Dudovskiy Methodology Audit

Sample report · Flexible working arrangements and employee retention in UK hospitality SMEs

About this sample. This is a complete, unedited DMA report on a fictional methodology chapter written for demonstration (no real student or study). The chapter was written with problems examiners commonly raise, so it has more findings than many real chapters: stronger chapters get shorter reports, but every report covers all nine dimensions. The full chapter is reproduced at the end so you can check every quote.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Substantial revision

FINDINGS

1 critical 5 major 6 minor

FIX THESE FIRST

1. Add managers as interviewees or reword RQ2 to be about employees (F1) — Rethink
2. Reframe RQ3 and the causal claims as association, and add the causal limits (F2) — Rethink
3. Rewrite the philosophy assumptions to fit pragmatism and your position as a researcher (F3) — About an hour

Report at a glance

Dimension	Status	Findings
Alignment	Needs revision	F1
Philosophy, approach and design	Needs revision	F2, F3
Sampling	Needs revision	F5, F9
Data collection	Needs revision	F8
Analysis	Adequate	—
Integration	Needs revision	F4, F7
Quality	Needs revision	F10
Ethics	Needs revision	F6, F11, F12
Feasibility	Adequate	—

No.	Severity	Finding
F1	Critical	RQ2 asks about managers but only employees were interviewed
F2	Major	A causal effect is claimed from cross-sectional data
F3	Major	A pragmatist philosophy is combined with positivist assumptions
F4	Major	The design is called convergent parallel but the procedure is sequential
F5	Major	A convenience sample is claimed to be representative and generalisable
F6	Major	The ethics of recruiting colleagues as a duty manager are not addressed
F7	Minor	How the two strands are combined is not described
F8	Minor	A predictor in the regression is not clearly linked to a questionnaire item
F9	Minor	The interview sample size and selection are not justified
F10	Minor	The source of the intention to leave scale is not named
F11	Minor	Data security for storage on a personal laptop is not described
F12	Minor	Withdrawal from an anonymous survey is not explained

How to read this report. Your chapter is split into numbered paragraphs (P1, P2…), so you can find every quoted sentence. Findings (F1, F2…) are ordered by severity. **Critical** means the study as written could not answer its questions, poses a real ethical risk, or contains a core contradiction; **Major** means a supervisor or examiner would very likely ask for revision; **Minor** means a clarity or completeness point. A *contradiction* means two parts of your chapter conflict; a *missing justification* means a choice may be fine but is not explained.

How this audit works. Your chapter is checked against nine fixed dimensions, from alignment to feasibility. Severity follows written rules, not impressions. Every quote is copied character for character from your text, and every research question is traced through design, data and analysis in the alignment table. The report ends with likely examiner questions and a revision plan that shows the effort each fix needs.

Overall assessment

Substantial revision. There is one critical finding (F1): research question 2 asks about managers, but every interviewee is a front-line employee. There are also five major findings (F2 to F6), on causal claims, philosophy, the mixed-methods sequence, generalisation and the recruitment of colleagues.

Scope statement

- What was audited: the title, three research questions and a methodology draft of about 1,700 words, split into 51 paragraphs (P1 to P51). Headings count as paragraphs.
- Study type: mixed methods (an online survey and semi-structured interviews), described in the draft as a convergent parallel design. Integration applies.
- Nothing was missing from the inputs. No text in the draft was addressed to the reviewer.
- This audit assesses the methodology as written in the submitted extract. It does not check results, the literature review or formatting, and it does not judge whether the topic is worthwhile.

Summary

The chapter has a clear structure. It shows what access to flexible working means in practice, cites a source for its survey sample size, and describes ethics approval, consent and member checking. The most important problem is that research question 2 asks how managers see flexible working, but the interviews are with front-line employees only, so the study as designed cannot answer that question. Several other claims go beyond what the design can support: a causal effect from cross-sectional data, generalisation from a convenience sample, and a convergent parallel label for what is really a sequential design. Start by deciding whether to interview managers or to reword RQ2. Then align RQ3, the philosophy and the design label with what the study actually did. Some smaller points, such as how categorical predictors affect the sample-size formula, were left out because of the 12-finding limit.

Evidenced strengths

- You spell out what access to flexible working means in practice. The questionnaire asked respondents "whether they had access to each of six arrangements" (P27), which gives RQ1 a concrete, measurable basis.
- You justify the survey sample size with a cited rule: "With five independent variables, the minimum required sample is 90, so a target of 150 provides a comfortable margin." (P23)
- You give a reason for choosing interviews: "Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while ensuring that the main topics are covered in every interview" (P31)
- You use a quality procedure suited to qualitative work: "Credibility was ensured through member checking, in which each participant was sent a copy of their transcript to confirm its accuracy." (P43)
- You state that approval came first: "Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university's research ethics committee before data collection began." (P45)

Findings

F1. RQ2 asks about managers but only employees were interviewed

- **Dimension:** Alignment
- **Severity:** Critical
- **Type:** Contradiction
- **Evidence:** "How do managers in UK hospitality SMEs perceive the role of flexible working arrangements in retaining staff?" (P18) and "All eight interviewees were front-line employees, including waiting staff, bar staff, housekeepers and kitchen porters." (P32), together with "The themes identified are presented in Chapter 4 and used to answer RQ2." (P38)
- **Paragraph reference:** P18, P32, P38
- **Issue and explanation:** RQ2 asks about managers' perceptions, but the only data used to answer it comes from eight front-line employees. The draft does not state that any manager took part in the survey or the interviews. Employees' accounts of their own experience cannot show how managers see the role of flexible working, so the study as written cannot answer RQ2.
- **Correction:** Either collect data from managers in UK hospitality SMEs (and describe how you would recruit and interview them), or reword RQ2 so that it asks about employees' perceptions, and update Chapter 1 and P18 to match. Example: *RQ2: How do employees in UK hospitality SMEs perceive the role of flexible working arrangements in their decisions to stay or leave?*
- **Unresolved context:** If any interviewees also held supervisory or management roles, saying so would narrow this finding, but P32 describes all eight as front-line staff.

F2. A causal effect is claimed from cross-sectional data

- **Dimension:** Philosophy, approach and design
- **Severity:** Major
- **Type:** Contradiction
- **Evidence:** "The research is cross-sectional, as data were collected at a single point in time." (P14) and "The regression results are used to answer RQ3 by showing whether flexible working arrangements cause lower intention to leave." (P36). See also "Nevertheless, the design allows the study to determine the effect of flexible working arrangements on employee retention" (P14)
- **Paragraph reference:** P14, P36
- **Issue and explanation:** A regression on survey data collected at one point in time can show an association, but not that flexible working causes lower intention to leave. Other explanations, such as reverse causation or unmeasured differences between employers, remain open. Your own hypothesis is worded as an association: "The main hypothesis is that access to flexible working arrangements is associated with lower intention to leave among hospitality employees." (P9). The causal claims in P14 and P36 go beyond what the design and that hypothesis can support.
- **Correction:** Reword RQ3 and the claims in P14 and P36 in terms of association or relationship, and add the limits on causal inference to P49. Example: *The regression shows whether access to more flexible arrangements is associated with lower intention to leave, controlling for age, length of service, job role and contract type.*
- **Unresolved context:** None

F3. A pragmatist philosophy is combined with positivist assumptions

- **Dimension:** Philosophy, approach and design
- **Severity:** Major
- **Type:** Contradiction
- **Evidence:** "This study adopts a pragmatist philosophy." (P6) and "the study assumes that employee retention is an objective phenomenon that exists independently of the perceptions of the people

involved, and that it can be measured precisely and without bias" (P7)

- **Paragraph reference:** P6, P7
- **Issue and explanation:** P6 adopts pragmatism, while P7 states assumptions about an objective reality and measurement free of bias that belong to positivism. P7 also says "The researcher therefore remains detached from the participants throughout the study", which conflicts with inductive interviews in which "themes are allowed to emerge from the interview data rather than being imposed in advance" (P10). It also sits uneasily with recruiting colleagues at your own workplace (P22). Retention is also measured through stated intention to leave (P28), which is a perception rather than a phenomenon independent of the people involved.
- **Correction:** Remove or rewrite P7 so that its assumptions fit pragmatism. Explain how you, as a researcher who works in the sector, relate to the participants in each strand. Example: *Consistent with pragmatism, the study treats intention to leave as measurable through self-report while recognising that employees' experiences require interpretation.*
- **Unresolved context:** None

F4. The design is called convergent parallel but the procedure is sequential

- **Dimension:** Integration
- **Severity:** Major
- **Type:** Contradiction
- **Evidence:** "quantitative and qualitative data are collected during the same phase, analysed separately, and then compared to see whether they confirm or contradict each other" (P12) and "the interview questions were developed after the initial survey results had been reviewed, so that the interviews could explore the patterns found in the survey in more depth" (P13)
- **Paragraph reference:** P12, P13
- **Issue and explanation:** In P13, interviewees are drawn from survey respondents and the interview questions are built on the survey results. That is a sequential design in which the qualitative strand follows the quantitative one and explains it. It is not a convergent parallel design with independent strands collected at the same time. The label shapes how the strands should be prioritised, timed and combined, so the mismatch affects how your integration will be judged.
- **Correction:** Relabel the design to match what was done (for example, explanatory sequential), and update P12 and P51. Otherwise, describe a procedure in which the strands really are independent. Example: *An explanatory sequential design was used: survey results were reviewed first and informed the interview guide and the selection of interviewees.*
- **Unresolved context:** The dates of the interviews compared with the three-week survey window (P29) would show how far the two phases overlapped.

F5. A convenience sample is claimed to be representative and generalisable

- **Dimension:** Sampling
- **Severity:** Major
- **Type:** Contradiction
- **Evidence:** "A non-probability convenience sampling method was used instead." (P22) and "Because the sample is large, it can be considered representative of hospitality SME employees across the UK, and the findings can be generalised to this population." (P23)
- **Paragraph reference:** P22, P23
- **Issue and explanation:** Sample size does not make a convenience sample representative. Recruitment through three Facebook groups and your own workplace can over-represent certain kinds of worker and employer. The 50 + 8m rule in P23 concerns statistical power for regression, not representativeness. The claim to generalise to all UK hospitality SME employees therefore conflicts with the sampling method you describe.

- **Correction:** Replace the generalisation sentence with a statement of what the sample can and cannot support, and add the non-probability sample to the limitations in P49. Example: *The sample size gives adequate power for the regression, but the convenience sample means findings cannot be statistically generalised to all UK hospitality SME employees.*
- **Unresolved context:** None

F6. The ethics of recruiting colleagues as a duty manager are not addressed

- **Dimension:** Ethics
- **Severity:** Major
- **Type:** Missing justification
- **Evidence:** "shared with colleagues at the hotel where the researcher works as a duty manager" (P22)
- **Paragraph reference:** P22, P45
- **Issue and explanation:** You hold a managerial role at the hotel where you recruited, and the survey asks about intention to leave. Some colleagues may report to you, so they may feel pressure to take part or worry that their answers could reach their employer. The ethics section (P45 to P47) does not state how this power relationship or the possible identification of workplace respondents was handled. Taking part could carry a real risk for those employees.
- **Correction:** In the ethics section, explain how you reduced pressure on colleagues to take part and how you kept their answers from being identified by you or the employer. Alternatively, explain why recruiting at your own workplace was appropriate. Example: *Colleagues received the link only through a general notice, and responses could not be linked to individuals or departments within the hotel.*
- **Unresolved context:** Whether the hotel itself meets the SME definition of fewer than 250 employees (P21), and whether the ethics committee approved workplace recruitment specifically.

F7. How the two strands are combined is not described

- **Dimension:** Integration
- **Severity:** Minor
- **Type:** Missing justification
- **Evidence:** "The findings from the two strands are discussed together in Chapter 5." (P40)
- **Paragraph reference:** P40
- **Issue and explanation:** Combining the strands is the point of a mixed-methods design. The draft does not state how the survey and interview results will be brought together, what will be compared, or how agreement or disagreement between the strands will be handled. With each strand answering a different research question, it is not clear what the combination adds.
- **Correction:** Expand P40 to say when and how the strands are combined and what the combination is meant to show. Example: *In Chapter 5, interview themes are used to explain the regression results, noting where employees' accounts support or qualify the survey pattern.*
- **Unresolved context:** None

F8. A predictor in the regression is not clearly linked to a questionnaire item

- **Dimension:** Data collection
- **Severity:** Minor
- **Type:** Missing justification
- **Evidence:** "The independent variables were the number of flexible arrangements available to the respondent, age, length of service, job role and contract type." (P36) and "Section A collected demographic information, including age, gender, job role, length of service and type of employer." (P27)

- **Paragraph reference:** P36, P27
- **Issue and explanation:** The draft does not state where contract type was collected. Section A lists type of employer but not contract type. The draft also does not state how categorical predictors such as job role are coded. If they are entered as several dummy variables, m in the 50 + 8m calculation in P23 will be larger than five.
- **Correction:** State which question measured contract type and how categorical variables were coded, and update the sample-size calculation in P23 if m changes.
- **Unresolved context:** The full questionnaire. The word including in P27 may mean the list of demographic items is not complete.

F9. The interview sample size and selection are not justified

- **Dimension:** Sampling
- **Severity:** Minor
- **Type:** Missing justification
- **Evidence:** "Eight participants is considered sufficient for a master's level study." (P24)
- **Paragraph reference:** P24
- **Issue and explanation:** The draft gives no source or reasoning for eight interviews, such as information power or saturation. It also does not state how the eight were chosen from the respondents who agreed to be contacted.
- **Correction:** Add a reason, with a source, for the number of interviews, and describe how interviewees were selected from the volunteers. Example: *Eight participants were selected to include a range of job roles and lengths of service, with sample size judged on information power (Malterud et al., 2016).*
- **Unresolved context:** None

F10. The source of the intention to leave scale is not named

- **Dimension:** Quality
- **Severity:** Minor
- **Type:** Missing justification
- **Evidence:** "a three-item scale adapted from an established turnover intention scale" (P27) and "Content validity was supported by adapting the items from an established scale that has been used in previous studies of employee turnover." (P42)
- **Paragraph reference:** P27, P42
- **Issue and explanation:** Your claim of content validity depends on the original scale, but the draft does not name or cite it or say how the items were adapted. Without that, a reader cannot assess the claim.
- **Correction:** Cite the original scale, give the items or put them in an appendix, and briefly describe what was changed for hospitality SME employees.
- **Unresolved context:** The scale may be cited in Chapter 2 or in an appendix.

F11. Data security for storage on a personal laptop is not described

- **Dimension:** Ethics
- **Severity:** Minor
- **Type:** Missing justification
- **Evidence:** "The survey responses, interview recordings and transcripts were stored on the researcher's personal laptop." (P47)
- **Paragraph reference:** P47
- **Issue and explanation:** The draft does not state how data on a personal device was protected (for example encryption or password protection), how long transcripts and survey data will be kept, or

how this follows UK data protection rules and university policy. This matters because the data concerns employees' plans to leave their jobs.

- **Correction:** Add the security measures, the retention period and the policy followed. Example: *Data were stored in an encrypted, password-protected folder and will be deleted after the dissertation is assessed, in line with university data management policy.*
- **Unresolved context:** None

F12. Withdrawal from an anonymous survey is not explained

- **Dimension:** Ethics
- **Severity:** Minor
- **Type:** Missing justification
- **Evidence:** "Participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason." (P46) and "The survey did not collect names" (P47)
- **Paragraph reference:** P46, P47
- **Issue and explanation:** If survey responses are not linked to names, a respondent cannot normally withdraw after submitting. The draft does not state how, or until when, survey participants could withdraw, so the promise in P46 may not be possible to keep.
- **Correction:** State the withdrawal arrangements separately for each strand. Example: *Survey respondents could withdraw by closing the form before submission; once submitted, anonymous responses could not be identified and removed.*
- **Unresolved context:** The participant information sheet may already set out these limits.

Dimension	Status	Findings	Note
Alignment	Needs revision	F1	RQ2 is about managers, but only employees provide the data.
Philosophy, approach and design	Needs revision	F2, F3	Causal claims and positivist assumptions sit beside a pragmatist cross-sectional design.
Sampling	Needs revision	F5, F9	The generalisation claim and the interview sample size need correcting or justifying.
Data collection	Needs revision	F8	Contract type is not clearly linked to a questionnaire item.
Analysis	Adequate	—	The techniques fit the data; the causal reading of the regression is covered in F2.
Integration	Needs revision	F4, F7	The design label does not match the sequence, and the point of combination is not described.
Quality	Needs revision	F10	The source scale behind the content validity claim is not named.
Ethics	Needs revision	F6, F11, F12	Insider recruitment, data security and survey withdrawal need explaining.
Feasibility	Adequate	—	Access and scale look realistic; the achieved number of responses is not stated.

Alignment review

Research question	Design	Data collected	Analysis	Aligned?
RQ1: Access to flexible working arrangements	Cross-sectional online survey of employees	Section B: access to each of six arrangements	Descriptive statistics	Yes

RQ2: Managers' perceptions of flexible working in retention	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews with eight front-line employees; data from managers not stated	Thematic analysis	No
RQ3: Effect of flexible working on retention	Cross-sectional online survey of employees	Number of arrangements available; three-item intention to leave scale	Multiple linear regression, interpreted as causal	Partly

RQ1 is well aligned. RQ2 cannot be answered with the people interviewed (F1). RQ3 can be answered as a question about association, but not about cause (F2).

Examiner questions

1. Your second research question is about managers, yet everyone you interviewed works on the front line. How do these interviews tell us what managers think? (F1)

   A strong answer would cover:

   - Whether you will add managers as participants, and how you would recruit them in hospitality SMEs, or whether you will reword RQ2 to be about employees.
   - How the reworded question, or the new data, connects to the thematic analysis in P38.
   - What the change means for the title, Chapter 1 and the combination of findings in Chapter 5.

2. Your data were collected at one point in time. How can a regression on these data show that flexible working causes lower intention to leave? (F2)

   A strong answer would cover:

   - The difference between the association your regression can show and a causal effect.
   - How RQ3 and the wording in P14 and P36 will be reframed to match your hypothesis in P9.
   - Which other explanations, such as reverse causation or differences between employers, should go into the limitations.

3. You describe your philosophy as pragmatist, but then assume an objective reality measured without bias and a detached researcher. Which position does your study actually take? (F3)

   A strong answer would cover:

   - What pragmatism means for how this study treats self-reported intention to leave and interview accounts.
   - How your position as a hospitality duty manager affects detachment in each strand.
   - How the revised P7 fits the inductive qualitative approach in P10.

4. Your interview questions were based on the survey results. Why do you call this a convergent parallel design? (F4)

   A strong answer would cover:

   - The actual order of survey analysis, interview guide development and interviews.
   - Which design label matches that order, and why.
   - How the corrected label changes the way the strands are prioritised and combined.

5. Your sample was recruited through Facebook groups and your own workplace. On what basis can it represent all UK hospitality SME employees? (F5)

   A strong answer would cover:

   - Why the size of a convenience sample does not make it representative.
   - Which groups of workers or employers may be over- or under-represented through these channels.
   - What claims the findings can support instead, and how the limitations section will say so.

6. Some of your survey respondents were colleagues at the hotel where you are a duty manager. How did you make sure they did not feel pressured, and that their answers about leaving could not be traced? (F6)

A strong answer would cover:

- Whether any respondents report to you, and how the invitation was worded and shared.
- How workplace responses were protected from identification by you or the employer.
- Whether the ethics approval covered recruitment at your own workplace, and whether the hotel meets the SME definition.

Revision plan

#	Action	Findings	Paragraphs	Effort
1	Add managers as interviewees or reword RQ2 to be about employees	F1	P18, P24, P32, P38	Rethink
2	Reframe RQ3 and the causal claims as association, and add the causal limits	F2	P14, P19, P36, P49	Rethink
3	Rewrite the philosophy assumptions to fit pragmatism and your position as a researcher	F3	P6, P7	About an hour
4	Relabel the design to match the sequential procedure	F4	P12, P13, P51	About an hour
5	Replace the generalisation claim and add the sampling limitation	F5	P23, P49	Quick fix
6	Explain how pressure and identification risks for workplace colleagues were handled	F6	P22, P45	About an hour
7	Describe when and how the two strands are combined	F7	P40	About an hour
8	Link contract type to a questionnaire item, explain the coding and check the sample-size calculation	F8	P23, P27, P36	About an hour
9	Justify the number of interviews with a source and explain how interviewees were selected	F9	P24	About an hour
10	Name and cite the original intention to leave scale	F10	P27, P42	Quick fix
11	Add data security measures and the retention period	F11	P47	Quick fix
12	Explain the withdrawal arrangements for each strand	F12	P46	Quick fix

There are 2 Rethink actions, 6 About an hour actions and 4 Quick fix actions.

Summary for your supervisor

I am revising my methodology chapter, starting with research question 2: it asks about managers' views, but my interviews are with front-line employees only, so I need to either interview managers or reword the question. I am also rewording research question 3 and my regression claims, because cross-sectional survey data can show an association but not a causal effect. I will make my pragmatist philosophy, mixed-methods design label and generalisation claims consistent with what I actually did. Finally, I will add detail on the ethics of recruiting colleagues at my own workplace, data security and withdrawal, and on how the two strands are combined.

Appendix: the chapter audited

Flexible working arrangements and employee retention in UK hospitality SMEs. Fictional text written for this sample.

P1 Chapter 3: Research Methodology

P2 3.1 Introduction

P3 This chapter explains how the research was designed and carried out in order to answer the research questions set out in Chapter 1. It describes the research philosophy, approach and design, followed by the sampling strategy, the methods of data collection and the techniques used to analyse the data. The chapter then discusses how the quality of the research was ensured, the ethical considerations that guided the study, and its limitations. The structure follows the research onion proposed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), moving from the outer layers of philosophy and approach to the inner layers of techniques and procedures.

P4 3.2 Research philosophy

P5 Research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The main philosophies in business research are positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism. Each holds different assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), what counts as acceptable knowledge (epistemology) and the role of values in research (axiology).

P6 This study adopts a pragmatist philosophy. Pragmatism holds that the research question should determine the methods used, rather than a commitment to a single view of reality, and it allows the researcher to combine quantitative and qualitative methods within one study. This makes it well suited to the present research, which seeks both to measure the relationship between flexible working and retention and to understand how employees experience flexible working.

P7 At the same time, the study assumes that employee retention is an objective phenomenon that exists independently of the perceptions of the people involved, and that it can be measured precisely and without bias. The researcher therefore remains detached from the participants throughout the study, so that the findings reflect reality as it is rather than the researcher's own interpretation.

P8 3.3 Research approach

P9 The study follows a deductive approach. Hypotheses were developed from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, in particular from social exchange theory, which suggests that employees who receive valued benefits from their employer reciprocate with greater loyalty. These hypotheses are then tested using survey data. The main hypothesis is that access to flexible working arrangements is associated with lower intention to leave among hospitality employees.

P10 The qualitative part of the study uses an inductive approach, in which themes are allowed to emerge from the interview data rather than being imposed in advance. Combining the two approaches is consistent with the pragmatist philosophy described above.

P11 3.4 Research design

P12 The study uses a mixed-methods design, specifically a convergent parallel design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). In this design, quantitative and qualitative data are collected during the same phase, analysed separately, and then compared to see whether they confirm or contradict each other.

P13 The quantitative strand consists of an online survey of hospitality employees. The qualitative strand consists of semi-structured interviews. Interview participants were selected from survey respondents who indicated on the questionnaire that they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview, and the interview questions were developed after the initial survey results had been reviewed, so that the interviews could explore the patterns found in the survey in more depth.

P14 The research is cross-sectional, as data were collected at a single point in time. The time horizon of a master's dissertation does not allow a longitudinal study. Nevertheless, the design allows the study to determine the effect of flexible working arrangements on employee retention, as required by the third research question.

P15 3.5 Research questions

P16 The study addresses three research questions:

P17 RQ1: To what extent do employees in UK hospitality SMEs have access to flexible working arrangements?

P18 RQ2: How do managers in UK hospitality SMEs perceive the role of flexible working arrangements in retaining staff?

P19 RQ3: What is the effect of flexible working arrangements on employee retention in UK hospitality SMEs?

P20 3.6 Population and sampling

P21 The target population is employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK hospitality sector, including hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars. SMEs are defined as businesses with fewer than 250 employees. The hospitality sector was chosen because it has some of the highest staff turnover rates in the UK economy, which makes retention a pressing concern for employers.

P22 Because no complete list of hospitality SME employees exists, probability sampling was not possible. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used instead. The survey link was posted in three Facebook groups for hospitality workers and shared with colleagues at the hotel where the researcher works as a duty manager. Participants had to be at least 18 years old and currently employed in a hospitality SME in the UK.

P23 A total of 150 completed responses were targeted. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2019), a regression analysis requires a minimum sample of 50 + 8m, where m is the number of independent variables. With five independent variables, the minimum required sample is 90, so a target of 150 provides a comfortable margin. Because the sample is large, it can be considered representative of hospitality SME employees across the UK, and the findings can be generalised to this population.

P24 For the qualitative strand, eight interview participants were selected from the survey respondents who agreed to be contacted. Eight participants is considered sufficient for a master's level study.

P25 3.7 Data collection

P26 3.7.1 Questionnaire

P27 The questionnaire was administered through Microsoft Forms and consisted of three sections. Section A collected demographic information, including age, gender, job role, length of service and type of employer. Section B measured access to flexible working arrangements, asking respondents whether they had access to each of six arrangements: flexible start and finish times, compressed hours, shift swapping, part-time hours, annualised hours and remote working for administrative tasks. Section C measured intention to leave using a three-item scale adapted from an established turnover intention scale, rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

P28 Employee retention was measured through respondents' stated intention to leave their current employer within the next twelve months. The questionnaire was designed to take no more than ten minutes to complete, in order to encourage participation among employees with limited free time.

P29 The questionnaire was open for three weeks in June 2024. A reminder was posted in the Facebook groups after ten days.

P30 3.7.2 Semi-structured interviews

P31 Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow the researcher to explore participants' experiences in depth while ensuring that the main topics are covered in every interview (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). An interview guide was developed with open questions on participants'

experiences of flexible working, their reasons for staying with or leaving previous employers, and their views on what employers could do to retain staff.

P32 The interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams, lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and were recorded with the participants' permission. All eight interviewees were front-line employees, including waiting staff, bar staff, housekeepers and kitchen porters.

P33 3.8 Data analysis

P34 3.8.1 Quantitative analysis

P35 Survey data were exported from Microsoft Forms to SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, were used to describe the sample and to show the extent of access to flexible working arrangements, addressing RQ1.

P36 Multiple linear regression was used to test the relationship between access to flexible working arrangements and intention to leave. The independent variables were the number of flexible arrangements available to the respondent, age, length of service, job role and contract type. The dependent variable was the mean score on the intention to leave scale. The regression results are used to answer RQ3 by showing whether flexible working arrangements cause lower intention to leave.

P37 3.8.2 Qualitative analysis

P38 The interview recordings were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, following the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding was carried out manually in Microsoft Word. The themes identified are presented in Chapter 4 and used to answer RQ2.

P39 3.8.3 Combining the findings

P40 The findings from the two strands are discussed together in Chapter 5.

P41 3.9 Research quality

P42 The reliability of the intention to leave scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a value of 0.70 or above considered acceptable. Content validity was supported by adapting the items from an established scale that has been used in previous studies of employee turnover.

P43 For the qualitative strand, the study followed the trustworthiness criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through member checking, in which each participant was sent a copy of their transcript to confirm its accuracy. Transferability was supported by providing a description of the participants' roles. Dependability and confirmability were supported by keeping a record of the main decisions made during the analysis.

P44 3.10 Ethical considerations

P45 Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university's research ethics committee before data collection began. All participants received a participant information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, what participation involved, and how their data would be used.

P46 Survey participants gave consent by ticking a box at the start of the questionnaire, and interview participants signed a consent form before the interview. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

P47 The survey did not collect names, and interview participants were given pseudonyms in the transcripts. The survey responses, interview recordings and transcripts were stored on the researcher's personal laptop. The interview recordings were deleted immediately after transcription to protect participants' anonymity.

P48 3.11 Limitations

P49 The study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design captures intention to leave at a single point in time, and intentions may change. Second, the use of self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, as respondents may not wish to admit that they are planning to leave. Third,

the study was limited to SMEs, so its findings may not apply to large hospitality chains. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a sound basis for answering the research questions.

P50 3.12 Summary

P51 This chapter has explained the methodology used in the study. A pragmatist philosophy and a convergent parallel mixed-methods design were adopted, combining an online survey of 150 hospitality employees with eight semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression, and the qualitative data using thematic analysis. The next chapter presents the findings.