

**“A qualitative investigation into the Great Resignation in Ireland:
The reasons behind employee turnover within the tech industry
during the COVID-19 pandemic”.**

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of Ireland.



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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the reasons why workers within the tech industry in Ireland resigned from their roles during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the Great Resignation being a relatively new topic, limited research and investigations have been completed to get a deeper understanding on the reasons that led to decisions to resign, notably within the tech industry.

Data was collected through six respondents during semi-structured interviews with employees of different tech companies. Respondents had chosen to resign from their role since the pandemic unfolded rapidly in Ireland in approximately April 2020 and are now working in the tech industry. The researcher used open ended questions to gain a better understanding of their reasons as to why they resigned, focusing on four key areas of pay, work-life balance, relationships with management and training, with the aim of the study to advise tech companies on how to implement policies to reduce already high turnover rates and to retain their employees. The qualitative data gained from respondents was analysed thematically to allow for both existing and potential new ideas and themes to emerge from the data. The analysis identified themes and was compared with the academic literature reviewed, such as the priority of career progression, the need for flexible working and the fact that pay is not a main motivator when resigning and searching for a new role.

The researcher imparted recommendations for companies within the tech industry to implement more up-to-date strategies and policies to retain employees since the occurrence of the pandemic, with the findings expected to assist in lowering high turnover rates during the period of the Great Resignation. The study has limitations of sample size with six respondents, but allows a basis for further research in the tech industry on the reason behind resignations and the impact those reasons have on turnover within the industry.

Library Submission Form

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

‘The Great Resignation’ is a new phenomenon that has arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic, coined by Anthony Klotz (a professor at Texas A&M University) to describe the pool of people who are either resigning from, or reevaluating their employment since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020 (Mehta, 2021). Statistics show four million Americans resigned from their jobs in July 2021 and the resignation figure remained unusually high for the remainder of 2021 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). This seismic turnover within the workforce could not only lead to different career choices for employees, but for employers, could lead to a gap in the workforce for many different roles and levels.

1.2 Reason for research from a HRM perspective

Turnover can become a big problem for many companies, but especially where skills are sparse, time to backfill is long, or recruitment costs are high (CIPD, 2021). Evidence shows upwards of a 30% attrition rate in certain job categories, with clients in the tech industry describing the turnover as unrelenting (Breitling *et al.*, 2021). The high level of turnover in the tech industry standing at 13.2% (LinkedIn, 2021), coupled with the high skill level required in the field means that companies in this space cannot afford to lose employees and need to investigate into the reasons behind resignations. Slowing turnover and improving retention are issues that are important to companies in order to save cost, save time and to ensure strategic success. The cost to replace someone in an organisation can be up to 6-9 months of their yearly salary (Lynchburg Regional SHRM, 2017). In fact, organisations who search to understand the reason behind their turnover can highlight issues that currently exist (such as career progression or compensation) and therefore, can aid in improving their retention and minimising turnover and the costs associated with it (CIPD, 2021).

With the Great Resignation being a relatively new topic in 2021, there are not many studies conducted thus far in Ireland on reasons behind the surge in resignations. Current research is mainly US based and may help give a baseline judgement for the new trend, but potential differences between the two countries may give way to variations in employees’ reasons for resignation. Focusing the research on Ireland will fill a gap in current literature, therefore, this research looks at the Great Resignation as a phenomenon in Ireland. Primary qualitative research will be conducted on a sample of approximately six people who have

resigned from their jobs since April 2020, to examine the reasons behind their own resignations during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation. The main themes uncovered focus on pay, training, relationships with management and work-life balance, with the theme of career progression being uncovered during primary research.

1.3 Overview of project structure

The research project is broken into six chapters:

Chapter One: Chapter one introduces the topic of the Great Resignation, providing background and context to the recent issue, whilst outlining the objectives of the research and building logic for the need for more research in the area.

Chapter Two: The literature review gives a deeper analysis of recent literature (such as academic articles and books), reviewing turnover theory and models to compare and contrast normal turnover periods to the phenomenon of the Great Resignation and considers recent research on the topic.

Chapter Three: The previous chapters allow the researcher to formulate a research question in chapter three, and also to outline the aims and objectives of the study. The research methodology is also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Four: The analysis of results is conducted and the main findings from the primary research are outlined.

Chapter Five: A more in-depth discussion of findings is presented alongside the literature reviewed in chapter two.

Chapter Six: This chapter concludes the study and provides recommendations to companies within the tech industry to review policies and procedures with the aim of lowering turnover and improving retention.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 An important note on the Great Resignation

On further research, it is found that the term ‘the Great Resignation’ has been somewhat misaligned at times, with some having the idea that employees are leaving the workforce completely. This idea is contrasted by research from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics where 4.3 million citizens resigned from their roles in August 2021 to move into different jobs, or were looking for roles with better reward and benefits (Landau, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that the Great Resignation is not necessarily putting a complete end to employment for those who do resign, but rather, people changing workplaces or roles due to several factors explored later in this paper.

Confirming earlier figures, data collected by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (2021) clearly shows constant and powerful increases in voluntary resignations in a vast range of sectors. An August 2021 Job Seeker survey finds 55% of the workforce in the US are more than likely to search for a new role in the next year (Bankrate, 2021). These figures make it even more pertinent for an investigation into the reasons behind resignations and to discover if employers can use these findings to explore methods to retain the talent they already possess during this phenomenon. The important question is, how does this phenomenon differ from previous periods of normal voluntary turnover? The research above shows that numbers of resignations have increased sharply, leading to higher turnover than the pre-pandemic era. To understand this phenomenon, the factors behind an individual’s decision to resign should be investigated through literature both pre-pandemic and then compared to post-pandemic, to discover if the resignation factors have changed, in turn leading to the increase in turnover.

Before going further, it is important when mentioning turnover in this research to recognise the difference between voluntary and involuntary turnover. As this study intends to focus on the reasons why employees resign from their roles, this leans more toward voluntary turnover, which can be described as when someone in an organisation who received compensation voluntarily ceases their membership (Hom and Griffeth, 1995). Involuntary turnover is the opposite meaning, where an employee is terminated from their position (for example, if they are made redundant) which is not relevant to this research, as this research is seeking where employees were in control of the situation and exercised their choice to resign

as a result of a decision process. Secondly, ‘turnover’ and ‘turnaway’ are two separate concepts that need to be defined. Turnover can be defined as when an employee resigns from an organisation but stays in the same profession, whereas turnaway is described as moving profession to another field either inside or outside of the organisation (Porto Bellini *et al.*, 2019). These definitions will be imperative later in the research to create a narrower focus to define the population and sample into those who are ‘turnover’ rather than ‘turnaway’.

2.2 Existing turnover literature and turnover models

To understand the underpinning concept of voluntary employee turnover before comparing it to the Great Resignation, it is best to look at some underlying theoretical models to explain turnover. A deep dive into turnover modelling and ideation carried out by Morell *et. al* classifies two traditions of turnover research; the economic/labour market school and the psychological school. The economic school primarily focuses on factors such as labour supply and demand and availability of other jobs, whereas the psychological school centres on the affects and the decision dimension of turnover (Morell *et al.*, 2001). With the economic school based on the labour market and other opportunities, some authors such as Dreher and Dougherty (1980) and Morell *et al.* (2001) criticise the relationship between employment opportunity and turnover as it is not practical when describing and predicting an employee’s decision to resign from their role. In the psychological school, analysis of turnover is aimed at describing and forecasting an employee’s decision to resign, so occupies research with a person’s individual choice and the models assume homogeneity amongst the population concerned. This is more suitable to aid in the creation of strategies to manage turnover in comparison to the economic/labour market accounts, as they are voluntarist and highlight the factor of individual choice rather than the more determinist external influences of the economic accounts. This criticism is important to consider when researching, as it is noted by theorists that the reasoning behind leaving an organisation may actually have no correlation with their work environment (Lee and Mitchell, 1994) and therefore, a range of other variables need to be considered. As the economic school focuses more on external labour market factors, for the purpose of this research, it is more appropriate to examine the psychological school in-depth, as the reason behind individuals leaving their roles and the choices they make are being investigated.

2.2.1 Early turnover research: March and Simon’s model

One of the first formal models for turnover is based on the two factors of ease of movement and desirability (March and Simon, 1958). This model is often cited by contemporary

turnover theorists and forms the foundation of subsequent models within turnover literature. This early model is not without some limitations and criticism from others in the field, mainly both that an individual's potential desire for long-term development may not be considered an influence, alongside the fact it does not consider in what stage an individual is at on their career journey (Morell *et al.*, 2001). These two personal factors omitted in the model may greatly sway intentions to resign from a role, potentially with an even bigger impact during a global pandemic. For example, someone who is towards the end of their career may decide it is easier for them to stay in a role due to impending retirement, regardless of their current levels of satisfaction, or someone who is earlier in their career journey may decide to resign in seek of further career progression as that is their priority at that moment of their journey.

This model was used as a foundation for other turnover models in both schools and the two main factors of ease of movement and desirability developed into job availability (if the labour market is favourable for employees, they would move) and job dissatisfaction (dissatisfaction would induce a hunt for alternatives) by Mobley (1977) and Price and Mueller (1981). In both of these situations, if a better job was found, voluntary turnover would be the end result. Mobley (1977) formulated links between affects and quits, with Price and Mueller (1981) giving way to a range of both organisational and environmental antecedents that primarily affect resignations due to the individual's job attitudes. This development in the research allows us to now paint a bigger picture of turnover with the introduction of antecedents that could potentially begin to inform the reasons behind turnover in organisations and lastly, leading us closer to the reasoning behind why people resign from their roles.

2.2.2 Development of turnover models and ideations into predictive tools

Later research within the final stage of the 20th century such as Hulin, Roznowski and Hachiya (1985) and Steers and Mowday (1981) move to focus more on the predictive aspect of voluntary employee turnover and culminates that contextual conditions (the environment the business creates such as pay practices) and job attributes (for example teamwork and autonomous working) form the basis of leaving intentions and actions. Other authors such as Lee and Mitchell (1994) narrate four individual decision paths when describing turnover, which can both lead to suggest that the turnover process is different for different situations, shaped by individual life circumstances and certain relevant job-market conditions rather than following a linear decision process. This point is imperative to consider when conducting further research as it may be found that personal circumstances will affect the outcome of an

individual's decision and it may not be entirely due to job satisfaction and the organisational environment as seen earlier. On the second point of job-market conditions, Michaels and Spector (1982) are sceptical of this, raising the point that labour market perceptions of individuals potentially have no correlation with actual market realities. If individuals are making perceptions based on the labour market for their profession, it remains to be seen if an individual's perception of their market may be different throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to normal periods of turnover.

Thus far, the literature has identified there are different schools of thought and different models that can be considered when looking at turnover within organisations. Turnover models have evolved throughout the years from basic bivariate models to more complex models that include both a range of external and internal factors. Some of the authors above have mentioned there are many individual and personal factors as to why people resign from their roles, focusing more closely on antecedents as the models and literature evolves. Even though aspects of the research explore potential predictors of turnover behaviour, bivariate accounts (those with two variables) are insufficient to apprehend the phenomenon. For this research therefore, looking at basic turnover models will not suffice, and other ideations and theories should be discussed to have a more significant insight rather than a narrow insight into the understanding of voluntary turnover.

2.3 Push-pull factors and reasons to resign from roles

The existing turnover research and models seen before pose some problems and questions, mainly in the area of their predictive power. Lee and Mowday (1987) note that most researchers are inclined to pinpoint prediction as a criterion when critiquing models, but according to some authors, it is generally more important for understanding the factors to be the goal of enquiry (Morell *et al.*, 2001). As discovered earlier with Steers and Mowday (1981) and Hulin *et al.* (1985), understanding the reasons why people resign from their roles led to models trying to focus more on the predictive aspect of voluntary turnover, bringing antecedents into research that form the basis of leaving intentions and actions. This helps us to narrow down areas to research into, narrowing down into the specific reasons why people resign from their roles.

A surprising warning from Mobley *et al.* (1979) that HR practitioners admit there are several factors that influence the actual written recorded reason for a person resigning from their job. Morell *et al.* (2001) and Campion (1991) share similar views that the factors may

not correspond to the real reason for leaving, either on the organisation's side (some reasons may cast the organisation in a bad light) or the employee side (they could feel it may harm their career prospects). Therefore, it is important and potentially more valid for a neutral party to investigate the resignation criteria with the leavers themselves, as this could have a positive influence for more accurate turnover prediction and improve the research within the field. Taking this warning into consideration, Branham (2012) has compiled and categorised thousands of comments from leavers themselves since 1998, with his method breaking them into 'push' factors and 'pull' factors in order to improve the research and make it more accurate.

2.3.1 Push-pull factors

To focus in on the push and pull factors, CIPD (2021) note that there are certain 'pull' reasons (can be described as external factors, for example, the attraction of another organisation) and push reasons (internal factors either to the individual or organisation, for example, where the individual seeks an alternative role due to dissatisfaction with remuneration) that cause individuals to resign from their roles. Hulin *et al.* (1985) agree that push-pull studies are more likely to produce better understanding of voluntary turnover than narrow focus models mentioned previously.

The comprehensive research by Branham (2012) lists several trigger events that bring on employee disengagement and throughout their research, also describes 'the last straw', an event that pushes or pulls the individual to make the decision to resign. This is similar to earlier findings by Lee and Mitchell (1994) and their unfolding model of turnover, where the majority of voluntary turnovers (63%) occur after a shocking event they coined a 'shock to the system', which can result in an individual stopping and considering the meaning and consequences of the event in relation to their current role and company. Maertz and Campion (2004) concur, finding an individual's intention to resign are often brought about by certain circumstances or following an occurrence of an event. A recent example of this is found in a study in Brazil of IT professionals during a crisis. Porto Bellini *et al.* (2019) finds the crisis further impacted the intention of IT professionals to resign from their roles and that the older the professional, the more likely they were to 'turnaway' from the profession rather than turnover. The study investigates feelings pre-crisis and during a crisis-conscious moment after the Brazilian government admitted the tough economic situation. This event can be described as a shock to the system and akin to the COVID-19 pandemic, may sway individuals in terms of leaving their roles.

A key point to note when discussing ‘shocks to the system’ that authors such as Campion (1991) acknowledge the voluntariness of turnover may vary in circumstances. For example, if an individual left their role to care for their children or a dependent during the COVID-19 pandemic (the shock to the system), does this fit the criteria of necessary or voluntary turnover? This expands the need for exploratory qualitative research with individuals themselves as this shock may have varying correlation with their level of job satisfaction or factors to do with their current or future organisations themselves. To take into account the ‘shock to the systems’ potential impact on an individual’s decision process, Branham (2012) has also completed research on turnover throughout the Great Recession (a period of economic downturn in the early 2000’s) which can be described as a similar shock event. It finds that push factors for events or issues within the organisation are more frequently mentioned than pull factors from external sources. This may lead us to believe that even through there is a shock event, it may not be the event itself, but the event combined with the circumstances that the individual finds themselves in, or the way that the organisation reacts (the push factor) to the shock event, may be leading to resignations.

Outside of potential shocks to the system, Branham (2012) compiled, from the leavers, a list of the 10 most frequent trigger issues:

1. Poor management
2. Lack of career growth and advancement opportunities
3. Poor communication
4. Pay
5. Lack of recognition
6. Poor senior leadership
7. Lack of training
8. Excessive workload
9. Lack of tools and resources
10. Lack of teamwork

Branham has contributed hugely to the conversation on turnover, mentioning turnover is largely avoidable (94% being for push reasons). Lack of trust in management is found to be the number one reason for resignation, with the reason of pay being only behind 12% of decisions to resign. Lack of training and lack of growth or advancement opportunities is high on the list with poor management, poor leadership and excessive workload (which may in

turn affect work-life balance) featuring in the top ten issues. The reality that these factors have ranked so highly as issues means it would be good to explore these more in depth with leavers in this research.

2.3.2 Other variables to consider

Hulin *et al.* (1985) have noted the difference in effect job alternatives and satisfaction of employee turnover have across numerous populations. Price and Mueller (1986) also agree, finding the thought process beginning the action of turnover will vary across populations. For example, individuals from diverse groups or backgrounds and those who have different personal or organisational circumstances may resign due to varying factors. Hulin *et al.* (1985) also noted this may differ between types of employees within an organisation. For temporary employees, job satisfaction is less important than job alternatives available to them, with full-time employees likely to give importance to both. Some reasons for leaving are down to individual preference, for example, one individual might find autonomy more satisfying in their role and others may find it dissatisfying. It is important to therefore examine a group of people with similar circumstances, for example in this research, full time employees in the same industry. Alongside this, the earlier research covered in the literature review contains little investigation in Ireland, opening up scope to explore more in detail as there may be geographic differences.

Lastly, difference in gender may also potentially become visible during research. Blomme, Van Rhee and Tromp (2010) confirm on previous studies that women are more affected by work-life balance issues, due in partial to the fact women usually have more responsibility for family and household work. It is also found promotional opportunities affected females' decisions to turnover, as women tended to have less promotional opportunities than men which affected their work-life balance issues, therefore, they mention promotions more frequently in their career decisions. In terms of relationships with management, Windia *et al.* (2020) mention findings that the impact of supervisory support on turnover is lower among females than males, stipulating differences in gender may have a larger influence on turnover intentions. Women and members of the LGBT+ community are disproportionately most likely to face push factors like discrimination or barriers in the organisation which could lead to resignations (CIPD, 2021).

2.3.3 Factors chosen to investigate in the COVID-19 era

It can be seen authors in the field have moved from earlier conceptual research on turnover nearer to the actual act of resigning from a role. Their theories identify different paths to turnover, of which most are triggered by pinpointed events and motivational forces aside from lack of satisfaction. Though some factors are proven to predict turnover in some cases, some authors feel there is little capacity of theory to enable the full explanation of an individual's decision to resign from their role (Morell *et al.*, 2001). The literature can mainly aim to predict turnover by clarifying and ordering antecedent factors reckoned only by interactions between the individual and their work environment, rather than other unexpected events or external factors, so decline to portray a considerable amount of voluntary turnover decisions (Lee and Mitchell, 1994). Some authors conclude that there is no universally agreed model or framework to describe why individuals decide to resign from their roles (Morell *et al.*, 2001). However, within the above research based in the pre-pandemic era, there are some statements regarding **pay, lack of trust with management, work-life balance and lack of training** that can allow us to paint a picture of the main causes of resignations and turnover. Even though there are more factors listed within the literature, for more depth these above mentioned four factors will be chosen to investigate further within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, to explore if the pandemic has changed the perspective of employees on these issues within their careers and organisations.

2.4 Applying turnover literature to the Great Resignation: A focus on pay, relationships with management, work-life balance and training

Given the above research mentions individual life circumstances and perceptions (including perceptions of the labour market itself), the reasoning behind employees resigning from their roles during the COVID-19 pandemic may be different than normal turnover, for example, as new circumstances have arisen such as the ability to work from home. The disruptive nature that has occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic has given employees space to assess their priorities and consider their opportunities and choices. Do the above four factors affect the reasons why people may resign from their role and search for a new one? This may be the key to discover the differences and allow for comparison between normal voluntary turnover (pre-pandemic) and within the COVID-19 era.

2.4.1 Focus one: Pay

Tech salaries globally have risen by an average of 6.2%, with Perry (2021) citing the Great Resignation as driving this jump when workers are looking for better remuneration, benefits and work-life balance. Bank of America finds Gen Z clients have seen a 19.9% pay increase over the past year, double the average increase for others. With this, they have also seen that changing roles is helping people keep ahead of inflation, with the average pay increase for changing jobs standing at 17.6% (Leonhardt, 2022).

Even though the figures for pay are rising fast within the tech industry, it does not necessarily mean that this is the most common reason why people are deciding to resign from their roles. Motivation and commitment research suggests that pay is not the only motivational factor in an employee's opinion (Tang and Kim, 2000) with Lee and Mitchell (1994) finding not many individuals resigning due to events related to pay. The literature reviewed seems to suggest pay is more of a satisfactory point rather than a main motivator. This fact, alongside the stark rise in pay instils grounds for investigation to see if this mindset changed during the pandemic and if the leaver's priority has moved to a more monetary view.

2.4.2 Focus two: Management relationships

A new analysis during the pandemic finds the largest predictor of attrition in organisations is not remuneration, but moreover a toxic work culture. Company culture is 10.4 times more likely than pay to predict if an employee will resign. A further dive into this research defines a toxic workplace culture as discrimination and harassment, cutthroat environments and abusive leadership (Sull, Sull and Zweig, 2022). A survey during COVID-19 shows employees having a higher priority for good relationships with their colleagues and managers over many other factors (Dahik *et al.*, 2020). With trust and transparency within managerial relationships, it is also found a driver of the Great Resignation is the executive-employee disconnect with policy implementation. 66% of executives report designing of future workforce policies have limited to no input from employees (Future Forum, 2021). Lack of transparency could be linked with lower levels of job satisfaction amongst employees, bringing low feelings of value and perceived equity. It is proven in this situation that these employees are 17.3% more likely to be open to looking for a new role within the next year (Future Forum, 2021).

To assess this critically with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be some challenges with a potential dynamic shift in the management and employee relationship when

working from home. Some employees and managers may struggle without in person communications which puts a strain on the relationship and trust between both parties. This serves as an important investigation point for further research to see how the pandemic has an impact on this relationship, trust and transparency and if this encourages the leaver's decision to resign.

2.4.3 Focus three: Work-life balance and flexible working

In the literature review, it can be seen work-life balance has become an important topic since the COVID-19 pandemic. Excessive workload, commuting and childcare or family caring needs have contributed to the need for flexible working to improve an employee's work-life balance. 76% of employees want flexibility in their location of work, with 93% wanting flexibility in working hours and these results remain similar across two quarters of the year 2020 and are almost identical across all geographic locations. Alongside this, fully remote workers feel twice better about work-life balance and 2.4 times better about work-related stress than their in-office counterparts (Dahik *et al.*, 2020). As seen earlier, job satisfaction is pertinent to employees and within this, the above factor of flexibility of the role is found to be an important factor behind reward and compensation. Therefore, employers may need to consider building flexibility into their workplace plans and infrastructure to support this. Other realistic reasons for moving roles or leaving the workforce entirely is the fact that caring for young children and caring for family members or dependents during the pandemic has fallen on those within the workforce. This has unfortunately resulted in millions of women leaving the workforce (Landau, 2021). Burnout has disproportionately affected working mothers, with one in four women with dependents under ten years old considering leaving the workforce during the pandemic, stating they were tired from the increase in household and rearing duties, but felt judgement from their colleagues when trying to develop flexible working options (Mehta, 2021). This links in with earlier research from Blomme *et al.* (2010) showing differences that may occur between genders in this area.

Both pieces show consideration for flexibility and that work-life balance is important for employees. However, with many people in the tech industry working from home during the pandemic, does this setup create flexibility or does it have potential to blur the line between work and life if both are ongoing within the same four walls? Is there a want for people to go back to the office, to work solely remotely or to have a hybrid work week? This may vary by individual circumstances (for example, location of home from office or family

status) and would be critical to probe further in qualitative research to understand the circumstances of an individual's work-life balance.

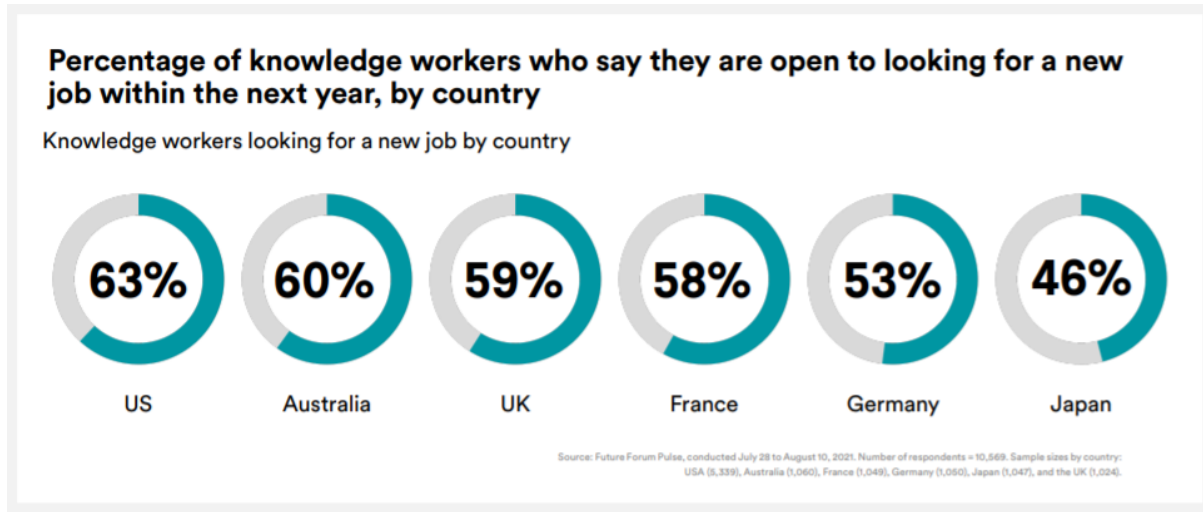
2.4.4 Focus four: Training

Lastly, a lack of training and interactional learning in roles caused by pandemic restrictions and working remotely could be a contributing factor to resignations. For example, a trucking company in the US discovered through extensive analysis that drivers with less experience and with remote support rather than in-person support are most likely to resign in comparison to their more experienced counterparts. However, when the company implemented a retention campaign based on this data collected, they secured a 10% reduction in resignations, even during a period of intense competition from other companies (Cook, 2021). Providing a pathway for growth and career opportunities can be achieved by the organisation through training and development, which is vital in the pandemic due to workers resigning when they do not find the trainings needed to advance in their current role (Christopherson, 2022). Training has a dual benefit, with employees and employers benefiting from it. If employees do not receive this, they may feel the only option they have to progress is to leave the company. This is preventable, with statistics showing 68% of employees globally willing to retrain and learn new skills during the pandemic (Strack *et al.*, 2021). This shows the readiness of employees to pivot and learn new skills to help the business succeed, even if this may mean a change of roles for them within the organisation. Clear training methods and goals are even more pertinent when some of the employees in an organisation work remotely, as they may need to find an alternative method of training and evaluation that suit these new methods of work. This leads to the question if those leaving their roles may have resigned due to adequate training provided by their company during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4.5 Rationale for research

To conclude, for employers taking these four areas into account, the ability to examine and evaluate resignation data accurately could help establish turnover trends within the organisation and to potentially reduce the turnover rate during the Great Resignation. Taking the factors, establishing how they affect resignation rates and implementing policies to overcome this could be the saving of the business in a post-pandemic era. The four points of pay, work-life balance, relationships with management and lack of training gathered from the literature are proven to be strongly associated with turnover intentions and require more in-depth analysis for the reasons explained above.

The findings throughout the literature review are predominantly based on global statistics. As seen below, the percentage of workers open to looking for new roles varies by country, with the US leading the group.



(Future Forum, 2021)

For further study, the potential difference in work cultures globally and in Ireland may make reasons for resignation largely different. For example, would the factor of increasing workload be more dominant for US employees with their minimal work-life balance (Statista, 2020)? With mortgages becoming harder and more expensive to attain in Ireland (Weston, 2022), are financial factors such as compensation more relevant to our workforce? Are non-remuneration conditions such as flexibility of working hours or management relationships a dominant factor in willingness to change employer? Further research is merited in Ireland due to the limitation of the previous research mostly being based outside of Ireland.

Chapter Three: Research Question and Methodology

3.1 Research aims and objectives

With the limitation of little to no research on the Great Resignation within Ireland, this area merits further research and leads to the aims and objectives of this study, the research question and sub-questions. The main research question can be defined as:

What are the reasons behind Irish employee's resigning from their roles during the Great Resignation?

The sub-questions to be explored are taken from the above literature review and can be phrased into the following:

Sub-question 1: Is pay a motivator for those who have resigned from their roles?.

Sub-question 2: What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic made on Irish employee perspectives regarding work-life balance?

Sub-question 3: Is the relationship with management an aspect that contributed to resignations?

Sub-question 4: Is training a factor that influenced decision to resign from their role?

Sub-question 5: What are the other main reasons for employees resign from their roles during the COVID-19 pandemic?

An appropriate methodology is important as it lays out theory and philosophy of the assumptions the research is based on and how this impacts the overall chosen method (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The following research methodologies have been considered under the below headings to what is appropriate for the research question outlined previously.

3.2 Epistemological considerations

An epistemological framework predicts, describes, empowers and deconstructs population-specific world views, which expands the knowledge base and brings a better understanding of the purpose of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Two main philosophies identified within this are positivism and interpretivism, each with different views and allowing researchers to consider our insights and blindness and what is acceptable and not acceptable during research. A positivism approach measures and observes reality and that society influences individuals. It recommends scientific techniques (experiments, logical proof) to analyze data

and concerns itself with quantitative research (for example, structured questionnaires or statistics). Under this approach, science should be free of values and judged by logic, with the data gathered being objective. Interpretivism, on the other hand, concerns itself with multiple realities and experiences of individuals and populations, where actions result from their own meanings rather than external forces of society. Interpretivism can gather information on the respondent's world view, with the data gathering process being subjective and individuals experiencing the same reality in different ways and reacting in different manners (Tennis, 2008). Interpretivism suggests qualitative methods (for example, unstructured interviews or observation) with data being open to descriptive feedback with no right or wrong answers.

Given these two conflicting thoughts, interpretivism suits the chosen research question better, as it allows the researcher to gain a deeper, more descriptive understanding of the reasons behind individual's resignations. With respondent's views being subjective to their own resignation experiences, an interpretivist view allows the researcher to interpret the motives and beliefs of the respondents, rather than the limitation of treating the data by numbers and experiments with positivism.

3.3 Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative research

There are two research methods that could be considered for the purpose of this study; quantitative research and qualitative research. Quantitative research links to numerical research, gathering numerical data or data that can be numerically coded. It is most often used in descriptive and causal research designs and involves gathering structured data that is typically numerical, needing large sample sizes. The questions are close ended to allow for statistical analysis, with results having the ability to be plotted and graphed. Methods of gathering quantitative data can include questionnaires or polls (Quinlan *et al.*, 2019). Qualitative research, however, focuses on a more exploratory research design and centres on human experience to discover more in-depth ideas (non-numeric data). This can be explained as not only the 'what' but the 'why' question and data is measured with words. The research gains less structured subjective data, focusing in on experiences, opinions and feelings of respondents. Typically, the data is gathered in smaller sample sizes and can be analysed through methods such as thematic analysis or grounded theory analysis (Quinlan *et al.*, 2019). Methods of gathering qualitative data can include interviews or focus groups. Some authors such as Tharenou, Donohue and Cooper (2007) believe the issue between qualitative and quantitative data is not in the data gathered, but in the methods of analysis that are applied to the data. If the researcher wants to understand richer meanings behind the data and build

explanations from respondent's understanding, then qualitative research is more appropriate. But, if the researcher wants to test predictions with precise measurement variables, then quantitative research is best suited. Quantitative research has limitations in terms of developing a deeper understanding of the data, but qualitative research can be lengthy and take time to analyse to get the best results. Throughout the literature review, authors such as Landau (2021) and Campion (1991) focus on quantitative data, whereas authors like Hom and Kinicki (2001) and (Dreher and Dougherty, 1980) focus on qualitative data, showing both approaches have been used on the topic of resignations.

Examining both methods of research is important and there are limitations to both methods including the richness of data collected and the time constraints and resource intensity. When considering the research question, the most appropriate method for this study was qualitative research as this allowed the researcher to gain more knowledge into 'why' the respondent has resigned from their role and also allowed for new areas to emerge. The data gathered from respondents could be probed and explored more in-depth, allowing for a deeper understanding for the researcher and better quality of data for the researcher to work with.

3.4 Research approach: Inductive and deductive research

Next to consider are two primary research approaches, deductive and inductive. With deduction, a theory is required before analysis can be undertaken. With induction, the reverse can be considered, with theory undertaken based on analysis. The decision on whether to use one method over another depends on the start and the end of the research (Blumberg, 2008). With this research, the qualitative research undertaken accomplished the research objectives laid out following the review of the literature. The literature was used in conjunction with the research findings to compliment and prove or deny the objectives and allowed the researcher to recognize any gaps that occurred in the literature.

3.5 Chosen qualitative research method: Interviews

Since qualitative data was chosen as the research method, a data collection method was selected that best suited the research. Interviews are a common qualitative research method, they can vary from structured (measures specific variables, typically more closed questions and tend to be used to conduct statistical analysis), unstructured (naturalistic, interpretive and inductive) and semi-structured interviews that are a medium between the two former types of interviews (open and closed questions, probing questions and clarifying questions). The

interview structure was selected based on the nature of the research question being asked and it was best to avoid rigid structured interviews when the research is exploratory (Tharenou *et al.*, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were deemed more appropriate by the researcher as they have an overall topic (for example, resignations), general themes (for example, pay or training) and specific questions. Semi-structured interviews have benefits in that they allow respondents to have flexibility to talk through issues more in-depth, but also contain structure, allowing the researcher to gain information on specific areas. A limitation of interviews is what respondents say during an interview and what they action can differ (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010).

Focus groups are also another method of qualitative research that could be considered. Respondents answer in groups of around six to ten people at the same time (Quinlan *et al.*, 2019). However, there are limitations in terms of the research question with focus groups. Not only are they slightly harder to execute in terms of organization, but the research question chosen is individualistic and each person's resignation experience is independent, with individual thoughts and opinions. Focus groups may not reflect the individual's true, unbiased experience. Therefore, one-to-one individual semi-structured interviews were selected as the appropriate research method.

3.5.1 Interview question development

The interview question design was based on the theoretical framework underlying the research question, with clarity behind the purpose of each question asked to the respondent (Tharenou *et al.*, 2007). Certain authors such as Foddy (1993) set out procedures for the development of interview questions. The 'TAP' method is one of these procedures that can be considered by the researcher, with question formulation requiring a topic, applicability and perspective. Within this, questions asked were open-ended to allow the respondent to take any direction they would like on the topic specified by the question. The questions were not highly complex or too long, to avoid confusion of the respondent and to avoid gathering inaccurate responses. Given the nature of the research topic, it was important for the researcher to avoid using both past and present tenses in one question. In terms of the layout of the questions, questions were ordered so that there was no bias influence from preceding questions (Foddy, 1993). The interview questions formulated (illustrated in Appendix A) contained introductory questions to begin the interview and establish certain criteria, followed by more structured, direct questions in a funnel nature to introduce the topics of pay, management relationships, training, and work-life balance.

3.6 Sample

As the appropriate research question, methods and approach were selected, it was then possible to define the sampling methods. Qualitative research samples are usually small samples explored more in depth in order to gain richer information out of the respondents. There are different methods of qualitative sampling strategies to choose from that can be divided into the two categories of probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Qualitative research is mainly concerned with non-probability sampling techniques such as convenience sampling, voluntary sampling, quota-sampling, purposive sampling, dimensional sampling and snowball sampling (Blaxter *et al.*, 2010). A probabilistic sampling approach may not be necessary as views on resignations will vary between individuals, with the researcher choosing non-probability sampling and selected participants based on their judgment that they are representative of the population and fit the chosen criteria. The non-probabilistic techniques of convenience (those to whom the researcher has easy access), quota (convenience sampling within groups of the population), purposive (hand selected cases) and snowballing (building of sample through respondents) are the main three considered for this research (Creswell, 2007). The researcher aimed to use mainly convenience sampling, with the idea of posting to a professional social media network, searching for volunteers who fall within the criteria. The researcher was open to using snowball sampling also where necessary, taking recommendations from respondents about others they know who fit the criteria and may be interested in taking part in the research.

For the sample size, the value recommended for qualitative research is 12 respondents, however the justification could be based on resources available and analysis depth desired (Fugard and Potts, 2015). It was the researcher's aim to try to reach as many as possible in order to gain multiple views on the Great Resignation, but with the limitations to resources for achieving this, the researcher interviewed six respondents. The researcher aimed to have a gender split, as there were some aspects of gender that arose throughout the literature. All respondents were over 18 years old (for consent purposes), in full-time employment (due to keepings variables aligned), working in Ireland and had resigned from a role since the COVID-19 pandemic started in approximately April 2020. As discussed in the introduction, due to limited research on the Great Resignation in the tech industry and the earlier seen unrelenting level of turnover in the tech industry (Breitling *et al.*, 2021), the researcher decided to focus on this section of individuals. Pilot studies are advantageous when there is little information available on the topic of the study (Salkind, 2010), therefore a

small pilot was carried out with a comparable participant to ascertain if the questions were appropriately phrased and relevant to the topic. After the pilot study, the researcher rephrased certain questions and removed some questions where repetition was evident before the main research began.

3.7 Data collection, transcription and storage

The respondents were shown an information sheet to understand the concept and reason behind the research (illustrated in Appendix B). The information sheet contained:

- Research purpose and researchers contact details
- Details on the way the research will be conducted (recorded interviews)
- The risks and benefits for the respondent of taking part in the research
- Confidentiality aspects of participating in the research

The respondents also signed a consent form (illustrated in Appendix C) which contained:

- Information on their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time
- Consent to recording of the interview

The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes each, with 26 questions identified by the researcher, covering the four chosen earlier topics and including general questions at the start of the interview and a main general question at the end. The interviews were voice recorded to allow for further analysis and recordings were stored safely on OneDrive with anonymous labels (for example, 'Respondent A') to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were then transcribed to be included in the dissertation. The prime advantage of recording the interviews is it allows the researcher to focus on the interview instead of taking down notes, making it easier for the researcher, but also allowing for more natural conversation with the respondent, potentially leading to them becoming more at ease and honest with their responses (Creswell, 2007). There are some disadvantages, however, with recording and transcribing taking a considerable amount of time. To overcome this, the researcher extracted key notes and quotes for the dissertation.

3.7.1 Reliability and validity

A vital aim for every piece of research is to be reliable and valid, with reliability concerning being free of random error and validity concerning if the researcher is in fact measuring what they are claiming to measure (Blaxter *et al.*, 2010). Poor reliability and validity mean the research could lack precision or accuracy. The reliability of responses during the interview

depended on numerous factors such as the respondents' intent to give accurate information or even the relationship with the researcher.

3.7.2 Data storage

All recordings and transcripts were stored on the college's secure OneDrive. They were password protected, accessible by the researcher only and in accordance with the college's data storage policy. Copies of the consent form and original recordings will be retained until after the degree has been conferred, with written transcripts of the interviews retained for a further two years. The college is required to make all research available for public dissemination, with copies of all dissertations to be held and available through the library.

3.8 Chosen analysis

Qualitative interviews can have several meanings and multiple interpretations and therefore can be analysed in different ways. Explication and thematic analysis are two forms of analysing interviews (Blaxter *et al.*, 2010), with explication being a phenomenological tradition involving more experienced researchers. Thematic analysis is similar in method, where the researcher familiarises themselves with the data, generates initial codes, searches for and reviews themes, defines and names themes and then produces the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can report repeated patterns within the data, with some authors arguing that it is not seen as a 'named' analysis method such as grounded theory or narrative analysis. Grounded theory seeks patterns in the data, but is theoretically bounded (Braun and Clarke, 2006), whereas thematic analysis does not require intense theory or technical knowledge so is more accessible to those who are new to qualitative research. It also is not linked to any specific theoretical framework. Given this, thematic analysis was undertaken following the interviews with the researcher, as this allowed for new themes to be explored and due to its flexibility, provided rich but complex accounts of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is important to note for the thematic analysis to be reliable that there must not be overlap between themes and there must be more than one or two extracts for a theme (Blaxter *et al.*, 2010).

3.9 Ethics

As with all research projects, the researcher must ensure they are working in an ethical manner with their research following ethical procedures (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The researcher aimed to have informed consent for all respondents, where they consent freely to participate knowing all information about the study, their rights and the way in which the data

was used by the researcher (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The researcher distributed information sheets and consent forms (Appendix B and C) outlining the reason for research, the voluntary aspect of the research and outlined the right for the respondent to withdraw at any time, or not answer some or all questions without penalty. In terms of confidentiality, all information gathered about and from the respondents' is kept confidential in line with the National College of Ireland Ethics Committee requirements, with respondents given alphabetical labels from Respondent A through to Respondent F. All information from respondents was anonymised at each opportunity to protect the respondents' identities to ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act. For data storage, the forms stated the data provided will be stored securely as mentioned earlier and that the transcript with all identifiable information will be stored for a further two years. Under GDPR, respondents are also entitled to access this information provided at any time.

3.10 Limitations

As with most research there are some limitations faced. Interviews were time consuming, with the research only gathering information from a very small number of respondents, which could affect the quality of the research. Considering there are numerous people who fit the criteria, the results cannot be generalised based on the limited number of responses. The convenience sample size may also not truly reflect the overall population however, this was deemed the most feasible way for the researcher to gain respondents within a limited space of time. The topic of the Great Resignation is quite new, therefore access to existing literature is also quite limited.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Results and Main Findings

The objective of this research was to examine the reason behind resignations in Ireland since the COVID-19 pandemic started in April 2020, to identify how these factors changed from a normal period of turnover in comparison to the Great Resignation. Aside from seven general introductory questions (such as participant age) to establish the criteria have been met, respondents were asked nineteen questions. Some of these questions enabled them to steer the conversation to any area regarding their own resignation experience, whilst the other questions focused on the five topics explored. The four topics explored revealed some common themes, but there was also a common theme surrounding career progression that the researcher had not anticipated. The research participants (Appendix D) were over 18 years old, are working in the tech industry and have resigned from a role in Ireland since the start of the pandemic in approximately April 2020.

4.1 Common themes identified

4.1.1 Career progression is the main factor contributing to resignations

A key finding of this research was the importance of career progression. For five respondents, career progression and want for a new challenge is found to be the top reason for resigning from their previous roles. Respondent A felt unchallenged in their role, stating “*I wasn't being challenged enough. I just didn't really see as much potential future growth for myself in that role*”. According to Respondent C, they had been taking over some responsibilities while their manager was on leave. “*I was in a unique situation where I was covering my manager. In terms of progressing upwards, when my manager returned, I'd already gotten the experience I needed. I just wouldn't have felt challenged in the role*”. Similarly, Respondent E claimed they were carrying out responsibilities beyond their role and their progression was not recognised. “*I was stagnated in a junior position, doing senior management work without the title or without the compensation to go with it. The best thing for me was to find somewhere that can challenge me and see the hard work I put in and reward that with progression*”. The topic of career progression was briefly touched upon in the literature review, with lack of career growth and advancement opportunities identified by Branham (2012) as the second most frequent trigger issues for resignations, and was a

criticism from Morell *et al.* (2001) about March and Simon's model, where an individual's potential desire for long-term development may not be considered an influence.

4.1.2 Pay is not the main motivating factor behind resignations

Pay only featured as the top motivating factor for one respondent's resignation, with that respondent's second main motivator being career progression. For that one respondent, the lack of satisfaction with pay was linked with the responsibilities and workload taken on in comparison to the amount of pay given. Respondent B stated, "*my job had changed in terms of that I was doing almost two or three times the amount of workload for the same pay*". Interestingly, this inequity had only come about for the respondent since the COVID-19 pandemic meant the company had to switch to working from home. Respondent B also stated that their top motivator after pay was career progression; "*with the workloads increasing, I always think that you should be recognized through monetary or clear promotions, and I wasn't getting either, so the easiest thing to do was to move companies for both*".

In contrast, when discussing the topic of pay, Respondent A claimed "*It wasn't the driving factor. I think salary would have only come into it when rejecting certain companies for having too low of a salary rather than me going for the highest salary*". There was a similar consensus from most of the other respondents, which aligns with research found by Tang and Kim (2000).

One respondent claimed they were prepared to take a pay cut, as they were moving career path completely from one industry to another. Respondent D declared "*I was actually prepared to take a pay cut if I had to, to secure to move into the area I wanted to go into... It was all down to the career path that I wanted to go onto and a complete change of career*". The same respondent, who had career progression as their top motivating factor, moved into the tech industry and into a new role for the "*potential to actually be able to earn more money over the next few years and overall better packages and benefits that are available in the tech industry*". This could be classed as turn away from an industry and role, rather than turnover as seen with research from Porto Bellini *et al.* (2019) in the literature review.

4.1.3 Reasons for resignation could change depending stage of career

Respondent F was the only person interviewed that was aged over 30 and highlighted that their circumstances may have differed due to the stage in life they were at. "*I do feel that my decision was 90% to do with childcare and family needs. I have a few friends at different stages in their lives, who are technically part of the Great Resignation. I find that our*

circumstances are different in terms of why we resigned from our roles". Although under 30, when Respondent C was asked would they think the factors be similar in their next move, they stated *"I think the same factors would apply, but maybe less so on the travel piece as I get a bit older and want to settle down"*. Similarly, Respondent B claimed, *"I think as I grow and the more years of experience I gain, I think the career one will probably become number one factor and the pay will become number two naturally as I get more senior"*. There was no literature reviewed where age became apparent, aside from Morell *et al.* (2001) criticism of March and Simon's model, where the model does not consider in what stage an individual is at on their career journey.

4.1.4 Flexible working is extremely popular for work-life balance

A theme that was highlighted in most interviews was the positive opinion on the ability to work from home or flexible working. Respondent B is now working in a fully remote company, working asynchronously with their colleagues and can work from anywhere in the world. *"I did want to look at remote companies just to give me that flexibility. I think I'm happier at home or working from anywhere remotely. You set your own hours, and this really has given me the freedom to build things that I like to do throughout my day"*. Similarly, Respondent A was committed to remote working and had wanted to resign from their new company to find a fully remote role due to workload. *"My manager really listened and said you can be fully remote; we will take away whatever you need off your plate"*. Respondent C, D, E and F all also agreed that they would not return to an office full-time, with some stating that less commute time, more time to spend with family and higher productivity levels have all been beneficial to them, their work-life balance and their mental health. This aligns with Dahik *et al.* (2020) research explored within the literature review, with 76% of employees want flexibility in their location of work, with 93% wanting flexibility in working hours.

A meaningful statement from Respondent A when asked if they would like to give any more information that they feel could be relevant, stated, *"the employee a company lets go of might have wanted to work remotely and they say no, we're not moving on that, but they struggle so much to find someone who's as good. Does the benefit of someone coming into the office really outweigh that other person's years of knowledge and expertise?"*. This could be important for businesses when they consider the impacts and opportunity costs associated with turnover in comparison to being more flexible with policies and procedures.

4.1.5 Personal factors or events did influence some decisions to resign

Two respondents out of all interviewed highlighted personal events that contributed to their resignation. Respondent B, although not their main reason for resigning, stated, *“my mom was sick, and it just put into perspective that I didn’t want to come back up to Dublin just for the job... it really helps take the pressure off when I work remotely”*. Respondent F, however, claimed having a child was the main reason for resigning from their previous role due to inflexibility. *“The main reason I moved was due to family reasons. My previous company wanted me to return to the office more regularly, but we had our first child during the pandemic and with the mortgage in Dublin, it just didn’t work out”*. This could be considered a shock to the system as seen earlier with Maertz and Campion (2004), with an individual’s intention to resign brought about by certain circumstances or following an occurrence of an event, in this case, raising a family.

For other respondents, the pandemic could have also been considered a shock event that brought some new ways of thinking about their careers, with Respondent D stating *“the pandemic hit, and I at looked at myself, my career, where I’m going with the future and then it puts a bit of a fire in your belly”*. Respondent E claimed, *“I probably wouldn’t have loved the benefits of working from home as much, that’s all I knew until the pandemic”*. The COVID-19 pandemic may have brought more critical thinking in terms of career choices, paths and future goals. Respondent A, when considering the contrast between working life and personal life, stated, *“I think if the pandemic hadn’t happened, and I was still doing all the activities that I was doing before COVID, I would have been more into a slow-paced job when coupled with all those exciting activities outside of work”*, showing that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we view and our attitude towards our careers and workload.

4.1.6 Training had little effect on decisions to resign

Few of the respondents resigned from their previous role due to lack of satisfaction with training. According to Respondent A, training didn’t form part of the decision unless training was classed as part of career progression. *“From a learning and development perspective on the job, it was a big factor for me leaving but not in a formal training sense”*. A common theme with training throughout the research conducted is that training formed no opinion until the realisation occurred when they moved to their new company that it was lacking in their previous company. For example, Respondent B claimed, *“I didn’t know that this was poor until I left, so it didn’t impact me leaving. I really didn’t consider this because it very much was just the norm until you move, and you realize the contrast”*. Respondent D also did

not consider training to form part of their decision, however this was due to their proficiency in their role. *“The training didn’t have an impact on my decision because I was in the role so long and after a year or two, I knew the role inside out. If I was going back to insurance, it definitely would be something that would play into my decision process”*.

Only one respondent partly considered training in their decision to resign, however this was not a main factor. Respondent E, when discussing their previous company said, *“I was hoping I would land a role that would be willing to pay for examinations and luckily enough I did”*. This was more of a secondary factor of a ‘want’, rather than a ‘must have’ when searching for a new role. Research seen in the literature review from Christopherson (2022) showed that employees will resign when they do not find the trainings needed to advance in their current roles, with the only option to progress being to leave the company. This was largely not the case, with training not a main reason behind resignations.

4.1.7 Relationships with managers weren’t a main resignation factor, but made decisions easier to determine

When respondents were asked did their relationship with their manager contribute to their decision to resign, there were some mixed views. Respondent D agreed that the micromanagement experienced from previous roles had pushed them away. *“I was eight years in that role. So over time it kind of worn me out a bit, so it definitely was a factor as to why I wanted out”*. Respondent F also rated it in their top three motivating factors, with lack of transparency after changes in senior management contributing to their decision. *“I think if family reasons did not contribute or it was earlier in my life, the way the transparency was fading, this would definitely play a bigger part in my decision”*.

On the topic of transparency, Respondent B talked more about the way management dealt with the shock event of redundancies within the company, claiming *“it completely broke my trust in senior management and my manager too. The way they handled the redundancies, it was not transparent. I lost trust and credibility in the company, and I needed a change”*. The same respondent, in hindsight, said that not having that good relationship with their manager after that event *“made it a very easy decision to leave because I didn’t feel supported in my previous company”*. As seen in the literature review from Future Forum (2021), lack of transparency has proven 17.3% of employees are more likely to be open to looking for a new role.

Respondent A claimed it was an interesting question and when looking back on their decision, stated “*I don’t think I did consider it. Now I would. When you have a manager that is extremely strong, it can hold you in a company more. I don’t think that my old manager was strong enough to keep me there*”. When discussing their current manager, the respondent thought towards the future, saying “*it is excelling my career so much with my current manager and is a huge factor to stop me from leaving the company*”. The positive management experience for this respondent may be the key for lowering the rate of turnover for companies into the future.

From a different angle, Respondent C had a great relationship with their previous manager but still decided to leave the company to seek career progression. “*I did give consideration to it, I always know in making a sacrifice in moving that you’re going to have to leave a couple of good things behind to better yourself, so I made the sacrifice there*”. This respondent’s wish for career progression had outweighed the good relationship with their manager. This may mean that good relationships alone may not be enough to keep employees from resigning and other, more prominent factors should be considered.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

In order to discuss the findings, the research objective and sub-objectives should be explored in terms of both the existing literature and the research conducted by the researcher. This main objective of this research was to find out the main reasons why people have resigned from their roles leading to the Great Resignation in Ireland, with the research question being:

What are the reasons for Irish employee's leaving their roles during the Great Resignation?

The number one reason for resignation amongst the respondents interviewed was career progression. From an academic perspective, there were not many pieces of literature found that focus on career progression except for Branham (2012), who listed it as the second largest trigger factor for resignations. Career progression alongside a challenging role can motivate employees to stay in the company. Structured, transparent career paths and employee development should therefore be a top priority for practitioners who are looking to retain talent and lower their rate of turnover.

It is noted by the researcher that most of the respondents who gave career progression as their main factor were 30 years of age or younger. Due to sampling methods, there was only one respondent who was over the age of 30. This respondent had mentioned that due to the stage they were at in their life and career, that their main reason for resigning was family, but others they know would have different reasons as they have different circumstances and priorities, for example, mortgages or building a career. This may mean that top reasons could differ with age or stage in career path, with those higher up the career ladder potentially not giving a priority to career progression as they have already reached the top, or those who do not wish to start a family or have no dependents not giving as much priority to flexible working as those who do have those responsibilities.

5.1 Sub-question one: Is pay a motivator for those who have resigned from their roles?

Throughout the literature review, it is found pay figures are rising within the tech industry, but that pay is not the only motivational factor for resignations. The findings within this research coincide with the literature review, finding that pay is not the number one motivational factor when resigning from a role. For the respondent who did state pay was the motivating factor, this linked heavily into fair pay for fair work, with the respondent taking

on more responsibility without the reward. This corresponds to early literature explored from authors such as Hulin *et al.* (1985), and more recent literature from Branham (2012) finding that pay is only the reason behind 12% of decisions to resign. Lee and Mitchell (1994) found pay is more of a satisfactory point rather than a main motivator, which was apparent in most respondents. Some respondents only considered turning down job offers from new companies if it was too low, rather than leaving their company due to a low salary. Therefore, on review of the sub-question, pay is a factor for those who have resigned from their role, but it is not the top motivator. For organisations, considering a right pay package that aligns with job responsibilities is key to maintaining employee satisfaction and lowering turnover. A theme that became apparent with some respondents was firstly, the misalignment of the amount of work done for rate of pay and secondly, the lack of recognition (both monetary and non-monetary) for conducting more senior responsibilities. On the topic of pay and compensation, the tech industry was noted and complimented by some respondents for their perks and benefits outside of base salary, which could be a small key benefit alongside standard compensation packages to boost morale and make the employee feel they are being more adequately compensated for their work.

5.2 Sub-question two: What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic made on Irish employee perspectives regarding work-life balance?

The researcher found when reviewing the literature that high workloads, commuting and family needs bring about a requirement for flexible working and that flexible working can help ensure a better work-life balance. As seen during the analysis, flexible and remote working options were popular with respondents, allowing them to have more time to get personal tasks and rituals completed more efficiently during the day. All respondents started working from home since the COVID-19 pandemic began to grow in Ireland. When asked if they thought the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their decision to resign, for all bar one participant, it affected the way they viewed their roles holistically. It affected their decision in terms of how they view their future career paths and inspired new views within their minds of their want to work from home to enjoy a better work-life balance and have more flexibility. Considering the above sub-objective explored, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on employee's perspectives regarding work-life balance. Their perspectives have changed to want for more remote working or flexible working arrangements that were not in existence for many of them before the pandemic in order to ensure a better work-life balance.

5.3 Sub-question three: Is the relationship with management an aspect that contributed to resignations?

Company culture and relationships with management were found throughout the literature review to be likely to predict resignations, more than pay, with COVID-19 era literature suggesting good relationships are a priority for employees over other workplace factors (Dahik *et al.*, 2020). When respondents were asked about their relationships, trust and transparency with their manager and senior management in both their old roles and their new roles, there was a common theme of managers having differing management styles, with micromanagement leading to lower morale and lack of trust in the employer/employee relationship. However, with this there was also a respondent who, even though they had a great relationship with their manager, still decided to leave the company due to career progression being more of a priority. It can be inferred when taking into consideration this sub-objective that relationships with management did not contribute strongly to resignations and unlike Dahik *et al.* suggests, may not be a bigger predictor than pay, as pay was still a more prominent reason for leaving than management amongst respondents. When conducting the analysis, bad management relationships were found to be more of a secondary factor that only solidified for respondents that the decision to resign was better than staying.

There were also some findings within the literature from Windia *et al.* (2020) that the impact of supervisory support on turnover is lower among females than males. The respondents interviewed were a 50/50 split of gender and on review there was not many differences between the two genders when it came to resignation decisions due to managerial support and relationships.

5.4 Sub-question four: Is training a factor that influenced the decision to resign from their role?

According to the literature reviewed, employees are found to resign when training does not meet the needs of employees to advance in their roles (Christopherson, 2022). As previously mentioned, only one respondent considered training as a reason for resignation, but similarly to management relationships, this was more of a secondary factor. For this respondent, they had hoped that they would find an employer who would allow them to complete formal certifications, but it was not something that they had listed in their criteria during their job search. For most respondents, training only became apparent as important to them when there became a contrast between the way one employer facilitated it over another employer.

Training facilitation in most respondent's previous companies seemed to span from no training at all to very standard trainings, with one respondent describing it as a tick-the-box exercise.

In fact, no respondent had complimented their previous employer when asked their opinion on the way that employer facilitated training, but a point to note with most respondents mentioning with their new employer in the tech industry that training grants of a predetermined sum are given for their employees. Most respondents were appreciative of this, explaining it allows them to choose courses and certifications that suit them, with some not necessarily having to be exactly aligned with their current role and job responsibilities, as long as it may benefit the business in the long run. Giving ownership to the employee on their training may be the key to success, allowing them to decide what is best for their training needs and could link in with them feeling in control of and advancing their own career progression. Even though training was not a strong factor when considering resigning, effective training facilitation may go hand in hand with the main factor of career progression to help organisations retain their employees.

5.5 Sub-question five: What are the other main reasons for employees leaving their roles during the pandemic?

Aside from career progression, the second most frequent factor from all participants when resigning from their previous role was remote or flexible working, with the third most frequent factor being pay. When all respondents were asked if they feel their reasons for resigning would be the same if they were planning another move, they all answered yes for the near future. As tech companies are experiencing high levels of turnover, it can be inferred from this research that the main two pillars they should focus on should be ways to ensure appropriate and timely career progression, opportunities for remote or flexible working and once these two pillars are solidified, they should also ensure that their levels of pay are reflective of the job responsibilities and market value for their roles within the company.

Personal circumstances were a theme that became apparent during the literature review, with Campion (1991) acknowledging the voluntariness of turnover may vary in circumstances and Lee and Mitchell (1994) suggesting that the turnover process is different for different situations, shaped by individual life circumstances. When respondents were asked did personal circumstances contribute to their decision, only two out of six divulged personal factors such as childcare and family sickness which had contributed to their decision

to resign as their needs due to those personal circumstance had changed. One respondent acknowledged that their needs would change if their personal circumstances changed in the future, such as if they decided to settle down and have a family. This does conform with the literature that turnover can, in some situations, be shaped by individual life circumstances that are outside the span of control of the business. However, for organisations the key to avoid turnover with personal circumstances is to offer enough flexibility when these circumstances may arise. Using an example from Respondent F, the organisation being more flexible with their remote working policy may have deterred the respondent from resigning, as it would have given them enough space to deal with their personal circumstance whilst also continuing to fulfil their role.

Lee and Mitchell (1994) developed an unfolding model of turnover, where most voluntary turnovers (63%) occur after a shocking event they coined a ‘shock to the system’ which can result in an individual stopping and considering the meaning and consequences of the event in relation to their current role and company. This was certainly a recurring theme with respondents, as most had stated the COVID-19 pandemic had given them time to consider their roles, their working situation and their career paths. For one respondent, this event even led to the decision to ‘turnaway’ from both an industry and a role to build a career in a different one. For companies, good communication and guidance from managers and even HR may help employees to process and deal with shock events in a constructive manner and may give the opportunity for the company to alleviate the situation and prevent potential turnover arising from the shock event.

Lastly, the literature reviewed the concept of push and pull factors. Branham (2012) findings state push factors for events or issues within the organisation are more frequently mentioned than pull factors from external sources. With the factor of career progression, it was clear to the researcher that this was a ‘push’ factor for respondents as this was something they realised they were lacking with their previous employer that ultimately caused them to resign. Pay was also a push factor and lack of flexible working practices was a push factor for some respondents. When asked what had attracted them to their new employer, respondents replied mostly with the solutions of factors that had pushed them away from their previous employer, for example, the satisfaction of a clear career path. It can be concluded from this that push factors played a bigger role than pull factors amongst respondents interviewed.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This research aimed to discover the reasons why people in Ireland have resigned from their roles since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the recent phenomenon called the Great Resignation. Key aspects arose from the literature review around the topic of pay, work-life balance, relationships with management and training. However, when a qualitative exploration of topics was considered throughout interviews to allow for new themes to emerge that the researcher may not have initially considered, the main finding discovered is the desire for career progression as the top factor in those deciding to resign and search for a new role.

Concluding on the four focus areas, in agreement with the literature review, pay was not found to be a main motivational factor for those deciding to resign, but rather, a secondary factor for most respondents. The only time pay was considered a main motivational factor was in a case where pay did not align with the responsibilities of the role, which is a vital finding for organisations to take from this research. Generally, respondents shared their view on compensation packages in the tech industry, with most meeting their needs before resigning from roles, showing that tech industry companies may not need much review of compensation packages in the current climate. Contrary to the literature review, training did not have a part in any decision to resign by the respondents. It was discovered by the researcher that training was more of an ‘afterthought’ by respondents, as they only notice when moving companies if their training in their previous company was lacking. It is noted most respondents enjoyed the widely used tech company method of a standard sum of money given to each employee towards their training, as this empowered them in their own development to choose what training suited their needs at the time, which could go alongside assisting in the most sought-after factor of career progression.

Another learning from the research that corresponded with the literature review was how important flexible working is for work-life balance, with many respondents willing to resign in the future if their employers asked them to return to the office full-time. For respondents without children, they noted flexibility allowed them to do other tasks throughout their day such as laundry and gym workouts, whilst also cutting down on commute times. For respondents with family, this was the most important factor as it allowed

them to raise their children and not miss out on important milestones in their family life. Even though none of the respondents had worked from home before the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic has opened up different ways of working, which both companies and employees alike can benefit from if managed correctly.

Lastly, relationships with management were not a top priority in decisions to resign from roles, with most respondents saying that bad relationships and lack of trust made their decision easier to resign rather than forming part of the main decision. If relationships with management were stronger, it remains to be seen whether this could be a factor in retaining employees, as one respondent had claimed they still resigned even with the good management relationship in place. Nevertheless, other benefits of good relationships with managers such as higher team morale make it important for organisations to provide adequate training for managers and also hire managers that have the soft-skills necessary to not just manage, but to lead a team to success.

This research has identified key areas for the tech industry to focus on to lower turnover rates and improve retention as part of their human resource management strategies. It has provided tech companies with increased awareness of factors that affect resignations and findings may determine the future success of organisations, with further recommendations being made by the researcher below. The research was conducted ethically, with some limitations and areas for further study such as a deeper understanding of the need for career progression or exploration within different age groups and career stages.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendation one: Organisations must make their top priority career progression

The first clear recommendation for current practitioners and organisations is to review career paths and competency frameworks within the organisation to ensure there is a path for progression within each role. It was clear with almost all respondents that the career progression in their previous company was not sufficient to retain them, either in terms of visibility of the next available role, the length of time it takes to be promoted or being recognised for doing work that exceeds their normal span of responsibilities. Tech companies should review their internal recruitment policies and procedures including timing of promotions to ensure this is in line with the development needs of their employees.

6.2.2 Recommendation two: Organisations should review flexible working policies

The second recommendation is regarding an organisation's flexible working policy, as a popular theme amongst respondents was flexibility of working hours and location to aid in work-life balance. Most of the respondents enjoyed the flexibility, with most considering resigning from their roles in the future if their employer decided to bring their workforce back into the office full-time. Tech companies will need to review and implement flexible working policies where possible, considering if it is a hard requirement to return to the office after COVID-19 or if their employees can effectively carry out their duties in a flexible location, instead of losing staff through requirements to be physically present in an office environment, saving the company turnover costs.

6.2.3 Recommendation three: Ensure pay aligns with job responsibilities

Although pay was not considered a top motivating factor, two out of six respondents interviewed had an issue with their salaries not aligning with their job responsibilities. This is crucial for organisations to ensure equal pay for equal work, as this could lower morale hugely within the company. Alongside reviewing the current market conditions for roles, organisations should look at job profiles to ensure the responsibilities undertaken are in line with job level. Recognition through pay, bonuses or promotional opportunities for achieving more than is set out in the job responsibilities should be considered, especially when employees take on managerial responsibilities outside of their job profile.

6.3 Implication of findings

On completion of this research, recommendations have been identified for tech companies in Ireland to help reduce the number of resignations during the period of the Great Resignation. Tech companies should be made aware of the cost and timeframes associated with these findings and recommendations. The priority for these companies should firstly be career progression, with reviewing frameworks and policies to ensure timely progression. This is a relatively fast and cost-effective way of ensuring career progression needs are met, with reviews potentially assisted by existing learning and development or employee development teams plus internal recruitment teams if promotions are required. The second priority should be review of flexible working policies. The cost of this process may vary depending on the level of flexibility given to employees (for example, if working from home, will a subsidy be given for internet bills or electricity? If allowing employees to work remotely from other countries, organisations may need to review their tax obligations which could be costly and a limitation to the organisation). Organisations will need to consider costs to find a balance of

the level of flexibility they can afford to implement and ensure cost balances the benefit, considering opportunity costs, including but not limited to the potential cost of turnover if not enough flexibility is given. As tech is a fast-moving industry, the quicker the company can change their policies, the better the strategic benefit will be, as they can use these changes to become a leader in their field and attract new, highly-skilled talent from other companies.

CIPD Personal Learning Reflection

Currently working in the tech industry in the area of Human Resources, completing this dissertation has allowed me to expand my knowledge and to put theory into practice in the field. The topic of the Great Resignation and turnover is of huge importance to me, having also myself resigned from a role for the first time in my career in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. This inspired me to investigate if there are common themes around turnover in this turbulent period and begin to help employers within the tech industry understand the reasons behind this turnover, to help improve their already high turnover rates and retain valuable, highly-skilled employees. With limited existing research within the tech industry in Ireland on this topic, this gave me even more motivation to explore the topic in-depth as part of my degree.

This research did not come without its challenges. Personally, balancing moving company within the middle of the writing period and learning a new role full-time was difficult alongside the day-to-day pandemic life circumstances. However, with support from my colleagues and manager, family and friends, regular communication with my supervisor, time management and effective organisational skills, breaking the workload into manageable goals allowed me to complete the process. The result of the work has considerably improved my personal writing skills, research skills and field knowledge and can help me to advance my career in this area. It has taught me patience, perseverance and more importantly, empathy, which I will carry throughout my career.

If undertaking this research again, one thing I would aim to change is to try interview more respondents of varying ages. Due to the convenience sampling techniques used and my time constraints, the respondents were volunteers who were easily accessible and most happened, by chance, to be aged 30 or under, which may not conclude a true view of the full working population within the tech industry in Ireland. Nevertheless, on reflection, this process was highly rewarding and my most significant achievement so far in my academic career. I hope that both my own current organisation and other organisations within the tech industry will benefit from this research.

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Appendix A: Interview questions

General (non-open-ended questions to establish criteria):

1. What age are you?
2. What is your job title?
3. When did you resign from your previous role?
4. What industry were you in previously?
5. When did you start in your new role?
6. Had you been working from home or taking part in flexible working in your previous role?
7. Are you working from home or flexible working in your new role?

Initial question:

8. *Tell me about your resignation and the main reasons behind your decision*

Pay

9. What is your perspective on the pay/compensation given by your previous employer?
10. In what way would you have considered pay as a factor in your decision to resign from your previous role?

Work-life balance

11. Describe your previous role in terms of work-life balance and workload manageability?
12. What is your opinion on flexible working and how this has affected your work-life balance? (If applicable)
13. What are your feelings around returning to the office (if applicable)?
14. Did you consider flexible working arrangements as part of your decision when resigning from your previous role?

Management

15. What is your perspective on the trust and transparency you had with your previous manager?
16. How does this compare with your current manager?
17. Did you give any consideration to relationships with your manager or senior management when deciding to resign from your previous role?

Training

18. What is your perspective on your previous employer's effort to provide and deliver training?

19. Do you consider training to have had any impact on the decision behind your resignation?

Push/pull factors

20. What was the best and worst thing(s) about your previous employer?

21. If you were to describe reasons why moved to your new employer, what would the main reasons be and why?

22. Were there any personal events that you feel may have had an impact on your decision to resign?

23. Do you think the COVID-19 pandemic had affected your decision in any way?

24. Is your new company still meeting your needs that you had before you moved?

25. Do you think the factors you mentioned will play a similar part in your decision for your next move?

Final Question:

26. Is there anything else you would like to say that you feel could be important with regards to your resignation?

Appendix B: Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

A study of the Great Resignation in Ireland:

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study on the Great Resignation in Ireland. Before you decide to partake, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether to take part or not.

Who I am and what this study is about:

I am currently a Master's in Human Resource Management student in National College of Ireland. As per the requirements of my course, I am currently undergoing a dissertation on the Great Resignation in Ireland and the reason behind people leaving their roles since the COVID-19 pandemic started in April 2020. The aim of the study is to discover reasons behind why people have quit their roles.

What will taking part involve?

Taking part in this study will involve an approximate 30–45-minute interview with me, covering a range of open-ended questions on the topic of why you resigned from your role, pay, relationships with Senior Management in your previous role, training and work-life balance. The interview will take place over video call (Microsoft Teams). This interview will be recorded (audio, not video) purely for the purpose of ease of transcription and analysis for the dissertation.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this research as you meet the criteria of being over 18 years of age, working full-time within the Tech industry and having resigned from your role since the COVID-19 pandemic in approximately April 2020.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate, refuse to answer certain or all questions, or withdraw at any point without any consequences.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

There are benefits to participation in this research. There is little in-depth knowledge surrounding the Great Resignation in Ireland at this time concerning the reasons why employees have resigned from their roles. This research aims to give an insight into the thought process behind leaving and what the factors were that contributed to resignations. There are very little to no risks associated with participation in the research, but any risks will be dealt with if or when they arise.

Will taking part be confidential?

Your identity and information you give during the interview will remain private and confidential throughout the process. You will be given a label throughout the process, for example, 'Respondent 1' to keep your identity protected at all times. Interview recordings will be stored on the college's OneDrive to ensure it is safe. If the researcher deems there is a serious risk of harm or danger to the participant or another individual (e.g., physical, emotional or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent or criminal activity) or if a serious crime has been committed, confidentiality may need to be broken. Non-anonymized data (signed consent forms and audio recordings) will be retained solely by the researcher as part of the research process, but not published in the final dissertation.

How will the information you provide be recorded, stored and protected?

The interview will be audio recorded and stored on the secure OneDrive of the National College of Ireland. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in OneDrive with access only to the researcher until after my degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legislation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time during this period.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will form part of my dissertation to fulfil the degree program and will be submitted to the National College of Ireland.

Who should you contact for further information?

You can contact me at any time on (researcher's email) or (researcher's phone number).

Thank you,

The Researcher

Appendix C: Participant consent form

Consent to take part in Research

“A study of the Great Resignation in Ireland”

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves answering questions to the best of my ability on topics surrounding my resignation.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree with my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of the people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a OneDrive folder on the National College of Ireland network, accessible only by the researcher until the exam board confirms the results of the researcher’s dissertation.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board. I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Michelle Hayden, MA in Human Resource Management

Signature of research participant _____ Date _____

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Participant Data

RESPONDENTS	AGE	ROLE AREA
Respondent A	28	Data
Respondent B	25	Sales
Respondent C	27	Insights
Respondent D	30	Recruitment
Respondent E	27	Finance
Respondent F	40	Sales