

# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Effective Hiring Process Background Check Strategies

by

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 1991

BSBA, University of Phoenix, 1989

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

Job applicants often falsify information in their application materials. Using the disparate impact theory as the conceptual framework, the purpose of this multiple case study was to identify strategies Human Resource professionals use to complete effective background checks while maintaining compliance with federal regulations. I collected data by interviewing executives of 3 organizations located in the Southwest region of the United States, who had successful strategies for performing background checks to identify falsified information in the application process. I assured the validity and reliability of the data by reviewing organizational documents and member checking of the interpretation of the data. Through the thematic analysis process, 6 themes emerged: employment verification, education verification, professional reference checks, criminal background checks, the cost of background checks, and background check guidelines and policies. Leaders adapting the above findings could enhance communications within their organizations, and improve the perceived transparency, profitability, and sustainability of a company. Implication for positive social change include leaders' opportunity to preserve organizational sustainability and improve the economic climate in communities in which the organization operates, resulting in corporate transparency, fair hiring practices, and a reduction of recidivism in criminal activities.



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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

### **Background of the Problem**

Trends in employment suggest that the ongoing decline in the unemployment rate and the retirement of baby boomers will cause business leaders to experience labor shortages in certain professions starting in 2019 and continuing through 2024 (Levanon, Cheng, & Paterra, 2014). Qualified employees are scarce as the current available workforce continues to achieve retirement age, changing the demographics of the workforce (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2014). Hiring quality and competent employees is a challenge for businesses. When hiring an employee, the knowledge, skills, and abilities must match the job requirements. Company leaders may decrease training costs by hiring appropriate personnel (Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, & Martinez, 2015).

Hiring trustworthy employees is another challenge for businesses. Kennedy and Benson (2016) stated that employee theft is higher in small firms, and in the accounting and financial functions of a company. Employee theft in small business can devastate the owners as small business owners operate on smaller profit margins (Kennedy & Benson, 2016). Job candidates sometimes exaggerate qualifications to meet the job requirements (Levoy, 2014). Hiring managers complete thorough background checks to evaluate the qualifications and trustworthiness of job applicants (Reinhard, Scharmach, & Müller, 2013).

Employers are using electronic media when performing background checks (Harrison & Budworth, 2015). Proper procedures for completing job applicant background checks improve the quality of employee and mitigate the potential for

employment-related litigation (Peterson, 2014). According to Tracey (2014), the availability of current research in strategies for conducting effective background checks is lacking, and scholars should continue to examine the screening process.

### **Problem Statement**

Some job applicants submit resumes that contain falsified information, requiring extensive background checks in the hiring process (Levoy, 2014). During 2015, employment and human resource related court settlements cost employers more than \$2.48 billion; much of this figure is a result of employer poor hiring practices (Maatman, 2016). The general business problem is some companies' leaders do not investigate employment candidates' backgrounds as part of the hiring process. The specific business problem is some area human resource (HR) leaders lack employment background check strategies to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with the government regulations.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the employment background check strategies area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations. I collected information from HR leaders of three organizations located in the Southwest region of the United States who have successful strategies in identifying falsified information. I collected this information by completing face-to-face interviews with the HR leaders. The information from the results of this study could assist area HR leaders with hiring quality candidates. Specifically, the findings could help area companies' HR leaders hire employees with

appropriate qualifications, financial stability, and integrity, resulting in a potential increase in profitability. Leaders sharing information on background check strategies could enhance communications within business operations and improve the perceived transparency, profitability, and sustainability of a company. Leaders maintaining sustainability within the company could positively improve the economic climate of the local communities (Hansen, Dunford, Boss, Boss, & Angermeier, 2011).

### **Nature of the Study**

Researchers use a qualitative approach and open-ended questions to identify themes in the research when limited historical literature and data are available (Yin, 2014). As a result, I used a qualitative method to explore strategies some area HR leaders use to complete effective background checks to identify falsified information.

Researchers use quantitative research in the development of closed-ended research questions and corresponding hypothesis statements (Myers, 2014). Researchers use quantitative and the mixed-method to analyze data to determine if relationships or differences exist among variables (Wagner, Hansen, & Kronberger, 2014). Because I was not seeking to determine if relationships or differences exist among variables, I did not use the quantitative or mixed-methods methodology.

The qualitative designs are case study, phenomenological, and ethnographic (Yin, 2014). Owen (2014) applied the qualitative method and suggested the case study as appropriate to evaluate strategies and business processes. Thus, I used the case study design as I am going to explore the hiring strategies of HR business leaders. Researchers use the phenomenological design to collect information on the meaning of participants'

experiences (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014). Researchers use ethnographic designs to explore groups' cultures and their differences (Atkinson, Delamont, Coffey, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001). I did not use either one of these research designs as I was not collecting information on experiences or evaluating differences between groups.

### **Research Question**

What employment background check strategies do some area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with the government regulations?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to verify information in an employment candidate's application or resume?
2. How effective have these strategies been in helping you identify qualified candidates?
3. How do you ensure your strategies are compliant with government regulations regarding background checks and employment practices?
4. What barriers or challenges have you overcome while developing and implementing these strategies?
5. How did you overcome these barriers or challenges while maintaining compliance with government regulations?
6. What other information can you share?

## Conceptual Framework

Disparate impact theory is the conceptual framework for this study. The underlying concept of the disparate impact theory is that some employers unintentionally discriminate against potential job applicants by engaging in practices applied consistently to all applicants but have different outcomes. In disparate impact theory cases, applicants need not prove intentional discrimination, only that the employer did not follow the requirements of the law in employment and other applications. Disparate impact liability is the legal term for employers who violate laws in the hiring practices (Pattison & Varca, 1991).

Griggs introduced the disparate impact theory in 1971 as the result of a class action lawsuit. In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424, 430 (1971), policies and processes are unbiased in the hiring process, but processes may still not be legal or appropriate. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1971, the focus of the disparate impact theory shifted towards implementing procedures to ensure compliance with government regulations (Loafman & Little, 2014). Companies should develop policies and procedures to ensure compliance with laws regulating the hiring process (Loafman & Little, 2014). Ensuring compliance with laws while performing background checks mitigates associated risks. Verifying candidate information and completing effective background checks in the hiring process are important in evaluating applicants. The disparate impact theory provides a potential foundation for ensuring proper strategies in performing background checks on job applicants. The findings of this study could



contribute to hiring strategies by identifying background check strategies area HR leaders use in verifying the information without unintentionally discriminating against applicants.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Adverse action:* Adverse action is any negative action taken against a job applicant or current employee (Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1970 [FCRA], 2015).

*Corporate social responsibility:* Corporate social responsibility is the process of leaders of a corporation engaging in policies and actions that result in socially desirable outcomes (Attig & Cleary, 2015). The fundamental question of right or wrong (Wynder & Dunbar, 2016).

*Social media:* Social media is the use of any electronic form of open communication where users share information, ideas, messages, and other personal information (Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are boundaries the researcher identifies in the process of designing the research project. Assumptions are what I as the researcher assume to be true. Limitations are boundaries not within my control as the researcher. Delimitations are within my control and defined as the boundaries I have established for this research.

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are statements taken as true but not proven by supporting theory (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). I assumed employers hire job applicants based on qualifications for a position. Another assumption I made was that employers perform

background checks on potential applicants and verify information contained in job applications and resumes. The final assumption I made was the subject professional in the case study was truthful in responses to the interview questions.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are boundaries and constraints beyond the control of the researcher (Abd Rashid & Yusoff, 2015). While performing this qualitative case study, the first limitation was to identify willing participants employed within companies presently using effective strategies in performing background checks on job applicants. Another limitation was identifying information defining effective strategies in performing employment background checks. A critical limitation was that current literature on effective background checks is scarce.

### **Delimitations**

The researcher creates delimitations by establishing boundaries and constraints in the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The delimitation I have established is I am studying successful companies that have strategies for performing effective background checks to identify falsified information presented by the applicant in the hiring process. I limited the study to companies with hiring operations in the Southwest region of the United States.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The quality of job candidates continues to challenge businesses (Kulkarni et al., 2015). Government regulations limit information gathering a hiring professional can

obtain on a potential candidate (Volpone, Tonidandel, Avery, & Castel, 2015). The findings could benefit local hiring professionals by containing strategies area HR leaders use in completing employment background checks and using consumer reports in compliance with regulatory laws to identify falsified information.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings could contain strategies area other HR leaders in similar organizations can use to assist in verifying candidate's information as truthful. Ensuring that hiring strategies are compliant with government regulations demonstrates a commitment to the foundation of social responsibility to the community. Social responsibility expands into other areas including environmental and community issues, but social responsibility starts with compliance with the law (Artene, 2014). The community could realize economic benefits in the continuity of business operations by hiring qualified candidates. The community could benefit from a sense of security knowing companies are completing thorough background checks on employees working within their community.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the employment background check strategies area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations. I explored strategies HR leaders use to conduct effective background checks. In this literature review, I present a critical analysis of literature to demonstrate a need for the completion of this qualitative case study to identify strategies leaders in the HR profession implement when completing

employment background checks on job applicants. The process of analyzing and synthesizing literature is an acceptable method of secondary research to generate new knowledge on a topic (Torraco, 2016). This literature review contains a critical synthesis of historic and current literature focusing on supporting and contrasting theories and the conceptual framework, including the disparate impact theory, employee turnover, background check processes, social media usage in the hiring process, employment background checks, the use of third-party consumer reports in employment practices, and corporate social responsibility.

### **Search Strategy**

Extensive research documenting strategies for completing employment background checks to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations does not exist. I used Boolean searches with phrases that included *hiring practices* and *background checks* with *credit checks*, *preemployment* and *employment process* with *background checks* and *credit checks*. A search of peer-reviewed sources from three online databases resulted in numerous articles to support the need for the research, the approach to conducting the research, the conceptual framework and theories, and the description of the business problem. The online databases used were ABI/Inform, ProQuest, and Ebsco Host. The search results provided an adequate representation that a business problem exists. Searches for appropriate applications of qualitative case studies and different conceptual theories provided substantial literature on research methods and conceptual frameworks appropriate to the business problem. To preserve the integrity of the supporting literature, I provided the digital object identifier

(doi) when available. This approach to documenting the literature review preserves the search ability of the scholarly work in the future (Klein et al., 2014).

I explored peer-reviewed journal articles, seminal articles and books, and relevant governmental and professional organization web sites. The use of multiple sources of information ensured academic scholarship and rigor in the study process. These sources resulted in 153 sources referenced in the literature review and throughout the study, of which 145 are peer-reviewed journal articles, six are seminal sources, one is a professional article, and 128 are from 2014 or later (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Content Type, Total, and Percentage of References*

Literature review content	Total #	# within 5 years of graduation date	% within 5 years of graduation date
Peer-reviewed journals	145	128	88.3%
Seminal books	6	3	50%
Government websites	1	1	100%
Professional journal	1	1	100%
Total	153	133	86.9%

I organize the literature by providing an overview of the theories I explored. I also compare theoretical concepts I considered when completing this study. I then present a review of the literature relating to the challenges to evaluating job applicants for employment. The literature review includes gaps in theory to support the need for the current research, in addition to employee turnover, background check processes, social

media usage in the hiring process, employment background checks, the use of third-party consumer reports in employment practices, and corporate social responsibility.

### **Evaluation of Theories and Conceptual Framework**

Scholars have suggested comparing applicable theories to develop the basis for the conceptual framework of the research process (Helitzer et al., 2014; Ivey, 2015). The frameworks are the relevant theories and concepts that through relationships; build the foundation for the research (Ivey, 2015). The researcher should gain knowledge through contrasting theories to develop the foundation for completing research (Helitzer et al., 2014). I searched several theories related to hiring strategies to support this study.

I initially started with understanding the negligent hiring theory. Employers limit liability by performing criminal background checks on job applicants (Pattison, Sanders, & Ross, 2014). Employment background checks are important as a matter of workplace security (Owen, 2014). Reference checking and evaluating information contained in the job application is important to protect against negligent hiring practices (Woska, 2007). The negligent hiring theory is the result of *Garcia v. Duffy*, 492 So. 2nd 435 (1986). In this case, the Florida Supreme Court held an employer liable for negligent hiring. The court determined that the employer should have known of the inappropriate behavior patterns of the employee had the employer had sufficient policies in place to complete an effective background check before hiring the employee. Black, Stone, and Johnson (2015) found that many employers use social media to evaluate candidates for employment, but lack policies in the use of social media in the hiring process. Achieving a balance between employee privacy and protection from employing a potentially

dangerous employee minimizes the risk of engaging in negligent hiring (Black et al., 2015; Woska, 2007). Hiring professionals must follow documented policies and procedures to conduct an effective background check on a job candidate to minimize the potential for liability for engaging in negligent hiring practices (Petersen, 2015; Woska, 2007). The policies of the company should outline the process hiring professionals follow to evaluate criminal records and social media presence of job applicants (Thomas, Rothschild, & Donegan, 2015). Thomas et al. (2015) further suggested that the policies outline how the evaluation will affect the hiring of job candidates. Thus, the negligent hiring theory was not appropriate for this study as I explored strategies to identify falsified information.

I then explored the resource-based view (RBV) theory. Wernerfelt (2013) introduced the resource-based view theory in 1984. Wernerfelt's original concept was to use available resources as a basis to make decisions when identifying competitive strategies and building organizations (Wernerfelt, 2013). Using current resources in developing processes allows managers to maximize the effective use of assets (Wernerfelt, 2011). Manroop, Singh, and Ezzedeen (2014) applied the RBV theory and found that policies and procedures implemented by HR managers influenced overall business operations and added value to the organization. Wernerfelt (2013) expanded this theory suggesting a dollar value assigned to the resources would place additional value on the use of the resource. In 2012, modifying the RBV theory by adding a value construct to the use of the resource was the foundation for the development of the RBV theory (Wernerfelt, 2013). Although I considered this theory as a foundation for the

study, I explored strategies and not measuring the use of resources in completing processes. Therefore, the RBV theory was not appropriate for this study.

The next theory I explored was the impression management theory. The impression management (IM) theory contains the framework for examining how job applicants create distorted, positive public perceptions using social media (Harrison & Budworth, 2015). Goffman first introduced the IM theory in 1959, focusing on how a person acts to impress those around him or her (Kacmar & Tucker, 2016). The use of social media has developed unintentional consequences of a digital presence when searching for jobs (Harrison & Budworth, 2015). Job candidates capitalize on this process by intentionally creating positive impressions through social media and other public outlets to hide any potential negative impressions (Harrison & Budworth 2015; Kacmar & Tucker, 2016). The IM theory supports the need for strategies in performing effective background checks to identify falsified information presented in the application process, as the basis for this theory is how people create public perceptions that may not be accurate. As I explored effective hiring strategies, the IM theory was not an appropriate theory for this study because the evolution of this theory relates only to public perception by manipulating impressions (see Harrison & Budworth, 2015).

I also considered additional theories including the human capital theory, person job fit theory, and the relative deprivation theory. Becker developed the human capital theory in 1964 (Becker, 1965). The theory contains the premise that screening job applicants based on not only qualifications alone but also using personality tests to evaluate candidates is an effective hiring practice (Becker, 1965). The screening process



includes the entire background check process. Kulkarni et al. (2015) expanded the meaning of the human capital theory to include the assumption that human capital is evident when an individual gains job appropriate knowledge and skills through education and work experience. The policy for many hiring officials is to hire from within, but continually hiring with internal candidates does not allow for new talent and perspectives to enter the business (Brymer, Molloy, & Gilbert, 2014). Tan (2014) stated that scholars believe this policy is an economics theory instead of the human capital theory. The socioeconomic demand and supply constraints are present when leaders engage in hiring from within as opposed to exploring external talent (Brymer et al., 2014; Tan, 2014). The basis of this theory correlates how education improves the abilities of an individual, as a relationship exists between education, training, and qualifications for positions (Tan, 2014). This theory does not provide a basis for performing effective background checks, and therefore was an inappropriate theory to support this study.

The person job fit theory contains the steps necessary to evaluate how well a person fits the requirements of a job. Evaluating how well a person fits with a job requires the evaluation of the candidate's credentials and background (Kulkarni et al., 2015). Neumann (2016) stated that the available labor pool is shrinking, making the need to evaluate credentials more important. Hiring professionals use various analyses to determine whether a potential candidate is an appropriate fit for a vacant position (Kulkarni et al., 2015; Lanyon & Goodstein, 2016). Lanyon and Goodstein (2016) completed a study and found the use of a general impression questionnaire as part of the preemployment process not effective in determining future job performance. Performing

effective background checks ensures a candidate fits the job requirements (Kulkarni et al., 2015; Lanyon & Goodstein, 2016; Neumann, 2016). Tan (2014) suggested that the candidates believe they are worth much more than an employer offers. This person's worth thought process is the foundation of the relative deprivation theory (Kulkarni et al., 2015). These theories support the need for strategies to conduct effective background checks, but a gap in the literature exists as to effective strategies for performing these background checks.

Helitzer et al. (2014) stated the conceptual framework is the recipe for developing a quality research project. During the research, I explored the conceptual frameworks underlying a number of studies relating to employment background checks and hiring strategies. The disparate impact theory contained the appropriate constructs needed to create strategies for performing background checks. The introduction of the disparate impact theory was the result of the outcome of the class action suit started by Billy Griggs in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424, 430 (1971). Disparate impact liability is the legal term for employers who violate laws in the hiring practices (Pattison & Varca, 1991). In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424, 430 (1971), the judge ruled that while employers' policies and processes are unbiased in the hiring of job candidates, the processes may still not be legal or appropriate.

The disparate impact theory differs from the disparate treatment theory in that the disparate treatment theory states employers discriminate against job candidates based on the five protected statuses under the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Harper, 2016). The underlying concept of the disparate impact theory is hiring professionals

perform effective background checks without discriminating against any specific class of candidates (Petersen, 2015). The disparate impact theory requires hiring professionals to develop effective policies and procedures in the hiring process that are both legal and appropriate. Managers should develop policies and procedures to ensure compliance with laws regulating the recruitment process (Loafman & Little, 2014). Griggs and the disparity impact theory had the greatest impact on the HR profession as background checks tend to unnecessarily place barriers to employment, leading to possible discrimination. Information sought in the background check should be relevant to the job function to avoid any potential liability (Woska, 2007). Hiring professionals should make sure the processes are consistent in evaluating job candidates equally by following policies and procedures for performing effective background checks (Peterson, 2014; Petersen, 2015). A need exists to develop theory relating to HR procedures and practices as theory development in HR research (Nimon, 2015). A mapping of theory through practice and processes minimize bias in the hiring process (Hirsh, 2014).

Sengul (2017) suggested literature relating to theory in background checks is scarce. A gap in the literature exists, as no research outcomes that contain strategies for conducting effective background checks exist. Through the results of this study, I expanded the knowledge to fill the gap in this literature and solve a current business problem by providing strategies to perform effective background checks while maintaining compliance with government regulations.

## Employee Turnover

Hiring strategies are important as employee turnover is increasing. More baby boomers are reaching retirement age and leaving the workforce (Colley, 2014). The aging baby boomers are changing the demographics of corporate work forces (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2014). The change will affect all industries, but leaders in government and not for profit organizations will experience higher challenges as the aging population exits the workforce (Colley, 2014). Colley (2014) suggested replacing the experienced workers would require extensive recruitment activity. The aging population is just one reason for the increase in employee turnover (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2014; Levanon et al., 2014).

Levanon et al. (2014) stated current economic conditions are another factor that would affect employee turnover rates. An ongoing decline in the unemployment rate in the past 5 years and the ongoing retirement of baby boomers suggests business leaders will experience severe labor shortages in certain fields in the next 5 to 10 years (Levanon et al., 2014). Employee turnover cost businesses more than \$10,000 per employee in recruitment costs (Alony, Hasan, & Sense, 2014). Alony et al. (2014) stated the cost of employee turnover expands to intangible costs of a loss of knowledge, skills and corporate knowledge. Hiring professionals assist in reducing the employee turnover rate by hiring the right employee as employee retention starts with selecting and hiring the correct employee for the position (Levanon et al., 2014). Hiring the best candidate improves employee retention rates and reduces hiring costs (Vasquez, 2014). Hiring professionals seek to hire the most qualified candidate of all applicants to reduce the

training costs (Sengul, 2017). The process of recruiting new talent and the best candidate to replace the tangible and intangible costs lost through turnover requires the use of effective background check strategies (Madichie & Nyakang'o, 2016).

The process of hiring new employees is a costly process to business owners (Biga, Spott, & Spott, 2015; Kogan, Hellyer, Stewart, & Dowers, 2015). The recruitment of new employees is a process by which hiring professionals locate and attract individuals to fill vacant positions (Amin, Khairuzzaman Wan Ismail, Zaleha Abdul Rasid, & Daverson Andrew Selemani, 2014). Amin et al. (2014) suggested the managers could prevent hiring mistakes by determining what qualifications a successful job candidate should possess before the recruiting process starts. Proper job descriptions and specifications need to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for the individuals (Amin et al., 2014).

### **Purpose of Background Checks**

Leaders need to perform background checks on potential employment candidates to verify the information candidates present in the application process to ensure the candidates meet the requirements of the position (Reinhard et al., 2013; Sengul, 2017). Engleman and Kleiner (1998) suggested hiring officials sometimes make hasty decisions in hiring employees to minimize the effects on operations. Hiring officials should not evaluate candidates based on personal feelings, or feel pressured into hiring just to have a body in the position. Several scholars agreed that hiring officials need to implement employment-screening processes to hire the most qualified candidates based on qualifications and job match (Engleman & Kleiner, 1998; Hannan, 2016; Kogan et al.,

2015; Sengul, 2017). Background checks include the completion of reference checks, employment history checks, educational checks, professional credentials check, credit checks, criminal records checks, and media checks (Kogan et al., 2015; Owen, 2014). Performing the basic background check will verify the information a candidate presented in the application process (Engleman & Kleiner, 1998; Uggen, Vuolo, Lageson, Ruhland, & Whitham, 2014).

Some candidates falsify information during the application process (Brody, 2010; Levoy, 2014). Some job applicants exaggerate work experience and education on resumes and job applications (Brody, 2010; Mandelbaum, 2014). The number of candidates exaggerating information is increasing as competition for specific vacant positions increasingly becomes more difficult (Levoy, 2014). Levashina and Campion (2009) referenced the results of a 2007 study that suggested over 41% of all applicants misrepresented information in the application process. Potential employers should use diligence to verify information in resumes and job applications (Brody, 2010; Levoy, 2014). Reinhard et al. (2013) stated that experience in the hiring process does not improve the ability for a hiring official to detect deception through the application process. Developing hiring processes that assess the risk factor of a job candidate's behavior reduces the chance of hiring the wrong candidate (Hannan, 2016; Kennedy Benson, 2016; Kogan et al., 2015; Woska, 2007). Effective strategies ensure the validation of employment candidate's information (Engleman & Kleiner, 1998; Reinhard et al., 2013). Evaluating information presented by the candidate in the application process is the start of the background check, but does not ensure the candidate is honest

(Reinhard et al., 2013). Schuessler and Hite (2014) suggested approaching the evaluation of a job candidate as a security risk to the company.

Employee theft of time and resources is the largest form of loss to a company (Brody, 2010; Kennedy & Benson, 2016). The number of employees committing white-collar crime is rising and is a growing concern among business owners (Brody, 2010; Kennedy & Benson, 2016; Zuber, 2015). Zuber (2015) suggested unethical behavior would continue to spread if the behavior becomes the social norm. Pierce and Snyder (2015) believed employees who engage in unethical behavior have a higher job satisfaction rating, resulting in less employee turnover. Therefore, a need exists for hiring officials to be critical in the evaluation of applicants to avoid job offers to candidates who have displayed unethical behavior in the application process (Pierce & Snyder, 2015).

Unfortunately, corporate corruption is more common today. Corporate corruption comes in many forms, but unethical or criminal acts by upper level management can destroy an entire organization (Thomas et al., 2015). Identifying and reporting of fraud is important to minimize the behavior and typically happens through tips from employees and associates (Weber, 2002). Unethical behavior, fraud, and embezzlement by employees result in profitability loss in business (Kennedy & Benson, 2016; Weber, 2002). Unethical behavior destroys managers' emotions because trusted employees betrayed management (Kennedy & Benson, 2016).

Ethical employees assist in identifying and reporting fraud committed by other employees. Hiring professionals assist in protecting corporate assets by hiring of ethical

employees (Kramer, 2015; Pierce & Snyder, 2015). Thomas et al. (2015) suggested hiring professionals complete a criminal background check on applicants to search for convictions of financial related crimes to minimize the risk of hiring an unethical employee. Small businesses owners do not have financial resources to survive a fraud loss (Kennedy & Benson, 2016; Kramer, 2015). Failure to identify an unethical employee before hiring could have devastating consequences to small business owners as a financially dishonest employee can bankrupt a company (Kennedy & Benson, 2016; Kramer, 2015). An effort to minimize or eliminate the risk of employee theft requires a more critical analysis of job candidates in the hiring process (Kennedy & Benson, 2016; Kramer, 2015; Shorr, 2015; Woska, 2007). Tracey (2014) suggested scholars develop a process for evaluating job applicants that would prove the most beneficial in the hiring process.

### **Background Check Process**

Lam (2016) stated the evaluation of the quality of a job candidate starts with a basic background check. Completing a thorough background check on job applicants is an accepted step in the preemployment screening process (Brody, 2010; Lam, 2016; Lanyon & Goodstein, 2016). Not all corporate structures have personnel or resources to complete extensive background checks (Biga et al., 2015). If the cost exceeds the benefit, small business leaders will outsource HR functions, including those functions regulated by government (Calcagno & Sobel, 2014). Because of the cost, some leaders hire outside firms to complete background checks into executive management as investigations completed by specialty companies are more in-depth than HR



professionals are because HR professionals do not have the resources to maintain compliance with federal regulation (Brody, 2010).

HR professionals conducting background checks should have procedures in place as discrimination and bias are still a concern in employment settings. Managers should recognize and improve the procedures in completing background checks to eliminate bias and provide fair treatment to candidates in the hiring process (Brody, 2010; Hersch & Shinall, 2016; Hirsh, 2014; Woska, 2007). HR managers are responsible for creating cultures of tolerance and fair treatment in recruiting practices, as this is the first exposure to the corporate culture an applicant experiences (Lambert, 2015). Leaders should implement and audit the hiring process to ensure the hiring professionals are following the policies and procedures and not using the background check process to discriminate against applicants (Calvasina, Calvasina, & Calvasina, 2015; Hersch & Shinall, 2016).

Historically, the use of polygraphs and voice stress analyzers were acceptable methods of evaluating candidates, but legislation has since banned these techniques in evaluating candidates for most employment situations (Brody, 2010). A written authorization to contact references and check the candidate's background is the first step to the background check process to protect the employers from potential litigation in the hiring process (Levashina & Campion, 2009). The hiring professional should obtain authorization from the candidate that contains all processes the hiring official will complete in verifying a candidate's suitability for employment (Lam, 2016). The hiring professional should verify previous work experience by contacting prior employers (Engleman & Kleiner, 1998; Shorr, 2015). A barrier some hiring professionals encounter

in the reference checking process is current and former employers are not forthcoming with information (Mustafa, 2014; Woska, 2007). A larger number of HR professionals will limit the information provided on former employees to minimize the potential of lawsuits (Mustafa, 2014). According to Mustafa (2014), the challenge of verifying employment is the ability to obtain information when many companies only verify the length of employment and position. Employers have no obligation to provide a reference for a current or former employee (Mustafa, 2014; Woska, 2007). Because former employers' HR staff is not forthcoming with information during the reference check process, hiring professionals do not always conduct thorough reference checks (Woska, 2007). HR professionals should request and check additional professional references (Mustafa, 2014).

Levashina and Campion (2009) noted the results of the 2008 recession had left many job candidates with gaps in employment. Levashina and Campion (2009) further suggested all candidates should explain all gaps in employment. The candidate's explanation for gaps in employment assists the hiring official in evaluating the candidate's honesty in responding to questions (Levashina & Campion, 2009).

Hiring professionals should verify additional background information on candidates for all positions. During the background check process, HR managers should emphasize the knowledge and skills required to perform in the position (Amin et al., 2014; Manroop et al., 2014). Additional background information consists of educational levels, eligibility to work in the United States, professional licenses, and references (Levashina & Campion, 2009). Applicants frequently provide inaccuracies in education

levels to gain a competitive advantage (Dotson, 2014). Verifying education levels protects managers from hiring unqualified candidates (Engleman & Kleiner, 1998). According to Mandelbaum (2014), some employers prefer educational degrees from traditional institutions earned in a traditional setting, and candidates do not disclose the learning modality in the application materials. A hiring professional can identify education earned through an online modality by verifying a candidate's degree (Mandelbaum, 2014).

Hiring professionals use other external sources to evaluate a candidate for employment, but the hiring authorities need to ensure the additional sources relate to the position (Nielsen & Kuhn, 2009; Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). Regardless of the sources hiring professionals use, Calvasina et al. (2015) recommended company leaders have clear policies and procedures when performing background checks. The procedures should contain the details concerning how the hiring officials will use other sources of information in the evaluation process.

### **Social Media**

Business leaders use various social media sources to assist in recruiting potential job candidates (Berkelaar, 2014; Calvasina, Calvasina, & Calvasina, 2014; Pramod & Bharathi, 2016). Some hiring managers evaluate job candidates by exploring online resources through various social media sites (Pramod & Bharathi, 2016; Young, 2015). Other recruiters use all types of electronic media including web searches when recruiting, evaluating, and selecting candidates (Blount, Wright, Hall, & Biss, 2016). Ninety-eight percent of 173 HR professionals who responded to a 2012 survey acknowledged the use

of social media in the recruiting process (Calvasina et al., 2014). Other HR professionals contemplate using social media resources (Young, 2015).

In evaluating candidates for employment, hiring professionals evaluate information potential job applicant's post on social media sites including LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter to evaluate behavior patterns (Curran, Draus, Schragger, & Zappala, 2014; Gibbs, MacDonald, & MacKay, 2015). Another social media outlet, Facebook, had over 1 million active users in 2013 (Stoughton, Thompson, & Meade, 2015). This number has continued to grow to over 3.9 million active users in 2017 (Hall & Caton, 2017). Information sought, whether ethical or legal, is easily available by using electronic media and, according to one survey, 37% of current employers are using social media to evaluate information on job candidates (Curran et al., 2014; Harrison & Budworth, 2015). Of the 37%, 65% used Facebook as their primary tool to evaluate candidates (Curran et al., 2014). Some hiring officials use a search engine such as Google on a candidate to obtain available information (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). Extensive research does not exist to demonstrate the effectiveness of using online media to evaluate candidates for positions, as hiring professionals tend to overlook the quality and skills of the candidate and instead focus on the online media content (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015).

Another aspect of the social media issue develops when a candidate does not have a presence on social media; not having this presence concerns some hiring officials as most people have some form of social media activity (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). Job candidates should have some form of a presence on social media. Gibbs et al. (2015)

suggested a person should consider possible implications when posting on social media because employers do use social media to evaluate candidates for employment. Some candidates create misleading profiles on social media to impress potential employers (Hall & Caton, 2017). HR professionals believe these professionals can identify potential negative behaviors and communication skills through evaluating social media outlets in the background check process (Curran et al., 2014). Some HR professionals will reject job applicants who openly post information on social media relating to drug or alcohol use (Pramod & Bharathi, 2016). According to Berkelaar (2014), the usage of social media in the employment context should require employers to provide a social media contract to employees and job applicants. The contract would protect the employer from litigation, but the challenge still exists, as the use of online media in any context is difficult to monitor (Berkelaar, 2014).

Scholars caution hiring professionals about using social media to evaluate candidates for employment as this process may have consequences as potential candidates consider this an invasion of privacy by the employer (Gibbs et al., 2015; Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015; Stoughton et al., 2015). Employers must be considerate of potential legal implications when using information obtained from social media sites in evaluating candidates for employment (Blount, et al., 2016; Calvasina et al., 2014; Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015). Several scholars suggested the review of social media sites might provide information relating to federally protected information such as medical information, age, gender, religion, and national origin (Blount et al., 2016; Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015; Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). Obtaining the protected

information using social media can result in hiring professional's bias in the hiring process (Blount et al., 2016; Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015).

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) protects a candidate's medical information, and obtaining information relating to medical information via social media would violate HIPPA (Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015). The inappropriate use of electronic media violates constitutional rights as defined by the National Labor Relations Board in employment and hiring processes (Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015). Well-written policies relating to the use social media sites to evaluate candidates will mitigate potential consequences, but according to Lam (2016), employers have not allocated appropriate resources to develop policies and procedures relating to the use of social media as an evaluation tool in the hiring process. Hiring professionals should have adequate social media policies in place as part of the employment background check process (Peterson, 2014). Lam (2016) stated government is considering regulation regarding the use of social media in the context of employment. Social media is one of the other resources the HR professional uses in completing background checks on job candidates.

### **Third-Party Consumer Reports**

Some hiring professionals complete credit checks and criminal background checks on job applicants. Using information obtained from an outside resource is a third-party consumer report (FCRA, 2015). Brody (2010) stated information a hiring professional obtains during the hiring process from a third-party meets the definition as a third-party consumer report, and the FCRA law regulates the use of these reports. Hiring

professionals conducting background checks using resources from a third-party must comply with the requirements of the FCRA. Completing extensive background checks on applicants using third-party consumer reports result in few candidates negatively impacted by the results of these background checks (Woska, 2007). However, hiring professionals still use these reports in the evaluation process. During the Obama administration, Congress proposed changes to the FCRA, complicating the HR decision-making process (Calvansina, 2015).

The FCRA outlines the legal requirements hiring officials must follow if using third-party consumer reports in the hiring process (Brody, 2010). Before an employer can take an adverse action against a potential job candidate based on information gained with a third-party consumer report, the employer must provide a copy of the information to the candidate and request an explanation of the questionable information (FCRA, 2015). Hiring professionals also need to ensure that resources used in the background check are job-related and do not discriminate against a potential candidate under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Brody, 2010; Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). HR professionals use a number of outside resources to perform background checks in the evaluation of a candidate for employment (Brody, 2010).

**Credit checks.** Performing credit checks on potential applicants is a trend becoming popular with employers. Potential employers are the second largest user of consumer credit reports (De Armond, 2016). According to a survey by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) in 2012, approximately 34% of responding employers reported that credit background checks are a requirement in the hiring process

on some potential applicants. Thirteen percent of the responding employers reported credit background checks are a requirement of the hiring process on all applicants (De Armond, 2016). In another report, over 50% of all employers use credit reports to evaluate candidates for some of a company's new hires (Weaver, 2015). Bernerth, Taylor, Walker, and Whitman (2012) reported that the results of a third survey conducted in 2010 indicated 60% of employers surveyed conducted credit background checks for some or all job applicants. The use of credit checks is a common tool used to evaluate applicants.

An increasing number of employers used these reports to determine the financial stability of potential candidates (Volpone et al., 2015). Employers assumed job candidates with lower credit scores are financially unstable (Bryan & Palmer, 2012). Hiring professionals believed employees who are responsible with their finances make the best employees because challenges with personal finance will spill over into the workplace (Gallagher, 2006). Other hiring professionals believed job applicants in financial distress are more apt to steal from companies and engage in other unethical behavior that could cause harm to the company (Bernerth, et al., 2012; Bryan & Palmer, 2012). The process of using these reports can disclose otherwise prohibited information such as date of birth, account information including limits and balances, and marital status (Gallagher, 2006). Credit reports also may disclose medical debt. HIPPA protects personal medical information (De Armond, 2016).

The practice of checking credit reports in the application process is a concern of government regulators as researchers have yet to determine how credit scores affect job



performance and why they are even needed regarding candidate evaluation (Bernerth et al., 2012). Employers should consider the position when determining whether to evaluate the credit report of the applicant as the position should relate to financial responsibility (Woska, 2007; Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). Employers should procure credit histories when a relationship between financial responsibility and a potential employee's position exists, as employees in financial duress are also more likely to engage in fraudulent behavior (Bernerth et al., 2012; Bryan & Palmer, 2012; Gallagher, 2006). Weaver (2015) suggested a poor economy could result in a negative credit rating of an otherwise financially responsible candidate. Consideration of the economic conditions would assist hiring professionals to evaluate credit ratings during economic hardships (Weaver, 2015).

The challenge with the use of credit reports is the percentage of inaccurate information contained in the report. Researchers reported that prior studies show between 24% and 29% of all credit reports contain erroneous information that could result in the denial of credit (De Armond, 2016; Gallagher, 2006). De Armond (2016) suggested 21% of all credit reports contain erroneous harmful information. Credit reports containing inaccurate and incomplete information can harm both the job candidate and potential employer using the information to make decisions (De Armond, 2016; Gallagher, 2006; Ransbotham, 2016). Understanding not all reports are accurate should assist hiring professionals in determining how to evaluate a candidate's report.

**Criminal background checks.** Another common third-party report some hiring professionals obtained in evaluating a candidate for employment is a criminal background report. The use of criminal background checks is a requirement for certain

positions involving contact with people (Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). Eighty percent of hiring professionals conduct criminal background checks on employment applicants (Owen, 2014). Another survey suggested 69% of hiring professionals conduct criminal background checks (De Armond, 2016). Petersen (2015) stated an estimated one in every five Americans has a criminal record, necessitating the need for a criminal background check. Employers protect themselves and limit liability for negligent hiring by conducting criminal conviction background checks on applicants (Brody, 2010; Engleman & Kleiner, 1998).

A challenge with the use of criminal background checks is the methods used for collecting and storing criminal data are inconsistent (Hughes, Elliott, & Myers, 2014). Usage of a criminal background check in the hiring process falls under the regulation of the FCRA to protect the applicant against incorrect information (Pattison et al., 2014; Zeitler & Luisi, 2016), as searching many of the criminal history databases provide inaccurate results (Hughes et al., 2014). Hiring professionals still use these databases as the use of electronic media can disclose criminal record information with minimal cost (De Armond, 2016).

Applicants who have criminal convictions need additional evaluation, but hiring professionals should not immediately eliminate these candidates from consideration (Petersen, 2015). Hiring professionals must overcome the challenge of understanding the difference between convictions and arrests never resulting in conviction as both arrests and convictions are available in a background search (Uggen et al., 2014). When evaluating candidates and performing background checks, employers should consider

criminal records but also consider the age of the applicant on the date of conviction, the length of time since the conviction, and the type of conviction, as a criminal conviction should not disqualify a candidate for employment (Petersen, 2015).

The use of third-party consumer reports in the hiring evaluation process has legal implications. Regardless of how a hiring professional uses information, the hiring professional must comply with the requirements of the FCRA if the professional is going to use a third-party consumer report in the hiring process (De Armond, 2016). Company leaders should define the scope of background investigations performed on potential candidates. Defining the evaluation criteria should be in the company's policies and procedures (Brody, 2010). Employers need to ensure that the background check and related consumer report is job-related and the employer is not unduly discriminating against a potential candidate under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Brody, 2010; Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). When taking adverse action as the result of the use of a third-party consumer report, the employer needs to comply with the requirements of the FCRA (Gallagher, 2006). Professionals should develop background check procedures that comply with applicable laws to protect the employer from liability.

**Fair Credit Reporting Act.** The Federal Trade Commission enforces the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA). The FCRA (2015) requires employers to afford candidates and employees the opportunity to respond to negative information obtained using third-party consumer reports, and request an explanation before taking adverse action against the individual. The hiring officials must provide a copy of the third-party report when requesting a response from the candidate (FCRA, 2015). A professional

who develops hiring procedures that ensure compliance with the FCRA limits liability exposure for the company.

Many HR professionals are retaining private investigating companies to conduct in-depth background checks to ensure compliance with the government regulations, specifically the FCRA (Brody, 2010). Hiring professionals perform extensive background checks on senior executives and other levels of management, as this process is becoming a normal course of operation in the hiring process (Brody, 2010). Extensive background investigations include credit checks, and the process must not discriminate in violation of regulations (Volpone et al., 2015). A candidate should be in good financial standing and financially responsible. A candidate that has filed bankruptcy should be of concern to a hiring company (Brody, 2010).

Potential applicants feel an invasion of privacy and untrusted prior to gaining employment with an employer who uses these reports in the hiring process (Kuhn & Nielsen, 2008). The purpose as to how hiring professionals use third-party consumer reports to evaluate candidates for employment is an area not extensively researched. Job applicants should possess education to understand the rationale of why employers choose to use consumer reports such as credit checks in the hiring process (Nielsen & Kuhn, 2009). Education of job candidates will improve the transparency of the company operations.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

To have a need to perform background checks, a hiring manager must have individuals apply for positions. Job applicants evaluate potential organizations in their

engagement and publication of corporate social responsibility to draw conclusions relating to the perceived quality of the organization (Park & Kim, 2015). Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) suggested transparency with stakeholders, including employees, assists in developing a positive social image of the entity.

Managers have an ethical responsibility for the consequences of their actions and organizational procedures (Wynder & Dunbar, 2016). When building ethical criteria into the HR processes, the perception is the ethical behavior exists through the entire corporate culture, creating a positive social image (Manroop et al., 2014). Park and Kim (2015) concluded a positive image relating to corporate social responsibility attracted job applicants to specific organizations.

Managers have a responsibility to minimize risk and mitigate litigation and by doing so improve corporate stability (Peterson, 2014). Business stability portrays a positive social presence that results in an improvement in financial performance. The actions of managers reflect in corporate outcomes, both financial and qualitative outcomes (Attig & Cleary, 2015; Wynder & Dunbar, 2016)). Scholars suggested that when employing companies cease to exist; workers and the surrounding communities suffer from deprivation of monetary resources in the community (Attig & Cleary, 2015; Gould & Desjardins, 2014). Most leaders understand the concept of corporate social responsibility stretches beyond the financial performance of a company (Attig & Cleary, 2015).

Management can improve the surrounding community by adding monetary resources to the community by hiring vulnerable adults in appropriate positions after

completing appropriate background checks (Lee & Cho, 2016). In addition, hiring professionals need to be open to hiring employees with diverse backgrounds (Lambert, 2015). Hiring these adults would improve the corporate social responsibility image and have a positive impact on social change (Lee & Cho, 2016). Scholars have suggested hiring professionals perform effective background checks to ensure they do not eliminate quality job applicants just because a flaw in the applicant's past exists (Lee & Cho, 2016; Petersen, 2015).

HR leaders who implement strategies in the recruitment process through transparency in alignment with corporate governance, assist in improving the corporate social responsibility image (Pargendler, 2016). Corporations comprised of a diversified workforce are more desirable as these employers appear more socially responsible in meeting the needs of the community (Lambert, 2015). Leaders who are transparent in processes could build trust and loyalty with job applicants and employees, resulting in lower employee turnover rates. Reducing turnover rates improves the profitability of the company, increasing the sustainability of the enterprise (Alony et al., 2014).

The use of credit scores in the hiring process can have adverse results from a customer perception, or legal liability point (Volpone et al., 2015). The Internet and social media have opened job candidate's personal life to scrutiny in the hiring process. Applicants feel an invasion of privacy more when employers research credit reports, driving records, and criminal reports but are more open to this intrusion since the 9/11 attacks (Owen, 2014). Business leaders have a social responsibility to gain an

employee's trust, as many benefits including employee loyalty will result from gaining this confidence (Hansen et al., 2011).

According to a 2015 survey conducted by the SHRM, over 56% of employers require all applicants to submit to a background check using a third-party consumer report. The same survey revealed 28% of the employers take adverse action, but fail to notify the candidate the adverse action is the result of information obtained through the background check. Companies have a legal responsibility to comply with laws and regulations. Artene (2014) stated compliance with the law is the foundation of social responsibility. While social responsibility expands into other areas including environmental and community issues, social responsibility starts with compliance with the law (Artene, 2014). Compliance with legal requirements demonstrates a corporate respect for the law. Complying with legal requirements demonstrates an understanding of responsibility to the guidelines established by society. Assisting leaders in complying with the law will benefit the company by demonstrating a fundamental method of being socially responsible (Artene, 2014; Weber & Gerard, 2014). The impact of applying social responsibility lies with the actions of management and employees within the company (Attig & Cleary, 2015; Wynder & Dunbar, 2016). With this study, I provided strategies to hiring leaders to validate information while maintaining compliance with federal regulations including the FCRA when using third-party consumer reports in the hiring process.

### **Transition**

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies hiring professionals used to conduct effective background checks on job applicants to identify falsified information. In Section 1 of this study, I have provided the background information to the problem, the problem and purpose statement, and the research question. I also included the interview questions, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, and the significance of the study. I have explored and presented published literature relating to the background of the problem, and purpose of the study. I provided a literature review demonstrating gaps in the literature relating to applicable theories. I discussed the extensive research relating to challenges human resource professionals must address when evaluating a candidate for employment. I included a summary of the scholarly literature relating to what effective strategies HR professionals should use in conducting thorough background checks.

In Section 2, I will state the purpose of the research and my role as the researcher. I will identify the participants, and expand upon the research method and design selected for this study. Additionally, I will expand on the process I will use in identifying the population and sample selection for this study and state how the study will align with the components of ethical research. I will discuss the data collection process including the data collection instrument, data collection technique, data organization, and data analysis. As a researcher, I must ensure my data collection is reliable and valid. In Section 2, I will describe how I will ensure data reliability and validity. I will explain how I will maintain ethical considerations through the research process.



In Section 3, I will provide the analyses of the data collected, and provide the findings of the case study research. I will provide a summary of how the strategies have a positive effect on business practices and improve social responsibility. My conclusions in Section 3 will include recommendations for strategy implementation into business procedures and a section with recommendations for future research.

## Section 2: The Project

The employment demographics are changing as more baby boomers leave the workforce, requiring the recruitment of new employees (Ilmakunnas & Ilmakunnas, 2014). The changes in governmental regulations relating to background checks and the honesty of job applicants have created a challenge in hiring new employees (Maatman, 2016). In this section, I present a restatement of the purpose statement, the role of the researcher and participants, the population and sampling, ethical research practices, and the research method and design chosen. I describe the data collection process I used to collect data including the data collection instrument, collection methods, and the method to organize and analyze the data. I also discuss the methods I used to ensure the reliability and validity of the research.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the employment background check strategies area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations. I collected information from HR leaders of three organizations located in the Southwest region of the United States who have successful strategies in identifying falsified information. I collected this information by completing face-to-face interviews with the HR leaders. The information from the results of this study could assist area HR leaders with hiring quality candidates. Specifically, the findings could help area companies' HR leaders hire employees with appropriate qualifications, financial stability, and integrity, resulting in a potential increase in profitability. Leaders sharing information on background check strategies

could enhance communications within business operations and improve the perceived transparency, profitability, and sustainability of a company. Leaders maintaining sustainability within the company could positively improve the economic climate in communities in which the company operates (Hansen et al., 2011).

### **Role of the Researcher**

Researchers performing case studies have an additional strain on emotions in the research process (Yin, 2014). The emotions are partially the result of a lack of clear procedures for performing case studies that are not routine such as in an experiment or by administering surveys (Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to minimize the emotional distance between the researcher and the participant. Minimizing emotional distance assists the researcher in the consistent application of interview questions to reduce the risk of undue influence on the participants' responses (Råheim et al., 2016).

As the researcher, I administered the data collection instrument consisting of open-ended research questions by completing in person interviews. I informed the participants of the purpose of the study, obtained informed consent from the participants, and completed the analysis of the data. I have experience in hiring individuals and having background checks performed on me in the employment process. My experience with inconsistent background check processes was the purpose for my seeking strategies to perform effective background checks.

The Belmont Report contains the guidelines and ethical framework when performing research involving human subjects (Kowalski, Hutchinson, & Mrdjenovich,

2017). I implemented the ethical framework when performing this research. Researchers should obtain informed consent from all participants (Wessels & Visagie, 2017). The framework I followed included obtaining informed consent from the participants, informing the participants of the right to withdraw from the research at any given time, and protecting the identity and potential risks of the participants.

The definition of bias is a systematic error in the research process. Bias can occur through any stage of the research process, from research design to the presentation of the results (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). A researcher can eliminate potential ethical dilemmas by eliminating the possibility of a dual role in the research process. Researchers should eliminate bias when collecting and analyzing data (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). The data collection process should not include the researcher's responses (Råheim et al., 2016). I used sampling techniques and semistructured interviews using open-ended interview questions in the data collection and analysis process. I followed the interview protocol and used member checking to minimize bias in the data collection process. Researchers should mitigate bias when collecting and analyzing data (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). I did not have a relationship with the participants to eliminate a potential dual role process. When selecting a sample, selection bias can be present because of the sampling method chosen. Disclosing the sampling method in the research process identifies potential bias in the research results. Using random sampling techniques from the population of interest minimizes selection bias (Malone, Nicholl & Tracey, 2014).

I used open-ended interview questions to complete the data collection. Follow-up questions assisted in probing for additional information in the interview process. The use of open-ended interview questions using additional questioning to provide additional information in qualitative research is an acceptable method to collect data in qualitative research studies (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, & Manning, 2016). Structure is not a requirement when using interviewing techniques. Interview questions must contain language understandable to both the interviewer and interviewee. When using appropriate language and consistent terminology during interviews, communication does not become a barrier (Mammen, Norton, Rhee, & Butz, 2016). I used questions containing understandable wording and consistent language.

### **Participants**

The participants were HR hiring professionals from three separate organizations who have documented strategies to conduct effective background checks on job candidates to identify falsified information while complying with federal regulations. A researcher completing a multiple case study using multiple participants in qualitative research can provide reliable information and direction in answering a research question (Boddy, 2016). Qualitative research places more emphasis in the quality of the participant instead of the quantity of the participants (Lee, 2014).

I attempted to select participants who are members of SHRM, which is one of the recognized organizations for HR professionals. Members of professional organizations maintain a certain level of competence and skills and are a quality source for study participants (McLean & Akdere, 2015). I contacted potential participants by accessing

the Arizona SHRM member directory to identify professionals working in a hiring capacity responsible for completing background checks on applicants for companies based in the Southwest region of the United States. I invited participants by email (Appendix A) and through a request for participants in the SHRM newsletter to participate in the study if their hiring practices include completing background checks to identify falsified information. A participant who verifies all candidate information in the application process in compliance with regulations has effective strategies. I followed up by telephone with the potential participants to develop working relationships with the participants. Initiating telephone contact with potential participants identified appropriate personnel at the organizations to contact for the letter of cooperation from the organization. Follow up personalized letters inviting participants to engage in the study is the approach to maximize recruitment of participants (Chisega-Negrilă, 2014). Selecting participants using predetermined criteria is an appropriate method in qualitative studies (Lysaght, Kranenburg, Armstrong, & Krupa, 2016).

### **Research Method and Design**

Selecting an appropriate research method and design approach to solving a research problem is critical to data collection to arrive at valid results. Many research methods exist. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method are the three research methods used in research studies (Yin, 2014).

### **Research Method**

I considered three research methods for the appropriateness to this business problem. Quantitative research methods are the standard of investigation in academia

(Owen, 2014). Using quantitative methods, a researcher can quantify the results, adding credibility to the extensive literature review and qualitative analysis portion of the research. A researcher completing quantitative research develops research questions and hypotheses statements (Myers, 2014). Performing a quantitative study requires aligning the business problem for the quantitative study.

When deciding on a qualitative approach, efficiency needs to be a priority since research is time consuming (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). A researcher using a qualitative methods approach is most appropriate when extensive research on the topic does not exist (Yin, 2014).

Researchers use a mixed-method approach because they require both quantitative and qualitative methods to complete the study (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). When completing a qualitative study, quantitative results are not present. When completing a quantitative study, exploratory results do not exist (Mertens, 2015). A mixed-method evaluation of a topic bridges the deficiencies of each method qualitative and quantitative (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). According to Mertens (2015), business leaders do not implement effective uses of a mixed-methods approach to address challenging problems when time is running out to find a solution. A researcher applying a mixed-method approach to a problem improves the probability of identifying appropriate solutions (Mertens, 2015). The sequential transformation processes in a mixed-method approach to research require qualitative study results to guide the quantitative analysis portion of the study (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). I did

not choose a quantitative or mixed-method approach to the study as I did not complete a study collecting numerical metrics to measure and analyze. I collected qualitative data.

### **Research Design**

The qualitative designs are ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Yin, 2014). The ethnography design is a qualitative research approach technique useful in examining cultures that are engaging in questionable or inappropriate activity (Bamkin et al., 2016). Inappropriate activity does not mean an individual engages in intentional negative or deviant activity. Inappropriate activity means the activity is inappropriate or illegal but not intentional (Atkinson et al., 2001; Bamkin et al., 2016). Draper (2015) stated that the ethnography design is appropriate when the surrounding culture that affects a person's behavior is the topic of the study. As I did not research cultures, I did not use the ethnography approach to the research design.

A researcher applying a phenomenology approach to qualitative research is appropriate when gathering information to demonstrate practices of organizations. Annells (2006) suggested the phenomenology approach to research when gathering information relating to which policies a leader follows when using consumer reports in the hiring process. Collecting and analyzing various life examples to determine which method is best is the foundation of the phenomenology approach to research (Honer & Hitzler, 2015). A researcher should narrow the scope and focus to complete the research study (Flick, 2014). Narrowing the scope in research is challenging when using the phenomenology approach as multiple lived experiences results in subjectivity by



evaluating specific life examples (Honer & Hitzler, 2015). Therefore, I did not use the phenomenology approach.

A researcher applying the case study approach is appropriate as the researcher can collect information and investigate current business practices (Ament et al., 2014). Analyzing conversations through the interview process assist the researcher in gathering information for recommendations (Ament et al., 2014; Travers, 2001). Current business practices answer the how and why of the strategies (Yin, 2014). Case studies are under valued in research (Boddy, 2016). As I conducted interviews asking about background check strategies, I used the case study design.

The topic of strategies for completing effective background checks to identify falsified information is a topic without significance research available. A researcher who uses a qualitative case study approach will identify current strategies and answer the research question (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Yin, 2014). Specifically, I completed a multiple case study to collect relevant information regarding what strategies an HR leader follows to ensure the completion of effective background checks to identify inaccurate information and avoid violations of government regulations. Ament et al. (2014) suggested qualitative case studies are an effective method for identifying successful strategies for completing a specific task.

The researcher needs to achieve data saturation in a case study. Data saturation assists in ensuring the reliability of the results and conclusions in research (Oleinik, 2015). Many methods exist to ensure data saturation. If the researcher does not achieve data saturation, the quality of the research minimizes the validity of the results (Fusch &

Ness, 2015). Since I conducted the interviews, methodological triangulation is an acceptable approach to data validation and is the method I used to ensure data saturation and validation. Researchers can strengthen the reliability of the data collection by following an appropriate interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

### **Population and Sampling**

The identified population as the focus of this study was Arizona based organizations employing members of the Arizona chapter of the SHRM currently employed as a hiring professional within organizations in the State of Arizona. Lists of professional members working with larger companies are available through a professional human resource organization. Organizations containing a larger number of staff members are more likely to perform comprehensive background checks on employment candidates (Calcagno & Sobel, 2014). The use of existing mailing lists maximizes the identification of appropriate companies and assists in validating the study (Owen, 2014). Selecting businesses in Arizona is appropriate, because Arizona is the starting point state regarding employment requirements for hiring and firing employees (Tellez, 2016).

I considered many sample selection methods including a random sample, systematic sample, purposeful sample, and focus group sample. Researchers who use a simple random or systematic sample randomly select participants and are commonly used techniques in quantitative studies (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). Researchers use focus groups to identify processes and solutions to problems in research (Boddy, 2016).

The sample selection for the multiple case study included HR professionals employed by three Arizona organizations with a proven success record in performing extensive candidate background checks. The sampling technique for selecting the sample I applied to this study is the purposeful sampling method. The purposeful sampling technique is a method a researcher uses in selecting a sample where the participant in a qualitative study has information rich and valuable to the results of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015).

A researcher could conduct a qualitative study interview in writing, by telephone, or in person (Chetty, Partanen, Rasmussen, & Servais, 2014). The researcher should select a participant supportive of the purpose of the study, and consider the environment when determining the interview environment (Woith, Jenkins, Astroth, & Kennedy, 2014). Chetty et al. (2014) suggested not performing the interviews by telephone but instead conduct the interviews in person to evaluate body language, as the participant's body language can identify opportunities for follow up questions. When selecting the place for the interview, the researcher should minimize the possibility of potential distractions (Woith et al., 2014). Yin (2014) suggested the completion of case study interviews in an environment familiar to the participant. I conducted the interviews at the participants' place of employment, and ensured the participants were available for an uninterrupted interview.

### **Ethical Research**

Conducting research that avoids bias in the research process is the first step a researcher can take in ensuring the research process is ethical (Yin, 2014). Once the

researcher addresses any potential bias, the researcher must identify the process to use to protect the participants. Yin (2014) suggested the researcher obtain informed consent from the participant, and take measures to protect the participant's privacy. The National Research Council provides guidelines for protecting participants involved in a research study, but the guidelines do not address big data and electronic media (Fiske & Hauser, 2014). The electronic age requires additional steps to ensure the privacy of participants.

The participant in the study should provide informed consent and the researcher should verify the participant understands that participation is voluntary, the researcher must protect the participant's identity and privacy, and they must have a right to withdraw from the study at any time (Yin, 2014). Transparency in research is necessary, and the researcher may need to educate the participant regarding what informed consent means (Atz, Sade, & Williams, 2014).

Approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) ensures the researcher has research procedures in place to protect the participants from harm (Fiske & Hauser, 2014). I requested approval from Walden University's IRB before conducting the actual research. Part of the Walden's IRB approval process required that I develop and submit an informed consent form with the IRB approval process. IRB's assigned approval number 03-29-18-0639495 to my study. Once I obtained approval to proceed with the research, I obtained and included an IRB approval number in the informed consent form. I requested the participant agree that they understood and acknowledged the informed consent process. I obtained this consent in writing by using the informed consent form. I emphasized to the participant that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Scholars argue payment for participating in research studies violates ethics in research (Johnson & Wendler, 2015). The consent form stated I would not compensate the participant for participating in the study.

Participation in a research study is voluntary (Yin, 2014). At the beginning of each interview, I emphasized that the participant had the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. A participant wishing to withdraw must only state they do not want to participate and the interview will end. I have not identified the participants or their organizations by name in the published study. I used coding to identify the participants in the study. I will maintain the data I collected through this study in a locked box for 5 years to protect the rights of the participants.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The purpose of this study was to explore the employment background check strategies area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations. As a researcher completing a qualitative case study, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Willgens et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). I was the primary data collection instrument. As the primary data collection instrument, I established boundaries and identified any potential bias. A researcher needs to establish boundaries when collecting data (Råheim et al., 2016).

I used open-ended research questions, administering follow-up questions as appropriate. The use of semistructured interview questions in the data collection process assists in eliminating bias in the data collection process (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). I

collected the data in a normal environment. Researchers completing case studies collect data in familiar environments and not in a controlled laboratory (Yin, 2014).

I digitally recorded and transcribed the interview. I also collected data by taking notes during the interview process, and reviewed documents the participant volunteered to share with the researcher. To validate the data collection instrument, I used the methodological triangulation method. Triangulation ensures data validity (Oleinik, 2015). The use of methodological triangulation to ensure data validation uses multiple sources of data collection including observations, notes, and interview transcription (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Member checking is a method to validate the transcription of the interview (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). The participants reviewed the transcript of the interviews to validate the data. I compared the transcription of the interview to my notes and field observations to provide the second and third data validation required for methodological triangulation.

I followed the interview protocol outlined in Appendix A. Researchers should ensure each interview question aligns with the research question, and the interview is conversational (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I developed interview questions that align with the research question. Researchers should have the interview responses validated by the participant (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Oleinik, 2015; Yin, 2014). Member checking is a method to validate the researcher's interpretation of the interview responses (Birt et al., 2016). Using member checking, I requested the participants to verify if my interpretations of my interview notes were correct. I used this process to validate my records and interpretation of their interview responses. I continued this process until my

interpretations of the participants' responses were correct, and there was no new additional information.

### **Data Collection Technique**

To answer the research question “What employment background check strategies HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations”, I conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions. A researcher should conduct face-to-face interviews in familiar environments with no interruptions (Woith et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). To facilitate this undertaking, after identifying the participants, I scheduled face-to-face interviews in an environment familiar to the participants. I strived to eliminate distractions through the interview process. I used a digital voice recorder to record the interviews.

Before conducting interviews, scholars suggested the researcher develop the interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Willgens et al., 2016). The interview protocol should include an overview of the purpose of the study, the procedure the researcher will follow, and the interview questions (Yin, 2014). Establishing the protocol before the researcher starts the data collection process will strengthen the reliability of the research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). According to Yin (2014), most researchers believe the protocol consists of only the interview questions.

Researchers should obtain informed consent before collecting data from participants to demonstrate the participants are aware of their rights (Fiske & Hauser, 2014; Yin, 2014). Informed consent protects the rights of the participants (Yin, 2014). I will first obtain informed consent from the participant.

When conducting qualitative interviews to collect data, the researcher is the data collection instrument (Willgens et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). Researchers develop interview questions that align with and support the research questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Developing the interview questions before the interview strengthens the protocol, improving the reliability of the data (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Willgens et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). The reason researchers conduct interviews is to gain new knowledge (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Using open-ended questions provide the researcher data rich in knowledge (Yin, 2014). I acted as the data collection instrument. I followed the interview protocol and used the open-ended interview questions developed and included as Appendix A.

Once I collected the data from the interview, I transcribed the interview. The process of the researcher obtaining agreement from the participant of the interview transcript is validation and is an acceptable data validation method (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Oleinik, 2015; Yin, 2014). Member checking is the process used to validate an understanding of the qualitative data and eliminate the potential for researcher's bias (Birt et al., 2016). I requested the participant's review and validated my understanding of the transcript and notes as accurate.

### **Data Organization Technique**

I collected data using open-ended interview questions. I used follow-up questions as appropriate. Structuring interview questions reminds the researcher of the need for the information and the importance of gathering the complete information (Yin, 2014). I



used a digital voice recorder to record the interview. I also took notes throughout the interview. I transcribed the interview to hard copy.

Researchers of qualitative studies code the data into categories to establish themes in the data (Chowdhury, 2015; Yin, 2014). Chowdhury (2015) suggested the identification of themes support strategies in qualitative studies. I coded the data to identify themes in the data. I electronically filed the themes for data analysis.

I have secured the paper copy of the data in a locked storage box for 5 years after the completion of the study. I have secured the electronic copy of the data on disk. I have password protected all electronic files. After the 5-year retention period has passed, I will destroy the data by using electronic methods including shredding paper documents and erasing electronic data.

### **Data Analysis**

During the interview, I collected responses to interview questions. I also took notes, made observations, and requested policies to review. A researcher participating in the observation of responses provides the opportunity to observe physical attributes such as body language and facial gestures (Denzin, 2016). Triangulation is one method to ensure data saturation and validation when conducting interviews (Carter et al., 2014; Oleinik, 2015). Triangulation in data analysis of qualitative data occurs when multiple data sources validate the responses to support a purpose (Carter et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Methodological triangulation is a method of data analysis process a researcher can use to validate the results of the data collection process when collecting qualitative data (Carter

et al., 2014; Denzin, 2006). I applied the methodological triangulation method to the analysis of the data I collected during this study.

The researcher should transcribe the interview and obtain validation shortly after completing the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Chowdhury, 2015). I transcribed the data within one week of conducting the interview. I asked the participants to verify and confirm the question responses after transcription of the interview to validate the interview data. Member checking is a process a researcher uses to validate responses and minimize research bias by comparing the researcher's notes and understanding to the interviewee's responses (Birt, et al., 2016). I verified and confirmed the interview responses to the hand-written notes I took during the interview to the transcription, and clarified discrepancies between the notes and interview transcription. Verifying the interviewer's notes with the transcripts provides the third verification in the triangulation process (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Classifying themes is an appropriate method of qualitative data analysis (Chowdhury, 2015; Flick, 2014). I entered the themes into NVIVO. NVIVO is an acceptable program for analyzing themes in qualitative research (Owen, 2014; Vasquez, 2014). The program also offers features to translate audio files, and provides output for the presentation of data. Depending on the themes, and flow of the questions, I may use charts and graphs in addition to tables in analyzing the themes. Using charts and graphs is an appropriate method to display results of qualitative data (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). I continued to review the literature and compare themes between the

literature and the data. I explored the themes I identified which exist within, and are lacking in current theories.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity is different for quantitative and qualitative data.

Qualitative data analysis is not measurable, and therefore researchers use different methods to ensure reliability and validity of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I will discuss the methods I used to ensure reliability and validity of the data.

#### **Reliability**

Reliability in the data requires the researcher to determine if the data is dependable (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data is dependable if the participant reviews the transcripts from the interview and validates the results (Birt, et al., 2016). Member checking is an appropriate method for ensuring the data is dependable and reliable (Birt et al., 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers should use multiple methods of code review to improve the reliability of the data (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler, & Ranganathan, 2016; Morse, 2015). Morse (2015) suggested dependability and reliability are interchangeable. A researcher can attain dependability with the use of multiple review methods of the data and an inquiry audit (Morse, 2015).

I reviewed the transcript of the interview with the participant and asked the participant to validate the responses. I made note of corrections in the data to ensure reliability. I compared the notes I took during the interview with the interview transcripts. This method provided multiple levels of review to demonstrate the data is dependable and reliable.

## Validity

Triangulation is the currently accepted method to verify the validity of qualitative data (Birt et al., 2016; Secolsky, Wentland & Denison, 2011; Yin, 2014). A researcher validates data to ensure the data is credible and transferable (Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). A researcher could ensure the study maintains credibility by implementing triangulation and member checking of the data (Morse, 2015). I used methodological triangulation to validate the data collection.

Transferability of data validity is the process of transferring findings to another person (Morse, 2015). A researcher's process and data analysis should be rigorous to improve the transferability of the results (Morse, 2015). The purpose of my research was to share the findings with other business leaders. I used rigor when I collected data and reported the findings of the study to ensure transferability of the study to outside individuals.

Confirmability in ensuring data validity is the simultaneous use of triangulation and an audit trail in the data validity process (Morse, 2015). I used triangulation to ensure confirmability in the validation of the data, and I will audit the results. Data saturation also ensures data validity (Birt et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). To ensure data saturation, scholars suggested the use of multiple credible data sources (Birt et al., 2016; Chowdhury, 2015; Yin, 2014). I used note collection through observations, interviews, and company documentation to validate the data and ensure data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I provided the purpose statement for the study, my role as the researcher, and the study participant. I provided an in-depth analysis of why I chose the research method and design strategies for the study. I discussed the population and sample selection and ethical issues relating to the study. I provided justification for the data collection instrument and technique, and the data organization technique and analysis I intend to implement. I concluded this section with how I am going to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection and analysis process.

In Section 3, I provided the application to the business problem. In this section, I also presented the research findings, how one can apply the findings to professional practice, and the implementation for social change. Finally, I provided recommendations for action, future research, and conclude with reflections on the completed study.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

Hiring professionals need effective employment background check strategies to identify potential falsified information in the application process. In this section, I discuss my research findings. I include (a) an overview of the multiple case study, (b) the presentation and discussion on the findings, (c) the application of these findings to the professional practice of HR, (d) current and future implications for social change, (e) recommendations for actions in the background check process, (f) recommendations for future research in the area of employment background check process, (g) my reflections on the research process, and (h) a summary of the study and conclusion. I present the findings by discussing the main themes identified through my research.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the employment background check strategies area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations. Based on the process identified in Section 2, I collected information from HR leaders of three organizations located in the Southwest region of the United States who have successful strategies in identifying falsified information. I collected this information by completing face-to-face interviews with three HR specialists, managers, and directors within two different organizations responsible for verifying information contained in job applications and resumes presented to the leaders in the employment process. Two of the participants worked within one organization, and the third participant worked in a separate organization. Conducting face-to-face interviews is an acceptable and effective method of collecting qualitative

data (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). After the participants agreed to and signed the consent form, the participants answered six semistructured interview questions (see Appendix A). I digitally audio recorded the interviews, took field notes during the interview process relating to question responses, asked follow-up questions, and noted behavioral observations.

After collecting the data and transcribing the interviews, I compared these transcriptions with my field notes. Each participant verified my field notes of my interpretation of his or her responses. Each participant reviewed and verified the interview transcripts. The participants also reviewed my interpretation of the additional documents provided for my review. I used this approach to ensure triangulation and validation of the data. I compiled these data, including my notes, for analysis.

Researchers commonly include field notes in the compilation of qualitative data (Yin, 2014). I used NVIVO software to assist in coding and identifying themes within the data.

Based on the analysis of the data, the following six emerging themes were identified: (a) Verifying employment history is limited to company, length of time, and position; (b) state regulatory agencies provided information to verify educational background; (c) references must include previous supervisors; (d) criminal checks are completed through a third party; (e) conducting thorough background checks in house is costly, and current staffing levels are prohibitive of more detailed background checks; and (f) guidelines and policies are written to provide consistency in decisions, supporting the framework of the disparate impact theory. The participants identified these themes as

best practices in conducting background checks. I present the findings through these emerging themes.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

Through the completion of this study, I identified employment background check strategies that some area HR leaders used to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with the government regulations. The importance of verifying job application information was apparent when I sought potential participants for the study. Obtaining the required Letter of Cooperation from organizations required approval from many legal departments, making the participation of interested parties impossible. As a result, I identified two organizations willing to submit the required Letter of Cooperation to participate in my study. Driven by the research question, “What employment background check strategies do some area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with the government regulations?”, I completed face-to-face interviews, took notes, made notes of observed body language, and reviewed some documentation shared by the participants. I interviewed three participants within these organizations, and have identified these participants as P1, P2, and P3 in the findings. I analyzed the data collected using NVIVO software to identify themes. I identified six emerging themes demonstrating some successful strategies hiring professionals in the Southwest region of the United States use in completing employment background checks while maintaining compliance with government regulations.



### **Theme 1: Employment Verification**

The participants stated their desire to hire honest and trustworthy employees as not all applicants are honest. Some candidates falsify information in the application process (Brody, 2010; Levoy, 2014). Applicants falsify information in the application process to give themselves a competitive advantage, and some professions have higher rates of applicants falsifying information (Roulin, Krings, & Binggeli, 2016). The first strategy in the hiring process is to determine if the candidate meets the qualifications for the position on paper. Once the participants determined that the candidate met the qualifications for the position, the participants verified the information presented in the application materials. Verification of the materials is the first strategy to evaluate the honesty of the potential job applicant. More job applicants are exaggerating their work experience and education (Brody, 2010; Mandelbaum, 2014). While completing a background check does not verify honesty, verifying previous employment compared to the application materials is the first step in determining whether an applicant is honest (Reinhard et al., 2013). The participants used the employment verification information as the first strategy to evaluate the honesty of the job applicant in completing the application documentation. Their rationale was that if the job applicant is honest in reporting the past employment information, this was the first strategy the HR professional applied in the evaluation of the honesty of a candidate for employment.

All participants stated that they verified past employers listed on the job application materials. The only information the participants gained through the verification process was to verify whether a person worked for the company, how long

they worked for the company, and the position they held. P1 stated that a question such as “is the person eligible for rehire” is a loaded and biased question, and the response could eliminate an otherwise qualified applicant from consideration. P2 and P3 stated that to reduce potential liability for their organization, their policy is that they provide dates of employment and position held when contacted to verify employment on current and previous employees. As such, they do not expect to receive additional information when they contact previous employers for a reference.

The literature I reviewed indicated that many employers only verify the basic information to eliminate the potential for future liability, as previous employers have no obligation to provide a reference for a former employee (Mustafa, 2014; Woska, 2007). Hersch and Shinall (2016) stated that by minimizing the amount of information shared during an employment check, the less information is available for the potential employer to use in discrimination against an applicant in violation of various federal employment laws. The participants had procedures in place demonstrating their strategies in applying the disparate impact theory to the background check function. An HR professional who developed and followed documented procedures in the hiring process minimized the possibility that the professional discriminated or violated federal laws in the hiring process (Loafman & Little, 2014). This finding confirmed the challenge HR professionals have when verifying prior employment.

## **Theme 2: Education Verification**

Highhouse, Brooks and Wang (2016) found that applicants tended to exaggerate their education to gain a competitive advantage and boost their status. Conducting

extensive background checks is costly and time-consuming, and the benefit must outweigh the costs (Calcagno & Sobel, 2014). All participants sought less expensive strategies for conducting thorough background checks by using the resources of second party entities when possible.

P1 and P2 were responsible for verifying information contained in job applications by applicants who are in regulated professions, through a state regulatory body. The state regulatory body has specific education requirements for licensure or certification. The state regulatory body verifies the education of the applicant in the licensure or certification process. P1 and P2 verified current licensure or certification credentials and used these credentials as the strategy for verifying educational credentials. If the job applicant presented educational information that exceeds the state regulatory requirement, P1 and P2 contacted the job applicant by telephone to inquire as to why the applicant did not pursue a higher level of certification or licensure based on the presented education level in the application materials. The use of regulatory body information to verify information presented by the applicant in the hiring process is an identified strategy to extend the knowledge for the hiring professional not previously identified in current literature.

P3 was responsible for verifying information on job applicants not in a profession regulated by a regulatory body. P3 verified educational information directly with the educational institution. P3 completed the education verification process only if the position had a specific educational requirement. HR professionals should use outside resources and verify information that relates to the position (Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). P3

stated by applying the strategy of verifying educational information when related to the position ensured the practical use of resources. Petersen (2015) confirmed that the strategy of verifying relevant information minimized discrimination against any class in the hiring process, as the concept of the disparate impact theory supported hiring professionals that did not discriminate against any group of candidates.

### **Theme 3: Professional Reference Check**

HR professionals should require and check professional references (Mustafa, 2014). HR professionals need to check professional references as prior employers are not always forthcoming with information (Mustafa, 2014; Woska, 2007). All applicants should provide at least three professional references as friends are not an acceptable professional reference.

While Reinhard et al. (2013) asserted that experience in the hiring process does not improve the ability for a hiring professional to detect deception through the application process, all participants stated that they listen for specific phrases or comments when performing professional reference checks. The phrases the participants listened for suggested that the reference was a friend instead of a professional contact. P1 shared that the phrase “when we were in college” suggested the applicant and reference were friends through school, and do not have a professional relationship. P3 shared that the ability to identify the questionable phrases during a reference check improved with experience. The participants stated that they gain experience in identifying statements that suggested the applicant might not be truthful with the information provided in the

application process. The theme of using experience in conducting background checks contradicts prior literature and was an acceptable strategy with the participants.

Some hiring professionals must verify relevant experience for those job candidates that do not have previous official employment (Shattuck & Rendall, 2017). The participants shared previous mentors and college professors are acceptable as professional references when applicants do not have a strong employment background. The participants followed the same strategy for verifying references who are mentors and former professors.

The participants stated that they have zero tolerance for asking questions that could result in obtaining potentially discriminatory information. P1 shared not all professions attract diversity, and adding to this lack of diversity is not acceptable. The participants did not ask questions that could disclose the applicant's age, gender, race, or other protected information. The elimination of questions that could disclose protected information is one strategy HR professionals use to eliminate bias in the hiring process (Brody, 2010; Hersch & Shinall, 2016; Hirsh, 2014; Woska, 2007).

#### **Theme 4: Criminal Background Checks**

According to P2, it is becoming more common for job applicants to have a criminal conviction on their record. All the participants stated some form of a criminal record such as driving under the influence (DUI) is common. Petersen (2015) stated an estimated 20% of all applicants have a criminal record. Denver (2017) stated more potential applicants have prior convictions and weighing the basis of the conviction

against the position for which the applicant applied will minimize inappropriately eliminating an otherwise qualified candidate from the application pool.

All participants required applicants to provide written authorization and submit to a criminal background check. Due to a lack of internal resources, the participants contracted with an outside third party to complete the criminal background checks. AccuSource is one such company in the Southwest region of the United States that completes criminal background checks on job applicants. A challenge with the use of criminal background checks is the methods used for collecting the criminal data is not consistent (Hughes et al., 2014). The use of an outside company by the participants provided consistent strategies for conducting the criminal background checks. The participants stated a criminal conviction does not necessarily eliminate an applicant from consideration for employment, but the applicant should disclose the conviction in the application process to demonstrate a form of honesty.

All participants have established guidelines that define the type of position and the type of convictions that are acceptable given a specific passage of time since the conviction and the application date. This strategy provided consistency in the use of the criminal data. For some of the positions, the applicant had to pass a criminal background check to secure a fingerprint clearance card. The participants received the criminal background check as part of the process of obtaining a fingerprint clearance card on select applicants. P2 and P3 stated they compared the criminal background check to the application materials to determine if the applicants are honest about self-reporting convictions. If the participants have questions because of the criminal background check,

the strategy they applied is to contact the applicant and ask for clarification of the information. This strategy ensured that the participants complied with the requirements of the FCRA and eliminated potential bias and discrimination in the background check process.

### **Theme 5: The Cost of Background Checks**

Completing background checks is a costly and time-consuming necessary task that all HR professionals must undertake to consider qualified applicants for employment (Biga et al., 2015). The benefit must outweigh the cost when determining whether the HR professional should implement a specific background check strategy (Calcagno & Sobel, 2014). All participants stated resources are scarce and the strategy is information verified in the background check is necessary to limit their liability exposure for poor hiring decisions. As such, all participants applied the strategy to verify only qualifications and other information relevant to the position. They also used resources available from other sources including government regulatory agencies to verify information. All participants stated the lack of financial and human resources limit verification of additional information.

### **Theme 6: Background Check Guidelines and Policies**

All participants have documented policies and procedures to follow when conducting background checks throughout the application process. P1 shared the situation when an executive of the company circumvented the HR professional and published policies to hire an applicant without following the established policy. The

employee was not a quality candidate, and staff used extensive time to document substandard performance to support the termination of the employee.

The first strategy is to ensure that written documentation is available. All participants have internal guidelines when verifying information obtained through a third party to ensure compliance with the FCRA. P2 and P3 are new to their positions, only being in the positions for three years. At the beginning of employment for P2 and P3, guidelines to ensure compliance with the FCRA and other employment laws were not in existence. Together, P2 and P3 worked to develop guidelines and ensure all staff followed the guidelines when completing background checks. The information sought during the background check process must be relevant to the position to avoid any potential liability (Woska, 2007).

Social media is an electronic form of open communication and information (Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015). The use of social media in the hiring process allowed human resource professionals to profile specific applicants. Profiling specific applicants can result in bias and discrimination in the hiring process (McDonald, Thompson, & O'Connor, 2016). All participants have developed strict instructions and policies banning the use of any social media sites when evaluating any potential job applicants. The instructions included the use of LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and other electronic forms of open communications. HR leaders who used social media to evaluate candidates overlook the quality and skills and focus on the social media content (Berkelaar & Buzzanett, 2015). The participants stated the strategy of eliminating the use of social media; the hiring professionals focus on the qualifications of the applicant and do not



introduce unintentional or inappropriate bias in the hiring process. McDonald et al. (2016) suggested the need of more research relating to strategies for using social media in the hiring process to ensure hiring professionals do not discriminate in the hiring process.

The participants stated that a strategy of having guidelines and policies are crucial in verifying information in the application process while maintaining compliance with federal regulations. The hiring professionals should ensure the policies are consistent in evaluating all job applicants (Peterson, 2014; Petersen, 2015). All three participants applied the strategy of consistent application of the guidelines and policies when conducting background checks on job applicants. The lack of the litigation involving the participants' background check hiring practices demonstrated the strategies relating to following the policies are effective.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings I presented in this study are relevant to the business practice of hiring qualified employees as potentially participating HR professionals can apply the identified strategies to implement effective hiring process background check strategies while maintaining compliance with the federal regulations. Some job applicants falsify information during the application process (Brody, 2010). An estimated 41% of all job applicants falsified information in the application process in 2007 (Levashina & Campion, 2009). Levoy (2014) quoted a 2014 SHRM survey increasing this percentage to over 50%. Effective strategies ensure validation of the employment candidate's information (Engleman & Kleiner, 1998; Reinhard et al., 2013).

The strategies identified by area HR professionals improve the hiring process and ensure the hiring of only qualified applicants. The strategies include verifying prior employment, professional references, and education. The HR professionals used education requirements for licenses and certifications issued by government regulatory agencies as a method for verifying education. The HR professionals used fingerprint clearance requirements as a method for conducting criminal background checks. The application of these strategies minimized the risk for employment hiring litigation and provided some level of assurance as to the applicant's honesty and qualifications.

In 2014, almost 89,000 applicants filed employment discrimination cases in federal court, the majority claiming discrimination based on protective classes of age, gender, and race (Terpstra & Honorée, 2016). A hiring professional can identify with some reasonable assurance protected applicant data by searching social media sites, and therefore professionals should not use social media in the application process (Blount et al., 2016; Lowenstein & Solomon, 2015; Zeitler & Luisi, 2016). The strategy of consistently following policies and guidelines including strictly prohibiting the use of social media in the verification process has assisted the participants in eliminating employment hiring litigation. Litigation costs are extensive for business leaders, as the cost of litigation whether successful or not are a costly process (Terpstra & Honorée, 2016).

The conceptual framework for this research was the disparate impact theory. Griggs and the disparate impact theory affected the human resource profession by stating HR professionals should follow policies and procedures in evaluating job applicants

(Peterson, 2014; Petersen, 2015). Effective hiring process background check strategies provide a level of assurance the HR professional is hiring the most qualified, honest candidate while minimizing litigation risk.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Many leaders of organizations engage in actions to bolster corporate social responsibility, but many actions have no social impact (Walker, Hills, & Heere, 2017). Chi, Yeh, & Guo (2018) found quality applicants preferred companies with positive social images, and employers should develop a positive image to attract quality applicants. Leaders sharing information on background check strategies could enhance communications within business operations and improve the perceived transparency, profitability, and sustainability of a company. Managers are responsible for minimizing corporate risk and mitigating possible litigation, and by doing so improve the stability of the company (Peterson, 2014). Leaders maintaining sustainability within the company could positively improve the economic climate in communities in which the company operates (Hansen et al., 2011).

HR professionals who have strategies to use published policies of the hiring process do demonstrate transparency in the application process. Inappropriately discriminating against applicants because of a criminal conviction is not useful in providing stability in the surrounding neighborhoods in which these people live, and may violate federal employment laws (Westrope, 2018). Hiring applicants with a criminal record reduces the recidivism rate of future convictions, also improving the social impact of hiring an otherwise qualified applicant (Denver, 2017). The strategy of evaluating the

crime, length of time since the crime, and the relationship between the crime and the position does not eliminate applicants with criminal records. Effective strategies for policies and guidelines relating to hiring applicants with criminal records improve the image of the organization and have a positive social and economic impact on the surrounding communities.

Intangible social impacts of policies and strategies should translate into tangible social impacts in the communities to be effective (Walker et al., 2017). I have identified effective background check strategies an HR professional could use to improve the surrounding communities. The tangible benefits will possibly result in corporate transparency, fair hiring practices, and a reduction in recidivism in criminal activities.

### **Recommendations for Action**

I presented literature that documented prior studies demonstrating the increase in the number of job applicants that falsify information, and the application process continues to grow every year. I also documented in the literature the number of employment-related litigation cases continues to grow every year. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the employment background check strategies area HR leaders use to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations.

Scholarly literature suggested HR professionals develop and apply consistent policies that identify the background check strategies. HR professionals should develop background check strategies to verify information and identify potential falsified

information. These strategies will provide a level of assurance that employers hire honest and qualified candidates.

During the study, participating HR professionals identified strategies for verifying information contained in the job application, strategies for applying consistent policies for the background check process, and specific instructions not to search social media sites on potential job applicants. The findings in this study apply to all HR professionals engaged in conducting background checks on applicants. These strategies will minimize risk in both hiring qualified applicants and avoid potential litigation relating to hiring practices. Leaders in the human resource profession should use the strategies presented in this study to improve current internal strategies within their employment environment.

I agreed to share the results of the study with the participants. I will also share the results of this study with the SHRM professional organization, both on a local and national level. I will distribute the results of this study through local conferences, and SHRM's newsletter.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The first limitation of this study was to identify willing participants employed within companies presently using effective background check strategies. Some organizations that I contacted stated they contract the background check process out to an outside company. Because background checks are time-consuming, some firms hire outside companies to complete the background checks to maintain compliance with the law (Brody, 2010)

I recommend researchers research to identify what these background check companies do regarding completing background checks. This research would possibly identify whether the contractor or the contracting organization maintains responsibility for complying with federal regulations in the background check process, and which organization maintains liability for the compliance with federal regulations.

Thirty-seven percent of hiring officials use social media to evaluate an applicant for employment (Curran et al., 2014; Harrison & Budworth, 2015). The participants in this study stated they prohibit the search of social media sites on applicants so not to exclude applicants from employment based on a protective class. I recommend future research on strategies HR professionals have in exploring electronic media in the background check process. This research would expand on the legal implications presented by electronic media, and expand on the application of the disparate impact theory in background check strategies.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral journey and completion of this study have challenged me to think beyond the textbook. I have an extensive research background and thought I would flow through the process because of my previous experience. This assumption was not the case. I noticed some mistakes that I made in the process that I had to correct. If I had to start the study all over again, I would have taken a different approach to my study.

I also learned that just because you obtain a doctoral degree, this does not mean you know everything. During the process, the committee members challenged my statements. In some instances, I had to demonstrate my statements were factual and

correct. In other instances, I had to make changes to my document. I started to make the requested changes but realized not all requested changes were appropriate. I learned to believe in myself and support my statements with fact. The experience through this process provided the foundation for my desire to complete future quality research.

### **Conclusion**

Baby boomers are reaching retirement age and leaving the workforce. As a result, employee turnover is increasing. The percentage of applicants who falsify information in the application process continues to rise every year. Filling positions requires evaluating an applicant to determine if the applicant is qualified and honest.

HR leaders have some useful strategies in place to identify falsified information while maintaining compliance with government regulations. The first theme that emerged from this study included an understanding of the limitations of information that specific reference checks will provide. Additionally, the strategies compare the information to the application materials to evaluate the honesty of a candidate. The second theme that emerged is HR professionals used outside information from regulatory bodies to verify information such as education. The third theme that emerged is all HR professionals require a professional reference check from individuals who have a professional relationship with the applicant. Professional references provide information relating to character and qualifications. The fourth theme that emerged is all HR professionals perform criminal background checks on applicants if the criminal history is relevant to the position. The fifth theme that emerged is time and other resources to perform extensive background checks are cost prohibitive and limit all HR professionals.

As a result, HR professionals applied strategies that used other means for verifying information such as education and criminal backgrounds. The strategic use of regulatory body information and fingerprint clearance cards verifies information contained in the application materials. The final emerging theme is the strategic development and application of background check policies. The HR professionals identify the applicant information they are going to verify, how they are going to verify the information, and what they will do with the information collected in the verification process. The policies prohibit the strategy of using electronic media in the application process.

These strategies can assist area HR leaders in developing background check strategies so they can improve the identification of falsified information in the application process. These strategies could assist HR leaders in maintaining compliance with the government regulations when completing background checks on applicants. Effective hiring process background check strategies provide a level of assurance the HR professional is hiring the most qualified, honest candidate while minimizing litigation risk.



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### Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

1. Introduce self to the participant.
2. Provide an overview of the purpose of the case study.
3. Present the consent form. Explain the purpose of the form and answer any questions the participant may have regarding informed consent.
4. Obtain signature on the informed consent form. Provide a copy of the form to the participant.
5. Start the digital recording device.
6. Identify the date and time of the interview, and the coded identification of the participant.
7. Begin the interview with Question # 1.
8. Make notes of the participant's response and non-verbal actions.
9. Follow up with appropriate follow-up question.
10. Continue this process for Questions # 2-6.
11. Ask the participant to share any written policies with the researcher.
12. Conclude the interview by thanking the participant for agreeing to the interview.
13. Schedule a time to review the transcript to validate the data.
14. Introduce the purpose of the follow-up interview (data validation).
15. Provide the participant a copy of the transcript for each question and follow-up question.
16. Clarify any questions resulting from the data analysis.
17. Ask the participant to verify each response provided in the transcript.

18. Seek any additional information the participant may wish to provide.
19. Thank the participant for participating in the study.

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies do you use to verify information in an employment candidate's application or resume?
2. How effective have these strategies been in helping you identify qualified candidates?
3. How do you ensure your strategies are compliant with government regulations regarding background checks and employment practices?
4. What barriers or challenges have you overcome while developing and implementing these strategies?
5. How did you overcome these barriers or challenges while maintaining compliance with government regulations?
6. What other information can you share?