Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
J Soc Sci, 50(1-3): 118-123 (2017)
DOI: 10.1080/09718923.2017.1311726

Perception of Employee Turnover Intentions at a South African Higher Education

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KEYWORDS Attrition. Employee Intention. Higher Education. South Africa. Turnover

ABSTRACT This study investigates the perception of turnover intention of employees at an institution of higher education in South Africa. The study utilised the Intention to Stay Questionnaire (ISQ) as the quantitative survey instrument to generate data related to the study. 250 employees participated in the survey and the random sampling technique was used to identify the participants. The study utilised the Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS version 23 for analysing data. The Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability. The study found that employee benefits and other interesting responsibilities reduce turnover intentions. Recommendations to improve turnover intentions at an institution of higher education are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Bandura (2012) pointed out that institutions of higher education are crucial division in South Africa because they play a significant role in assisting the South African government grow a sustainable economy for the humanity. Turnover intention in institutions also impact negatively on employees. Furthermore, Carr et al. (2006) argued that turnover intentions leads to decreased employee commitment and increased employee fatigue which could result in additional turnover . It is important to highlight that the actual actions and conducts of the employee may be different from the intention. Pietersen and Oni (2014) pointed out that external factor such as superior job offers from competing institutions adds to voluntary employee turnover in the Public Institutions.

However, there is a positive relationship between behavioural intention to quit and employee turnover across industries and academically is believed to be an imperative predecessor to turnover (Gregory et al. 2007). Turnover intention and turnover are the least supported by institutions because it has a likelihood of affecting the institutions adversely. This is to emphasise that the situation of uncertainties and fear experienced by employees should not be allowed to continue. Allowing the uncertainties and fear to carry on will lead to decreased employee confidence, increased employee stress, increased employee anxiety and decreased institutional obligation. The costs of turnover with continued uncertainties and fear will lead to intentions to leave, recruitment costs of replacing the employee, decreased commitment, loss of organisation memory, loss of productivity and decreased job satisfaction. The aim of this paper is to assess the turnover intention of employees at an institution of higher education in South Africa.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to investigate the turnover intention of employees at an institution of higher education in South Africa.

Review of Literature

Picket (2005) pointed out that employees are important resource for any institution, in addition institutions should have unique ways of handling and growing employees. Organisations should concentrate on employee ability, skills and institution capability (Picket 2005). Similarly, Olusegun (2013) argued that retaining employees and ensuring productive employees are important issues for human resource management. Saeed et al. (2014) indicated that turnover intention are severe crises experienced by institutions. Similarly, Alkahtani (2015) pointed out that employee turnover is costly and a key problem that affects institutions. Alkahtani (2015) highlighted that the cost of employee turnover can be classified into two that is, visible and invisible costs. The visible costs comprise of leave capitalisation, staffing, reference checks, security clearance, moving, orientation and training. Whereas the invisible costs are enlarged human resources and payroll administration, loss of productivity and informal training. Saeed et al. (2014) categorised turnover intention into two namely; voluntary (employee quitting at will freely and happily) and involuntary (employee sacked by the institution). Furthermore, their study found an inverse connection between job satisfaction and turnover intentions. In addition, Olusegun (2013) found turnover intention of library personnel to be high in selected universities of south western Nigeria. Similarly, In South Africa, Pietersen and Oni (2014) found a high employee turnover in a public institution of Limpopo province. However, it is important to note that some factors that relate to turnover and turnover intentions. Alkahtani (2015) found the following seven factors to be related to turnover; (1) organisational commitment, (2) job satisfaction, (3) training,(4) perceived organisational support, (5) perceived supervisor support, (6) organisational climate, (7) employee benefits and opportunities as well as (8) organisational justice. In addition to these factors Schyns et al. (2007) found that there is a positive relationship between turnover intentions and preparedness for change. Lastly, Cho and Lewis (2016) found a positive correlation between turnover intention and turnover behaviour using age and experience.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the quantitative research methodology. The quantitative approach was suitable for the purpose of the study as it allowed for a systematic inquiry, independent of the influence of the researcher, resulting in an objective deduction research process (Martin 2007).

The target population for the study was the academic/research and administration staff at a South African institution of higher education. The population of employees in the institution is 1250 employees at the time of the study. The final sample frame was comprised of a random sample of *n*=400 employees in line with recommendations by Leedy and Armrod (2005) which suggests sufficient sample sizes based on total populations. According to Leedy and Armrod (2005) from a target population of *n*=1500, a sample of at least *n*=300 (20%) is considered sufficient, while from a target population of *n*= >5000 a sample of at least *n*= 400 is acceptable.

A quantitative survey was conducted, utilising the Intention to Stay Questionnaire (ISQ-Roodt 2004; Riley 2006; Martin 2007). The reliability and validity of the ISQ is based on a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of 0.7. The minimum acceptable coefficient of the Cronbach's alpha is 0.7.

The Correlated Item – Total correlation above 0.3. This is consistent with (Martin 2007). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 was utilised for analysing data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of study. The response rate for the study is 83.33 percent with 250 of the sample frame of *n*=300 responding to the survey and providing usable data. This response rate is according to Martin (2007) sufficient for data analysis. Table 1 depicts the demographic profile of respondents.

From the 250 respondents 76 were male employees (30.40%) while 174 were female employees (69.60%).The majority of respondents (32.80%) in this study were aged between 40-44 years of age, while 25.60 percent, 15.20 percent, 14.40 percent and 12 percent of respondents were aged 35-39 years, 45-49 years, <35 and >50 years of age respectively. In terms of race, the majority (73.60%) were of African descent, with 22.40 percent being white and the remaining 4 percent being Indian. With regards to the educational profile of respondents, the bulk of the respondents (28%) held a Certificate/Diploma qualification, while 24 percent, 12 percent, 21.60 percent and 14.40 percent held a Bachelors, Honour, Masters, Doctoral/post-Doctoral degree respectively.

The employment status of the respondents was as follows: 83.20 percent were permanent employees, while 11.20 percent were employed on a temporary basis and the remaining 4 percent on a contractual basis. According to Daweti (2015), having a large percent of permanent employees result in informed responses which yields quality results. The majority of respondents within the sample population (44.80%)

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Population	Male F	Male Cum %	Female f	Female Cum %	Total	Total cum %
Total	76	30.40	174	69.60	250	100.00
Age of Respondents						
<35	12	4.80	24	9.60	36	14.40
35-39	18	7.20	46	18.40	64	25.60
40-44	12	4.80	70	28.00	82	32.80
45-49	14	5.60	24	9.60	38	15.20
>50	20	8.00	10	4.00	30	12.00
Total	76	30.40	174	69.60	250	100.00
Race of Respondents						
African	60	24.00	124	49.60	184	73.60
White	10	4.00	46	18.40	56	22.40
Indian	6	2.40	4	1.60	10	4.00
Total	76	30.40	174	69.60	250	100.00
Educational Qualification						
Certificate/Diploma	14	5.60	56	22.40	70	28.00
Bachelors	24	9.60	36	14.40	60	24.00
Honours	2	0.80	28	11.20	30	12.00
Masters	20	8.00	34	13.60	54	21.60
Doctorate/Post-doctorate	18	7.20	18	7.20	36	14.40
Total	78	31.20	172	68.80	250	100.00
Employment Status						
Permanent	64	25.60	144	57.60	208	83.20
Contract	2	0.80	8	3.20	10	4.00
Temporary	10	2.40	22	8.80	32	12.80
Total	76	30.40	174	69.60	250	100.00
Job Category						
Academic/research	30	12.00	40	16.00	70	28.00
Administration	24	9.60	88	35.20	112	44.80
Support staff	22	8.80	46	18.40	68	27.20
Total	76	30.40	174	69.60	250	100.00

Key: f =Frequency; Cum %=Cumulative Percentage

were administrative staff, while (28%) were Academic/research staff and the remaining (27.20%) of the respondents were support staff. Table 2 summarises the empirical findings of this study.

Table 2 summarises the empirical findings of the study. As a result of the study it emerged that the majority of employees (40%) agree that they considered leaving their job, (27.20%) were neutral and (32.80%) of the respondents disagree that they considered leaving their job. This result is consistent with a study by Chun (2009) which reports that employees may have negative perceptions about the organisation. Similarly, the study found that most employees (41.60%) agree that they frequently scan newspapers for alternative job opportunities, (32%) were neutral and (26.40%) of the respondents disagree. In addition, the majority of respondents (44%) pointed out that their current jobs always satisfy their personal needs, (28%) were neutral and (28%) of the respondents disagree. However, most respondents (50.40%) disagree that they are frustrated about not being given the opportunity to work towards achieving their personal work-related goals. In addition (52.80%) disagree that their personal values at work are compromised.

The majority of the sampled employees disagree that they would be likely to accept another job at the same compensation or level with another employer (43.20%). Most employees at the institution (41.60%) agree that they look forward to another day at work. The majority of employees (41.60%) were neutral about other responsibilities always preventing them from quitting their job. The results also indicate that the majority of the respondents (42%) agree that benefits associated with their current jobs prevented them from quitting.

The majority (46.40%) disagree that they are emotionally agitated when coming home after work, while they similarly also disagree that their

Table 2: Summary of survey findings

Variable	*Disagree*		*Neutral*		*Agree*			
	F	*Cum %*	*f*	*Cum %*	*f*	*Cum %*	*Total*	*Total cum %*
How often have you considered leaving your job?	82	32.80	68	27.20	100	40.00	250	100.00
How frequently do you scan the newspapers in search of alternative job opportunities?	66	26.40	80	32.00	104	41.60	250	100.00
To what extent is your current job satisfying your personal needs?	70	28.00	70	28.00	110	44.00	250	100.00
How often are you frustrated when not given the opportunity at work to achieve your personal work-related goals?	126	50.40	60	24.00	64	25.60	250	100.00
How often are personal values at work compromised?	132	52.80	78	31.20	40	16.00	250	100.00
How likely you to accept another job at the same compensation or level should it be offered to you?	108	43.20	50	20.00	92	36.80	250	100.00
How often do you look forward to another day at work?	98	39.20	48	19.20	104	41.60	250	100.00
To what extent do other responsibilities prevent you from quitting your job?	56	22.40	104	41.60	90	36.00	250	100.00
To what extent do the benefits associated with your current job prevent you from quitting?	79	31.60	66	26.40	105	42.00	250	100.00
How frequently are you emotionally agitated when arriving home after work?	116	46.40	80	32.00	54	21.60	250	100.00
To what extent does your current job have a negative effect on your personal well-being?	102	40.80	92	36.80	56	22.40	250	100.00
To what extent does 'fear of the unknown' prevent you from quitting?	76	30.40	118	47.20	56	22.40	250	100.00
Do thoughts of quitting your job cross your mind?	90	36.00	80	32.00	80	32.00	250	100.00
Do you plan to look for a new job within the next 12 months?	92	36.80	64	25.60	94	37.60	250	100.00
How likely is it that, over t he next year, you will actively look for a new job outside of this institution?	102	40.80	70	28.00	78	31.20	250	100.00

Key: *f* =Frequency; Cum %=Cumulative Percentage

current jobs had a negative effect on their personal well-being (40.80%). With regards to the fear of the unknown being a factor in preventing employees from quitting, the majority (47.20%) were neutral. When asked whether the thought of quitting one's job ever crossed their mind, most employees at (36%) disagree that the thought had never crossed their minds.

When asked whether they planned to look for a new job within the next 12 months, the majority of respondents from CA (37.60%) agree that they plan to look for another job within the next 12 months. However, not surprisingly the majority of respondents (40.80%) disagree that they were never likely to look for a new job outside the institution actively over the next year.

The result above brings optimistic and pessimistic benefits to the employees. This is consistent with the study by Arnolds et al. (2013) which reveal that an institution brings along both positive and negative benefits to employees.

CONCLUSION

The study investigates the turnover intention of employees at an institution of higher education in South Africa. As a result of this study one may conclude that while employees at the institution had at one time or another considered leaving the new institution, most had stayed due to the benefits associated with their current jobs and other interesting responsibilities they had. Although the results indicate that employees were consistently scanning the media (newspapers) for job opportunities, most did not intend to leave the institution for another at the same compensation and/or at the same level. Issues such as emotional agitation and personal well-being as it emerged were not factors in their intent to leave the institution, with most employees being satisfied with their opportunities to achieve their work-related goals. More importantly it emerged that the majority of employees had no intention to leave the institution in the next calendar year. Some of the salient factors influencing the turnover intention of employees included a lack of growth opportunities, poor working conditions and not liking how their supervisors were treating their subordinates. Although these factors were not exclusively surveyed in this study issues such as emotional well-being, fear of the unknown and the effect of non-work related other responsibilities were surveyed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends the following to mitigate the factors influencing the turnover intentions of employees at an institution of higher education. In order to manage turnover intentions one needs to understand it causes. First, institutions of higher education needs to develop and implement job evaluation/ appraisal criteria. Furthermore, institutions of higher learning needs to provide clear career path for employees. In addition, institutions of higher education needs to motivate employees by rewarding good performance and praising good workers. Fourth, institutions of higher learning needs to pay employees market-related salaries. Furthermore, institutions of higher education needs to create promotion opportunities for employees. Additionally, institutions of higher learning needs to improve working conditions of employees. Moreover, institution of higher education needs to make permanent appointment for employees that are employed temporarily. Last, Institutions of higher education needs to improve the communication with employees.

These recommendations have important managerial implications for the senior management of the institution, especially if they intend to retain their qualified and experienced staff. Further qualitative research may be recommended to investigate issues such as fear of retrenchment, assimilation of management practices and symmetry of information within the higher education sector.

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Paper received for publication on December 2015
Paper accepted for publication on December 2016