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Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employee Turnover in Luxury Hotels in China

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Iwan Dietschi

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Ronald Black, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Charlotte Carlstrom, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Allen Endres, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2018

Abstract

Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employee Turnover in Luxury Hotels

in China

by

Iwan R. Dietschi

Executive MBA, California State University, 2012

BS, Hotel Management School Lausanne, Switzerland, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

May 2018

Abstract

Some midlevel managers in the China's luxury hotel industry lack leadership strategies for engaging employees to reduce employee turnover. Employee turnover rates in China's hotel industry have reached the 30% mark, affecting hotels' bottom lines. This high employee turnover rate is impacting the hotels' performance, and negatively affecting the industry's profitability. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore employee engagement strategies luxury hotel industry midlevel managers apply to reduce turnover. The conceptual framework for this study was the three levels of leadership model created by Scouller. The participants in this study were 5 midlevel department managers from 3 luxury hotels in China, who demonstrated strong employee engagement leadership strategies to reduce turnover. Data were collected using semistructured interviews as the primary source, and companies' related websites and internal documents about training and talent development. After analysis of the data through qualitative content analysis, 4 themes emerged, including corporate culture-related strategies, talent development-related strategies, leadership-related strategies, and mentorship- and coaching-related strategies. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by improving leadership competencies to strengthen economic output, increase job opportunities, and improve and sustain employment benefiting employees, families, and communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my late father Josef Dietschi-Borer, my role model and mentor, who always supported me in anything I wanted to achieve, who dedicated his life to his family, and positively influenced other people through his incredible heart, love and selfless pursuit to do good to other people. My wonderful mother, Hedy Dietschi-Borer, who was always here during this fantastic journey with love, support, and understanding, and who assisted me in anything I needed to pursue my dreams and to achieve the best in my professional and academic life. My incredible brother Josef Jun., who taught me how to focus on my goals, always helped me to become better and to think out-of-the box, and who never stopped believing in me. I have the best family, I love them very much, and I owe everything to them.

I would also like to dedicate this study to all my co-workers, past and present, and everyone who influenced me positively to achieve greater heights. As was my late father to me, I would like to be a role model to all aspiring young and talented hoteliers, for them to pursue their professional dreams, and to create excellence in their own hotelier journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank my committee chair, Dr. Ronald Black. You have given me incredible guidance, constant encouragement, and have provided me with critical information and feedback to complete this study successfully. You have inspired me with your commitment to excellence, your ability to motivate me and all the other students to go above and beyond. I would also like to thank my doctoral study committee members Dr. Charlotte Carlstrom (2nd committee member), and Dr. Al Endres (URR). A special “Dank je” to Dr. Annemie De Scheemaeker, who guided me through the various stages of my doctoral study with a lot of competence, and who has become a role model, not only for me but for many other students in the class.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Employee turnover rates in the hotel industry in China are as much as 30% and about 80% higher than the average across all Chinese industries (Zhao, Liu, & Gao, 2016). The increased cost caused by the heavy employee turnover has placed pressure on leadership in the hotel industry (Zhao et al., 2016). Employees in the service industry in China are not as well educated compared to other industries, and lack sufficient training opportunities and on-the-job training needed to succeed in their respective positions (Zhao et al., 2016). These issues impose challenges, as the supervisors and midlevel managers promoted from below lack the necessary leadership skills to carry out their responsibilities successfully; to motivate, coach, teach, and inspire their followers to achieve acceptable levels of competency; and to lead their employees to success (Zhao et al., 2016). Employee turnover has caused steady cost increases and added additional concerns to hotel companies' service quality. A further issue in the luxury hotel industry is the potential decrease of service quality and standards due to heavy turnover, especially regarding employees who voluntarily depart. Training costs are higher than in lower hotel segments, and important know-how gets lost when employees with the right attitudes and a willingness to learn and grow leave the organization due to lack of leadership competency. To overcome those concerns in a very challenging and competitive luxury hotel environment in China, it is necessary to further study the phenomenon of leadership

competencies midlevel managers use to reduce employee turnover, and to create long-term success for hotel companies.

Problem Statement

The challenge of leadership in China's hotel industry is to satisfy and motivate employees to reduce turnover (Zhang, Prammanee, & Chantarathong, 2014). Employee turnover rates in the hotel industry in China have reached the 30% mark, affecting hotels' bottom lines (Zhao et al., 2016). The general business problem is that high employee turnover is negatively affecting the profitability in China's luxury hotel industry. The specific business problem is that some midlevel managers in the China's luxury hotel industry lack leadership strategies to engage employees to reduce employee turnover.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies luxury hotel midlevel managers use to engage employees to reduce employee turnover. The targeted population included five midlevel hotel managers from three luxury hotels in China who have used employee engagement strategies to reduce employee turnover in their departments. The results of this study may contribute to social change by improving standards and leadership competencies to strengthen economic output, increase job opportunities, and to create employment sustainability within communities.

Nature of the Study

The research methodology used for this study is qualitative. The qualitative method is appropriate because the researcher collects extensive data over an extended

period, in a naturalistic setting, in order to gain insights not possible using other types of research (Eide & Showalter, 2012). The qualitative method allows researchers to explore the participants' perceptions on the research problem in an actual setting, and to gain a better understanding of the circumstances that determine the participants' situations (Eide & Showalter, 2012). Qualitative methodology was appropriate to study and understand important behaviors of midlevel managers regarding their leadership competencies to increase employee engagement, and to reduce turnover rates. Using qualitative methodology provides a researcher flexibility through the use of personal interviews, open-ended questions, and focus groups (Yin, 2014). Both the mixed method and quantitative method were not suitable for this study. Quantitative research methods include the collection of data, relying less on interviews, observations, and focus groups, and employing statistical techniques to test hypotheses for examining relationships and differences among variables (Corner, 2002). A quantitative methodology was not appropriate to this study because my focus was not on examining relationships or differences among variables. The mixed methods approach enables researchers to analyze specific business problems through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Mertens, 2014). My study did not require a quantitative or mixed methodology, and therefore, I used a qualitative case study methodology.

A multiple case study design was the most appropriate for my study. A qualitative multiple case study design is an in-depth strategy, enabling a researcher to explore behaviors and experiences of the participants, and to generate a full understanding of the

phenomenon under study (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). The case study design was a powerful means to identify real-life leadership solutions in a rigorous, creative, and wide-ranging variety of ways, and to assist midlevel managers in the Chinese luxury hotel industry to improve employee engagement competencies to reduce turnover. Using a case study design enables researchers to function as the primary collection and analysis instrument to explore the research questions within a bounded system (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). In case study research, the type of questions to answer is *how* and *what*, and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2014). Alternative qualitative research designs that I considered included ethnographic, phenomenological, narrative, and grounded theory. Ethnographers study groups' cultures and use in-person observation and informal interviews to describe the everyday lives and practices of participants (Hallett & Barber, 2014). A researcher uses a phenomenological design to explore and understand the essence of an event and the meaning of lived experiences within a group of individuals (Robertson & Thompson, 2014). Researchers use a grounded theory to develop a theory for explaining social actions or processes (Cho & Lee, 2014), and as I did not seek to develop a theory in my doctoral study, grounded theory was not appropriate. Narrative researchers seek to obtain exhaustive stories and conversations to explore the meaning of individuals' life experiences (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs, & Saylor, 2013). Ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology were not appropriate qualitative designs for this study because I pursued

to identify and explore employee engagement strategies midlevel managers use to reduce turnover in luxury hotels in China.

Research Question

The central research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do midlevel managers in China's luxury hotel industry use to engage employees to reduce employee turnover?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you found most effective to reduce employee turnover?
2. How do you involve your team members in the decision-making process?
3. What mentoring programs do you offer your employees as part of your retention strategy?
4. What barriers did you encounter to implementing the strategies, and how did you address the implementation barriers?
5. How do you assess the efficacy of the strategies for engaging employees and reducing employee turnover?
6. How do you motivate your employees daily?
7. What would you like to add about how you are reducing employee turnover?

Conceptual Framework

As a conceptual basis for my doctoral study, I used the three levels of leadership model created by Scouller in 2011. This framework presents a modern paradigm of leadership, combining the strengths of older leadership theories; traits, behavioral/styles,

situational, functional models, while addressing their limitations (Scouller, 2011). The focus of Scouller's (2011) model is on how to improve leadership presence, knowhow, and skills. The first two levels are based on the outer or behavioral areas and are named public and private leadership (Scouller, 2011). Scouller differentiated between the behaviors that are related to influencing two or more people at the same time, which he called *public leadership* in contrast to influencing, mentoring, coaching, and teaching people one-to-one, which he called *private leadership*. The third level of this leadership model is *personal leadership*, an inner level, focusing on one person's leadership presence, competency, skills, beliefs, emotions, and unconscious habits (Scouller, 2011). Scouller created the three levels of leadership model, combining known leadership theories, and incorporating two key issues to achieve greater success: (a) leadership presence, and (b) a leader's psychology.

With the three levels of leadership model, Scouller (2011) offered a foundation for a servant leadership philosophy. Greenleaf (1977) explained that servant leaders focus least on satisfying their own personal needs, but on motivating their followers and prioritizing the specific needs and desires the followers might have to achieve employees' personal goals. Servant leaders are humble, more concerned about others than themselves, and their humility stimulates strong relationships with their followers and encourages the employees to become fully engaged in their work (Owens & Hekman, 2012). Servant leadership consists of several dimensions: (a) emotional healing, (b) conceptual skills, (c) empowering, (d) behaving ethically, and (e) creating value for the

community (Liao, Liden, Wayne, & Meuser, 2014). Using the three levels of leadership model combined with servant leadership as a composite guiding leadership approach provided a potential lens for viewing and understanding the results of my study.

Operational Definitions

Employability: Employability is the capacity to gain and retain a formal employment, or the ability to find a new employment if necessary (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Kaiser, 2013).

Employee Engagement: Employee engagement is the involvement, energy, and a willingness to contribute to the organizational success (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011). Engaged employees are more committed to the company, have lower rates of absenteeism, and have no intention of leaving the organization (Schaufeli, 2012).

Employee turnover: Employee turnover represents a total separation between the employee and the organization, and includes cessations, discharges, layoffs, and resignations (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012).

Organizational culture: Organizational culture is the underlying values, beliefs, and principles that serve as a foundation for an organization's management system as well as the set of management practices and behaviors that exemplify and reinforce those basic principles (Hogan & Coote, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be true but are not actually verified (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Assumptions carry risk and should be treated as such. A mitigation discussion would be appropriate. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated that assumptions in a doctoral inquiry refer to issues that the researcher presumes to be true but cannot validate. There were three assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that employee engagement strategies for reducing employee turnover are essential for increasing the profitability in the Chinese luxury hotel industry. The second assumption was that participants in this study would answer the interview questions freely, honestly, and based on their understanding and experience. The third assumption was that participants in this study would not feel any pressure from their superiors to engage in this study.

Limitations

Marshall and Rossman (2016) specified that limitations include possible constraints of a research study, and particular conditions which are not within the researcher's control. There were two distinct limitations in this study. The first limitation was that the findings might not be transferable to other Chinese luxury hotels outside of Shanghai and Beijing, which are primary cities with a longer standing tradition of luxury hotel operations compared with second- and third-tier cities. The second limitation was that the participants may not openly reveal information, concerns, and critical strategies

about their employee engagement and leadership approaches during the interview process, affecting the potential input. The participants work for competitor hotels with various competency levels and length of service in the industry and might not feel comfortable to reveal critical information about their successful engagement strategies to reduce turnover.

Delimitations

Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that delimitations are aspects of a study that are in a researcher's control and are critical points that define and limit the boundaries of a study. There were two delimitations in this study. The first delimitation was that the participants were midlevel managers in luxury hotels that are part of leading luxury hotel companies in the Beijing and Shanghai markets. The second limitation was that participating midlevel managers had at least 10 employees under their supervision, had outperformed their peers in their departmental turnover rates in the past 2 years, and compared with other luxury hotels in the same market.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Human capital is a company's most important asset, and organizations that fail to retain their trained employees jeopardize their future success (Ramlall, 2004). Catalyzed team members' performance contributes to an improved working environment for the employees (Kilduff, 2014). The results of this study could fill gaps in knowledge by improving internal processes and focus areas to create more effective employee

engagement strategies for midlevel managers to reduce turnover in luxury hotels in China. The results of this study could provide midlevel managers with a more focused approach and guidance to strengthen their leadership competencies. Improved leadership strategies could enable midlevel managers to more effectively engage line employees, increase morale, strengthen individuals' knowledge and development prospects, and could create a stronger and more united workforce to achieve improved top- and bottom-line results.

Implications for Social Change

The hospitality industry plays an important role around the world regarding job creation and economic mobilization. Employee turnover is an issue negatively affecting the industry and requiring a more focused approach (Vasquez, 2014). Leadership behavior and leadership competency can influence employees' job satisfaction, and positively affect turnover in the organization (Babcock-Roberson, 2010). Improved leadership competencies of midlevel managers are critical for increasing overall communication between managers and employees, to create a more solid work environment, to foster creativity, and to nurture individuals' talents.

The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by motivated, engaged, and competent employees being involved in social causes, positively affecting their environment by dedicating their time and knowledge to various local missions. The communities may directly benefit from improved standards and midlevel managers' leadership competencies as inspired and well-trained employees could contribute to

various community programs. Reducing high turnover rates in the hotel industry in China by identifying and focusing on improving employee engagement strategies to reduce turnover can offer more opportunities for both employees and their families. A financially healthy organization can assist in creating jobs, which could benefit the local community and contribute to positive social change.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies midlevel managers in the luxury hotel industry use to engage employees to reduce employee turnover. This literature review includes information and statistics from various leadership sources from within the hotel industry and from other industries and sectors. I researched and retrieved articles from journals associated with leadership, human resources (HR) management, and hotel management related topics.

The development of the literature review assisted me to learn more about the background of leadership; the most common leadership approaches, with a specific focus on servant leadership; and to understand key elements to achieve success in leading others. Reviewing the articles and journals enabled me to understand midlevel managers' shortcomings and successes in creating employee engagement for reducing turnover in the hotel industry in China.

As illustrated in Table 1, the total sources cited in this literature review is 111, of which 97 (87%) are peer-reviewed academic articles and 96 (86%) were published within the timeframe between 2013 and 2017. The total number of sources cited in this study is 194, of which 165 (85%) are peer-reviewed academic articles and 165 (85%) were published within the timeframe between 2013 and 2017.

Table 1

Types and Counts of Sources

Type of Source	Current Sources (2013-2017)	Older Sources (Before 2013)	Total Sources	% of Total Sources
<u>1. Total Study</u>				
Peer Reviewed Journals	146	19	165	85%
Other sources	19	10	29	15%
Total	165	29	194	
%	85%	15%		
<u>2. Literature Review</u>				
Peer Reviewed Journals	87	10	97	87%
Other sources	9	5	14	13%
Total	96	15	111	
%	86%	14%		

My strategy for searching the literature included the following keywords and combinations of them: (a) *theories*, (b) *servant leadership*, (c) *transformational leadership*, (d) *employee turnover*, (e) *organizational culture*, (f) *selection*, (g) *training*

tools, and (h) *education*. I retrieved peer-reviewed articles from various sources published in databases, including the Walden Library, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, ProQuest Central, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, Hotel Management Journal, and government sources, specifically from China.

China's Tourism Sector

China has gone through a tremendous transformation in the past 30 years and has become a very important and popular travel destination in Asia, attracting domestic tourists and travelers from around the globe. Based on the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (2017), the direct contribution of travel and tourism to the Chinese Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016 was Renminbi 1,828.0 billion (USD 275.2 billion), 2.5% of total GDP in 2016 and is forecast to rise by 7.5% in 2017. Furthermore, there is an expected rise by 7.5% per annum, from 2017-2027, to Renminbi 4,043.7 billion (USD 608.8 billion), representing 3.1% of total GDP in 2027 (WTTC, 2017). In 2016, the total contribution of travel and tourism to overall employment in China, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 9.0% of total employment of 69,527,500 jobs (WTTC, 2017). This percentage of total Chinese employment was expected to raise by 1.7% in 2017 to 70,724,500 jobs and rise by 3.5% per annum to 99,331,000 jobs in 2027, or 12.5% of China's total employment (WTTC, 2017).

Li, Song, Chen, and Wu (2012) explained that service providers in the Chinese tourism sector, operating in the current intensified competitive environment, which is expected to continue to intensify, need to develop a differential advantage in delivering

services. However, to gain a competitive advantage and to position hotels as leaders in the market requires competent leadership and engaged employees who are carefully selected and continuously trained to further improve their skills (Chang & Ma, 2014). A hotel can increase its competitive advantage by creating service brand value. Service brand value is a resource-based merit, which is fostered by the top management team's transformational leadership through investment in human capital and the establishment of a service culture to enhance the quality of service (Chang & Ma, 2015).

Leadership Theories

Scouller's leadership model. Scouller's (2011) framework combines the strengths of older leadership theories; traits, behavioral/styles, situational, functional models, while addressing their limitations. Scouller's model incorporates a new element of leadership, the need for leaders to develop their leadership presence, attitude towards others, and behavioral flexibility by practicing psychological mastery (Samosudova, 2017).

The three key aspects of Scouller's (2011) model deepen the understanding of how to improve leadership presence, knowhow, and skills. Scouller sought to summarize what leaders must do, not only to bring leadership to their group or organization, but also to improve technically and psychologically as leaders (Samosudova, 2017). Scouller differentiated between the behaviors that are related to influencing two or more people at the same time, which he called public leadership. Influencing, mentoring, coaching, and teaching people one-to-one are called private leadership (Samosudova, 2017). The third

level of this leadership model is personal leadership, an inner level focusing on one person's leadership presence, competency, skills, beliefs, emotions, and unconscious habits (Samosudova, 2017). The two outer levels, which focus on the four dimensions of leadership, are what the leader must do behaviorally with individuals or groups to address these dimensions of leadership (Samosudova, 2017). These dimensions are (a) shared, motivating group purpose or vision; (b) action, progress, and results; (c) collective unity or team spirit, and (d) individual selection and motivation (Samosudova, 2017). With the three levels of leadership model, Scouller offered a foundation for a servant leadership philosophy.

Scouller (2011) stated that the older leadership theories offer only limited assistance in developing a person's ability to lead effectively. He explained that the *traits theories*, which tend to reinforce the idea that leaders are born and not made, might help us select leaders, but they are less useful for developing leaders. Furthermore, Scouller mentioned that most of the situational/contingency and functional theories assume that leaders can change their behavior to meet differing circumstances at will. In practice, some leaders find it difficult or impossible to do so because of unconscious beliefs, fears, or ingrained habits. An important element in Scouller's leadership theory is the element of leadership presence, which none of the other theories addresses effectively. Leaders need to build trust, inspire followers, take decisions, and command presence, and motivate employees to want to work with them. The use of Scouller's (2011) leadership model by midlevel managers in China's luxury hotel industry can improve employee

engagement, reduce employee turnover, and improve overall service levels to achieve increased profitability.

Servant leadership. Greenleaf (1977) introduced the notion of servant leadership based on the work of Hesse (1957). Hesse's (1957) portraying of the archetype of a servant-first leader inspired Greenleaf to introduce this concept to the modern organizations (as cited in Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2014). The power of servant leadership lies in the leader's ability to unleash the potential and thus the power in those around them (Van Winkle, Allen, DeVore, & Winston, 2014). Servant leaders focus on others first, and poor servant leaders are egocentric (Chen, Zhu, & Zhou, 2014). Poor servant leaders fail to portray a critical developmental orientation that is important in-service settings (Chen et al., 2014). Cooper (2015) explained that servant leaders set employees up for success by understanding and facilitating meeting followers' needs. Using the servant leadership approach can assist in creating an environment of trust and increase overall employee engagement, positively affecting others and the overall performance of the business unit. In his study, Cooper presented examples of servant leadership behaviors, including (a) actively attending and being involved in safety committees, safety meetings, toolbox talks, and similar activities; (b) consistently seeking and facilitating people's ideas/actions to improve safety; and (c) resourcing and following up on any corrective and preventive actions to ensure completion.

To develop employees' overall competencies, a servant leader needs to be authentic and show humility. It is a critical element of any servant leader to assist an

employee, to listen, and to show empathy to create the necessary trust and environment for followers to achieve their goals. Bakar and McCann (2015) emphasized that a servant leader demonstrates high trustworthiness and a positive attitude, focuses on achieving organizational goals, and portrays the qualities to encourage employees to achieve the highest possible job performance. Hunter et al. (2013) and Liden, Panaccio, Meuser, Hu, and Wayne (2014) concluded that servant leadership represents an effective leadership style for fostering a favorable service climate, effecting positive follower behaviors, and reducing turnover intentions of employees. Servant leadership has an important impact on the service climate as mediating the relationship between team-level servant leadership and subjectively rated team performance (Hunter et al., 2013). Wu, Tse, Fu, Kwan, and Liu (2013) stated that servant leadership is positively related to individual organizational citizenship behavior.

Wu et al. (2013) provided evidence for arguments that servant leadership plays an important role in the hospitality industry. Schein (2013) explained that humility could affect joint decision making, instill a culture of dialog, and catalyze a genuine interest in mutual understanding through humble inquiry. Chen et al. (2014) emphasized that servant leaders demonstrate greater respect and acceptance toward their employees compared with transformational leaders, and followers consider servant leaders as competent and trustworthy. Servant leaders are more likely to be accepted as part of the group by employees compared with transformational leaders (Chen et al., 2014). Servant leaders play a crucial role in creating a work environment where employees accept their

leaders as role models and have the inspiration to go above and beyond minimal requirements to achieve their goals. Chen et al. further elaborated on their study that employees' efficacy beliefs increase when servant leadership is high. Servant leaders, compared with transformational leaders, display a strong developmental and altruistic orientation, which may stimulate the followers' episodic future thinking, and create an environment where employees see each other as partners rather than independent, self-focused individuals (Chen et al., 2014).

Authentic leadership. Avolio and Gardner (2005) explained that authentic leaders are insightful and self-aware with high ethical and moral standards. Authentic leaders are highly aware of their beliefs and how these values influence followers, which engage in balanced decision-making and present their genuine selves to others. Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, and Sels (2015) stated that authentic leadership occurs when individuals enact their true selves in their role as a leader, and when leaders are being honest with themselves and sincere with others. Authentic leaders invest in strong relationships and have strong connections with others, often willing to share their experiences with others and create mutual trust (Ouma, 2017). Nelson et al. (2014) indicated that authentic leadership affects the work climate in a positive manner, resulting in increased levels of psychological well-being at work. If employees feel psychologically positive, then they will automatically feel satisfied with their jobs which will be reflected positively on their work well-being (Maher, Mahmoud, & El Hefny, 2014). Authentic leadership builds trust

and confidence in followers and contributes to positive psychological well-being (Nelson et al., 2014).

Based on Wong and Laschinger's (2013) findings, authentic leadership is an important antecedent to structural empowerment, and the combination of authentic leadership and empowerment is associated with higher job satisfaction among new graduate nurses. The authentic leadership style is characterized by four core behaviors, including (a) balanced processing, (b) relational transparency, (c) an internalized moral perspective, and (d) self-awareness (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). Authentic leaders focus on a balanced approach with their followers, requesting the followers' input before deciding (Read & Laschinger, 2015). Openness and acceptance are critical aspects of this leadership model and ensure that team members feel encouraged, safe, and being part of the overall process to achieve personal and professional goals (Read & Laschinger, 2015). Authentic leaders represent principles of honesty and transparency, which become more valuable as the complexity of the business world increases (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2014). Highly authentic leaders understand their own strengths and weaknesses and recognize how others view their leadership (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2014). As indicated by Yagil and Medler-Liraz (2014), to be objective, it is important to have a balanced approach to knowing, understanding, and accepting one's positive and negative attributes and qualities, that have important implications for leaders' decision making. In the Chinese cultural context, authentic leadership plays a positive role, building psychological safety and personal identification within team members (Liu, Laio, & Wei,

2015). The use of servant and authentic leadership by midlevel managers in China's luxury hotel industry to engage employees will enhance overall service levels, and will help reduce turnover and improve profit.

Transactional leadership. Burns (1978) explained that transactional leadership was based upon exchange of rewards, where cooperation and motivation of the employees are gained from providing rewards. Bass (1985) argued similarly that transactional leadership is dependent upon reward-based performance. Transactional leadership includes three components: (a) contingent reward – staffs' performance associated with contingent rewards or exchange relationship; (b) active management by exception – leaders monitor employees' performance and take corrective action if needed to achieve the desired outcomes; and (c) passive management by exception – leaders fail to intervene until problems become evident and serious (Bass, 1997). Zeb, Saeed, Rehman, Ullah, and Rabi (2015) posited that transactional leaders focus on employees' job satisfaction and motivation by creating expectations. Nelson (2014) explained that transactional leadership behaviors focus on negotiating compliance behaviors with employees, using incentives and punishments, and that at its base, using the logic of economic exchange, transactional leadership elicits rationally oriented behaviors. Girma (2016) emphasized that the transactional leaders focus on the connection among leaders and employees and aim to achieve set goals. Transactional leadership functions like an exchange type of relationship between the two parties. Ghanbari and Abedzadeh (2016) stated that the transactional style of leadership involves motivating and directing

followers primarily through appealing to their self-interests. The authors further explained that knowledge management plays an important role in achieving organizational objectives. Transactional leaders tend to be directive and action oriented and are mostly working within the existing systems and boundaries to achieve the desired outcome (Ghanbari & Abedzadeh, 2016). Behaviors most associated with transactional leadership are establishing the criteria for rewarding followers and maintaining the status quo (Ghanbari & Abedzadeh, 2016).

Hein and Chavez (2016) and Ma and Tsui (2015) elaborated further in their studies on different leadership styles. Transactional leaders focus on the fundamental management process of monitoring, controlling, organizing, planning, and motivating their employees to accomplish their task and achieve the set targets by performance-based rewarding or punishing (Hein & Chavez, 2016; Ma & Tsui, 2015). The transactional leadership approach has more of a passive nature to leadership, strictly evaluating performance based on expectations. Transactional leaders tend to be involved in the process of benefit exchange rather than focusing on the human aspect of leadership (Dai, Dai, Chen, & Wu, 2013). Transactional leadership involves exchanges between leaders and followers designed to provide benefits to both, and leaders influence followers through contingent rewards and negative feedback or corrective coaching (McCleskey, 2014). The transactional leadership approach weakens the company's ability to adapt to new markets, customers, competitors, goods, and services provided as well as systems (Hein & Chavez, 2016).

In China, the more dominant leadership style has been the transactional approach (Lama & O'Higgins, 2013). However, based on the study by Lama and O'Higgins (2013), the evidence showed a change to a transformational leadership style, which depends more on a direct and interpersonal relationship with the followers. Lama and O'Higgins further concluded in their study of Chinese employees of two companies in Shanghai, that transactional leadership is negatively correlated with emotional intelligence, and that Chinese managers fare better with the transformational leadership approach.

Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was first introduced by Burns in 1978 and became a part of the full range of leadership models, together with transactional leadership and laissez-faire behavior (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leaders are instrumental in building follower commitment to achieving goals and challenging, inspiring, and motivating them to perform (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Transformational leadership may be found at all levels of the organization: teams, departments, divisions, and the organization as a whole (Gathungu, Iravo, & Namusonge, 2015).

The most constructive leaders are those who display transformational leadership behaviors in addition to transactional ones and who can build certain positive conditions in the organizational setting (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders shape and transform a company's culture by knowing where they want to go and focusing all efforts to achieve the desired destination (Cooper, 2015). Bass (1985) explained that

transformational leaders impact their followers dramatically and change how they see and interpret the world. In today's business world, it is crucial to align the interests of employees and organizations through leaders who motivate, inspire, and stimulate intellectually and are attentive to the needs of followers (Hein & Chavez, 2016).

According to Buda and Leh (2017), transformational leaders who manage to retain employee's commitment will create a more successful organization. Transformational leaders communicate a strong vision of the growth opportunities to their employees, encourage followers to think critically about change initiatives, enhance employees' confidence in dealing with adaptation, and emphasize the importance of achieving set goals while transcending self-interests for the overall team's success (Bass, 1997).

Transformational leader behaviors are emotionally, ideologically, and identity-charged (Nelson, 2014). Leaders transform the needs, values, preferences, and aspirations of followers from self-interest to align with the collective interest of the organization (Lama & O'Higgins, 2013). Transformational leaders describe, visualize, and direct in ways that motivate followers to act, describe the conditions necessary for success, and encourage employee participation to achieve the set targets (Cooper, 2015).

Transformational leaders focus on strategy creation to achieve the desired vision, diagnose the issues, and develop a plan with measurable milestones to address the issues (Cooper, 2015). Northouse (2015) stated that transformational leaders have the needed competency to understand the core values and convince employees to reach their potential. Clarke (2013) explained that transformational leaders emphasize the required

conditions to achieve success and encourage employee participation to achieve collective goals. Saeed, Gelaidan, and Ahma (2013) argued that transformational leaders can increase the level of organizational commitment among employees, especially in terms of their continuance commitment. Charisma, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation characterize transformational leadership and transformational leaders focus on creating the needed environment for the employees to understand and strive for the company goals (Zeb et al., 2015). A shared understanding of required performance between management and the staff is a critical aspect of success. Communicating in a positive way, transformational leaders try to connect their employees' sense of identity with the organization's vision to create the desired future for the employees (Cooper, 2015). Özer and Tinaztepe (2014) mentioned that transformational leaders are committed to building organizations and applying the same behaviors to motivate employees to promote and strengthen the company's culture and social environment. Wang et al. (2016) explained that transformational leadership was positively related to trust in a leader and considered a motivator to boost feedback-seeking behavior among employees. Transformational leadership is a process in which leaders take actions to try to increase their followers' awareness of what is right and important (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2015). Transformational leaders focus on motivating their followers to perform beyond expectation and encourage employees to look beyond their self-interest for the good of the entire organization (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2015).

Deinert, Homan, Boer, Voelpel, and Gutermann (2015) mentioned that the

personality traits most strongly associated with transformational leadership overlap with the emergence of other forms of leadership, including extroversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. A positive feature of affiliated leaders to sustain transformational leadership is showing consideration and emotional responsiveness to subordinates (Deinert et al., 2015). Collins (2014) stated that selecting, managing, and retaining employees is a key human capital strategy that impacts the sustainability of a business. Graves, Sarkis, and Zhu (2013) explained that transformational leaders focus employee attention on the long-term goals of the company or organization and instill a sense of higher purpose. Any organization focusing on achieving the long-term vision can only be successful if leadership emphasizes employee alignment with a solid approach to achieve expected outcomes through constant employee focus while creating the opportunities for employees to learn and grow. Leadership is the key factor enabling talent to develop and thrive (Betchoo, 2014). Transformational leadership received most attention among other leadership theories from researchers for decades in the literature (Dinh et al., 2014).

Two key elements most often associated with transformational leadership are adaption and change (Dinh et al., 2014). DuBrin (2013) emphasized that transformational leaders are dedicated to achieving an understanding of their employees by comprehending their motives beyond reward and punishment. Transformational leaders affect organizational performance (Carter, Armenakis, Feild, & Mossholder, 2013) and personalize the change vision of the organization; they focus on a closer collaboration

with employees to achieve goals (Carter et al., 2013). Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, and Frey (2013) concluded that transformational leadership was positively related to employees' job satisfaction at both the individual and team level of a performance. Astrauskaite, Notelaers, Medisauskaite, and Kern (2015) explained that a transformational leader facilitates autonomy and provides employees with the resources of independence and power. Astrauskaite et al. explained that the literature suggests that transformational leadership relates to the quality of the work environment and may facilitate certain job characteristics.

Bass (1997) argued that the transformational leadership paradigm transcends national boundaries because a wide range of cultures in South America, Africa, and Asia has shown the same conception and relationships. Ghasabeh and Provitera (2017) stated that transformational leadership has risen to a phenomenon that is worth understanding, learning, and using in organizations around the world. Li and Shi (2008) commented, however, that it cannot be assumed that models of leadership in the West are transferable to countries like China and constructed a new measurement of China-specific dimensions of transformational leadership. Li and Shi included the following: (a) moral modeling, based on altruism, freedom from corruption, fairness, and hard work; (b) charisma, based on passion and courage; (c) vision articulation, based on providing employees with clear vision and direction, and (d) individualized consideration, based on showing concern for individual employees and their families.

Employee Turnover

Hom et al. (2012) explained turnover as a total separation between the employee and the organization, which includes cessations, discharges, layoffs, and resignations. Turnover creates various costs for organizations (Hom et al., 2012), and more specifically, turnover generates human resource management expenses such as recruitment, selection, and training (Park & Shaw, 2013). Employee turnover becomes a main concern for many business leaders because of the costs involved (Pearlman & Schaffer, 2013; Saraih, Aris, Sakdan, & Ahmad, 2017). Based on Mutua and Simba (2017), employee turnover is one of the most costly human resource challenges confronting both public and private organization and affects growth, profitability, and both guest and employee satisfaction. There is an increase in risk of knowledge sharing with competitors as employees move from one organization to another, potentially leading to the disclosure of core processes and information, affecting market share (Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel, & Pierce, 2011; Katsikea, Theodosiou, & Morgan, 2014). Employee turnover has always been a concern for all type of organizations because a higher percentage of employee turnover may be a critical issue to both the company and the employees (Saraih et al., 2017). With a shift in the economy over the past decades, turnover consequences for organizations are different nowadays. Turnover in a knowledge-based economy translates into the need for a specific skillset, more advanced training, and increased wages for educated, knowledgeable, skilled employees (Hancock et al., 2011).

Turnover can create obstacles for the operation and lead to decreased customer service and quality (Hancock et al., 2011). Human resource professionals tend to focus on the basic aspects of knowledge and skills that the jobseekers have rather than the applicants' internal determinants to stay and to contribute longer to the organization (Sairah et al., 2017). An employee's intention to leave a company can be perceived as an attempt of employees to move to another organization that fit the individual's needs (Sairah et al., 2017). Tews, Stafford, and Michel (2014) explained that entry-level positions have the highest turnover rate in the hospitality industry. Employee dissatisfaction prompts a search for other opportunities and if an employee finds a more suitable job, turnover will be the result (Hom et al., 2012). The authors identified two categories as reasons for leaving an organization: (a) enthusiastic leavers, and (b) reluctant leavers (Hom et al., 2012). The authors explain reluctant leavers as employees leaving a company due to business concerns, financial worries following restructuring of departments, or due to merger and acquisition.

Human and social capital theories suggest that turnover rates at any level hurt organizational performance (Park & Shaw, 2013). Context-emergent turnover theory conceptualizes turnover within flows of human capital resources and defines collective turnover as the quantity and quality of knowledge, skills, and abilities affecting a department's performance (Nyberg & Ployhart, 2013). An increase of competent and qualified leavers exaggerates these effects because workloads increase and the coordination of tasks decreases. The risk of a turnover contagion among high-quality

employees becomes existent, which can lead to a decline in customer service quality (Call et al., 2015). Companies need to ensure that employees are motivated and can contribute new ideas and processes to assist an organization's sustainability. It is a critical task for leadership in organizations to promote employees' positive cognition and emotion toward the organization (Li, Liang, & Zhang, 2016).

In the hotel industry, employee turnover is an ongoing challenge worldwide (Santhanam, Kamalanabhan, Dyaram, & Ziegler, 2015) and employee turnover intention acts as a surrogate for actual employee turnover. The hotel business focuses heavily on its HR system to achieve its competitive advantage, and as it is a highly customer service-oriented business, interactions between employees and guests determine the competitive advantage and success of the business (Santhanam et al., 2015). Potential employees perceive hotel jobs as less desirable due to their nature to serve people, especially in China. Based on Santhanam et al., people view hospitality employment as an industry with low wages, poor working conditions, lack of job security, and insufficient promotion opportunities, eventually resulting in higher employee turnover.

Corporate Culture

There are various definitions of corporate culture. Cremer (1993) explained corporate culture as the unspoken code of communication among members of an organization. A different explanation is that culture is a convention that helps coordination, like which side of the road we drive on (Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2015). Chatman, Caldwell, O'Reilly, and Doerr (2014) assessed that the corporate culture

is a set of norms and values that are widely shared and strongly held throughout the organization. Corporate culture is a complex construct involving values, norms, and attitudes (Bushman, Davidson, Dey, & Smith, 2015). Corporate culture represents the unspoken code of communication among all the employees and stakeholders of an organization (Guiso et al., 2015). Büschgens, Bausch, and Balkin (2013) referred to culture as a system of shared values and beliefs. Harwiki (2013) mentioned that the culture of an organization should assist employees, develop a support system to help others, and improve teamwork and spirit.

An organization's culture can contribute to an individual's moral development by allowing employees' decision-making responsibility and by encouraging role-taking opportunities (Abrhiem, 2012). A corporate culture is a crucial element in any organization's success and the failure to incorporate a company-wide alignment on how to conduct business will eventually result in a negative business outcome, which impacts performance (Wei, Samiee, & Lee, 2014). Organizational culture is an essential ingredient of organizational performance and an important source of sustainable competitive advantage (Kohtamaki, Thorgren, & Wincent, 2016). Eccles, Ioannou, and Serafeim (2014) explained that successful and long-term focused companies have a corporate culture of alignment, have organized procedures for stakeholder engagement to be more long-term oriented, and have a more open policy to share information with employees. Values play a crucial role and employees with similar value systems are attracted to such corporations (Eccles et al., 2014).

Jing (2015) focused on four key elements which every corporate culture needs to incorporate: (a) a corporate culture is people-oriented management, where employees are highly valued and where communication and interaction with all employees and stakeholders from all different departments is a required basis for success; (b) shared values are the core element of corporate culture, which are consistent with the company's mission and vision, and aligned with the personal values of its employees; (c) fostering of the corporate culture relies on all leaders and visible carriers; and (d) the criteria and the evaluation of any corporate culture is whether it can adapt to a competitive and ever-changing competitive market environment. Coleman (2013) gave similar explanations about the key elements of a corporate culture, highlighting the importance of instilling and living the culture throughout an organization. Employee's embracing of the corporate culture is an important factor to consider for any company because the constant reminder about why the organization exists and where the company is headed is required to have complete alignment from within.

Leadership plays an important role in keeping the culture alive (Coleman, 2013). Pinho, Rodrigues, and Dibb (2014) emphasized that creating a work environment that fosters the particular cultural dimensions of atmosphere and connectedness, while limiting the constraining aspects of formalization, is a crucial element for enhancing organizational performance. Schwartz (2013) stated that firms need to ensure that within their broader corporate culture of shared values and beliefs, a strong ethical corporate culture also exists rather than a weak culture. The identification of cultural attributes by

the leadership and the organization helps to develop coherent strategies for required cultural change (Pinho et al., 2014). Understanding those key attributes, communicating and teaching them to all employees in the organization are vital to create alignment, but it takes leadership and the top executives to support, live, and lead the efforts on a daily basis.

The rise of the corporate culture, and the important focus on how business gets done in an organization, started in the early 1980s due to the decline of the U.S. economy (Zhao, 2016). This downturn started partly because of the threat of a Japanese dominance in the global economy, and the rise in managing a company through a joint culture (Zhao, 2016). It became evident that organizations needed to embrace a specific way of how to conduct business, to involve the experience and expertise of its employees, and to create a vision and mission to improve overall alignment and sustainability. Corporate culture plays a crucial role in the development of any organization (Jing, 2015).

In China, the idea of a corporate culture was initially introduced as an advanced and more competitive style of management after the implementation of major reforms and the opening-up policy in the early 1980s, and has since undergone nearly 30 years of improvements and fine-tuning (Jing, 2015). In the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese companies, mostly state-owned enterprises, learned about the western way of conducting business through the translation of books and articles into Chinese (Jing, 2015). Chinese intellectuals and business leaders published domestic work with the focus on corporate image (Jing, 2015). Although the theories garnered the praise and attention of many

executives, the overall concept of corporate culture was not embraced fully or with the right attention and intentions within organizations (Jing, 2015). Both China and Korea still have a strong influence of reflecting Confucianism in daily life, with Confucianism the dominating component in both countries' cultures (C.Y. Lee & Lee, 2014). In 2005, the Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of China's State Council issued the new guiding principles for state-owned companies to build and further strengthen companies' corporate cultures (Jing, 2015). With the central government leading the way for state-owned organizations, this directive started a new era in the corporate environment in China to adapt and embrace the necessity and importance of a corporate culture throughout all organizations. It was critical during this time for companies to align with the instructions from the government and to create companies based on a comprehensive philosophy, aligning all stakeholders in the way the company is doing business (Jing, 2015).

The corporate culture in China is still at the beginning of building its own management culture and philosophy, and is facing different problems and challenges today (C. Y. Lee & Lee, 2014). Theories and practice of corporate culture construction in domestic corporations in China are still not comparable with western and more established economies and lag far behind, especially in large corporations (Jing, 2015). In terms of running an organization, this distance and inefficiency represents one of the main factors which impair development and competitiveness of domestic organizations. A solid corporate culture, lived and owned by every employee in the company, needs to

be part of the mission of an organization and requires senior leadership to focus on the reorganization of the company, including all divisions and departments. Many Chinese companies manage their organizations in a traditional way and based on the management style proclaimed and instilled from the political and military systems. A paradigm shift is needed and the responsibility comes back to executives to increase their understanding of the importance of a corporate culture (Jing, 2015). Frequently, company leaders still do not understand the essence and importance of corporate culture, although many books were translated into Chinese and various consultant companies have focused on this topic to teach corporate leaders in China (Jing, 2015). A basic for leadership is to understand the essence of a corporate culture to implement a solid construct within their organizations. A corporate culture can only be efficacious if it is incorporated in the company's daily operational practices and inculcated among the employees, which assists in creating full alignment, excitement, and ownership by all stakeholders. Adhering to the company culture and values will enhance the ability of midlevel managers to successfully engage employees to reduce turnover and create a sustainable business model to increase the profitability of the hotel.

Employee Engagement

Ariani (2013) explained that engagement is associated with job-related attitudes such as organizational citizenship. Jena, Bhattacharyya, and Pradhan (2017) mentioned in their study that employee engagement revolves around specific attributes of the employee attitude and employee behavior, such as taking initiatives and productivity levels. Line

employees are critical to the success of any hotel operations because they are directly communicating with the guests and deliver services (Grobelna & Marciszewska, 2013). Bakker and Demerouti (2009) stated that highly engaged employees are positive about their jobs and organizations, treat co-workers with respect, assist other team members to improve their work efficacy, fine-tune their competencies, and are highly active in their job environment. Tripiana and Llorens (2015) stated that fully engaged employees clearly comprehend the potential that exists in their work environment, and that these employees are eager to contribute to their personal and the company's success. Based on Osborne and Hammoud (2017) dedicated and meaningful work enables employees to realize how valuable they are within the organization and increases their overall engagement level. Supervisors and midlevel managers play an increased important role in the service delivery because engaged managers inspire, teach, and develop line-employees, which in turn benefit the organization as a whole. (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013). Employees with high levels of vigor often demonstrate willingness and persistence in investing effort to perform their job duties as best as possible (Karatepe & Demir, 2013). Employee satisfaction lowers turnover rates of employees, which positively influences productivity and thus enhances overall company output (Agarwal & Dewan, 2016). It is critical for any organization to focus its efforts on sustainable employee engagement to support long-term stability and competitiveness (Agarwal & Dewan, 2016). A company's performance is expected to improve because competent, satisfied, and engaged

employees are better able to recognize opportunities and threats, and understand how to leverage limited resources to maximize the company's profit (Agarwal & Dewan, 2016).

Ugwu, Onyishi, and Rodríguez-Sánchez (2014) concluded in their study that the relationship between organizational trust and work engagement is critical to the success of an organization and opens opportunities for leadership. The authors further discussed that organizational trust is a significant component of organizational interventions and that organizations and their employees understand that supporting each other is crucial to remain competitive and viable as a company. Highly engaged supervisors are likely to develop more engaged employees, which in turn benefits the entire organization (Menguc et al., 2013). Companies need to understand the importance of midlevel managers in its employees' engaging, training, developing, and recognizing and in achieving better, more sustainable long-term results and teamwork. Companies need to try to create a work environment of trust and mutual understanding to achieve better employee engagement and to achieve organizational goals.

Employee Recruitment, Selection, Training, and Education

Recruitment and selection. Recruitment is an HR process, involving the attraction of interested potential employees (candidates) for a specific job and department of an organization (Kamran, Dawood, & Bin Hilal, 2015). Human resource specialists play a critical role in the recruitment, hiring, compensation, and motivation of this most important organizational resource (Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2013). The recruitment method includes the communication with the actual or potential job seekers, inviting

them to post for the job and to arrange the needed interviews within the organization. Attracting and selecting the most suitable person for a particular position has become arguably one of the main concerns a company faces. Recently, this recruitment challenge has become even more important as there has been a shift toward knowledge-intensive and team-oriented work practices that place a stronger emphasis on hiring the right worker for the organization (Hogan et al., 2013).

The ever-changing expectations of employees, particularly with the rise of the service industry in developing countries and the ongoing pressure of organizations to become more profitable and productive have created a constant evolution in the nature of how employees get selected (Hogan et al., 2013). Especially in the luxury hotel business, companies require talented professionals with a vision that mirrors the expectations of the respective hotels and companies. Based on Cooke, Saini, and Wang (2014), there are two aspects of talent in terms of stages of development. One is talent (to be) who can be developed and put into key organizational positions (succession planning); the other is talent (already made) to be attracted, retained and fully utilized. The overall selection process for key talents will continue to be an ongoing priority, which hotel executives and HR directors need to address and manage seriously. Abraham, Kaliannan, Mohan, and Thomas (2015) explained that HR managers may be aware of strategic HR management, but their understanding of the recruitment and selection process, as an HR architecture linking the firm and HR strategy, may be vague. There is a lack of literature and understanding on the best possible approaches, creating opportunities to make

sustainable improvements through benchmarking processes. Educational attainment and background often act as a first-pass filter in personnel selection (Hogan et al., 2013). Hogan et al. further explained that educational attainment was studied in detail and that psychologists traditionally argued that it is a function of cognitive ability. Based on Hogan et al., several recent studies highlighted the importance of personality characteristics as predictors of academic performance. The conventional wisdom of applied psychology emphasized that employers and recruitment managers should be most interested in the degree to which applicants possess cognitive ability, conscientiousness, and other personality characteristics that employers believe add value to their organizations (Hogan et al., 2013).

Training. To ensure that hotel companies, leaders, and divisional managers are prepared to teach and lead midlevel managers to the next level, it is critical to offer the required training within the organization, based on a clearly defined training plan for different levels of competencies. Ulrich (1997) explained that following the demanding process of attempting to produce more with less input, organizations must focus on each employee's skills and capabilities to achieve the best possible results. Úbeda-García, Marco-Lajara, Sabater-Sempere, and Garcia-Lillo (2013) stated that training is a tool for enhancing individuals' behavior, skills, and knowledge, and to assist a company to gain a competitive advantage. Although costly, leadership training and development are important tools for training and engaging the organizations' leaders (Phipps, Prieto, & Ndinguri, 2014). Phipps et al. explained that leadership training facilitates the

effectiveness of the leader in the social or interpersonal aspects of leadership, and to be effective, should comprise five important elements: (a) perspective, (b) context, (c) effectiveness, (d) traits, and (e) change. Important elements creating higher turnover in the industry are that highly trained and qualified employees are not sought after (Santhanam et al., 2015) and high potential employees do not receive enough opportunities to move up and focus on their career development (Phipps et al., 2014).

On-the-job training is one of the basic employee development methods within the hospitality industry (Ravichandrana, Cichy, Powers, & Kirby, 2015). Other forms of employee training include classroom training and internet-based training, which enable employees to train at their own pace and at a time and place that is convenient to them. Creating an environment of constant learning is vital to the success of any organization. As highlighted by Kim and Ployhart (2014), a further desired effect of training and talent development is the increase in productivity by the employees or the human capital, which reduces costs and eventually increases profitability. Employees are eager to learn, excited to focus on the prospects, and embrace a leadership approach based on individual talents and employee-specific improvement plans.

Education. McGinley, O'Neill, Damaske, and Mattila (2014) suggested that hotel leaders focus on advancement opportunities through special programs for employees, especially the younger generation, which could help young managers in particular. A concern in the hotel industry is that the career progression is too slow for many eager and enthusiastic employees, even though many staff members are willing to make a short-

term sacrifice to achieve the desired long-term success (McGinley et al., 2014). M. Littledyke, Manolas, and Littledyke (2013) emphasized that companies, as a priority, need to focus on education to create organizational sustainability. Millar and Park (2013) mentioned that hospitality professionals view students as potential change agents who could help define an organization's sustainability and appropriate solutions and approaches for improving organizations' performance.

Hotel managers need to understand the importance of younger employees in any of the divisions, and to create the needed educational opportunities for them to grow from within. Melissen and Damen (2014) stated that students and professionals see the importance to focus jointly on developing the skills and knowledge to create sustainable organizations. The travel and tourism industry in China has steadily grown and has become an important pillar and activity of economic and social importance in China (Leung, Li, Fong, Law, & Lo, 2014). Scholars disclosed a substantial increase in the number of research studies on tourism in China, giving information and guidance on a healthy development of the industry (Leung et al., 2014). Chinese tourism researchers have adapted to industry changes and focused on more timely research to cater to the needs of the industry professionals. This advanced approach to research has increased the hospitality industry's sophistication (Leung et al., 2014). Moreover, the advancement in methodological sophistication allowed the findings to serve as credible references to support the decision-making process of organizations, including the hotel industry (Leung et al., 2014).

In the past 30 years, the increasing demand from the hospitality industry initiated a rapid development of hospitality higher education across China. L. Li and Li (2013) explained in their study that hospitality and tourism management programs are one of the rapidly developing subject areas in Chinese universities. Offering new hotel management courses is a critical and important development because hotel education needs to be improved to cope with the challenges in the industry. The Ministry of Education has long regulated the hospitality education and for hospitality students, most Chinese universities offer only a bachelor's degree in tourism management or a bachelor of business administration degree (L. Li & Li, 2013). Furthermore, the authors explained that only a small number of universities offer majors in hotel, lodging, or hospitality management with a degree separate from tourism management (L. Li & Li, 2013). Bao, Chen, and Ma (2014) explained that a switch in the institutional arrangement in Chinese universities produced a more practice-oriented research in the tourism field. L. Li and Li (2013) emphasized that hospitality students expect more hospitality-related training opportunities and programs, but do not think that the professors have the needed competencies to teach advanced hospitality courses. Every hotel company and leader in the industry needs to understand the critical educational needs and gaps, and the necessity to create a sustainable, effective, and relevant educational approach. It is important for midlevel managers to own education, training, and development for employees personally because continuous growth is vital to engage employees, to reduce employee turnover, and to create long-term success of the hotel.

Transition

Section 1 of this proposal included the foundation and background for my qualitative multiple case study. In the literature review, I emphasized the various leadership styles, specifically servant leadership and transformational leadership theories. These theories are critical to the success of hospitality leaders and are emphasized in the three levels of leadership model by Scouller (2011), which is the conceptual framework of this study. I focused on literature important for business leaders to create engagement strategies to reduce turnover, and to improve overall business outcomes, including employee recruitment, selection, training, and education. Midlevel managers need to understand the shortfalls, concerns, and opportunities to focus their leadership strategies required to engage, motivate, and train employees, eventually reducing turnover and increasing organizations' profitability.

In Section 2, I elaborated on the required processes and procedures for this multiple case study, with a clear outline of the role of the researcher, the population, the sampling method, the participants, the research method, and the research design, including a clear explanation of the significance of conducting an ethical research. I also detailed the approach to data collection and analysis techniques, including the processes for assuring my study's reliability and validity.

Section 3 includes the presentation of the research findings, along with an application for professional practice and implications for potential social change. I

focused on potential applications of my findings, made recommendations for future research and presented my overall conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I outline the research method and design of my doctoral study, including the role I play as the researcher in the overall study process. Furthermore, I highlight the selection method of the various midlevel managers and the ethical considerations. I provide an explanation of the qualitative multiple case study data collection process, the data analysis strategy, and the processes for assuring my study's validity and reliability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies luxury hotel industry midlevel managers use to engage employees to reduce employee turnover. The targeted population was five midlevel hotel department managers from three luxury hotels in China who have used employee engagement strategies to reduce employee turnover. The results of this study may contribute to social change by improving standards and leadership competencies to strengthen economic output, increase job opportunities, and to create employment sustainability within the communities.

Role of the Researcher

Yin (2014) explained that the data collection process includes interviews, observations, document reviews, and/or fieldwork. The role played as the researcher of this study incorporated the choosing of the most appropriate design method and the data collection methods, as well as the selection of the participants, informing the selected

participants about the data collection process, and identifying common themes for addressing the purpose of my study. A researcher's main role is to project an adequate account of the informants' experience (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), giving voice to the interviewees during the early stages of data gathering and analysis, and representing their voices prominently in the reporting of the research, which create rich opportunities for discovery of both new and existing concepts.

I started my career in the hotel industry many years ago and had an early interest in the business through relatives and friends who owned hotels. My career spans over 20 years in the luxury hotel industry, and I have seen and encountered leadership concerns daily. Turnover in the hotel sector, especially in China, is very high (Zhao et al., 2016) and hotel executives have a duty to understand the turnover phenomenon to ensure that employees remain positively engaged with the hotel and organization through specific leadership competencies and strategies. Since my first leadership position in the hotel industry, I have been involved and responsible for reducing turnover. Based upon my experience, China, as a developing country and with management practices different from established economies, face an ever-increasing issue with turnover. I made it my duty to find appropriate, more solid, and sustainable strategies to reduce turnover in the luxury hotel industry, and then to encourage others to apply these strategies as well.

A researcher must apply the highest ethical standards to the project. Gioia et al. (2013) defined ethical behavior as professional agreement concerning appropriate behavior. I ensured that I gave the necessary voice and time to the interviewees as they

are the experts in their field and the research matter. I created the required environment for the subjects to answer all questions in an open and flexible manner. The Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979) identifies the critical areas to which a researcher must adhere. I ensured that I fully complied with the principles of respect and confidentiality toward all study subjects, and followed the ethical guidelines concerning the involvement of human participants. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that a researcher bias or own worldview is a concern, whether it is from the standpoint of the researcher or the participant. Establishing an interview protocol is a critical element to mitigate bias (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Miscommunication can become a concern, especially during an interview process where cultural differences are apparent, and therefore, an interview protocol is a very important tool (Amerson, 2011). Fusch and Ness further stated that the better researchers are able to recognize their personal view of the world and to discern the presence of a personal lens, the better they are able to hear and interpret the behavior and reflections of others, and represent them in studies' findings. Reflexivity is important in striving for objectivity and neutrality (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). I ensured to reflect upon ways in which bias might become a concern during the interview and data analysis process, knowing that my own background, professional competencies, and beliefs were critical to understand and address.

Johnson (2014) identified issues of potential concerns with confidentiality and anonymity, and that it is critical to present draft summaries of transcripts and findings to

the individuals for review. I was the prime interviewer and the one conducting the study. As stated by Fusch and Ness (2015), hearing and understanding the viewpoints of others may be one of the most difficult dilemmas a researcher faces. It was, therefore, necessary to recognize my viewpoints of the world, and the presence of a personal lens, to better be able to hear and interpret behaviors, intentions, and reflections of others. Yilmaz (2013) explained that multiple realities exist in different cultural groups construct based on their worldviews or value systems, and that there are multiple perspectives on any event or situation. Furthermore, Yilmaz stated that understanding the phenomenon under investigation from the perspectives of the participants is critical. Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested to document and to describe the experiences regarding the phenomenon under study, to enable a researcher to understand the subject from the participants' viewpoints, and with a new needed and fresh perspective.

According to Yin (2014), to address the possibility of bias in qualitative research, a researcher needs to set aside emotion, listen attentively to the subjects, and ask clear and focused questions. Nonverbal communication is important to get the full meaning of a participant's answer (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). In this study, I followed a clear interview protocol (see Appendix C) to reduce bias. I ensured that I worked with the participants in an open and respectful way and tried to avoid showing any emotions or negative reactions. As I have worked for more than 20 years with a renowned luxury hotel company and several years in China, I have built solid relationships with other general managers and many of the executives in various locations. My solid relationships

could have presented a concern in terms of personal bias and influence the participants of my study. One way to avoid or to minimize this potential bias was to choose participants whom I did not know. Selecting midlevel managers with whom I do not have any professional relationship was important as it enabled me to focus on the questions and the managers' answers, and to identify emerging themes from the participants' inputs.

Participants

The study participants included five midlevel managers from various luxury hotel properties in China. I selected managers from three luxury hotels in the cities of Beijing and Shanghai. I was not directly involved in those hotel operations or decision-making processes, which have employed successful employee engagement strategies to reduce turnover in their respective departments/divisions. I connected with various general managers in Beijing and Shanghai to learn about the best performing hotels, and then obtained the required turnover reports from the general managers of the selected hotels.

The participating managers were the experts in their field, especially in engaging employees and creating a solid work environment for employees to strive, contribute, and succeed, and were well-versed in the English language. The participants were part of leading luxury hotel companies in the Beijing and Shanghai markets. I ensured that none of the selected midlevel managers had any relationship with me, as I am responsible for luxury properties of my organization in the south of China. The participating midlevel managers have excelled in reducing or maintaining their turnover rates in their respective departments compared with the market trend in similar luxury hotels. I selected potential

participants following the rules and guidelines of Walden University's International Review Board (IRB) principles, and the research guidelines in the Belmont Report. I ensured that all participants in this study (a) were midlevel managers; (b) were working in one of the identified luxury hotels in China; (c) had English language competency; (d) were identified by their respective general managers as having successfully applied employee engagement strategies to reduce turnover; and (f) had a minimum of 10 employees under their direct supervision. Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested that researchers must be clear and demonstrate throughout the study that personal bias will not affect the outcomes of studies, especially when interviewing the study subjects.

According to Yin (2014), it is vital to have a solid plan to approach the interviews, to be clear when asking questions, to be a good listener, and to be flexible when interacting with the participants one-on-one. To create a solid working relationship, I contacted the potential candidates via telephone, introduced myself, thanked the candidates for the interest in participating in my study, and introduced the topic in detail. It was important to brief all participants fully, and to make sure that they felt comfortable talking with me openly. It was critical that all study subjects participated on a voluntary basis, and to explore their experiences and competencies profoundly in addressing my study's research question.

Research Method and Design

I applied the qualitative methodology in this study. Gaya and Smith (2016) explained that qualitative researchers can capture the complexity of the phenomenon. I

chose the qualitative multiple case research design for my doctoral study because it enabled me to explore the various focus areas, approaches, and strategies of midlevel hotel managers who have succeeded in engaging employees for reducing employee turnover.

Research Method

Qualitative methodology was the most suitable research method for this study to explore midlevel managers' strategies to engage employees and reduce turnover in luxury hotels in China. By using the qualitative method and approach, I expected to obtain the needed understanding how midlevel managers successfully apply employee engagement strategies to achieve consistent success in reducing turnover in their respective areas. Bless, Higson-Smith, and Sithole (2013) explained that researchers can gain first-hand experience and amplify the participants' voices by applying the qualitative methodology. Utilizing qualitative methods enabled me to uncover the experiences of midlevel managers to engage employees and reduce turnover by using interviews and archival company documents pertaining to leadership strategies, company culture, recruiting, selection, training, and education programs and processes.

Quantitative researchers seek to examine the concepts in terms of amount, intensity, or frequency, and focus on numerical data and what is deductive (Ketokivita & Choib, 2014). Quantitative researchers place a primary emphasis on generalizability and gain knowledge that is representative of the population from which the sample was drawn (Palinkas et al., 2015). Yilmaz (2013) explained that quantitative researchers pursue

generalization, probability, and associations through deductive reasoning. The focus of my study was on the learning and understanding how midlevel managers in luxury hotels in China successfully develop and apply strategies to increase employee engagement, and reduce employee turnover, which did not require the quantitative approach. Therefore, the quantitative methodology was not appropriate for my study.

Mixed-methods research is an approach that researchers use to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods in the same research inquiry (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). A mixed-methods approach can help develop rich insights into various phenomena of interest that cannot be fully understood using only a quantitative or a qualitative method. The purpose of my study was to explore employee engagement strategies applied by midlevel managers in luxury hotels in China to reduce employee turnover. Bansal and Corley (2012) explained that in the mixed-methods approach, a researcher is applying a combination of deductive and inductive methods. Mixed-methods researchers use quantitative and qualitative research methods, either concurrently or sequentially, to get the necessary understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Venkatesh et al., 2013). The mixed-methods approach is appropriate when a qualitative or quantitative method alone is insufficient to answer the research question and the complementary strengths of both methods are needed to provide comprehensive inferences (Sparkes, 2015). I only used statistical data to identify the most appropriate hotels with the lowest turnover rates in the Beijing and Shanghai luxury hotel market and did not use any further quantitative information to answer the research question.

Research Design

I used a qualitative multiple-case study design as it was the most appropriate for my study. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that a researcher should choose the design that enables obtaining to best answer the research question. A qualitative multiple-case study design is a particular strategy for qualitative empirical research that allows an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, generating managerially relevant knowledge (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). The case study method is differentiated from other research strategies because the focus of the research is on a bounded system or case (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014).

Yin (2014) explained that case studies may be exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive, and may involve a single organization and location or multiple organizations and locations for a comparative case study design. A case study design is a means to advance real-life leadership solutions in a rigorous, creative, and wide-ranging variety of ways (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the case study design was appropriate to learn about employee engagement strategies from key midlevel managers in the Chinese luxury hotel industry to reduce turnover. Applying a case study design enables researchers to function as the primary collection and analysis instrument to explore the research questions within a bounded system (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). In case studies, the type of questions to answer is *what*, *how*, and *why*, and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2014).

Alternative qualitative research designs that I considered included ethnographic, phenomenological, and grounded theory. Ethnographers study groups' cultures and use in-person observation and informal interviews in their natural habitat to describe their everyday life and practices (Hallett & Barber, 2014). A researcher uses a phenomenological design to explore and understand the essence of an event and the meaning of lived experiences within a group of individuals (Robertson & Thompson, 2014). Researchers use a grounded theory approach to develop a theory relating to a social action or process (Cho & Lee, 2014), and as I did not seek to develop a theory in my doctoral study, grounded theory was not appropriate. Narrative researchers aim to obtain detailed stories and conversations to explore the meaning of individuals' life experiences (Rosile et al., 2013). Ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology were not appropriate qualitative designs for this study because I pursued to identify and explore successful strategies and leadership practices midlevel managers use to engage employees and reduce turnover in luxury hotels in three hotels in Beijing and Shanghai, China.

Data saturation refers to the stage in the data collection and analysis process when further data collection generates no additional new insights or perceptions, when there is enough information to replicate the study, and when further coding is no longer necessary (Fusch & Ness, 2015). It is critical that the researcher focuses on the interpretation of the phenomena presented by the participants and not of the researcher to evaluate data saturation (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). For my multiple case study, triangulation was an

additional means for achieving data saturation. Denzin (2009) stated that triangulation involves the employment of multiple external methods to collect data as well as the analysis of the data, and by using triangulation researchers can explore different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon. Data saturation is achieved through the depth and breadth of the data rather than the sample size, and the researcher should choose the sample size that provides the best opportunity to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). By repeating the same questions in each interview and requesting each participant to disclose the same type of archival documents throughout the data collection process, I assured that I assembled enough data from each type of source to acquire data saturation and increase the dependability of the study. Another strategy that I applied to achieve data saturation was member checking, whereby each participant received a synopsis of the interview and was invited to validate the accuracy of the interview data and derivative conclusions (Elo et al., 2014; Richardson, Davey, & Swint, 2013). By analyzing and validating any new information that may appear during the member-checking process, the researcher engages in a reiterative process of data collection and member checking until no new data emerge (Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014; Richardson et al., 2013).

Population and Sampling

The study participants included five midlevel managers from three luxury hotel properties in the cities of Beijing and Shanghai, China. These midlevel managers have shown consistent leadership strategies to catalyze employee engagement and reduce turnover in their own areas and were within the top 5 departments within their hotels in

overall turnover. As stated by Yin (2014) and Palinkas et al. (2015), purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research. Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011) and Palinkas et al. (2015) explained that purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. Robinson (2014) focused on providing requirements for efficacious sampling in qualitative interview-based research. I highlighted the four key elements of Robinson's (2014) essay for my study: (a) defining the sample universe, (b) selecting a sampling strategy, (c) deciding upon a sample size, and (d) sample sourcing.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that researchers rely on their personal judgment to select the most appropriate study subjects in purposeful sampling. For my doctoral study, the sample size included five midlevel managers of luxury hotels in China, specifically in Beijing and Shanghai, who have successfully implemented strategies to engage employees to reduce turnover in the managers' departments. To identify the appropriate study subjects, I engaged with various HR leaders in those respective markets and learned about the hotels and departments with the lowest turnover numbers. Turnover reports are common in the hotel industry and readily available. A sample of three to five cases is a suitable sample size for a multiple case study (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp & LaRossa, 2015). While data saturation may occur when analyzing the data obtained from the interviews (Morse et al., 2014), reaching data saturation is likely to occur sooner when exploring secondary sources such as company

documents and websites (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). As secondary sources, and as indicated by Yin (2014), I focused my research on information gathering through the companies' archives and online data, including (a) corporate culture information, (b) training plans, and (c) talent development processes. To ensure I had the appropriate amount of data to analyze, I interviewed the target population and analyzed company archives and documents until I decided that the accumulated information from each source demonstrated data saturation.

Ethical Research

Ethics is defined as norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and plays a critical role in research (Mikesell, Bromley, & Khodyakov, 2013). Qualitative researchers maintain a continuous sensitivity to the ethical issues surrounding human interactions and to uphold the highest ethical standards, as those in the Belmont Report to protect the rights and well-being of the research participants (Mikesell et al., 2013). For my study, I followed the guidelines as stated by Mikesell et al. (2013), which clearly outline the importance of ethical principles and how to conduct research:

- (a) every study participant is treated as an individual autonomy, and the respect for every person requires that individuals be treated as autonomous agents;
- (b) all study participants receive sufficient information about the study, to enable them to independently decide whether they want to participate; and

(c) beneficence and nonmaleficence require researchers to maximize benefits and minimize harm to research participants and ensure individuals' well-being by demanding that researchers carefully consider the risk–benefit ratio of participation.

In conducting my study, I ensured to apply further core ethical principles, as stated by Resnik (2015), including: (a) honesty, (b) objectivity, (c) integrity, (d) carefulness, (e) openness, (f) respect for intellectual property, (g) confidentiality, (h) responsible publication, (i) nondiscrimination, and (j) competence. I was careful to protect and support the study participants throughout the process.

I applied for the approval of my study from the Walden University IRB. My IRB approval number is 1429070. I started contacting the study subjects only after obtaining IRB approval. I followed the eligibility criteria to select the appropriate candidates for my research. Each participant had to sign a consent form with the necessary details of the study, his or her participation requirements, the interview process, and the information of how to withdraw from the study if the participants decided to do so. The participants were free to withdraw from the study without explanation, consequences, or further obligations. To withdraw from the study, any participant could contact me by phone or email to inform me about her or his decision to withdraw from my doctoral study. I communicated with every study participant about every step of the process and communicated that I would audio record the interviews to ensure all details of the conversations and all their answers and input were clear and details were correctly

transcribed and interpreted. Every participant could freely decide if using an audio recording was acceptable or if I should have taken notes only. After each interview, I wrote a detailed synopsis of the conversations, and asked the study participants to validate the content or to add further information, which was part of the member-checking process for each interview.

I kept all electronic files on a USB stick, and protected the data from anyone by safekeeping it in my own home office safe for at least the next 5 years. I will shred hard copies and destroy electronic information using data destruction software as recommended by Reardon, Basin, and Capkun (2013) 5 years after the completion of the study to avoid the risk of disclosing the participants' confidential information. As stated by Wong et al. (2015), transcripts are to be kept secure in a locked file cabinet for data safe keeping and confidentiality. I am the only person with access to the files and USB stick in my office and I follow the guidance of Mitchell and Wellings (2013), stating that only the researcher should have access to the participants' information. I did not compensate any of the study participants, did not provide any incentives, and ensured that no names or company information were included in the final study documents.

Data Collection Instruments

Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that the researcher functions as an active instrument in the data collection process in qualitative studies. For this multiple case study, I was the primary researcher. The research phase consists of collecting suitable data for content analysis (Elo et al., 2014). I primarily focused on semistructured face-to-

face interviews but also on researching company information on the websites and other available documents. Interviews are probably the approach most used to collect data in qualitative studies, as they are particularly useful in uncovering the story behind a participant's experiences (Doody & Noonan, 2013). As indicated by Holloway and Wheeler (2010), the most common form of interviews used in qualitative research is semistructured interviews, involving the use of predetermined questions, where the researcher is free to seek clarification and further input from the study subjects. In semistructured interviews, the questions are open-ended, where participants respond in their own words and based on their competencies, knowledge, and understanding of the subject matter. This system of interviewing facilitates sufficient freedom for the participant to diverge slightly from the script and to expand on the topics freely during the interview (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Yin (2014) indicated that an interview protocol is a critical element of the interview process and represents an effective directory for the researcher to enhance the consistency of the data. My interview approach was always the same, based on the predetermined interview questions (Appendix B) and the interview protocol (Appendix C). Strictly adhering to the interview protocol should assure that all interviews have the same process and maximum consistency. A qualitative researcher establishes rigor of the inquiry by adopting various credibility strategies, including member checking and triangulation (Anney, 2014). Member checking is the process to test the data and interpretation accuracy through the interview audience and study participants (Anney, 2014), and to help prevent researcher bias when analyzing and

interpreting the results. Richardson et al. (2013) stated that member checking and triangulation are two of the best approaches for evaluating the credibility and validity of qualitative research. I used methodological triangulation to compare the data from the interviews and other sources, including company websites and documents related to HR practices, training programs and selection process, to ensure that the findings were consistent and complete. Ritchie et al. (2013) explained that methodological triangulation involves the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of, or extend, inferences drawn from the data, and provides a fuller picture of research phenomena.

Data Collection Technique

Marshall and Rossman (2016) indicated that data collection in qualitative research occurs through multiple sources, including direct interviews with participants or with subjects in a group setting, observations, archival document reviews, company website consultation, and potentially including fieldwork. I applied two data collection techniques for my study: primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the semistructured interviews with the five midlevel managers of three luxury hotels in China. The secondary sources were the companies' websites, including HR specific information from each of the three hotels. I used the information obtained from the secondary sources to verify content from the interviews and for methodological triangulation purpose. Ritchie et al. (2013) explained that the interview process is most important in relation to the subject and objectives of the enquiry. Using document assessment as a second process for data analysis offers various advantages: (a) enables repeated review of the information;

(b) provides explicit information such as names, dates, and statistical data; (c) offers information independent from the obtained interview data; and (d) can enable longitudinal reporting on critical events, changes, and settings (Yin, 2014). The availability of various data collection points enables the researcher to explore the same phenomenon from different sources and perspectives, which assists in validating the study findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Eker and Zimmermann (2016) stated that semistructured interviews can provide rich qualitative data and underlying stories of the interviewees, allowing the participants to elaborate freely on the subject matter.

Methodological triangulation is the means by which the researcher explores different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon through connecting and comparing data from multiple types and sources of evidence (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used methodological triangulation to enhance the credibility of my doctoral study, as indicated by Houghton, Shaw, and Murphy (2013). A qualitative researcher establishes rigor of the inquiry by adopting the following credibility strategies: (a) prolonged and varied field experience, (b) time sampling, (c) reflexivity, (d) triangulation, (e) member checking, (f) peer examination, (g) interview technique, (h) establishing authority of researcher, and (i) structural coherence (Anney, 2014). Case study findings are likely to be more accurate and convincing if they originate from several different information sources because multiple sources of evidence allow for data triangulation and the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2014). Interviews were one source of information but in addition, and in order to methodologically triangulate various data sources, I reviewed

company information and documents related to employee engagement strategies, turnover reduction, HR practices and training guidelines from the different hotels, and other relevant sources that the participating hotels' leaders felt comfortable to share with me. Another important source of data was the various company websites, specifically focusing on the HR aspect of the hotel, including selection and orientation processes. To receive the participating hotels' permission, I requested access via a letter of cooperation. As indicated by Yin (2014), an assessment of documents as an additional source of information collection allows different advantages, including; (a) a repeated review of the information; (b) a source of explicit information such as names, dates, and statistical data, and; (c) and the opportunity to review information independent from the participants' perceptions. Also, using independent document review enabled me to validate the data obtained from the interviews. As Yin (2014) further indicated, a potential disadvantage to the document review process is that the participants or community partners may deny access to relevant documents following their reluctance or concern to disclose certain information. To offset any disadvantage, I requested to have access to potential documents relevant to the discussion and study topic during the initial communication phase with all the participants. Everyone cooperated and presented me with additional company documents and information pertaining to my subject. I validated the additional data after the initial interviews and during the member-checking process.

Once I had obtained the approval from the Walden University IRB, I started the recruitment and then the data collection process. The primary source of my data

collection came from the face-to-face interviews with the five midlevel managers in three selected luxury hotels in China. I built a rapport, prior to the actual interviews, connecting via emails, online communication or Skype, to ensure that the study subjects felt safe and comfortable to share their information. Building a prior connection with the study subjects was expected to enable me to exchange information and develop a connection before the interview (as stated by Deakin & Wakefield, 2013).

An important aspect of conducting the research and semistructured interviews was to have a clear outline, based on a solid protocol (Appendix C), which guided me through the entire process. I scheduled the interviews for a specific date and time, and ensured that the locations and times were convenient for the study participants. An advantage conducting face-to-face interviews was the ability to observe any reaction, body language, and other signs from the participant. Participant observation gave me the opportunity to further enhance the quality of the responses by asking specific follow-up questions. As stated by Yin (2014), face-to-face interviews might have a disadvantage, consisting of reflexivity, with the possibility that the researcher and participants might exert a mutual influence. I needed to keep the focus clearly on the feedback received from the study participants. Member checking was an important tool to assure data validity by providing the information to the participants, and to allow them to clarify the data and inferences from the interviews (Houghton et al., 2013; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). After I had compiled the interview protocol (see Appendix C), I engaged

each of the study subjects to verify the information, and if necessary, add additional points to ensure that the information was properly validated.

I enhanced the interview information with additional data from company websites and HR information with a specific focus on corporate culture, selection of employees and leaders, and leadership development programs and strategies. The additional data sources included specific company information and documents related to employee engagement strategies, turnover reduction, human resources practices, and training guidelines from the different hotels. Furthermore, I searched data from the various company websites with a focus on the HR aspect of the hotel, including selection and orientation processes, corporate culture of the different hotel companies, and specific human resources' insight about training processes. Yin (2014) explained that an important principal of case study design is to collect data from two or more types of data, to assure the validity of the study's findings and conclusions. I applied methodological triangulation to connect and compare the various information researched, and to assure my study's validity and reliability. Member checking and triangulation are two important approaches to check the integrity and validity of research (Ritchie et al., 2013). After the completion of the interview process, I applied the member-checking process, allowing the validation of the findings through the various study participants. Member checking included the detailed review by each of the participants of the interview transcript, reflecting my interpretation to validate the information. Furthermore, as indicated by Anney (2014), using data and methodological triangulation enabled me to assure the

completeness of the information, reduce bias, and improve the overall validity of the study. I employed methodological triangulation of the interview data, information from the various company websites, and archival information from the specific hotels about training processes to evaluate the consistency of the findings and to ensure the completeness of the information.

Data Organization Technique

The inductive approach of data organization includes the open coding, creating categories, and abstraction, and is an essential part of data organization (Elo et al., 2014). I created a management data system to ensure that all data were kept safe, and as stated by Yin (2014), a system to ensure all data collected from interviews, audio files, and transcripts were safely preserved. I created a logbook and master list to ensure that all gathered information was organized properly, and to avoid any risk of misaligning the data.

I transcribed the information, checked for errors and unnecessary phrases and sentences, and uploaded the various files onto the NVivo11 after every interview and after completing the data collection process. I utilized NVivo11 to code the data from various sources into nodes, referring to the various codes and themes. When necessary, I reorganized these nodes in a hierarchical manner, as suggested by Eker and Zimmermann (2016). Assuring the privacy and protection of the data was a critical aspect of the research. I keep all documents, including interviews, transcripts, audio files, consent forms, and other related data on a USB stick, a back-up, and a secure hard drive, safely

locked in my home office safe, and stored for a minimum of 5 years. All data are password-protected, and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Data Analysis

To conduct the qualitative data analysis for this study I chose to use qualitative content analysis (Elo et al., 2014). Using qualitative content analysis enables researchers to identify key categories. The qualitative content analysis process consists of three main phases; (a) preparation, (b) organization, and (c) reporting of the results (Elo et al., 2014). The analysis phase is a challenging and exciting stage of the qualitative research process, and it requires a mix of creativity and systematic searching, a blend of inspiration and diligent detection (Ritchie et al., 2013). In qualitative content analysis, the researcher analyzes both the content and the context of all documents gathered and identifies themes, while focusing on the ways to identify, verify, and present each theme and the frequency of each theme's occurrence (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Anney (2014) explained that a qualitative researcher establishes rigor of the inquiry by adopting various credibility strategies, including (a) prolonged and varied field experience, (b) time sampling, (c) reflexivity, (d) triangulation, (e) member checking, (f) peer examination, (g) interview technique, (h) establishing authority of researcher, and (i) structural coherence. Based on Anney (2014), triangulation assists an investigator to reduce bias, cross-examining the integrity of the participants' responses. Furthermore, Anney stated that there are three major types of triangulation;

- (a) investigator triangulation that uses multiple researchers to investigate the same problem, helping to strengthen the integrity of the findings;
- (b) data triangulation/informants triangulation, with a focus on different sources of data or research instruments, such as interviews, focus group discussion or participant observation, or that utilizes different informants to enhance the quality of the data from different source; and
- (c) methodological triangulation that includes different research methods.

Fusch and Ness (2015) and Hyett et al. (2014) referred to triangulation as the use of multiple sources of evidence for assuring the reliability of the study, and for achieving data saturation. Triangulation is for ensuring multiple data sources and types shape the case by context and emerging data (Gaya & Smith, 2016). Aguiar and Silva (2013) stated various aspects of triangulation to increase objectivity: triangulation of sources, triangulation of data, and triangulation of techniques. Based on Fusch and Ness (2015), methodological triangulation ensures that data are rich in depth, and correlates data from multiple data types and collection methods. For my doctoral research, I focused on two different data sources: interviews with midlevel managers of selected luxury hotels in China (Beijing and Shanghai), and archival documentation concerning the company, the different companies' corporate culture, including information on training specifics and the selection process. My approach to triangulate successfully the information was to focus on the data processes to identify various repeating themes, to categorize them accordingly, and to ensure that the outcome identified successful strategies for midlevel

managers to use to engage employees and reduce employee turnover. After the completion of the data collection process, I transcribed the interviews, and present the information to the participants, as a further follow-up and to apply member checking with the study subjects. The transcription allowed me to check on the credibility of the document, and to verify if I correctly stated and interpreted the interview information in the process. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) explained that, where possible, the qualitative researcher applies the member-checking process to assure the study's validity. Yilmaz (2013) stated that member checking is the process where the participants check and evaluate the final research document and ensure that the descriptions and themes accurately reflect their viewpoints.

Yin (2014) indicated that applying NVivo software enables a researcher to analyze the data by creating codes, categorizing the records, and identifying themes. I grouped similar expressions and matched themes deduced from the interviews with themes inferred from the archival document review to substantiate evidence. I correlated key themes with the conceptual framework and literature review in this study and indicated similarities, differences, and/or inconsistencies in the research findings. During the entire research process, I continued to identify relevant articles and studies through Google Scholar, and newly published doctoral studies, to enable me to further fine-tune my study, and to ensure that information and data were relevant and current.

Reliability and Validity

Ritchie et al. (2013) explained that in the broadest conception, reliability meaning *sustainable* and validity meaning *well-grounded* will have relevance for qualitative research helping to define the strength of the data. Yilmaz (2013) emphasized the fact that the concept of reliability and validity in qualitative studies refers to dependability and auditability (reliability) and credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity (validity).

Reliability

Gaya and Smith (2016) and Yilmaz (2013) stated that, since reliability is synonymous with consistency, demonstrating qualitative studies' reliability is important when data are collected through qualitative research methods. Reliability concerns the replicability of research findings, and whether the findings would be confirmed if another researcher conducted a similar study through applying the same or similar methods (Cope, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2013). Other terms, including confirmability, consistency, or dependability are employed to describe qualitative studies' reliability, and depending of the nature of qualitative research, can refer to the security and durability of a study's findings (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Dependability. A study is dependable if the researcher describes the study's audit trails, a code-recode strategy, stepwise replication, triangulation, and potentially, peer examination (Anney, 2014). Dependability is achieved by describing the processes for obtaining and keeping all the interview records, participants' comments, e-mails, including the member-checking process documentation. Dependability evolves from

participants' evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to ensure that the findings are supported by the data received from the study's organization and participants (Anney, 2014). Using digital recordings and field notes can also assure the dependability of the information received for future research (Anney, 2014).

Leung (2015) explained that dependability for qualitative research is synonymous with consistency. De Massis and Kotlar (2014) suggested that the application of structured processes for data collection and analysis, as well as the use of interview protocols, enables researchers to assure and demonstrate the reliability of research. To ensure that the data from the interviews were correctly captured and documented, I applied member checking. Marshall and Rossman (2016) explained that by using member checking, a researcher can confirm the interpretations of the interview data with the participants of the study and support the completeness and accuracy of the information. After each interview, I transcribed the interview and field notes. After completion of this process, I reached out to each of the study's participants via email and phone calls to ensure that the transcribed information accurately reflected the information each interview participant provided.

As suggested by Hyett et al. (2014), I used various data sources and types to triangulate the data from the primary and secondary sources for assuring the study's reliability and validity. Fusch and Ness (2015) concluded that the application of triangulation can assure the reliability of results and the attainment of data saturation.

Ritchie et al. (2013) stated that data and methodological triangulation involve the use of different sources and types to verify the integrity of, or extend, inferences drawn from the data. Together with the interview questions, I collected archival documents from the study's participants, the HR directors, and company websites to assure the dependability and credibility of my study.

Validity

Leung (2015) explained validity in qualitative research as appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data for assuring the quality of the findings. There is a direct link between data triangulation and data saturation, where data triangulation is a method to attain data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Validity refers to the correctness or precision of a studies' findings and in qualitative research validity concerns the extent to which the study population perceives the descriptions and interpretations of the study phenomena as being reasonable and accurate (Ritchie et al., 2013). Patton (2015) stated that reaching data saturation can assure the study's validity. Validity in qualitative studies relates to the concepts of *credibility*, *transferability*, and *confirmability* (Cope, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013).

Credibility. To establish credibility, a researcher must ensure to identify and describe the participants accurately, and to apply precise data collection procedures to answer the research question (Elo et al., 2014). As stated by Yilmaz (2013), the terms credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity in qualitative research mean that studies' findings are accurate or true, not only from the standpoint of the researcher, but also from that of the participants and the readers of the study. Yilmaz explained that the credibility

of a qualitative study depends on the usage of systematic data collection procedures, multiple data sources, triangulation, thick and rich descriptions, external reviews or member checking, and other techniques for producing trustworthy data. I applied the processes of data and methodological triangulation and member checking throughout my study for assuring the credibility of my study's findings, conclusions and recommendations. Ritchie et al. (2013) explained methodological triangulation as the process that involves the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of, or extend, inferences drawn from the data. Next to the semistructured interviews, I included data obtained from various company document reviews and information gathered from the respective corporate websites. Fusch and Ness (2015) explained this process as exploring the same phenomenon from different angles and perspectives, which enables a researcher to assure studies' validity.

Transferability. Elo et al. (2014) and Yilmaz (2013) referred to transferability as the potential for extrapolation; as the capacity to transfer the study findings to other similar settings and to display that the implications and interpretations apply to the new circumstances. When the researcher provides a detailed description of the initial study's context, enabling the reader to reflect on the interpretations, other researchers can determine the transferability of the inquiry (Anney, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013). Yilmaz (2013) explained that judging the transferability of the study to other situations in a similar setting requires providing a thick description of the setting, context, people, actions, and processes. My doctoral study includes a full description of the methods

applied, including a thorough description of the overall study's context, to enable other researchers to judge my study's transferability to other domains.

Confirmability. As defined by Anney (2014), confirmability refers to the degree to which other researchers can confirm or corroborate the results of an inquiry. As suggested by Anney, I used various approaches to enable others to determine the confirmability of my study, including describing audit trails, using reflexive journals, and employing methodological triangulation. Researchers conducting qualitative research inevitably bring their skills, experiences, and biases into the process. Confirmability ensures that the findings and interpretations reflect the views of the participants and are not unduly swayed by the researcher's preferences or personal agenda (Cope, 2014). Confirmability can be achieved through using member checking with participants and explaining how the findings are linked to the raw data (Tong & Dew, 2016). To strengthen confirmability, I used the processes of member checking and methodological triangulation.

Data saturation. Data saturation occurs from analyzing the data obtained from the interviews (Morse et al., 2014) and other data types. The prospect of reaching data saturation increases when exploring secondary sources such as company documents and websites (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). To ensure I had the appropriate amount of data to analyze, I interviewed the target population and analyzed company documents and websites until I achieved data saturation for each type of data. As secondary data sources, and as indicated by Yin (2014), in addition to the interview data, I gathered associated

data through the companies' archives and online data, including (a) corporate culture information, (b) training plans, and (c) talent development processes.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I reemphasized the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study, explained my role as the researcher, further discussed the method, the study design, ethical procedures, and detailed the rationale behind the method and data collection of midlevel managers' employee engagement strategies to reduce turnover in their respective department/divisions in the luxury hotel industry in China. I also included in this section the process how to organize the data organization, the data analysis techniques, and a description of various approaches to assure the reliability and validity of my doctoral study.

In section 3, I begin with a review of the purpose statement and research question, and included the presentation of the research findings, along with potential applications for professional practice. To conclude this doctoral study, I added the discussion about implications for social change, recommendations for future research, and reflected on my overall experiences in completing study and conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore employee engagement strategies that midlevel managers in luxury hotels in China apply to reduce turnover. I conducted semistructured interviews with five midlevel managers of three luxury hotels in China (Beijing and Shanghai). To assure validity, I used methodological triangulation through comparing findings from interviews, companies' archives, and online data pertaining to (a) corporate culture (b) training plans, and (c) talent development processes. The conceptual framework of Scouller's leadership model facilitated understanding of what successful midlevel managers used to achieve sustainable employee turnover reduction. I classified the findings in four key strategic approaches: (a) corporate culture-related strategies, (b) talent development-related strategies, (c) servant leadership and authentic leadership-related strategies, and (d) mentorship and coaching-related strategies.

Presentation of the Findings

The primary research question in this qualitative multiple case study was: What strategies do midlevel managers in China's luxury hotel industry use to engage employees to reduce employee turnover? The conceptual framework of this study was Scouller's three levels of leadership, directing the focus of the participants' responses to the psychological aspect of leadership and the servant- and authentic leadership theories to engage employees to reduce turnover. All participants had appropriate knowledge and

competencies to answer the research question because they all had experience in their hotels to successfully reduce turnover. Each participating midlevel manager voluntarily contributed to the study by offering her/his perception of successfully reducing turnover through employee engagement strategies. The semistructured interviews consisted of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) and took place in a location and at a date of the participants' choice, and in a quiet and private area.

All midlevel managers answered the interview questions based on their experience and perception of the topic, which I designed to answer the central research question. All participants received the questionnaire prior to the actual interview, and as part of the informed consent letter a few days prior to the meeting. This gave all participants time to read through the questions, to get familiarized with the topic, and to prepare for the answers. To ensure that I properly transcribed the data and information and to verify the accuracy of my comprehension of the participants' responses, I presented each participant a synopsis of the interview transcript. Each of the participants confirmed my interpretation of their feedback during the member-check interview. In addition to interviewing five department managers, I explored and examined archival documents related to employee engagement strategies in the various organizations, and other relevant information about corporate culture and human resources practices in each participant's luxury hotel. The documents included website data, press releases, HR practices, talent development strategies, rewards and recognition practices, and corporate culture information. The outcomes of the analysis indicated that the successful employee

engagement strategies midlevel managers in luxury hotels in China use to reduce turnover related to the following four major themes: (a) corporate culture-related strategies, (b) talent development-related strategies, (c) servant leadership and authentic leadership-related strategies, and (d) mentorship and coaching-related strategies.

Table 2 contains an overview of the four themes and their respective subcategories.

Table 2

Emergent Themes, Subthemes, and Number of Participants (Sources)

Themes	Subthemes	No. of Sources
1 Corporate Culture-Related Strategies	Vision and Mission	5
	Value Systems	5
	Core Alignment by Leadership	4
	Living Values and Practices	5
2 Talent Development-Related Strategies	On-the-job Training	5
	Talent Development Plan	4
	Core Competency-Building	5
	Training Opportunities	5
3 Leadership-Related Strategies	Required Leadership Skills	4
	Leadership Training	5
	Role Model Emphasis	5
	Motivation Techniques	5
4 Mentorship and Coaching-Related Strategies	Leading by Example	5
	Buddy System and Learning-by-Doing	4
	Growth for Both	4

The results from the analysis indicated that the four themes are a combination of topics identified in the literature review, elements highlighted by Scouller's leadership model. The themes in this study revealed that midlevel managers have a greater chance to succeed in reducing turnover if the organization commits to a comprehensive corporate culture, and when midlevel managers continue to improve their professional and leadership competencies, combined with a solid training program to ensure talent development of the employees.

Emergent Theme 1: Corporate Culture-Related Strategies

The first emergent theme revealed that a solid and comprehensive corporate culture is an important base to create successful employee engagement strategies to reduce turnover. As stated by Wei et al. (2014), a company culture is a strategic resource that influences a range of activities within firms and demonstrates that it has an impact on performance. Jing (2015) emphasized that a corporate culture is an important intangible part of an enterprise's foundation for success, and a lack of a positive corporate culture can negatively affect the liveliness, cohesion, and operational efficiency of a corporation. While corporate culture is not the only determinant of organizational success or failure, a positive culture can enable the smooth flow of information and nurtures harmony among its team members (Lee & Lee, 2014). Various indications throughout the analysis of the data revealed that a corporate culture that is communicated, owned, and lived by everyone is at the base of a successful organization. In Table 3, I present the number of participants and the number of times they referenced each subtheme in Theme 1.

Table 3

Subcategories of Emergent Theme 1

Corporate Culture-Related Strategies	No. of Participants	No. of References
Vision and Mission	5	35
Value Systems	5	34
Core Alignment by Leadership	4	24
Living Values and Practices	5	23

Vision and mission. There was a strong alignment among all the participants that their vision and mission of the company are part of the success in aligning the employees' commitment throughout the hotel. Participant 4 explained that a corporate culture is at the base of the hotel's organizational success and the key to creating alignment between leadership and employees in the various departments. Furthermore, she believed that the vision and mission of the hotel, based on the corporate culture, guided everyone in the hotel and assisted every staff member in how to operate the business on a daily basis. Participants 3, 4, and 5 emphasized the point that they review their departmental vision and mission statements on a yearly basis, as part of the strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis process.

Value system. People-oriented management is an essential part of a positive corporate culture, where employees are highly valued and synergistic interactions within and across functional departments exist (Jing, 2015). As highlighted by all five

participants, company values are important to create a solid operation and are at the core of any decision-making process. Participant 3 continued stating that she is inspired by the corporate culture of the hotel, trying to create this special environment in everyday operations by demonstrating the values of the company through examples of service excellence. As stated by Participant 1, the corporate culture plays a very important role because employees need to understand and live the values of the organization.

Furthermore, taking care of others is important, and everyone should support each team member to achieve success. Participant 4 mentioned that the corporate culture aligns everyone on how business gets done, and everyone needs to adhere to the direction, principles, and values. Participant 5 made a similar statement, explaining that core values and the corporate culture are at the base of a successful company, and everyone must embrace and live them to create alignment.

Core alignment by leadership. Participant 5 pointed out that the corporate culture dictates how employees and leaders treat one another, setting the tone and direction for how to conduct business on a daily basis. Participant 3 emphasized the importance of aligning everyone on the corporate culture and stated that leaders need to own the philosophy and the values of the organization to achieve excellence in the team members. Participant 4 discussed leaders' responsibility to always reinforce the core values as part of the corporate culture. Every participant emphasized the importance of receiving comprehensive senior leadership support to achieve success in the various disciplines, especially when it comes to professional and competency building for

midlevel managers. Schmeltz (2014) stated that management plays a critical role in developing, facilitating, and communicating corporate values and identity. The reason for a company to define and communicate corporate values to stakeholders is to build a culture of engaged, reliable, and faithful employees, and is a way of accommodating external stakeholders (Schmeltz, 2014).

Living values and practices. A leader needs to be a role model in how to live the culture, especially the importance of respecting others. Participant 2 emphasized the point of being a role model as well, and the need to ensure the corporate culture and the values are adhered to every day. All participants explained that living the values and leading the team members based on a strong philosophy needs to start with senior leaders. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of leadership to demonstrate and practice the value system of the company as part of their leadership style. Furthermore, she explained that employees need to understand the value system of the organization to fully embrace and live the core culture. As stated by Eccles et al. (2014), successful and long-term focused companies have organized procedures for stakeholder engagement to be more long-term oriented and have a more open policy to share information with employees. Senior leadership of hotels is responsible for creating that environment, by clearly defining a sustainable approach to achieve success, and by teaching and coaching employees and managers, through living and demonstrating organizations' values.

Tie to the conceptual framework. Scouller's leadership model emphasized that leaders need to consistently improve their skills to enhance competencies (Scouller,

2011). A comprehensive corporate culture is necessary to allow leaders to further their professional knowledge, where senior leaders understand the critical aspect of employees' growth, and where everyone can embrace the opportunities to strengthen their overall leadership abilities. Lee and Lee (2014) stated that companies need to focus on long-term goals and build common values that benefit the employees and corporation. Scouller's leadership model focused on employees and leaders, and their ability to further learn and grow to achieve common company goals. To support a leaders' development, Scouller's model focused on the principles and techniques of self-mastery, which is the key to growing one's leadership presence, building trusting relationships with employees, and while staying connected to one's core values (Samosudova, 2017). A leader's core values should align with a company's philosophy and corporate culture as there should be a very strong connection and identity to achieve mutual goals and benefits. Participant 1 stated that the corporate culture plays a very important role in her hotel and ensures that employees understand and live the values of the company. She further elaborated on this point explaining that everyone in the hotel, especially senior leadership, must show the example of how to conduct business and how to behave in the hotel environment, as staff members copy their superiors. Although Scouller's model does not directly explain the importance of a corporate culture and a leader's ability to grow professionally, it is evident from the data that alignment between the value systems and beliefs is essential to create excellence and to achieve the vision of the leader and the company. Every

participant emphasized that a strong corporate culture needs to be at the core of the hotel operation to foster employees' growth, and to create opportunities for all staff members.

Emergent Theme 2: Talent Development-Related Strategies

The second emergent theme showed that talent development and training opportunities are critical to the company's success. The data revealed that for a hotel to achieve sustainable success, employees need to have the appropriate opportunities to further learn and grow in their working environment, where they feel engaged and excited to improve on a consistent basis. Dwomoh, Boachie, and Kwarteng (2017) explained that companies need to view training of employees as an important investment for ensuring the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by employees to perform their job satisfactorily. Ravichandran et al. (2015) stated that employees' identified higher efficiency, better understanding of how to perform tasks, opportunity to move into a higher position, reinvigorated appreciation of the job, and increased earnings as specific benefits from training. The analyses of the data showed that HR managers and the overall leadership support from the senior level are critical elements to ensure that talent development becomes an emphasis of the organization. Involving employees and focusing on their growth are important strategies to engage employees and for midlevel managers to successfully reduce turnover. Participant 1 explained that training and development is a key aspect of creating focused, excited, and engaged team members. She further explained that employees typically respond well when they know that they can learn and grow, and that leaders take care of employees' development needs. Table 4

contains the number of participants and numbers of references to each of the subthemes in the Theme 2.

Table 4

Subcategories of Emergent Theme 2

Talent Development-Related Strategies	No. of Participants	No. of References
On-the-job Training	5	48
Talent Development Plan	4	20
Core Competency-Building	5	19
Training Opportunities	5	15

On-the-job training. Participant 2 mentioned that the responsibility of a leader is to ensure that employees have the right tools and the appropriate competencies to become effective in their work. Therefore, providing enough training to team members, based on their development needs, is very critical to the success of an organization and to reduce turnover. Participant 4 stated that the most effective trainings are *role plays* during the line-ups and other training moments throughout the day and week. As a leader, she must show the example, explain the vision and mission of the company how to move forward every day, and how to execute the daily tasks in the best possible way. All participants explained that on-the-job training is necessary and very effective, as this is the best way for employees to learn. As stated in Ravichandran et al. (2015), on-the-job training is most frequently applied in the hotel service industry. Participant 5 encourages on-the-job

training opportunities for every employee to improve their competencies as well. Teaching, training, and coaching on a daily basis is critical for the success of the department, and a leader needs to ensure that the right processes are in place. Participant 3 highlighted the importance of learning by doing as well; she explained how this approach helped her in creating stronger self-confidence in the employees and how it further strengthened the team spirit as employees become more professional.

Talent development plan. A leader needs to understand the training needs of an employee to properly and effectively plan for promotion opportunities. As indicated by participant 3, constant learning is critical, and a leader must make staff aware of improvement opportunities. Furthermore, a leader needs to understand an employee's personality to be able to assign specific tasks effectively, to improve the learning, and to create the best possible outcome for the team and the overall department. A competent leader has an effective talent development plan in place; he/she is ready and available at all times to conduct such training as he/she is ultimately responsible for the employees' success and growth (participant 4). All five participants discussed their own successes, and the importance of having senior leadership support them in their quest to develop their skills and become better professionals and leaders.

Core competency-building. As mentioned by participant 2, another effective way of strengthening a staff's competency is by offering cross-training opportunities for employees to learn from other departments and to further improve their overall knowledge. Participant 3 explained that involving employees in the decision-making

process is a critical learning tool, which improves their capabilities and competencies, and helps everyone in the team to contribute to the desired outcome. Personal involvement of leadership is critical, and it is the responsibility of every manager to contribute to the professional success of the employees (participant 5). The appraisal process enables a leader to assess an employee's level of competency; as such, these evaluations directly contribute to high morale and increased engagement (Osborne & Hammoud, 2017). Every participant emphasized the importance of employee assessments, and his/her involvement in improving their team members' professional knowledge. Four out of five participants explained in detail how they provide the needed support on a daily basis to ensure their employees can grow based on the needed core competencies.

Training opportunities. As indicated by all five participants, line-ups prior to starting the shift are important tools to communicate, train, and listen to the staff and need to be executed consistently. A leader always must measure training effectiveness by asking questions, observing the team members, and eventually analyzing the results. Dwomoh et al. (2017) stated that organizations' training investment has a considerable indirect and direct effect on a company's bottom line, with a balance among organizations acquired skills, knowledge, abilities, and shareholders wealth. Dwomoh et al. added that any company therefore needs to focus on training its employees, regardless of size, and needs to improve its performance, incorporating tailor- made training that focuses on strategic directions of the organization. Participant 5 described the importance

of company training programs especially for high potential employees and junior leaders. He further mentioned that particular training programs allow staff members to further grow based on their needs and competency gaps and will help those employees improve their professionalism within their job function. Participants 2 and 5 elaborated on the importance of the selection, orientation, and training process for new candidates. Managers need to be flexible and tailor the training method for each employee to accommodate the diverse learning styles (Ravichandran et al., 2015). In luxury hotels, it is vital to choose employees with a natural talent to engage others and who enjoy serving people. Selecting employees who lack the right talent and attitude typically hurts the team spirit and overall engagement.

Tie to the conceptual framework. Training and development programs are crucial in the success of luxury hotels to strengthen their employees' service knowledge and professional skills and to align employees' service behavior with brand values (Chang & Ma, 2014). Scouller (2011) explained that the third level in his model, *personal leadership*, and the focus on competency and skill-building are primary means for creating leadership excellence. Scouller designed his model not only to summarize what leaders should do but also to further strengthen their technical competencies and capabilities. Improving skills is an ongoing journey for every employee, and therefore, senior leaders, together with HR, need to create training programs and opportunities as part of the organization's sustainability plan. As indicated by all participants in this study, leaders should always be open and ready to assist employees with their training needs.

An engaged midlevel manager should assist with appropriate programs, either on-the-job or through organized company training sessions. Engaged leaders need to inspire their followers through demonstrating the leaders' professional abilities as well as through a supporting corporate culture and philosophy, with the team members' continuous professional growth in mind. Engaged employees also focus on self-learning, which should be encouraged by leadership and HR. Participants 1, 3, and 5 explained that it is their responsibility to create the needed training for the employees, and that leaders need to initiate alternative opportunities based on the various competency levels of the employees. Participant 4 reinforced that statement but added that a close collaboration with the training department is essential, and that senior leaders need to be open to additional competency-building sessions for their team members. Every participant was very clear that on-the-job training is the best way to learn and grow, and that they are responsible in their own areas to develop and foster this environment.

Emergent Theme 3: Leadership-Related Strategies

The third emergent theme reflected two important leadership strategies to achieve desired results in reducing turnover through employee engagement approaches. It is evident that leadership competencies are necessary to successfully engage employees, based on Scouller's leadership model and the literature review. Leadership elements that emerged from the interviews were related to the leadership theories of servant leadership and authentic leadership. In Table 5, contains the number of participants and references of the subthemes in the Emergent Theme 3.

Table 5

Subcategories of Emergent Theme 3

Leadership-Related Strategies	No. of Participants	No. of References
Required Leadership Skills	4	29
Leadership Training	5	28
Role Model Emphasis	5	19
Motivation Techniques	5	18

Required leadership skills. All the participants explained how they improved their knowledge and skill levels over the years, and how they were able to move into their current role through hard work, continuous learning, and proving that they are capable of leading team members to meet corporate expectations. Four of the interview participants explained that they spend time with their employees on a daily basis to support them during their daily work, engage with them, and get to know their strengths and weaknesses. Participant 5 stated that the hotel must have a *people culture*, sensing employees and must have leaders who understand the need to *serve* others. She continued to explain that an engaged leader needs to be part of the success of the employees, to coach and teach them, and to be always available to support their growth. Participant 1 mentioned the importance of leadership; leaders need to build trust by living the corporate culture and “walk their talk.” Participant 5 talked about the same issue, indicating that leadership can only be credible if they step-in and lead by example.

Participant 3 emphasized that leaders only become credible if they build solid relationships and gain the trust of the employees. Participant 1 noted that she is always available for her staff, and that it is her responsibility to guide her team members step-by-step, if necessary.

Leadership training. Participant 2 said that leaders need to take full responsibility for successes and failures and for the potential lack of cooperation and understanding from their subordinates. She further elaborated on leadership involvement and responsibility by mentioning that she encourages growth of employees within the team. She implemented a program of task champions, where the employees can fine-tune their skills to become experts, to teach and coach others, and where the selected team members have the opportunity to improve their own leadership skills. All participants stressed the importance of their own previous leadership training to achieve the needed competencies to teach and coach their team members. Participant 3 also stated that employees' growth is a critical part of a leader's daily focus and remains a challenge as she consistently needs to improve her own leadership skills so to improve everyone's capabilities. Furthermore, she explained that employees should always feel comfortable to ask for input, and that a leader must sense when to serve employees to achieve the desired outcome. Leaders have the responsibility to seek additional growth opportunities, either with the assistance of the hotel HR learning classes or online teachings, or by programs offered through the hotel company. Furthermore, he explained that a leader

needs to remain curious to learn and grow, and take advantage of the hotel's training and learning modules.

Role model emphasis. Zhao et al. (2016) stated that servant leaders are usually viewed as role models by their subordinates, especially in a service-specific work environment. Four out of five participants emphasized that authenticity is a critical aspect of a leader's success. Examples from Participants 1, 3, and 5 show that their success formula is to remain real, by explaining to team members that they also made and continuously make mistakes and that this is a part of everyone's growth process. Participant 2 mentioned that she is a role model in how to live the culture, especially what it represents to respect others, living by example. According to the interview participants, it is evident that leaders in the luxury hotel industry need to be role models in everything they do and say, and that authenticity of leadership is critical to engage and excite employees. Liden et al. (2014) mentioned that servant leadership may influence follower- and team-performance outcomes via role modeling and employee identification. Participant 5 stated on several occasions that a leader needs to be humble showing the employees how to improve their competencies, leading by example, and stepping in to assist when it is required. Ma and Tsui (2015) mentioned that especially in the Chinese culture, and based on Confucianism, leaders should be role models to demonstrate the values of seeking self-perfection through learning, meditation, and self-reflection. Participant 5 explained his role, based on the teachings of Confucius, that a leader needs to gain the credibility not by speaking but by knowing and doing. Participant 5 further

stated that he feels the pressure and challenge to be always one step ahead of his team members, which is a motivator for him to continue to seek new learning opportunities.

Motivation techniques. As stated in the study of Stephan, Patterson, Kelly and Mair (2016), enhancing individuals' motivation and skills and changing their decision-making contexts stimulate more proenvironmental, healthy, and prosocial behaviors. Three out of five participants emphasized on the importance of empowering staff members to do their jobs well and independently, and to learn and grow on the job through the assignment of additional tasks. These participants further stated that motivating their employees through empowerment, recognition, and praise is of tremendous value to the success of the team and individuals' growth. Participants 4 and 5 explained that increased wages were an important factor for employees as well, and therefore, a leader must focus on staffs' well-being, continuous growth, and promotion prospects. All the participants highlighted that their senior leaders trust them, and that they receive the empowerment to execute their jobs to their best abilities. Hunter et al. (2013) mentioned that servant leaders spend quality time, forge interpersonal bonds with their followers, and empower them. Leroy et al. (2015) concluded that autonomous work motivation among followers emerges from the synergistic effects whereby leader and follower authenticity combine to enhance follower satisfaction of basic needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Tie to the conceptual framework. As indicated in Scouller's leadership model, two leadership theories: (a) servant leadership, and (b) authentic leadership, are desired styles to

successfully implement the overall leadership model (Samosudova, 2017). Servant leadership theory proposes that when leaders behave in a manner that is consistent with a drive to adopt and enact a leadership role for maximizing stakeholder interest as opposed to self-interest, followers experience increased growth and well-being (Panaccio, Henderson, Liden, Wayne, & Cao, 2015). Furthermore, follower commitment and contributions to organizational and societal goal attainment surpass self-seeking or transactional orientations toward their work. All participants stated that employees' commitment to the well-being of the team members and the focus on achieving the goals together has strengthened through adapting a more servant leadership style. Being an example as a leader, as highlighted by all participants, fosters a work environment where people can thrive and where everyone has the opportunity to learn and become more competent. Authenticity of a leader emerged as a critical part of a leader's success (participants, 1, 2, 3, 5). H. Wang, Sui, Luthans, Wang, and Wu (2014) explained that authentic leaders share the information needed to make decisions, accept others' inputs, and reflect their personal values, motives, and sentiments. Participants 1 and 4 provided examples when they have opened up to the employees, showed empathy, and talked with the staff about their personal experiences. It became evident from these participants that they were able to increase the work spirit, gained the trust of the team members, and were able to create a close, and almost family-style environment.

Emergent Theme 4: Mentorship and Coaching-Related Strategies

Theme 4 focused on the mentorship role of a midlevel manager. The data disclosed that successful leaders need to assist, guide, coach, and teach their employees

through their professional journey. As stated in Fuentes, Alvarad, Berdan, and DeAngelo (2014), there are five components as the basis for a definition of mentorship, including (a) a focus on achievement; (b) the relationship is reciprocal; (c) the relationship is personal; (d) mentors are defined by exhibiting greater experience, influence, and achievement; and (e) mentors support mentees emotionally and psychologically, assist with career and professional development, and are true role models. The analysis of the data showed that the participants understood the importance of mentorship to achieve success, as it was part of their journey to become a leader in the luxury hotel industry. Table 6, provides a summary of the number of participants and references of the subthemes in the Emergent Theme 4.

Table 6

Subcategories of Emergent Theme 4

Mentorship and Coaching-Related Strategies	No. of Participants	No. of References
Leading by Example	5	26
Buddy System and Learning-By-Doing	4	12
Growth for Both	4	11

Leading by example. Mentorship gives the opportunity to lead by example, to work very closely with others, and to increase understanding of employees' motivations, strengths, and weaknesses. Showing support for employees creates a work environment

of trust and enables leaders to focus on critical key elements of employees to achieve sustainable success in their work. Participant 3 said that a mentor and coach is someone who is competent overall to do the job in the best possible way, who can be trusted, and who shows the best way forward by guiding and explaining employees through a desired experience. Furthermore, participant 2 elaborated that in her department, everyone receives the same respect, attention, and focus. “If they see how I respect them, then they will learn and apply respect to others as well”. She added that as a mentor, she is always ready to listen and assist, and to create trust and a solid work environment; leaders need to “walk their talk.” She expects the same from her leaders and employees, especially when mentoring others. Participant 5 said that a mentor must be dedicated to the employees and demonstrate support for their growth. Furthermore, a mentor needs to have the best possible outcome in mind and needs to work with the mentee to show the way forward. Ledlow and Coppola (2013) stated that mentorship involves openness, equality, and trust between the mentor and the mentee.

Buddy-system and learning-by-doing. As stated in Panaccio et al. (2015), servant leadership indirectly boosts organizational performance as a result of attitudinal and behavioral benefits that followers reap from such leaders. A servant leader focuses on fulfilling others’ needs which create a great learning experience through a person-to-person training model. Participant 3 explained that she implemented a buddy-system, assigning a senior employee with the right qualifications and competencies to every new employee in the department. This system works well to ensure that newly arrived staff

can learn and grow fast, on-the-job, and through a dedicated and skilled staff member. Participant 3 explained that mentorship is critical to the success of the employees and to make sure they are happy and integrated into the team. Participant 5 further stated that this system allows a competent employee to coach and engage with a new employee on a daily basis. This program also works for anyone who might need some further training, just to ensure they feel comfortable with the required improvements to succeed in the job. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 5 also explained that mentoring is constant, especially by the senior department leaders and themselves, because the growth of every employee must be at the forefront of each leader's priorities. The same participants stated that training, coaching, and guiding take more time to implement on an individual basis and that these learning tools are focused on the needs of each employee. A leader should never be reluctant to step in and show by example, which enhances the work environment and builds trust among the team members. Such a system is relevant today as it was in the past, and has helped in improving competency levels, employee and guest engagement, and financial success of the department (participant 5).

Growth for both. Participant 4 explained that mentorship is critical to any employee's success and that she experienced mentorship first-hand. She also stated that she succeeded in her career because of her past mentors and leaders, and that she knows that her role as a mentor will make her a better leader as well. Both coaching and mentoring are skill sets to nurture staff and deliver desired results (Serrat, 2017). Serrat also explained that coaching and mentoring are learning and development activities that

share similar roots. All participants identified themselves as being the employees' main coaches with the purpose of improving their competencies to achieve the hotels' goals. A leader must monitor employees' daily routine and coach them to achieve improvements in their service behavior (participant 2 and 5). As concluded by Hein and Chavez (2016), coaching and mentoring activities are effective methods to develop both employees and leaders.

Tie to the conceptual framework. Scouller's leadership model contains both outer and inner levels, and the outer level touches upon the private and public leadership aspects of the model. Scouller focuses on leadership capability-building, interacting with one or more employees, improving their abilities, strengthening competencies, and closely monitoring their progress. As an effective leader, one must empathize with others, try to learn about team members' capabilities and competencies, and further nurture the talents through mentorship and coaching. Caesens, Stinglhamber, and Luypaert (2014) stated that support from a superior through mentorship and training programs bolster line-level employees' work engagement. Coaching skills are a key part of a manager's toolkit, and through regular coaching conversations, leaders can have considerable impact on developing trust, awareness, responsibility and learning, and ultimately improve employees' engagement and performance (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). All five participants shared their views on their own coaching skills. The participants' stressed that they have received useful training from other coaches, not only in their respective hotels but throughout their careers with different hotel companies. Participant 5

highlighted that the company, HR, and the training department leaders need to fine-tune the mentorship and coaching training programs because leaders in the industry have become younger, with fewer honed competencies and less actual leadership experience.

Research Findings Alignment with Findings from the Literature.

The results of this qualitative multiple case study tie with the existing literature, as it relates to the central research question; What strategies do midlevel managers in China's luxury hotel industry use to engage employees to reduce employee turnover? A solid corporate culture is at the core of a great organization, and influences results (Pinho et al., 2014). Wei et al. (2014) concurred by stating that a corporate culture is a strategic resource that influences a range of activities within organizations, and that empirical evidence from management and marketing demonstrates that corporate culture impacts performance. As stated in Mutua and Simba (2017), corporate culture is the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, and assumptions that shape the way in which employees behave and get things done. All participants stressed the importance of a corporate culture that aligns the team members, leaders, and line-employees to a specific set of values. The outcome of the study emphasizes that values need to be lived by all and need to be reiterated in various ways throughout the organization on a daily basis. The study participants explained that they need to lead the way, become role models for their subordinates, instill the values consistently into everyone, and build the required trust through not only words – but actions. For a leader to become credible and to build trust, she or he needs to set the tone and align with the core values of the company. As stated

by Eccles et al. (2014), successful and sustainable companies have a corporate culture of alignment, have organized procedures for stakeholder engagement, to be more long-term oriented, and have an open policy to share information with employees. Four out of five participants clearly emphasized the importance of well-understood and communicated corporate practices and noted that their company has clearly communicated procedures to allow employees to speak up, and to make their voices heard on a consistent basis and through various channels. All the midlevel managers participating in this study understand the importance of creating an open-door policy, listening to the concerns and input of the staff members at all times, and to involve employees in the decision-making process to achieve sustainable success.

A further theme highlighted in the analysis is the importance of talent development for all the team members, to give employees the opportunity to learn and grow constantly through HR processes, on-the-job-training, and other means. All participants explained the importance of their further growth that they will be able to cope with management challenges and leadership issues. Hein and Chavez (2016) stated that leadership development is critical in maximizing the potential of the leader capability and growth of human capital and leadership competencies. Most of the study participants explained that development opportunities are available for them, either in their own properties or in other hotels for solid cross-trainings. Furthermore, specific leadership training programs are offered for midlevel managers by all the different luxury hotel companies, preparing them not only for new challenges but also for their own growth,

and to acquire needed knowledge to move into a higher leadership position. Leaders in the hospitality industry perceive training to be the key input to ensure peak performance and consider soft skills to be the most important competency for value generation (Chang & Ma, 2014). Four out of five participants stated the importance of training on-the-job as the most effective approach to teach and strengthen the employees' competencies.

Having a mentor guiding employees through various scenarios, and in a repetitive way, will assist staff members to learn technical as well as soft skills (participants 2 & 3).

Chang and Ma (2014) indicated in their study that successful hotels offer training programs to strengthen employees' service knowledge and professional skills and align employees' service behavior with brand values. C. Y. Lee and Lee (2014) explained that especially in China, companies need to develop their values, code of ethics, and standards of behavior and improve the professional competence of their employees based on a people-oriented mindset. Furthermore, leaders can impact their employees positively through the focus on training and education, guidance, inspiration, and incentives, which will lead an organization's employees to acquire a strong mental drive. Ravichandran et al. (2015) stated that proper training leads to enjoyment at work and enhanced job productivity. All participants emphasized the importance of continuous learning to create a work environment where employees feel comfortable and valued.

The findings of this study indicated that leaders' authenticity and focus to serve others are highly effective in creating a strong work environment. These particular leadership elements were highlighted in Scouller's leadership model, the conceptual

framework of this study, and also tie to the findings from the literature review. On several occasions, the study participants discussed the importance for a leader to show humility. Sousa and Van Dierendonk (2014) explained that humility is about modesty reflected in a servant-leader's tendency to give priority to the interest of others, acknowledging mistakes and giving room to learn. Servant leaders tend to be respected and admired by followers, which motivates employees to emulate their leaders' behaviors (Liden et al., 2014). All study participants mentioned that it is critical to become a role model for the employees. Especially in China, as stated by almost every participant, it is necessary to always show, explain, and lead the way for the younger generation to see, feel, and understand the importance of specific behaviors in the luxury hotel industry. It became evident that successful midlevel managers, as in the example of the five participants, are very authentic when engaging with the employees on a daily basis. All participants emphasized the importance of being *real* and that employees need to know the true person behind the leader. Nelson et al. (2014) explained that authentic leadership impacts the work climate in a positive manner, thereby increasing the psychological levels of well-being at work. As stated in Leroy et al. (2015), authentic leadership represents a form of leadership that originates from authentic functioning and seeks the development of the followers and, more specifically, serves to promote authentic followership. Yagil and Medler-Liraz (2014) mentioned that authentic leaders represent principles of honesty and transparency, which become more valuable as the complexity of the business world increases. Authentic leadership is characterized by four core behaviors; (a) balanced

processing, (b) relational transparency, (c) an internalized moral perspective, and (d) self-awareness (Read & Laschinger, 2015). In addition, the authors stated that by honestly presenting themselves to others, authentic leaders model openness and acceptance, encouraging new graduates to feel safe disclosing their learning needs, professional goals, and areas for development.

Summary

The findings in this research indicated that successful midlevel managers apply clear strategies to engage employees and re-emphasize the critical points on a consistent basis. The important components to creating sustainable success in reducing turnover by midlevel managers include (a) corporate culture-related strategies, (b) talent development-related strategies, (c) leadership-related strategies, and (d), mentorship and coaching-related strategies. Other data I collected from company archival documents and company-related information gathered through the different websites, confirmed the findings from the interviews, and further strengthened the relevancy of the different themes. As stated by Fusch and Ness (2015) using methodological triangulation assured the reliability of the study and occurred by using multiple sources of evidence and the attainment of data saturation. In addition, it became evident that the findings are in line with Souller's (2011) three levels of leadership model, emphasizing the critical aspect of core competencies needed for any leader to be successful in creating credibility among team members, and the critical aspect of applying servant- and authentic leadership attributes and mentorship and coaching approaches to engage employees consistently.

The study outcomes also highlighted the importance of a clearly defined corporate culture, where everyone in the organization can contribute to strengthen the values of the company and achieve long-lasting success for the hotel and all stakeholders.

Applications to Professional Practice

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies midlevel managers in luxury hotels in China use to engage employees to reduce turnover. The analysis of the interview responses from the different study participants in Beijing and Shanghai, and all related company documents and online information, revealed four major themes: (a) corporate culture-related strategies, (b) talent development-related strategies, (c) servant leadership and authentic leadership-related strategies, and (d) mentorship and coaching-related strategies. It became evident that Scouller's leadership model is an appropriate and guiding theory for midlevel managers to improve their employee engagement strategies to reduce turnover. The findings of this study indicate opportunities for leadership and HR professionals of luxury hotels in China to assist midlevel managers to strengthen their leadership competencies, improve their professional knowledge, and ways to increase credibility as a role model to engage employees more successfully. As stated by Kumar, Adhish, and Deoki (2014) developing self-management skills, such as communicating vision, charisma, integrity, self-awareness, time management, and keenness to acquire and learn is essential for becoming an effective leader. Scouller's leadership model emphasizes those points very clearly, with an important focus on task-oriented competencies as a base for a leader's

development. The study's findings confirm the importance of competency-building as a key element of every leader, and as an ongoing opportunity to learn and grow. Leaders gain credibility through demonstrating competency in their own field, and by teaching, coaching, and guiding employees on a daily basis to achieve their own professional aspirations. As highlighted by all five study participants, learning from a role model was invaluable to their own growth and careers. Based on Nottingham, Barrett, Mazerolle, and Eason (2016), an ideal mentor is someone supportive who has a willingness to help people and invest time in assisting in skill growth and development. Senior leaders are challenged to understand their own roles in hotels to ensure that they represent leadership ideals midlevel managers can aspire to. A further crucial outcome of this study focuses on corporate identity, culture, and the value system of the organization. Based on the responses of all five study participants, successful midlevel managers indicated the importance of a well-thought through and communicated value system throughout the entire hotel. Employees feel part of the company and its mission and vision when they understand the clear direction, and when they see the senior leaders embrace and live the core culture on a daily basis.

Schneider, Erhardt, and Macey (2013) explained that the work environment in terms of its culture assists employees to see beyond their individual demographic differences and focus on the group and the achievement of the group's goals. A strong and well-understood and lived corporate culture creates an atmosphere where employees look not only at their own well-being but assist others to become successful within a

group setting. A solid work environment based on a well-communicated and instilled corporate culture will contribute to increase employee retention and reduce employee turnover.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change from this doctoral study include the development of leadership strategies of midlevel managers to reduce employee turnover in their departments and thereby improve customer service. Midlevel managers can positively impact team members by applying various leadership approaches to improve employee engagement, and to create an environment where team members feel welcome, appreciated, and where their customer service talents can be further developed. Midlevel managers with improved strategies to engage employees can create a fair and trustworthy environment and provide the necessary support for team members to learn and grow based on their own development needs. Stephan et al. (2016) explained positive social change as distinct combinations of change mechanisms enabled and supported by organizational practices. Improved leadership strategies, processes and practices enabling midlevel managers to better engage employees will result in more stable teams, where employees can excel, help improve the value of the company through increased competency and assist in strengthening the potential for the business to serve and support communities. Successful hotel companies can contribute to local economies through higher occupancies and rates that increase their top lines leading to competitive advantage. Improved competencies and higher hotel standards can help cities to

strengthen competitiveness and attract more businesses from diverse sectors and industries.

A renewed and more competent approach and focus from hotel companies to engage employees will create opportunities for all stakeholders. Especially the local talent, who can further learn and grow, can create opportunities for themselves, their peers, and eventually contribute to the growth of the hotel business in local markets. Positive social change requires individuals to take action to improve citizens' conditions by engaging in prosocial behaviors supporting communities (O'Cass & Griffin, 2015).

Recommendations for Action

Senior leadership and corporate officers in charge of HR and management, including executives in charge of divisions in hotels, need to have a clear understanding and alignment with the corporate culture, as indicated in the findings under emergent Theme 1. One of the learnings from the participants' interviews, company documents, and website information is that there are discrepancies among different luxury hotel brands in corporate culture understanding, comprehension from employees, and communication on a daily basis within properties. A company's core values need to be reviewed more critically by senior hotel leaders, as a solid corporate culture creates identity for employees, and enables employees to contribute to achieving long-term success. As stated in Wei et al. (2014), organizational culture affects a firm's decision making and organizational learning. Hotel companies, especially senior leaders in the luxury hotel environment in China, need to focus on a corporate culture that aligns all

employees, and indicates the direction through a clearly communicated mission and vision. Midlevel managers are responsible to create an atmosphere of excitement, learning, and personal growth for their employees. Senior leaders and supportive corporate executives need to communicate the necessity to create opportunities for all to learn and grow within the organization. A solid corporate culture allows for a comprehensive support system, processes and procedures, to assist managers, supervisors, and employees to achieve their goals. Company senior leaders need to review the corporate culture and its use for increasing competitiveness in an ever-changing market environment.

As stated in the emergent Theme 2, talent development should be at the forefront of every leader and as part of the company's value system and needs to be constantly revisited in terms of processes for providing company support. Bruning and Tung (2013) highlighted the challenges that confront firms in the Asian region as organizations seek to attain and/or sustain economic growth and development, and recognize the importance of leadership development and global talent management. Iglesias and Saleem (2015) explained that companies should see their employees as internal clients whom they need to support, satisfy and take care of because employee behavior heavily influences the relationships that the brand maintains with its customers. HR policies and practices are key influencers of a company's corporate culture (as stated in Iglesias & Saleem, 2015).

The findings of this study should be interesting not only for hotel HR leaders in luxury hotels in China but as well for corporate officers in HR and overall leadership and

midlevel managers. Applying these proposed themes within the different hotel companies may assist hotels to implement or fine-tune processes concerning corporate culture, leadership training, and employee development. These findings may be especially important for midlevel managers to engage employees consistently and effectively, resulting in better employee retention rates, and to create growth opportunities for leadership and the hotel. Teaching and communicating these findings can be organized through meetings, seminars, and larger conferences to interested hotel company leaders. I will organize various leadership sessions in my own hotel environment, work with other senior leaders of luxury hotels to enhance various training programs and conduct leadership seminars, and further strengthen the competencies of HR leaders, learning managers, and departmental trainers in luxury hotels in China. Furthermore, based on the findings of the study, I will share the learning with my own corporate leaders at the completion of this doctoral study.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this study, I included three distinct limitations. The first limitation was that the findings might not be transferable to other Chinese luxury hotels outside of Shanghai and Beijing, which are primary cities with a longer standing tradition of luxury hotel operations compared with second- and third-tier cities. The first recommendation for further research includes conducting future research in different large Chinese cities, for example Guangzhou or Shenzhen, and then in other upcoming and growing cities. As China is developing rapidly in various parts of the country, it would be important to seek

alignment or differences in approaches in other geographical locations. Understanding those differences and/or similarities could be helpful to learn to improve overall strategies and to teach midlevel managers about needed improvements in different size markets.

The second limitation was that the participants may not openly reveal information, concerns, and critical strategies about their employee engagement and leadership approaches during the interview process, affecting the potential input. Because the participants are working for competitor hotels with various competency levels and length of service in the industry, they might not feel comfortable to reveal critical information about their successful engagement strategies to reduce turnover. The second recommendation for further studies includes the participation of midlevel managers from the same brand of hotels as part of an agreed study with a particular hotel company. Researching within a single hotel company could eliminate the concern of not receiving the full support of the midlevel managers to conduct a thorough study. Findings could assist the hotel leaders to better understand the discrepancies within employee engagement and leadership strategies, and to create hotel-specific training programs and opportunities to align midlevel managers in their approaches to reduce their turnover numbers.

The third limitation of the study was the selected sample size of five midlevel managers in various luxury hotels in China (Beijing and Shanghai), which might have limited the ability to transfer the findings of this doctoral study. The third recommendation for further research is to conduct the study using a larger sample. As

indicated by Patton (2015), a larger case study population size could improve the transferability of the study. Including more midlevel managers could broaden the level of information, and potentially increase the understanding about the study topic and learning in general.

Reflections

The journey of my doctoral study at Walden University was a very enriching experience and full of great learning opportunities. I enjoyed the various courses, especially in the beginning of the program, gaining the needed competencies to conduct research with full confidence. Some of the study topics challenged me more than I anticipated but allowed me, to gain more important insights about the subject matter. I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge throughout, the great friendships established, and the interactions with the various professors and peers. Every semester was a new highlight for me, and I was anticipating the new learning topics with great excitement and joy. During these studies I lost my father, and I promised him that I will work harder, as well for him, and to make him proud. The entire process made me a more solid and competent business leader, as I was able to apply many of the study subjects within my own environment almost immediately. I have seen encouraging results, not only from my professors' feedback but as well in my own leaders and employees of the various hotels. Several of my employees were part of this special journey, and together, we were able to strengthen our professional competencies. Furthermore, my overall viewpoint as a

business leader has greatly evolved and improved, allowing me to look at business issues with greater ease and with more determination to adopt appropriate solutions.

The data collection process was a very exciting last step in my doctoral study process, allowing me to learn the critical issues and strategies applied in the domain of my study topic. I was initially concerned about potential bias when interviewing midlevel managers in my field of competency, but I learned through the process, and with the assistance of the professors, to focus on the researcher's main task of listening, engaging, and receiving open and honest answers to my various questions. I was anticipating these interviews and analysis for a long time, and the culmination in reaching a conclusion was a very important and proud moment. I perhaps underestimated the timing of the various steps in my doctoral study. I appreciate the thoroughness of all the feedback received from the entire faculty as it made me a more focused researcher, a better scholar, and eventually a more determined and competent professional. The outcome of my doctoral study improved my overall knowledge about the hotel business and different hotel brands through the lens of midlevel managers, and assisted me to increase my comprehension about the very important topic of employee engagement to reduce turnover in the luxury hotel industry in China.

Conclusion

High employee turnover rates in luxury hotels in China have become an important focus for hotel companies, senior leaders and various other stakeholders. Direct and indirect costs have been associated with employee turnover rates in luxury hotel in China,

which can have serious financial impacts for a hotel organization. My study revealed that different key strategies for midlevel managers can positively affect employee engagement to reduce turnover, eventually improving the hotel's bottom line.

Luxury hotels lead the industry in different aspects, from higher service levels to increased revenues and profitability for hotel companies and ownership. To sustain and meet expectations from all stakeholders, hotel companies offer various training and learning opportunities for their employees to enhance their technical competencies and overall leadership skills. Beyond the formal classroom training, a company can provide different options to improve employees' professional abilities. A company's corporate culture and the senior leaders' understanding and focus dictate the approach to a company's structure and organization, the alignment on the firm's vision and mission, and the importance of achieving employees' wellbeing, talent development and employee satisfaction to create and perpetuate service excellence.

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Appendix A: National Institute of Health Certificate



Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you found most effective to reduce employee turnover?
2. How do you involve your team members in the decision-making process?
3. What mentoring programs do you offer your employees as part of your retention strategy?
4. What barriers did you encounter to implementing the strategies, and how did you address the implementation barriers?
5. How do you assess the efficacy of the strategies for engaging employees and reducing employee turnover?
6. How do you motivate your employees daily?
7. What would you like to add about how you are reducing employee turnover?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
Midlevel Manager Leadership Strategies to Reduce Turnover in Luxury Hotels in China	
by	
Iwan R. Dietschi	
What to Do	What to Say (Script)
<p>Meet the participant for lunch/dinner or afternoon tea, and introduce the interview process</p>	<p>I will thank the participant for agreeing to participate in the interview.</p> <p>I will explain the process of participation to the midlevel manager, communicate that the participant was invited in this doctoral research because he/she is a midlevel manager in a luxury hotel in China (Shanghai or Beijing), and who has excelled in strategies to reduce turnover in her/his respective department/division.</p> <p>I will brief the participant about the purpose of the research, the time required to conduct the interview, which should not be longer than one hour.</p> <p>At this stage, I will present a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B), explain the participant in details the overall content, the process and purpose of the audio recording or handwritten notes of the interview, and I will give a summary of the interview questions, for the participant to better understand and mentally prepare. I will then ask to sign the document.</p> <p>It is important to clarify that the participation in this study is voluntary, and if the midlevel manager decides to withdraw, then she/he will be able to do so at any time, and without prior notice. The process can include a verbal communication (meeting or phone call) or email, and this even after the interview process is completed. Every participant will receive my contact details.</p> <p>I will ask several questions with the purpose to learn more about their strategies to reduce turnover in their respective</p>

	department/division.
<p>conducting the interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Check for nonverbal cues (body language) · Paraphrase as needed · Ask probing Questions to get more in-depth information and understanding 	Q1. What strategies have you found most effective to reduce employee turnover?
	Q2. How do you involve your team members in the decision-making process?
	Q3. What mentoring programs do you offer your employees as part of your retention strategy?
	Q4. What barriers did you encounter to implementing the strategies, and how did you address the implementation barriers?
	Q5. How do you assess the efficacy of the strategies for engaging employees and reducing employee turnover?
	Q6. How do you motivate your employees daily?
	Q7. What would you like to add about how you are reducing employee turnover?
Wrapping-up of the interview	<p>I will remind the participant that I will provide her/him with a detailed summary of my interpretations of her/his responses, to review in details, and to validate.</p> <p>I will request the copies of the documents relevant to the topic that the participant agreed to provide when accepting the invitation for participation in the study.</p> <p>I will thank the participant for taking time to participate in the interview process, and remain at their disposal for any further input, concerns, or potential questions they might have.</p>
Scheduling of the member-checking interview, and follow-up to the initial interview, based on the responses and researcher interpretations	I will arrange a place, date, and time for the member-checking of the interview and my interpretations of the responses. The time and date will need to be discussed with the participants, but should not be longer than two weeks after the initial interview.