

**Employees' experiences of recruitment and
retention in a research unit located
in a rural setting**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Wendy Pearsall, student number 7165234, declare that “Employees’ experiences of recruitment and retention in a research unit located in a rural setting” is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or have quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

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SUMMARY

Strategic recruitment and retention efforts improve the capacity of a research unit in delivering outputs such as collaborative research, increased grant funding and peer-reviewed journal articles (Chung, Clifton, Rowe, Finley, & Warnock, 2009). At the same time, knowledge of employees' experiences can help organisations improve HRM strategies and practices. In this regard, the motivation driving this study was that exploring the recruitment and retention experiences of staff in a university research unit could reveal significant insights that could assist in refining the organisation's HRM practices, thereby facilitating attraction and retention of valuable talent. This qualitative study was designed from an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist perspective in order to facilitate the exploration and understanding of employees' subjective experiences. Findings indicate that professional development, organisational appeal and networking opportunities make this research unit an employer of choice. These factors, among others, are both attractors and incentives to remain with the organisation which significantly outweigh factors that discourage attraction and retention.

KEY TERMS

Industrial and Organisational Psychology; personnel psychology; human resource management; recruitment; retention; qualitative research; thematic data analysis; employees' experiences; research unit;

CHAPTER 1 SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

Recruitment and *retention* practices as part of overall human resources (HR) functions and services are adopted to ensure that organisations are fully staffed with a high calibre workforce. This study explored employees' experiences of recruitment and retention in a research unit. This research unit is a department in a university and relies on grant funds to conduct research in population health and demographics in a rural area in South Africa.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

The discipline and practice of Industrial & Organisational Psychology abounds with accounts and chronicles of the world of work undergoing incessant changes that are sometimes dramatic (Cascio, 2001; Cilliers & Smit, 2006; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). Globalisation and the concomitant diversification of the workforce as well as technological advancement are identified as some of the factors that are driving changes in the world of work and have placed tremendous pressures on organisations to perform. In this milieu it has become imperative for organisations to attract and retain the most qualified people or talent in order to become or remain competitive (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Universities and other higher education institutions are not immune or exempt from the pressures created by the new world of work. For example, government expects tertiary institutions to become more economically viable (Singh, 2011). Universities are being held more accountable in terms of deliverables by all stakeholders in a tougher economic and competitive climate (Molefe, 2010). In South Africa, the funding of universities has changed dramatically with amongst other criteria, funding being based on the throughput or success rate of students and research outputs (North, Zewotir, & Murray, 2011). Through research and tuition, universities are able to develop human capacity, generate new knowledge and engage with the public and policy formulation (Cantwell & Mathies, 2012; Coker-Kolo & Darley, 2013). Russell

Group UK (<http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/>) rates universities on the basis of teaching and research outputs and their industry links.

Given the enormity of the primary task of these organisations and the environmental challenges intimated above, universities greatly benefit by recruiting and retaining competent academic and administrative personnel (Birx, Anderson-Fletcher, & Whitney, 2013; Molefe, 2010).

Researchers on talent attraction and retention have used diverse lenses to facilitate understanding of how individuals decide to join and remain in organisations or how employers encourage individuals to join and remain with their organisations (Cascio, 2014; Celani & Singh, 2011). On how organisations can leverage employee retention, Cascio (2014) identified employer branding, performance management and human resource development as fundamental.

From Cascio (2014) one immediately realises that organisational initiatives are significant to enhance recruitment and retention as employees make use of appraisal and intuition to decide whether to join and remain with their employers. Therefore both the organisational initiatives and employees' reaction to these initiatives are significant for understanding talent procurement and retention (Celani & Singh, 2011).

This study endeavours to develop an insightful understanding of how individual employees react to organisational initiatives such as those identified by Cascio (2014) by unveiling the participants' experiences of recruitment and retention in a research unit located in a rural setting. It is commonly acknowledged that recruitment and retention of employees are complex at the best of times but are intricate and more of a challenge in rural settings (Ditlopo, Blaauw, Bidwell, & Thomas, 2011). Pressure is placed on employers in rural settings by the inclination of the working population to migrate to urban centres in search of work with the expectation of better income, career development opportunities and employment prospects (Fisher & Fraser, 2010; Mafunisa & Tsanwani, 2011; Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Salmon, Curtin, Ginnivan, &

Neumayer, 2007). This study is therefore not oblivious of the challenges that the issue of locality introduces. However, the study relies on the views of the participants to unveil their experiences of recruitment and retention in this organisation.

The study used signalling theory as a lens to provide a broad overview of the extant literature on recruitment and retention and to develop an insightful understanding of the participants' experiences of recruitment and retention in the chosen organisation.

Accordingly, the thrust of the study is twofold:

- An enhanced theoretical understanding of employee recruitment and retention
- An enhanced understanding of how individual participants appraise organisational initiatives to attract and retain talent

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The review of the extant literature in the field of Industrial & Organisational Psychology, specifically Personnel Psychology reveals that a huge body of knowledge on talent recruitment and retention exists (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014; Cascio, 2014; Celani & Singh, 2011; Goud, 2014; Mahal, 2012; Wright & Huang, 2012). The review of literature also revealed limited research that has focused on recruitment of staff in research units (Beck, Boulton, Lemmings, & Clayton, 2012; Chung *et al.*, 2009; Roebken, 2010; Salmon *et al.*, 2007).

In unveiling the experiences of the participants through qualitative enquiry, the subjective experiences of individuals become the focal point of the study and consequently their reality (Heidegger, 1976). Employees' employment-related decisions are rooted in their individual experiences vis-à-vis organisations' employment-related initiatives and practices (Cascio, 2014). For example, organisations may endeavour to enhance employee career success and build human capital for themselves through employment-related initiatives and practices such as opportunities for developmental job experiences and professional development for their employees (Dong, Seo, & Bartol, 2014).

Employees' decisions to join, stay or leave organisations are often anchored on their evaluation of such employment practices. For instance, employees' decision to resign when they no longer experience professional development in their organisation is based on evaluation of employment practices. Insight into experiences and resultant decisions enable employers to see the outcomes of recruitment and retention practices. With this knowledge, employers, where necessary, are able to develop and operationalise appropriate talent management strategies and interventions (George & Dane, 2011; Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011; Roots & Li, 2013; Weiss & Rupp, 2011).

The review of extant literature reveals that employees' views and experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention strategy and practice are essential for the continuous improvement of the entire talent management function (Van Dijk, 2008; Weiss & Rupp, 2011). Employee recruitment and retention hinge on numerous factors internal and external to the organisation (Hughes & Rog, 2008; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Morrissette, 2011). For example, external factors may encompass the country's or region's unemployment rate, structural unemployment and the availability of labour (Daniels, 2007). A host of factors within the organisation may impact on its ability to recruit and retain talent. These include sound talent management policies and practices such as perceptions of equity and career advancement prospects (Fraser, 2010; Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Steele, Fisman, & Davidson, 2013; Van Vuuren, 2010). The interplay between internal and external factors may obfuscate the significance and impact of each set of factors. However, this interplay highlights the intricacy of recruitment and retention strategies and practices in organisations.

Broadly speaking, the study sought to unveil employees' experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention strategies and practices. In view of the preceding discussion, the broad focus of the study was delineated into theoretical and empirical objectives that formed the core of this study.

Theoretical questions

First, at the theoretical level the study sought to develop a more insightful understanding of employee recruitment and retention factors by focusing on two conceptual central tasks using the lens of signal theory:

- To enhance theoretical understanding of recruitment, the study conceptualised factors pertinent to employee recruitment through the lens of signalling theory
- To enhance theoretical understanding of retention, the study conceptualised factors pertinent to employee retention through the lens of signalling theory

Empirical questions

The heart of this study is formed by its empirical questions. Therefore at the empirical level, the study identified two focus areas:

- Unveiling the experiences of the participants was of practical significance to the organisation as it tended to reveal employees' reactions or appraisals of the organisation's recruitment and retention policies and practices. It is largely from learning about employees' experiences that organisations can improve their initiatives to attract and retain talent.
- Because employees' experiences provide the most valuable source for the improvement of organisations' talent management, recommendations were therefore made to assist the organisation under study to streamline its recruitment and retention strategy and practices.

1.3 AIMS

The general aim of this research study was to unveil employees' experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention strategies and practices. In view of this the aim of the study was delineated into theoretical and empirical aims.

1.3.1 Theoretical Aims

The aim of the study was to develop a more insightful understanding of employee recruitment and retention factors by focusing on two conceptual central tasks using the lens of signal theory:

- The study aimed at creating a more enhanced theoretical understanding of recruitment by conceptualising factors pertinent to employee recruitment through the lens of signalling theory
- The study aimed at enhancing theoretical understanding of retention by conceptualising factors pertinent to employee retention through the lens of signalling theory

1.3.2 Empirical Aims

Two empirical aims of the study were identified:

- The aim was to unveil the experiences of the participants so as to reveal employees' reactions or appraisals of the organisation's recruitment and retention policies and practices. Organisations strive to improve their strategies and practices aimed at enhancing recruitment and retention strategies by learning about employees' experiences
- The second aim was to provide recommendations that would assist the organisation under study to streamline its recruitment and retention strategy and practices

1.4 PARADIGMS

1.4.1 Theoretical framework

This study falls within the disciplinary context of Industrial and Organisational (I/O) psychology and its sub-discipline of personnel psychology (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010).

I/O psychology is the scientific study of the behaviour of individuals in the work environment at individual, group and organisational levels. Behaviour can be explained in terms of psychological theories, constructs and models. The knowledge of I/O psychology is developed and applied in various sub-disciplines, one of which is personnel psychology. Personnel psychology is the applied science of measuring and predicting the differences in human behaviour and performance in order to improve the attainment of organisational and individual goals (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010).

Two specific constructs or areas of personnel psychology formed the core of this study, namely, employee attraction and employee retention. The extant literature identified well-defined and executed employee recruitment and retention strategies and practices as vital ingredients for talent management essential for sustained competitive advantage (Al Ariss *et al.*, 2014; Goud, 2014; Mahal, 2012).

As already stated, at the theoretical level the study sought to develop a more insightful understanding of employee recruitment and retention using the lens of signalling theory. At the empirical level the study sought to unveil the experiences of the participants using the lens of signalling theory as well. Such employee experiences are an essential ingredient for improving talent attraction and retention (Celani & Singh, 2011).

The signalling theory of recruitment is used as a lens to develop an overview of the extant literature on recruitment and retention and to develop an insightful understanding of the participants' experiences of recruitment and retention in the chosen organisation. Briefly stated, signalling theory refers to how job applicants gather information to assess the nature and characteristics of the organisation by observing cues and their own experiences (Gregory, Meade, & Thompson, 2013). In this way they source information that as yet has been unknown to them. Signalling theory can assist to explain the job applicants' attraction to the organisation and subsequent decision to apply (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Therefore, signalling theory provides the underpinning theoretical framework. The theory, as briefly explained above, will be used in elucidating the theoretical factors linked with recruitment and retention as well as in expounding on the findings of the study.

1.4.2 Philosophical paradigm

Most research is conducted through the lens of a philosophical paradigm. However, some researchers do not always make explicit the philosophical paradigm underlying their research. The significance of paradigms lie in the fact that each one has a specific mode of creating knowledge and evaluating what defines knowledge (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Some have argued for the explicit adoption of a paradigm underlying research at the outset of the research process so that all stages throughout the methodology are approached in the same way and provide a consistent perspective.

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist view to explore the experiences of individual participants (Flood, 2010; Thorne, 1991). Methodologically the interpretive paradigm assisted the research by facilitating in-depth dialogue with the participants so as to understand their experiences regarding recruitment and retention in the organisation (Laverty, 2003).

The interpretive paradigm operates from the view that social phenomenon like employees' experiences is best understood from the subjective perspective of research participants. Therefore, in unveiling employees' recruitment and retention experiences, the focus is on their individual subjective experiences. In a sense the social world is explained from the experiences of the participants.

At the ontological level, embracing a constructivist and qualitative approach implied that reality is relative (Burrell & Morgan, 1977). The relative nature of employees' experiences implied that individuals have unique experiences of recruitment and

retention in the organisation as revealed by the results of the study. The participants individually constructed their own subjective experiences when they dialogued with the researcher during the interview. The implication of this relativistic view is that reality has multiple meanings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Epistemologically, the data lay within the experiences of the participants. It was essential to interact with the participants through individual interviews to gather data. It can then be seen that the epistemological assumption made in the study was that knowledge is something softer and subjective. This presupposed that knowledge was based on personal and unique experiences of individual employees, such as those unveiled in this study (Burrell, 1999; Morgan & Burrell, 1977).

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.5.1 Research approach

Employees' experiences of the research unit's recruitment and retention practices were explored through an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist world view. This view enables a researcher to study the subjective meanings and perspectives that individuals attribute to personal experiences and how these experiences influence decisions and subsequent behaviour. The words and stories of participants provide a rich form of qualitative data (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009; Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Qualitative research is primarily about meaning making and not formulating hypotheses (Mason, 2010). In this study, meaning making occurred by exploring and understanding, from the inside rather than the outside, experiences of employees during recruitment and retention practices.

Although signalling theory was used as a theoretical framework for unveiling the recruitment and retention experiences of the participants, an inductive approach was used to analyse the data in order to uncover the themes and meaning that the employees attached to their experiences. Therefore the themes and meaning emerged from the employees' experiences. The role of the signalling theory was subdued as data emerged naturally during interviews with the respondents. This is to affirm that the findings were integrated with literature in the field.

1.5.2 Research strategy

In this qualitative study, the unit of analysis was the individual employee (Lavery, 2003; Mason, 2010). Potential employee participants were selected if they held positions in the unit that reportedly required critical skills. The nature of these skills is referred to later (see 1.5.3.3 sampling method). In-depth interviews were conducted with those participants who accepted the invitation by signing informed consent forms. The data was analysed inductively in order to uncover the themes and meaning that the employees attached to their experiences and to integrate the relevance of the findings using theory (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

1.5.3 Research method

In the next section, the techniques and procedures used to conduct the empirical study are discussed.

1.5.3.1 Research setting

The research unit, in which this study was conducted, falls under a tertiary educational institution and procured its own funding from grants issued by industry leaders and other organisations that drive and stimulate research and innovation by investing in research activities and projects. The research unit has four main offices: one in Johannesburg and three in rural Mpumalanga. There is a distance of 520 km

between Johannesburg and the rural offices and another 40 km between certain rural offices. Apart from the difficulties caused by distance, there also appeared to be frequent connectivity drops and outages of landlines, internet and electricity. The unit's staff numbers at the time of the research proposal peaked at 248, but during the study, fluctuated between 190 and 220. Three percent of staff was situated in the Johannesburg office with the remainder in the rural offices. The staff complement consisted of two main groups: core staff (13%) and project staff (87%). "Project staff" is allocated to specific research projects. "Core staff" consisted of support staff and unit management involved with the day-to-day operational functioning of the unit as a whole. The unit issues a variety of fixed-term contracts for staff. These contracts are renewable, depending on grant holder and project requirements.

The unit employs a range of support staff, scientists and fieldworkers. Most of the fieldworkers were drawn from the local community; however there are certain fieldwork positions for which the skills were not readily available. The unit reported via email correspondence that it has been difficult to find and recruit nurses, lay counsellors, laboratory technicians, qualitative translators and data capturers. Those with skills in computer science, research data analysis and management, demography, research project logistics and management, research sciences, quality assurance and laboratory management have been sourced nationally and internationally. There was some disagreement about whether or not the following skills used by the unit are scarce: basic accounting; office administration; HR support; and data entry (DHET, 2012; HWSETA, 2013; NRF (n.d.)). Certain positions such as qualitative fieldworkers, research scientists and community liaison officers did not feature on the scarce skills lists (DHET, 2012; HWSETA, 2013; NRF (n.d.)). As a grant-funded entity there is usually not scope, within the terms and conditions of the grant, to include any extensive financial outlay for the training and development of those applicants who have the potential but who do not necessarily demonstrate the required skills (De Beer, 2003). Each research project is run on a limited budget for a set time, so the staffing allocation of the unit must be such that the project starts at full capacity from the outset.

1.5.3.2 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The tertiary institution under which this research unit falls required its own ethics clearance as the participants of this study were staff of the unit and the institution. Therefore two ethics clearance certificates were obtained, the first from the institution at which the researcher is a student and the second from the institution at which she works (appendix 1). In addition, the directorate of this unit gave written permission for this study to be conducted in the unit (appendix 2). As requested by the unit directorate, permission was also obtained from the line managers for the time the participants would have to take off from their working hours to attend the interviews.

Each identified employee invited to participate in this study obtained an informed consent form with a written and verbal explanation, and a confidentiality undertaking from the researcher (appendix 3). Interviews were only scheduled once they had signed and returned the consent forms. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted during the researcher's vacation leave. At the start of the interviews, permission was requested and granted to record the interviews (appendix 4). Interviewees were reminded that the researcher was conducting the research as a Unisa master's student and not as their HR administrator. Owing to time limitations, no alternate forms of communication were offered in terms of skype or telephonic interviews.

1.5.3.3 Sampling method

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who could provide more in-depth information from their diverse occupational backgrounds within the parameters of recruitment and retention for the specific job they held (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Only those job family groups that required scarce and/or critical skills were included in this study. The underlying assumption was that the unit would have more challenges attracting and retaining individuals who possessed the requisite scarce and critical skills. The scarce and critical skills were identified by referring to

unit documentation such as job descriptions and performance management documents. The scarce and critical nature of the skills was confirmed with unit management and by referring to DHET (2012), HWSETA (2013), and NRF (n.d.) documentation. Only one employee was approached from each relevant job family. The job families of the participants included IT and systems support staff, research data specialists, logistical staff, research data capturers, lay counsellors, nurses, qualitative fieldworkers, project site managers and quality assurance staff.

The motivation to participate appeared to be intrinsic, possibly motivated by the fact that all of the unit's employees are researchers or members of a research team, who knew and appreciated the benefits of research. The high acceptance rate might be a confirmation of this. Only two employees declined out of 13 invited to participate. Since these were the only two in their particular job family, no replacements were sought. Therefore there were 11 participants. More detailed demographic descriptions of the participants cannot be provided without breaching the confidentiality undertaking. Any description of the participants will make the participants easily identifiable to colleagues and management.

1.5.3.4 Data collection methods

Individual interviews were conducted following a standard set of initial open-ended questions. Further probing questioning was used to understand and obtain more detail about the participants' experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention practices. I, as interviewer, asked broad questions that allowed the respondents to set the direction of the conversation by their responses.

An interview schedule of the standard set of initial questions is identified as appendix 5.

The field notes made at the time of the interviews were later used during data analysis as reminder to herself, as researcher about any reluctance to participate, or when somebody nominated somebody else because she was 'sick'.

1.5.3.5 Recording of data

Permission to record the interview was requested at the beginning of the interview (appendix 4). If the participant appeared in any way intimidated by the recorder or expressed any reluctance because of the use of the recorder, then the researcher offered to take handwritten notes during the discussion. However, no participant refused to be recorded. All transcripts and notes were typed up by an external person for ease of data analysis. Thereafter the researcher listened to the audio recordings while correcting the typed transcripts. Eleven individuals were interviewed which equated to 209 A4 pages of transcripts.

1.5.3.6 Thematic data analysis

In this qualitative study, interpretive skills were used to engage with the data collated from interviews (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The data was coded into themes and used to explore and evaluate the unit's recruitment and retention practices from the perspective of the employees' experiences (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

The steps of an interpretive data analysis as described by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006) were used to analyse the data obtained in the interviews:

1. Familiarisation and immersion

Familiarisation and immersion occurred as the researcher listened to the recordings while checking the typed transcripts and simultaneously referred back to her field notes. This was an ongoing process throughout the data analysis.

2. Inducing themes from the interview transcripts

Each transcript was individually divided up under the following section headings related to the broad sequence followed during each interview:

- Research interview introduction
- Skills and scarce skills, job title (current and when started with the unit)
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Additional and concluding discussions

During the interview participants sometimes jumped between sections and so that part of the transcript was then 'cut and pasted' under the appropriate section.

All the transcripts were then consolidated under each of these sections and a ring-bound book printed with page numbers. Each participant was given a number for reference and continuity purposes during data analysis. While reading through the book, the researcher labelled each topic that the participants raised as a theme in the margin. An index of all the themes, with the related participant number and page number, was then created as they appeared in the book. Using this index and the book, an electronic document of themes was compiled using the related quotes as taken from the transcripts. By the end of this process there were numerous themes related to each interview section.

3. Elaboration of themes related to recruitment and retention

Themes, related to recruitment and retention that occurred twice or more were identified in the findings section and described in the discussion section of this dissertation.

4. Interpretation and checking

The findings and discussion sections of this dissertation were checked with the audio recordings and typed transcripts in order to ensure that the interpretation of the data remained true to the original content.

1.5.3.7 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Various steps throughout the process were adopted to ensure quality, integrity and trustworthiness of the data. As the notion of transferability of findings and not generalisation to the bigger population is of vital importance in qualitative research, rich descriptions of the context were provided. Such detailed descriptions of the context were significant for contextual applicability.

In addition, the transcripts were typed up verbatim in the natural voice (Mero-Jaffe, 2011) of the participants, which included the “uhms”, pauses, repetition of phrases and incomplete sentences. This was done so that none of the subtle nuances in meaning were lost. However, these natural voice elements were removed from the final version of the dissertation for coherence and ease of reading, and not to embarrass participants.

Member checking was used as a measure of trustworthiness (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Each participant was emailed the typed transcript of his/her interview and the findings, and asked to confirm that confidentiality had been maintained and that the transcript was a reflection of the conversation that took place. Regarding the findings and interpretation thereof the candidates were provided with an opportunity to express their views about the correctness. In order to check confidentiality, the participants were asked if they felt that a reader would be able to identify them as a participant. The participants expressed satisfaction with how their interviews were interpreted into findings without revealing their identity. Owing to extenuating circumstances, and after consultation, it was decided that any participant who had left the research unit after the interviews were conducted would not be contacted.

In order to ensure credibility and dependability the same consistent routine of research method was adopted for each and every interview. In addition an audit trail and research journal were kept. As part of her post-graduate studies, a Unisa supervisor was allocated to oversee the researcher’s work as student researcher,

from its inception at the research proposal stage. Every step, process and written draft was submitted to this supervisor for review and comment. In this way dependability can be affirmed because any other researcher could follow this method in the same setting with the same participants and get the same results.

The integrity of the data was ensured by storing the data transcripts and interview recordings safely and securely. In so doing the confidentiality and integrity of the information was maintained. The data that emerged from the transcripts relating to recruitment and retention was checked for context and meaning against the academic publications that were used to compile the literature review, in order to ensure that interpretation of the data was sound.

1.5.3.8 Reporting

The analysed data were collated into a framework of themes and subthemes, with the most descriptive transcript quotation/s cited in support of each subtheme (Moloto, Brink & Nel, 2014). The themes were then textually described and explained in the findings section. The findings and relevant academic literature were then integrated into a schematic diagram (figure 1) which aided in the discussion of factors that are incentives to join and remain with the organisation, and factors that discourage attraction and retention.

1.5.3.9 Conclusion and recommendations

A concluding examination of the findings of the empirical study and the literature review follows the discussion section to determine whether the problem statement and research aims were addressed. A schematic diagram integrating the findings with the literature was designed and used in making recommendations that could assist the research unit with streamlining its recruitment and retention strategy and

practices. The operational value of this to the organisation as a whole is that this model could be transferable to other research units within the university.

1.5.3.10 Limitations

The limitations of the literature review and empirical study are examined and discussed in chapter 4.

1.6 CHAPTER LAYOUT

Chapter 1. Scientific orientation to the research

Chapter 2. Literature review

Chapter 3. Article

Chapter 4. Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

This dissertation consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 explains the background to and motivation for this study, formulates the problem statement and aims, and details the research design. In chapter 2 the extant literature on recruitment and retention is reviewed. Most of the literature reviewed tended to be relevant to the themes and subthemes found in the data. Chapter 3 comprises a full academic journal article as per the guidelines of the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*. Chapter 4 focuses on the conclusions, limitations and recommendations for this study and dissertation.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the scientific orientation to this research study, which included the background and motivation, problem statement and aims, paradigms and research design. It concluded with a description of the article development and chapter layout.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The extant literature on recruitment and retention reveals that it is of vital importance to organisations because competitive advantage is anchored in the mix and quality of personnel that the organisation attracts and retains (Cardy & Lengenick-Hall, 2012; Phillips & Gully, 2015). Despite the vitality of recruitment and retention functions in organisational competitiveness and the huge body of knowledge relating to the two human resource or talent management functions, Phillips & Gully (2015) have censured developments in the field as lacking in theory.

Globally, organisations are increasingly finding it difficult to recruit and retain skilled talent (Goud, 2014; Cascio, 2014). The global economic recovery has accelerated competition amongst employers for skilled talent with the shift in the market for talent swinging from the buyers to the sellers (Cascio, 2014). Under this economic climate, skilled talent tend to have an upper hand and employers have to continuously develop talent management strategies that will ensure attraction and retention of skilled talent to their organisation (Cascio, 2014; Mohlala, Goldman, & Goosen, 2012). However, talent's attraction to potential employers and decisions to remain with the employing organisations has been explored from various theoretical lenses that include signalling theory (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Regarding recruitment, potential employees use a variety of sources such as their friends and family and media to obtain information about their potential employers (Dustmann, Glitz & Schönberg, 2011; Strehlke, 2010). Potential employees also evaluate the nature and characteristics of organisation by observing cues and their own experiences (Gregory, Meade, & Thompson, 2013). In this way they source information that as yet has been unknown to them. For instance positive and negative signals can be observed during their interactions with the interview panel (Saks & Uggerslev, 2009). If the interview panel appears to be disinterested and unfriendly then the job applicant will assume that the organisation is similarly not a hospitable place in which to work. Signalling theory can assist to explain job applicants'

attraction to the organisation and subsequent decision to apply to and remain with the organisation (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Regarding retention, for existing employees, appropriate and relevant HRM practices signal that they are valued by the organisation and considered worth the investment (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013). However, it needs to be pointed out that signals come from both the organisation and the individual employees (Celani & Singh, 2011). During recruitment, prospective employers also try and fill in the gaps of knowledge about job applicants from other factors apart from what they say during the interview (Spence, 1973). For instance a badly formatted CV with numerous spelling mistakes is taken by the organisation to indicate that the job applicant is not able to pay attention to detail.

The chapter conceptualises the constructs of recruitment and retention and elucidates the factors that impact on organisations' ability to attract and retain talent. First the concept of recruitment is provided. The factors that are likely to have a bearing on organisations ability to attract talent are then discussed. The extant literature on recruitment identified a plethora of factors that affect organisations' ability to attract talent (Cascio, 2014; Ford, Moore, & Scott, 2011; Goud, 2014; Mohlala *et al.*, 2012).

Organisations' ability to sustain their competitive edge cannot be guaranteed solely by talent attraction. Organisations have to ensure talent retention through their talent management strategies and practices. Failure to retain talent may have dire consequences for both the operational and strategic levels of the organisation (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2012). The chapter conceptualises the construct of talent retention and discusses the issues that influence talent retention in organisations. The extant literature identified a host of factors to explain organisations ability to retain talent (Cascio, 2014; Celani & Singh, 2011; Goud, 2014; Wright & Huang, 2012).

2.1 RECRUITMENT

Breaugh (2013) defines recruitment from an operational perspective as the process that starts with alerting job seekers about a vacancy and ends with making the job offer to the most suitable candidate. However from a strategic perspective, recruitment can be defined as proactively identifying and addressing skills requirements of the organisation and thereafter using various means to source and attract suitable talent (Phillips & Gully, 2015). This process includes using signalling mechanisms to provide candidates with a realistic and appealing picture of the organisation and job so that the most suitable candidates are encouraged to apply and participate in the recruitment process (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Modern technology and the internet, in particular, turn the world into a global village where many people are able to apply for a vacancy irrespective of the country in which they live (Rogerson & Crush, 2007; Sylva & Mol, 2009). Although organisations are easily able to recruit from anywhere in the world (Young, Noble, Mahon, Maxted, Grant, & Sibbald, 2010), shortages of skills on a global scale are still prevalent (Gamble, Patrick, & Peach, 2010; Horwitz, 2013). In many instances, the direction of the flow of talent is from developing economies to developed economies (Eckenwiler, 2009; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; Rogerson & Crush, 2007; Tucho, 2009; Young *et al.*, 2010). South Africa, for instance, supplies the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand with health workers, scientists, technologists, professionals and engineers (Maharaj, 2010; Rogerson & Crush, 2007). This means that as an emerging economy, South Africa has to be particularly vigilant in developing, sourcing and retaining its human resources, particularly in scarce skills categories.

In the 21st century business milieu, an organisation's success hinges on its ability to recruit and retain people who can and will do their jobs in accordance with the mission of the organisation (Dermody & Holloway, 1998; Goud, 2014). Employee

recruitment and retention are integral components of talent management (Farndale *et al.*, 2010).

The review of literature revealed that the subject of recruitment has been studied from numerous perspectives and there is not one integrated overarching recruitment theory (Breugh, 2013). However, there is some consensus regarding a host of factors that have a major influence on organisations' ability to attract talent. These factors are discussed next.

2.1.1 Strategic recruitment

The talent management of organisations that sustain long-term competitive edge hinges on its alignment with the vision, mission and strategy of the organisation. Talent management cannot be carried out on an ad hoc or piecemeal basis, particularly in an upward economic milieu (Cascio, 2014; Phillips & Gully, 2015). Optimal recruitment and retention practices are those that evolve from the vision, mission and strategies of the organisation (Lindgren & Hixson, 2010). Aligning recruitment practices to the organisation's strategic direction provides an opportunity to raise the bar from "implementing strategy" to "driving strategy" (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009). Through attracting and hiring the correct talent with the required skills in the current and anticipated vacancies, organisations are able to operationalise organisational strategies (Horwitz, 2012). Recruitment investments and costs can be justified by visibly measuring talent contribution to the advancement of organisational goals (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009).

Potential or new employees should be attracted to the organisation with the primary objective of selecting high calibre talent that should be able to advance the strategy and goals of the employing organisation. This process is facilitated by submerging applicants in the organisational strategy from the outset of the recruitment process by ensuring that all cues and signals coming from the organisation and recruiting

personnel give appropriate messages (Celani & Singh, 2011; Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009).

In the case of higher education institutions, strategic recruitment efforts improve the capacity of their research units to deliver outputs such as collaborative research, increased grant funding and published peer-reviewed journal articles (Chung *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, the strategic imperatives should be clearly communicated to the applicants or those who have just entered the organisation.

Talent management as a strategically aligned practice should improve attraction of skilled talent so that employees are able to improve productivity and witness their contribution to the vision of the organisation (Van Dijk, 2008).

Talent attraction is more than the financial package that employees receive from organisations and applicants' needs such as personal development plans and career growth have become vital considerations (Van Dijk, 2008). Organisations strive to make both their jobs and the organisation attractive by taking cues from potential employees (Celani & Singh, 2011).

At the recruitment stage, applicants evaluate their capacity to contribute to the organisation's vision and goals. Signalling theory affirms that the vision and mission statements of an organisation can be used by job applicants as a means to gathering information about the organisation from which they then extrapolate how the organisation operates and its rationale for existence (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). This establishes an attraction, or lack thereof, to the organisation.

2.1.2 Attraction and Realistic Job Previews (RJP)

It has already been explained that recruitment is the process of attracting staff with appropriate skills to fulfil roles and functions in the organisation (Botha, Bussin, & De Swardt, 2011). Recruitment starts with identified vacancies or vacancies that are

likely to exist in future and performance gaps in operational functions. As a result, organisations develop both the job descriptions and specifications for the current or future vacancies. However, the information is often shared with potential employees through advertisement which may happen internally and externally to the organisation (Van Dijk, 2008).

Job advertisements are one of the primary sources providing job seekers with information on the company and the job and therefore should be relevant, specific and credible in order to attract suitable candidates and ensure their willingness to apply (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012). This includes appropriately branding the organisation as an appealing employer (Cascio, 2014). Information about organisations may be obtained from a variety of sources that include friends and family, newspapers, internet, etc. Attraction is possibly the first experience applicants have with the employing organisation. Their reactions to cues and signals contained in advertisements (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012) and on corporate web pages (Allen, Biggane, Pitts, Otondo, & Van Scotter, 2013) translate into their willingness to apply for the post. The more realistic the information provided during the initial recruitment stage, the more likely employees are to experience job satisfaction as job incumbents (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012).

A realistic job preview (RJP) is defined as an honest and unbiased description of the organisation, job requirements and characteristics as given to the applicant during recruitment (Breugh, 2013; Phillips, 1998). This type of information goes out as cues and signals to the job applicants with the aim of effectively managing their expectations. In addition, RJP's successfully link recruitment and retention, as the resultant job satisfaction leads directly to an intention to remain with the organisation (Earnest, Allen, & Landis, 2011; Suszko & Breugh, 1986).

Wanous (1989) affirmed both the utility and validity of RJP's in assisting applicants in deciding about their suitability for the post and organisation. Management has to determine the thrust of the realistic job previews to applicants and new hires when

such previews are planned (Breugh, 2013; Phillips & Gully, 2015). Decisions about implementation may range from the timing, motivating reason, development, format, content and extent. Phillips (1998) emphasised that the format and timing would depend on the required outcomes, such as job satisfaction, performance and reduced turnover intention.

RJPs contribute towards the success of the hiring process because unsuitable applicants already withdraw on the basis of the preview received (Earnest *et al.*, 2011). Remaining applicants may be more committed and confident about their decision because an RJP enables them to make more of an informed choice and bolsters their coping ability during their tenure (Suszko & Breugh, 1986).

2.1.3 Branding and matching of values

Attraction to the organisation is increased when there is a match between employer and employee values (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Espoused corporate values give prospective applicants an opportunity to uncover more information about the organisation (Gregory *et al.*, 2013).

Individuals have fundamental enduring values consisting of their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Similarly, organisations choose to affiliate themselves with specific values such as being profit driven or being oriented towards community upliftment or educational values (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012). Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins (2006) analysed research studies on employee values and categorised values as extrinsic, intrinsic, altruistic and prestige, while De Cooman and Pepermans (2012) added interpersonal values.

Extrinsic values are met with pay packages and other benefits provided by the employer. Intrinsic values are found in challenging work, professional development and advancement. Altruistic values are expressed in concern for and contributing to others and communities, and prestige values are related to influence, power and

status. Interpersonal values are experienced in social interaction with people in the workplace (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012).

Organisational values are affirmed in organisational vision and mission statements and are evident in the corporate image and identity as portrayed to the wider public through advertising and branding. Appropriate branding could be used as a competitive strategy to attract and retain the best talent and combat global skills scarcity. Botha *et al.* (2011) identified the following building blocks in their “brand predictive model” that would be effective in guiding talent recruitment and retention, thereby giving organisations the competitive edge:

- Identify the personal needs of the required talent.
- Adhere to an employer value that is distinct and better than other prospective employers.
- Strategically align HR practices with the corporate brand.
- Actively and positively communicate and market the organisational brand.
- Deliver on the brand “promise” (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006).
- Track and measure brand indicators and outputs.

Values that are given expression in a clear visible corporate brand enables an organisation to more easily attract better suited job applicants who readily buy-in and commit to the organisation from the outset because of the signals and cues evident in the corporate brand and values (Jaidi, Van Hooft, & Arends, 2011).

2.1.4 Networking aids organisations and job seekers

Networks are social structures that give members access to resources and knowledge to which they would ordinarily not have had access. Networking can be described through the social capital theory (Portes, 1998) as informal and formal social networks that provide assistance to individuals through career and work opportunities merely because they are affiliated to that particular group or network

(O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2007). According to Portes (1998), the type of network and the extent of the resources available to the network may result in positive or negative social capital outflows.

From a recruitment perspective, industry-based networks consisting of suppliers, buyers and other organisational stakeholders (Almeida, Fernando, & Sheridan, 2012) have access to a wider range of individuals than the employing organisation and can therefore alert the employer to potentially suitable applicants and similarly advise job seekers of vacancies. Professional and social networks extend an individual's possible range of search for suitable vacancies (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). It is the experience of "who one knows" and "being in the right place at the right time" that assists the job seeker to hear of suitable vacancies.

According to Mulenga and Van Lill (2007), networking as a means of finding suitable vacancies and applicants has been used effectively to address the issue of skills shortage, even though networking appears to only benefit those who have links – direct or indirect – to the recruiting organisation. This means that suitably skilled foreign or national workers may in fact miss out on local opportunities. However, Almeida *et al.* (2012) found that networks play a crucial role in sourcing immigrant professionals. This is of particular importance when organisations are faced with critical and scarce skills within.

2.1.5 Labour market influences

An understanding of labour market influences helps to shed additional light on the impact scarce and critical skills have on recruitment and retention practices. Simply put, the labour market is the term that describes the negotiations that take place between employers and job seekers regarding the skills that are available to meet organisational staffing requirements (Horwitz, 2013). Rosenbaum, Kariya, Settersten and Maier (1990) use signalling theory to describe the interplay that happens within

the labour market as prospective employers and job seekers send out 'signals' which provide suggestions of their most positive attributes.

Prevalent labour market conditions influence applicants' reactions to the recruitment practices of organisations (Moriarty, Wickham, Krings, & Bobek, 2012). An economic boom during which there is a greater demand for skills places the negotiating power with job seekers. It also means that there is likely to be higher turnover of existing employees because they find better jobs elsewhere. In contrast, employers in a boom of labour supply adopt informal and less innovative recruitment and selection practices because they know they will easily find suitable applicants (Moriarty *et al.*, 2012). High skills shortage everywhere in the world has a negative impact on the labour market and impedes economic growth and the creation of new jobs (Sebusi, 2007).

Specific employment criteria of organisations can account for the relative scarcity of skills, for instance, when the vacancy is situated in a rural area but suitable applicants prefer to work in urban cities. This illustrates a geographic scarcity of skills in contrast to an absolute scarcity which exists if the demand for certain skills exceeds the supply (Hancock, Steinbach, Nesbitt, Adler, & Auerswald, 2009).

Concluding paragraph to recruitment section

The five sections above describe recruitment related factors and practices that assist organisations to gain competitive advantage by the type of job seekers they are able to attract and appoint. Seen through the lens of signalling theory these factors all provide applicants and employees with additional information which helps them to realise the extent of their attraction to the organisation.

2.2 RETENTION

Retention strategies aim to retain talented employees who continue to make positive contributions to the outputs of the organisation (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). These talent management interventions include identifying and addressing the needs of the employees so that they remain with the organisation, but simultaneously ensuring that these needs match the organisation's strategic and operational requirements. Talent management ensures job fit and the appropriate utilisation of skills (Deery & Jago, 2015) but also includes developing and upskilling which signals to employees that the organisation is committed to providing them with career progress and job satisfaction thereby encouraging employees to remain with the organisation (Deery & Jago, 2015; Huang, Lin & Chuang, 2005).

Employees remain with an organisation on the basis of how well this affiliation fulfils their needs (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Retention is the outcome of the cumulative effect of subjective experiences that employees have with the organisation and how these experiences meet various needs. The experiences are cumulative from the very first interaction the individual has with the organisation as job seeker up to the time the employee leaves the organisation.

Understanding the subjective experience of the employee changes the focus from the organisation's outputs and outcomes to the individual's experience of and at work (Weiss & Rupp, 2011). According to Coetzee and Bergh (2009), subjective work experiences determine the extent of satisfaction and meaning that employees find in work. This actual experience also includes the employees' assessment, opinion and feelings of the experience underpinned by personal attitudes and characteristics. It is not just a mere description of the event itself. External and internal circumstantial factors also contribute to the experience.

Although an organisation has certain outcomes in mind when implementing retention practices, these practices do not necessarily have the desired outcome because

experience and perception are subjective functions of employees' interpretations. By exploring "experiences" per se, one can establish whether or not retention practices are effective (Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011). Monitoring and evaluation post-implementation are equally essential and beneficial.

Retention challenges also revolve around managing and meeting of expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973; Proost, Van Ruysseveldt, & Van Dijke, 2012). Expectations are different for every individual. "Unmet expectations" form the gap between what the employee expected of the organisation and job and their actual experiences. Employers should proactively engage with each employee to explore and address his/her particular expectations so that the interventions are appropriate (Porter & Steers, 1973).

2.2.1 Orientation and induction

Organisations seek to bolster their employee retention strategies by engaging in numerous talent management practices such as orientation and induction. Proost *et al.* (2012) referred to orientation as a sense-making process that new employees' experience, which helps to make their expectations more realistic. Erasmus and Breier (2009) proposed that new employees, with limited to no work experience, are most in need of orientation and induction. However, Baruch and Hall (2004) indicated that with the diverse nature of new employees in seniority and experience, induction programmes should be available to all employees new to the organisation. Orientation and induction programmes are usually planned and directed interventions that assist new employees in understanding and adopting the practices, norms, values and culture of the organisation.

In light of "the shortage of health professionals in rural communities" Roots and Li (2013) analysed published research articles that covered the recruitment and retention strategies of physical therapists in rural areas. Induction into the rural

environment prior to appointment underpinned the success of recruiting and retaining these therapists in rural practices.

Various studies on retention have identified that orientation programmes help to reduce turnover intention (Aaron, 2011; Bakker, Butler, Fitch, Green, Olson, & Cummings, 2010; Mills & Millsteed, 2002; Roots & Li, 2013). A preceptor pilot programme study in which new nurses were paired with existing employees for orientation, training and mentorship, resulted in a significant improvement in the retention of the new staff within the first year of implementation and assessment of the programme (Aaron, 2011). Oncology nurses interviewed by Bakker *et al.* (2010) identified amongst other factors, new employees' orientation as essential in order to improve working conditions and assist in retaining nurses. Another study listed orientation as one of the organisational supports that could encourage job seekers to accept rural posts, but a lack of such orientation would become a reason to leave when the organisation did not deliver (Mills & Millsteed, 2002; Roots & Li, 2013).

Spouses' difficulties in adapting to a new country or town can also negatively affect employees' settling in and acclimatising ability (Gupta, Banerjee, & Gaur, 2012). Spousal adjustment is usually to community, language, culture, work opportunities and geographic characteristics. Family as an external factor to the retention process, does play a role in decisions of the employee to remain or to leave. Organisations should be cognisant of this and find ways to facilitate the family's move and social adaptation. This is a simple solution that could prove to be a cost saver in preference to the expense of restarting the recruitment process.

It is evident from the above that orientation and induction can encompass many different programs and proactive interventions, but in whatever form orientation and induction should be an integral formalised part of onboarding new employees. In spite of everything employees' experiences during the orientation and induction period are pivotal for the evaluation the employees attach to the decision to remain or leave the organisation.

2.2.2 Developmental opportunities

Organisations endeavour to enhance their stock of human capital by providing employees with opportunities for development (Dong, Seo, & Bartol, 2014). Learning opportunities help individuals cope with unmet expectations (Proost *et al.*, 2012). Learning opportunities refer not only to formal training and development structures in place in the organisation, but they also relate to how the job extends the individual to learn additional skills and competencies (Proost *et al.*, 2012; Rau, 2006). Staff who perceive that they are denied the opportunity to utilise and develop their skills and knowledge will leave the organisation (Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Van Dijk, 2008). Conversely, Stagnitti, Schoo, Reid, and Dunbar (2005) established that there is no correlation between on-the-job training and intention to remain with the employer.

However, job training must not be equated with formal career and professional development which is broader and may be future oriented. For example, organisations may desire to use developmental job experiences to enhance human capital or talent (Dong *et al.*, 2014). This initiative is equally significant for individual employees because it enhances their career success. The initiative may be regarded as a signal of the organisation's intention to invest in its talent. Employees' perceptions or evaluations of such organisational initiatives are significant as their decision to remain or stay with the organisation may partly be influenced by them (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Turnover can be related to the perceived lack of career development opportunities in rural sites relative to those available to urban or "metropolitan" workers. Fisher and Fraser (2010) conducted an analysis of published research articles in order to define and describe career and work decisions that health professionals make around taking up rural employment. Their envisaged purpose was to strengthen recruitment and retention as a means to address the international scarcity of health workers in rural facilities. Although a rural lifestyle was appealing, a lack of further educational opportunities and professional isolation were deterrents (Fisher & Fraser, 2010). The

availability of employment opportunities for spouses also determines turnover decisions (Fisher & Fraser, 2010).

A study into the recruitment and retention of special-needs teachers in rural districts established the importance of professional development in providing these teachers with the confidence and abilities to remain in rural positions (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011). This study established that shortages in a particular profession in a rural area result in less than stringent selection criteria being used during recruitment. This in turn undermines employees' confidence in their skills and abilities particularly if they are not supported by suitable training and development. This lack of developmental support and confidence increases the inclination to seek out urban posts.

From a different perspective, another study (Clark, Smith, & Uota, 2013) found that organisational support in the form of professional career development was initially a retention factor for social workers, but later promotion provided more seasoned social workers with an incentive to remain with their employer. The plausible explanation is that social workers have different requirements at different stages of their careers which may be characterised by varying milestones and setbacks. Predominantly, however, the choice of promotion was for a position using the same skills set, that is, social work and not administrative, managerial or training roles. For this reason a lateral move into a specialisation may help to decrease turnover statistics. This study was undertaken because of the high turnover among social workers, which negatively affected social welfare outputs. The researchers found that both promotion and training were positively and significantly associated with retention. They went on to recommend that mentoring junior social workers should be one of the criteria necessary for promotion (Clark *et al.*, 2013).

Further developmental opportunities can be provided through mentorship programmes. A study in an academic and research faculty revealed the significant contribution of mentorship towards retention (Steele *et al.*, 2013). These researchers

looked into the contribution of mentoring and role models to recruitment and retention outcomes in an academic medical faculty. Mentorship is a formalised relationship between a mentor and mentee for the purpose of development. Initially, mentorships inspired medical officers in residency to pursue an academic career. Later, once in academia, mentorships contributed to their career development. In addition, having role models helped to direct the career development and trajectory of younger staff. However, junior female staff highlighted the lack of researcher role models as they wanted to be matched to a mentor with similar biographical details. Mentorship has more recently progressed to online virtual mentoring and social networking, which Gieskes (2010) also found contributed to retention.

2.2.3 Embeddedness

Job embeddedness is another factor that significantly contributes to retention of employees. It is defined as the extent to which individuals are “tied into” their organisation and community, creating a reluctance and in some cases inability to leave either (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001). Retention is likely to increase as ties to the organisation and local community develop after appointment to the position (Fisher & Fraser, 2010). Job embeddedness offers a possible solution to high turnover in the rural employment setting.

Job embeddedness can be visually represented in a matrix showing the individual’s links, fit and sacrifice in relation to her/his organisation and in relation to the local community (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). Links are the tangible network of contacts and connections that the individual has which fulfil functional needs. Fit is how well his/her abilities are matched to the requirements of the job and organisation. Sacrifice is what would be lost when leaving the organisation or community (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001).

Understanding and facilitating the employee’s extent of job embeddedness will assist the employer in predicting turnover intention and developing effective retention

policies and incentives (Mallol, Holtom, & Lee, 2007). These practices should also extend to include immigrant employees' immediate families who usually arrive in the new country with a sense of emotional loss for the networks that they leave behind, a feeling of not belonging as no new social networks have been created as yet and this is intensified by their experiences of cultural diversity.

2.2.4 Job satisfaction

Evans and Huxley (2009) showed that satisfaction or the lack thereof featured prominently in turnover intention. Job satisfaction is a generally positive disposition towards work and associated circumstances (Messmer, 2005). An organisation that actively enhances and facilitates employee satisfaction is more likely to become an "employer of choice" (Rehman, 2012). Those with longer tenure are less likely to plan to leave their current employer, but it was debatable whether this was out of loyalty or aversion to change (Evans & Huxley, 2009).

Omar, Majid, and Johari (2013) attempted to assist public hospitals in Malaysia to draft effective retention strategies because the dire shortage of nurses is a global and growing phenomenon. They confirmed the significant impact of job dissatisfaction as a reason to resign, but found that a sense of moral obligation of nurses could mediate this relationship.

Work characteristics that usually contribute to job satisfaction are autonomy and varied work responsibilities, the actual work, career and developmental opportunities, leadership, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, working conditions and remuneration (Bittner & Connor, 2012; Keane, Smith, Lincoln, & Fisher, 2011; Pietersen, 2005; Rehman, 2012; Rothmann & Buitendach, 2009). However, one should bear in mind that financial benefits only add to job satisfaction and motivation for a limited time (Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011). Although salary packages were regarded by management as contributors to effective recruitment and retention, a study showed

that high salary packages appear not to reduce turnover but were rather a response to scarce skills issues (Evans & Huxley, 2009).

2.2.5 Work-based identity and identification

Bothma and Roodt (2012) statistically established an extremely strong inverse relationship between work-based identity and turnover intention.

From an organisational psychology perspective social identity is the “who I am” in relation to organisational entities (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identification is the “state and process” of creating an identity through association with a group, vocation and organisation (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Identification with tasks, aspects and responsibilities of a job adds to the sense of identity. Employee identification helps to emotionally cement the sense of connection the employee has with the organisation and guides subsequent behaviour (Albert *et al.*, 2000). The strength of this identification underlies the degree to which the individual employee willingly takes responsibility for and ownership of the organisation's outputs and achievements (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bothma & Roodt, 2012).

Taking responsibility for work outputs and assimilating them into one's identity creates a collective identity (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006). In an extreme case of “over-identification”, the self becomes a permanent representative token of the work role. In other words, the sense of self is coupled to the larger sense of what the work and organisation do and represent (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006).

According to Saayman and Crafford (2011), work-based identity is a type of social identity. This study brings the new concept of “identity work” into the theory of social and work identity. Identity work is the ongoing process of creating an identity in various life contexts. Job characteristics, requirements and opportunities, specifically in the work context, facilitate this identity work and in this way employees find

meaning in work. However, this is a highly individualistic process because work activities that appeal to one individual, might be of no interest to another. Similarly an employee can have identities across the organisation in so far as he/she identifies with various departments and work units in the organisation and then with the organisation as a whole (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, identification with one facet of the organisation does not mean that the employee identifies equally with all facets (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010).

Shim, Hwang, and Lee (2009) established that a lack of professional identity relating to the work role and career leads to job dissatisfaction which, in turn, significantly contributes to turnover intention in social workers in Korea. In this group of participants, a weak professional identity was attributed to insufficient career opportunities, low financial packages, work stress and a poor professional reputation.

This appears to be a highly individualistic phenomenon. Nevertheless organisations could use this knowledge to improve employee satisfaction, performance and ultimately retention.

2.2.6 Withdrawal and turnover

Finally employees signal their dissatisfaction with retention practices of employers by withdrawal and ultimately resigning and leaving.

Factors contributing to withdrawal and turnover can be grouped into the following four categories (Porter & Steers, 1973; Wöcke & Heymann, 2012):

- *organisational*: pay, promotion
- *immediate work environment*: leadership, feedback, recognition, work unit size, peer group interaction
- *job*: content, routineness, autonomy, responsibility, role clarity
- *personal*: age, tenure, job and interests match, personality, family circumstances, gender, race and education

Employees especially rate these factors on how fairly and equitably the employer administers them (Porter & Steers, 1973). Withdrawal is a sequential process because the cumulative effect of factors mounts up, creating an overall dissatisfaction (Porter & Steers, 1973). Negatively, these factors contribute to job dissatisfaction which is the precursor to withdrawal. No one single incentive will improve retention; it is always influenced by a multitude of factors (Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011).

Certain researchers posit that it is incorrect to assume that turnover and retention are on the opposite ends of the same continuum. Diminishing those factors that cause high turnover will not necessarily by implication improve retention (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006; Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, *et al.*, 2001). In other words, incentives that encourage employees to remain with the organisation may eventually be outweighed by external factors that compel the same employees to resign.

Scanlan, Still, Stewart, and Croaker (2010) concurred that employee resignation is not always the result of failed internal organisational retention efforts. It could come about because of personal factors external to the organisation such as a spouse not finding employment opportunities in the local rural community.

Another study viewed turnover from a positive perspective by concluding that poor performers are more likely to leave. This study revealed that those who rated their performance as good, were more inclined to be satisfied with their job and therefore remain with their employer (Yurchisin & Park, 2010).

Employers should take cognisance of all internal and external factors that could contribute to withdrawal and, where possible, intercede with better talent management practices.

Concluding paragraph to retention section

In summary, retention practices could also be informed by signalling theory (Huang, Lin, & Chuang, 2006). For instance the time and effort the organisation is prepared to invest in orientation and developmental opportunities “signals” to employees the value the organisation attaches to them, as employees. The more valued they are the more likely employees are to remain with the organisation. Similarly an organisation could interpret the extent of job satisfaction, embeddedness and work identity as employees’ signals of their intention to remain with the organisation.

2.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In line with the research aims, this chapter defined and explored recruitment and retention chiefly from employees’ perspectives. Research on organisational attraction, realistic job previews, strategic recruitment, branding, values, networking and labour market influences, were included under the recruitment literature. Literature about subjective work experiences and expectations, orientation and induction, professional development, the fit, link and sacrifice of embeddedness, job satisfaction, work-based identification and factors for withdrawal were discussed in the retention section.

In accordance with the requirement that the next chapter be in the format of a journal article, chapter 3 contains an explanation of the scientific orientation to this study and the research design. In addition, the recruitment and retention related findings are presented. The discussion integrates the findings with the literature aided by a schematic diagram. The article concludes with limitations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 3 ARTICLE

Employees' experiences of recruitment and retention in a research unit located in a rural setting

ABSTRACT

Orientation

The discipline and practice of Industrial & Organisational Psychology abounds with accounts and chronicles of the world of work undergoing incessant changes that are sometimes dramatic. Universities and other higher education institutions are not immune or exempted from the pressures created by the new world of work. Given the enormity of the primary task of these organisations and the environmental challenges, universities greatly benefit by recruiting and retaining competent personnel, both academic and administrative.

Research purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore employees' experiences of recruitment and retention practices at a university's research unit through the lens of signalling theory and to make recommendations that could assist the unit in streamlining its recruitment and retention strategy and practices to improve staff retention and thereby demonstrate an operational model that could be used by other research units in the same university.

Motivation for the study

The motivation driving this study was that exploring recruitment and retention experiences of staff at the university research unit could reveal significant insights that could help to refine the organisation's talent management practices, thereby facilitating the attraction and retention of valuable talent. In addition, the study was motivated by the fact that the organisation is located in a rural setting in South Africa. The rural location of the institution presents it with unique staff sourcing and retention challenges.

Research design, approach and method

This qualitative study was designed from an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist perspective in order to facilitate the exploration and understanding of subjective employees' experiences. Employees working in the research unit were selected to participate in this study through purposive sampling. Data was sourced from the participants during individual one-on-one in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis techniques were then applied to the data.

Main findings

Professional development, organisational appeal and networking opportunities make this research unit an employer of choice. These factors, among others, are both attractors and incentives to remain with the organisation, which significantly outweigh factors which discourage attraction and retention.

Practical and managerial implications

This research gives input into the possible ways in which this research unit could streamline Human Resources and talent management practices in order to optimise

attraction and retention factors, thereby demonstrating an operational model that could be used by other research units in the same university.

Contribution and value-add

This study provided an overview of employees' experiences of recruitment and retention practices of a research unit based in rural South Africa. In addition, it provided a schematic representation of the findings integrated with academic literature. These findings may be of relevance to other research units within the university.

Key words

Personnel psychology, human resources management, recruitment, retention, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Key focus of the study

A host of factors internal and external to business impact on an organisation's ability to recruit and retain talent. External factors can include structural unemployment (Daniels, 2007) and labour market influences (Moriarty, Wickham, Krings, & Bobek, 2012), while internal factors encompass perceptions of equity (Fraser, 2010; Mullei *et al.*, 2010) and career advancement prospects (Steele, Fisman, & Davidson, 2013; Van Dijk, 2008). Each has a unique but crucial role in an organisation's ability to attract and retain people. From an individual's perspective, an employee's decisions to join and remain with the organisation are based on the intricate interaction of numerous external and internal factors. Internal factors are encapsulated under organisational, managerial and personal realms (Brown, Fraser, Wong, Muise, & Cummings, 2013). The fact that these factors are subjectively experienced by individual employees amplifies the intricacy of employee attraction and retention challenges with which organisations have to contend. Hence an account of employees' experiences can provide input into the improvement of human resources management (HRM) strategies and practices.

Background to the study

The discipline and practice of Industrial & Organisational Psychology abounds with accounts and chronicles of the world of work undergoing incessant changes that are sometimes dramatic (Cascio, 2001; Cilliers & Smit, 2006; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). Globalisation, workforce diversification and technological advancement are identified as some of the factors that are driving changes in the world of work and have placed tremendous pressures on organisations to perform. In this milieu it has become imperative for organisations to

attract and retain the most qualified talent in order to become and remain competitive (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Universities and other higher education institutions are not immune from the pressures created by the new world of work. Universities are being held more accountable in terms of deliverables by all stakeholders in a tougher economic and competitive climate (Molefe, 2010). For example, government expects tertiary institutions to become more economically viable (Singh, 2011). In South Africa, the funding of universities has changed dramatically with amongst other criteria, funding being based on the throughput or success rate of students and research outputs (North, Zewotir, & Murray, 2011). Through research and tuition universities are able to develop human capacity, generate new knowledge and engage with the public and policy formulation (Cantwell & Mathies, 2012; Coker-Kolo & Darley, 2013).

Given the enormity of the primary task of these organisations and the environmental challenges intimated above, universities greatly benefit by recruiting and retaining competent personnel, both academic and administrative (Bix, Anderson-Fletcher, & Whitney, 2013; Molefe, 2010).

Researchers on talent attraction and retention have used diverse lenses to facilitate understanding of how individuals decide to join and remain in organisations or how employers encourage individuals to join and remain with their organisations (Cascio, 2014; Celani & Singh, 2011). On how organisations can leverage employee retention, Cascio (2014) identified employer branding, performance management and human resource development as fundamental.

From Cascio (2014) one immediately realises that organisational initiatives are significant to enhance recruitment and retention as employees make use of appraisal and intuition to decide whether to join and remain with their employers. Therefore both the organisational initiatives and employees' reaction to these initiatives are significant for understanding talent procurement and retention (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Research purpose

This study endeavours to develop an insightful understanding of how individual employees react to organisational initiatives such as those identified by Cascio (2014) by unveiling the participants' experiences of recruitment and retention in a research unit located in a rural setting. It is commonly acknowledged that recruitment and retention of employees are complex at the best of times but are intricate and more of a challenge in rural settings (Ditlopo, Blaauw, Bidwell, & Thomas, 2011). Pressure is placed on employers in rural settings by the inclination of the working population to migrate to urban centres in search of work with the expectation of better income, career development opportunities and employment prospects (Fisher & Fraser, 2010; Mafunisa & Tsanwani, 2011; Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Salmon, Curtin, Ginnivan, & Neumayer, 2007). This study is therefore not oblivious to the challenges that the issue of locality introduces. However, the study relies on the views of the participants to unveil their experiences of recruitment and retention in this organisation.

The study provides a broad overview of the extant literature on recruitment and retention and develops an insightful understanding of the participants' experiences of recruitment and retention in the chosen organisation. Accordingly, the thrust of the study is twofold:

- An enhanced theoretical understanding of employee recruitment and retention
- An enhanced understanding of how individual participants appraise organisational initiatives to attract and retain talent

Trends from the research literature

The extant literature on recruitment and retention reveal that these are of vital importance to organisations because competitive advantage is anchored in the mix and quality of personnel that the organisation attracts and retains (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2012; Phillips & Gully, 2015). Despite the vitality of recruitment and retention functions in organisational competitiveness and the huge body of knowledge relating

to the two human resource or talent management functions, Phillips & Gully (2015) have censured developments in the field as lacking in theory.

Globally, organisations are increasingly finding it difficult to recruit and retain skilled talent (Goud, 2014; Cascio, 2014). The global economic recovery has accelerated competition amongst employers for skilled talent with the shift in the market for talent swinging from the buyers to the sellers (Cascio, 2014). Under this economic climate, skilled talent tend to have an upper hand and employers have to continuously develop talent management strategies that will ensure attraction and retention of skilled talent to their organisation (Cascio, 2014; Mohlala, Goldman, & Goosen, 2012). However, talent's attraction to potential employers and decisions to remain with the employing organisations has been explored from various theoretical lenses that include signalling theory (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Regarding recruitment, potential employees use a variety of sources such as their friends and family and media to obtain information about their potential employers (Dustmann, Glitz & Schönberg, 2011; Strehlke, 2010). Potential employees also evaluate the nature and characteristics of organisation by observing cues and their own experiences (Gregory, Meade, & Thompson, 2013). In this way they source information that as yet has been unknown to them. For instance positive and negative signals can be observed during their interactions with the interview panel (Saks & Uggerslev, 2009). If the interview panel appears to be disinterested and unfriendly then the job applicant will assume that the organisation is similarly not a hospitable place in which to work. Signalling theory can assist to explain job applicants' attraction to the organisation and subsequent decision to apply to and remain with the organisation (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Regarding retention, for existing employees, appropriate and relevant HRM practices signal that they are valued by the organisation and considered worth the investment (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013). However, it needs to be pointed out that signals come from both the organisation and the individual employees (Celani &

Singh, 2011). During recruitment, prospective employers also try and fill in the gaps of knowledge about job applicants from other factors apart from what they say during the interview (Spence, 1973). For instance a badly formatted CV with numerous spelling mistakes is taken by the organisation to indicate that the job applicant is not able to pay attention to detail.

The chapter conceptualises the constructs of recruitment and retention and elucidates the factors that impact on organisations' ability to attract and retain talent. First the concept of recruitment is provided. The factors that are likely to have a bearing on organisations ability to attract talent are then discussed. The extant literature on recruitment identified a plethora of factors that affect organisations' ability to attract talent (Cascio, 2014; Ford, Moore, & Scott, 2011; Goud, 2014; Mohlala *et al.*, 2012).

Organisations' ability to sustain their competitive edge cannot be guaranteed solely by talent attraction. Organisations have to ensure talent retention through their talent management strategies and practices. Failure to retain talent may have dire consequences for both the operational and strategic levels of the organisation (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2012). The chapter conceptualises the construct of talent retention and discusses the issues that influence talent retention in organisations. The extant literature identified a host of factors to explain organisations ability to retain talent (Cascio, 2014; Celani & Singh, 2011; Goud, 2014; Wright & Huang, 2012).

Recruitment

Breaugh (2013) defines recruitment from an operational perspective as the process that starts with alerting job seekers about a vacancy and ends with making the job offer to the most suitable candidate. However from a strategic perspective, recruitment can be defined as proactively identifying and addressing skills requirements of the organisation and thereafter using various means to source and attract suitable talent (Phillips & Gully, 2015). This process includes using signalling mechanisms to provide candidates with a realistic and appealing picture of the

organisation and job so that the most suitable candidates are encouraged to apply and participate in the recruitment process (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Modern technology and the internet, in particular, turn the world into a global village where many people are able to apply for a vacancy irrespective of the country in which they live (Rogerson & Crush, 2007; Sylva & Mol, 2009). Although organisations are easily able to recruit from anywhere in the world (Young, Noble, Mahon, Maxted, Grant, & Sibbald, 2010), shortages of skills on a global scale are still prevalent (Gamble, Patrick, & Peach, 2010; Horwitz, 2013). In many instances, the direction of the flow of talent is from developing economies to developed economies (Eckenwiler, 2009; Farndale, Scullion, & Sparrow, 2010; Rogerson & Crush, 2007; Tucho, 2009; Young *et al.*, 2010). South Africa, for instance, supplies the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand with health workers, scientists, technologists, professionals and engineers (Maharaj, 2010; Rogerson & Crush, 2007). This means that as an emerging economy, South Africa has to be particularly vigilant in developing, sourcing and retaining its human resources, particularly in scarce skills categories.

In the 21st century business milieu, an organisation's success hinges on its ability to recruit and retain people who can and will do their jobs in accordance with the mission of the organisation (Dermody & Holloway, 1998; Goud, 2014). Employee recruitment and retention are integral components of talent management (Farndale *et al.*, 2010).

The review of literature revealed that the subject of recruitment has been studied from numerous perspectives and there is not one integrated overarching recruitment theory (Breugh, 2013). However, there is some consensus regarding a host of factors that have a major influence on organisations' ability to attract talent. These factors are discussed next.

Strategic recruitment

The talent management of organisations that sustain long-term competitive edge hinges on its alignment with the vision, mission and strategy of the organisation. To maintain long-term competitive edge, an organisation needs to develop a talent management strategy that is aligned with its vision, mission and strategy. Talent management cannot be carried out on an ad hoc or piecemeal basis, particularly in an upward economic milieu (Cascio, 2014; Phillips & Gully, 2015). Optimal recruitment and retention practices are those that evolve from the vision, mission and strategies of the organisation (Lindgren & Hixson, 2010). Aligning recruitment practices to the organisation's strategic direction provides an opportunity to raise the bar from "implementing strategy" to "driving strategy" (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009). Through attracting and hiring the correct talent with the required skills in the current and anticipated vacancies, organisations are able to operationalise organisational strategies (Horwitz, 2012). Recruitment investments and costs can be justified by visibly measuring talent contribution to the advancement of organisational goals (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009).

Potential or new employees should be attracted to the organisation with the primary objective of selecting high calibre talent that should be able to advance the strategy and goals of the employing organisation. This process is facilitated by submerging applicants in the organisational strategy from the outset of the recruitment process by ensuring that all cues and signals coming from the organisation and recruiting personnel give appropriate messages (Celani & Singh, 2011; Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009).

In the case of higher education institutions, strategic recruitment efforts improve the capacity of their research units to deliver outputs such as collaborative research, increased grant funding and published peer-reviewed journal articles (Chung *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, the strategic imperatives should be clearly communicated to the applicants or those who have just entered the organisation.

Talent management as a strategically aligned practice should improve attraction of skilled talent so that employees are able to improve productivity and witness their contribution to the vision of the organisation (Van Dijk, 2008).

Talent attraction is more than the financial package that employees receive from organisations and applicants' needs such as personal development plans and career growth have become vital considerations (Van Dijk, 2008). Organisations strive to make both their jobs and the organisation attractive by taking cues from potential employees (Celani & Singh, 2011).

At the recruitment stage, applicants evaluate their capacity to contribute to the organisation's vision and goals. Signalling theory affirms that the vision and mission statements of an organisation can be used by job applicants as a means to gathering information about the organisation from which they then extrapolate how the organisation operates and its rationale for existence (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). This establishes an attraction, or lack thereof, to the organisation.

Attraction and Realistic Job Previews (RJP)

It has already been explained that recruitment is the process of attracting staff with appropriate skills to fulfil roles and functions in the organisation (Botha, Bussin, & De Swardt, 2011). Recruitment starts with identified vacancies or vacancies that are likely to exist in future and performance gaps in operational functions. As a result, organisations develop both the job descriptions and specifications for the current or future vacancies. However, the information is often shared with potential employees through advertisement which may happen internally and externally to the organisation (Van Dijk, 2008).

Job advertisements are one of the primary sources providing job seekers with information on the company and the job and therefore should be relevant, specific and credible in order to attract suitable candidates and ensure their willingness to

apply (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012). This includes appropriately branding the organisation as an appealing employer (Cascio, 2014). Information about organisations may be obtained from a variety of sources that include friends and family, newspapers, internet, etc. Attraction is possibly the first experience applicants have with the employing organisation. Their reactions to cues and signals contained in advertisements (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012) and on corporate web pages (Allen, Biggane, Pitts, Otondo, & Van Scotter, 2013) translate into their willingness to apply for the post. The more realistic the information provided during the initial recruitment stage, the more likely employees are to experience job satisfaction as job incumbents (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012).

A realistic job preview (RJP) is defined as an honest and unbiased description of the organisation, job requirements and characteristics as given to the applicant during recruitment (Breugh, 2013; Phillips, 1998). This type of information goes out as cues and signals to the job applicants with the aim of effectively managing their expectations. In addition, RJP's successfully link recruitment and retention, as the resultant job satisfaction leads directly to an intention to remain with the organisation (Earnest, Allen, & Landis, 2011; Suszko & Breugh, 1986).

Wanous (1989) affirmed both the utility and validity of RJP's in assisting applicants in deciding about their suitability for the post and organisation. Management has to determine the thrust of the realistic job previews to applicants and new hires when such previews are planned. Decisions about implementation may range from the timing, motivating reason, development, format, content and extent. Phillips (1998) emphasised that the format and timing would depend on the required outcomes, such as job satisfaction, performance and reduced turnover intention.

RJP's contribute towards the success of the hiring process because unsuitable applicants already withdraw on the basis of the preview received. Remaining applicants may be more committed and confident about their decision because an RJP

enables them to make more of an informed choice and bolsters their coping ability during their tenure (Suszko & Breugh, 1986).

Branding and matching of values

Attraction to the organisation is increased when there is a match between employer and employee values (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Espoused corporate values give prospective applicants an opportunity to uncover more information about the organisation (Gregory *et al.*, 2013).

Individuals have fundamental enduring values consisting of their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Similarly, organisations choose to align themselves with specific values which direct organisational behaviour (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012). Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins (2006) analysed research studies on employee values and categorised values as extrinsic, intrinsic, altruistic and prestige, while De Cooman and Pepermans (2012) added interpersonal values.

Extrinsic values are met with pay packages and other benefits provided by the employer. Intrinsic values are found in challenging work, professional development and advancement. Altruistic values are expressed in concern for and contributing to others and communities, and prestige values are related to influence, power and status. Interpersonal values are experienced in social interaction with people in the workplace (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012).

Organisational values are affirmed in organisational vision and mission statements and are evident in the corporate image and identity as portrayed to the wider public through advertising and branding. Appropriate branding could be used as a competitive strategy to attract and retain the best talent and combat global skills scarcity. Botha *et al.* (2011) identified the following building blocks in their “brand predictive model” that would be effective in guiding talent recruitment and retention, thereby giving organisations the competitive edge:

- Identify the personal needs of the required talent.
- Adhere to an employer value that is distinct and better than other prospective employers.
- Strategically align HR practices with the corporate brand.
- Actively and positively communicate and market the organisational brand.
- Deliver on the brand “promise” (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006).
- Track and measure brand indicators and outputs.

Values that are given expression in a clear visible corporate brand enable an organisation to more easily attract better suited job applicants who readily buy-in and commit to the organisation from the outset because of the signals and cues evident in the corporate brand and values (Jaidi, Van Hooft, & Arends, 2011).

Networking aids organisations and job seekers

Networks are social structures that give members access to resources and knowledge to which they would ordinarily not have had access. Networking can be described through the social capital theory (Portes, 1998) as informal and formal social networks that provide assistance to individuals through career and work opportunities merely because they are affiliated to that particular group or network (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2007). According to Portes (1998), the type of network and the extent of the resources available to the network may result in positive or negative social capital outflows.

From a recruitment perspective, industry-based networks consisting of suppliers, buyers and other organisational stakeholders (Almeida, Fernando, & Sheridan, 2012) have access to a wider range of individuals than the employing organisation and can therefore alert the employer to potentially suitable applicants and similarly advise job seekers of vacancies. Professional and social networks extend an individual’s possible range of search for suitable vacancies (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). It

is the experience of “who one knows” and “being in the right place at the right time” that assists the job seeker to hear of suitable vacancies.

According to Mulenga and Van Lill (2007), networking as a means of finding suitable vacancies and applicants has been used effectively to address the issue of skills shortage, even though networking appears to only benefit those who have links – direct or indirect – to the recruiting organisation. This means that suitably skilled foreign or national workers may in fact miss out on local opportunities. However, Almeida *et al.* (2012) found that networks play a crucial role in sourcing immigrant professionals. This is of particular importance when organisations are faced with critical and scarce skills within.

Labour market influences

An understanding of labour market influences helps to shed additional light on the impact scarce and critical skills have on recruitment and retention practices. Simply put, the labour market is the term that describes the negotiations that take place between employers and job seekers regarding the skills that are available to meet organisational staffing requirements (Horwitz, 2013). Rosenbaum, Kariya, Settersten and Maier (1990) used signalling theory to describe the interplay that happens within the labour market as prospective employers and job seekers send out ‘signals’ which provide suggestions of their most positive attributes.

Prevalent labour market conditions influence applicants’ reactions to the recruitment practices of organisations (Moriarty, Wickham, Krings, & Bobek, 2012). An economic boom during which there is a greater demand for skills places the negotiating power with job seekers. It also means that there is likely to be higher turnover of existing employees because they find better jobs elsewhere. In contrast, employers in a boom of labour supply adopt informal and less innovative recruitment and selection practices because they know they will easily find suitable applicants (Moriarty *et al.*, 2012). High skills shortage everywhere in the world has a negative impact on the

labour market and impedes economic growth and the creation of new jobs (Sebusi, 2007).

Specific employment criteria of organisations can account for the relative scarcity of skills, for instance, when the vacancy is situated in a rural area but suitable applicants prefer to work in urban cities. This illustrates a geographic scarcity of skills in contrast to an absolute scarcity which exists if the demand for certain skills exceeds the supply (Hancock, Steinbach, Nesbitt, Adler, & Auerswald, 2009).

Concluding paragraph to recruitment section

The five sections above describe recruitment related factors and practices that assist organisations to gain competitive advantage by the type of job seekers they are able to attract and appoint. Seen through the lens of signalling theory these factors all provide applicants and employees with additional information which helps them to realise the extent of their attraction to the organisation.

Retention

Retention strategies aim to retain talented employees who continue to make positive contributions to the outputs of the organisation (Festing & Schäfer, 2014). These talent management interventions include identifying and addressing the needs of the employees so that they remain with the organisation, but simultaneously ensuring that these needs match the organisation's strategic and operational requirements. Talent management ensures job fit and the appropriate utilisation of skills (Deery & Jago, 2015) but also includes developing and upskilling which signals to employees that the organisation is committed to providing them with career progress and job satisfaction thereby encouraging employees to remain with the organisation (Deery & Jago, 2015; Huang, Lin & Chuang, 2005).

Employees remain with an organisation on the basis of how well this affiliation fulfils their needs (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Retention is the outcome of the cumulative effect of

subjective experiences that employees have with the organisation and how these experiences meet various needs. The experiences are cumulative from the very first interaction the individual has with the organisation as job seeker up to the time the employee leaves the organisation.

Understanding the subjective experience of the employee changes the focus from the organisation's outputs and outcomes to the individual's experience of and at work (Weiss & Rupp, 2011). According to Coetzee and Bergh (2009), subjective work experiences determine the extent of satisfaction and meaning that employees find in work. This actual experience also includes the employees' assessment, opinion and feelings of the experience underpinned by personal attitudes and characteristics. It is not just a mere description of the event itself. External and internal circumstantial factors also contribute to the experience.

Although an organisation has certain outcomes in mind when implementing retention practices, these practices do not necessarily have the desired outcome because experience and perception are subjective functions of employees' interpretations. By exploring "experiences" per se, one can establish whether or not retention practices are effective (Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011). Monitoring and evaluation post-implementation are equally essential and beneficial.

Retention challenges also revolve around managing and meeting of expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973; Proost, Van Ruysseveldt, & Van Dijke, 2012). Expectations are different for every individual. "Unmet expectations" form the gap between what the employee expected of the organisation and job and their actual experiences. Employers should proactively engage with each employee to explore and address his/her particular expectations so that the interventions are appropriate (Porter & Steers, 1973).

Orientation and induction

Organisations seek to bolster their employee retention strategies by engaging in numerous talent management practices such as orientation and induction. Proost *et al.* (2012) referred to orientation as a sense-making process that new employees' experience, which helps to make their expectations more realistic. Erasmus and Breier (2009) proposed that new employees, with limited to no work experience, are most in need of orientation and induction. However, Baruch and Hall (2004) indicated that with the diverse nature of new employees in seniority and experience, induction programmes should be available to all employees new to the organisation. Orientation and induction programmes are usually planned and directed interventions that assist new employees in understanding and adopting the practices, norms, values and culture of the organisation.

In light of "the shortage of health professionals in rural communities" Roots and Li (2013) analysed published research articles that covered the recruitment and retention strategies of physical therapists in rural areas. Induction into the rural environment prior to appointment underpinned the success of recruiting and retaining these therapists in rural practices.

Various studies on retention have identified that orientation programmes help to reduce turnover intention (Aaron, 2011; Bakker, Butler, Fitch, Green, Olson, & Cummings, 2010; Mills & Millsteed, 2002; Roots & Li, 2013). A preceptor pilot programme study in which new nurses were paired with existing employees for orientation, training and mentorship, resulted in a significant improvement in the retention of the new staff within the first year of implementation and assessment of the programme (Aaron, 2011). Oncology nurses interviewed by Bakker *et al.* (2010) identified amongst other factors, new employees' orientation as essential in order to improve working conditions and assist in retaining nurses. Another study listed orientation as one of the organisational supports that could encourage job seekers to accept rural posts, but a lack of such orientation would become a reason to leave when the organisation did not deliver (Mills & Millsteed, 2002; Roots & Li, 2013).

Spouses' difficulties in adapting to a new country or town can also negatively affect employees' settling in and acclimatising ability (Gupta, Banerjee, & Gaur, 2012). Spousal adjustment is usually to community, language, culture, work opportunities and geographic characteristics. Family as an external factor to the retention process does play a role in decisions of the employee to remain or to leave. Organisations should be cognisant of this and find ways to facilitate the family's move and social adaptation. This is a simple solution that could prove to be a cost saver in preference to the expense of restarting the recruitment process.

It is evident from the above that orientation and induction can encompass many different programs and proactive interventions, but in whatever form orientation and induction should be an integral formalised part of onboarding new employees. In spite of everything employees' experiences during the orientation and induction period are pivotal for the evaluation the employees attach to the decision to remain or leave the organisation.

Developmental opportunities

Organisations endeavour to enhance their stock of human capital by providing employees with opportunities for development (Dong, Seo, & Bartol, 2014). Learning opportunities help individuals cope with unmet expectations (Proost *et al.*, 2012). Learning opportunities refer not only to formal training and development structures in place in the organisation, but they also relate to how the job extends the individual to learn additional skills and competencies (Proost *et al.*, 2012; Rau, 2006). Employees who perceive that they are denied the opportunity to utilise and develop their skills and knowledge will leave the organisation (Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Van Dijk, 2008). Conversely, Stagnitti, Schoo, Reid, and Dunbar (2005) established that there is no correlation between on-the-job training and intention to remain with the employer.

However, job training must not be equated with formal career and professional development which is broader and may be future oriented. For example,

organisations may desire to use developmental job experiences to enhance human capital or talent (Dong *et al.*, 2014). This initiative is equally significant for individual employees because it enhances their career success. The initiative may be regarded as a signal of the organisation's intention to invest in its talent. Employees' perceptions or evaluations of such organisational initiatives are significant as their decision to remain or stay with the organisation may partly be influenced by them (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Turnover can be related to the perceived lack of career development opportunities in rural sites relative to those available to urban or "metropolitan" workers. Fisher and Fraser (2010) conducted an analysis of published research articles in order to define and describe career and work decisions that health professionals make around taking up rural employment. Their envisaged purpose was to strengthen recruitment and retention as a means to address the international scarcity of health workers in rural facilities. Although a rural lifestyle was appealing, a lack of further educational opportunities and professional isolation were deterrents (Fisher & Fraser, 2010). The availability of employment opportunities for spouses also determines turnover decisions (Fisher & Fraser, 2010).

A study into the recruitment and retention of special-needs teachers in rural districts established the importance of professional development in providing these teachers with the confidence and abilities to remain in rural positions (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011). Berry *et al.* established that shortages in a particular profession in a rural area result in less than stringent selection criteria being used during recruitment. This in turn undermines employees' confidence in their skills and abilities particularly if they are not supported by suitable training and development. This lack of developmental support and confidence increases the inclination to seek out urban posts.

From a different perspective, another study (Clark, Smith, & Uota, 2013) found that organisational support in the form of professional career development was initially a

retention factor for social workers, but later promotion provided more seasoned social workers with an incentive to remain with their employer. The plausible explanation is that social workers have different requirements at different stages of their careers which may be characterised by varying milestones and setbacks. Predominantly, however, the choice of promotion was for a position using the same skills set, that is, social work and not administrative, managerial or training roles. For this reason a lateral move into a specialisation may help to decrease turnover statistics. Clark *et al.* undertook the study because of the high turnover among social workers, which negatively affected social welfare outputs. The researchers found that both promotion and training were positively and significantly associated with retention. They went on to recommend that mentoring junior social workers should be one of the criteria necessary for promotion (Clark *et al.*, 2013).

Further developmental opportunities can be provided through mentorship programmes. A study in an academic and research faculty revealed the significant contribution of mentorship towards retention (Steele *et al.*, 2013). These researchers looked into the contribution of mentoring and role models to recruitment and retention outcomes in an academic medical faculty. Mentorship is a formalised relationship between a mentor and mentee for the purpose of development. Initially, mentorships inspired medical officers in residency to pursue an academic career. Later, once in academia, mentorships contributed to their career development. In addition, having role models helped to direct the career development and trajectory of younger staff. However, junior female staff highlighted the lack of researcher role models as they wanted to be matched to a mentor with similar biographical details. Mentorship has more recently progressed to online virtual mentoring and social networking, which Gieskes (2010) also found contributed to retention.

Embeddedness

Job embeddedness is another factor that significantly contributes to retention of employees. It is defined as the extent to which individuals are “tied into” their

organisation and community, creating a reluctance and in some cases inability to leave (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001). Retention is likely to increase as ties to the organisation and local community develop after appointment to the position (Fisher & Fraser, 2010). Job embeddedness offers a possible solution to high turnover in the rural employment setting.

Job embeddedness can be visually represented in a matrix showing the individual's links, fit and sacrifice in relation to her/his organisation and in relation to the local community (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). Links are the tangible network of contacts and connections that the individual has which fulfil functional needs. Fit is how well his/her abilities are matched to the requirements of the job and organisation. Sacrifice is what would be lost when leaving the organisation or community (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001).

Understanding and facilitating the employee's extent of job embeddedness will assist the employer in predicting turnover intention and developing effective retention policies and incentives (Mallol, Holtom, & Lee, 2007). These practices should also extend to include immigrant employees' immediate families who usually arrive in the new country with a sense of emotional loss for the networks that they leave behind, a feeling of not belonging as no new social networks have been created as yet and this is intensified by their experiences of cultural diversity.

Job satisfaction

Evans and Huxley (2009) showed that satisfaction or the lack thereof featured prominently in turnover intention. Job satisfaction is a generally positive disposition towards work and associated circumstances (Messmer, 2005). An organisation that actively enhances and facilitates employee satisfaction is more likely to become an "employer of choice" (Rehman, 2012). Those with longer tenure are less likely to plan to leave their current employer, but it was debatable whether this was out of loyalty or aversion to change (Evans & Huxley, 2009).

Omar, Majid, and Johari (2013) attempted to assist public hospitals in Malaysia to draft effective retention strategies because the dire shortage of nurses is a global and growing phenomenon. They confirmed the significant impact of job dissatisfaction as a reason to resign, but found that a sense of moral obligation of nurses could mediate this relationship.

Work characteristics that usually contribute to job satisfaction are autonomy and varied work responsibilities, the actual work, career and developmental opportunities, leadership, interpersonal relationships with colleagues, working conditions and remuneration (Bittner & Connor, 2012; Keane, Smith, Lincoln, & Fisher, 2011; Pietersen, 2005; Rehman, 2012; Rothmann & Buitendach, 2009). However, one should bear in mind that financial benefits only add to job satisfaction and motivation for a limited time (Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011). Although salary packages were regarded by management as contributors to effective recruitment and retention, a study showed that high salary packages appear not to reduce turnover but were rather a response to scarce skills issues (Evans & Huxley, 2009).

Work-based identity and identification

Bothma and Roodt (2012) statistically established an extremely strong inverse relationship between work-based identity and turnover intention.

From an organisational psychology perspective social identity is the “who I am” in relation to organisational entities (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identification is the “state and process” of creating an identity through association with a group, vocation and organisation (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Identification with tasks, aspects and responsibilities of a job adds to the sense of identity. Employee identification helps to emotionally cement the sense of connection the employee has with the organisation and guides subsequent behaviour (Albert *et al.*, 2000). The strength of this identification underlies the degree to which the individual employee willingly takes responsibility for and ownership of the

organisation's outputs and achievements (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bothma & Roodt, 2012).

Taking responsibility for work outputs and assimilating them into one's identity creates a collective identity (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006). In an extreme case of “over-identification”, the self becomes a permanent representative token of the work role. In other words, the sense of self is coupled to the larger sense of what the work and organisation do and represent (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006).

According to Saayman and Crafford (2011), work-based identity is a type of social identity. This study brings the new concept of “identity work” into the theory of social and work identity. Identity work is the ongoing process of creating an identity in various life contexts. Job characteristics, requirements and opportunities, specifically in the work context, facilitate this identity work and in this way employees find meaning in work. However, this is a highly individualistic process because work activities that appeal to one individual, might be of no interest to another. Similarly an employee can have identities across the organisation in so far as he/she identifies with various departments and work units in the organisation and then with the organisation as a whole (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, identification with one facet of the organisation does not mean that the employee identifies equally with all facets (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010).

Shim, Hwang, and Lee (2009) established that a lack of professional identity relating to the work role and career leads to job dissatisfaction which, in turn, significantly contributes to turnover intention in social workers in Korea. In this group of participants, a weak professional identity was attributed to insufficient career opportunities, low financial packages, work stress and a poor professional reputation.

This appears to be a highly individualistic phenomenon. Nevertheless organisations could use this knowledge to improve employee satisfaction, performance and ultimately retention.

Withdrawal and turnover

Finally employees signal their dissatisfaction with retention practices of employers by withdrawal and ultimately resigning and leaving.

Factors contributing to withdrawal and turnover can be grouped into the following four categories (Porter & Steers, 1973; Wöcke & Heymann, 2012):

- *organisational*: pay, promotion
- *immediate work environment*: leadership, feedback, recognition, work unit size, peer group interaction
- *job*: content, routineness, autonomy, responsibility, role clarity
- *personal*: age, tenure, job and interests match, personality, family circumstances, gender, race and education

Employees especially rate these factors on how fairly and equitably the employer administers them (Porter & Steers, 1973). Withdrawal is a sequential process because the cumulative effect of factors mounts up, creating an overall dissatisfaction (Porter & Steers, 1973). Negatively, these factors contribute to job dissatisfaction which is the precursor to withdrawal. No one single incentive will improve retention; it is always influenced by a multitude of factors (Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011).

Certain researchers posit that it is incorrect to assume that turnover and retention are on the opposite ends of the same continuum. Diminishing those factors that cause high turnover will not necessarily by implication improve retention (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006; Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, *et al.*, 2001). In other words, incentives that encourage employees to remain with the organisation may eventually be outweighed by external factors that compel the same employees to resign.

Scanlan, Still, Stewart, and Croaker (2010) concurred that employee resignation is not always the result of failed internal organisational retention efforts. It could come

about because of personal factors external to the organisation such as a spouse not finding employment opportunities in the local rural community.

Another study viewed turnover from a positive perspective by concluding that poor performers are more likely to leave. This study revealed that those who rated their performance as good, were more inclined to be satisfied with their job and therefore remain with their employer (Yurchisin & Park, 2010).

Employers should take cognisance of all internal and external factors that could contribute to withdrawal and, where possible, intercede with better talent management practices.

Concluding paragraph to retention section

In summary, retention practices could also be informed by signalling theory (Huang, Lin, & Chuang, 2006). For instance the time and effort the organisation is prepared to invest in orientation and developmental opportunities “signals” to employees the value the organisation attaches to them, as employees. The more valued they are the more likely employees are to remain with the organisation. Similarly an organisation could interpret the extent of job satisfaction, embeddedness and work identity as employees’ signals of their intention to remain with the organisation.

Research problem and objectives

The review of the extant literature in the field of Industrial & Organisational Psychology, specifically Personnel Psychology reveals that a huge body of knowledge on talent recruitment and retention exists (Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014; Cascio, 2014; Celani & Singh, 2011; Goud, 2014; Mahal, 2012; Wright & Huang, 2012). However, the review of literature also revealed limited research that has focused on recruitment of staff in research units (Beck, Boulton, Lemmings, & Clayton, 2012; Chung *et al.*, 2009; Roebken, 2010; Salmon *et al.*, 2007).

In unveiling the experiences of the participants through qualitative enquiry, the subjective experiences of individuals become the focal point of the study and consequently their reality (Heidegger, 1976). Employees' employment-related decisions are rooted in their individual experiences vis-à-vis organisations' employment-related initiatives and practices (Cascio, 2014). For example, organisations may endeavour to enhance employee career success and build human capital for themselves through employment-related initiatives and practices such as opportunities for developmental job experiences and professional development for their employees (Dong, Seo, & Bartol, 2014).

Employees' decisions to join, stay or leave organisations are often anchored on their evaluation of such employment practices. For instance, employees' decision to resign when they no longer experience professional development in their organisation is based on evaluation of employment practices. Insight into experiences and resultant decisions enable employers to see the outcomes of recruitment and retention practices. With this knowledge, employers, where necessary, are able to develop and operationalise appropriate talent management strategies and interventions (George & Dane, 2011; Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011; Roots & Li, 2013; Weiss & Rupp, 2011).

The review of extant literature reveals that employees' views and experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention strategy and practice are essential for the continuous improvement of the entire talent management function (Van Dijk, 2008; Weiss & Rupp, 2011). Employee recruitment and retention hinge on numerous factors internal and external to the organisation (Hughes & Rog, 2008; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Morrissette, 2011). For example, external factors may encompass the country's or region's unemployment rate, structural unemployment and the availability of labour (Daniels, 2007). A host of factors within the organisation may impact on its ability to recruit and retain talent (Cascio, 2014). These include sound talent management policies and practices such as perceptions of equity and career advancement prospects (Fraser, 2010; Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Steele, Fisman, & Davidson, 2013; Van Vuuren, 2010). The interplay between internal and external

factors may obfuscate the significance and impact of each set of factors. However, this interplay highlights the intricacy of recruitment and retention strategies and practices in organisations.

Broadly speaking, the study sought to unveil employees' experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention strategies and practices. In view of the preceding discussion, the broad focus of the study was delineated into theoretical and empirical objectives that formed the core of this study.

The aim of the study was to develop a more insightful understanding of employee recruitment and retention factors by focusing on two conceptual central tasks using the lens of signal theory:

- The study aimed at creating a more enhanced theoretical understanding of recruitment by conceptualising factors pertinent to employee recruitment through the lens of signalling theory
- The study aimed at enhancing theoretical understanding of retention by conceptualising factors pertinent to employee retention through the lens of signalling theory

Two empirical aims of the study were identified:

- The aim was to unveil the experiences of the participants so as to reveal employees' reactions or appraisals of the organisation's recruitment and retention policies and practices. Organisations strive to improve their strategies and practices aimed at enhancing recruitment and retention strategies by learning about employees' experiences
- The second aim was to provide recommendations that would assist the organisation under study to streamline its recruitment and retention strategy and practices

The potential value-add of the study

The study provided an overview of employees' experiences of recruitment and retention practices of a research unit based in rural South Africa and illustrated this in a schematic representation of the findings and an integration of these findings with literature. The findings and recommendations could be used to streamline human resources and talent management in order to enhance attraction and retention of staff for research institutions of universities.

What will follow

The structure followed during the research will be explained in the research design section. The findings will be presented in two sections, namely recruitment and retention and supported with quotes from the transcripts. Thereafter the themes will be discussed according to their potential as “incentives to join and remain” with the research unit and “factors that discourage attraction and retention”. The article concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and the recommendations for future research.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

Employees' experiences of the research unit's recruitment and retention practices were explored through an interpretive paradigm and a constructivist world view. This view enables a researcher to study the subjective meanings and perspectives that individuals attribute to personal experiences and how these experiences influence decisions and subsequent behaviour. The words and stories of participants provide a rich form of qualitative data (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009; Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Qualitative research is primarily about meaning making and not formulating hypotheses (Mason, 2010). In this study, meaning making occurred by exploring and understanding, from the inside rather than the outside, experiences of employees during recruitment and retention practices.

Although signalling theory was used as a theoretical framework for unveiling the recruitment and retention experiences of the participants, an inductive approach was used to analyse the data in order to uncover the themes and meaning that the employees attached to their experiences. Therefore the themes and meaning emerged from the employees' experiences. The role of the signalling theory was subdued as data emerged naturally during interviews with the respondents. This is to affirm that the findings were integrated with literature in the field.

Research strategy

In this qualitative study, the unit of analysis was the individual employee (Laverty, 2003; Mason, 2010). Potential employee participants were selected if they held positions in the unit that reportedly required critical skills. The nature of these skills is referred to later (see 1.5.3.3 sampling method). In-depth interviews were conducted with those participants who accepted the invitation by signing informed consent forms. The data was analysed inductively in order to uncover the themes and meaning that the employees attached to their experiences and to integrate the relevance of the findings using theory (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Research method

In the next section, the techniques and procedures used to conduct the empirical study are discussed.

Research setting

The research unit, in which this study was conducted, falls under a tertiary educational institution and procured its own funding from grants issued by industry leaders and other organisations that drive and stimulate research and innovation by investing in research activities and projects. The research unit has four main offices: one in Johannesburg and three in rural Mpumalanga. There is a distance of 520 km between Johannesburg and the rural offices and another 40 km between certain rural offices. Apart from the difficulties caused by distance, there also appeared to be frequent connectivity drops and outages of landlines, internet and electricity. The unit's staff numbers at the time of the research proposal peaked at 248, but during the study, fluctuated between 190 and 220. Three percent of staff was situated in the Johannesburg office with the remainder in the rural offices. The staff complement consisted of two main groups: core staff (13%) and project staff (87%). "Project staff" is allocated to specific research projects. "Core staff" consisted of support staff and unit management involved with the day-to-day operational functioning of the unit as a whole. The unit issues a variety of fixed-term contracts for staff. These contracts are renewable, depending on grant holder and project requirements.

The unit employs a range of support staff, scientists and fieldworkers. Most of the fieldworkers were drawn from the local community; however there are certain fieldwork positions for which the skills were not readily available. The unit reported via email correspondence that it has been difficult to find and recruit nurses, lay counsellors, laboratory technicians, translators and data capturers. Those with skills in computer science, research data analysis and management, demography, research project logistics and management, research sciences, quality assurance and laboratory management have been sourced nationally and internationally. There was some disagreement about whether or not the following skills used by the unit are scarce: basic accounting; office administration; HR support; and data entry (DHET, 2012; HWSETA, 2013; NRF (n.d.)). Certain positions such as qualitative fieldworkers, research scientists and community liaison officers did not feature on the scarce skills lists (DHET, 2012; HWSETA, 2013; NRF (n.d.)). As a grant-funded entity there is

usually not scope, within the terms and conditions of the grant, to include any extensive financial outlay for the training and development of those applicants who have the potential but who do not necessarily demonstrate the required skills (De Beer, 2003). Each research project is run on a limited budget for a set time, so the staffing allocation of the unit must be such that the project starts at full capacity from the outset.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The tertiary institution under which this research unit falls required its own ethics clearance as the participants of this study were staff of the unit and the institution. The researcher therefore obtained two ethics clearance certificates, the first from the institution at which the researcher is a student and the second from the institution at which she work (appendix 1). In addition, the directorate of this unit gave written permission for this study to be conducted in the unit (appendix 2). As requested by the unit directorate, permission was also obtained from the line managers for the time the participants would have to take off from their working hours to attend the interviews.

Each identified employee invited to participate in this study obtained an informed consent form with a written and verbal explanation, and a confidentiality undertaking from me, as researcher (appendix 3). Interviews were only scheduled once they had signed and returned the consent forms to me. The researcher conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews during her vacation leave. At the start of the interviews, permission was requested and granted to record the interviews (appendix 4). Interviewees were reminded that the researcher was conducting the research as a Unisa master's student and not as their HR administrator. Owing to time limitations, no alternate forms of communication were offered in terms of skype or telephonic interviews.

Sampling method

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who could provide more in-depth information from their diverse occupational backgrounds within the parameters of recruitment and retention for the specific jobs they held (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Only those job family groups that required scarce and/or critical skills were included in this study. The underlying assumption was that the unit would have more challenges attracting and retaining individuals who possessed the requisite scarce and critical skills. The scarce and critical skills were identified by referring to unit documentation such as job descriptions and performance management documents. The scarce and critical nature of the skills was confirmed with unit management and by referring to DHET (2012), HWSETA (2013), and NRF (n.d.) documentation. Only one employee was approached from each relevant job family. The job families of the participants included IT and systems support staff, research data specialists, logistical staff, research data capturers, lay counsellors, nurses, qualitative fieldworkers, project site managers and quality assurance staff.

The motivation to participate appeared to be intrinsic, possibly motivated by the fact that all of the unit's employees are researchers or members of a research team, who knew and appreciated the benefits of research. The high acceptance rate might be a confirmation of this. Only two employees declined out of 13 invited to participate. Since these were the only two in their particular job family, no replacements were sought. Therefore there were 11 participants. More detailed demographic descriptions of the participants cannot be provided without breaching the confidentiality undertaking. Any description of the participants will make the participants easily identifiable to colleagues and management.

Data collection methods

Individual interviews were conducted following a standard set of initial open-ended questions. Further probing questioning was used to understand and obtain more detail about the participants' experiences of the organisation's recruitment and

retention practices. I, as interviewer, asked broad questions that allowed the respondents to set the direction of the conversation by their responses.

An interview schedule of the standard set of initial questions is identified as appendix 5.

The field notes made at the time of the interviews were later used during data analysis as reminder to herself, as researcher about any reluctance to participate, or when somebody nominated somebody else because she was 'sick'.

Recording of data

Permission to record the interview was requested at the beginning of the interview (appendix 4). If the participant appeared in any way intimidated by the recorder or expressed any reluctance because of the recorder, then the researcher offered to take handwritten notes during the discussion. However, no participant refused to be recorded. All transcripts and notes were typed up by an external person for ease of data analysis. Thereafter the researcher listened to the audio recordings while correcting the typed transcripts. Eleven individuals were interviewed which equated to 209 A4 pages of transcripts.

Thematic data analysis

In this qualitative study, interpretive skills were used to engage with the data collated from interviews (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The data was coded into themes and used to explore and evaluate the unit's recruitment and retention practices from the perspective of the employees' experiences (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006).

The steps of an interpretive data analysis as described by Terre Blanche *et al.* (2006) were used to analyse the data obtained in the interviews:

1. Familiarisation and immersion

Familiarisation and immersion occurred as the researcher listened to the recordings while checking the typed transcripts and simultaneously referred back to her field notes. This was an ongoing process throughout the data analysis.

2. Inducing themes from the interview transcripts

Each transcript was individually divided up under the following section headings related to the broad sequence followed during each interview:

- Research interview introduction
- Skills and scarce skills, job title (current and when started with the unit)
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Additional and concluding discussions

During the interview participants sometimes jumped between sections and so that part of the transcript was then 'cut and pasted' under the appropriate section.

All the transcripts were then consolidated under each of these sections and a ring-bound book printed with page numbers. Each participant was given a number for reference and continuity purposes during data analysis. While reading through the book, the researcher labelled each topic that the participants raised as a theme in the margin. An index of all the themes, with the related participant number and page number, was then created as they appeared in the book. Using this index and the book, an electronic document of themes was compiled using the related quotes as taken from the transcripts. By the end of this process there were numerous themes related to each interview section.

3. Elaboration of themes related to recruitment and retention

Themes, related to recruitment and retention that occurred twice or more were identified in the findings section and described in the discussion section of this dissertation.

4. Interpretation and checking

The findings and discussion sections of this dissertation were checked with the audio recordings and typed transcripts in order to ensure that the interpretation of the data remained true to the original content.

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Various steps throughout the process were adopted to ensure quality, integrity and trustworthiness of the data. As the notion of transferability of findings and not generalisation to the bigger population is of vital importance in qualitative research, rich descriptions of the context were provided. Such detailed descriptions of the context were significant for contextual applicability.

In addition, the transcripts were typed up verbatim in the natural voice (Mero-Jaffe, 2011) of the participants, which included the “uhms”, pauses, repetition of phrases and incomplete sentences. This was done so that none of the subtle nuances in meaning were lost. However, these natural voice elements were removed from the final version of the dissertation for coherence and ease of reading, and not to embarrass participants.

Member checking was used as a measure of trustworthiness (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Each participant was emailed the typed transcript of his/her interview and the findings, and asked to confirm that confidentiality had been maintained and that the transcript was a reflection of the conversation that took place. Regarding the findings and interpretation thereof the candidates were provided with an opportunity to express their views about the correctness. In order to check confidentiality, the participants were asked if they felt that a reader would be able to identify them as a participant. The participants expressed satisfaction with how their interviews were interpreted into findings without revealing their identity. Owing to extenuating circumstances, and after consultation, it was decided that any participant who had left the research unit after the interviews were conducted would not be contacted.

In order to ensure credibility and dependability the same consistent routine of research method was adopted for each and every interview. A research diary was kept as an audit trail which documented all decisions made and procedures adopted during the research and data analysis thereby contributing to the rigor of this qualitative study (Cassell & Symon, 2011; Tan, Wilson, & Olver, 2009). As part of her post-graduate studies, a Unisa supervisor was allocated to oversee the researcher's work as student researcher, from its inception at the research proposal stage. Every step, process and written draft was submitted to this supervisor for review and comment. In this way dependability can be affirmed because any other researcher could follow this method in the same setting with the same participants and get the same results.

The integrity of the data was ensured by storing the data transcripts and interview recordings safely and securely. In so doing the confidentiality and integrity of the information was maintained. The data that emerged from the transcripts relating to recruitment and retention was checked for context and meaning against the academic publications that were used to compile the literature review, in order to ensure that interpretation of the data was sound. However, this is not to suggest that data were forced to confirm to existing theory; only to say that the extant literature assisted in developing a more insightful understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Reporting

The analysed data were collated into a framework of themes and subthemes, with the most descriptive transcript quotation/s cited in support of each subtheme (Moloto, Brink & Nel, 2014). The themes were then textually described and explained in the findings section. The findings and relevant academic literature were then integrated into a schematic diagram (figure 1) which aided in the discussion of factors that are incentives to join and remain with the organisation or factors that discourage attraction and retention.

FINDINGS

Data analysis unveiled a host of participants' experiences of recruitment and retention strategies and practices of the organisation. Because of the huge volume of data, it was decided to consolidate the findings with one descriptive interview quotation per theme in most cases. The most descriptive quotations were chosen for their uniqueness, relevance and how well they substantiated the results of this study.

Findings – recruitment

This section presents those themes and subthemes relating to recruitment.

Reason for applying

When the participants were asked why they had applied for their jobs, they put forward the following reasons for applying: learning opportunities, altruistic values, organisational appeal and family circumstances.

Learning opportunities: Participants foresaw that they would be able to apply in practice what they had learnt at school and during their studies. Applying and joining the organisation would provide some of the participants with opportunities to use their technical skills and perform jobs suitable for their skills and abilities. The following verbatim statements capture some of the participants' reasons for applying to the organisation:

I realised that this was an opportunity because I was not using the qualification that I got. Then I said this will be an opportunity for me to start doing the practical aspects of it because it was theoretical. Things that you learn when reading books, it's not like what you get in the field, there are a lot of challenges.

One of the frustrations was with the job I was in. I needed to change jobs. The job had changed. I was no longer working to my strengths there so I wanted a job that was giving me a mixture of using my technical skills but also with the opportunity to develop my research skills and I certainly wasn't really getting that opportunity in the

current job so I was looking for something that works. So a key part of the discussions and the negotiations was, will I have the opportunity to get involved in my own research as well as supporting other researchers in the unit. So that was the kind of clincher.

Altruism: Some of the participants expressed the views that they wanted to join the organisation because it provided them with opportunities to work with the community' and to learn more about their culture, norms and values. In the view of the participants working in this organisation would provide them with a sense of purpose. This will enable and provide them with the means to contribute to positive change in the lives of individuals in the local community. One candidate explains the significance of this community involvement:

I like to work with community programmes. I like to do something which I think will change the lives of community. It may change, it may not change everyone's lives but that one or two people that may be helped by that particular program I always like to be out of it.

Organisational appeal: Some of the research participants perceived the research unit as making available the opportunity to further their academic qualifications essential for their career advancement. Participants reported they experienced their colleagues as highly supportive and encouraged them to do research and further their studies. Their colleagues utterances of this is a "learning institute" as opposed to the "private sector" were experienced as motivational. In addition this research unit operates within the ambit of the field of public health and this was a strong attractor for those participants with a career or research interest in the same or similar field. Two of the respondents shared their experiences:

It is a learning institute whereby to me I thought it was an opportunity to advance my career because if you are at a university you have chances of doing higher courses, Master's, PhD. If you are working in a private sector there is not encouragement to study and also to research but in a university setup where there is teaching and research you know there are. Every time you meet different people, they encourage you. And also new ideas are coming up.

The reason I initially came was not just for the job. When I came out I had just finished my master's. My plan was to do a PhD.

Family circumstances: Some of the respondents reported that they joined the organisation because of family circumstances. For one participant it was the right move at the right time because it meant that the entire family could relocate when the participant started working at the unit. For others, a push factor was circumstances in their home countries, necessitating job hunting and a move to South Africa.

The timing was right and myself and my wife were in a position where we could move and we discussed it and decided that it was the right move for us at the time. So a mixture of personal and professional.

So we were sitting everyday and also other [home country] students just discussing, you know guys we don't think things will be right at home at the moment so that's when I realised I have to apply, to get something and bring my family here.

A death in the immediate family influenced a migrant worker to actively seek employment with this research unit so that he/she could return to live and work in his/her local community.

It was after the death of my mom I felt like there is no-one home who is responsible so let me try something.

How did the participants hear about the vacancy

The participants were asked how they heard that the Unit was recruiting. Participants said they heard about the vacant positions through their individual networks or advertisements. Networks included family and local community members, professional colleagues and unit employees. Other participants had previously worked for the unit or university, or originally lived in the community and knew of the unit. The latter participants had purposefully remained in contact with unit staff for professional and/or social reasons. These networks had helped them to hear of vacancies as they became available in the unit. Unit employees had also approached

individuals directly if they had thought they were suitable candidates for a vacancy. The verbatim statements below encapsulate the diversity of the networks in use.

I heard my aunt that they would need people in [the unit].

I was called by a colleague.

And I also looked up on the net. It was not advertised locally ... That's where I saw it. Some guy who was there sent me the name and then that's how I got to know about it.

The first time when I left [the university] I still kept in communications with the people I worked with here ... he says to me there's space coming up and he gave me a heads up.

I've been in contact with [unit HR] to check [for vacancies].

The unit advertises on the university and unit's web pages and, in some cases, places the advertisement on collaborating institutions' web pages. When necessary the unit will place an advertisement in a newspaper; otherwise a printed version of the advertisement is posted on walls in hospitals, shops and supermarkets in the local community.

It was on the university website.

I saw an advert in the Mail & Guardian. This one was more detailed.

I just saw it on the advert in my village. They posted it on the wall at the supermarket. So that's where I've read the information then I go and apply for it.

... I saw the position on the internet ... There was not much information on the advert in such a way that initially I thought that the post was in Joburg.

Interviews and related assessments

Most applicants had been interviewed more than once during which the panel had asked them structured, open-ended questions to assess their suitability for the respective positions.

I would say it was more open, not like structured questions, it is all about whether I can provide. So they came up with questions: How can you handle these and all those stuff? How would I be able to provide the service based on whatever they want me to do? It didn't end up on a third interview. I came for a fourth interview.

Some participants had used the interviews to find out more about the unit and its various research projects. This seemed to instil some realistic job expectations in the applicants.

It ended up being my interview with them. I was interviewing them basically to try and understand the study. Because as I said earlier on a study is something that has a different set up from what I'm use to and their questions were short and when I had to ask them I think they spent more time answering my questions than me spending time answering their questions.

Practical assessments and training workshops

The unit includes training workshops and practical assessments as part of the screening process as additional ways of ensuring that the applicants are indeed suited to the positions for which they applied.

Practical assessments consist of work-related activities such as typing tests and budgeting. One participant in particular described his/her experience of the practical assessment as being “bad”, but actually demonstrated resilience and ingenuity.

There was a typing test that they check the errors for typing skills, they check how many words do you type.

The practical was, the bad thing which was there is the computer we were given was not like, it didn't have the Excel program that we wanted to use. So the thing was, so it was about budgeting. You are given a scenario whereby the budgeting and also the other part of it which was third part which I still remember well. It was organising a conference. What are the requirements of organising a conference? But you have to do that and also to put a budget of the conference and So, it was so easy to me but now the unfortunate thing was that I couldn't use Excel. I had to use Word. So what I did is I had to use words and very simplified figures. ... then I explained to her that I had to use simplified like 1, 2, but multiplying it to say there will be a scale to

say these are thousands, these are hundreds, something like that on top of the columns.

In addition to the practical assessments, the applicants had also attended training workshops to inculcate a more realistic understanding of the job.

Then I received the call and they said my application has been successful so then I should come for training in two days to come. I was so excited really because there a lot of things that are happening in the unit and I was so happy because the job that I got is something that I knew on what to do. Even the training. I went to training with the expectations because I received training before so it was something that excited me because really it was a good offer to me.

The training session it has a lot of activities. There is pre and post counselling and the behaviour of me as a counsellor, and the how should I behave, even the dressing code of me, my physical appearance. And even the, how can I say, the updated information should always look, I mean upgrade yourself and try to expand as a counsellor and look at updated information. You mustn't just stay as knowing the old information, this is what I know. So there are lots of things that we've been trained as a counsellor, even the part of HIV as a whole in the country and worldwide and the treatment wise.

Site visits

The most suitable candidate is offered a site visit if he/she is not from the local community. The unit arranges all transport and accommodation during this site visit. Sometimes a site visit includes a final interview, but always it is for the purpose of orientation. The candidate is taken to all the offices in the rural setting and meets unit staff at the sites and those who will become colleagues.

They even said that the people who are successful, if you want to go to see the place you go and see the place. She said don't worry everything will be organised from this side, just tell me the date that you want to go there. They bought an air ticket for me. I was here for 3 days. I stayed at [university accommodation]. So second day I had to go to the field then the third day I was here at the offices.

They bought a ticket from the bus, City Bus I think and then from [town] they picked me up and I went for the last interview.

We were here on a Wednesday and we went back on the Friday to Joburg. ... When we got to Johannesburg that's when I got a call from [HR] confirming that I was the successful candidate.

One particular participant had a standard question that he/she asked everybody whom he/she met during the site visit: "what do you do here?" He/she did this so that he/she could see how he/she would fit into the system and what his/her first tasks would be.

... the team was friendly and the things, you know when I was asking exactly what do you do here because I wanted to know exactly what the people do and nearly each and every one was explaining what he or she does. They say I am in the field, I do this, I do this. So all those things now and I say ah no it's not new, these things are not new to me but it will be only now how I'm going to fit into the system. My first tasks were the only things in my head to say ok where do I start now.

Relocation and orientation

The unit assisted appointees in various ways with their relocation of self, family and possessions to the rural site.

And [unit Manager] notified me that [unit staff member] will be coming to Joburg so if you've got your things you can give him ... Can we bring a bigger car or smaller car and I said no there are only two bags here so a smaller car can do. Then he came. He took everything. The blankets, the books, everything, and the clothes.

A participant eagerly embraced the rural setting by moving out of university accommodation when he/she felt it was too sheltered and moved into a house in the local community village.

I always wanted to have that opportunity to learn and to be involved with other people and to be part of them, do whatever they are doing and all that, because ever since I was born I was in urban area, cities and towns and all that so I said to myself maybe this is an opportunity for me to learn something new. I know how city life is. I've been to Joburg, I've been to Durban, I've been to P.E., I've been to Cape Town, all these big cities but I've never been into rural area so I said let me take a chance, let me see how it goes, then that was my driving force basically to learn more than anything else.

The first three months I was staying at [university accommodation]. I feel that [university accommodation] was still providing me with what I'm used to, that comfort asset. I was comfortable. So this is not giving me that opportunity I told myself about. Let me go and, obviously I needed, as much as I wanted to go down a more of a rural area whatever, but things like electricity had to be there, things like that. That I don't have to walk for kilometres to fetch water. That was all that I needed and when I was checking around I saw that I can find such a place [in a community village near work]. Yes it's a village home. It's myself and the neighbour.

Rural setting

I tried to include follow-up questions about the rural setting to those who had relocated, but it became evident this was not an issue to the participants. Some of the participants came from deep rural settings in their own home countries and this setting was better than they expected. A participant explained why scarcity of skills is sometimes an issue in this rural area by saying that those highly skilled individuals prefer to locate to better jobs in urban centres.

Well they tried by all means to hint during the interview that this position is in rural South Africa and so the moment they started painting the rural picture I started forming my own picture of the rural set-up and when I came here what I thought and what I saw was not exactly the same. In fact what I saw was much better. It was a much better, it was better here. It was not a nasty surprise or shock because where we come, when you say rural, it's deep rural: facilities, roads and everything, they are not there. I mean I think I quickly adapted and adjusted, obviously there are a number of things we needed to adjust.

It's just a different kind of skill set that is not very common around here. There are a lot of people that have the skills but they don't prefer to work here. Even in the rural areas they prefer to go work in Joburg.

Recruitment timelines

A participant said that the recruitment process duration was unusually extended, and if he/she was not that interested in the study of the unit, he/she would have moved on. He/she had to in fact chase the unit for an offer or regret so that he/she could move on, one way or the other.

I think the recruitment process for me. the only part which was a little bit hectic was it took too long actually for me to get responses from these guys and if it wasn't for the fact that I was interested in taking part in the study and getting to do new things I would actually have moved on to other institutions

I ended up saying to them look guys I really understand all of the challenges and the dynamics which you guys are supposed to deal with but also me as a person I also want to move onto new things and I said to them, you know I would be happy if you guys just declined me at the moment because you can't make decisions. Because I don't wanna make decisions and move on and when I actually start a new job in a month's time you guys start making me an offer. So rather decline me so I can start working on other things and just forget about this position. Yes so that I think is the thing which stood out the most.

Findings – retention

All the participants were asked for their reasons for staying with the unit. This question elicited a wide range of responses.

Professional growth

Many of the participants expressed the view that they had remained with the unit because they were looking for “professional growth”.

I'm looking for professional growth. That's the thing that keeps me going because I know there are opportunities for me to further my studies and also with the network of people that you dealing with here at the university, it's a rich network whereby you are not limited to one area. Especially also maybe in terms of finance and the other projects that are coming, you can get something like short courses or even funding to do part of the research. And funding to do part of the research they say ok you can also do this part and then also publish, or you can be a publisher of the materials. Those are the things that are major.

Another participant felt that being in an organisation or unit that is still growing is essential for personal professional growth.

Really there are a number of things in the fact that [this research unit] is growing and as a professional if you are looking for growth then you wanna stay with a company which is still growing and then in that sense you also grow personally. But otherwise if you are in a company which has grown already, has reached the ceiling, there is no more growth, and then you also walk in there you hit the ceiling and then you are really not developing in that sense. But then also looking at the public health sector it is also expanding in different ways and looking at what [this research unit] is doing here and looking at what other DSSs [demographic surveillance sites] are doing in other areas in other countries there is still more developments to come in terms of what new technology are these other institutions using. So there's lots of other technologies which other organisations are using and if we actually look at that you basically clearly see I wanna be part of the group who's just going to say hey this is a new technology, we actually tested this in rural South Africa, it can work in other places ... that's the direction, that's what would really keep me here.

Academic isolation due to the rural location was seen as a deterrent to professional growth. Most of this research unit's staff work from offices in a rural setting close to the research study site with limited contact with the main university located in an urban city.

The other thing which again is beginning to happen now is academically improving the contacts between us at the unit and the university because one of the difficulties, I think, is that sense of academic isolation that we have here. So you won't get that same sort of input you would if you were based in Johannesburg. So that is something, whether it is regular study visits to Joburg which is happening, and the opportunities are coming for that for people which is, that's good.

Professional development is also seen as informal, on-the-job mentorship and learning during which time the employee gains as much work experience as possible in a particular job. By learning they are maximising [future] job opportunities.

So basically what kept me here is the fact that I'm looking after my profile so I wouldn't actually just come here for a year and go because if I come here for a year and go obviously I didn't learn anything from this experience. Number two my profile becomes dented in the fact that who else is going to hire me after five years when each and every year I am changing jobs. So also on top of that when I looked at my job I learn new stuff every day so I am actually maximising my job opportunities to say is there anything in this unit which I haven't learned, because then if I'm not learning anything it means my time has arrived for me to move onto something else.

If the job is not challenging enough or perhaps does not utilise the incumbent's full skills, then, according to the participants, this results in frustration and employee retention becomes an issue.

Now I'm realising I'm exactly back where I started and I hope as time goes on maybe things will change for the better and all that but the challenges are no longer there.

I really was not well being used for what I was good at in the unit so I had to look for other opportunities somewhere else.

Remuneration

There was mixed opinion about whether the salary packages were fair and reasonable, but it was evident that salary alone was not a retention factor.

... the salary also it is fair if you compare it with the type of sector and other institutions ...

For the participant who felt that the salary package was too low, there was justification and awareness of the unemployment rate in South Africa.

I can say that what makes me to stay in the unit, really I'm interested. First of all, I can say is I need the money. I stay here for the money. And also there is a shortage of jobs in South Africa as you know. That's why I stay with them, even though I know I don't get enough money but I can stay with them.

Some of the participants indicated that enjoyment of the job was more important than remuneration but that there should be a balance between them. Another participant concluded that although one could move to another organisation in pursuit of a higher package, there was no guarantee that one's skills would be fully utilised by the new employer and this would result in him/her not enjoying his/her job.

Also the nature of the job. You can have skills, I mean I can go work in a different organisation and they can give me more money but if they give me a position that I'm not using skills and I am not enjoying what I'm doing. I'm getting more money but I don't like the other job but for me the job is part of me and I have to like what I'm

doing. It's not just about the money but also doing what I like doing and also getting paid for doing what I like doing.

For another participant, salary and experience were crucial in deciding to remain with the unit.

... gain experience, I get paid at the end of the month. That is what makes me to wake up in the morning and come here.

Types of employment contracts

Themes that became evident during employment contract discussions were short-term temporary contracts, permanent jobs, grant-funded projects and unit-related retention issues, and the impact on employee morale.

Owing to grant funding restraints and research project staffing requirements, this research unit places most of its employees on fixed-term contracts. For some participants, this limits their ability to make long-term plans and to feel settled.

I like stability and I like to focus and that has been my challenge actually for my career that you don't find easily a permanent post because in most cases they will tell you that the post is subject to the availability of funds and all that of which, ok when I was starting on research, I never understood what does that mean. I just thought the employers were just being selfish or something. But as growing up with projects and with experience and positions I got to understand and to learn what does that mean. But at the same time I feel that it's a bit of a challenge to any company.

Others relied on the assurances that contracts are renewable enough to relocate families locally and make longer-term plans.

And the type of the contract, even they are like short-term fixed term contracts but with the people who have been with the unit and whatever they will assure you that this is renewable. The moment you know that this is renewable you can do long-term plans but if you just know that you are here for 2½ years and the possibilities and chances of renewing are zero, you find that you don't even call the family to come and join you because you don't know. 2½ years is not a long time when you have got

a family. But when you are alone you find that maybe it is long but they assure you that the contracts are renewable. Those are the things that made me to stay you see.

Ultimately everybody is looking for a permanent contract in order to provide more “benefit” to their families, although one participant took a more philosophical approach that he/she was perhaps not destined to obtain a permanent contract.

... not that I'm not focusing on going far with my, ja because as far as you know that is not a permanent job. We are all looking for a permanent job so that we can benefit our families, our children.

I never got a permanent job that was going to be mine but actually I understood finally that it was not meant to be mine.

Fixed-term contracts “kill the momentum and [productivity] of the company” as everybody starts to job hunt before the end of their contract. Emotionally some are “stressed and frustrated” about holding fixed-term contracts and this does appear to negatively impact on employee morale.

So that's why the retention becomes critical and at the same time that kills the momentum and the production of the company. In one sense you stay with a company. They give you two years contract. After a year you start looking around and saying what's my next move and having said that this is a very scarce skill, you can get something immediate after that. Then you move to the next company immediately. The only reason you move to the next company because they say they will give you two years and you know are only left with one year here.

Other people are failing to cope with that and as a result you will find that the production is not up to scratch. You have to push people and every now and then those kind of remarks “Ah our contract is coming to an end” and all that, you can see that thing is working on them. ... think about other people who are getting frustrated, who are stressed, who are coming to work and you still expect them to perform. Ja that's the biggest challenge. That's the biggest challenge.

Altruistic reasons

Participants described altruistic values and reasons for remaining with the unit. The motivators were to fulfil a higher purpose in terms of one's destiny or by rescuing the unit.

I was supposed to be here. So if I was to move it will be something very big. Not only salary wise, but something very big to move me out.

Love of my job

In some participants, the retention question elicited the emotive response of "I love my job". One participant elaborated further by explaining that his/her job is like a hobby that provides enjoyment and fulfilment.

First of all I love my job. That's all I know and that's all I've been doing. So I, not only is it my job, it's also a hobby. I mean I don't have [any] problems doing it for free as long as I am getting enjoyment and fulfilment. Solving people's problems, but at the same time I have to earn a living. So that's the first reason I wake up in the morning and that's the reason why I'm needed. I can do extra hours without even thinking about it. That's the first and I think the primary reason.

For another participant, the love for the job arose from the opportunities available to serve the people of the community villages and the unit's research project.

I have been in this field because I, for the love of the job, so let me not talk about financial or whatever because what I can say even financial I am okay they are giving me, the salary that I am getting first thing I'm satisfied with it, not that I'm not focusing on going far, because as far as you know that is not a permanent job. We are all looking for a permanent job so that we can benefit, you know our families, our children. I understand that this is not a permanent job but actually the thing that drives me to come to [work] is just because I love the job. ... The thing I want to say to the people around the villages that we're helping. So I feel it is my duty to do that, to come to work to serve the people, to serve the project ... So for the love of the job and to serve the people, I mean there are young woman who are needy, they are looking for help from me.

Another participant was dedicated to her work because she liked her work and was learning.

Also what makes me to come, what makes me to wake in the morning and come to here really I like my job, I like my job. The experience that I got makes me to understand that every morning I have to come to my work. I'm learning every now and then from the field and even in the office it makes me feel great. Really I'm dedicated to my work.

Some participants associated themselves as distinctly part of the unit and regarded the unit's achievements as their own. Participants also expressed the need for their work efforts to have an enduring nature and contribution to the research unit even after they have left.

I'll say a lot but one thing that I've learned in my whole career is to love and own whatever I'm doing. In all the projects that I worked for I was so angry when they moved me out of those projects because all the time when I worked on those projects, I own it. So in this case it's difficult to take me out of the office because of the ownership that I have with the project. So one thing for sure that is really pushing me to come every day is the fact that this is my building, I gonna make sure that it grows.

Rural location

The participants responded with varying reaction to the rural location of the unit. The general consensus of foreign staff is that this rural environment is not "deep" rural. However, those employees whose spouses are unable to find work are not likely to remain for longer tenures. The university accommodation, although convenient, was described as isolating and lonely, especially for those spouses who do not drive. For one participant, the location was irrelevant as long as he/she had internet access, good communication networks and accommodation.

I think the geographical situation here makes it difficult for people. You know, there are some people can spend 10, 15 years here but other people that's difficult because of there are not opportunities other than for yourself.

I think my family doesn't have a problem with the environment. My wife is from [African country] – and what is rural in [African country], this is kind of a small town. Same in [another African country]. This is kind of a small town compared to the towns at home. For me what is important is if I find good accommodation, Wi-Fi, have internet access, good communication networks, then I'm fine (laughs). Those are the things that come to mind even though we wanted to move to [a nearby town] the first few months "how do we get internet here?". If I'm cut off from the internet then my life will be difficult. Ja at home we have Wi-Fi router from MTN. Of course it's not fast but it serves our needs. Ja of course we have, sometimes down time.

Balance between PhD research and work requirements

The research unit currently has a number of staff undertaking PhD studies. For the unit this is a significant investment of time and money in the development of employees. It was evident that there had been an issue around work and PhD outputs, but at the time of the interviews for this study, the unit was in the process of arranging an amicable balance between the two for staff contributing to the research outputs of the unit through their PhDs. This talent development significantly contributes to the human resource capacity and research outputs of the unit for the duration of the PhD, although a clear retention strategy post-PhD is not evident to employees.

I've had a little bit of frustration that I wasn't getting the dedicated time for the research you know the PhD part of my job and it was a bit frustrating with a slow progress of that ...

... like all things in life it is up to individuals to take the advantage and not sort of sit back and wait for it to be delivered to them. That's a sign of maturity so, I think the unit is balancing, management of the unit has found a reasonably good balance for the conflicts between making sure that people deliver on their full time paid job and have the ability to do the research work they want to do. So I think it is a very supportive environment for that but you know anything out of life you get out of it as much as you put in.

Unit support and work environment

One of the participants gave a highly descriptive account of the realities of the community in which the unit's research studies occur. This account highlights the support that he/she receives from the unit in order to cope with the community circumstances that he/she witnesses which evoke an emotional reaction and negatively affect his/her performance. Another participant described the work environment as relaxed and conducive to productive work.

But it was difficult for me sometimes like when I work with the orphan and vulnerable children. We were having a lot of challenges. Challenges like sometimes I have to interview the child-headed families where the parents are gone and I have to go and sit down with a young lady who is still young but she is the one that is taking care of her siblings. So sometimes it was hard for me. Sometimes I go to the household to interview the elder person, the grandmother who is looking [after] the children whose parents are gone. So I was really worried when I do such interviews because like a grandmother and a young children whose is child-headed they were expecting me to give them something and in the end I didn't have something to give them. But in the end I don't have nothing to help them but I have to cope with the situation because my field [supervisor] said I don't have to take what I see in the household I have to cope in that situation but I was trying to cope. Most of the time I was talking to that [unit research project leader]. She was trying sometimes to counsel me so that I will be able to understand the situation. I was having to hear about different deaths. Ja it was difficult but my job, my skills I have not to take it that situation and put it in my heart. I leave it there, then I come back.

And then also the environment here is conducive. Well I've been in tough environments where you have a slave driver all over and at the end of the day you feel drained but here it is quite relaxed but serious stuff is going on. So if you can achieve the same without, why do you have to be in a tough environment.

Tenure

One of the participants was certain that a longer tenure is essential to build one's work "profile" and to show that one has in fact learnt from the work experience at the current employment.

I think the main reasons really which, I mean what's keeping me here is the fact that when I actually started working, so I had lots of other people who were actually playing the role as my mentors and I got to learn there are certain things you don't just do like changing jobs more often. So basically what kept me here is the fact that I'm looking after my profile so I wouldn't actually just come here for a year and go because if I go then if I come here for a year and go obviously I didn't learn anything from this experience. Number two my profile becomes dented in the fact that who else is going to hire me after five years when each and every year I am changing jobs.

Succession planning

Participants have personal interest in the continuation and permanence of their contribution to the unit even after their departure. One particular participant described sharing his knowledge with his colleagues so that the output capacity of his position and department would continue even if he resigned. According to participants, the unit does not have a formal succession planning process in place.

... also in the process of me gathering some new experiences I also share with my colleagues like the people I supervise. I'm like I want to say when I leave, somebody else can confidently step into my position and continue with the work. It becomes sad when you leave and you realise that everything that, all the years that I spent there was just a waste because then things fall apart and all that kind of stuff so really the thing in me which got instilled at an early stage is that when you start a project you stay till the end so basically that is what is keeping me here.

Family factors

Family circumstances and experiences, as external factors, can also contribute to an employee's decision whether or not to remain with the unit.

The lack of employment and career development opportunities for spouses determine whether the immediate family remains in the home country or if the entire family relocates with the new employee. Difficulties in obtaining work permits for spouses compound this issue. Participants indicated that this could be a determining factor as

to whether they seek work elsewhere. A desire to be nearer to extended families back in home countries while children grow up was also expressed.

So like everything it's a combination of things. We originally came out here with a two or three year view of us being here and it has sort of stretched to four years. I think the main reasons have been my wife's employment. While she was finding work out here she wasn't happy in the recent 6 to 9 months so she was ready to get back to [home country] and carry on with her professional work over there and also because of personal reasons we have got [children] and wanting to be closer to our own extended families.

At times, the available university accommodation can further isolate the family, making social links into the local community difficult to develop. Informally the unit does try to assist, with some colleagues being highly adept at insightfully assisting. In some cases, employees moved to more distant towns from work for better education for their children and now travel daily to the unit's offices.

I'm currently doing my PhD so for now I don't see any need to move and also life is kind of dynamic. So things change. You getting old and start having family. It's not just about you but also you have to cater for the needs of your family. If I find out my children, like now I have just moved from [university accommodation] to stay in [nearby town] because there are not better schools around. We had to go to [nearby town] so that we can find a better school for our kid. If I found it is difficult then maybe I will consider moving around to find more opportunities in terms of the kid's education. There are lots of factors. Some of the factors will depend on your age.

In spite of all the challenges another participant described:

"this [as] a wonderful experience to give one's family, even with the challenges, [especially] if they come from another country".

DISCUSSION

Main objective of this study

The main objective of this research study was to unveil employees' experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention strategies and practices. In view of this the aim of the study was delineated into theoretical and empirical aims. At the theoretical level the study sought to develop a more insightful understanding of employee recruitment and retention using the lens of signalling theory. At the empirical level the study sought to unveil the experiences of the participants using the lens of signalling theory as well. Such employee experiences are an essential ingredient for improving an organisation's talent attraction and retention (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Main contributions of this study

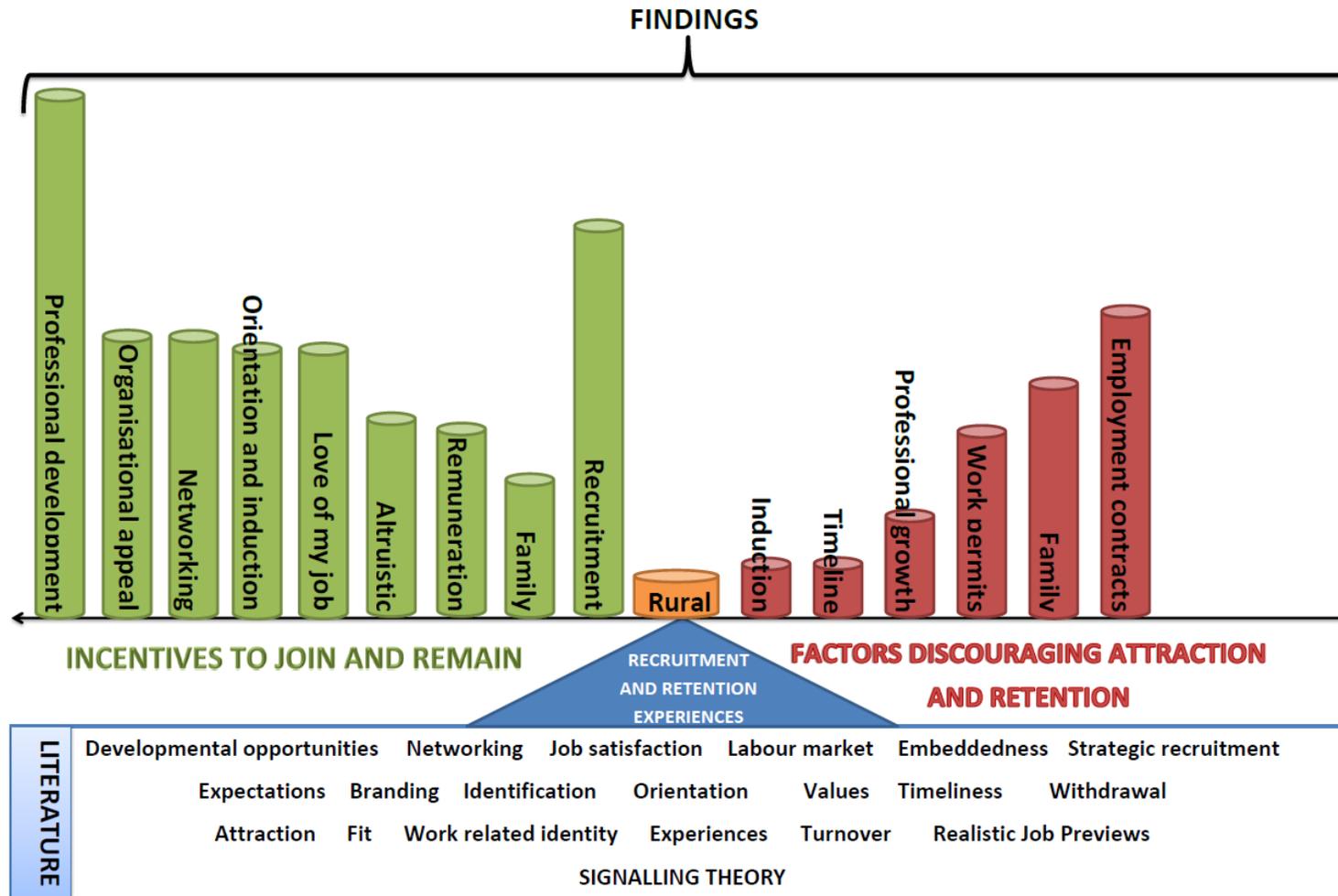
This study provided insight into employees' experiences of recruitment and retention practices in the research unit. Factors that contributed to both attraction to and retention in the organisation were identified. These factors could be grouped as internal or external because some originated within the organisation and others outside it.

The participants' experiences were encapsulated in the research findings. This section endeavours, through the lens of signalling theory to integrate the findings with extant literature in the field of talent recruitment and retention. This discussion will implicitly highlight which talent management strategies and practices impede and which enhance attraction and retention of employees. The conclusions will be transferable to other research units within the university, and particularly if they function within a rural setting.

A schematic representation of the discussion is presented in figure 1.

FIGURE 1: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION EXPERIENCES

Adapted from the “model of retention equilibrium” of Mills and Millsteed (2002, p. 177) and the “schematic representation” of Scanlan, Still, Stewart, and Croake (2010, p. 108)



Integration of findings with literature

In this section, themes and subthemes which are densely populated with data, show unique characteristics of the unit, and relate different and unusual experiences, are discussed. In most cases the recruitment and retention data overlapped and were combined. These themes and subthemes are then supported and substantiated with relevant research literature. In addition, for the purpose of this discussion the themes and subthemes have been categorised into “incentives to join and remain” and “factors discouraging attraction and retention”. This discussion is illustrated in figure 1 which was adapted from the “model of retention equilibrium” of Mills and Millstead (2002, p. 177) and the “schematic representation” of Scanlan, Still, Stewart, and Croake (2010, p. 108).

The findings and their integration with literature are graphically portrayed in figure 1. The fulcrum of the figure, and the focal point of the study, is ‘recruitment and retention experiences’. In the figure this fulcrum, represented by the triangle, rests upon related literature. This is to illustrate how the findings have been contextualised within theory throughout this discussion. Resting on top of the fulcrum is a balancing scale. For the purpose of a concise and clear display the scale is horizontally level in this figure, but a more realistic portrayal would be to make the scale (line) slope down to the left side as there are more experiences and themes within the findings that point to a conclusion that participants have more reasons or incentives to join and remain with the unit than factors that discourage attraction and retention. The columns on top of the scale represent themes that were discussed in the findings which came out of the data analysis of the transcripts. Likewise these columns - themes - are discussed in the sections that follow under ‘Incentives to join and remain’ and ‘Factors that discourage attraction and retention’ below. The height of the columns represents the depth and detail of each theme. The number of transcripts in each theme was used to confirm their depth and detail. This description of the figure provides more insight into the continued discussion below and the concluding section.

Incentives to join and remain

Professional development

This theme outweighed all the other themes in terms of density of data, demonstrating that it as a significant factor in both recruitment and retention. Unit employees attach high value to their professional development and growth. They measure the extent of this professional development through opportunities to: further their education, network with professional colleagues within and outside the unit, utilise their skills and acquired knowledge, and learn more from their own jobs.

Professional development provides employees with confidence in their abilities and a willingness to remain in rural posts (Berry *et al.*, 2011). However, Clark, Smith, and Uota (2013) established that organisational support for professional career development was not a retention factor for all employees at every career life stage. For instance, promotion was more of an incentive to remain with the organisation for senior social workers.

Networking with professional colleagues provides developmental opportunities (Steele *et al.*, 2013). Steele *et al.* (2013) also highlighted the significant contribution of mentorship to retention (Steele *et al.*, 2013). In a rural setting mentoring could be provided through an online social network platform, necessitated by the distance between colleagues. Those employed in rural settings have access to virtual mentoring through social networking and other online platforms (Gieskes, 2010). Ultimately, staff members who perceive that they are denied opportunities to develop their knowledge and utilise their skills will leave their organisation (Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Van Dijk, 2008).

Professional development as a positive retention factor enhances and bolsters the individuals' career and curriculum vitae profile, and simultaneously enhances the human talent essential for improved competitiveness. In this way professional

development benefits both the individual and the organisation. This development might inadvertently result in the employing organisation being unable to retain the person as it improves the employee's employability within the job market (Ferreira, Basson, & Coetzee, 2010; Fugate *et al.*, 2004), but most participants' acknowledgement that they join and remain with the organization because they feel that their professional development needs can be satisfied in this unit.

Organisational appeal

The theme of organisational appeal occurred as a recruitment and retention factor in the findings and was characterised by the following: the unit's current and potential growth, the fact that the unit and university are institutions of learning; the fact that there is opportunity to collaborate with professional colleagues internally and from all around the world, and the fact that the unit is in the field of public health. Theoretically, organisational appeal can be described as the attraction that job seekers and employees have for signalled organisational characteristics that encourage job seekers to apply for vacancies and employees to remain with the organisation (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012; Celani & Singh, 2011). A match between employer and employee values increases employees' attraction to the organisation. Values that are clearly evident in the corporate brand facilitate a match between employee and organisation values and encourage job applicant attraction (Botha *et al.*, 2011; Jaidi *et al.*, 2011). Some participants had exposure to the unit and/or university as a previous employee or collaborator and this motivated them to (re)join the unit. Employees were also aware of a good "fit" between their skills, and the job and unit (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001).

Cascio (2014) advocates that those organisations with positive brands and development opportunities for staff through performance and human resources management activities have the most success with attracting and retaining employees. The unit's "organisational appeal" which offers benefits beyond just the financial package meets applicants and employees' needs. Ultimately, this will lead to

greater productivity and job satisfaction, thereby securing a longer work tenure (Van Dijk, 2008).

Networking

Job seekers heard of unit vacancies through networks of family, professional colleagues, community members and unit employees. Participants indicated that networking was an effective means of attracting them to the Unit as these networks signalled a positive regard for the research unit which encouraged the job seekers to apply for the vacancies (Roebken, 2010; Roots & Li, 2013). The review of literature confirmed the nature and potency of networking. Professional and social networks enable job seekers to hear of more vacancies, in some cases even before the recruitment process has commenced (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Likewise the utilisation of networks enables organisations to source a greater pool of job seekers (Almeida *et al.*, 2012).

The theory of job embeddedness demonstrates how networks 'tie' employees into the organisation and community as these networks fulfil functional needs (Mitchell, Holtom & Lee, 2001). The empirical evidence confirmed that networking opportunities within the Unit meet employees' needs for research collaboration, publishing, mentorship, supervision requirements of further studies and funding for research. These networks and associated outcomes encourage employees to remain with the organisation.

Orientation and induction

An interesting practice characteristic of this research unit is to bring those successful applicants who are not from the local community to the rural offices for a site visit as part of the recruitment and selection process. The main focus of the site visits is to orientate selected applicants to the rural setting and this has additional advantages of introducing them to their future colleagues, familiarising them with the unit's work and

their related role, and helping them to select accommodation for when they relocate. Stretton and Bolon (2009) confirmed the benefit of site visits and Roots and Li (2013) emphasises the significant importance of prior knowledge of the rural setting and conditions in assisting with retention.

Participants did not mention any formal induction programme, although some employees were proactive in their own settling in and orientation. They did comment on how some unit staff members are particularly adept at helping new employees and their families to settle in and feel welcome. Theory emphasises the importance of formalised induction programs particular in relocating to rural settings as this reduces initial anxiety and helps the incumbent and family to settle in (Mills & Millstead, 2002). In addition, orientation and induction realistically adjust new employees' expectations (Proost, Van Ruysseveldt, & Van Dijke, 2012).

Love of my job

"I love my job" was a straight-forward but strongly emotive response to the retention question. The discussion relating to this theme encompassed words like hobby, enjoyment, fulfilment, interest, dedication and learning. This love for their job enables employees to take ownership and responsibility for their job and unit outputs (Albert *et al.*, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Shim *et al.*, 2009). It also enables employees to experience a deep sense of job satisfaction. Researchers have established a strong link between job satisfaction and retention (Evans & Huxley, 2009; Omar, Majid, & Johari, 2013; Rehman, 2012).

Altruistic values

It was evident from the findings that the match in altruistic values between the unit and employees has an important role to play in both recruitment and retention. This concurs with theory which emphasises the importance of matching individual and

organisation's values with the aid of correct and appropriate branding for effective talent attraction and retention (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Further to this De Cooman and Pepermans (2012) emphasised the importance of organisations branding and promoting their affinity to altruistic values which at times are so obvious that organisations, in particular non-profit, assume they don't have to communicate them, in preference to communicating less obvious benefits and characteristics.

Altruistic values encompass a need to help others and contribute to society (Lyons *et al.*, 2006). Participants described the unit's activities that enable them to act out their altruistic values as rescuing the unit by helping with the research, fulfilling a higher purpose, serving the unit and community, and pursuing an interest in people. Individuals who esteem these altruistic values are more attracted to organisations with complimentary values and goals (Lyons *et al.*, 2006). The unit's activities and outputs are extremely altruistic in nature, namely research and related publications, and being a health and demographic surveillance site in rural South Africa. This match in values increases the employees' attraction to and subsequent desire to remain with the unit (Botha *et al.*, 2011; De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012; Lyons *et al.*, 2006). Employees identify with and take ownership of the unit's outputs because these outputs signal and affirm the altruistic values of both employer and employees.

Empirically and theoretically it is evident that altruistic values are of particular importance to employees within the para-public sectors (health care and education) and any para-public organisation visibly promoting these as their values aid and encourage attraction and retention of employees (Lyons *et al.*, 2006).

Remuneration

Although the role of fair and equitably benchmarked remuneration is not to be underestimated (Thomas, Venter, & Boninelli, 2010; Wöcke & Heymann, 2012) participants indicated that experience gained and utilisation of skills could augment

remuneration by providing additional job satisfaction. Ditlopo *et al.* (2011) highlighted that financial benefits only add to job satisfaction and motivation for a limited time.

High unemployment rate in the country makes it difficult for participants to find jobs elsewhere, including those who described the remuneration as “not enough”. With the limited choices in work especially in rural communities, job seekers are prepared to accept lower wages rather than be unemployed (Sebusi, 2010; De Hoyos & Green, 2011).

Family

An analysis of the “family” theme seemed to indicate that there is less of an “incentive to join and remain” and more of a “factor discouraging attraction and retention”. Overall, the incentives to join and remain encompassed home country circumstances driving job applicants to seek work in South Africa, family responsibilities “pulling” a migrant worker to return to the community, and finally a unit vacancy coming at the most opportune time for the job seeker and family. These push-pull factors can be described with the aid of the job embeddedness theory. Job embeddedness is the extent to which the individual is “tied into” the organisation and community, creating a reluctance and, in some instances, inability to leave (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, *et al.*, 2001).

Generally participants experienced a good “fit” between their skills and the job and organisation; and over time their “links” with organisation and community members became quite entrenched as their functional needs were met. However, there was evidence that in some cases participants were mindful of the “sacrifices” that they made in remaining with the Unit, such as access to better education for their children and aging grandparents in other countries having limited interaction with grandchildren. Gupta, Banerjee and Gaur (2012) confirm the empirical findings that spouses’ inability or lack of opportunity to socially engage with others and acclimatise

in the rural setting would be a consideration when deciding not to remain with the organisation.

Recruitment

Certain recruitment experiences are intricately interwoven into and become retention factors.

Advertisements and interviews, as signalling mechanisms, provide job applicants with realistic job previews (RJP) of relevant information about the unit and the vacancy requirements (Breugh, 2013; Phillips, 1998; Wanous, 1978). RJP's extend recruitment to retention because the meeting of realistic expectations creates harmony and job satisfaction essential for retention, which lowers turnover intention (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012; Earnest *et al.*, 2011; Suszko & Breugh, 1986). The unit's advertisements ranged from being extremely detailed to being so limited that an impression was given that the job was located in Johannesburg instead of the rural offices. The unit signals and extends its social responsibility and commitment to the community by advertising vacancies extensively on the walls of shops and hospitals in local villages. Some applicants proactively used the interview sessions to become familiar with the unit and their future job requirements. In so doing, they realised their skills and experience were a good match to the unit and job. This seemed to bolster their confidence (Berry *et al.*, 2011; Suszko & Breugh, 1986).

Practical assessments and training workshops are other recruitment methods that the unit uses to ensure that it appoints those applicants who most closely match the selection criteria. Practical assessments are usually conducted after shortlisting but before interviews and involve the applicant coming into the office in order to complete timed, computer-based, work-related tasks. Training workshops are held before the start of each research project. Suitable candidates are required to attend these workshops so that they learn to apply their existing knowledge and skills *in situ*, and acquire new knowledge relating to the particular research project. There are

continuous assessments throughout the workshops on which the trainees are given feedback. The unit makes the final selection on the assessment results. In some cases, where it is found that a person is unsuitable for a particular position or if they have trained more people than they need, the unit places them in another more suitable position. Generally, there was a positive attitude towards these training opportunities as they were regarded as achievements. Participants receive certificates on successful completion of the training. This contributes to their self-efficacy and confidence that they can do the job (Bullock-Yowell, Peterson, Wright, Reardon, & Mohn, 2011; Perdue, Reardon, & Peterson, 2007), and their employability (Ferreira *et al.*, 2010; Fugate *et al.*, 2004).

Strategic recruitment involves the alignment of recruitment and retention practices with the organisation's vision, mission and strategies (Lindgren & Hixson, 2010). Strategic recruitment efforts improve the capacity of a research unit to deliver outputs such as collaborative research, increased grant funding and published peer-reviewed journal articles and simultaneously offer developmental opportunities to employees (Chung *et al.*, 2009).

Factors that discourage attraction and retention

This section focuses on those issues that may undermine the efficacy of organisations' recruitment and retention strategies and practices. To say that these factors may undermine the efficacy of recruitment and retention strategy and practice is not to suggest an inevitable increase in employee turnover rate. As previously argued, turnover and retention are not opposite ends of the same continuum and reducing the factors that cause high turnover does not necessarily improve employee retention (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006; Holtom *et al.*, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2004; Mitchell *et al.*, 2001).

Employment contracts

Employment contracts emerged as the most densely populated factor that undercuts retention. The unit mostly issues short fixed-term contracts which signal to employees an appearance of a lack of financial security and impermanence in the employment relationship. This in turn discourages family relocation. A participant felt that he/she would only be able to give his/her family certain “benefits” with a permanent contract, whereas another participant spoke directly of the stability issue, saying that fixed-term contracts pose both a challenge to individual careers and the unit as a whole. Evidently, fixed-term contracts impede the momentum and productivity of the unit and affect employee morale as employees are “stressed and frustrated” by the lack of stability and the uncertainty of what happens with regard to employment once the contract comes to an end. Participants demonstrated their resilience by trying to adopt different perspectives, by affirming that it was perhaps their destiny not to have permanent contracts, carrying on with life as if their contracts would always be renewed and really trying to understand the unit’s options within the parameters of limited grant funding.

Fixed-term contracts limit employees’ abilities and opportunities to develop ‘links’, a tangible network of contacts and connections that the individuals have with people, places and organisations which fulfil functional needs (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). Employees could signal their dissatisfaction with the organisational practice of issuing fixed-term contracts by withdrawal and ultimately resigning and leaving (Porter & Steers, 1973; Wöcke & Heymann, 2012). However, the issue of the contracts being renewable seemed to mitigate the problems in the eyes of some respondents.

Family

Participants related numerous family factors as plausible reasons they would consider resigning. Family factors included lack of employment opportunities for spouses, a sense of isolation and a loss of social networks, challenges in obtaining relevant work

permits for various members of the immediate family, and the quality of education for their children. These factors concur with what has been established in extant literature that even though an employer has excellent and effective retention practices, external factors that are beyond the employer's control might eventually still compel employees to resign (Hancock, Steinbach, Nesbitt, Adler, & Auerswald, 2009; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Stretton & Bolon, 2009). In fact, some participants had moved further from the unit's offices in order for their children to attend schools which evidently offer a better quality of education. A participant also described how certain family life stages may prompt employees to resign and return to their home country, for instance, aging and elderly parents and the need to be nearer to relatives as children grow up (Gupta *et al.*, 2012; Lo, Wong, Yam, & Whitfield, 2012).

Professional growth

The only two negative factors described by participants and categorised under the theme of professional growth were "academic isolation" and the unit not utilising the job incumbents' skills. "Academic isolation" was a term used to explain how the distance between the unit's rural offices and the university campuses limited interaction with academic colleagues and exposure to university activities and input. Inadvertently signalling an unintentional disconnect between the university based in Johannesburg and the employees based in the research unit's rural offices. (See Berry *et al.*, 2011; Hancock *et al.*, 2009; Hughes, Odgers-Jewell, Vivanti, Ferguson, & Leveritt, 2011; Stretton & Bolon, 2009).

In addition participants agreed that if their skills were not utilised in their job that it would be a valid reason to seek employment elsewhere (Dockel, Basson, & Coetzee, 2007; Messmer, 2005; Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011). One participant reported that his/her skills were not being fully utilised but he/she remained hopeful that this situation would improve. Lack of further educational opportunities and professional isolation were shown to be deterrents in attracting health workers to rural facilities (Fisher & Fraser, 2010).

Recruitment timelines

Although there was only one negative account of recruitment timelines, this particular account illustrated most appropriately the importance of streamlining and refining recruitment and retention processes for optimal effect. There was an exceptionally extended delay in making a job offer and the applicant eventually insisted that the unit give him/her a definite “yes” or “no” so that he/she could move forward in either direction. The only reason this applicant was willing to wait for so long was because he/she was interested in a particular research study that the unit was running but the delay signalled to him/her that perhaps the unit felt that actually he was an unsuitable candidate (Carless & Hetherington, 2011).

Orientation and induction

It appears that the formal induction and orientation programme of the unit is not consistently implemented as when a new employee did not know who his/her line manager was for a month or two. Many of the respondents expressed the view that the organisation sought to familiarise its new employees with their jobs, the organisation as well as the surrounding environment. The literature emphasises the importance of orientation and induction in order to improve retention (See Aaron, 2011; Bakker *et al.*, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2012; Mills & Millstead, 2002; Roots & Li, 2013).

Unexpected results

Rural setting

The literature clearly describes the recruitment and retention challenges faced by employers in rural settings (see Berry *et al.*, 2011; Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011; Ditlopo, Blaauw, & Rispel, 2013; Erasmus & Breier, 2009; Fisher & Fraser, 2010; Hancock *et al.*, 2009; Keane *et al.*, 2011; Mills & Millstead, 2002; Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Roots & Li, 2013; Salmon *et al.*, 2007). For this reason and because all the participants in this

study worked in the unit's rural offices, the researcher expected to gather strongly positive or negative data under the theme of rural setting. In line with the findings for this theme it seemed more relevant to put it on the fulcrum of the diagrammatic representation of the discussion (figure 1), thereby showing that it rather unexpectedly did not seem in of itself to hold an obvious influence on employees' decisions to remain with or leave the unit. A subtle indirect influence of the rural setting of the location could be extrapolated from comments about better schools and academic input elsewhere and references to isolation. Also, the unit seemed to attract those accustomed to rural settings or a particular participant seeking to contrast an accustomed urban setting with a rural setting.

The findings of the study reveal several perceptions regarding the rural location of the organisation:

For some of the participants the setting is not as "deep rural" and is actually the equivalent of a "small town" if compared to some towns in home countries. One participant said that as long as he/she had good connectivity for communication and accommodation, that it was irrelevant if the setting was rural or urban. One participant expressed the view that he/she had grown up and worked in urban settings and working in a rural area was an opportunity to learn something new.

Of course many external factors enunciated elsewhere in this study such as the unemployment rate are significant issues to focus on when evaluating an organisation's ability to attract and retain talent. However, the central issue in this study remained the perceptions and experiences of the participants regarding the unit's attraction and retention strategies and practices.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study showed that overall there are more incentives to join and remain with the organisation than the challenges. A strong emphasis was placed on professional development and organisational appeal as both attractors and retention factors. By

focusing on those factors that discourage joining and remaining, the organisation could identify which HRM practices to streamline in order to improve attraction and retention of talent. However, a few suggestions will be made here.

By actively and positively communicating as well as marketing the organisational brand (Botha *et al.*, 2011), the unit could continue to position itself as the employer of choice. The brand image should revolve around all facets of professional development and organisational appeal.

Within the parameters of available grant funding and budgets, a suggestion would be to positively position fixed-term contracts in such a way for and to staff so that there would be added benefit and improved morale.

Although there is orientation during site visits and training workshops, it is recommended that a formal, planned and directed orientation programme (Proost *et al.*, 2012) is implemented to cover all essential aspects of employment.

In addition, it is proposed that a community orientation programme be offered to families of those employees who have relocated to this rural setting.

These activities and interventions could signal significant commitment on behalf of the employer to employee retention.

In light of the high significance attached by employees to professional development it is advisable that the research unit firmly embeds formal development interventions within its recruitment and talent management strategies, thereby signalling to job applicants and staff their commitment to meeting the developmental needs of employees and ensuring that the employment relationship is mutually beneficial.

Limitations of the study

A limitation was that the research site, the unit's rural offices, are situated 500 km away from the researcher's office base, so interviews had to be completed during a five day visit, which meant that a process of finding saturation (Mason, 2010) could not be followed. This time restriction also meant that there was limited opportunity to pilot the interview questions. By properly piloting the questions, the large volume of data obtained could have been less and focused specifically on the experiences of employees. The current data contains much recruitment process and procedural information.

A further limitation of this study was that participants who were from the local community were not asked if they had considered moving to an urban city. This could be the reason why the challenges a rural setting add to recruitment and retention were not as evident in this study, in contrast to the related challenges published in academic literature.

Suggestions for future research

In order to add to the depth of this study one could interview ex-employees, those who have actually resigned from this Unit and find out how they experienced the recruitment and retention practices and what experiences influenced them to resign. Such a research will give the 'other side of the story'.

The objective of this study was to explore how employees experienced the organisation's recruitment and retention strategies and practices. Given that the objective was not to generalise the results, a more appropriate study with a quantitative research design could be undertaken to test the findings obtained in this study.

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CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The general aim of this research study was to unveil employees' experiences of the organisation's recruitment and retention strategies and practices and to make recommendations that can assist the organisation in streamlining its recruitment and retention strategy and practices to improve staff attraction and retention. The theoretical component of the study revealed how the extant literature conceptualised employee recruitment and retention through the lens of the signalling theory. The empirical aims of this research were to explore employees' experiences of recruitment and retention practices within a university's research unit located in a rural setting. It is largely from learning about employees' experiences that organisations can improve their initiatives to attract and retain talent.

The penultimate chapter, explored these experiences and concluded that overall there are more incentives to join and remain with this research unit than to leave, with very strong emphasis on professional development and organisational appeal as being both attractors and retention factors. By focusing on factors that discourage attraction and retention, this unit could identify which HRM practices to streamline in order improve retention of talent and some suggestions were made at the end of the said chapter. By adopting these suggestions, this research unit can demonstrate an operational model that could be used by other research units in the same university. The findings and the suggestions may be used as hypotheses for future research with different and appropriate designs.

Chapter 4 as the final chapter of the dissertation, draws conclusions about the literature review and empirical study, and then proceeds to discuss the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. All references to theory in Chapter 4 are linked to the literature review in Chapter 2.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

This section focuses on drawing research conclusions from the literature review and empirical study.

4.1.1 Conclusions drawn from the literature review

The development of the literature review section was a reiterative process from the research proposal stage all the way through to post data analysis. It conceptualised the constructs of recruitment and retention and elucidated the factors that impact on organisations' ability to attract and retain talent. The literature review enabled the researcher to explore and address specific aims in order to achieve the general aim of this study. Conclusions were drawn about each of the specific aims.

4.1.1.1 First aim: To create a more enhanced theoretical understanding of recruitment by conceptualising factors pertinent to employee recruitment through the lens of signalling theory

The literature review enabled the researcher to define recruitment and describe recruitment processes and practices, such as strategic recruitment, realistic job previews, branding, matching of values, networking and labour market influences, in terms of employees' experiences. Employees equate their experiences with characteristics of the organisation as signalled during the recruitment process (Celani & Singh, 2011; Gregory, *et al.*, 2013). Understanding job seekers' reactions to their experiences during recruitment can help organisations to improve their recruitment practices.

The global nature of recruitment empowers people to apply for jobs anywhere in the world provided they have the required skills (Gamble *et al.*, 2010; Horwitz, 2013; Young *et al.*, 2010). However, this does put pressure on emerging markets as they relinquish scarce skills to First World countries (Maharaj, 2010; Rogerson & Crush,

2007). This competition with mature markets emphasises the importance of local employers branding themselves as the most appealing organisations to work for, in order to attract and retain talent (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012).

Appropriate branding and providing realistic job previews throughout the recruitment process, contribute significantly to attracting suitable job applicants who match the job criteria and the values of the organisation. These applicants are more likely to have a successful and longer tenure with the organisation because they experienced greater job satisfaction (Earnest *et al.*, 2011; Suszko & Breagh, 1986).

Signalling theory affirms that the vision and mission statements of an organisation can be used by job applicants as a means to gathering information about organisation from which they then extrapolate how the organisation operates and its rationale for existence (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). This establishes an attraction, or lack thereof, to the organisation. In turn, strategic recruitment means to align recruitment practices to the organisation's vision, mission and strategies (Lindgren & Hixson, 2010), but the effectiveness of these practices can be further enhanced if needs of individual employees can also be met.

According to Van Dijk (2008), this meeting employee needs leads to greater productivity and job satisfaction, thereby securing longer work tenure. Botha *et al.* (2011) also emphasised the importance of identifying the personal needs of the required talent and included it as one of the building blocks of the "brand predictive model" (Botha *et al.*, 2011) which may give employers the competitive edge and guide talent recruitment and retention practices. Likewise, the match between employer and employee values increases employee attraction to the organisation. Individuals have fundamental enduring values consisting of attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012). Similarly, organisations also embody values with which they are most affiliated.

Signalling credible, realistic and valuable information about the organisation and the position to job seekers throughout the entire recruitment process creates organisational appeal which attracts suitable applicants who are therefore willing and eager to apply to the organisation for the vacancy and then later remain with the organisation (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012). A realistic job preview (RJP) helps job seekers to assess their suitability for the post (Wanous, 1989). It gives them an indication of how well they may be suited to the organisation and position, and it is this perceived fit that is the precursor to attraction to the organisation (Chen *et al.*, 2012). The more informed the choice, the more committed and confident applicants are, and in the long term as employees, this bolsters their coping abilities (Suszko & Breugh, 1986). This leads to job satisfaction which in turn diminishes the inclination to leave the organisation (Phillips, 1998).

Labour markets, skills shortages and the availability of networks can facilitate or hinder job searches and recruitment. Networking is the interactions of members of social networks during which these members have access to resources and knowledge (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; Portes, 1998). Being privy to these resources and knowledge is purely because they are members of the network. Professional and social networks extend an individual's possible range of search for suitable vacancies (Fugate *et al.*, 2004).

Labour market influences dictate the balance of negotiation power between job seekers and employers (Horwitz, 2013; Moriarty *et al.*, 2012). The preference of those highly skilled individuals to seek employment in urban centres puts pressure on rural employers through a relative scarcity of skills limited to a particular geographic region (Erasmus & Breier, 2009; Hancock *et al.*, 2009).

4.1.1.2 Second aim: To enhance theoretical understanding of retention by conceptualising factors pertinent to employee retention through the lens of signalling theory

In conceptualising the construct of employee retention, the importance of subjective work experiences and expectations of employees was emphasised. The cumulative effect of these experiences and the meeting of individuals' expectations ultimately sway employees towards staying with the organisation or leaving. Employers can utilise HRM practices to enhance employees' experiences by, for instance providing orientation, induction and developmental opportunities.

Retention is the outcome of the cumulative effect of subjective experiences gained by employees in their organisation and how these experiences meet various needs (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Subjective work experiences determine the extent of the satisfaction and meaning employees find in work (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009). An actual experience also encapsulates the employee's resultant assessment, opinion and feelings which are coloured by personal attitudes and characteristics. Retention also revolves around meeting employee expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973; Proost *et al.*, 2012). Unmet expectations form the gap between what employees expect of the organisation and their role, and their actual experiences.

Orientation is a "sense-making process" that new employees experience which assists them in making expectations more realistic (Proost *et al.*, 2012, p. 8). Formal induction programmes are planned and directed interventions that assist new employees in understanding and adopting practices, norms, values and the culture of the organisation (Baruch, 2006). Orientation and induction into the rural environment prior to appointment, encourage job seekers to accept rural posts, but a failure to provide these may contribute to reasons employees give for leaving the organisation (Mills & Millstead, 2002; Roots & Li, 2013). Participants in the Bakker *et al.* (2010) study viewed orientation, part of the recruitment-retention sequence, as a means of improving work conditions, thereby encouraging staff to remain. External factors such as families having difficulties in settling and a lack of employment opportunities for

spouses, play a significant role in employees deciding to remain or resign (Fisher & Fraser, 2010; Gupta *et al.*, 2012).

Learning opportunities also help individuals cope with unmet expectations (Proost *et al.*, 2012). Those denied the opportunities to utilise and develop their skills and knowledge will leave the organisation (Mullei *et al.*, 2010; Van Dijk, 2008). In particular, although lifestyle is appealing in a rural setting, a lack of further educational opportunities and professional isolation are deterrents (Fisher & Fraser, 2010). This lack of developmental support increases the inclination to seek out urban posts (Berry *et al.*, 2011). Professional development is not the only prerequisite for retention and its significance varies at the different career and work life stages of employees (Clark *et al.*, 2013). Mentorships, which involve pairing new employees with more seasoned employees, are a way of addressing the lack of developmental opportunities in rural settings (Gieskes, 2010; Steele *et al.*, 2013).

The more rewarding and richer the employment experience, the more likely employees are to have a sense of job satisfaction and embeddedness. An organisation that actively enhances and facilitates employee satisfaction is more likely to become an employer of choice (Rehman, 2012) and this encourages longer tenure commitment from its employees (Evans & Huxley, 2009). Numerous factors exist through which organisations can contribute to and mediate job satisfaction (Keane *et al.*, 2011; Martins & Coetzee, 2007; Omar *et al.*, 2013).

Job embeddedness offers a possible solution to high turnover in a rural employment setting. Job embeddedness is the extent of the links, fit and sacrifice employees and their families have with the employer and local communities (Fisher & Fraser, 2010; Mallol *et al.*, 2007; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, *et al.*, 2001). Links are the tangible network of contacts and connections that the individual has which fulfil functional needs. Fit is how well his or her abilities are matched to the requirements of the job and organisation. Sacrifice refers to what the employee and family would lose when leaving the organisation or community.

Understanding and facilitating the employee's extent of job embeddedness will assist the employer's prediction of turnover intention and development of effective retention policies and incentives (Mallol *et al.*, 2007).

Positive work experiences encourage employees to develop a strong work-based identity through a process of identification with the organisation, vocation, job and tasks (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006). Identification is the state and ongoing process of creating an identity through association with a group, vocation and organisation (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006; Saayman & Crafford, 2011). Employee identification helps to cement the emotional sense of connection the employee has with the organisation and guides subsequent behaviour (Albert *et al.*, 2000). Identification with tasks, aspects and responsibilities of a job add to this sense of identity. Job characteristics, requirements and opportunities facilitate this identity work and in this way employees find meaning in their work. The strength of the identification is proportionate to the degree to which individual employees willingly take responsibility for and ownership of the organisation's outputs and achievements (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006). Bothma and Roodt (2012) statistically established a strong inverse relationship between work-based identity and turnover intention.

Withdrawal occurs cumulatively over a period of time as employees negatively rate how fairly and equitably employers administer organisation, work environment and job factors (Porter & Steers, 1973; Wöcke & Heymann, 2012). Negatively, these factors contribute to dissatisfaction which is a precursor to withdrawal with an eventual outcome of resignation. However, positive retention practices and turnover are not necessarily on opposite ends of the same continuum as factors external to the organisation might eventually outweigh any internal incentives to remain with the employer (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006; Holtom *et al.*, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2004; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, *et al.*, 2001).

The time and effort the organisation is prepared to invest in interventions encouraging retention, signals to employees the value the organisation attaches to them as

employees. The more valued they are, the more likely employees are to remain with the organisation.

4.1.2 Conclusions drawn from the empirical study

Two empirical aims of the study were identified:

- The aim was to unveil the experiences of the participants so as to reveal employees' reactions or appraisals of the organisation's recruitment and retention policies and practices. Organisations strive to improve their strategies and practices aimed at enhancing recruitment and retention strategies by learning about employees' experiences
- The second aim was to provide recommendations that would assist the organisation under study to streamline its recruitment and retention strategy and practices

The research findings and the discussion sections in chapter 3 of this dissertation illustrated that these aims were achieved. In particular these sections unveiled how employees of this research unit experienced recruitment and retention practices that attracted them to the organisation and provided incentives to remain. Conversely, the study also unveiled which factors that could discourage attraction and retention. This section derives and explains conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of the empirical study.

4.1.2.1 Empirical aim: To unveil the experiences of the participants so as to reveal employees' reactions or appraisals of the organisation's recruitment and retention policies and practices

This interpretative aim was to explore the recruitment and retention experiences of employees of the research unit. As per the tenets of in-depth qualitative studies, the purpose was not to provide one overall conclusion, but rather to describe conclusions that could sum up and explain the themes that emerged throughout the findings.

Conclusion 1: Attraction is the primary outcome of positive recruitment and retention experiences

Universities are in competition with the private sector to attract and retain staff. According to Theron, Barkhuizen, and Du Plessis (2014), universities lose staff to the private sector in favour of better packages and other employment benefits. In particular, this research unit needs to attract and retain highly skilled and competent staff in order to achieve its research and related outputs. Appropriate branding, as a form of signalling, could be used as a competitive strategy to attract and retain the best talent and combat global skills scarcity (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Signalling theory refers to how job applicants gather information to assess the nature and characteristics of the organisation by observing cues and their own experiences (Gregory, *et al.*, 2013). In this way they source information that as yet has been unknown to them. Signalling theory can assist to explain the job applicants' attraction to the organisation and subsequent decision to apply (Celani & Singh, 2011).

Attraction is possibly the first experience the applicant has with the employing organisation and this reaction translates into a willingness to apply for the post (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012). Job advertisements provide job seekers with information on the company and should therefore be relevant, specific and credible in order to attract suitable candidates and ensure their willingness to apply (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012). Perceived fit is a precursor to their attraction to the organisation (Chen *et al.*, 2012).

Organisational appeal can be described as the attraction that job seekers and employees have for organisational characteristics that encourage job seekers to apply for vacancies and employees to remain with the organisation (Acarlar & Bilgiç, 2012). The particular attraction for certain individuals to this research unit is the opportunity to further their academic qualifications which, in turn, is a means to "advance my career". Participants felt that their colleagues were extremely supportive and encouraged them to take up research and studies, and they substantiated this by stating that this is a "learning institute" as opposed to the "private sector".

One participant's first and instant answer to why he/she remains with the unit was that he/she is looking for "professional growth". Participants defined and described professional growth as further tertiary education, on-the-job short courses and training, collaborative networks and opportunities to research and produce related outputs. One participant felt that being in a company or unit that is still growing is essential for personal professional growth. Participants foresaw that they would be able to put into practice their qualifications, previous work experience, strengths and skills and this motivated them to apply for a job with the unit.

This research unit falls within the wider ambit of the field of public health and this was a strong attractor for those participants with a career orientation and interest in the same or similar fields. The match between the employer and employee values, increases employees' attraction to the organisation (Botha *et al.*, 2011). Altruistic values were met by "working for my community" and "learning more about their culture norms and values". The ability and means to contribute to positive change in the lives of individuals in the local community give these participants a sense of purpose. Participants described altruistic values and reasons for remaining with the unit. The motivators were to fulfil a higher purpose in terms of their destiny or by rescuing the unit.

As can be seen from this conclusion, the psychological construct of attraction in response to effective signalling by the organisation is the common thread that runs through all the themes arising out of this study.

Conclusion 2: Incentives to join and remain outweigh factors that discourage attraction and retention

The schematic diagram (figure 1) and discussion in chapter 3 illustrated that incentives for employees to remain with this research unit outweigh any incentives to resign and leave. Strong emphasis was placed on professional development and organisational appeal as being both attractors and retention factors.

Incentives to join and remain

The professional development theme outweighed all the other themes in terms of density of data, demonstrating it as a significant factor in both recruitment and retention. Unit employees attach high value to their professional development and growth and measure this development through opportunities to further their education, network with professional colleagues both within and outside the unit, utilise their skills and acquired knowledge, and learn more from their own jobs. Those activities that constituted as professional development overlapped with unit characteristics that appealed to job seekers and employees.

The theme of organisational appeal occurred as a recruitment and retention factor in the findings. This appeal was characterised by the unit's current and potential growth, by the fact that it and the university are institutions of learning, by the opportunity to collaborate with professional colleagues internally and from all around the world, and by the unit being in the field of public health. Networking afforded the participants further opportunities for research, publication outputs, mentorship opportunities, supervision of studies and funding for research. Certain participants had had exposure to the unit and/or university as previous employees or collaborators and this had motivated them to (re)join the unit. Employees were also aware of a good "fit" between their skills, and the job and unit (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001).

A worthwhile practice in this research unit is to bring those successful applicants who are not from the local community to the rural offices for a site visit as part of the recruitment and selection process. The main focus of these site visits is to orient selected applicants to the rural setting and this has added advantages of introducing them to their future colleagues, familiarising them with the unit's work and their related role, and helping them to select accommodation for when they relocate. The unit also assists with relocation as much as possible. However, no mention was made of a formal induction programme even though some employees were highly proactive in their own settling in and orientation. The participants did comment on how certain

unit staff members are particularly adept at helping new employees and their families to settle in and feel welcome. Although university accommodation is available for rent, it is felt that this could add to a sense of isolation because it is situated away from the local community and could prove especially problematic for spouses who do not drive.

“I love my job” was a straight-forward but strongly emotive response to the retention question which was participants’ way of describing their work identity and identification (Bothma & Roodt, 2012). The discussion relating to this theme encompassed words like hobby, enjoyment, fulfilment, interest, dedication and learning. This love for their job enabled employees to take ownership and responsibility for their job functions and unit outputs (Albert *et al.*, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Kreiner *et al.*, 2006; Saayman & Crafford, 2011; Shim *et al.*, 2009). Certain participants described themselves as being a distinct part of the unit and regarded the unit’s achievements as their own. Participants also expressed the need for their work efforts to be of an enduring nature and to contribute to the research unit even after they leave.

The match in altruistic values between the unit and employees was described by participants as playing a role in first their recruitment, followed by their retention. The unit’s activities enable employees to give expression to their altruistic values by fulfilling a higher purpose, rescuing and serving the unit and community, and pursuing an interest in people. Similarly, the unit’s activities and outputs are extremely altruistic in nature: research and related publications; and being a health and demographic surveillance site in rural South Africa that contributes to the health and wellbeing of this and similar communities. This match in values increases the employees’ attraction to and subsequent intention to remain with the unit (Botha *et al.*, 2011; De Cooman & Pepermans, 2012; Lyons *et al.*, 2006).

Remuneration was described by the participants as being fair and the experience gained and utilisation of skills augment the sense of remuneration. The high

unemployment rate makes it difficult for many people to seek employment elsewhere, including those who described their remuneration as “not enough”. One of the participants felt certain that a longer tenure is essential to build a work “profile” and future employability by demonstrating that new skills and work experience have been acquired during current employment.

The unit’s advertisements ranged from being extremely detailed to being so limited that an impression was given that the job was located in Johannesburg instead of at the rural offices. The unit signals and extends its social responsibility and commitment to the community by advertising vacancies extensively on the walls of shops and hospitals in local villages. Certain applicants proactively used the interview sessions to become familiar with the unit and their future job requirements. In so doing, they realised that their skills and experience were a good match to the unit and the required role. This seemed to bolster their confidence to apply for the vacancy, and then eventually as an incumbent of the position (Berry *et al.*, 2011; Suszko & Breagh, 1986).

Factors that discourage attraction and retention

The discussion surrounding employment contracts presented as the most densely populated factor in discouraging retention. The unit mostly issues short fixed-term contracts which generally discourage family relocation. However, with assurances from fellow employees that the contracts are renewable, new employees are more likely to relocate to the unit’s rural offices with their entire family. A participant felt that he/she would only be able to give his/her family certain “benefits” with a permanent contract, whereas another participant spoke directly to the stability issue saying that fixed-term contracts pose a challenge to both individual careers and to the unit as a whole. Evidently fixed-term contracts impede the momentum and productivity of the unit and affect employee morale as employees are “stressed and frustrated” by the lack of stability and the uncertainty about employment that faces them once the contract comes to an end. Participants demonstrated their resilience by trying to

adopt different philosophical perspectives, such as affirming that it was perhaps their destiny not to have permanent contracts, or carrying on with life as if their contracts would always be renewed, while others tried to understand the unit's options in relation to contracts within the parameters of research agreements and limited grant funding.

An analysis of the "family" theme seemed to indicate that there is less of an "incentive to remain" and more of an "incentive to leave". The main incentives cited by participants to remain with the unit encompassed the following: Home country circumstances driving a job seeker to seek work in South Africa; family responsibilities "pulling" a migrant worker to return to the community; and a unit vacancy coming at the most opportune time for the job seeker and his/her family. However, participants related numerous family factors as the reasons they would consider resigning. This concurs with literature stating that even though an employer has excellent and effective retention practices, external factors might eventually still compel employees to resign (Hancock *et al.*, 2009; Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Stretton & Bolon, 2009). Family factors include the lack of employment opportunities for spouses, a sense of isolation and a loss of social networks, challenges in obtaining relevant work permits for various members of the immediate family, and the quality of education for their children. Certain participants had moved further from the unit's offices to enable their children to attend schools which are believed to offer a better level of education. One participant also described how at certain family life stages employees may be prompted to resign and return to their home country, for example, to take care of aging and elderly parents or the need to be nearer to relatives as children grow up.

The logistics and delay in obtaining work permits could be a deterrent for those foreign nationals who have the scarce skills that the unit is seeking. Work permits may delay the entire recruitment process but in turn ensure that the recruitment process is formalised (Erasmus & Breier, 2009; Mulenga & Van Lill, 2007; Rasool & Botha, 2011; Rasool, Botha, & Bisschoff, 2012). Selected applicants were cautious in

giving notice to their previous employers for fear of their work permit applications being declined. One participant requested that the unit guarantee his/her starting date. This is problematic when it is not known when or if the permit will be issued. Occasionally other internal delays in the unit may extend the recruitment and selection process, but this is rare. One participant stated that he/she had been willing to wait for an unreasonably long time following an extended delay in making an offer, only because he/she was interested in a particular research study that the unit was running (Carless & Hetherington, 2011).

Two negative factors described by participants and categorised under the theme of professional growth were academic isolation and the unit's failure to utilise the job incumbents' skills. "Academic isolation" was a term used to explain how the distance between the unit's rural offices and the university campuses limited interaction with academic colleagues and exposure to university activities and input (Berry *et al.*, 2011; Hancock *et al.*, 2009; Hughes, Odgers-Jewell, Vivanti, Ferguson, & Leveritt, 2011; Stretton & Bolon, 2009). In addition, participants agreed that if their skills are not utilised in their job that would become a valid reason to seek employment elsewhere (Dockel, Basson, & Coetzee, 2007; Messmer, 2005; Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011). One participant was still hoping that his/her circumstances would change to enable his/her skills to be fully utilised as currently this is not the case.

It is evident that participants of this study described more positive than negative experiences, thereby providing more incentives to join and remain with the unit than factors that discourage attraction and retention.

4.1.2.2 Empirical aim: To provide recommendations that would assist the organisation under study to streamline its recruitment and retention strategy and practices

The empirical study revealed that the incentives to join and remain with the research unit outweigh factors that discourage attraction and retention. Nevertheless it is

possible to make recommendations that could help the unit to streamline its recruitment and retention practices in order to enhance staff retention.

The unit could actively harness its strengths of organisational appeal and professional development in order to continue its status as an employer of choice. Employers can increase their “organisational appeal” by offering benefits beyond just financial packages that meet applicants’ needs (Ditlopo *et al.*, 2011). This will ultimately lead to greater productivity and job satisfaction, thereby securing a longer work tenure (Van Dijk, 2008). This does presuppose though that the unit is aware or becomes aware of individual employees’ needs and values, and is in a position to support them.

Professional development, as a positive retention factor enhances and bolsters the individuals’ career and curriculum vitae profile, but simultaneously this development improves the employee’s employability thereby inadvertently resulting in turnover as the person becomes sought after by other companies (Ferreira *et al.*, 2010; Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Employees have different needs and requirements at different work career stages (Clark *et al.*, 2013). The unit would need to be responsive and appropriately adjust the opportunities it offers employees as they develop professionally. The unit could respond to any inevitable turnover by proactively implementing succession plans (Davids & Esau, 2012; Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2009; Redman, 2011).

In addition, it might be worthwhile to re-evaluate and streamline the HRM practices of orientation, induction and employment contracts. It is recommended that a planned and directed orientation programme be implemented from the first day of employment (Proost *et al.*, 2012), and that a community orientation programme be offered to families who have relocated with new employees to this rural setting. Within the parameters of available grant funding and budgets, it is suggested that by positively positioning fixed-term contracts with added benefits and status the employer could improve staff morale about their fixed-term contracts (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001; Porter & Steers, 1973; Wöcke & Heymann, 2012).

Two negative factors described by participants and categorised under the theme of professional growth were academic isolation and non-utilisation by the unit of the job incumbents' skills.

“Academic isolation” was a term used to explain how the distance between the unit’s rural offices and the university campuses limited interaction with academic colleagues and exposure to university activities and input (See Berry *et al.*, 2011; Hancock *et al.*, 2009; Hughes, Odgers-Jewell, Vivanti, Ferguson, & Leveritt, 2011; Stretton & Bolon, 2009). It is recommended that mentorships could address this sense of academic and professional isolation. Mentorship programmes that pair new employees with more seasoned employees are a way of addressing the lack of developmental opportunities in rural settings (Gieskes, 2010; Steele *et al.*, 2013). The unit could match new employees as rural mentees with urban mentors from the university’s main campuses.

Participants agreed that if their skills are not utilised in their job then this could become a valid reason to seek employment elsewhere (Dockel *et al.*, 2007; Messmer, 2005; Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011). One participant hoped that his/her work environment would improve sufficiently to enable his/her underutilised skills to be fully utilised. It is proposed that the unit implements a skills audit and follows through with a skills plan in order to assess and address the application of skills (Davids & Esau, 2012; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Mbhalati, 2010). However, the challenges involved in auditing skills are acknowledged because research projects have varying requirements in terms of staffing and other resources, and are by nature of limited duration.

By implementing the above-mentioned recommendations, the unit would facilitate the process of embedding the employee and family in the organisation and community through strengthening their links and fit, and increasing the potential sacrifice employees would make should they chose to leave (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001).

4.2 LIMITATIONS

A limitation was that the research site, the unit's rural offices, is 500 km away from the researcher's office, so interviews had to be completed during her visit of five days to the research site. With this limited time it meant that a process of finding saturation (Mason, 2010) could not be followed. This time restriction also meant that there was limited opportunity to pilot the interview questions. By properly piloting the questions, the large volume of data obtained could have been less and focused specifically on the experiences of employees. The current data contains a wealth of recruitment process and procedural information. However, there was some adaptation of the questions in response to participants' answers, although not a major departure from the initial scheduled questions.

Since this was a qualitative study in a particular research setting, it cannot be generalised to other universities, but the results may be transferable to other research units within the same university.

As the researcher was an employee in the unit at the time of this study the possibilities of researcher bias were real. However, in line with the dictates of the qualitative tradition, this limitation was circumvented by requesting participants to check their transcripts and the researcher's findings. In addition the researcher tried to remove any potential bias that she could bring to the study with her prior knowledge gained as an employee, by clearly informing all participants that she was interviewing them in her role as a student and they were to assume that the researcher knew nothing about them. In addition the researcher conducted the interviews during her vacation leave, i.e. not during her working hours which facilitated a real separation between work and research.

In the background and introduction sections of chapter 1, emphasis was distinctly placed on the significance of the location of this research unit, which operates in a rural environment. It was contended that the location adds to the complexity and

challenges of recruitment and retention practices in the unit. Unit managers were originally also interviewed and questions relating to scarce skills and the rural setting were included in their interview schedules, but their data was not included in this dissertation because it was later decided to limit this study to employees' experiences only. Questions relating to the rural nature of the employment setting were only included as in-depth probing questions when they related to the content of the participants' answers during the interviews. During data analysis it became evident that the rural setting was only discussed with participants who were foreign nationals and not those who had originally come from this rural community. The latter participants might have been a valuable source of further information confirming different recruitment and retention experiences merely because the unit is based in a rural setting. Hence the rural factor could not be included in the "incentives to join and remain" or in the "factors that discourage attraction and retention", as illustrated in the schematic diagram (figure 1).

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL USE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Recommendations for practical application in the research unit were explored in section 4.1.2.2 of this chapter in which an empirical aim was addressed by proposing recommendations that could assist the organisation in streamlining its recruitment and retention strategy and practices to enhance staff retention. In summary, these recommendations included the active harnessing of the unit's strengths of organisational appeal and professional development in order to continue its status as an employer of choice. In addition, it might be worthwhile re-evaluating and streamlining the HRM practices of orientation, induction and fixed-term employment contracts. It is recommended that a planned and directed orientation programme be implemented from the first day of employment (Proost *et al.*, 2012), and that a community orientation programme be offered to families who have relocated with new employees to this rural setting. Within the parameters of available grant funding and budgets, it is suggested that fixed-term contracts be positively positioned in such a way that they reveal added benefits to staff and thus improve morale. Mentorship

programmes, skills audits and plans are proposed as solutions to academic isolation and effective utilisation of skills respectively.

The research and findings of this study could be transferred to other research units within the same university. Once the recommendations are applied then this research unit could be held up as the operational model for recruitment and retention practices by other research units. It is suggested that future research include a retention study of all research units belonging to a single university irrespective of whether located in a rural or urban setting. The research topics could then be narrowed down to focus solely on organisational appeal and opportunities for professional development and how these might contribute to the research outputs of the units, and ultimately the university.

Furthermore in order to add to the depth of this study one could interview ex-employees, those who have actually resigned from this research unit and find out how they experienced the recruitment and retention practices and what experiences influenced them to resign. This research will give the 'other side of the story'.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 4 discussed the conclusions drawn from the theoretical and empirical study. Limitations of this study were identified and recommendations for future research proposed.

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APPENDIX 1

University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee Approval



Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON MEDICAL)
R14/49 Pearsall

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER H130213

PROJECT TITLE

Strategies used to recruit and retain scarce skills in a rural research unit

INVESTIGATOR(S)

Ms W Pearsall

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT

Public Health/

DATE CONSIDERED

15/02/2013

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

EXPIRY DATE

27/02/2015

DATE 28/02/2013

CHAIRPERSON


(Professor T Milani)

cc: Supervisor : Mr KP Moalusi

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

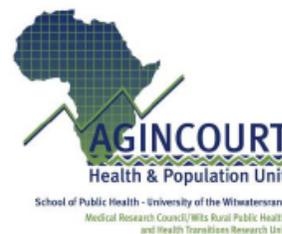
I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**


Signature

2013 03 01
Date

APPENDIX 2

Unit Directorate permission and approval



School of Public Health, 7 York Road, Parktown 2193, South Africa
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Prof Rian Viviers
Manager: Master's Programme
Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology
College of Economic and Management Sciences
UNISA

7 November 2012

Dear Prof Viviers,

I confirm that the MRC/Wits Rural Public Health and Health Transitions Research Unit (Agincourt) has given consent for Wendy Pearsall to conduct research within the Unit, for the fulfilment of her Masters dissertation requirement.

This said, I have raised a couple of concerns with Wendy. The first is that her research must be of some benefit to our Research Unit, and the second is that Wendy needs to carefully coordinate the time she removes staff from their jobs in order to conduct her research interviews. This will have to be done in consultation with project and line management – the time off work cannot be excessive and must occur with least disruption.

Please let me know if you have any queries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'K Kahn'.

Professor Kathleen Kahn

Senior Researcher: MRC/Wits Rural Public Health and Health Transitions Research Unit (Agincourt)
Associate Professor: Health and Population Division, School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand

APPENDIX 3

Informed consent form

Wendy Pearsall – Unisa student number 7165234
Wits ethics clearance certificate protocol number: H130213

Title of research project:
Employees' experiences of recruitment and retention in a research unit located in a rural setting

INFORMATION SHEET

You know me as a staff member (HR Administrator) in our MRC/Wits-Agincourt unit, but I am also a student with Unisa studying for my Master's in Industrial and Organisational Psychology. This information sheet is about my research to be conducted as part of my dissertation.

This study falls within the disciplinary context of Industrial and Organisational (I/O) psychology and its sub-discipline of personnel psychology. I/O psychology is the scientific study of the behaviour of individuals in the work environment, at individual, group and organisational levels. The behaviour is explained in terms of psychological theories, constructs and models. This knowledge is developed and applied in various sub-disciplines, one of which is personnel psychology. Personnel psychology is the applied science of measuring and predicting the differences in human behaviour and performance in order to improve on the attainment of organisational and individual goals.

My research topics of recruitment and retention fall in the personnel psychology field where human resource management (HRM) and psychology overlap. More specifically my intention in this study is to explore our unit's processes and procedures around recruitment and retention. I will hold separate individual interviews with both line managers and staff in certain job positions. Owing to time restraints, I am not able to interview everybody and so will select certain individuals in certain positions.

This study will in no way harm or benefit your work with our unit. It is purely for the purpose of my education and completion of my degree. Our interview recording (only if you agree to a recording) and transcript will be labelled with a code or number and not your name. All the interviews will be combined together into results and reporting for my research. All personal information that can be traced back to you will not be included in my results and reporting. In this way, I will ensure your anonymity and the information you give me during our interview

will be kept confidential. All the research information contained in my dissertation and academic journal article will not in any way identify you.

In addition, participation in this study is purely voluntary. This means that you have the right to decline before the study starts. You are also entitled to withdraw at any time even though you have signed the consent form. However, with regard to withdrawal, once our interview is complete you will not have any further opportunities to withdraw.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I can be contacted on wendy.pearsall@wits.ac.za or 011 717 2714 or 081 706 5038.

Attached herewith is a consent form for you to sign if you fully understand the implications of this research study and are willing to participate.

CONSENT FORM

I _____ (full names) hereby give my consent and willingness to participate in this study. There has been no coercion and I am voluntarily participating.

I fully understand the extent and implications of this study and all my questions have been answered in full and to my satisfaction.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 4

Permission to record form

Researcher: Wendy Pearsall
Unisa student number: 7165234
Research topic: Recruitment and retention

PERMISSION TO RECORD

I have read the information sheet and understand my interview with the researcher, Wendy Pearsall, will only be recorded if I give permission. I understand that recording the interview will assist the researcher to more easily analyse the data but my refusal will not negatively impact on the study.

If at any stage during the interview I become uncomfortable with the recording, the recording will be stopped at my request, even though I signed this "Permission to record" form just before the start of the interview.

It has been explained to me that the person typing the recording will not know my name and I have been assured of anonymity and confidentiality. I have been told that the transcript will be labelled with a number or code and not my name. I have also been advised that the digital recordings will only be used for the purpose of this study and they will be destroyed after five years.

I _____ (full names) hereby give my consent and willingness to for this interview to be recorded. There has been no coercion and I am voluntarily giving permission.

I fully understand the extent and implications of this study and all my questions have been answered in full and to my satisfaction.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 5

Interview Schedule

Wendy Pearsall – UNISA student number 7165234

Wits ethics clearance certificate protocol number: H130213

Title of research project:

Employees' experiences of recruitment and retention in a research unit located in a rural setting

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted, following a standard set of open-ended questions. The conversation will then continue with further enquiry into the answers. In this way the data will comprehensively cover the research topics.

Interview schedule – employees

Scarce and critical skills

1. Describe your most valuable skills that you use in your current position.

Recruitment topic

1. What position were you appointed to when you first started with the unit and what position do you hold now?
2. Why did you apply for your position/s when it was vacant?
3. Please take me through the recruitment process as you experienced it.

Retention topic

1. Why do you stay with the Unit?