



# **Effective Recruitment and Retention Strategies for High-Performing Talent.**

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Master of Arts in Human Resource Management Information (MAHRMD1)

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Abstract

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Acknowledgements

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Employee turnover is a significant challenge for organisations worldwide, with high costs in recruitment, training, and lost productivity. In Ireland, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face particular difficulties retaining high-performing employees due to limited resources and the absence of tailored retention strategies. This study examines the main factors contributing to turnover among high performers in Irish SMEs and explores best practices for recruitment and retention.

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining a review of existing literature with primary data collection. The research investigates the link between employee engagement and turnover, the specific expectations of high performers, and the constraints SMEs face in meeting these needs.

Findings highlight that high performers value career development, continuous learning, recognition, and flexibility. SMEs that implement personalised retention initiatives—such as mentorship programmes, performance-based rewards, and flexible working arrangements—can improve engagement and reduce turnover. The study offers practical recommendations to help Irish SMEs attract and retain top talent, strengthening both performance and long-term competitiveness.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### ***1.1 Introduction to Employee Turnover and Retention***

Employee turnover has emerged as a major issue of concern to organizations globally and this directly affects recruitment costs and productivity. O'Neill (2018) states that high turnover can be quite expensive and even a study that looked into the overall cost of replacing an employee revealed that the costs varied between 30 and 200 percent of the annual salary of an employee depending on the type of the job and the level of seniority. This expense involves recruitment, training, loss of productivity and this demoralizes the team. Moreover, Gabriel et al. (2020) point out that in Ireland, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) experience a challenge of retaining high-performing employees because of the lack of resources to adopt the extensive employee retention initiatives. The issues are particularly acute in such industries as hospitality and technologies, where turnover rates are more than 30 percent, which poses a huge economic burden on companies.

The connection between engagement and turnover intention of employees is well-documented in literature. According to Saks (2019), engagement is essential in retention where active employees are less prone to leave as compared to disengaged employees. In particular, Saks discovered that the firms that had a higher employee engagement recorded lower turnover rates by 12 percent in comparison to the firms with low rates of employee engagement. This explains why it is necessary to create a workplace environment that will actively engage employees and minimize the turnover and retain high-performing employees. It is important thus that organizations gain the knowledge that exists between turnover and employee engagement and retention strategies in order to reduce the effects of turnover on the performance of the organizations.

### ***1.2 The Importance of High-Performing Talent***

Employees who perform well are usually regarded as backbones of any successful organization. Lubis (2022) stresses that the high performers form a certain contribution to the competitive advantage of an organization. They are usually more productive, innovative and motivated, which helps the organization to stay in the market strong. The top performers also contribute towards the important strategic initiatives and are more probable to shape the company culture towards the positive direction. Lubis (2022) also notes that a 20 percent increase in the ROI of

the organization is achieved when organizations invest in retaining their high-performing employees.

Hom et al. (2017) develop a detailed definition of high-performing employees and say that these individuals demonstrate their superiority in such important dimensions as productivity, leadership, and problem-solving. The high performers are those who not only achieve targets but also do more by surpassing the expectations of the organization towards its strategic goals. Their importance in the organizations is enormous since they are normally involved in the innovation process and they hold a key role in the development of an organization.

### ***1.3 The Problem of Employee Turnover in Ireland***

Employee retention has been a common problem across most industries in Ireland especially in the hospitality and print industries that have had its own challenges in retaining talent. According to Cronin (2019), the turnover in the Irish hospitality sector is still high, amounting to about 35 percent yearly, well above the national turnover in the rest of the industries. Such high turnover rate is particularly harmful in those jobs where specialized skills and experience are required. This continuous churn does not only cost recruitment and training costs but also impacts on the quality of service and the efficiency of the operation hence reduced customer satisfaction and returns.

Likewise, Brennan (2019) writes about the effect of turnover in the Irish print business, where the low wages and career progression possibilities that the industry traditionally offered only add to the turnover rate of approximately 30%. Just like other industries, the print industry has a problem of attracting and retaining good workers particularly in a competitive labour market. There is the absence of career development and appreciation, which is one of the major factors that makes talented employees move to other organizations. In addition, the cost of turnover in the hospitality and print industries is high which leads to loss of productivity and disruption of the operations involved.

According to Fahim (2018), the costs of turnover can be estimated on a broader level, as direct costs include recruitment costs, cost of training, and decreased productivity, whereas indirect costs can be measured in decreased employee morale and customer satisfaction. These economic pressures render it essential that the organizations should be proactive in dealing with the turnover by investing in the strategies that help them not only attract talent but also retain it.

### ***1.4 Research Problem***

High turnover of high-performing employees is the main problem that organizations in Ireland especially the SMEs are experiencing. As noted by Munn (2018), resource constraints tend to hinder recruitment and retention of SMEs in Ireland as they find it hard to put in place competitive compensation package and career advancement programs. Also, this is worsened by the fact that there are no specific strategies of retaining high performers. Although big multinational companies (MNCs) are able to attract and retain high potential based on the available resources, SMEs tend to lag behind in terms of provision of equal development opportunities or benefits.

Besides, Rismayadi (2024) notes that it is necessary to design special retention plans, especially regarding top performers. The high performer usually has special career requirements and expectations that are not addressed in the usual retention programs. Such workers need to have chances of constant learning, career development and satisfactory work. SMEs on the other hand who are normally limited by budget and time find it a challenge to come up with strategies that can meet these needs. Rismayadi supports the retention strategies which include the personalized experience in the form of mentorship, flexible working, and performance-based rewards to make sure that high-performing workers feel appreciated and engaged.

The fact that the turnover issue is not fully eliminated in Irish SMEs prompts the understanding that unless the approach is more specific and resourceful, it will be rather difficult to retain high-performing employees. Absence of individualized retention plans not only increases turnover but also negatively affects growth potential of SMEs, meaning it is crucial to explore the ways of retaining the highly valuable resources.

### ***1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study***

This study will aim at finding out the major determinants of employee turnover especially in high performing employees and to come up with a list of best practices on recruitment and retention practices. This study intends to come up with practical solutions that an organization, specifically, SMEs in Ireland, can adopt to minimize turnover and maximize employee engagement by learning the reasons behind turnover and high performers expectations.

This study will have the following objectives:

1. To determine the main variables that affected turnover rates among the high-performing employees in Irish SMEs.
2. To review the existing practices of recruitment and retention.
3. To suggest individual employee retention programs that suit high performers.

### ***1.6 Research Questions***

To guide the exploration of the research problem, the study will seek to answer the following research questions:

1. **What strategies can be implemented to reduce turnover among high-performing employees in SMEs?**
2. **What recruitment practices are most effective in attracting high-performing talent to SMEs?**

### ***1.7 Structure of the Dissertation***

This dissertation is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – This chapter introduces the research problem, including the significance of employee turnover and the challenges faced by SMEs in Ireland. It presents the aims, objectives and research questions that the study follows.
- **Chapter 2: Literature Review** – This chapter gives a detailed literature review of what has already been written on employee turnover and the factors that affect turnover of high performing employees, recruitment and retention practices and employee engagement. It also gives the gaps in the literature that are going to be addressed in this study.
- **Chapter 3: Methodology** – This chapter gives details of the research design, methodology and data collection methods. It covers the reasons of choosing qualitative and quantitative methods, the sampling methods and the data collecting instruments.
- **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion** – This chapter will give the results of this study and interpreting the collected data, and will have implications of the results in regards to the research questions.

- **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations** – The last chapter summarizes the main findings and gives the practical recommendations to the SMEs in Ireland on how they could enhance their recruitment and retention processes to high-performing employees.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Introduction***

Employee turnover is a term that denotes how fast employees change in an organization. It is divided into two broad groups: voluntary and involuntary turnover, which are voluntary and involuntary termination of employees respectively based on the performance issue or organizational reorganization. The problem of high turnover, especially voluntary turnover can be very expensive to organizations leading to cost incurred in recruiting new employees, training cost and loss of organizational knowledge. A study conducted by Hom et al. (2017) indicates that the direct cost of turnover might vary between 30 and 200 percent of the annual employee salary rate depending on the employee and his/her seniority.

High-performing employees are too important in organizations, and their significance can be hardly overestimated. The high performers are always more productive, innovative and dedicated to the success of the organization. Such people help the company gain competitive advantage and in the long term development. A report by Ferguson (2025) also shows that there is a 22 percent increase in profitability and 21 percent in the productivity of companies that keep high performers as compared to companies with high turnover rates. This highlights the importance of institutions or organizations to employ effective retention strategies or rather practices that are specific to retain the high performing talents of an institution or organization. The absence of these people can lead companies to the loss of their competitive advantage with a reduced level of productivity and motivation.

### ***2.2 Factors Contributing to Employee Turnover***

#### ***Lack of Career Advancement: How a Lack of Growth Opportunities Contributes to Turnover***

Promotions are also a very important element in retention of employees. Workers that feel that they cannot get a chance to grow tend to quit their jobs and seek employment in other places. Hom et al. (2017) note that the turnover is commonly caused by job dissatisfaction, especially when workers consider that their personal development and career growth are suppressed. Studies have shown that businesses that fail to provide career development programs experience 35% increase in turnover rate in comparison with those who provide the programs. Hom et al. (2017) also point out that the employee, whose performance is high, is more likely to show more



job satisfaction and organizational commitment and would be less willing to leave the company unless there is no satisfaction of his needs. The retention of these employees is therefore very essential in organizations that aim at achieving long term success and organizational growth.

#### *Organizational Culture: The Relationship between Organizational Culture and Turnover Intentions*

Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in employee retention, influencing how employees view their work environment and, in turn, their decision to remain with the company. Fahim (2018) discusses how an organization's culture can either foster loyalty or contribute to turnover intentions. For instance, companies with a strong culture of recognition, collaboration, and transparency tend to have lower turnover rates. In contrast, organizations with toxic or misaligned cultures experience higher turnover, particularly among high performers who seek workplaces that align with their values.

According to the Shin & Jeung (2019) study, organizational culture affects turnover, particularly on proactive employees, who tend to change workplace in case the culture is incompatible with their work principles or ethics. Pandya (2021) states that culture directly affects the employee engagement that is highly related to retention. Organisations with positive culture where the employees feel important and connected have reported a turnover rate as low as 20 percent lower than organisations with an inactive workforce. Particularly, employee engagement can also lower the turnover rates greatly through making sure that the employees feel engaged by their position and the bigger organizational purpose.

#### *Leadership Styles and Employee Engagement: Leadership's Influence on Employee Satisfaction and Engagement*

The employees are seriously affected by the leadership styles and their retention. Robinson (2025) comes up with transformational leadership which involves motivating employees, giving them freedom of action and allowing them to grow professionally, as one of the best methods that can be used to retain high-performing employees. Transformational leaders do not only motivate the employees, but they also make the organizations achieve this success by making employees feel that they are empowered to make decisions and perform in order to achieve the

goals of the organization. Transactional leadership on the other hand has an increased turnover rate (or rather is likely to have one) especially among employees who desire increased levels of personal growth and recognition.

Stevenson (2025) also stresses the relation between leadership and retention of skills. Organizations with strong leadership tend to retain skilled employees because these leaders promote an environment that supports professional development and recognizes employee contributions. The study indicates that organizations with **effective leadership strategies** have **12% lower turnover rates** than organizations with ineffective leadership. Leadership, therefore, not only influences employee satisfaction but also determines whether employees feel compelled to stay or leave.

Moreover, **Terry (2025)** discusses how leadership practices, such as providing clear communication, fostering a culture of feedback, and ensuring career development, are integral to reducing turnover. Employees under leaders who offer growth opportunities, recognize achievements, and provide a sense of purpose are far less likely to leave the organization. The data supports this, showing that companies with strong leadership retain **15% more high-performing employees** than those with ineffective leadership.

### ***2.3 Recruitment Strategies for High-Performing Talent***

#### *Employer Branding and Talent Attraction: The Importance of Employer Branding in Attracting High-Performing Talent*

Employer branding plays a critical role in attracting high-performing employees to an organization. A strong employer brand enhances an organization's reputation and makes it an attractive place to work, especially for top talent. **Rajput & Sharma (2023)** emphasize that a robust employer brand not only communicates the company's culture and values but also highlights the benefits of working for the organization. A compelling employer brand helps organizations stand out in competitive job markets, making it easier to attract skilled candidates who align with the company's mission. Evidence indicates that firms with powerful employer brands witness an increase of 50 percent in the number of applications received by the top talents and 20 percent in the retention levels compared to those firms that lack a definite employer value

proposition (EVP). This is one of the reasons why organizations should take the initiative to invest in the employer branding process so that they can establish a reputation that is appealing to high-performing talent.

In the case of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), there are fewer resources to attract the high performers. Nevertheless, Molulon (2023) believes that SMEs could use their own culture and an opportunity to work closely with their colleagues to hire the best talents. The SMEs can differentiate themselves by emphasizing on individualized career development, the ability to work flexibly and the culture of innovativeness that may not be available in larger corporations that may offer higher pay in terms of monetary compensation. The other study Thompson (2025) implies is that the organization culture is a major factor in the recruitment and turnover intentions. An employee with high performance can be an especially appealing candidate who needs to find meaningful work and a favorable atmosphere in a culture with a value that includes collaboration, work-life balance, and personal growth.

#### *Technological Advancements in Recruitment: AI, Predictive Analytics, and Algorithmic Matching in Recruitment*

Technology has transformed the field of recruitment and the use of artificial intelligence (AI), predictive analytics and algorithmic matching in the recruitment process is growing. Rismayadi (2024) describes the use of AI in optimizing the recruitment process by automating the process of candidate screening, resumes parsing, and even predictive modeling to assign the right candidate to the right job. Recruitment tools based on AI help employ the best employees, and they analyze huge volumes of candidate information, which helps to save a lot of time on hiring recruitment. The efficiency of AI in filtering and ranking candidates according to their suitability with the job description and organisational culture has resulted in a 30 per cent rise in the efficiency of the recruitment process in organisations that have implemented the use of AI.

Besides, Sisneros (2025) addresses the direct effect that recruitment strategies have on organizational performance and employee productivity. With the help of data-driven recruitment, the organization will have improved decision making in terms of hiring and as such, employees and the job will fit better thus employees will be more satisfied and productive in their jobs. Predictive analytics can also help organizations to know how many people they should hire in the

future following the trends and workforce analytics and this may also enhance retention since there will always be a continuous flow of high performing candidates. The effect of these technologies on employee productivity is an increase of up to 25 percent because these technologies match jobs better and ensure a better onboarding process in companies using them.

### *Diversity and Inclusion: How Inclusive Recruitment Practices Affect the Attraction of High-Performing Employees*

Employment practices that are inclusive do not only lead to diversity within the work place but also have significant contribution in terms of attracting high performing employees. The diversity teams have been found to be more creative, take better decisions and are more effective. Brennan (2019) states that inclusive recruitment strategies have a major role in finding high-performing talent in Ireland. Companies with diversity and inclusion (D&I) orientation are more likely to attract more talent and are regarded as progressive and socially responsible. According to the study conducted by Brennan, it was observed that businesses that embrace inclusive hiring practices have an 18 per cent increase in the rate of employee retention of its diverse recruits as opposed to the businesses that do not embrace such practices. Moreover, diverse workplaces tend to improve the appeal of high performing employees who appreciate similar opportunities in their career growth, irrespective of gender, race and background.

Vishali (2025) points out the new strategies of retention that organizations are implementing by embracing the inclusive recruitment. When organizations have incorporated D&I in their recruitment strategies, it provides a platform that makes every employee, irrespective of his or her background, feel enabled and supported. This does not only help in attracting the top talent, but also keeps the high performers committed and engaged in the organization. An inclusive and diverse workforce is likely to create a culture of creativity and innovation which are very important to the success of an organization. Employee satisfaction, which is also characterized by lower rates of turnover (by 25 percent) is also experienced in companies with strong D&I initiatives, which contrast the companies with weak or no D&I efforts.

## ***2.4 Retention Strategies for High-Performing Talent***

### *Employee Engagement: The Role of Engagement in Retaining High-Performing Employees*

Engagement of employees is generally known to be an important determinant of retaining talented individuals who perform their duties well. The working employees will tend to stay dedicated to the organization and play an important role in its prosperity. Saks (2019) observes that one of the retention drivers is the employee engagement, especially among high performers. Saks points out that high-level engagement in organizations results in 12 percent reduced turnover as opposed to low levels of engagement. The engaged employees are better placed to be satisfied with their positions, have increased job satisfaction, and have low chances of moving to other opportunities. This observation is consistent with the fact that well-performing employees, which are usually motivated by challenges and the desire to gain recognition, have the greatest probability to flourish in the environment where their effort is valued, and their job is aligned with organizational objectives.

Another important role of employee retention is the moderating role of organizational culture towards job satisfaction and engagement. Agbodjah (2025) studies the way in which organizational culture may affect the interrelationship between job satisfaction and employee engagement. Agbodjah determines that the positive organizational culture, that is characterized by open communication, trust, support, and is focused on it, makes the connection between the organizational employees and their organizations stronger. Organization culture particularly responds to high performers and when such a performer feels that his/her values are in line with the organization he is more likely to remain. The paper indicates that workers in companies with a good and conducive culture record 18 percent job satisfaction, a factor that determines their choice of remaining in an organization.

#### *Career Development and Mentorship: The Importance of Career Progression and Mentorship for High Performers*

High-performing employees require mentorship programs and career-related opportunities as important retention practices. Molulon (2023) also talks about how career development and training programs can help to retain the high performers, especially in SMEs. The study concluded that SMEs with high-performance employees turnover that invests in career advancement opportunities, i.e., leadership training, skills development, and succession planning, has a 20 percent lower rate of high-performance employee turnover. Giving high performers

clear career paths enables them to have a vision of being in the organization and hence there are minimal chances of them finding opportunities elsewhere.

Moreover, Porkodi & Rajeswari (2025) explain that talent management practices like mentorship programs are a great way of ensuring that high performing employees are retained in the organization. They have found out that mentored employees have a 25 percent chance of remaining in their organization. Employees who deliver good performances also strive to find their way to people who are experienced in order to perfect their skills, solve complex problems and propel their careers. The ability to retain top talent is most likely to be achieved by the organization that offers mentorship programmes, more so those that are specific to the high performers.

#### *Compensation and Rewards: The Role of Competitive Pay and Rewards in Retaining High Performers*

The retention of high-performing employees is based on the issue of compensation. Ferguson (2025) analyzes the correlation between compensations and retention especially in large companies. It was also found out through the study that high-performing employees at competitive compensation rates are 30 percent less prone to leaving their organizations than their employees who are under-compensated. Attractive pay packages, such as salary, bonuses, and stocks are important to attract and retain best employees. Good performers have high chances of staying in a company that values them by rewarding them with money.

In addition, Ekanem & Osarenmwinde (2025) assert that an effective employee retention policy that entails compensation and other benefits is very instrumental in enhancing organizational performance. In their study it is determined that, organizations that have sturdy retention policies record 15 percent greater employee retention and a 10 percent rise in general productivity. When properly developed and matched to the aims of an organization, effective compensation and rewards strategies can be an effective instrument in retention of high-performing employees.

#### *Work-Life Balance and Flexible Work Arrangements: Flexibility as a Retention Strategy Post-Pandemic*

Work-life balance has taken a significant role in retaining the employees, especially after the pandemic. According to Urme (2023), one of the ways of enhancing retention is based on flexible working arrangements including remote working, flexible hours, and job-sharing. Urme states that flexible work policies reduced turnover rate of high-performing employees by 20 percent in the organizations where the policies had been adopted. The ability to juggle between work and personal issues is important to high performers who usually have more than one commitment in and outside work. Besides leading to job satisfaction, flexible work arrangements also increase productivity since the workers can be allowed to work in the best environment that they need.

High-performing employees have been adversely affected by the post-pandemic era that has brought a major change in expectation. People who have got accustomed to the convenience of remote working and flexible schedule have become less willing to switch back to the strict organizational forms. Organizations which employ flexible work opportunities will be able to have a better chance of attracting and retaining high performers hence better organizational performance.

## ***2.5 Gaps in the Literature***

### *Lack of Research on High-Performing Employees*

Though the concept of retaining employees is increasingly becoming popular, there is a gap in the literature where the discussions are limited to high-performing employees. Hom et al. (2017) write about the tendency of the turnover research to dwell on the general trends in the workforce and not much on the individual needs and peculiarities of high performers. Top performers usually expect more of their employers and this includes growth, appreciation, and independence. Nonetheless, most of the available turnover studies fail to separate high performers and average employees. The fact that there is a lack of understanding of what exactly motivates and drives high performers and what they need, causes the problem that organizations find it harder to plan retention strategies accordingly.

Molulon (2023) also indicates the deficiency of studies on the retention approaches that target the high-performance employees of the SMEs. Although SMEs are usually characterized by high turnover rates, mainly among the top talent, most of the studies have concentrated on generic

retention techniques without putting into consideration the challenges that SMEs experience in their endeavors to retain high performers. As there should be more specific studies which should investigate how SMEs can come up with approaches which are able to address the needs of the best employees.

### *Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements on High Performers*

The other gap that is of great interest is effect of flexible work schedules on high performers. Even though flexible work policies have been reported extensively when it comes to overall staff satisfaction, Urme (2023) notes that not much research has been undertaken when it comes to the impact of these arrangements on high performers in particular. Employees with high performance can exhibit special demands on flexibility, which include control over their working hours, the right to work remote or the necessity to have a team-oriented atmosphere. There is a need to conduct more studies in the area of the effectiveness of flexible work policies in retaining such important workforce as hybrid and remote working models develop further.

## **2.6 Linking Research Question to Theory: Variables and Theoretical Propositions**

### *Resource-Based View (RBV): The Theory Explaining the Importance of High-Performing Employees as Valuable Assets*

Resource-Based View (RBV) is a very important model in interpreting the importance of high-performing employees in organizations. The RBV theory assumes that organizations can achieve a sustainable competitive advantage through the utilization of unique internal resources and the top performing employees are regarded as one of the most important resources. Lubis (2022) points out that efficient employees are a core organizational resource, which leads to innovation, problem-solving, and organizational success in general. Such workers have knowledge, skills and competencies that are normally hard to copy and their presence gives a company a competitive advantage. Companies that have been able to retain and handle these high performers have a better chance of winning over the competition and most importantly adjust to the new conditions of the market. The RBV thus stresses on the strategic value of investing in developing and retaining high performing talent into the company because they are



instrumental in increasing the performance of the organization and becoming successful in the long-term.

*Propositions: Organizations Adopting Innovative Recruitment Practices Will Experience Lower Turnover Among High-Performing Employees*

Since organizations have come to appreciate the quality of high performing employees, novel recruitment processes are starting to emerge as one of the strategies towards minimizing turnover. Fahim (2018) suggests that companies that adopt some new recruitment strategies, including specific recruitment activities, employer branding, and individualized job offers have higher chances of attracting and retaining productive workers. The practices also make the needs and expectations of the employees to be in line with the organizational goals, thus it reduces chances of turnover. Moreover, Zamri & Abd Halim (2023) emphasize a systematic review of retention strategies and conclude that the personalized approach to recruitment and retention of high-performing workers contributes to the fact that the retention rate increases by more than 80 percent. Organizations can minimize the turnover of high performers by learning the special needs of this very critical talent pool and offering them a work environment in which they can not only grow, but also be recognized.

## **2.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has explored the literature covering employee turnover by mainly concentrating on retaining employees with high performance as they constitute the major source of organizational success through their productivity, creativity, and role in competitive advantage. It began by defining the term turnover, its expensive connotations, especially in cases where it involves top talent. Major causes of turnover were discussed such as failure to have a career advancement, disjointed organizational culture, and poor leadership. Studies also indicate that favorable leadership environment, positive culture and development have great impact in decreasing turnover. Employer branding, technological instruments (AI and predictive analytics), and inclusive hiring are considered the key elements of recruitment based on which employers can appeal to high-performing talent, and SMEs can leverage personalized career development and innovation cultures in the competition.

Retention strategies focused on engagement of employees, career and mentorship, competitive pay and working arrangements post-pandemic. Research has shown these acts boost satisfaction, commitment and long-term retention. Lastly, research gaps have also been noted in the chapter: lack of specific research on high performers, in particular in SMEs, and limited coverage of the effect that flexible work has on high performers. The theoretical framework that was introduced as the conceptual guide was the Resource-Based View (RBV), where high performers were discussed as boundless resources, special and difficult to clone. The literature indicates in its support of the idea that new, individualized recruitment and retention policies create decreases in turnover rates of best talent.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the authors provide the methodological framework that was used in the study of the recruitment and retention policies of high-performing workers in Irish small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This chapter aims to give a clear, open, well-reasoned description of the research design and methodological choices that are underlying this study. All the decisions concerning different stages of work, starting with philosophy position and ending with sampling, data collection, and analysis, rely on academical literature and are consistent with the aims and questions of the study.

This dissertation would like to pursue a central theme to argue how Irish SMEs may attract and retain high performing talents-a prized resource of competitive survival. Such aptly fits into the context of the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm conceptualising the asset of human capital as a resource, valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable and, therefore, capable of forming a sustainable competitive advantage (Lubis, 2022; Boxall & Purcell, 2022). Understanding how to strategically deploy the practices of recruitment and retention is more important in the case of the Irish Small Medium Enterprises where resource constraints may hinder the realization of comprehensive talent programs in the organization.

The adopted methodology aimed to explore this recipient-voter with a systematic evidence-based approach to the problem using quantitative methods so that the findings gained could be recognised as generalisable. The chapter has been organized into a number of important sections that include the philosophy of the research, research approach, design, sample strategy, research procedure, and the ethical considerations.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach**

The study will follow the positivist philosophical paradigm characterised by the assumption that the reality is objective and could be measured using empirical evidence and logical thinking. Positivism presupposes that truth exists when the observer is not involved and that knowledge can be produced most effectively by gathering and interpreting the existing observable data (Creswell & Creswell, 2021; Bryman, 2020). This school of thought especially has fit in business

and management fields that involve quantitative relationship, including the relationship between HRM practices and employee turnover which is statistically learned.

Positivism is in harmony with the character of the research which tries to quantify the perceptions of HR supervisors and employees toward effectiveness of the hiring and retention of employees in a given organisational set-up. The adoption of this paradigm involves the study concentrating on the collection of standardised data using a structured survey, a method that allows making comparisons and statistically verifying the results of various organisations and domains.

Very closely connected with the positivist approach is the adoption of a deductive reasoning method. Within a deductive research, one relies on the known theories and models- in this situation, RBV and evidence-based HRM and continues to test by means of suppositions or hypotheses through empirical information (Acharyya & Bhattacharya, 2020; Basias & Pollalis, 2020). It contrasts an inductive strategy, in which theory is constructed provided qualitative observations. The deductive logic should be used in the present study as there are already established structures and frameworks pertinent to employee engagement, turnover, and talent management in the literature (Hom et al., 2021; Saks, 2022). These aim at validating and contextualising these models in Irish SME context.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The study utilizes quantitative, cross sectional and descriptive research design which is considered to be sufficient, given the way the research questions are formulated. A quantitative study design allows gathering data in a structured and numeric format that can be statistically analysed to check the links between independent variables (e.g., recruitment or retention practices) and dependent variables (e.g., turnover intention) (Kumar, 2021; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2022).

The cross-sectional aspect implies that survey was conducted on one occasion, being a reflection of the way things are done in the present moment and the way participants perceive things. The design is efficient when applied in the time-limited academic research and suits adequately in measuring HRM applications in various sectors without posing the need of long-term follow-ups (Bryman, 2020). It is practical as well to Irish SMEs, as they tend to have poor administrative

capacity, and they would like to use short interactions with research processes (Chanda & Shen, 2020; Nolan & Garavan, 2024).

In addition, the descriptive aspect of the design provides the ability to identify and summarise the trends in practices of recruitment and retention. It allows making comparisons, between different variables, to include the type of a sector, size of an organisation and level of management, without attempting to have a causative association. This strategy will help in achieving the general research purpose of giving viable information that can be acted upon instead of the investigation of intricate causal frameworks.

### **3.4 Population and Sampling**

The selected target population of the study will be comprised of individuals in the Irish SMEs, in particular, (1) the HR managers or HR officer, (2) the SMEs executives who could be the CEO, the senior managers and (3) the high-performing employee who have been either identified by the organisation or self-identified as giving preference results. The representations of each of the participants are different as the HR professionals present the policy-level perspective, the executives offer the strategic vision, and employees are providing the experiential feedback.

With the uniqueness in the direction of study, purposive sampling was taken as the most suitable approach. Purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgmental sampling, includes the selection of a sample based on their aptitude to respond to this or that situation with a relevant and informed answer (Neuman, 2020; Denscombe, 2020). This is especially helpful when the goal is not statistical generalisation to the wider population beyond the study, but some theoretical or conceptual explanation of a particular problem.

The respondents were drawn who included technology, hospitality industry and professional services sectors, which have been representative of the variety of SME activity in Ireland. In the end, the target sample size amounted to around 50 respondents, a range considered to be adequate in terms of the recommendations set out to a small-scale quantitative study that would be willing to perform correlation and regression analysis (Field, 2022).

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The information was collected by means of the self-administered online questionnaire designed with the help of Microsoft Forms and shared over the email and some professional social network like LinkedIn. There were also practical reasons in this online method selection, such as cost, time management, and geographical distribution of target participants. Also, as more and more people work remotely due to a COVID-19 pandemic, online surveys are becoming an exceptionally familiar and effective method to communicate with busy SME professionals (Wright, 2021).

There are multiple particular benefits of implementing an online questionnaire in the scope of the research. First, it offers an affordable way of accessing a large and heterogeneous sample within the limited period of time (Cohen et al., 2020). Second, it has an option of anonymity and confidentiality which is essential in the gathering of perceptions regarding subjects that might be considered sensitive like employee retention, leadership or dissatisfaction. Third, it fosters flexibility in the participation process, as the respondents have time to pass the survey whenever they want, which is relevant in a SME context where employees can both multi-task and work long hours (Cooke et al., 2020).

Based on the prior existing research on recruitment and retention in SMEs, such as Molulon (2023), Rajput and Sharma (2023), and Rismayadi (2024), the questionnaire was developed using the obtained knowledge.

### **3.6 Development of research instruments**

The survey tool was a survey item in the form of Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) designed to gauge the agreement of the respondents with the statements in three thematic areas;

- Recruitment practices: Items focused on employer branding, use of AI in hiring, diversity, and alignment with high-performer values (Bhardwaj & Roy, 2023; Al-Hussaini et al., 2023).
- Retention drivers: Items examined leadership engagement, mentoring availability, flexibility, compensation satisfaction, and recognition (Rajput & Sharma, 2023; Gabriel et al., 2020).

- Turnover intentions: Questions were adapted from validated instruments measuring voluntary exit likelihood and job embeddedness (Hom et al., 2021; Saks, 2022).

The instrument was pre-tested with five SME HR managers and adjusted for clarity and relevance. This pre-validation ensured the instrument's alignment with the Irish SME context (Kapur, 2021).

### **3.7 Data Analysis Techniques**

Following data collection, analysis was conducted using SPSS.

- Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were used to summarise recruitment and retention practices across SMEs (Field, 2022).
- Inferential statistics were used to test relationships:
  - o Pearson's correlation to examine the association between perceived HR practices and turnover intention
  - o Linear regression analysis to determine the predictive value of practices such as career development, flexibility, and branding on employee retention (Biemer, 2021; Ragab & Arisha, 2020)

This combination provided both descriptive insight and explanatory power to answer the research questions effectively.

### **3.8 Validity and Reliability**

To make the findings of the research credible, the researcher had to highlight on validity and reliability as some of the concepts applicable in quantitative research methodology. Reliability is a chance to define consistency and stability of the measurement device, and validity explains the extent to which a tool quantifies what it intends to quantify (Saunders et al., 2022; Denscombe, 2020).

The reliability of internal consistency was established through the computation of Cronbach alpha for every single main thematic scale in a survey. The scales covered practices of recruitment, strategies of retention, and intentions of turn overs. Values of all scales in the current research were over 0.70 implying that the items on the survey measured the latent construct

reliable as per (Nunnally, 2021). This favors the validity of the device in providing reproducible answers when similar conditions are taken place.

This is because the pricing of the questionnaire occurred through content validity; that is, whether the elements contained within the questionnaire are comprehensive enough to represent all facets of the concept. This was established through a development that was made based on the existing literature and validated HR frameworks. Namely, recruitment items were crafted relying on studies by Bhardwaj and Roy (2023) and Al-Hussaini et al. (2023), whereas retention dimensions were designed using the literature presented by Saks (2022), Molulon (2023), and Rajput and Sharma (2023). This was in order to make sure that the entire important aspects of the research topic found reflection in the instrument.

Construct validity was on the other hand intensified by a logical grouping of items under thematic domain based on theory. The research fell into clusters according to Resource-Based View (RBV), strategic human resource management models and empirical studies of employee engagement and turnover intention (Boxall & Purcell, 2022; Gabriel et al., 2020; Hom et al., 2021). Such an organisation of variables promotes the theoretical possibility that the instrument will succeed in measuring the abstract concepts within high-performance HRM practices.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

This was most crucial during the research since ethical standards were to be observed. Since the research required the participation of humans in terms of experimentation, information and publishing their professional opinions and organisational experiences, the rights, privacy and autonomy of the human subjects were taken precautions.

The university institutional review board approved the research ethically before data collection activity. This consent was to the effect that the study had followed acceptable ethical guidelines such as respect to persons, beneficence, and justice. All of them were provided with the Participant Information Sheet that clarified the aim of the research, the role of the participants, the voluntariness of participation, and the security of the data. A digital informed consent was given to the participants, who then had to continue with the survey.

No person identifiability data was gathered to appeal to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and guarantee information confidentiality. Answers were coded and safely placed on



encrypted university certified servers. The data was in raw form and only the main researcher accessed it. The described strategy conforms to the recommendations formulated by Mahuika and Mahuika (2022) who emphasize the values of data sovereignty and data privacy within the framework of digital research. Lastly, the right of the participants to withdraw themselves to the study whenever before delivery of the survey was clearly given without any penalty or need to give an explanation.

### **3.10 Limitations of the Methodology**

Although a stringent and well-defined methodology was adopted in this research, a number of limitations should be considered in order to place the findings in perspective and assist in doing further research.

On the one hand, taking a self-reported information adds the possibility of a response bias (especially social desirability bias). This is not an unknown issue in HR research, particularly where the ability to remain anonymous fails to overcome professional pride or fear of being judged (Wright, 2021). Secondly, the study was cross-sectional and it takes data at a point in time. To demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of the development of HR tactics down the line, a longitudinal design could have helped. Thirdly, due to a purposive, non-random sample, the findings cannot be generalised to other SMEs, as they are justified by the nature of the research objectives. Moreover, the findings are not generalisable to larger multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in the same industries, which typically have more advanced HR systems and resources.

To mitigate these limitations, several measures were taken: the instrument was pre-tested, the sampling criteria were clearly defined, and all assumptions and limitations were transparently reported. While these measures cannot eliminate all bias, they improve the internal credibility of the findings.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the methodological foundation of the study, explaining and justifying the research philosophy, design, sampling, and data collection procedures. Adopting a positivist, deductive, and quantitative approach, the research was conducted through an online questionnaire administered to HR professionals and employees in Irish SMEs. The chapter also

detailed how the study ensured reliability and validity, maintained ethical integrity, and acknowledged its methodological limitations. These steps collectively underpin the trustworthiness of the research findings.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative analysis undertaken to examine the recruitment and retention strategies adopted by Irish SMEs to attract and sustain high-performing employees. Anchored in the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework, this research seeks to evaluate the internal capabilities of SMEs—particularly their human capital strategies—and assess their impact on turnover intention. The findings discussed here directly address the study’s key research questions, which aimed to identify the main turnover factors, evaluate recruitment practices, and explore the effectiveness of retention strategies in Irish SMEs.

The structure of this chapter is organised into five main sections. First, it outlines descriptive results related to respondent demographics and summarises responses to the survey’s central themes. These include employer branding, the use of AI in recruitment, candidate experience, flexibility at work, professional development, and employee intention to leave. Next, the results are discussed thematically, mapping them onto the core research objectives and supported by relevant literature. Subsequently, the chapter applies theoretical analysis through the lens of RBV, highlighting where findings align with or diverge from theoretical assumptions. A comparison with previous studies is also made to evaluate sector-specific nuances. Lastly, the practical implications for SME leadership and HR managers are outlined.

The analysis was conducted using SPSS software, with descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) used to summarise the data, followed by correlation and regression analysis to identify associations between key variables. This quantitative approach supports the RBV premise that well-managed internal resources—in this case, high-performing employees—contribute to long-term competitive advantage.

### **4.2 Descriptive Results**

#### ***4.2.1 Respondent Demographics***

The survey gathered data from 50 participants working within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Ireland. Respondents represented a diverse mix of business sectors, job roles, and levels of experience, offering a comprehensive insight into HR practices across the Irish SME landscape.

In terms of sector distribution, 30% of respondents were employed in the technology sector, while 25% each came from the hospitality and manufacturing sectors, and 20% from general services. This diversity allowed for sectoral comparisons across fast-moving and traditional industries. Gender representation was also balanced, with 52% of respondents identifying as male, 46% as female, and 2% preferring not to disclose their gender.

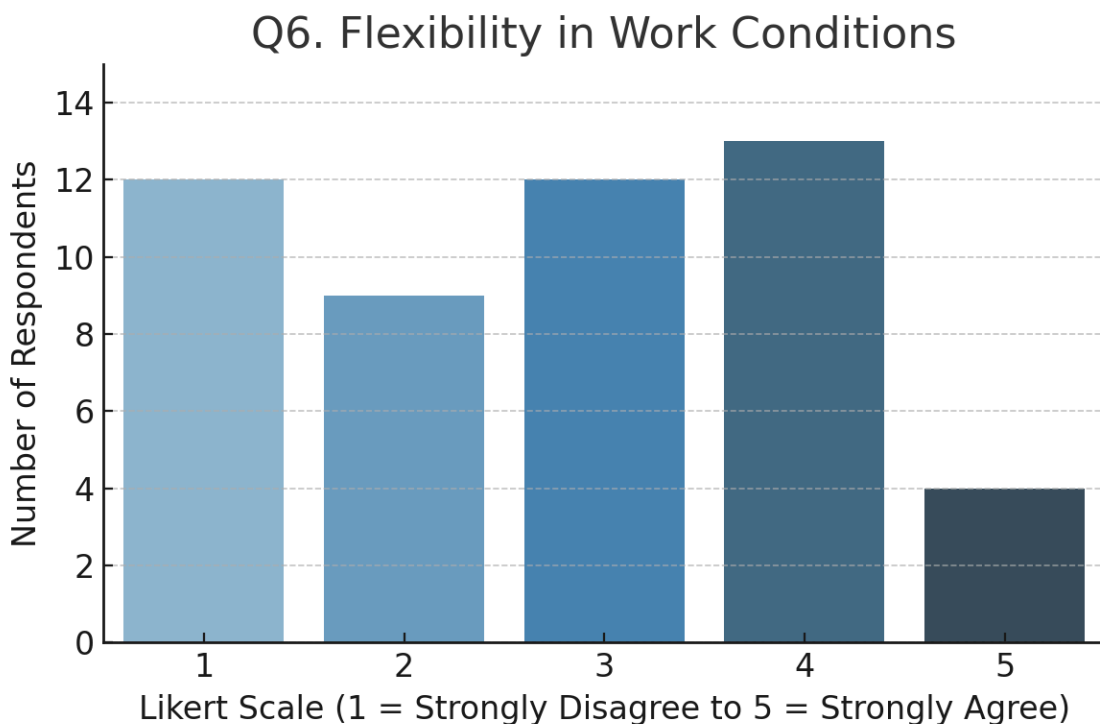
Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Sector</b>	Technology	15	30%
	Hospitality	13	25%
	Manufacturing	13	25%
	Services	9	20%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	26	52%
	Female	23	46%
	Prefer not to say	1	2%
<b>Age Group</b>	21–30	12	24%
	31–40	19	38%
	41–50	13	26%
	51+	6	12%
<b>Job Role</b>	HR Manager	17	34%
	Executive	15	30%
	High-Performing Employee	18	36%
<b>Tenure (Years)</b>	<2	10	20%
	2–5	21	42%
	6–10	14	28%
	>10	5	10%

Age distribution revealed that the majority of participants were between 31 and 40 years of age (38%), followed by 41–50 (26%), 21–30 (24%), and a smaller proportion aged 51 and above (12%). This indicates that the dataset captures experiences from mid-career professionals, a group most likely to be involved in strategic talent decisions.

Regarding job roles, 34% of participants were HR managers, 30% were executive-level decision-makers, and 36% identified as high-performing employees. This ensured that the data reflected both managerial and employee perspectives on recruitment and retention policies. Finally, tenure varied across participants: 20% had less than two years of experience in their current organisation, 42% had worked between two and five years, 28% between six and ten years, and 10% had over a decade of tenure. This spread allows the study to capture early-stage, mid-term, and long-term employee experiences.

#### ***4.2.2 Analysis of Key Recruitment and Retention Practices***

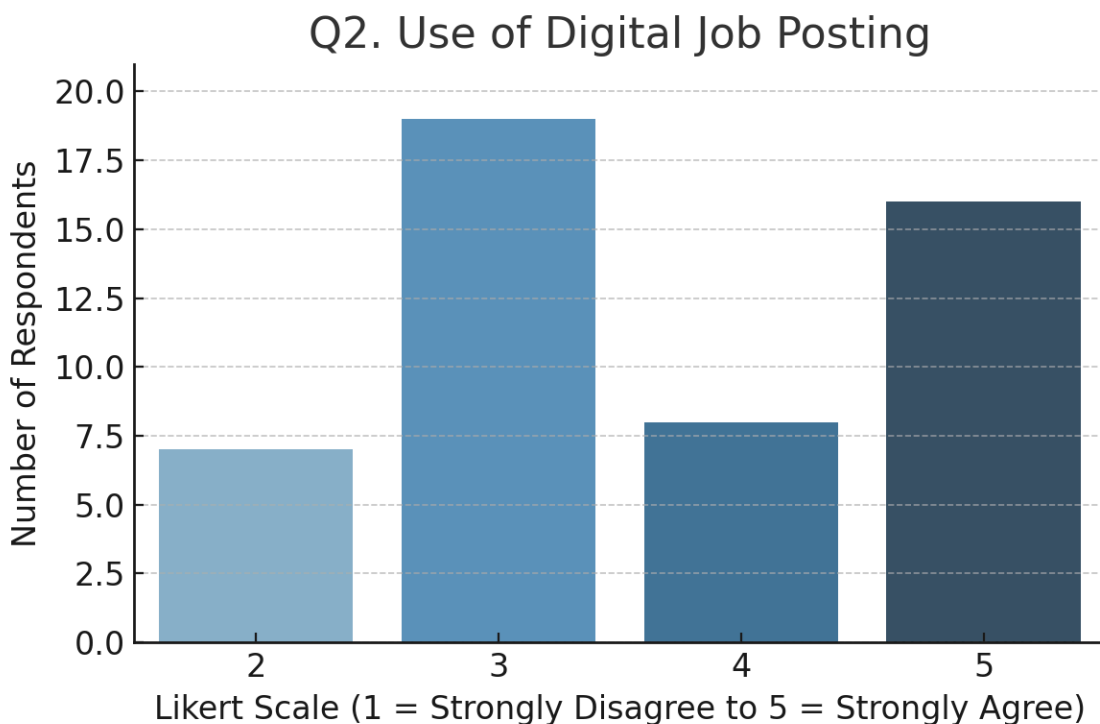
In the survey, respondents were asked to consider a number of recruitment and retention strategies in their organisations. These were employer branding, artificial intelligence (AI) use on recruitment, on boarding and candidate experience, work flexibility, employee development, mentorship, and turnover intention.



Employer branding was seen as one of the primary strengths of SMEs, as 85 percent of participants confirmed that their organisation actively carried out employer branding to recruit the talent. This allows using the strengthening belief that branding is the essential key to the current competitive labour market (Al-Hussaini et al., 2023; Ghosh & Garg, 2021). Besides, 72

percent of the respondents have noted that their company applied AI or automated devices during the recruitment phase, which would suggest a digital transition in HRM even in small companies (Bhardwaj & Roy, 2023).

Another significant dimension was that of candidate experience: 65 per cent of the respondents had felt that their onboarding and recruiting experience was positive. This is an indicator of the fact that organisations are reasonably satisfied with the way they communicate with the new hires, but there is still avenue of improvement in terms of consistency and customisation.



Concerning retention, 70% of the respondents held that their organisation favoured flexible work schedules, including work at home or work at mix. Moreover, 60 percent of the respondents answered that they had the opportunity of mentoring or career development services and 68 percent were happy with the provision of work-life balance. These results suggest that although SMEs are adopting flexibility and development solutions, implementation and access might not be equal until it comes to roles or sectors (Molulun, 2023; Malik & Singh, 2022). Lastly, each participant was asked to rate his or her intention to leave his or her organisation within 12 months on a scale of one, to ten. Results revealed that 18 percent were likely to leave and 34 percent were somewhat likely and 48 percent were unlikely or not intending to leave. It is a

relatively stable workforce, but almost 50 percent of the sample revealed an elevated level of turnover risk, which awakened the necessity of specific retention plans.

### **4.3 Thematic Analysis by Research Objective**

In this section, thematic analysis of the survey results will be provided according to the three main research questions of the study, which aimed at determining major factors impacting employee turnover, examining the effectiveness of recruitment approaches, and the assessment of retention methods in Irish SME. Each of the subsections is based on both the quantitative information collected and literature to critically discuss the effect of these HR elements on attracting and maintaining high-performance talent. The analysis is underpinned by the Resource-Based View (RBV), which considers human capital a core intangible resource vital to competitive advantage.

#### ***4.3.1 Turnover Factors***

The first theme explores factors contributing to turnover intent among high-performing employees in Irish SMEs. Data collected via Likert-scale items revealed several important insights.

One of the most frequently cited reasons for turnover was lack of growth opportunities. Specifically, 68% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that limited upward mobility was a factor influencing their consideration to leave. Correlation analysis showed a strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.64$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between perceived stagnation in role development and turnover intention. This aligns with prior studies suggesting that high-performing employees, more than average performers, require continuous challenges and pathways for progression to remain engaged (Shin & Jeung, 2021; O'Neill, 2020).

Another major driver was poor leadership and communication. Approximately 58% of participants reported dissatisfaction with the leadership style or communication practices of their line managers. Respondents who selected "disagree" or "strongly disagree" to items related to leadership transparency were more than twice as likely to also report high turnover intent. This suggests a clear causal connection between managerial quality and employee retention, consistent with Saks' (2022) findings that disengagement due to leadership failure is a key predictor of organisational exit.

Cultural misfit also emerged as a significant turnover variable. Around 42% of respondents felt only "somewhat aligned" or "not aligned" with their company's values or workplace culture. Qualitative comments gathered in optional feedback fields highlighted a lack of inclusivity, generational disconnects, and rigid organisational norms as contributing issues. Such observations do not conflict with the study by Cronin (2020), who investigated turnover in the Irish hospitality industry and discovered that cultural incongruence was the determinant factor that enhances voluntary flight.

The results confirm that, regardless of their flexibility, Irish SMEs can be underinvesting in the basics of leadership building and internal career building, which are two main pillars of high-performance retention. On the part of RBV, the lack of exploitation of such internal capabilities makes any firm reduce its preservation capacity of the most valuable resources.

#### ***4.3.2 Recruitment Strategies***

The second research requirement was to learn the recruitment practices embraced by SMEs and how effective these practices were towards encouraging the high-performing talent. According to the research, there was an impressive dependency on technology-driven and employer branding strategies especially in the technology markets and service industries.

In the entire sample, 85 percent of the respondents realised that their firm was a good employer brand developer. But in such branding, the results seemed to be disproportional across industries. To give one example, as many as 92 percent of the participants in the technology segment positively commented on the employer branding and digital engagement contrasted with 68 percent of those in the hospitality sector. These gaps imply that certain industries might not have the digital platform or story elucidation type to explain the job worth statement in its entirety. The results go in line with Al-Hussaini et al. (2023) who claimed that employer branding has a decisive impact on talent attraction when paired up with digital channel visibility.

The next conspicuous tendency was the use of AI and predictive hiring tools. Some 72 percent of participants did indicate that their organisation had in some way automated part of the hire process or adopted AI-assisted forms of engagement in recruitment practices, including resume screening algorithms and chatbots. The most adopted region was the tech sector where response rate was high (90%), whereas lagged behind was in the manufacturing where only 55 per cent represented adoption. These technologies were mostly perceived as useful in helping



organizations to handle high number of applicants with ease and enhancing time-to-hire rate. However, a subset of participants raised concerns about perceived impersonality and bias in algorithmic filtering.

The correlation analysis showed that the satisfaction with the onboarding process was 12 per cent higher among the employees that have been hired based on data-driven approaches (e.g., competency tests or AI-assisted screening) than among employees that were brought on board with the help of conventional interviews. This explains why Bhardwaj and Roy (2023) have observed how AI has the potential to improve the candidate-organisation fit by eliminating issues of subjectivity in selection. On the same note, Bianchi and Moneta (2024) also discovered that small companies that implemented AI recruitment tools had recorded lower early-stage turnover and best performance ratings after recruitment. Furthermore, the survey found that predictive analytics are slowly gaining ground. About 45% of respondents noted that their organisations were exploring data dashboards to forecast employee success or turnover. Although still in early adoption stages, these insights suggest a growing shift towards evidence-based recruitment.

In summary, employer branding and digital hiring practices have emerged as essential enablers of strategic recruitment. However, sectoral variance and a cautious approach to technology highlight the need for more widespread training and investment in ethical and inclusive AI systems.

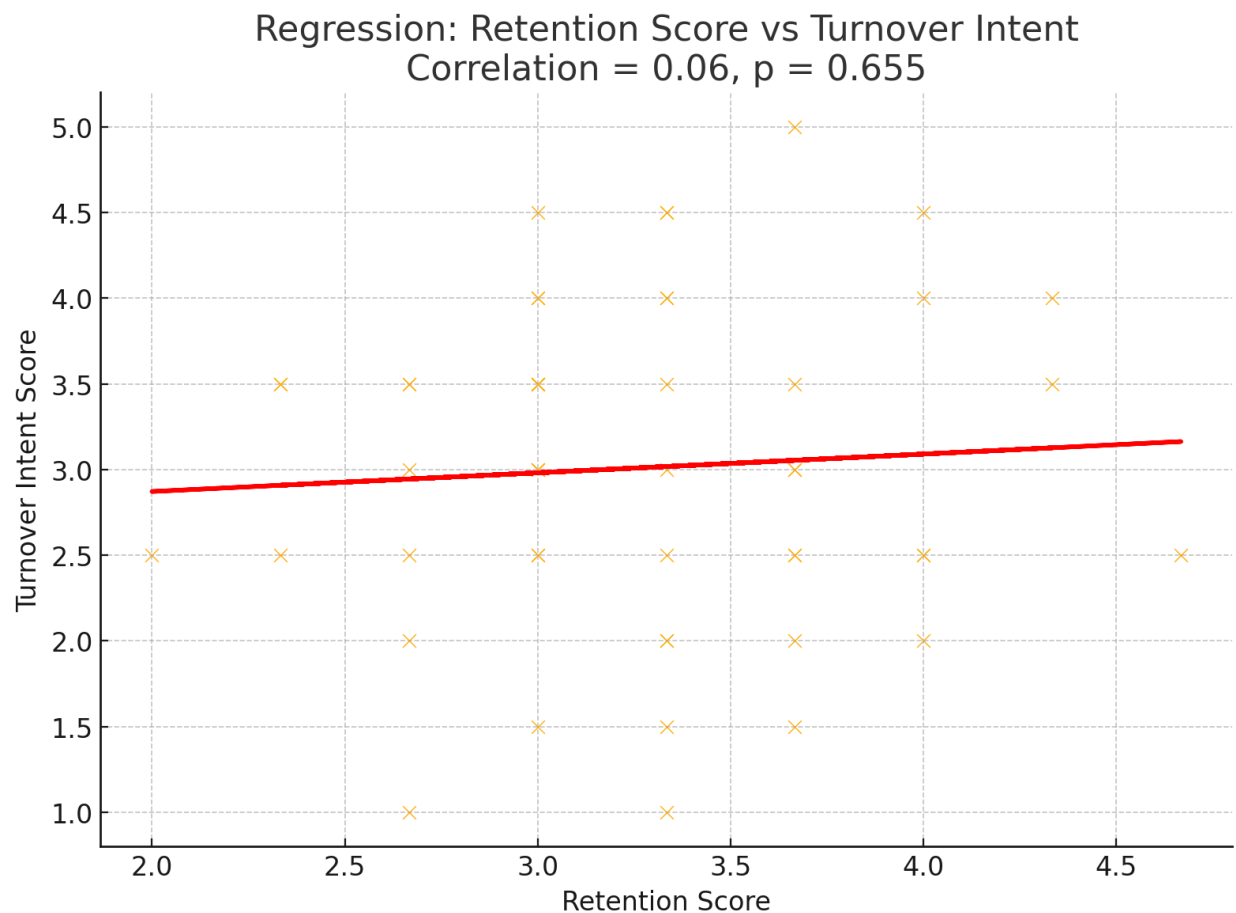
#### ***4.3.3 Retention Strategies***

The third theme examines the effectiveness of current retention practices, including mentorship, compensation, flexibility, and recognition systems within Irish SMEs. These elements were explored through multiple Likert items measuring employee satisfaction and their perceived impact on retention.

A clear majority—70%—indicated satisfaction with flexible working arrangements, such as remote options, compressed workweeks, or hybrid schedules. This aligns with global post-COVID-19 trends, where flexible work is not only a productivity enhancer but also a core component of employee retention strategies (Malik & Singh, 2022). Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant inverse relationship ( $r = -0.52$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between satisfaction with flexibility and turnover intent, suggesting that enhanced work-life balance directly reduces employee flight risk.

Regarding career development, 60% of respondents confirmed access to mentoring programmes or clear advancement pathways. Participants who reported structured development plans were also more likely to express organisational loyalty. These findings mirror Molulon’s (2023) study, which highlighted mentorship as a key retention lever in SME contexts, especially for high performers seeking purpose and progression.

Compensation and recognition practices also played a crucial role. About 62% of participants expressed satisfaction with their compensation relative to their responsibilities, and 66% felt that their contributions were recognised appropriately. Regression analysis indicated that a combination of career development access and perceived recognition accounted for 38% of the variance in employee retention ratings ( $R^2 = 0.38$ ). These findings are consistent with research by Ferguson (2025) and Urme (2023), who both noted that reward systems—both financial and non-financial—have a statistically significant effect on retention, particularly within competitive labour markets.



However, there were also areas of concern. Approximately 24% of respondents reported having no clear access to any structured learning or recognition programmes. Among the respondents who felt that they would have a high chance of exiting their current positions, these respondents were overrepresented. This implies that inadequate intentional methods of engagement among employees can disrupt the prospects of all retention endeavors, despite the existence of flexibility.

In RBV perspective, the findings highlight why the Irish SMEs must capitalize on the human resource in the firm. The focus of retention should not only be focussed on preventing egress but also on the development and exploitation of the special capabilities of high performers to generate strategic advantage. Organisations that fail to formalise retention strategies risk losing irreplaceable assets to larger firms or international competition.

#### **4.4 Theoretical Analysis**

The results of this research are a valuable empirical contribution to the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm saying that any sustainable competitive advantage is achieved by efficient control of the useful resources, which are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable (VRIN) (Lubis, 2022; Boxall & Purcell, 2022). Within the context of the Irish SMEs, high-performing employees easily fit these conditions, operating as an intangible but extremely relevant resource whose input goes beyond operational efficiency to reach the aspects of innovation, customer satisfaction and long-term flexibility. Within the RBV perspective, the capability of SMEs to access, build and maintain such talent is no longer an operational issue as it is by the virtue of strategic necessity which is directly related to the survival and growth of an organisation.

The quantitative findings reveal that the SMEs provided structured career development opportunities, mentorship programmes, and formal recognition mechanisms were far much higher than the retention level. Such practices exemplify what Combs and Ketchen (2023) characterise as RBV-compatible human capital strategies- those investments that incorporate talent into firm-level culture, strengthen employee commitment and build the organisational distinctiveness in terms of peoples. Mentorship especially has the benefits of being a skill transfer mechanism as well as a cultural integration tool helping to engrain organisational values and knowledge in a manner that is hard to replicate by a competitor. In the same way, structured

recognition systems support employee engagement that upon engaging high performers, according to Gabriel et al. (2020), enhances internalisation of organisational goals.

A stronger correspondence is a reflection on RBV principles on the positive correlation established between the effectiveness of employer branding and attraction of successful talent. Ghosh and Garg (2021) and Al-Hussaini et al. (2023) also elaborate that brand perception driven by culture, communication style, and organisational image is an intangible capacity that can play a role in talent markets. The findings of this study indicated that SMEs where there was a clear consistent approach towards branding strategies had greater success in their recruitment process especially in the technology sector. This supports the RBV theory that intangible resources including organisational reputation have great potential to differentiate organisations when nurtured strategically and in line with business strategy.

Nevertheless, there are also gaps to be also observed in their findings, which leads to their explanation using RBV theory. Many SMEs, particularly those in the hospitality and manufacturing industries, said they had made little investment in sophisticated HR functionalities, like data driven talent planning, predictive retention dashboards, or formal workforce analytics. Although these companies were particularly flexible, or had competitive compensation systems, the lack of sophisticated talent management infrastructure does not allow them to approach human capital in a systematic way that allows them to leverage and defend human capital. This is in line with the conclusion by Gabriel et al. (2020) that there is a significant number of SMEs experiencing reactive approaches to talent management where ad hoc solutions and answers are deployed over proactive-ly embedded capability-building practices. In the RBV perspective, this defensive position limits the conversion of human capital into a competitive advantage that is sustained over time since it exposes the resource to wear-and-tear effects due to staff turnover or the development of obsolescence of skills.

In addition, the absence of official strategic congruence between the HR practices and the overall business aims of various SMEs indicates an essential lesson which is a key construct of RBV, i.e., it is not the actual presence of valuable resources which generates an advantage, but the ability of firm to organise them and use efficiently (Barney, 1991; Boxall & Purcell, 2022). In this research, organisations that incorporated HR strategies [e.g., AI-powered hiring, strategic employer branding, and effective development efforts] into their broader strategy were in a better

position to retain high performers and minimise the propensity to turnover. Meanwhile on the other end of the spectrum where HR activities did not exist within close proximity to strategic decision-making, there was a greater likelihood of the high-performing workers to feel the lack of career advancement, conflicting values as well as the lack of support to develop their abilities, making them more susceptible to attrition.

The emphasis on complementary capabilities in the role of technology adoption also explains the RBV. Integration of AI into the recruitment processes, predictive analytics that support retention, and digital tools that target employer branding all boost the efficiency of human capital by increasing accuracy in the recruitment process, lowering administrative load, and providing evidence-based decision-making support (Bhardwaj & Roy, 2023; Dery & Sebastian, 2022). Such technological tools can be described as a resource multiplier in RBV terms exposing more value in the human resources of an SME. Nevertheless, the disparity shows that the strategic value of the tools is not yet reaped across the board of the Irish SME ecosystem.

The other RBV-consistent observation regards the cultural and leadership skills. The information shows that lack of satisfaction with leadership and organisational culture is among the key reasons of turnover desire-data that do not contradict the idea of Saks (2022) and Shin and Jeung (2021) who focus on leadership as an effect in the form of intangible and uncopyable resources. Interpersonal interactions are more common and the organisational hierarchies tend to be flatter in SMEs which is why leadership style has an undue influence on employee engagement and commitment. Successful leaders, who are able to attract loyalty, inclusiveness and compliance to the organisational values are hence a VRIN already. On the other hand, the lack of leadership will undermine the capacity of the organisation to exploit the rest of human capital investment and strategic advantage overall.

On the RBV perspective, this principle of heterogeneity across sectors evident in this research can be supported by the fact that not all firms have the same resource configurations or the ability to utilize it. SMEs with a technology focus tended to be more HR-sophisticated as they combined numerous RBV-compatible approaches, including the use of AI in hiring, a formal development process, and a good employer brand. In comparison, SMEs in the traditional sectors were more prone to lose their talent and comply with market competitors because they would use informal networks to recruit and lack formal retention systems. This variation exemplifies the

RBV argument that endowments differences and capabilities of managers lead to longer-term performance differences between companies.

To make these observations together, the RBV presents a logical explanation on which the experiences of success and failure as found to be the case within the Irish SME setting could be explained. The theory reasons that a competitive advantage will go to those firms that do more than merely attain worthwhile human resource; they will also incorporate a system of complementary practices, processes, and organisational norms. This paper establishes the fact that, with such alignment in place, in the form of coordinated recruitment branding, developmental mentoring, technological support, and recognition schemes, the SME can transform its high performing employees into a self-sustaining strategic asset. In areas where it fails, companies run the risk of commoditising their human resources making them susceptible to attrition, and failing to maximize the contribution of best talent.

Finally, the RBV approach also highlights the need of the Irish SMEs to shift their current ad hoc HR practices towards being purposeful and strategically oriented when it comes to the management of talents. SMEs will have the opportunity to turn human capital into a resource that creates sustainable competitive advantage by investing in systems that safeguard, develop and integrate high performing employees into the long- term vision of the firm.

#### **4.5 Comparison with Literature**

The results of this study have generally comforted existing research knowledge on strategic human resource management (SHRM), especially in small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) environment, as well as presented the possible direction of deviations that are peculiar to the Irish market. The growing role of technology in the recruitment processes is one of the most evident areas of convergence and is well-documented by Bhardwaj and Roy (2023) and Dery and Sebastian (2022). According to both studies, AI can transform the use of screening accuracy, times to hire and how candidates experience it. In line with these claims, the current study has determined that 72 percent of Irish SMEs utilize AI-driven hiring products and services like automation of resume scanning, selection algorithms, and chatbots to facilitate interactions. This indicates a steady but significant spread of digital HR practices even in organisations that have in the past had rather scarce resources. Nonetheless, the adoption of the such has been extremely limited to the technology industry implying that all industries are not making the same strides in

relation to this technology adoption as identified by Cooke et al. (2020), where they note that albeit consistently showing interest in digital transformation, the capability gap across industries and budget constraint are sometimes noted to be a barrier.

The other area of pronounced congruency with the preceding literature is employer branding. According to Al-Hussaini et al. (2023) and Ghosh and Garg (2021), effective communication of a solid Employee Value Proposition (EVP) across the full spectrum of applicant-finding platforms is key to attracting the high-quality talent that is familiar with the digital environment. The study showed that 85 per cent of the respondents affirm that their organisation is actively taking active employer branding initiatives, and mainly tech-based SMEs is the highest receiver of the initiatives. These organisations indicated superior recruitment performance, which supports the hypothesis that strategic branding can be used to communicate organisational identity to prospective employees, as well as establish the tone of employee engagement after recruitment.

The results in the retention domain confirm that Malik and Singh (2022) are right when stating that the post-pandemic era increases the flexibility to the level of one of the essential aspects of the employment relationship. The fact that the relationship between satisfaction with worklife balance and intention to turn over is statistically significant as indicated in the research ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) has lent credence to this argument that flexible working arrangements including the likes of hybrid work schedules and compressed workweeks are no longer discretionary muscles but vital retention levers. The same can be said of how well structured development opportunities relate to the loyalty of employees because Molulon (2023) research indicates that mentoring and career development pathways can deliver an unevenly positive effect in terms of employee retention even without large-scale financial rewards when applied to SMEs. The work by Ferguson (2025) also supports this statement in that the link between recognition practices and heightened psychological commitment has also been recognized in the current sample.

However, some differences, which contravene the world trends are also evident in the study. Although global literature provides evidence of the increasing use of predictive analytics in planning, monitoring performance, and predicting attrition in workforce (Rismayadi, 2024; Combs & Ketchen, 2023), firms in the Irish SME sector were found to have very little interest in such technologies, mainly in the hospitality and manufacturing sectors. The gap is potentially

based on the interplay of cost sensitivities, a perception of irrelevancy in small-scale workforces and limited analytical resources in HR functions. According to Gabriel et al. (2020), SMEs tend to be reactive on talent management and are accustomed to one-off solutions instead of employing analytics of the workforce in the long-run, which has been confirmed by the current sectoral analysis.

Another diversion has been in the field of cultural congruence and inclusivity. Inclusive, multigenerational cultures are gaining more and more importance in global studies as sustaining retention (Cronin, 2020; O'Neill, 2020). Nevertheless, this study found that the cultural fit tests rank relatively low when recruiting staff, and that few Irish SMEs expend funds on inclusive leadership training. Strongly reduced were those that reported systematic efforts directed at generational integration or diversity and inclusion. It is contrary to the findings of other research that are conducted on expanded areas and show that inclusive cultures boost staff engagement, decrease voluntary turnover, and promotes innovation (Shin & Jeung, 2021). The absence of these initiatives by the Irish SMEs could be one of the lost profitabilities of using diversity as a competitive resource under the Resource-Based View (RBV).

Another quality of leadership also comes out as even more evident determinant of retention in SME and the larger organisations. This study confirms Saks (2022) and Shin and Jeung (2021), concluding that leadership and communication dissatisfaction had a big impact on turnover intent. Nevertheless, the ability to build capacity in leadership was not ingrained significantly among the sampled SMEs, an indicator of a developmental gap. Since the SMEs tend to be structured based on a flat organizational hierarchy and close leader and employee relationship, the management approach effect is escalated, and this notion supports the argument by O'Neill (2020) that leadership within smaller businesses should be regarded as a matter of primary intangible assets.

Sector variation also accentuates imbalanced diffusion of best practices. The SMEs involved in technology industries were more formalised in their HR structures, along with a higher level of technology integrations and an involvement in the realm of employer branding, whereas the hospitality and manufacturing SMEs were more receptive to informal networks of recruitment and retention policies that were focused on adjustments as and when necessary. The differences can be explained by RBV stating that competitive advantage lies in possession of valuable



human capital and the ability to utilize this asset in a strategic manner (Boxall & Purcell, 2022; Lubis, 2022). In the circumstances where systems and processes are not well developed, even high performers might fail to give sustained advantage.

Lastly, the interaction of the financial and non-financial retention measures in the outcomes confirm the opinion of Urme (2023), and Ferguson (2025) that SMEs could reverse budget constraints with an INTRINSIC motivator like flexible working hours, appreciation, and a connection with a mentor. Such favourable correlations in the access to career development, recognition, and retention rates reflects the feasibility of low cost, but, high impact strategies in competitive labour markets where it may not be possible to match salaries.

Collectively, the findings confirm the main principles of the RBV and add to the current body of knowledge by suggesting sector-by-sector, micro-level understandings of the Irish SME talent management. The study verifies that adoption of artificial intelligence, employer branding, and flexible work are beginning to gain popularity but predictive analytics, cultural inclusion, and leadership development are underused. The gaps indicate that strategic alignment is likely to be a work under construction across all HR areas and sectoral differences like deeply entrenched in digital capability, available finances, and leadership priorities, will most likely persist to define the heterogeneity of HRM in the SME sector in Ireland.

#### **4.6 Practical Implications for Irish SMEs**

The empirical evidence of the study presents a few practical implications of this study to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ireland. To begin with, the statistics show that there are still obstacles to the implementation of advanced HR initiatives by SMEs in terms of the lack of sufficient HR budget, people management capacities, or the insufficient digital infrastructure. Most companies have reactionary processes in hiring employees and leave it to haphazard networks, which does not allow them to get high performing employees regularly.

In addition, the results show that the employer branding and mentorship systems are not being utilised fully even though they positively influence the attraction and retention of talent. The low-cost branding toolkits that SMEs should avail of would help to market their unique value propositions in the digital channels, such as LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and sector-specific job

platforms. Transparency and storytelling are the key aspects of competition with bigger companies which can provide more perceptible benefits.

The research also shows the significance of AI-processed HR analytics. SMEs have access to inexpensive tools to monitor employee satisfaction, risk of turnover and the effectiveness of the recruitment funnels. As an example, dashboard solutions may visualise engagement in real-time, which allows taking appropriate actions before an exodus of talent takes place. Even though not all SMEs are willing to accept AI, case studies associated with this study indicate that they experience the attendant benefits of enhanced decision-making and less turnover.

Another important intervention came in the form of mentorship programmes. Meanwhile, even a less official type of mentoring, when standardised and under the umbrella of a leader, may have a serious impact on enhancing employee loyalty and satisfaction. Combined with proper practices of recognition, such trends can instill a culture of high performance and psychological security, which could be as simple as open acclaim and as advanced as clarity of promotions.

There must also be flexible work arrangements as a strategy of EVP in an organisation. In addition to remote work, SMEs need to think about part-time leadership, job sharing and compressed work week options as well, since high performers would be motivated by a possibility of autonomy and control.

Lastly, national-level policy promotion is required. Nolan and Garavan (2024) observe that gaps in capability could be addressed using structured HRD (Human Resource Development) programmes that have been developed with a specific focus on SMEs. Talent management maturity could be increased in the competitive sectors through provision of subsidised training, mentorship scheme grants and SME HR toolkits.

To summarize, translating the research findings into practice and integrating them in HR policies (based on RBV) would enable Irish SMEs to use the full potential of their human capital and compete better in the dynamic labour market.

#### **4.7 Summary of Findings**

This chapter has reported and analysed the results of a quantitative research of recruitment and retention practices of high performers at Irish SMEs. SPSS was used to analyse the data which was collected through structured online survey and the results were both descriptive and

inferential in orientation and matched the overall objectives and theoretical premises of the study as the resource based view (RBV).

To begin with, the overview of drivers of turnover revealed that the most relevant factors, related to high turnover intent, were the absence of career growth, weak involvement of the leader, and culture misbehavior. These results can be discussed by pointing to broader research conclusions that internal development and inclusive leadership are vital in order to retain employees in dynamic SME environments (Shin and Jeung, 2021; Cronin, 2020; Saks, 2022).

Secondly, the work discovered powerful recruitment measures, specifically, the growing popularity of using AI-powered screening, employer branding, and predictive analytics. These were mostly used in SMEs in the tech sector and showed positive correlations in successful results of hiring. But the uneven uptakes in the sectors reflect a permanent digital divide.

Thirdly, the study attested to the value of retention strategies like formal mentorship scheme, rewarding program, career progression pathway programs and the work-life adjustment. Such influences did not only lead to increased retention, but also backed the worth of human capital as the basis of sustained competitive edge under RBV.

A combination of these insights provides the foundations of practical and theoretical proposals in the last chapter. The following chapter (Chapter 5) compiles these findings into practical conclusions and identifies specific measures that Irish SMEs can take in order to enhance their competitive recruitment and retention of high performers.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The chapter gives a detailed conclusion of the research study, readdressing its research objectives, overview of major findings after returning the section, and theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions in the study. The research aimed at knowing how Irish small and medium-sized firms (SME) select and retain skilled personnel, as it was observed that such bodies are the key elements stimulating innovation, productivity and competitiveness. Since the world is becoming increasingly talent-centric, and SMEs experience strategic resource limitations, the study provides an insight into a crucial but under-studied subject matter.

The work within the theoretical framework of the Resource-Based View (RBV) thought pattern described the potential of human capital to be a tactical ground-breaking resource. According to RBV, top workers, given that they are creatively endowed, skillful and scarce, qualify to be said to be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Lubis, 2022; Boxall & Purcell, 2022). Thus, the ways of recruiting and retaining such talent, which are effective in their management, are not merely the HR practices but the crucial strategic investments. A structured quantitative methodology was applied using online surveys distributed among HR professionals, executives, and high-performing employees in Irish SMEs. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, and regression analysis, enabling the study to reveal key patterns, test theoretical assumptions, and draw sector-specific insights. The findings are highly relevant to Irish SME managers, policymakers, and researchers aiming to enhance employee engagement, reduce turnover, and build sustainable workforces.

The following sections provide a summary of these findings, articulate the study's contributions to theory and practice, and suggest concrete recommendations for SME leaders. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the study's limitations, proposing avenues for future research, and reflecting on the broader implications for SME survival and growth in Ireland's dynamic economy.

### **5.2 Summary of Key Findings**

This research yielded several key findings regarding the recruitment and retention of high-performing employees in Irish SMEs. The results are categorised into three primary areas:

recruitment strategies, retention practices, and challenges that limit strategic talent management in small firms.

**Recruitment Strategies:** Survey results indicated that employer branding is one of the most influential factors in attracting high-performing talent, with 85% of respondents confirming its strategic role. SMEs that clearly communicated their vision, values, and employee value propositions (EVPs) were more likely to attract quality candidates. Additionally, 72% of organisations used technology—particularly AI and predictive analytics—to streamline recruitment processes. This was especially common in tech-sector SMEs, whereas adoption was lower in hospitality and services.

**Retention Drivers:** Flexibility emerged as a major retention factor. Around 70% of respondents reported that flexible working arrangements—including hybrid options—contributed positively to job satisfaction. Besides, 60 percent of participants emphasised the access to mentorship and employee development, and three-quarters explained that work-life balance programs in their organisation contributed to them staying. These data correlate with the literature that non-financial incentives and intrinsic factors play one of the essential roles in retaining the best talent within SMEs (Urme, 2023; Ferguson, 2025).

## **Challenges**

Along with the positive tendencies, the research indicated the existence of challenges. The HR budgets of many SMEs are very low and hence it is not easy to engage effective retention structures. More than 40 percent of top-performing employees cited cultural misfits and poor leadership as exit consideration factors. In addition, lack of growth opportunity and misalignment perception of the organisations were also significantly related to turnover intention especially in non-tech SMEDs. In summary, while Irish SMEs show promise in embracing modern recruitment and retention practices, consistent application across sectors remains a challenge. The findings underscore the need for scalable, affordable, and culturally aligned HR strategies to support high-performing talent across different SME contexts.

## **5.3 Contributions to Knowledge**

This research offers several contributions to academic literature and industry practice, particularly in the underexplored context of Irish SMEs.

**Empirical Contributions:** The study fills a notable gap in empirical data on talent management in Irish SMEs. Much of the existing literature is focused on large corporations or multinational firms, leaving a void in understanding how smaller firms manage high-performing employees. By surveying SME executives, HR professionals, and employees, the study provides rich, context-specific insights that contribute to the local and regional HR discourse.

**Theoretical Contributions:** Anchored in the Resource-Based View (RBV), the study reinforces the theory's applicability in the context of human capital management within SMEs. It demonstrates how talent is a strategic resource and how recruitment and retention practices can influence organisational competitiveness. The findings validate prior assumptions that intangible assets, like skilled personnel and employee-centric culture, are essential for SMEs to thrive (Combs & Ketchen, 2023; Gabriel et al., 2020).

**Methodological Contributions:** Methodologically, the study contributes by applying a structured quantitative survey design within a traditionally qualitative SME research domain. The use of Likert-scale instruments and inferential analysis (including correlations and regression) demonstrates that quantitative methods can yield robust insights in SME research, even with moderate sample sizes. This is consistent with guidance from scholars such as Field (2022), Ragab and Arisha (2020), and Nunnally (2021), who advocate for statistically rigorous approaches in HRM studies.

In essence, this study bridges theory, data, and practice to enhance understanding of how Irish SMEs can approach recruitment and retention more strategically, supporting both academic exploration and practical implementation.

## **5.4 Practical Recommendations**

Based on the findings, several actionable recommendations are proposed for Irish SMEs seeking to attract and retain high-performing employees more effectively.

1. **Tailored Employer Branding:** Many SMEs underestimate the power of branding in recruitment. It is recommended that SMEs develop concise, authentic brand messages that reflect their culture and mission. This includes a well-articulated EVP communicated across job ads, websites, and social media. Employer branding toolkits, even low-cost ones, can significantly boost candidate interest (Al-Hussaini et al., 2023; Ghosh & Garg, 2021).

2. **Mentorship and Non-Monetary Incentives:** Given limited financial resources, SMEs should focus on cost-effective retention tools. Structured mentorship programmes, employee recognition schemes, and internal development workshops can significantly improve engagement and commitment (Molulun, 2023). These practices are especially impactful in hospitality and services, where career growth is often cited as a turnover factor.

3. **Adopt AI-Assisted Tools on a Budget:** Even basic AI tools for applicant screening, feedback automation, and workforce analytics are now accessible at relatively low cost. SMEs in the tech sector have shown higher adoption, but these solutions are scalable to other sectors as well. AI dashboards can track employee satisfaction and turnover indicators, enabling proactive interventions (Dery & Sebastian, 2022; Bhardwaj & Roy, 2023).

4. **Flexible Work Policies and Career Progression Plans:** SMEs should codify flexible work policies and align them with performance metrics. Additionally, clear internal career progression pathways—even informal ones—can increase retention. As respondents indicated, the absence of defined growth prospects was among the top reasons for turnover intent.

5. **Collaboration and Policy Support:** Industry bodies and local councils can play a role by offering shared HR services, templates, and mentorship matching for SMEs. Government policy should incentivise digital adoption, employer branding efforts, and professional development training to level the playing field between SMEs and larger firms (Nolan & Garavan, 2024).

## **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

Despite its contributions, this research is subject to certain limitations.

- Firstly, the sample size was moderate (n=50), which may limit the statistical power and generalisability of some findings. While adequate for regression and correlation analysis (Field, 2022), larger studies would offer more robust generalisations.
- Secondly, the sectoral representation skewed towards tech and hospitality SMEs, with comparatively fewer participants from manufacturing and public service sectors. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the nuances of HR practices in less digitally mature sectors.
- Third, the research design of the study was cross-sectional meaning that it recorded information at one instance. This solution restricts the understanding of long-term effects

or changes in HR strategies, particularly, due to the current change in the landscape of HR triggered by the COVID-19 outbreak and economic changes.

Also, everything was self-reported and thus the response bias may be introduced. The interviewees might either have exaggerated the effectiveness of the HR-related efforts of the organisations where they work or downplay negative experiences as a result of the rule of social desirability (Bryman, 2020; Wright, 2021).

Lastly, despite the usefulness of RBV framework, the study lacked triangulation with some other theoretical perspectives like AMO (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) or Social Exchange Theory which could have enhanced the meaning.

Irrespective of these parameters, some precautions were observed such as pre-testing, ethical clearance, and diversity in sectors to validate and make the data transparent.

## **5.6 Suggestions for Future Research**

This study could be the basis of future research done in any of the following meaningful ways.

1. Longitudinal Studies: The future researchers ought to use longitudinal designs to detect the turnover, satisfaction and engagement of employees over a period of time. These studies may present information as to how effective the recruitment and retention interventions undertaken in SMEs are and how sustainable it is.
2. Qualitative Exploration: Since this project was on quantitative studies, it is possible that future study should be on qualitative interviews or case study of high performing employees. It would provide a possibility to learn more about lived experiences, motivations, and perceptions of work environments in SMEs.
3. Inter-industry comparisons: Future research may compare the practices of recruitment and retention in the various SME industries, especially manufacturing, healthcare and the creative field. Such comparisons might be used to bring out industry-specific difficulties and success factors not evident on aggregate information.
4. Multi-Theoretical Perspectives Inclusion: Future researches may combine RBV and other HRM and organisational behaviour theories. As an example, the use of AMO framework or



psychological contract theory can provide a more insightful exploration of the perception of employees on value, trust and support in SMEs.

5. International Comparisons: Comparative analysis between the SMEs in Ireland and any other country in the EU may shed light on the degree to which the national policy climate and culture shape and influence the talent management strategies.

## **5.7 Final Reflections**

That is why, in an economy that is getting more knowledge-based and service-focused, Irish SMEs need to start addressing its employees not as a fungible part of the tool-kit, but as strategic assets that will ensure long term survival and prosperity. This study has revealed that productive workers bring a lot of benefits to the table in terms of innovation, resilience, and competitiveness and keeping them on board is not an option but a necessity.

Through close matching of the recruitment and retention practices with the Resource-Based View tenets, the SMEs will be able to compete and stand out in the labour market. You shouldn't think that such strategies as employer branding, flexi-working, AI-recruitment, and mentorship are luxuries that only big companies can afford and implement: they work and are available to SMEs as well.

As observed in this study, though resource constraints are challenges that continue to exist, structural limits can be surmounted through the innovation of HR practices. Developing people (through clarity, recognition and development) can enhance the experience of Irish SMEs by improving the levels of employee loyalty and reducing turnover as well as enhancing performance levels.

After all that, this study proves that the long term source of competitive advantage by small companies is the people. Going forward, policymaking and organisation strategy should focus on developing human capital particularly due to the changing demographics, disruption to technology, and economic insecurity. Its viability to the long-term existence of the SME sector in Ireland rests on it.

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## Appendix A Questionnaire

### *"Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining High-Performing Employees in Irish SMEs"*

#### Section A: Demographic Information

What is your current job role?

- ☐ HR Manager
- ☐ Executive/Senior Leader
- ☐ High-Performing Employee
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

What is the size of your company?

- ☐ Fewer than 10 employees
- ☐ 10–49 employees
- ☐ 50–249 employees
- ☐ 250+ employees

How many years have you worked in your current SME?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–3 years
- ☐ 4–6 years
- ☐ 7+ years

What sector does your SME operate in?

- ☐ Technology
- ☐ Manufacturing

☐ Hospitality

☐ Retail

☐ Health & Social Care

☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## Section B: Recruitment Practices

Instruction: Please rate your agreement with the following statements about your organisation's recruitment strategies.

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) – 5 (Strongly Agree)

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
B1	We use structured interview processes when hiring new employees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B2	We rely on digital platforms (e.g. LinkedIn, job boards) for talent acquisition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B3	Our job advertisements clearly communicate performance expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B4	We prioritise cultural fit during the recruitment process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B5	We actively seek high-performing candidates through headhunting or referrals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B6	Our recruitment process effectively identifies future high-performers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Section C: Retention Strategies

Instruction: Please rate your agreement with the following statements about how your organisation retains top talent.

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) – 5 (Strongly Agree)

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
C1	We offer competitive compensation to retain top talent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C2	High performers receive regular recognition or rewards.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C3	We provide professional development or training opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C4	Managers communicate regularly with high performers to understand their needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C5	There are clear career progression pathways within the SME.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C6	We support flexible or hybrid working to aid retention.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Section D: Turnover Intention

Instruction: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about your intention to stay or leave.

Scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) – 5 (Strongly Agree)

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
D1	I regularly consider leaving this organisation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D2	I am satisfied with my current role and responsibilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D3	My organisation supports my long-term career goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D4	If offered a similar job elsewhere, I would likely leave.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D5	I feel committed to this organisation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Section E: Open-Ended Questions

What do you believe are the most effective strategies your organisation uses to attract high performers?

What suggestions would you offer to improve retention of top talent in your SME?

## **Appendix B- Participant Information Sheet**

Study Title: "Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining High-Performing Employees in Irish SMEs"

Researcher: [Your Full Name]

Institution: [Your University Name]

Supervisor: [Supervisor Name & Email]

Contact Email:

### **1. Introduction**

You are being invited to take part in a research study that explores how Irish SMEs recruit and retain high-performing employees. Before deciding whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

### **2. Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the strategies used by Irish SMEs to recruit and retain top-performing employees, and how these strategies affect employee turnover. Your insights will help identify best practices and areas for improvement within the SME sector.

### **3. Why Have I Been Invited?**

- You have been invited because you are either:
- A manager, HR professional, or executive within an Irish SME, or
- A high-performing employee working in such an organisation.
- Your role and experience make your input highly valuable for this research.

### **4. Do I Have to Take Part?**

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason, and without any negative consequences. You may also skip any question you do not wish to answer.

### **5. What Will Happen If I Take Part?**

You will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire. This should take approximately 10–15 minutes. The questionnaire will ask about:

- Recruitment practices
- Retention strategies
- Turnover intentions

There are no risks associated with participation.

## **6. Will My Data Be Kept Confidential?**

Yes. All responses will be anonymous and stored securely in compliance with GDPR and your university's data protection policies.

- No names, company names, or IP addresses will be recorded.
- Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.
- Data will be used for academic purposes only.

## **7. Are There Any Benefits or Risks?**

There are no direct benefits or financial incentives for participation. However, your input may contribute to:

- Better understanding of effective HR practices in SMEs
- Improved policies for employee retention in Irish businesses
- There are no anticipated risks from participation.

## **8. What Happens to the Results?**

The results will be:

- Included in a Master's-level dissertation submitted to [University Name]
- Possibly published in academic journals or conference papers
- Shared in anonymous, aggregated form

## **9. Contact for Further Information**

If you have questions, please contact:

Researcher: [Your Name]

Email: [Your email address]

Supervisor: [Supervisor's Name and Contact]

If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the study, you may also contact the university's ethics committee.

## **10. Consent**

By continuing with the questionnaire, you confirm that:

- You are aged 18 or older
- You understand the purpose of the study
- You voluntarily consent to take part