it. So it's for me. It's worth the \$40, you know."
Motivation through recognition	Motivating by recognizing.	P2: "[An employee said] great. I'm doing the work. I'm putting the work. I'm evolving. And I'm also being recognized. So I think it was what led him to stay like that positive environment." P10: "Reward, and then recognize people who employees who, who are doing great job. I think everybody wants to be recognized for something that you're doing."
Motivation through respect and gratitude	Motivating by showing respect and gratitude.	P1: "Employees are clearly the most important asset in your company, and you've got to treat them that way." P8: "If we hire someone outside the company seems to take people while really figure out how this this company operates more so than I've seen, I guess, to similar. What I said before treating people like, you know, human beings with real lives and real problems and stuff outside of work."
Provide feedback and transparent updates	Giving feedback and sharing organizational updates.	P1: "Emphasis on the performance review process every year. I review every performance review. [I] rewrite 90% of them because I wanna make sure that we're giving meaningful feedback." P6: "Very open, and they want that kind of feedback, and they want to work together."
Seek help from the organization	Seeking help from other organizational leaders and departments.	P2: "What I did was like I brought to leadership, point blank, straight feedback. We can either continue to do this approach where everything is fine and you're so independent and people feel empowered, and they have a good work-life balance, or we can really push for better ways. Because otherwise we're gonna continue to see people leaving, and at the end of the day we need them to do the work." P4: "What I try to do is present their work ethic to present, you know. Hey? This guy's or this guy or girl, you know, male, male or female, they're a team player. They're always there. They're working this overtime, you know."
Support with impediment removal	Removing obstacles.	P9: "Attrition happens because people are facing obstacles, and those obstacles are causing frustration. So if I can remove those obstacles, and I can help. Reduce the frustration that they're facing on the day to day." P10: "We do have that quality of work. That we promise. People have more on their plate to do that, attention to detail also begins to waver and wane a bit. Attrition happens because people are facing obstacles. And those obstacles are causing frustration. So if I can remove those obstacles, and I can help."

Continued

		P3: "I'll like to have my employees run it like 80 90% of their capacity, because there's always gonna be times when you're gonna run right up against that 100%. And and you can't can't work like that for extended period of time, because then that's when you'll get, you'll get burned out."
Support workload management	Supporting manageable workload through capacity management and prioritization.	P10: "At the beginning [of logistics delays], it's like you feel people are dragging, you know, their feet a little bit because you're giving me additional work. Get the team to understand the issue that we are faced with and give them the necessary, all the the necessary phrasing, and that they would need to be able to to deliver, you know, despite the extra load of work. We need to go back into the prioritized to hear what we can put on hold, and then what we need to prioritize to get out of the way quickly."
		P5: "Out of work activities. Sometimes, you know, we'll get the team together, go out for dinner, or maybe, you know, on Fridays, well, for drinks after work."
Team activities	Promoting team engagement through team-building activities.	P9: "Creating like a weekly or bi-weekly what I call a mocktail, and essentially a let your hair down session where we sit down. We're not talking about anything work related, but we're focused on just who we are as a person. I try to incorporate some fun games or activities that focus on just digging a little bit deeper on who this person is, what their interests are, because that fosters an opportunity for people to connect and see similarities between themselves."
Teamwork	Promoting team engagement through teamwork.	P4: "Having those meetings with them, you know. I talked about a morning meetings and and everything else. You didn't know, understanding that there's just, you know, we're we've got your back." P7: "Fostering an atmosphere of teamwork so that they feel that they are valued and engaged. If they feel that they're valued, then that increases engagement."
Telecommuting	Offering work-life balance options through telecommuting options.	P1: "Well, finding qualified replacements is always difficult. It was difficult to to recruit. So you've got to grow the workforce yourself and find people that have got transferable skills. I think a lot of employees wanna work remotely. People want that flexibility." P10: "We do like the hybrid. So people sometimes want that, you know freedom to be able to work from home on certain days and be able to take care of some stuff that they they would may be they would have taken the whole day off to to do whilst they are working."
Training	Providing tools and training needed for the job.	P1: "Let's get the people trained so that they can effectively use the equipment that we have." P3: "If there's anything, any tools, anything else that we can do to make our lives easier, for a lot of people, that's what they they want."

In the second step of thematic analysis, final codes were reviewed and grouped into seven categories, as shown in **Table 2**. Each category was linked to the relevant final codes and given a concise definition that explained its meaning.

Table 2. Interconnection of categories, definitions, and codes.

Category	Category definition	Linked codes
Conversations	Talk with employees to know them and their needs.	Asking employees about needs; check-in; communicate support plans; conversations; engage with employees; get to know employees; listen to employees; provide feedback and transparent updates
Empower	Empower by enabling employees to do their jobs and make decisions.	Empower to take initiative; involve in decisions
Learning and growth	Support employee growth and development to help employees reach aspirations.	Growth and development conversations; growth and development opportunities; growth and development support; training
Support	Remove obstacles, help manage capacity, and solicit help from others.	Seek help from the organization; support with impediment removal; support workload management; training
Ways to build teams	Foster team engagement and enable team-building activities.	Team activities; teamwork
Ways to motivate	Motivate through rewards and recognitions, appreciation and gratitude, and respect.	Motivation through materialistic means; motivation through recognition; motivation through respect and gratitude
Work-life balance	Offer flexibility to enable a balance between work and personal responsibilities.	Boundaries; flexibility; telecommuting

In the third step of thematic analysis, initial themes were developed. In the fourth step, themes were reviewed to reflect the dataset's meanings accurately. In the fifth step, final themes were defined and named, as shown in **Table 3**, summarizing each as a short paragraph.

Table 3. Themes.

Theme	Interconnected categories
By ensuring employees have work-life balance through schedule flexibility, telecommuting options, support to set boundaries, empowerment to take the initiative, and inclusion in decision-making, leaders may reduce attrition and the associated issues of logistic delays, quality of work problems, staffing challenges, and financial impacts.	Work-life balance; empower; support
Leaders can lower attrition and decrease the correlated quality of work issues and financial problems by focusing on communicating with employees. This involves checking in with employees to ask what they need, listening to employees, getting to know them personally, providing feedback to employees, and engaging in conversations.	Conversations; learning and growth; support; ways to motivate
Promoting teamwork among employees by enabling them to work together, having employees engage in team-building activities both within and outside of work, and providing recognition and gratitude to the team can help foster a sense of belonging among employees, which can help decrease attrition and associated logistics delays.	Conversations; ways to build teams; ways to motivate
Leaders can lower attrition and improve subsequent quality of work and staffing problems by guiding and supporting employees on their journeys of growth and development. This can entail providing training and tools for the job, helping employees discover their aspirations through conversations and cross-training, and supporting employees by providing them with educational reimbursement and dedicated time for education.	Conversations; learning and growth; support

Figure 1 was created in the sixth step, illustrating the relationships between categories and their corresponding themes.

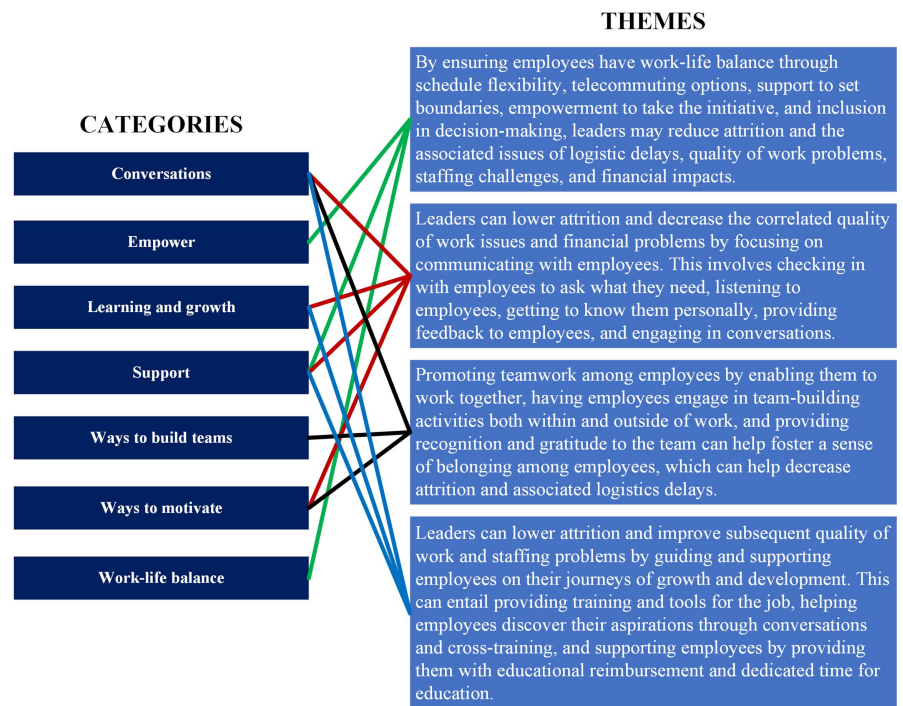


Figure 1. Themes and category interconnection.

7. Discussion

7.1. Attrition-Reducing Themes

7.1.1. Theme 1: Work-Life Balance

The first theme emphasizes the importance of providing employees with work-life. Leaders saw that best practices in this theme helped reduce attrition and the associated effects of logistical delays, quality of work problems, and staffing challenges. Leaders provided work-life balance to their teams through schedule flexibility and telecommuting options. They also supported them with boundaries so employees could take time off and disconnect. Empowering employees to take the initiative, allowing them to make decisions, and including them in the decision-making process were also critical best practices. Leaders found that giving employees the freedom to perform their duties without excessive oversight, such as micromanagement, allowed them to attain a better-balanced approach to work. Helping employees prioritize workloads was an additional best practice used to ensure employees felt supported.

7.1.2. Theme 2: Communication

The second theme highlights the value of effective communication between leaders and employees in lowering attrition and improving its subsequent effects on work quality and financials. Leaders found it essential to regularly check in with employees, actively listen to their concerns, and provide feedback. Building personal

and professional connections motivated employees to stay longer and contributed to a supportive and open environment. Sharing work-related and personal information helped establish trust and foster transparency between employees and leaders. Leaders who communicated their plans to support employees effectively, such as by offering additional staff to alleviate capacity issues, further reduced attrition.

7.1.3. Theme 3: Teamwork

The third theme centers on fostering employee teamwork and a sense of belonging to decrease attrition and associated logistics delays. Leaders encouraged team cohesion by organizing team-building activities both within and outside the workplace. Additionally, they enabled employees to work together, which further strengthened teamwork. Showing recognition and gratitude, such as acknowledging individual contributions in front of the team or providing small tokens of appreciation, further strengthened bonds.

7.1.4. Theme 4: Growth and Development

The fourth theme focuses on supporting employees' growth and development, which leaders saw as helping reduce attrition and its associated impacts on work quality issues and staffing challenges. Leaders focused on a three-part lifecycle. First, they emphasized the importance of providing the necessary tools and training for employees to succeed in their roles, which helped prevent frustrations that could lead to turnover. Second, leaders learned about employee aspirations through career-oriented conversations. Third, to enable employees to achieve their aspirations, leaders supported them through cross-training, educational reimbursement, and allocating time at work for training.

7.2. Contribution to Existing Knowledge

7.2.1. Theme 1: Work-Life Balance

This theme helped extend Boundary Theory by demonstrating the importance of leaders helping employees maintain work-life balance through strategies like flexible schedules, telecommuting, and boundary-setting. Researchers such as [Piszczek and Berg \(2014\)](#) and [Farivar and Richardson \(2021\)](#) noted that leadership support for maintaining work-life boundaries can increase employees' organizational commitment. Flexible schedules can help employees become emotionally attached to the organization ([Piszczek & Berg, 2014](#)), similar to telecommuting being seen as enhancing employees' commitment thanks to generating feelings of being supported by the leader ([Farivar & Richardson, 2021](#)). Leaders who help employees maintain boundaries show respect for personal time, increasing employee loyalty ([Piszczek & Berg, 2014](#)).

From a scholarly literature perspective, the study confirmed findings on the positive effects of empowerment, flexibility, and telecommuting on retention, as [Kim and Park \(2020\)](#) and [Awan et al. \(2021\)](#) postulated. It also addressed conflicting views on telecommuting, where some research, such as from [Knardahl and Christensen](#)

(2022), identified potential risks of isolation. This study provided specific, actionable practices for supporting work-life balance, including task prioritization and boundary support.

In terms of practitioner literature, the study helped show the practical benefits of work-life balance initiatives, such as reducing attrition and improving business outcomes. Specific recommendations include offering telecommuting options, empowering employees to make decisions, and involving them in organizational changes, aligning with findings from Saad and Patel (2006).

7.2.2. Theme 2: Communication

This theme expanded Relational Leadership Theory and underscored the role of communication, including personal conversations, feedback, and check-ins, in building trust and reducing turnover intentions. This aligns with Jian (2022), who emphasized empathy and ethical leadership as critical for reducing attrition, and Ji et al. (2023), who found that leader-employee interactions were vital for retention. Personal conversations have been seen as a trust-building tactic that demonstrates empathy by the leader, which has also been seen as essential for turnover reduction (Jian, 2022). Such interactions create a stronger leader-employee relationship. Similarly, providing consistent and constructive feedback through check-ins fosters trust by showing ethical leadership behavior (Ji et al., 2023).

The research addressed gaps in the scholarly literature regarding specific communication strategies. While research from Marchalina and Ahmad (2017) linked effective communication to organizational commitment, this study emphasized the importance of personal and ongoing conversations, which were less explored in prior studies.

The study highlighted regular check-ins, personal conversations, and feedback as essential practices for building trust and reducing attrition. Leaders who listen to employees and engage in meaningful dialogue create supportive environments that enhance loyalty and satisfaction. These findings align with practitioner literature from Charlton (2021) and Mortensen and Edmondson (2023), who emphasized the critical role of clear communication and meaningful leader-employee relationships in improving retention.

7.2.3. Theme 3: Teamwork

This theme supported Social Identity Theory by showing how team-building activities and recognition foster a sense of belonging among employees, reducing attrition. Arshad et al. (2022) and Shaikh et al. (2022) highlighted that group identity and belonging motivate employees to remain with their teams. Team building and teamwork strengthen the group's bonds, creating a sense of unity among employees (Arshad et al., 2022). Similarly, recognition establishes a sense of belonging, strengthening the desire for employees to remain within the team (Shaikh et al., 2022).

While prior scholarly research, such as Kaleel et al. (2021), touched on employee relationships, this study provided a deeper understanding of how team building

and recognition activities strengthen employee retention. The findings extended the literature by detailing the role of non-work activities and leader-driven gratitude in fostering team cohesion.

Practitioners can reduce turnover by creating a strong team environment. This includes organizing team-building activities, both in and outside of work, and recognizing contributions through public acknowledgment or small gestures like providing coffee or snacks. Primary research participants highlighted these practices as effective.

7.2.4. Theme 4: Growth and Development

Social Exchange Theory was extended based on this theme to illustrate how leadership support for employee development, through training, cross-training, and educational reimbursement, builds loyalty and reduces turnover. This finding aligns with Narayanan et al. (2019), who noted that talent management practices minimize attrition, and Wei et al. (2022), who emphasized the role of social relationships in retention. Employees with training opportunities see that the organization values them, fostering loyalty and creating a reciprocation of benefits with employees wanting to stay longer (Narayanan et al., 2019). Cross-training provides collaboration opportunities, social relationship building, and trust based on employees similarly seeing the organization invest in them (Wei et al., 2022). Educational reimbursement programs show long-term commitment by the leader, boosting employee loyalty (Narayanan et al., 2019).

This study confirmed the critical role of tools and training, as discussed by scholars like Biro (2018) and Fletcher et al. (2018). It also contributed new insights on cross-training and diverse work exposure as retention strategies, less commonly addressed in prior literature.

The study highlighted that offering training, cross-training, and educational reimbursement effectively reduces attrition and fosters loyalty. Similarly, business practitioners like Schawbel (2016) emphasized the rising expectation for development opportunities, particularly among younger workers, while Goler et al. (2018) noted that clear growth pathways and mentoring strengthen retention. These findings encourage practitioners to prioritize development initiatives that demonstrate a commitment to employees' long-term growth and career advancement.

8. Conclusion

The research findings provide practical strategies to improve business practices by addressing attrition and associated logistics delays, work quality issues, staffing challenges, and financial impacts. These best practices are applicable across various industries, particularly relevant to the supply chain sector. Reducing attrition enhances business performance and benefits the economy by minimizing delays in goods transportation and mitigating price fluctuations.

Theme 1 highlighted the importance of work-life balance in reducing attrition and mitigating its adverse effects. Leaders who offer flexibility, telecommuting options,

and support for setting boundaries help employees better balance work and personal life. Empowering employees to take the initiative and including them in decision-making further enhances retention and reduces logistical and staffing challenges.

Theme 2 emphasizes the critical role of communication in lowering attrition and addressing the quality of work and financial issues. Leaders who regularly check in with employees, listen to their needs, and engage in personal and professional conversations build trust and motivation. Providing constructive feedback and fostering open dialogue strengthens the relationship between employees and leadership, encouraging employees to remain with the organization.

Theme 3 focused on fostering a positive team environment to reduce attrition and associated logistical delays. Leaders who promote teamwork and organize team-building activities create a sense of belonging among employees. Recognizing individual contributions and expressing gratitude, such as through small tokens of appreciation, further enhances team cohesion and belongingness.

Theme 4 emphasized the importance of growth and development in addressing attrition and improving work quality and staffing. Leaders who provide necessary tools and training help employees discover their aspirations, provide cross-training opportunities, and support educational goals through reimbursement and dedicated learning time create an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to stay. These development opportunities not only reduce turnover, but also enhance overall organizational performance.

The identified gap in practice was that U.S. supply chain leaders lacked effective leadership strategies to reduce attrition, leading to logistics delays and adverse business impacts on work quality, staffing, and financial performance. Scholars and practitioners have noted that leaders are often unaware of why employees leave (Bar-trop-Sackey et al., 2022; Johnston, 2023) and require specific strategies to address attrition (Jaiswal, 2023). Moore (2022) emphasized the importance of leadership education in addressing this issue. Additionally, only one primary research participant indicated having undergone leadership training to learn tools for motivating employees to stay. This finding highlights a persistent gap in leadership training among supply chain leaders. This study has produced a list of actionable strategies to help U.S. supply chain leaders effectively reduce attrition and mitigate its associated effects on logistics and business performance.

The limitations of this study pertain to the attrition-reducing practices potentially being limited to U.S. supply chain leaders despite being transferable across industries. Additionally, only ten supply chain leaders were interviewed. The study was a qualitative generic inquiry, making the researcher the instrument of the study, which increases the risk of bias and subjective interpretation despite measures having been taken to mitigate this risk.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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