

**A HUMAN RESOURCE RISK MANAGEMENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR  
ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION IN AN OPEN DISTANCE ELECTRONIC  
LEARNING UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Tebogo Kefilwe Molotsi (student number, 34859306), declare that the study **“HUMAN RESOURCE RISK MANAGEMENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION IN AN OPEN DISTANCE ELECTRONIC LEARNING UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA”** is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis/dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

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.

*Tebogo Molotsi*

Signature

28/02/2021

Date

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A HUMAN RESOURCE RISK MANAGEMENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION IN AN OPEN DISTANCE ELECTRONIC UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The recruitment and retention of adequate and capable academics staff members with the right skills and knowledge in higher education institutions is a growing global problem. This is particularly the case in the African continent where academics leave their respective higher education institutions for a multitude of reasons, but mainly for better services. This suggests that higher education institutions in Africa may not be addressing the educational needs of students given the shortage of academics. This is a concern that requires urgent action. To date, there is a paucity of studies that have investigated academic staff retention in higher education institutions in the African continent. Hence, this study explored the perspectives of the academic staff of an ODeL institution in South Africa in relation to academic staff retention, including the risks associated with academic attrition.

The aim of this study was to explore and develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that may influence academics staff retention at an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The rationale was to develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in ODeL institutions in South Africa. To achieve this aim, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach and utilised interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a research design for critical reasons. IPA enabled the researcher to develop both an empathic and a critical understanding of the phenomenon on the academic staff retention and HR risk management by taking into consideration the principle of double hermeneutics.

Data were collected at an ODeL institution in South Africa using individual interviews (N=20) and focus group discussions with four participants per focus group (N=4x4) guided by semi-structured interview guides for each set of interviews. The interviews were conducted from 01 February 2017 to 30 June 2017 in the Pretoria (Muckleneuk) and Johannesburg (Florida) campuses. Each interview was audio-recorded and lasted for about 45 minutes.

The data of the study were analysed using IPA because of its stage-by-stage guide to analysis, which made the analytical process of the study data more manageable. The audio-recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were then subsequently analysed. The analysis was conducted in parallel with the interviews until category saturation was achieved. The analysis was conducted in two phases. Phase one of the data analysis was the individual interviews and phase two of data analysis was the focus group discussions.

The outcome of the analysis was five superordinate themes: 1) defining academic staff retention, 2) determinants of academic staff retention, 3) human resource risk assessment, 4) human resource risk management, and 5) cultural influence. Each of these superordinate themes consisted of sub-themes. Following the analysis of the data sets of the individual interviews and focus group discussions, a conceptual framework entitled “Human Resource Risk Management” was developed using the researcher’s experience in academic staff retention HR risk, the extant literature on this subject and the findings of the study. This framework may serve as a useful guide for academic institutions, including those with an ODeL mode of delivery for recruiting and retaining academic staff.

Despite the practical useful utility of the findings, this study is not free from limitations. It used a criterion purposive sampling approach to identify and recruit participants. Although a reasonable number of academic staff members participated in the study, academic staff at the study sites may have been different from those at other ODeL institutions in the context of their experiences and perceptions regarding academic staff retention and HR risks. The study was conducted in one ODeL institution.

Given this, it is recommended for future studies on this subject to be conducted in multiple ODeL institutions using a mixed-methods design that may employ both probability and non-probability sampling approaches.

**Keywords:** academic staff retention, human resource risk, human resource risk management, interpretative phenomenological analysis, Open distance e-learning.

## **TSHOBOKANYO**

### **LETLHOMESO LA MOGOPOLO WA TSAMAISO YA MATSHOSETSI A TSAMAISO YA BADIRI LA GO TSWELELA GO TSHOLA BADIRI BA BATLHATLHELEDI LE BABATLISISI MO YUNIBESITHI E E RUTANG BAITHUTI BA LE KWA KGAKALA KA TSELA YA ELEKETORONIKI MO AFORIKABORWA**

Go ngoka le go tswela go tshola badiri ba ba lekaneng le ba ba bokgoni ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi ba ba nang le dikgono le kitso e e siameng mo ditheong tsa thuto e kgolwane ke bothata jo bo golang lefatshe ka bophara. Seno se bonagala thata mo kontinenteng ya Aforika moo batlhatlheledi ba tlogelang ditheo tsa bona tsa thuto e kgolwane ka ntlha ya mabaka a le mantsi, mme bogolo segolo e le ka ntlha ya ditirelo tse di botoka. Seno se supa gore ditheo tseno tsa Aforika di ka ne di sa samagane le ditlhokego tsa thuto tsa baithuti sentle ka ntlha ya tlhalelo ya batlhatlheledi. Seno se a tshwenya e bile se tlhoka go tsibogelwa ka bonako. Go fitlha ga jaana, go na le tlhalelo ya dithutopatlisiso tse di tlhotlhomisitseng go tswela go tsholwa ga badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi mo ditheong tsa thuto e kgolwane mo kontinenteng ya Aforika. Ka jalo, thutopatlisiso eno e tlhotlhomisitse megopolo ya badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi mo setheong sa ODeL mo Aforikaborwa malebana le go tswela go tsholwa ga badiri ba batlhatlheledi, go akarediwa le matshosetsi a a amanang le go koafala ga thuto.

Maikaelelo a thutopatlisiso eno e ne e le go tlhotlhomisa le go tlhaloganya ka botlalo dintlha tse di ka tlhotlheletsang go tswela go tsholwa ga badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi mo setheong sa ODeL kwa Gauteng, Aforikaborwa. Lebaka tota e ne e le go tlhama letlhomeso la mogopolo wa tsamaiso ya matshosetsi mo HR malebana le go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi mo setheong sa ODeL mo Aforikaborwa. Go fitlhelela maikaelelo ano, mmatlisisi o dirisitse molebo o o lebelelang mabaka mme a dirisa tokololo e e ranolang tiragalo (IPA) jaaka thadiso ya patlisiso ya mabaka a botlhokwa. IPA e kgontshitse mmatlisisi go tlhaloganya ka botlalo tiragalo ya go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi le tsamaiso ya matshosetsi a HR go etswe tlhoko ntlhatheo ya go ranola le go tlhaloganya se se batlisisiwang ka botlalo.

Go kokoantswe *data* kwa setheong sa ODeL mo Aforikaborwa go dirisiwa dipotsolotso tsa bongwe ka bongwe (N = 20) le ditlhopha tsa dipuisano tse di neng di na le bannileseabe ba le bane mo setlhopheng sengwe le sengwe (N = 4 x 4), go kaelwa ke dikaedi tsa dipotsolotso tse di batlileng di rulagane mo potsolotsong nngwe le nngwe. Dipotsolotso di dirilwe go tloga ka 01 Tlhakole 2017 go fitlha ka 30 Seetebosigo 2017 kwa dikhemphaseng tsa Pretoria (Muckleneuk) le Johannesburg (Florida). Potsolotso nngwe le nngwe e gatisitswe mo segatisamodumong mme e tsere sebaka se e ka nnang metsotso e le 45.

*Data* ya thutopatlisiso e lokolotswe go dirisiwa IPA ka ntlha ya kaedi ya yona ya tokololo ya legato-ka-legato, e e dirileng gore tirego ya go lokolola *data* ya thutopatlisiso e nne bonolo go dirisega. Tokololo e dirilwe ka magato a le mabedi. Legato la ntlha la tokololo ya *data* e ne e le dipotsolotso tsa bongwe ka bongwe mme legato la bobedi la tokololo ya *data* e ne e le ditlhopha tsa dipuisano. Dipotsolotso tse di neng di gatisitswe mo segatisamodumong di ne tsa kwalololwa jaaka di gatisitswe la ntlha, mme morago ga lokololwa kgatiso e e kwalolotsweng. Tokololo e dirilwe mmogo le dipotsolotso go fitlha go tthaloganngwa tiragalo ka botlalo.

Dipoelo tsa tokololo e nnile meono e metlhanano e megolo: 1) go tthalosa go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlhededi le babatlisisi, 2) diswetsi tsa go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlhededi le babatlisisi, 3) tthatlhobo ya matshosetsi a tsamaiso ya badiri, 4) tsamaiso ya matshosetsi a tsamaiso ya badiri, le 5) tshusumetso ya setso. Mongwe le mongwe wa meono eno e megolo o nnile le meonopotlana. Go latela tokololo ya *data* ya dipotsolotso tsa bongwe ka bongwe le dipuisano tsa ditlhopha tsa puisano, go ne ga tthamiwa Letlhomeso la mogopolo wa Tsamaiso ya Matshosetsi a Tsamaiso ya Badiri go dirisiwa maitemogelo a mmatlisisi malebana le matshosetsi a HR a go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlhededi le babatlisisi, dikwalo tse di gona mo setlhogong seno le diphitlhelole tsa thutopatlisiso. Letlhomeso leno le ka dira jaaka kaedi e e mosola mo ditheong tsa thuto, go akarediwa tse di dirisang mokgwa wa ODeL, go ngoka le go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlhededi le babatlisisi.

Le fa diphitlhelole di le mosola go ka dirisega, thutopatlisiso eno e sa ntse e

lekanyeditswe. Go dirisitswe molebo wa go tlhopha sampole ka boithophelo jwa mmatlisisi go supa le go ngoka bannileseabe. Le fa go nnile le palo e e amogelesegang ya badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi ba ba nnileng le seabe mo thutopatlisong, badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi kwa setsheng sa thutopatlisio ba ka ne ba farologane le ba ba kwa ditheong tse dingwe tsa ODeL ka ntlha ya maitemogelo le melebo ya bona malebana le go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi le matshosetsi a HR. Thutopatlisio e dirilwe mo setheong se le sengwe fela sa ODeL.

Ka ntlha ya seno, go atlenegisiwa gore dithutopatlisio tsa isago tsa setlhogo seno di dirwe kwa ditheong tse di farologaneng tsa ODeL go dirisiwa thadiso ya mekgwa e e tswakantsweng e e ka dirisang melebo ya go tlhopha sampole go se na thulaganyo e e rileng le ka boithophelo jwa mmatliisi.

**Mafoko a botlhokwa:** go tswela go tshola badiri ba batlhatlheledi le babatlisisi, matshosetsi a tsamaiso ya badiri, tsamaiso ya matshosetsi a tsamaiso ya badiri, tokololo ya go ranola tiragalo, go ithuta ka tsela ya eleketroniki baithuti ba le kgakala



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

**COL:** Commonwealth of Learning

**CHEC:** Cape Higher Education Consortium

**DHET:** Department of Higher Education and Training

**HPCSA:** Health Profession Council of South Africa

**HR:** Human Resource

**HRM:** Human Resource Management

**ICDE:** International Council for Distance Education

**ICT:** Information and Communication Technologies

**IoDSA:** Institute of Directors in Southern Africa

**IPA:** Interpretative phenomenological analysis

**ODE:** Open Distance Education

**ODeL:** Open Distance Electronic Learning

**ODL:** Open Distance Learning

**SABPP:** South African Board for People Practices

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

**UNISA:** University of South Africa

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## **CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This study explores the factors that may influence academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in South Africa and develops a human resource (HR) risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention. This chapter includes discussions relating to the research problem and motivation for undertaking the study. Added to this, the chapter includes the purpose, objectives and research questions of the study. The chapter provides a theoretical foundation from which the HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in a South African ODeL institution was developed. It also offers discussions on the research paradigm, the definitions of the key concepts used in the study, and the contributions, which the study makes to the body of knowledge in the area of HR risk management. Added to this, a brief discussion of the research methodology utilised in this study is included in this chapter. This chapter ends with a layout of the rest of the chapters of this thesis, and a summary.

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Risk is the probability of an event occurring and its expected severity, which may prevent an organisation from achieving its goals and objectives if ignored (Renn, 2017). It is also considered a threat or hazard that is incompletely understood and thus its occurrence may be forecasted only with uncertainty (Hillson, 2017). Considering this, the risk is associated with negative connotations and uncertainties. Thus, people, sometimes engage in activities, such as mentorship and supervision to reduce the impact of perceived risks on both themselves and others (Bo, 2014). Similar approaches are often used by HR risk management personnel to prevent or reduce the incidents of HR risk and its corresponding impact on their employees, such as academic staff. The term academic staff refers to employees with roles and responsibilities of teaching and learning, research, academic citizenship and community engagement in higher education institutions (Bezuidenhout, 2015).

Higher education institutions are experiencing numerous challenges related to recruitment and retention of adequate and capable academics staff members with the

right skills and knowledge, and this remains to be a huge global problem (Bussin, 2014; Bussin & Thabethe, 2018; Islam et al., 2019; Makondo, 2015; Shariffuddin et al., 2016). The situation has become particularly urgent in the African continent. The word “right” is used here to refer to academic staff members that are committed and willing to address the aims and objectives of the organisations in which they are employed. The main function of an academic is to provide quality education service to the students and equip them with knowledge and skills (Donlagić & Fazlić, 2015). Anecdotal evidence suggests that most academic institutions do not have enough staff members to carry out these functions and the retention of those they have remains a challenge (Mushemeza, 2016).

HR risks are those events that occur in an organisation, which may endanger the activities and findings of the same (Stefánsdóttir, 2017). Examples of HR risks include shortages of employees, grievances and disputes, low morale, unauthorised absenteeism, violence in the workplace and non-compliance with HR-related legislation, such as Employment Equity Act, Skills Development Act, Basic Conditions of Employment Act, Black Economic Empowerment Act (Blacker & McConnell, 2015; South African Board for People Practices [SABPP], 2015), to name but a few. It is worth noting that HR risks are unavoidable and are normal occurrences in organisations (Molotsi & Molo, 2015). Thus, it is practically impossible to create a risk-free organisation, a view which Molotsi and Molo (2015) echo in their study of HR risks in South Africa. As risks may occur in any department and at any level of an organisation, no organisation is immune to HR risks (Van der Vegt et al., 2015). It is therefore logical for HR risk management personnel to spend their energy and time on risk minimisation rather than risk prevention. HR risk managers thus often make efforts to identify threats or risks with the view to minimise their occurrence and impact, as failing to achieve this may lead to organisational collapse (Hillson, 2017). Thus, it is therefore critical that HR risks of organisations are timely identified and managed.

Hopkin (2018, p. 3) defines risk management as the identification and assessment of actual and possible areas of risk that may affect an organisation either in part or in its totality. This definition indicates that risk management is a multifactorial process that calls for the participation of a range of stakeholders (such as managers and board of directors) in the alleviation of risks. The multifactorial nature of risk management suggests the need for effective planning and provision of guidance to ensure effective

alleviation of risk (Meyer & Abbott, 2017). Acknowledging this, the Institute of Directors in Southern Africa [IoDSA], (2016) offers a range of approaches for managing risk. Examples of these include avoidance, termination, transfer, tolerance, exploitation, and mitigation of each risk, or a response in the form of a combination of the above-mentioned approaches.

One aspect of risk management that is often discussed in the existing literature, is training and development (Bo, 2014; Hopkin, 2018; Hopkinson, 2017; Slovic, 2016). Given that risk management decisions are made by humans (SABPP, 2014), having appropriately qualified and competent people to carry out specific roles and functions in an organisation, is expected to result in effective HR risk management. This is the case, as adequately trained personnel may enable an organisation to attain its primary purpose of risk management, specifically, the alleviation of risk (Meyer & Abbott, 2017). Noting that risk management activities and practices are carried out by people, this concept can be considered a subset of human resource management (HRM). Lawler III and Boudreau (2015) consider HRM as a strategy for managing people effectively in an organisation to achieve its aims and objectives. Examples of HRM may include recruitment, retention, training, development, motivation, performance appraisal and HRM. This study focuses on HR risk management, including its practice that promotes academic staff retention.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

The universities of the 21st century are experiencing numerous challenges. One of these challenges relates to the recruitment and retention of suitable and competent academics with the right skills and knowledge, in the right place, and at the right time (Bussin, 2014; Bussin & Thabethe, 2018; Metcalf et al., 2005, p. 120). The word “right” is used here to refer to academic staff that are committed and willing to address the aims and objectives of the organisations they work for. Therefore, universities are to avoid shortages of such academics and once recruited; their respective HR departments are to enhance the skills and knowledge of their employees in the areas of teaching and learning, and research. The rationale for such an approach is to prevent attrition and promote academic staff retention.

Kozhushko (2020) echoes this and states: without proper forecasting, universities will run the risk of being understaffed, as they will be unable to retain their valuable HR assets. Acknowledging this, both organisations and academic staff benefit when the latter are supported in the context of knowledge and skills development. Kaplan and Norton (2015, p. 1); Zorek (2020) support this view and state that investing in people in the context of knowledge and skills development does not only improve the quality of work and job satisfaction, but it also enables individuals to attain additional income, higher wages and this creates employment opportunities. Despite this, academic staff members continue to leave higher education institutions to join private organisations (Theron et al., 2014). The question now arises, what is causing the increase in attrition of academic staff in an ODeL institution?

The high number of academic staff leaving academia to join non-academic institutions may be seen as an indication that something is wrong in academic environments. Although not conclusive, several reasons have been given for the high turnover rates in academic institutions. Examples of these include unattractive remuneration packages and incentives (such as performance bonuses), unfair promotion policies, limited research funding, and an increase in workload because of the growing numbers of students (Altbach, 2015; Mabaso, 2017; Manogharan et al., 2018; Mapolisa, 2015; Selesho & Naile, 2014; Teater & Mendoza, 2018).

The high turnover rate of academic staff undoubtedly harms higher education institutions, including the quality of teaching and learning, student throughput rates, and the well-being of the remaining academic staff (Manogharan et al., 2018; Selesho & Naile, 2014). These negative effects on higher education institutions form part of the HR risks (Appelbaum et al., 2017), facing the ODeL institution. To alleviate these risks, higher education institutions need to engage in strategies (such as the provision of incentives) that promote academic staff retention (Too et al., 2015). There is an apparent urgent need to adopt such approaches in higher education institutions because of the high academic staff attrition rates and associated problems, a view shared by Theron et al. (2014). They note that there is a drastic increase in the demand for academic staff in higher education institutions, because of problems with retaining academic staff, a view echoed by Kebaetse et al. (2016); Mushemeza (2016); Theron et al. (2014) Although the reasons for the problems about retention are still not clear, they are occasionally linked to HR risks (Chamberlain, 2017; Selesho & Naile, 2014).

Thus, the dilemma with academic staff retention and HR risks deserve further investigation.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Current literature indicates that there is a high turnover or attrition of academic staff in higher education institutions in South Africa (Chabaya et al., 2014; Selesho & Naile, 2014). This is largely attributable to the use of temporary employment contracts and limited career opportunities (Manogharan et al., 2018). It is also attributable to an increase in workload, experiences of stress, and limited support mechanisms, like mentoring and supervision (Attri, 2012). Generally, academics are inadequately remunerated in comparison with other professions of other sectors that require similar qualifications and knowledge (Altbach, 2015; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013). The inadequate remuneration discourages potential applicants from entering academia (Dube & Ngulube, 2013). In addition, the inadequate remuneration contributes to academic staff turnover (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017).

Academic staff turnover may have a negative impact on the functions of higher education institutions. Ainer et al. (2018) reiterate this by noting that academic staff turnover may cause institutions to run less smoothly, mostly because of lost organisational knowledge, lower morale and productivity. A lack of continuity and high recruitment costs are among some of the problems stemming from the loss of academic staff.

The University of South Africa lost many of its academic staff over the past decade due to resignation and retirement (University of South Africa, 2015, p.12). Table 3.1 (Section 3.6.1.2) shows an overall increase in the attrition rate of academic staff at the University of South Africa from 2012 to 2019. The loss of academic staff by the University of South Africa is noted in all disciplines, and this institution is experiencing difficulty with replacing the lost academic staff (University of South Africa, 2015, p.15). This is particularly the case in the scarce-skill disciplines, such as science, engineering and technology (Molotsi & Moloi, 2015). This could not only be a function of out-migration of academic staff, but it could also be a function of the academic staff of these disciplines being attracted to the private sectors by lucrative incentives (Molotsi & Moloi, 2015, p. 156). This is a concern that requires the adoption of several

approaches by the HR risk managers of the University of South Africa for prevention or at least minimisation of attrition of academic staff.

The staff profile and qualifications should be posted on the university website to promote publicity and networking among scholars. The papers observe several challenges that face African Universities today--funding (enhancement of financial base and sustainability), infrastructural demands, inadequate staff remuneration, high student enrolment with low staff-student ratio, and governance/management deficits (Kebaetse et al., 2016; Kiragu et al., 2019; Mushemeza, 2016; Yimer et al., 2017). Despite these challenges, it is possible to identify and implement strategic interventions to admit quality students/optimum level of student intake, appoint and retain quality academic staff if we are to build a well-functioning University for both institutional and social development in Africa (Mayer et al., 2011; Mushemeza, 2016).

Academic staff recruitment and retention issues remain a huge global challenge (Makondo, 2014). This is particularly the case in many African countries. Many leaders of universities in Africa acknowledge the lack of enhancement in the financial base to sustain the academic institutions, such as infrastructural demands, inadequate compensation, high student intake and staff shortages in their respective higher education institutions (Kiragu et al., 2019; Mushemeza, 2016; Yimer et al., 2017). They caution that unless something urgent is done in Africa, universities alone will be unable to retain the academic personnel required in their respective countries (Kiragu et al., 2019). The universities depend solely on academic staff for their accomplishment and sustainability, as this professional group contributes to the socio-economic and technological developments (Kiragu et al., 2019; Ng'ethe et al., 2012). The question now arises, what can university leaders do to retain quality academic staff in their respective higher education institutions?

One approach that has a proven success record of preventing or at least reducing academic staff attrition relates to the use of an HR risk management conceptual framework that includes recruitment and selection, performance management, corporate culture, training and development, and retention (Meyer & Abbott, 2017). It is worth noting that only a few studies on HR risk management in corporate organisations have been conducted in South Africa (Bo, 2014; Kraev & Tikhonov, 2019; Meyer & Abbott, 2017; SABPP, 2015). There is, therefore, a need to conduct a



study in this area, develop an HR risk management conceptual framework, and determine its role in academic staff retention.

## **1.4 RESEARCH PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS**

To realise the purpose, questions and objectives of the study, the study focused on the following:

### **1.4.1 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is twofold. The study aims to:

- explore and develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that may influence academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.
- develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

### **1.4.2 Research questions**

- What are the perceptions of academic staff regarding HR risk factors that may influence academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa?
- What are the academic staff's perceptions of the practices of academic staff retention and HR risk management in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa?
- What is the evidence-based guidance (HR risk management conceptual framework) for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa?

### **1.4.3 Research objectives**

The research objectives of this study are:

*Objective 1:* To identify, explore and describe academic staff's perceptions of HR risk factors that may influence the retention of academic staff of an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

*Objective 2:* To explore academic staff's perceptions of the practices of academic staff retention and HR risk management in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

*Objective 3:* To develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

## **1.5 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY**

Several theoretical frameworks have been used to explain employees' retention, including retention strategies of organisations. Examples of these include the Equity Theory (Lazaroiu, 2015), the Expectancy Theory (Lazaroiu, 2015) and Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (Alshmemri et al., 2017; Herzberg, 1959). Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959) is one of the seminal motivational theories that seek to explain the relationship between HR risks and academic staff retention. This theory has been used in several studies in varied contexts, including Africa. In South Africa, for example, Samuel (2008) as cited in Kassa (2015); Adedeji and Ugwumadu (2018) used the theory to establish motivational factors influencing staff retention in private and public organisations. Similarly, Radivoev (2005) used the theory to study factors influencing the retention of Sales Consultants in South Africa. The above-mentioned studies indicate that Herzberg's (1959) Two Factor Theory has practical utility and is relevant to the proposed study. The researcher, therefore, intends to use the same as an underpinning framework to guide the entire process of this proposed study, and thus it deserves a detailed explanation. See figure 1.1 for a diagrammatical illustration of Herzberg's (1959) Two Factor Theory.

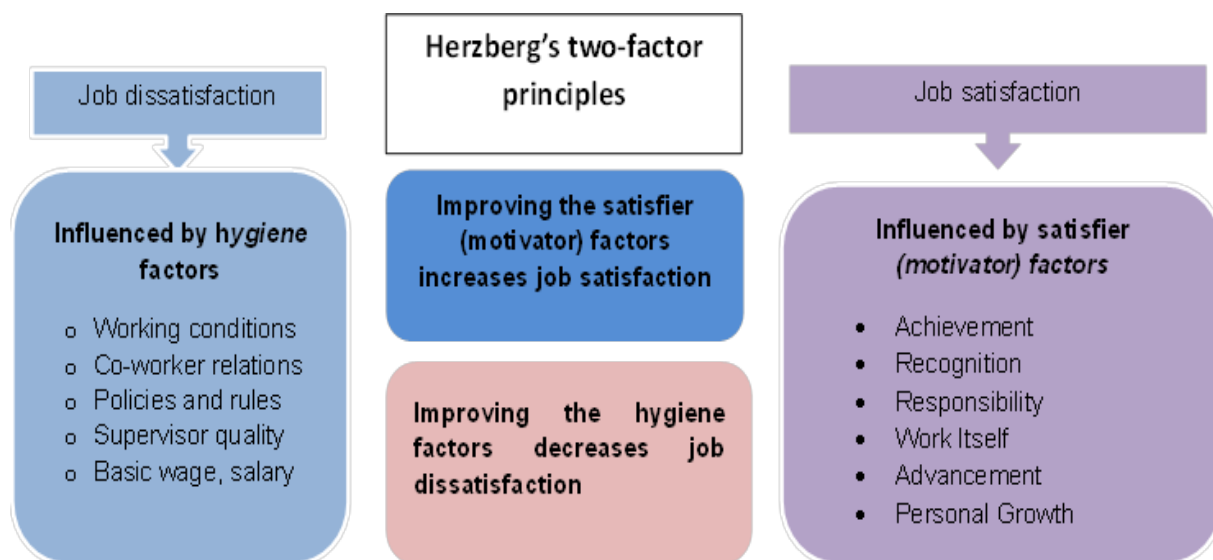


Figure 1.1: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, adapted from Herzberg (1959).

The Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, which is also known as the Two-Factor Theory, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and dual-factor theory, state that there are specific factors in work environments that cause job satisfaction, while a separate set of factors cause dissatisfaction. In Herzberg's (1959) view, these two factors, job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction act independently of each other. Thus, satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not on a continuum with one increasing as the other diminishes, but are independent phenomena (Samuel & Chipunza, 2013). Herzberg (1959) claims that employees of organisations are always motivated by internal values, rather than values that are external to the work. This indicates that peoples' intentions to work or carry out a task are in the main internally motivated; in other words, they are intrinsic to the work. Examples of these intrinsic factors include recognition, achievement, responsibility, advancement and personal growth.

Herzberg (1959) further stresses that it is the motivators (such as involvement in decision making and a sense of importance to an organisation) that make employees feel satisfied. This suggests that employees are not often satisfied by the hygiene factors; for example, those needs associated with minimum salary levels or safe and pleasant working conditions. Rather, employees are satisfied with higher-level psychological factors (like intrinsic or motivator factors). There are also specific factors in work settings that may cause dissatisfying experiences to employees which, Herzberg (1959) refers to them as extrinsic factors, as they are external to the work itself. Examples of these include policies, salary, co-worker relationships, supervisory

or management styles and work environment (Vasantham & Swarnalatha, 2016). These extrinsic factors are also called hygiene factors that are sometimes described as "KITA" factors (Herzberg, 1959). The acronym "KITA" stands for "kick in the ass", which is simply referring to the process of providing incentives or threats of punishment to enable employees to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Taking into account the discussion thus far, the Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959) suggests that to promote or improve academic staff retention and employees' attitudes toward work, HR managers need to address both intrinsic and extrinsic factors and to be cognisant that an increase in satisfaction may not lead to a decline in unpleasurable dissatisfaction. The Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959) is clear that the nature of the work an employee performs, has a huge potential to gratify higher-level psychological needs (intrinsic factors). However, it is worth noting that the absence of such gratifying needs may not necessarily lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Hence, if HR managers plan to increase staff retention and job satisfaction, they should focus on improving the nature of the work itself, including the opportunities it presents for gaining status, assuming responsibility and for achieving self-realisation. In contrast, if HR managers intend to reduce job dissatisfaction and academic staff attrition, then they are required to channel their energy or efforts on the job environments, which may include policies, procedures, supervision and working conditions (Theron et al., 2014). According to Alshmemri et al. (2017), it is the hygiene factors which cause dissatisfaction among employees in a workplace and such dissatisfaction may be decreased by offering reasonable wages, ensuring employee's job security and creating a positive work culture.

## **1.6 PARADIGMS**

Paradigms are interrelated systems of ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological assumptions. A paradigm is a set of beliefs, values and assumptions that guide researchers through the research process (Morgan, 2014). The philosophical foundation of qualitative research is postpositivism, advocacy/participatory, critical, pragmatism, constructivism, constructionism and phenomenology (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study adopts a phenomenological paradigm, as its assumptions are consistent with the study's methodology, methods of data collection and analysis. A

phenomenological paradigm, like other paradigms, consist of several interrelated assumptions: the philosophical assumptions about the nature of the truth or reality about a phenomenon (ontology), the researchers' position or stance in understanding the truth or reality of that phenomenon (epistemology), the values (axiology) that researchers may attach or react to the entire research process and the phenomenon under study (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Miller et al., 2018; Smith, 2016; Smith & Eatough, 2019).

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

This study adopted a qualitative methodology by exploring HR risk management and academic staff retention in ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The study utilised a phenomenological research design, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This was because it enabled the researcher to assume both an insider and outsider position in relations to this phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The data collection of the research design was conducted in two phases. The first phase of data collection was individual interviews, followed by the second phase, focus group discussions to ensure clarification and in-depth discussion of issues that were not fully addressed in the individual interviews (Langdrige, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2016; Smith & Eatough, 2019; Smith & Osborn, 2015). Both sets of interviews utilised a semi-structured interview format that allowed participants to freely express themselves within the bounds of the aims and objectives of the study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Thus, the researcher followed a certain line of questioning until it was exhausted and any unexpected lines of reasoning that the interviewee might have addressed (Noon, 2018). This was when both researcher and participant reached some kind of common understanding about the topics under discussion. This indicates that the experiences and understandings of a phenomenon were jointly agreed by researchers and participants. The direction of the interviews was dictated by the participants' responses, not the researcher. The participants who participated at the individual interviews also participated at the focus group discussions.

All interviews were audio-recorded. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were analysed manually according to the principles of the IPA research design (Charlick et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2018; Noon, 2018; Smith, 2019;

Smith & Eatough, 2019). According to the research design of the study, data analysis was conducted in two phases. Phase one involved analysis of individual interviews data, while phase 2 involved analysis of focus group discussions' data. To ensure credibility and dependability of the study outcomes, an external coder (co-coder) was used to also analyse independently a sample of both individual interviews and focus group discussions' data. The researcher also analysed the sample of the transcripts that were given to the external coder. The outcome of the data analysis is included in this study.

## **1.8 THESIS STATEMENT**

The HR risk management conceptual framework may be utilised to promote or improve academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

## **1.9 DEFINITIONS OF THE KEY CONCEPTS**

This section provides definitions of key concepts used in this study. The rationale for this is to enhance understanding of the study.

### **1.9.1 Academic staff**

The term academic staff refers to employees who have roles and responsibilities as part of their position, such as teaching and learning, research, academic citizenship and community engagement in higher education institutions (Bezuidenhout, 2015, p. 9). In this study, academic staff consist of those with the ranks of Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers, Junior Lecturers, and Researchers. It also consists of administrators in the direct line of responsibility for academic affairs, which may include Executive Deans, Deputy Executive Deans, School Directors and Chairs of Departments.

### **1.9.2 Academic staff attrition**

This refers to the unpredictable and uncontrollable reduction of academic staff due to resignations, retirements, sickness or deaths (Samuel & Chipunza, 2013). While this study adopts Samuel and Chipunza's (2013) definition of academic staff attrition, it

acknowledges that this global phenomenon is often a function of poor institutional management, poor remuneration opportunities, heavy workload and lack of career opportunities. Kiragu et al. (2019); Ng'ethe et al. (2012) echo this by stating that academic staff attrition is a multifactorial phenomenon, as it is caused by a multitude of factors that may include, for example, poor remuneration.

### **1.9.3 Human resource management (HRM)**

This has to do with the employment and development of people. It covers how organisations employ and manage people. Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p. 15) refer to HRM as a “strategic, integrated, coherent and comprehensive approach to the employment, development or enhancement of the physical and mental well-being of people working in organisations”. However, Watson, (2015, p. 1) refers to HRM as the managerial utilisation of the efforts, relevant knowledge and skills, including committed behaviours and positive attitudes, which people contribute to an organisation. These definitions echo the view of the researcher of this study. Hence, in this study, HRM covers the activities, such as recruitment, selection, job analysis, talent management, organisational development, learning and development, performance appraisal, compensation, employee relations and employee wellness.

### **1.9.4 Human resource (HR) risk management**

Risks are ‘uncertain future events, which if not mitigated, could negatively impact the success of an organisation’s goals and objectives, including its employees (Madhav et al., 2017). Thus, given that risks are inevitable; organisations have a legal obligation to attend to the safety and well-being of its employees. HR risks relate to risks that may occur due to loss of personnel, deterioration of morale, inadequate development of HR, inappropriate working schedule, inappropriate working and safety environment, inequality in HRM or discriminatory conduct (Steffee, 2008). HR risk management, on the other hand, is a tool for managing HR risk through risk classification, implementation of risk management strategies, and ensuring compliance with the same (Pirvulescu, 2016). This study adopts Pirvulescu’s (2016) definition of HR risk management, as it is consistent with the researcher’s current HR practices in the context of risk management.

### **1.9.5 Open distance and electronic learning (ODeL)**

The term ODeL refers to “forms of education provision that use contemporary technologies to enable varied combination of synchronous and asynchronous communication among students and educators who are physically separated from one another for part or all of the education experiences” (Alfonso, 2012, p. 1). Arinto (2016) expands the term open distance learning (ODL) to include the use of e-learning or online learning practices by bridging the distance between the students and the educators, such as using online portals, virtual learning environments and various Web technologies. This study utilises some aspects of Alfonso’s (2012), as it takes into account the notion of the student being physically separated from the educator during the teaching and learning experiences. It, however, acknowledges that some students may be provided with opportunities to engage physically with educators on a face-to-face.

### **1.9.6 Academic staff retention**

Retention is about retaining competent employees from leaving an organisation as this will affect service delivery of the organisation (Ssali et al., 2019). According to Too et al. (2015), academic staff retention refers to the process of retaining competent staff by an institution through the creation of employee-friendly environments. Failure to attain this could result in organisations not achieving their goals and objectives, a view consistent with that of Bushe et al. (2012). In this study, academic staff retention relates to ODeL institutions encouraging (with the help of vigorous strategies) academic staff to continue working in their respective institutions. Examples of these strategies include offering training and development, mentorship, and the provision of incentives.

## **1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research ethics refers to the system of moral values that are concerned with the degree to which the research procedures adhere to professional, legal and social obligations for the study participants (Polit & Beck, 2017). The researcher received ethical approval to conduct this study from the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics Innovation Committee (DREC) and Research



Permission Sub-Committee of the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) before data collection (see Appendix A). The researcher assured all the relevant authorities about ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. These were always respected throughout the study.

The data collection commenced after participants expressed their willingness for participation, in other words, after they signed their respective consent forms. Study participants were assured that the information they provided would be stored in a safe and secured place, accessible only to the researcher. The researcher of this study maintained professional ethics and scientific conduct throughout the study.

The researcher adopted several approaches to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. The rationale here was to ensure that the study conducted is of a high standard and adhere to ethical principles. Examples of the approaches adopted are the use of interview schedules, audio recording of interviews and taking fieldnotes. A detailed discussion of the trustworthiness and credibility is found in Chapter 4.

### **1.11 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT: A SUMMARY**

In the researcher's mission to develop the conceptual framework using the outcomes from data analysis of the study, data from the existing literature reviewed and the opinions of experts in the field of HR risk management and academic staff retention. Walker and Avant's (2019) three-way approach to conceptual framework development underpins the development of the HR risk management conceptual framework of this study. Walker and Avant's (2019) three-way approach has three distinct but interrelated stages; derivation, synthesis and analysis. These stages are discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The conceptual framework development was further evaluated using Chinn and Kramer (2017).

### **1.12 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Academic staff attrition is noted in the empirical literature sources as a significant problem affecting higher education institutions, including ODeL institutions. The

attrition of academic staff has a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning of the students. The findings of this study, which include enhancement of academic staff retention, and factors that may influence it in an ODeL institution, will be of practical utility to HR managers in the prevention of attrition and enhancement of staff retention.

This study resulted in the development of an HR risk management conceptual framework for the retention of academic staff. Its implementation in training and development will enhance academic staff retention, and thus it will arguably minimise academic staff attrition in ODeL institutions. The enhancement of staff retention in ODeL institutions has a wide range of benefits, and examples of these include:

- It enables staff to focus on their work for a prolonged period and to advance, where necessary, because of development over time.
- It promotes succession planning, particularly in instances where academic staff are stable and retained for long periods.
- It increases the throughputs of students and academic staff research outputs.
- It reduces the expenditures of academic staff recruitment.

### **1.13 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study was conducted in two sites of the University of South Africa: (Pretoria (Muckleneuk) and Johannesburg (Florida) campuses. The study used a criterion purposive sampling approach to identify and recruit participants. Academic staff at the study sites may have been different from those in other open distance learning higher education institutions in the context of their experiences and perceptions of staff retention and HR risks. Additionally, the findings of the study were based on retrospective accounts of experiences of staff retention and HR risks. Retrospective accounts are subject to memory bias. Participants were also potentially subjected to the social desirability effect, whereby participants may 'police' their responses to avoid negative judgments by researchers. Although the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the wider population of the universities and open distance e-learning institutions, they provide useful insights into understanding issues of academic staff retention, and how to improve the same.

## **1.14 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The chapters of this thesis will be presented as follows:

### ***Chapter one: Scientific overview of the study***

This chapter sets the scene for discussion by providing an introduction and background to the study and a rationale for undertaking the same. The chapter also includes the aims and objectives of the study, research problem and significance of the study.

### ***Chapter two: Open Distance e-Learning Context in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

This chapter provides a detailed discussion on the historical background of ODeL, its evolution and challenges. The chapter includes a discussion of the transition and implication of University of South Africa changing from ODL to ODeL mode of pedagogy.

### **Chapter three: HR Risk Management**

This chapter provides a detail discussion on relevant and existing literature on HR risk management.

### **Chapter four: Research Design and Methods**

This chapter includes a detailed discussion on the overall research design of the study, including a qualitative paradigm discussion, and a rationale for adopting interpretative phenomenological analysis as a research design. The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the data collection methods and analysis used, including its rationales. This chapter also includes discussions of quality issues related to the study and ethical considerations.

### **Chapter five: Research findings**

This chapter relates to the findings of the study.

## **Chapter six: Conceptual Framework Development**

This chapter of the thesis focuses on the development of the conceptual framework using the outcomes from data analysis of the study, data from the existing literature reviewed, the researcher's practical experiences of HR risk management, and the opinions of experts in the field of academic staff retention and HR risk management. Walker and Avant's (2019) three-way model for conceptual framework development supported the development of the HR risk management conceptual framework of this study.

## **Chapter seven: Discussion of the findings**

The chapter includes discussions the study findings using extant literature discussed in chapter two and three.

## **Chapter eight: Conclusion**

Included in this chapter are discussions on the quality issues of the study. The chapter also discusses the framework of best practice of HR risk management developed using varied sources, such as the study findings, extant literature and the opinion of experts in the field of HRM. The chapter ends with discussions of the implications of the study findings, and recommendations for practice, research and training.

### **1.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided the background to the research problem and motivation for undertaking the study, leading to the problem statement, research purpose, research objectives and research questions. Theoretical foundations of the study, research paradigms, research methodology and research design have been discussed. Finally, the ethical considerations, conceptual framework development, significance of the study, limitations of the study and the subsequent layout of the upcoming chapters was provided. The summary provided, sets the scene for discussions in the ensuing chapters. The research methodology and research design, including the purpose and objectives of the study ensure an understanding of the study findings in relations to the context in which the study was conducted. The following chapter focuses on the

review of the extant literature on the open distance e-learning context in the 21st century.

## **CHAPTER 2: OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING CONTEXT IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides explanations of Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) taking into consideration the global and African contexts that include the utilisation of this mode of pedagogy in South Africa. The chapter also includes a critical analysis of the benefits and challenges of ODeL in higher education institutions. Given that this study is conducted at the University of South Africa, the chapter includes a discussion of the use of ODeL at this institution, including the implications of changing from Open Distance Learning (ODL) to an ODeL mode of teaching and learning.

### **2.2 THE OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The offering of ODeL provides students and working adults with opportunities for accessible, affordable, life-long education and independent learning (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2018b). ODeL has become a phenomenon of interest in the field of information and communication technologies for various reasons (ICTs) (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017). The introduction of internet technology into teaching and learning practices has led to new ways of teaching and learning. Several terminologies are used to describe the varied internet-based learning activities used in ODeL (Essel & Agyei, 2017). Examples of such terminologies include technology-mediated learning, blended learning, tele-learning, telematics, open and flexible learning, e-learning, and open distance learning. However, ODeL is the most frequently used terminology to describe formal education where the student is separated geographically from the facilitators, and interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect students, resources, and facilitators (Letseka et al., 2018).

### **2.3 THE MEANING OF OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING**

ODeL is an instructional outcome or product of distance education whereby the students and academics, students and course materials, students and peers are separated by time and/or space (Bandalaria, 2018, p. 120). The term “open” in ODeL, indicates that learning is mediated by technology that makes education and learning accessible to all to use and re-use (Simonson et al., 2019). The term “open” as used

here, indicates increasing accessibility to education and learning (Simpson, 2018). Drawing on the work of Alalshaikh (2015), such flexibility in learning makes this mode of learning popular especially among individuals who are in employment. In support of this, Simonson et al. (2019) noted that ODeL includes various forms of study, which are not under the continuous and immediate supervision of lecturers, but learning is accrued at a distance through student support mechanisms. Thus, distance learning should be seen as an activity within the ability (of learning at a distance), which is controlled at different times and places (Puspitasari & Oetoyo, 2018). Given this, the term “distance learning” focuses on the limitations related to ‘distance’, that is, time and place (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017).

The meaning of ODeL has been a controversial issue even among academics and researchers. For example, authors, such as Alalshaikh (2015) and Manyike (2017) refer to ODeL as a learning transaction where facilitators are in some way removed from students, and interaction between students and facilitators is mediated by technology. The mediated interaction is facilitated using printed materials, electronic media and web-based technologies, such as blackboards. Whilst these explanations offer the geographical positions of students and facilitators, and the process of providing education at a geographical distance, they have failed to emphasise the student-centeredness element of open distance teaching (Diedericks, 2016; Maunonen-Eskelinen & Leppänen, 2015). Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka (2015); Qayyum and Zawacki-Richter (2018b) describe ODeL as a workable means of increasing access to education, given that learning is mediated by technology and there is no time limit to access education. Hence, ODeL provides students with the opportunity for quality education and a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility for learning. In terms of increasing a sense of autonomy and responsibility for learning, an ODeL mode of pedagogy (i.e. facilitation of learning) may only be effective when students are dedicated, self-motivated and committed to knowledge acquisition (Doley, 2017). It is these pre-requisites that make ODeL institutions unique learning environments that are distinctly different from conventional or traditional universities. However, traditional universities are increasingly integrating online student support and teaching and learning into their curricula (Zuhairi et al., 2019). Such an increase in the use of technology creates difficulties on occasions to differentiate between conventional and traditional universities. However, the literature points to the view that

ODeL involves a separation of students and facilitators in real space and that students receive study material and guided tuition through technologies.

Despite the controversy over the meanings of ODeL, this mode of learning has made it possible for working individuals and those in remote areas to go back to pursue formal education. Keegan (1980) identified three main elements of the meaning of ODeL:

- **The separation of facilitators and students**

This element is about accessibility and separation of students and facilitators. ODeL aims to make education accessible and affordable to anyone who needs it (Naidu, 2014). As a result, it embraced the notions of openness, which focuses on improving students' accessibility to education through technology (Maunonen-Eskelinen & Leppänen, 2015). It is however worth noting that the students and facilitators are geographically separated, but interaction is mediated by technology. ODeL was developed to serve a socioeconomic and political agenda to improve the quality of the underprivileged society, as education is a fundamental need that should be accessible to all (Naidu, 2014). It is therefore noteworthy to state that education is essential for the social and economic development of people (Mukama, 2018).

- **The use of technological media to unite facilitators and students**

ODeL is rapidly moving away from the use of printed study material to the use of technological-based teaching and learning materials, such as multimedia, audio and video conferencing and web-based learning tools like blackboards (Firat, 2017). In essence, ODeL is undergoing transformation given the increasing use of paperless teaching and learning materials. This is because technology promotes communication among students, facilitators and institutions (Diedericks, 2016; Uzhenyu, 2018).

Even though printed study material affords flexibility to the students, the flexibility it offers is limited particularly in developing countries where postal systems are not available or unreliable in all settings. It is such limitations that are advancing the need to use technology in ODeL institutions, to promote access and flexibility in education (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2018b). Keegan (1980) and Simonson et al. (2019)



mentioned that the use of technology has made learning in ODeL a lot more effective, efficient and engaging. “Engaging” in this context means that technology and its advances, facilitate communication among students and facilitators in ODeL institutions.

- **Physical meetings for didactic and academic socialisation**

Learning in ODeL institutions is mainly acquired at a distance with the help of supervisory support facilitated by technology (Mbatha, 2014). This suggests that ODeL sometimes takes place in occasional face-to-face meetings between the student and the facilitators (Essel & Agyei, 2017). This is particularly the case in practice-based educational programmes, such as medicine, chemistry, nursing and engineering that require students to frequently meet with their respective facilitators in a laboratory or simulation setting for supervisory guidance (Mphahlele & Tafesse, 2015). Meeting in these settings promotes networking and academic socialisation among students and facilitators, as well as minimises the theory-practice gap (Naidu, 2014). Despite these positives, Naidu (2014) reiterates that campus-based and face-to-face learning is becoming unmanageable and unsustainable in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Instead of opening of educational opportunities, there is a pressure of funding model and an increase in information and communication technologies and hence the need for ODeL and open distance education.

## **2.4 MODES OF OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING**

Four types of learning modes can be identified in ODeL, namely (1) correspondence learning; (2) online learning; (3) e-learning; and (4) technology enhance learning, which will be discussed in more detail below:

### **2.4.1 Correspondence learning**

Correspondence learning promotes the use of textual materials and the principles of online learning. This form of learning was born in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, and ODeL institutions that adopt this may provide hardcopy textual materials, assignments and computer-based study materials CD-ROMS to students via post (Simonson et al., 2019). The students study the learning materials and may be required to address tasks

and send the outcome thereof to their respective facilitators. In relation to the principles of online learning, the students' learning may also be facilitated via the internet using web-based technologies such as blackboard (Bates, 2019). Blackboard is used in many universities such as the University of Pretoria in South Africa and Cornell University in New York, as a learning management system for enhancing learning through technology.

The use of web-based technologies provides students with the opportunity to interact with one another and the facilitators of learning. Examples of such engagement may occur during discussion settings, often coordinated by facilitators, and through telephone, and other web-based media (Simonson et al., 2019). This approach of learning has shown to be efficient and has served millions of students in higher education institutions (Diedericks, 2016). Correspondence learning can take place at any time in almost all locations in the world. The word "almost" indicates that correspondence learning can sometimes be impeded by geographical locations as students may not have access to learning materials (Baloyi, 2012). This is particularly the case in the developing world, like Africa where the terrain in some of its locations makes towns and villages very difficult to access.

#### **2.4.2 Online learning**

The term online learning is referred to as learning experiences gained using ICTs (Ghavifekr & Rosdy, 2015). Both Simonson et al. (2019) and Kentnor (2015) describe online learning as a current version of distance learning, which has educational benefits for students at both non-traditional and traditional academic institutions. In other words, distance learning is a modern version of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that promotes more access and opportunities to education for many populations, including those that are marginalised in societies (Bordoloi, 2018). The provision of more access and opportunities to education is a function of the availability of the internet. Simonson et al. (2019); Cloete (2017) and Serdyukov (2017) agree with this assertion. They note that the issue is not only on accessibility in the context of online learning but also connectivity, flexibility and ability to engage in diverse interactions among students. Hence, since online learning is about "self-management of learning", Shih et al. (2013, p.144) claim that it can be accessed at any time depending on the educational needs of the student. This suggests that online learning is in the main not constrained by time

and geographical location, a view repeatedly noted in the literature (Mpungose, 2020; Palvia et al., 2018).

The learning styles which students tend to use may vary from one to student to the other. Alalshaikh (2015) and Wheeler et al. (2005) identify categories of learning styles: perceptual learning, cognitive processing learning, social learning styles. The students with perceptual learning style learn more through visual presentations, such as charts, figures and experiments (Shih et al., 2013). Those with cognitive processing learning styles prefer to learn from experiences and critical analysis of elements in reading the learning material. Students with social engagement learning style, on the other hand, prefer to interact with their peers through some rely solely on observing others in social situations (Shih et al., 2013). This indicates that the social learning style excludes students who prefer to study on their own, which makes this style of learning sometimes wanting for online learning.

Even though students have their preferred learning styles, they often adopt a mixture of learning styles during their pursuit of educational qualifications irrespective of the duration of the programme of study (Bhagat et al., 2015). It is therefore critical for facilitators of learning to be cognisant of this, and this is even more critical in an ODeL environment because students are geographically separated from their facilitators, and the latter are unable to observe the former and ascertain whether learning is taking place. The adoption of a mix of learning styles, promotes deeper learning, particularly where the mode of programme delivery is guided by student-centred approaches like problem-based learning and enquiry-based learning (Alalshaikh, 2015).

### **2.4.3 E-Learning**

The term e-learning originated during the 1980s and it is parallel to online learning (Bezovski & Poorani, 2016). The term is gaining prominence in the world of education (Ferreira et al., 2018). E-Learning has to do with communication, collaboration, connectivity, context, subject matter and competence, delivered through a range of technological materials, such as the internet, intranet, e-mail, CD-ROM, audio and videotape, satellite broadcast, interactive television, Microsoft teams, Zoom, Webinar and Webex teams (Ferreira et al., 2018). In other words, e-learning is delivered through the medium of virtual learning environments, as a means to deliver the

learning materials to the students (Dunn & Kennedy, 2019; Kennedy & Dunn, 2018). The rationale is to improve teaching and make learning to be more engaging, fun and interesting (Sobaih et al., 2020; Yilmaz et al., 2020). E-Learning is also an interaction between the students who are studying and the facilitators, who are working, in higher education institutions (Al-Samarraie et al., 2018).

E-Learning covers a wide range of applications and educational processes that is supported by digital technology both in the classroom and at a distance (Cloete, 2017). It is therefore sometimes refer to technology-enhanced learning, and most recently, as digital learning (Henderson et al., 2015). Furthermore, Bezovski and Poorani (2016) identified several benefits of e-learning, which includes cost-effectiveness, enhanced student-lecturer communication, the provision of timely tutorial materials, consistency in the provision of supervisory support, accessibility and the provision of prompt and timely feedback to students. Acknowledging this, e-learning has a significant role to play in higher education institutions in producing graduates who are fit for purpose and award. However, this can be realised if e-learning resources are effectively utilised in academic institutions offering open distance educational programmes (Bagarukayo & Kalema, 2015).

#### **2.4.4 Kolb's learning styles**

Kolb's learning styles has to do with how learners perceive, process, store, recall and conceptualise information to understand what they have been trying to learn (Cheng & Chau, 2016; Surjono, 2015; Truong, 2016). This learning system offers valuable instructions to students and teachers to understand the learning process. The theory of learning systems emphasised that the students do not think and learn in the same ways (Willingham et al., 2015). Thus, students think and learn in many ways, simply because learning can be tailored for individual students to accommodate their learning styles. For example, some of the students may learn best by listening or watching or doing. The styles of learning depend on the level and stage of learning of each student.

## **2.5 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING**

The concept of open distance learning (ODL) was born in the United States of America in the late 1800s at the University of Chicago, where the first distance learning programme in the universe was introduced to a cohort of students in full-time employment (Ghosh, 2012; Kentnor, 2015). This was mainly a function of the invention of the printing press and postal service that allowed the birth of this flexible mode of learning (Simpson & Anderson, 2012). This period also marks the birth of correspondence form of learning and the formation of a council of distance education titled International Council for Distance Education (Ally, 2017). It is worth noting that correspondence studies were established mainly to provide educational opportunities to those that were not elite and could not afford face-to-face classes (Pittman, 1991). Most elites at the time viewed correspondence education as simply poor excuses to avoid face-to-face education (Pittman, 1991), which is today commonly referred to as traditional educational systems.

Today, the uptake of distance education has witnessed an exponential increase in both privileged and disadvantaged individuals studying in ODL settings (Ally, 2017). The term ODL is replaced in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with the term ODeL. It is consistently used in the literature and academic settings to describe learning that takes place at a distance. This suggests that ODeL is not just for privileged individuals, but it is a learning for all in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, including those marginalised and disadvantaged in societies like people with disabilities (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2014). The growth in distance education and the learning that takes place within it in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries: parallels the advent and advances in ICT. ICT and its advances increase the accessibility of open education to communities and societies, and this is even the case for research-constrained environments like the developing world including the continent of Africa (Kentnor, 2015).

### **2.5.1 The evolution of open distance e-learning**

ODeL has undergone several changes over the years, and according to Ferreira and Venter (2011), the changes reported, entitled “generations”, are incremental in nature. To date, there are five “generations” reported (first, second, third, fourth and fifth), and these generations are associated with the modes of delivery of open distance

education (ODE), which ranges from the use of printed textual materials through electronic materials to web-based approaches (Keegan, 2013). Table 2.1 depicts the “generations’ of ODeL, including the modes of ODE delivery.

Table 2.1: *Generation of ODeL and delivery technologies (Fozdar & Kumar, 2007)*

<b>Generations</b>	<b>Models</b>	<b>Delivery technologies</b>
First generation	Correspondence	Print press and postal services
Second generation	Multi-media	Print, video-recording, audio-tapes, computer-based learning, TV/radio broadcast
Third generation	Multi-media	Teleconferencing, videoconferencing, TV/radio broadcasts
Fourth generation	Tele-learning	Interactive multi-media online, internet-based access to <a href="http://www.resources">www.resources</a>
Fifth generation	Flexible learning	Interactive multi-media online, internet-based learning

### **Generation 1**

This generation of ODeL is predominately facilitated using a combination of print press technology and postal services, which are known to be widely available at the time (Danver, 2016; Homol, 2017). In essence, books, guides and manuals are posted to the students. The target population for the ODE that offered this type of ODeL is mainly women and working-class employees, who are unable to access educational institutions (Diedericks, 2016). Most ODeL institutions in Africa, including the University of South Africa, fall under this category of ODeL, as they relied on posting tutorial materials to students (Mafenya, 2016; Uzhenyu, 2018).

### **Generation 2**

The second generation of ODeL uses radio and television as its main media of instruction. This generation gained popularity calls for a division of labour in delivering and producing instructional study material to educate students through mass media (Aoki, 2012). Various mega-universities of ODeL such as the Open University of the United Kingdom, the University of South Africa and the Open University of Japan had

been influenced by this generation (Anderson & Dron, 2012). These institutions started teaching by using radio and television as media of instruction to educate students.

### ***Generation 3***

The third generation of ODeL uses ICTs such as video conferencing, web-based media and synchronous interactive technologies to facilitate students' learning (Aoki, 2012). Synchronous interactive technologies refer to lecturing a group of students simultaneously. The third generation of ODeL is often used for multi-campus institutions (Diedericks, 2016). It encourages student-facilitator and student-student interaction and collaboration (Bates, 2005).

### ***Generation 4***

The fourth generation of ODeL in the focus on the use of multi-media and internet-based media as tools for the facilitation of learning. The rationale for using these categories of technologies is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in ODeL institutions (Aoki, 2012; Heydenrych & Prinsloo, 2010; Wang & Sun, 2001). This generation of ODeL is student-centred, as the student can control his/her pace and sequence of learning using the internet (Peters, 1994). This generation indicates that there is no longer the custodian of knowledge, as students can also access information related to subject matter from the internet (Mafenya, 2016). Thus, learning at this is a product or outcome of a co-production or co-construction of knowledge between the students and facilitators.

### ***Generation 5***

The fifth generation of ODeL is similar to the fourth generation in the context of its teaching and learning strategies. They mainly use web-based technology and the internet as their main facilitation media. As the fourth generation, the fifth ODeL generation is student-centred, and students search for knowledge though sometimes under the guidance of the facilitators. They are however different. This mode of ODeL is also facilitated by databases and software with the help of the internet. It also uses automated response systems. It is a generation of ODeL that considers students to be in an ocean of knowledge that can be accessed and understood using the internet.

The constant engagement of the students with the internet and interactions with facilitators expand their horizon of knowledge (Taylor, 2001). Hence, this mode of ODeL falls under a constructivist paradigm and the students are the main constructors of knowledge. Taylor (2001); Bates (2005); Simpson and Anderson (2012) emphasised that this generation of ODeL provides students with effective pedagogical, quality tuition and administrative support service at a lower cost.

The discussion thus far indicates that ODeL is a critical form of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as most students enrolled are employed and are therefore more likely to experience difficulties in accessing education in traditional face-to-face institutions. According to Latchem and Hanna (2001), the World Bank estimates that the number of higher education institutions' students will increase from 70 million to 160 million by 2025. This is a call for higher education institutions to embrace the notion of moving from traditional forms of pedagogy to ODE to accommodate the growing number of students. It is for this reason that, Simonson et al. (2019) put forward this warning. They noted that it is about time that higher education institutions focus on the quality, flexibility and adaptability of education they provide to the students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given this, it is envisaged that ODE is expected to grow at an annual growth rate of 33% (Pityana, 2009). The usage of internet in both developed and developing countries will provide the only cost-effective channel for access to ODE and gain ODeL (Taylor, 2001). It is worth offering discussions of ODeL in these contexts.

## **2.6 THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING**

The last two decades have evidently witnessed considerable growth in ODL (Traxler, 2018b; 2018a). This rapid growth, which could be attributed to globalisation and the onset of pandemics (e.g. Covid-19), was promoted by the advances in ICTs (Mpungose, 2020; Simonson et al., 2019). As telecommunication networks circled the globe, it became easy to link people from one nation to the other (Fry et al., 2009). Many ODeL universities have emerged to recruit, select and admit a large number of students, taking responsibility for aspects such as what they learn, how they learn, where they learn, how quickly they learn without obstacles in place and time (Keegan, 2013). Hence, ODeL has become a global phenomenon, as the landscape for online education has greatly and positively impacted on higher education institutions across



the globe (Kentnor, 2015). Thus, the importance of ICT and ODeL cannot be over-emphasised.

There is always a quest to search for new ways to improve ICT because of the growing need for in the universe to access this means of communication (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Taking this into account, higher education institutions all over the world must position themselves to make education accessible to the communities they serve (Serdyukov, 2017). This section focuses on ODeL in developed and developing countries, including countries in the continent of Africa.

### **2.6.1 Open distance e-learning in first world countries**

This section relates to the use of ODeL in first world countries. According to Panda and Mishra (2007); Schneller and Holmberg (2014), the largest distance education institutions of higher learning in first world countries are in Europe (e.g. Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia in Spain, the Open University of Jyvaskyla in Finland) and East Asia (e.g. the Open University of Japan in Japan and Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia). These institutions, as the names imply, promote ODeL and they have high student numbers enrolled on their respective courses (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2018a). In the United States of America, for example, of the 20.6 million students in 4700 higher education institutions, 6,359,121 million (14%) were enrolled in online courses in 2016 (Seaman et al., 2018; Snyder et al., 2016). Open distance enrolments in the United States have grown from 5.6% from 2015 to 2016 (Seaman et al., 2018). In Germany, out of 2.8 million students in higher education institutions, 154 325 (5.5%) were enrolled at a distance education institution in 2014 (Lehmann, 2018). The enrolments grew by 30% from 2009 to 2011, by 7% from 2011 to 2013 and by 0.9% from 2013 to 2014 (Seaman et al., 2018). Australia has 43 higher education institutions, serving 1, 410, 133 students, and about 261, 000 (18.7%) of these students were studying at a distance education institution in 2017 (De Freitas et al., 2015). In Australia, ODE has increased by 4% from 2016 to 2017 (Seaman et al., 2018). It is, however, worth noting that Germany has the lowest number of enrolments of higher education students studying in ODE (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2018c).

The demand for ODE has grown in private and public non-profit universities in these countries. Most of the higher education institutions are moving from single to the dual

mode of teaching (Qayyum & Zawacki-Richter, 2019). Thus, universities are now investing in cellular and broadband infrastructures instead of videoconference and broadcasting (Allen & Seaman, 2015). The use of digital technologies has therefore continued to expand in the first world countries, such as Australia, Brazil and the United States of America. The expansion of new ICTs and demand for quality education in ODE has increasingly become important and continue to change how students think in higher education institutions (Kaye & Rumble, 2018).

### **2.6.2 Open distance e-learning in developing countries**

Since the 1950s, the population in developing countries (such as Kenya and Uganda) has doubled; it is estimated at 5 billion people, and the majority of these often seek educational opportunities (Bongaarts, 2009; Mou & Rajib, 2019). This is undoubtedly a challenge that requires attention. In response to this, developing countries like Pakistan, India and China adopted a blend of teaching and learning strategies (didactic and student-centred) facilitated using technology to meet the educational needs of their respective citizens. Such an approach does not only promote access to education for all, including those marginalised in societies (e.g. the poor, and people with disabilities), it also promotes wider participation in higher education institution (Wangenge-Ouma, 2013).

The use of technology alleviates the need for students to migrate from one country to the other in search of knowledge. Even though this is the case, distance education in some of the developing countries has been a challenge (Kirkwood & Price, 2014). For example, workload and meeting assignment deadlines pose serious challenges in developing countries, partly because of connectivity problems and limited ICT resources (Deb, 2011; Mahlangu, 2018). For instance, nearly 51.92% of the South African population have access to the internet connection, and this proportion is even less in Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zimbabwe (Friederici et al., 2017; Uzhenyu, 2018). West (2015) confirms that access to the internet in developing countries is still limited. This indicates that the problem of a lack of or limited ICT resources is acute in developing countries because of their growing populations and increasing need to expand educational provisions. Despite this assertion, the Government of Ghana adopted distance education to complement conventional face-to-face education (Ananga & Biney, 2018). This was due to several qualified applicants who were unable

to get admission into face-to-face educational programmes in higher education institutions of learning because of the limited number of these programmes. Simply, social justice plays a significant role in promoting access to higher education institutions.

### **2.6.3 Open distance e-learning in Africa**

A consortium of international distance learning organisations was established to help bring change in developing distance education and e-learning systems in the African continent (Biney & Worlanyo, 2015). The consortium consists of several organisations, and examples of these include the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

A few ODeL institutions have been established in Africa. Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya, for example, developed ODeL colleges for English speaking students (Adamu, 2017; Biao, 2012). In East Africa, the Open University of Tanzania and the Institute of Adult Education and Distance Learning of Makerere University in Uganda were recently established ODeL institutions (Biao, 2012). In West Africa, the Open University of Nigeria is the only ODeL to date in this region of the world. In Southern Africa, there are ODeL institutions in South Africa (University of South Africa), Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Open University) (Kituyi & Tusubira, 2013; Dampson et al., 2020). In the context of South Africa, the University of South Africa is the largest ODeL institution in South Africa and even in the continent of Africa. There are several dedicated private units of ODL within some universities in South Africa. Examples of these include the University of Cape Town, University of the Free State, North-West University and the University of Johannesburg.

Distance education in Africa is imbedded with challenges. According to Pityana (2009), some of the challenges facing this mode of education in the African continent are insufficient funding and technological and infrastructural limitations. For some countries, the challenges related to their political instability and economic depression (Simonson et al., 2019). Only 6% of the African population has access to higher education institutions as compared to 25.5% of the world average (Mtebe & Raisamo,

2014; Shemahonge & Mtebe, 2018). In South Africa, 65,4% of students were enrolled through contact mode, while 24.6%, enrolled through distance learning, in 2016 (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2018). The good news is that there are many successful ODeL programmes across the continent and there are efforts underway that aim to address the challenges they are facing to ensure their sustainability and the provision of high-quality education (Adamu, 2017; Biao, 2012). Ensuring sustainability of ODeL programmes promotes access to education for all and provides a second chance for school leavers (dropouts) to enter the formal education system (Letseka & Pitsoe, 2014). The provision of another chance for the latter would enhance their skills, knowledge and employability in their areas of interest.

#### **2.6.4 The South African context**

The University of South Africa was established as one of the top mega-universities in the world, and it is considered the leading ODeL university in Africa and with the highest student enrolments since 1962 (De Hart et al., 2015). As a comprehensive university, the University of South Africa is ideally placed to bridge the gap between university and vocational educations, making learning available to all levels of communities and societies. Whilst this uniqueness makes this university a pleasant learning environment, the bulk of its students emanate from disadvantaged backgrounds and those lacking financial resources and places to study (Letseka et al., 2018; Letseka & Pitsoe, 2014; Venter, 2017). The Open University in the United Kingdom, the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India, Allama Iqbal Open University in Pakistan, University of Toronto in Canada, University of Maryland University College in United States, National University of Distance Education in Spain, Indonesian Open Learning University in Indonesia, National Open University of Nigeria in Nigeria are cited as other examples of mega ODeL institutions in the world (Tait, 2018). These universities have unique and similar characteristics to those of the University of South Africa (Paul & Tait, 2019; Tait, 2018).

Today, the University of South Africa (UNISA) caters to approximately 300,000 students, spread throughout the world with a personnel strength of 4,000 academic and administrative staff (Palaniandy, 2017). Of these, just over 90% are South African nationals, just over 9% are African nationals, and just less than 1% are other foreign nationals (DHET, 2018). The University of South Africa was ranked 9th out of 100

African universities and 1221st out of 10,000 universities in the world (Biao, 2012; Paul & Tait, 2019). The University of South Africa rules over the African ODeL space. This has brought a fundamental change in the way distance was practised in most of the world (Simonson et al., 2019).

Students may work and study at the same time in ODeL institutions and they are not required to attend classes (El-Annan, 2015). This means that the teaching, learning and administrative services are carried out by someone (i.e. a facilitator) removed in time and space from the learner worldwide (Bester & Brand, 2013). It also means that students in ODeL institutions may study in the comfort of their homes while continuing to work either full-time or part-time (Accuosti, 2014). The majority of UNISA students are in South Africa, with a smaller amount in other African countries and beyond (University of South Africa, 2015).

However, Langan et al. (2016) claim that studying at home may sometimes be distracting and more challenging than learning in a classroom alongside other students, a view consistent with students at UNISA. In line with this challenge, ODeL is often described by students as a 'lonely place to be', and this loneliness may make some learners to opt for studying in traditional or conventional universities (El-Annan, 2015). This is one of the rationales offered for the attrition of students at UNISA. In conventional universities, students are required to attend daily lectures or classes with other students in their respective campuses. However, students that are employed may find difficult to attend daily classes and may, therefore, prefer open distance learning to learn in traditional universities (Bullen, 2007; Reju, 2016). With the expected growth in the population of employed students, it is envisaged that ultimately all academics and professional staff should be trained in ODeL as an essential part of their development especially in an institution such as the University of South Africa that offers ODeL pedagogy. Interestingly, this resolve was realised by the establishment of the UNESCO Chair in ODeL at the University of South Africa in 2008 (Pityana, 2009).

## **2.7 OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: ITS CHALLENGES**

There are several terms used in the literature and practice to describe ODeL, and the terminologies in the main lack clarity. Examples of these terminologies include flexible learning, blended learning, online learning and e-learning. These terminologies do not convey a meaningful image of the learning environment to prospective students in comparison to the more recognisable image conveyed by the term distance education (Todhunter, 2013). While the challenges of ODeL are linked to the actual teaching, learning processes and outcomes, they are mainly related to psychological issues involved in an online course both for the student and the facilitator (Koutsoupidou, 2014). Acknowledging this, Semenova and Rudakova (2016) posit that for students to complete an online programme of study, they need to have basic knowledge and skills related to the subject. It, therefore, makes sense to envisage that students with a good educational background are more likely to understand study materials and complete a qualification. For example, if a student were to register for an introductory economics course, the student would study online and complete the programme of study if he/she had prior fundamental knowledge of economics. In Zhang et al. (2019), the converse is the case, as students are generally dissatisfied with educational programmes when there is a lack of prerequisite skills and knowledge relating to that programme. Such an experience may demotivate the student and increase the possibility of the student dropping out of the course. Thus, the completion of a course will be dependent on students' level of education and basic skills related to the course of their choice.

Students with higher educational attainment often complete their qualifications (Kromydas, 2017). This is probably because they are prepared to captivate information communicated by the teachers (Semenova & Rudakova, 2016). However, for students with lower educational attainment, completing their studies is often reported as a challenge (Tuckman & Harper, 2012).

Challenges of ODeL are also related to technology and problems with electricity supply. In relation to this, (Karsenti & Collin, 2013) reported frequent power and internet failures as significant challenges to online learning. Apart from these, personal constraints (e.g. financial difficulty), cultural and social barriers may also impede ODeL.

## **2.8 OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING: IT'S VALUE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Even though the use of technology has its challenges, it still plays a significant role in promoting access to education in higher learning institutions (Koutsoupidou, 2014). It is for this reason that most higher education institutions include the commencement of ODE as a critical facet of their long-term plans (Baloyi, 2012). Today, higher education institutions, for example, the University of South Africa and the State University of New York, are student-centred, and this is evidenced in their missions and visions (Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2017; Rayens & Ellis, 2018). Hence, these institutions offer online provisions that create an opportunity for people from different countries and life routines to engage in disciplines of their choice and not be restricted by what is available or accessible to them within the limits of their home location. Added to this, the online provisions create the opportunity for “students who are juggling with school, work and family responsibilities to complete college” (Kurzman, 2013, p. 335). Apart from these, students may also derive other benefits from ODeL.

Ngubane-Mokiwa (2014) notes that ODeL is a flexible, effective, efficient, and affordable form of learning that takes place in environments that are time- and place-independent, facilitated by technologies. Given this, it seems that ODeL may, in the near future, substitute all the face-to-face classroom instructions in most, if not all, educational organisations, including higher education institutions (Keegan, 2013). This is because factors such as distance, travel expenses and/or work commitments to name but a few, often prevent prospective students from attending face-to-face classrooms (El-Annan, 2015). While this means that home environments may sometimes be distracting and more challenging than learning in a classroom alongside other students, it points to the view that ODeL offers students with more freedom and access to a wider range of opportunities for learning and qualification. However, this mode of learning can only be effective if students are dedicated, self-motivated and committed to knowledge acquisition (Doley, 2017). It is these pre-requisites that make ODeL institutions unique learning environments that are distinctly different from traditional universities.

## **2.9 UNISA'S ACADEMIC CHANGE FROM ODL TO ODeL MODEL**

ODeL has been gaining momentum in the field of education in the past 20 years (Kemeh, 2018). Most of the ODeL institutions have developed into efficient learning solutions of ICTs, referred to as e-learning (Andronie, 2014). The use of technology is therefore crucial at UNISA to deliver its vision and mission to become the African university in the service of humanity by becoming a mega-ODeL university provider (Mafenya, 2016).

The strategic plan of UNISA's ODeL has clearly articulated a need for a conceptual framework for technology-enhanced teaching, learning and learner support (Chetty, 2014). The framework stipulates that student learning should be supported by ICTs and other digital facilities. The focus of the UNISA strategic plan is to provide learning opportunities to predominately Africans who are previously disadvantaged students who would be able to study in an ODeL institution (Simpson, 2018), particularly those that are from the rural areas. It is, therefore, necessary for UNISA's students to have access to electronic technologies so that there is easy interaction between lecturers and students. Thus, for ODeL to be successful at UNISA, it would depend on the efficient and effective use of ICTs by both the facilitators and students. To achieve this, UNISA had to appoint a task team to develop an integrative sustainable relationship between different stakeholders, such as students, ICT, academics and teaching and learning. The main purpose of this was to: (1) intensify ICT support to staff and students; (2) equip students with ICT skills; (3) integrate ICTs to meet the aspirations and needs of students; and (4) support and encourage academics and students (Mafenya, 2016). Whilst UNISA has moved towards an ODeL model, ICT has become the main link between the university and students. The move from ODL to ODeL was to establish a good culture of learning underpinned by electronic technologies (Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015).

## **2.10 IMPLICATIONS OF UNISA CHANGING TO ODeL**

There has been resistance to the change from ODL to ODeL, particularly by the academics who are less technologically competent. ODeL is forcing the traditionally-inclined lecturers to support the students by using modern electronic technologies (Ncube et al., 2014). If the use of modern electronic technologies is not supported, this



can deprive UNISA students' opportunity to engage with lecturers and peers in utilising the digital world. Makoe (2015) emphasised that academics should embrace the modern electronic technologies used by their students to improve on the pass rates.

The implementation of ODeL means that the lecturers will not only change the way they teach the students, but they will have to change the way they design the learning materials. Teaching and learning are facilitated by using Web 2.0 tools through social networks such as podcasts, blogs, wikis, shared docs, YouTube, bookmarks, vodcasts and tagging (Mbatha, 2014), to help the students to collaborate with their peers online. Research has also shown that most students can easily access social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube (Ngubane-Mokiwa and Letseka, 2015) to facilitate their learning. The learning material must be easily accessible for the diverse student population, for collaborative learning, for student-centred engagement and critical engagement. This will encourage the ODeL teaching and learning to be more creative and original (Ngubane-Mokiwa & Letseka, 2015).

ODeL provides students with access to study material and creates an environment where they can study at any time and place, wherever they are, downloading their learning materials from the internet. Lecturers can retrieve students' assignments through a click of a button through on-screen marking (Brindley, 2014). With these well-functioning e-learning programmes in place, the students will receive feedback on time and be able to interact with their lecturers, e-tutors and peers. Although the interaction between the e-tutors and students is more effective when the e-tutors have few students to support (Nhlapo, 2014). This will ultimately reflect on the students' performance.

In sum, given the discussion thus far, UNISA has the potential of offering effective ODeL to its students despite the challenges mentioned above. Hence, the challenges should be perceived as motivators or catalysts for effective implementation of ODeL.

## **2.11 ACADEMICS WORKING IN ODeL**

Some of the academics prefer to work in ODeL institutions. However, most of them have reported that they miss face-to-face interaction with their students (Harrison et al., 2017). Some also have reported constraints such as lack of data and limited IT skills to support students (OECD, 2020). Added to this, they frequently talk about

difficulties in engaging students particularly those that are in remote areas where internet access is a problem. Contrary to this statement, there are some academics that are confident in using online virtual learning platforms to support their students and highlighted that it increases access to education for people around the world, particularly, those that find it difficult to relocate to where the institutions are situated (Harrison, 2017). The advent of Covid-19 pandemic has reminded academics of the need to engage in ODeL, and to explore different ways of teaching and learning in this environment (Kaup et al., 2020).

## **2.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has discussed the historical background of ODeL, including its evolution and challenges. Given that the focus of this study is the University of South Africa (UNISA), the chapter includes a discussion of the transition and implications of Unisa changing from ODL to ODeL mode of pedagogy. The chapter provides a succinct discussion of the learning styles to reflect learning in ODeL pedagogy. Added to this, the chapter includes a detailed discussion of how ODeL is perceived in the developing and developed world. This and the other aspects of the extant literature included here, serve as a foundation for the discussion of the results and in part contribute to the development of the HR risk management conceptual framework. The next chapter focusses on HR risk management and its application in ODeL higher education institutions.

## **CHAPTER 3: HR RISK MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter of the literature review provides a theoretical foundation from which to develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in a South African ODeL university. It specifically examines literature sources related to HR risk management. Several universities, such as; the University of South Africa and the University of Pretoria, have realised that they need to put more emphasis on HR risk management to protect themselves against this category of risk (Joseph, 2014; Mitrofanova et al., 2017; Meyer & Abbott, 2017). This realisation has resulted in universities employing risk officers to effectively manage and govern risk factors. It is therefore critical that strategies are developed to deal with this phenomenon.

Risk, regardless of the size of the universities, if not properly managed, can either weaken or destroy the functions of the business of the universities. Thus, for universities to be successful, in the context of meeting their goals and objectives, they are required to actively seek ways to identify, prevent, avoid and mitigate HR risks (Becker & Smidt, 2016; Reason, 2016). This can be achieved through setting up of ongoing HR risk management systems that focus specifically on HR risk mitigation (Anaraki-Ardakani & Ganjali, 2014).

### **3.2 THE MEANING OF RISK**

The concept risk refers to the chance or possibility of something happening, which could be positive or negative (Hopkinson, 2017). Starting with the latter, an example could be a newly hired employee behaving in an aggressively and violently manner towards other employees. An example of positive risk, on the other hand, might include a newly hired employee mentoring and coaching others in the functions of the university. A closer look at these examples indicates that risk can be visible and invisible, with the latter indicating the difficulties that may be encountered in predicting it (Viner, 2016). A negative risk can deter an organisation (in this case, a university) from achieving its goals and objectives, particularly if ignored (Hopkin, 2018). It is for this reason that organisations often associate risks with negative connotations with degrees of uncertainties (Renn, 2017). Given this view of uncertainties, the notion of

risk, including HR risk, is relative. Hence, Aven (2013; 2016) and Chapman (2019) tend to talk about high, medium and low levels of risks.

### **3.3 TYPES OF RISKS IN UNIVERSITIES**

Most universities are facing risks arising from different aspects of their environments. Hopkin (2018) identified three types of risks: hazard (or pure) risk; control (or uncertainty) risk; and opportunity (or speculative) risks.

#### **3.3.1 Hazard or pure risks**

Hazard risks, sometimes called operational risks, are risks or events that may result in negative outcomes (Slovic, 2016). Examples of these risks may include a heavy workload, stress, anxiety, psychotic disorder, depression and perceived unfair promotions (Akomolafe & Omotosho, 2020; Hopkin, 2018). These risks may lead to high attrition rates of academic staff. McCormack and Sheen (2013), therefore referred to this risk category as the risk of gaining or losing employees, systems, processes and external events (Durst & Henschel, 2020). In essence, this category of risk can disrupt the day-to-day activities of universities. It, therefore, needs to be effectively managed within the level of tolerance.

#### **3.3.2 Control or uncertainty risks**

Organisations, such as universities are always engaged in the implementation of activities. This may include the rolling out of policies and procedures, and the introduction of study programmes (Hopkin, 2018; Otley, 2014). The implementation of organisational activities is associated with unexpected events, which are generally referred to as control or uncertainty risks. The unexpected events may relate to, for example, an educational programme that is not delivered effectively in time as agreed or resources, such as funds used before the completion of the programme (Hopkin, 2018). Today, universities are considered as business organisations because of their need for funds to ensure sustainability and effective functioning in the context of teaching and learning of educational programmes (Okebukola, 2015). Given that universities are business entities; the risks of control or uncertainty are applicable to them. The management of control risks is therefore expected to be undertaken to

ensure that the desired outcomes of universities are achieved. Thus, the primary motive should be on reducing the variance between anticipated outcomes and actual findings.

### **3.3.3 Opportunity or speculative risks**

Opportunity or speculative risks are risks that are deliberately taken by organisations in order to achieve a return on investment (Hopkin, 2018; Yoe, 2019). Thus, opportunity risks relate to the relationship between risks and returns. This risk category calls for organisations to be proactive in taking actions or measures with the view to achieving positive gains from their investments.

In sum, HR risk may fall under all the types of risks described thus far. HR risk is a key aspect of this study, reflected in its aim and objectives. Noting this, it is imperative for it to be given some attention.

## **3.4 HR RISKS**

HR risks are problems or changes in an organisation, which may negatively affect its activities and hinders the achievement of the organisational goals (Mitrofanova et al., 2017, p. 699). Examples of such risks include talent shortages and retention, unauthorised absenteeism, incompetence, violent behaviour and non-compliance with policies and procedures to name but a few (Blacker & McConnell, 2015). According to Stefánsdóttir (2017), HR risks can be grouped into three categories: (1) compliance, that has to do with financial or reputational damage when there is failure in legal or regulatory requirements; (2) loss of productivity or underperformance due to lack of qualifications, motivation and unskilled employees; and (3) failure to maximise major growth or development of the business. These risk categories can have a negative impact on an organisation, which in this case relates to universities. For instance, any failure by a university to comply with its recruitment and selection procedures could result in the employment of incompetent and/ or dishonest employees. Added to this, any failure to implement policies for effective succession planning could promote incompetency in higher education institutions (SABPP, 2014). Taking this into account, universities are to attract academics and have meaningful mechanisms in place to

nurture, retain and enhance the competencies of their employees (Blacker & McConnell, 2015).

The categorisation of HR risk by Mitrofanova et al. (2017) indicates that risk is a dichotomous variable, which suggests that it is either present or absent. It should be noted, however, that this is not the case, as there is always some degree of HR risk at all universities, even those with effective HR departments (Van der Vegt et al., 2015). Given this, it is appropriate to consider HR risk as a continuous variable that exists on a continuum of severity. This suggests that the effects of HR risk may vary from one academic to another in higher education institutions, a function of their differential personalities, experience and coping mechanisms. HR risks may have a negative effect on academics in ODeL institutions of a higher education institution (Toma et al., 2014). For example, academics may sometimes feel unfairly treated by their managers, and such feelings could result in poor performance that in turn could negatively impact the goals and objectives of ODeL institutions. Hence, it is critical for ODeL institutions to regularly and frequently engage in the assessment of HR risk with the view of mitigating its negative impact (Toma et al., 2014).

### **3.5 HR RISK ASSESSMENT**

There is a growing interest in HR risk management given the negative effects of HR risks on organisations and employees. The management of any category of risk, including HR risk, is often preceded by a risk assessment to identify, quantify and characterise threats. Hence, HR risk assessment is referred to as a systematic approach to evaluate the occurrence of future human risk, as well as the impact and consequences of that risk, including potential harms and benefits (Aven, 2016). Considering the notion of potential harm, it is critical for HR risk assessment to be conducted effectively. The question therefore arises, what is an effective HR risk assessment? According to Haines (2016), an effective HR risk assessment is an assessment that is transparent, relevant, timely, multi-dimensional, multi-professional and yields reliable outcomes. Figure 3.1 is an HR risk management conceptual framework that illustrates the multi-professional and multi-dimensional of risk assessment.

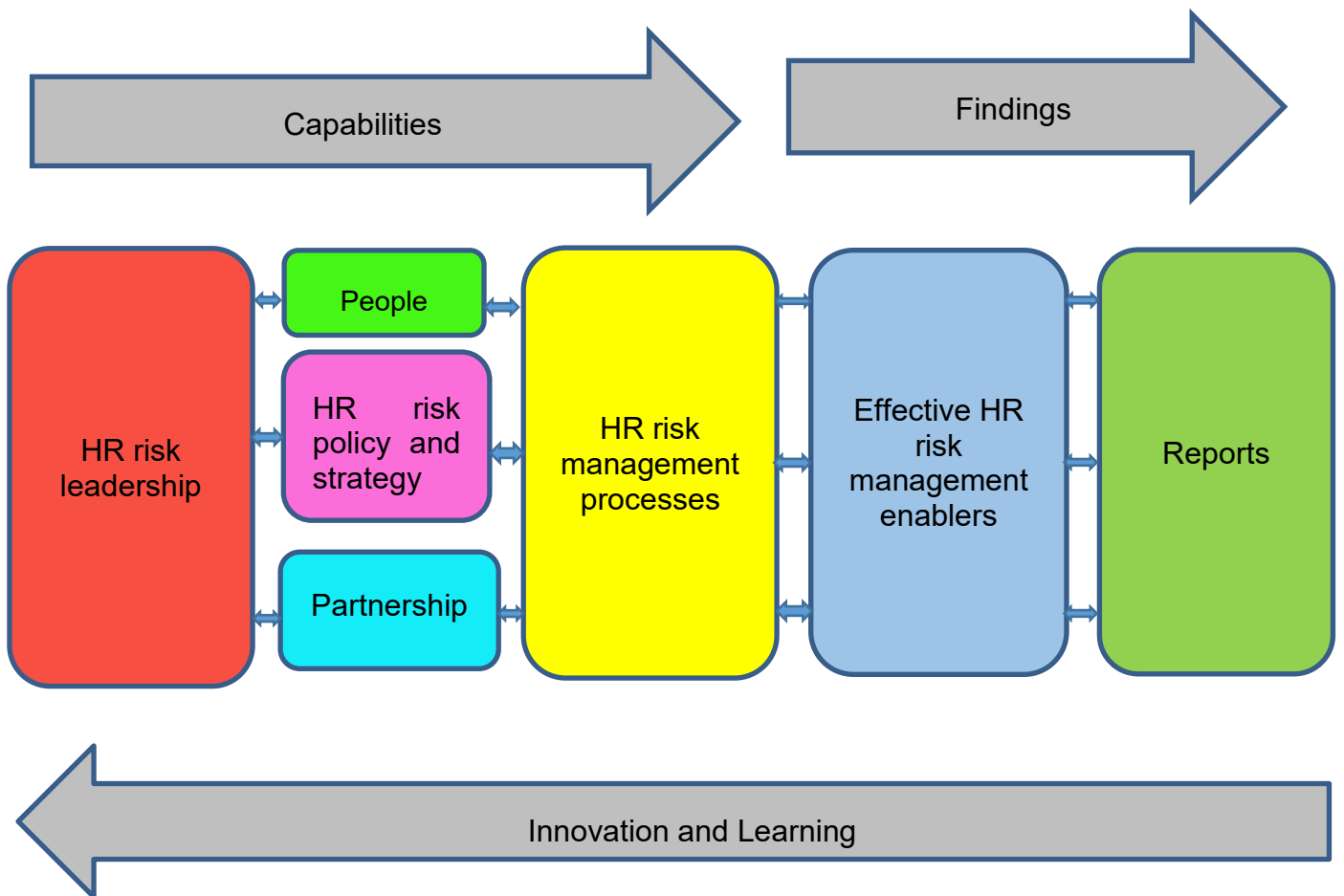


Figure 3.1: HR Risk Assessment Framework (Blacker & McConnell, 2015).

Figure 3.1 indicates that HR risk assessment requires the leadership of HR managers to ensure effective HR risk assessment and risk prediction, and subsequent management of identified risk (SABPP, 2015; Blacker & McConnell, 2015). HR risk assessment processes adopt a partnership approach to risk assessment. Thus, HR risk managers work in partnership with other stakeholders (HR staff and academics) at the university in conducting an HR risk assessment. Such a framework of a team approach would often result in reliable outcomes (Bo, 2014). Hence, it is critical that different stakeholders, both internal and external, participate in the HR risk assessment processes (Blacker & McConnell, 2015). Doing so may result in the identification and alleviation of negative HR risks, which in turn, may lead to the achievement of the institutional goals and objectives (Anaraki-Ardakani & Ganjali, 2014; Chang et al., 2014; Meyer & Abbott, 2017). The achievement of institutional goals and objectives, Meyer and Abbott (2017) assert, would reinforce and sustain a culture of HR risk assessment and management at academic institutions. This is

particularly the case in instances where negative HR risks are frequently, and consistently identified and alleviated (Anaraki-Ardakani & Ganjali, 2014).

The assessment and management of HR risks are guided by policies and procedures of the universities. This suggests that the outcomes of HR risk assessment and management form part of a structured process as indicated in Figure 3.1. The structure created by the policies and procedures ensures effective risk assessment, prediction and management. Added to this, the structure created by the policies and procedures points to the categorisation of HR risks assessment.

There are four types of risk assessment: (1) hazard identification assessment relates to the process of evaluating, examining and analysing risk; (2) exposure assessment has to do with the estimation of people or employees being exposed to risk; (3) dose-response assessment relates to the effect of an exposure on identified outcomes of employees; and (4) risk characterisation is a combination of exposure and dose-response assessments to estimate the number of employees that could be affected by HR risks, such as stress and physical health problems (Blacker & McConnell, 2015). This categorisation requires HR professionals to take into consideration a range of factors when conducting HR risk assessments. This indicates that risk assessment is a multi-pronged approach, and thus involves many factors. The factors that are associated with HR risk assessment are discussed below.

### **3.5.1 Compliance with policies, procedures and laws**

Assessment of HR risk involves an examination of whether employees and universities are complying with policies, procedures and laws that ensure effective and ethical functioning of those universities. The term compliance is an “all” or “nothing” phenomenon, indicating that people or organisations can either conform or not conform to an activity, which in this case relates to policies, procedures and laws (Schutte et al., 2015). Therefore, non-adherence to, for example, university rules and regulations can be regarded as non-compliance, which may result in negative outcomes (Mitrofanova et al., 2017). Drawing on the work of Meyer and Abbott (2017), if a university does not comply with recruitment and selection laws and procedures by employing candidates with limited abilities to carry out tasks, it may fail to achieve its goals and objectives. Examples of the South African laws include the Employment



Equity Act (55 of 1988), Skills Development Act (97 of 1998), and Unemployment Insurance Act (30 of 1996), to name but a few. Given this, compliance must be considered as a process where laws, policies and procedures of the university are clearly articulated and followed. It is therefore imperative to regularly engage in risk assessment to ensure compliance with relevant legislation, policies and procedures (Hopkin, 2018). Doing so would enable universities to avoid or at least minimise the risk of penalties and litigations (SABPP, 2015).

### **3.5.2 Attrition of academic staff members**

Academic staff attrition forms part of the key components of HR risk assessment strategies. Given that academic staff members play a significant role in the functioning of universities, it is therefore essential for HR risk assessment to include mechanisms for determining the reasons and impact of academic staff attrition on academic staff members and institutions (Bailey et al., 2018). Current literature indicates that there is a range of reasons that attribute to academic staff attrition. Examples of these include feelings of unfair treatment, lack of recognition for good performance, limited resources and limited opportunities to name but a few (Mitrofanova et al., 2017). This is also true for ODeL institutions in South Africa. The identification of reasons for academic staff attrition would assist managers in planning and implementing strategies for preventing or at least minimising attrition rates.

### **3.5.3 Institutional culture**

Institutional culture relates to the values, behaviours and practices employees are expected to demonstrate that contribute to the attainment of the aims and objectives of an organisation. The terms institutional culture and organisational culture have the same meaning, and the use of either of this term, is a matter of preference. Given the frequency in the use of the term institutional culture in academic institutions, it is adopted here to ensure consistency and understanding of the ensuing discussions.

The cultures of universities, undoubtedly do influence the HR risks employees are exposed to (Taylor et al., 2018). This assertion is a function of the view that institutional culture influences employees' behaviour, practices and adoption (Schein, 1990). In essence, this relates to how employees interact with one another and how they interact

with their respective institutions. The manner in which academic institutions are managed in South Africa are influenced by its historical background. Thus, an HR risk assessment should also focus on understanding the cultures of the specific institutions to determine the behaviours and feelings of employees, which in this case relate to academic staff members. Determining the behaviours and feelings of academic staff towards one another and organisations would help in the identification of HR risks and their degree of severity of these risks (Caldwell et al., 2019). The determination of the severity of the risk, that is whether it can be regarded as low, medium or high, is what is referred to in the field of risk assessment and management as “risk prediction”.

#### **3.5.4 HR risk prediction**

Predicting the severity of risk following assessment requires delicate handling, as there is the possibility of false-positive and false-negative predictions. False-positive predictions are circumstances where a risk assessment wrongly indicates that risk, including its specific severity, are present (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2015). False-negative predictions, on the other hand, concern situations where risk and its level of severity are absent (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2015). Given these erroneous possibilities, HR risk prediction needs to be conducted in a rigorously and systematically that requires a careful examination of collateral and gathered information from risk assessment processes. This is a reminder of the reality that not all the predictions may be accurate. Hence, the adoption of a painstaking exercise in HR risk prediction would help to minimise the chance of achieving false positive or false negative outcomes. This suggests that guarding against these false predictions is key to successful HR risk management.

### **3.6 HR RISK MANAGEMENT**

Risk management is inherently not an HR concept; it is borrowed from the field of finance (Mitrofanova et al., 2017). Despite this, the concept is increasingly being used in the discipline of HR management because of the threats, like poor performance and attrition, organisations are facing (Govender, 2019; SABPP, 2015). These threats, Urbancová and Linhartová (2011) assert, prevents organisations from achieving their goals and objectives. Organisations, therefore, need to take HR risk management seriously. Hence, most universities and other organisations in South Africa have

started to give HR risk management the attention it deserves (Meyer & Abbott, 2017). For instance, several universities, such as the University of Cape Town and the University of South Africa, offer short academic courses in HR risk management (SABPP, 2014). South African private companies, such as Eskom and Transnet, employ risk managers to ensure that risks are identified and managed effectively (SABPP, 2014). The question now arises; how can the phenomenon of HR risk management be conceptualised?

HR risk management is about identification and evaluation of possible areas of risk that may affect the entire organisation or parts of it (Haimes, 2016). Acknowledging this, HR risk management is therefore required to be a continuous activity that should consist of well-defined steps for understanding risks and alleviating those that may have detrimental effects on organisations (Pritchard & PMP, 2015). One risk that specifically concerns this study, is the attrition of academic staff. Thus, this study explores approaches for retaining academics in higher education institution with an emphasis on ODeL institutions. Organisations, including universities, need to have clear strategies with clearly defined approaches for managing HR risk. Given that there are several approaches for HR risk management, only a few that are relevant to this study are discussed.

### **3.6.1 Academic staff retention**

Academic retention is an activity in which skilled and experienced academic staff are recruited and retained in higher education institutions (Selesho & Naile, 2014). Retaining academics has become a critical topic in most universities in the content of Africa.

The South African higher education institutions and the rest of the world are experiencing challenges related to recruitment and retention of adequate and capable academic staff members with the right skills and knowledge (Makondo, 2014; Saurombe et al., 2017). The situation has become particularly critical in South Africa. The word “right” is used here to refer to academic staff members that are committed and willing to address the aims and objectives of the universities they work for. The main functions of academic staff members are to provide teaching and learning to the students and equip them with knowledge and skills (Aithal & Kumar, 2016). The

current literature suggests that most universities do not have sufficient academic staff members to carry out this function (Onah & Anikwe, 2016).

Several authors gave reasons for the problems with retention (Masum et al., 2015; Manogharan et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2016). Examples of these include poor mentoring and capacity development, and inadequate compensation and incentives (Al-Qarshoubi, 2020). Without well qualified and committed academic staff members, the sustainability of higher education institutions becomes a huge challenge (Kiragu et al., 2019; Ng'ethe et al., 2012). Retaining these employees has become a daunting task for academic institutions. Higher education institutions are struggling to retain productive academics, regardless of their sizes (Manogharan et al., 2018). This indicates that universities need to have clear strategies with clearly defined approaches for retaining their academic staff members and managing HR risk in general. Given that there are many approaches to academic staff retention, only a few of these, relevant to this study are discussed here.

### **3.6.1.1      *HR risk managers***

The appointment of HR risk managers in universities is a salient and important HR risk management strategy, as this category of employees' responsibilities focus entirely on HR risk identification, its prediction and management (De Beer & Du Toit, 2015; Moniri et al 2020). This assertion calls for HR risk managers to be part and parcel of key structures of South African universities, such as the University Council Members, HR and Remuneration Committees. The rationale is in part to engage in activities for reducing the negative impact of HR risks that in turn may promote the successes of universities (Meyer & Abbott, 2017). Thus, HR risk managers are responsible to motivate and inspire academic staff members to stay in their respective universities (Thomson et al., 2015). In other words, HR risk managers ensure that the work environment is conducive for academic staff members and remain in employment (Samuel, 2008). This suggests that poor leadership of HR risk managers may cause high-stress level, low job commitment, low job satisfaction, poor performance, and subsequent attrition (Gwavuya, 2011). Most academic staff members leave their work due to poor leadership styles (Mkulu, 2018).

A study conducted by Kiragu et al.(2019); Netswera et al. (2005) and Ng'ethe et al. (2012) confirmed that leadership style is a prominent factor to academic staff retention in South African universities. Thus, the role of HR risk managers in academics' staff retention is vital. Their responsibilities require the utilisation of clear HR risk management strategy. HR risk managers are responsible for developing HR risk management strategies and disseminating the same to all relevant organs of universities (Hillson, 2017). Achieving this, alleviates HR risks, and promotes academic staff performance and generic achievements of universities' goals and objectives (Erven et al., 2012).

### **3.6.1.2      *Recruitment and selection***

Recruitment and retention of academic staff members have been a major concern in higher education institutions, given that academics are needed to ensure quality education. Thus, the success of universities is dependent on academics and administrative staff members' performance (Maimela & Samuel, 2016; Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). Therefore, universities often focus on enhancing the effectiveness of the day-to-day tasks of academics and administrative staff. This, in essence, relates to mitigating the HR risks that may negatively impact the performances of these staff (Bo, 2014). One way of ensuring this is by universities engaging in robust recruitment and selection processes (Alonso, 2015). This involves the recruitment and appointment of academic staff with the right skills, knowledge and experience in vacant positions (Armstrong, 2016; Ashraf, 2017; Ekwoaba et al., 2015).

Recruitment and selection are sometimes done internally, and the decisions to do so are dependent on managers. One of the primary reasons for managers to engage in internal recruitment and selection processes is awareness of the skills, knowledge and experience of academics, including their attitudes toward work. Such an approach helps managers to recruit and select the right academics for the right positions, which in turn, promotes the success of universities (Thomson et al., 2015). In other words, universities are required to recruit skilled and competent employees to enable them to perform more effectively and efficiently and achieve meaningful findings (Lussier & Hendon, 2017). However, concerns have been expressed repeatedly in the literature about the alarming rates of resignation and retirement of academic staff, specifically in South African higher education institutions (Manogharan et al., 2018). For example,

at the University of South Africa, 52 (2.3%) and 360 (16.1%) of academics retired and resigned in 2019 respectively. In the preceding year, 2018, 49 (2.2%) and 336 (15.3%) of academic retired and resigned respectively from the same institution. Thus, resignation is an HR risk that require serious attention from managers of academic institutions.

Approximately half of the highly qualified and experienced academics and top-rated researchers in South Africa will be retiring in the next five to ten years (Cape Higher Education Consortium [CHEC], 2014). The present pool of academics is insufficient to fill the retiree gap (Theron et al., 2014). To address this, some universities in South Africa set their retirement age at 65 for academic employees. The rationale is for experienced academics to train and offer supervisory support to novice academics (Dube & Ngulube, 2013). An added rationale for this stance is to promote academic staff retention and professional development (Mapolisa, 2015a; Theron et al., 2014). Despite this, the attrition rate of academics in higher education institutions including the University of South Africa remains a concern (University of South Africa, 2015). This is a function of resignations, deaths and retirements. Table 3.1 depicts the attrition rates of academics at the University of South Africa.

Table 3.1: *Attrition rate of academic staff per year (University of South Africa, 2020)*

<b>Years</b>	<b>Total number of academic staff</b>	<b>Number of Academic staff who retired (%)</b>	<b>Number of academic staff who resigned (%)</b>
2013	1899	27 (1.4%)	261 (13.7%)
2014	2114	17 (0.8%)	285 (13.5%)
2015	2016	30 (1.5%)	397 (19.7%)
2016	2106	32 (1.5%)	476 (22.6%)
2017	2100	48 (0.04%)	320 (15.2%)
2018	2201	49 (2.2%)	336 (15.3%)
2019	2234	52 (2.3%)	360 (16.1%)

The University of South Africa has been experiencing difficulties in replacing these lost academic staff (University of South Africa, 2015). This is particularly in the case for scarce-skills disciplines, such as in the College of Science, Engineering and Technology (Molotsi & Moloi, 2015). This could be because the academic staff members of these disciplines are more attracted to private sectors with lucrative

incentives (Molotsi & Moloi, 2015; Al-Qarshoubi, 2020)). Given this, there is a need for universities to develop strategies for attracting and retaining academic staff (Samuel & Chipunza, 2013; Selesho & Naile, 2014). Examples of these could include training and development, performance management, talent management, mentorship and supervision, compensation and remuneration, promotion of employee wellness, professional development and positive work environment.

### **3.6.1.3      *Training and Development***

Training and development is a process whereby employees learn the skills needed for a particular job (Huang & Su, 2016). Thus, training and development of South African academic staff forms an important part of HR risk management in academic institutions, including those offering ODeL. Providing academics with the requisite HR risk-related training and development will enable them to understand the rationale, expectations and procedures underpinning HR risk management and academic staff retention. Thus, there are a number of questions related to HR risk management that universities need to ask of HR managers (Carpitella et al., 2018; Meyer & Abbott, 2017):

- (1) Do HR practitioners understand the roles and responsibilities of academic staff?
- (2) Are academics offered the right training?
- (3) Are there policies and procedures in place for alleviating HR risks, such as attrition?

In addressing these questions, radical steps must be taken to manage HR risks by HR leaders. These will depend on the skills, knowledge and experience they have in the organisation. Larsen (2017) and Raheja (2015) support this assertion and provided a suggestion for managing HR risk. They highlighted that training and development of academics need to be an ongoing activity for reasons of sustainability and success of universities.

According to Lussier and Hendon (2017), the benefit of training outweighs its costs. Training and development empower academic staff with essential skills, knowledge and abilities to accurately perform their duties (Noe et al., 2018). It enhances the confidence of academics, reduces their frustrations and instils a sense of teamwork

spirit (Zeuch, 2016). Training and development encourage and motivates employees to make greater efforts towards their work and be associated with high levels of commitment and performance. It is also claimed to reduce unnecessary performance errors (Lussier & Hendon, 2017). However, poor training can increase the HR risks of organisations, such as attrition and poor performance (Pynes, 2017). This suggests that adequate and quality training and development can result in academic staff retention as training and development enhances job satisfaction, knowledge and skills of academic staff (Bajwa et al., 2014). Simply, investing in employees' training and development findings in a significant increase in productivity, and retention and a consequent decrease in attrition (Terera & Ngirande, 2014). This will result in academic staff members feeling important and capable to adequately perform their tasks. In other words, the more knowledgeable and skilful academics staff members are, the more they will perform and deal with the challenges of their day to day activities at work (Kiragu et al., 2019; Ng'ethe et al., 2012).

Lack of opportunity for training and development is one of the reasons why performing academic staff members leave the institutions. If academic staff members are unhappy, they will move on to the next organisation, since many opportunities are at their disposal (Selesho & Naile, 2014). The challenging part of HRM practices is that when academic staff members resign, the new replacement must be trained and developed (Frederiksen, 2017), which is costly to the university. Hence, training and development form part of academic staff retention.

#### **3.6.1.4      *Performance management***

Performance management is a process that is often used in the workplace, where people work together to achieve the desired goals and objectives (Kallio et al., 2016). Performance management is regularly used by the managers and employees to plan, monitor and review the goals and objectives of the organisation to ensure productivity (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). It is also used to determine how well they performed relative to the performance standards, targets and expectations as outlined in their job descriptions (Gerrish, 2016). The supervisors must identify and correct whatever gaps identified so that the employees can advance their careers. For instance, in academic institutions, performance management serves to assess employee's poor performance and reward excellent performer. Given this, performance management



is exposed to the risk of being biased in instances where the assessment tools and procedures are not adhered to (Grabner et al., 2016). Thus, performance management should be implemented with caution to alleviate HR risk and promote academic staff retention.

### **3.6.1.5      *Talent management***

According to the CHEC, (2014), half of the highly qualified and experienced academics in South Africa will be retiring in the next five to ten years. These academics will be taking with them what Kisoonduth (2017, p. 1) refers to as “irreplaceable intellectual capital”. Apparently, it is difficult to attract and retain young academics since they are attracted to more lucrative incentives in the private sector (Molotsi & Moloi, 2015). This is a call for universities to identify and explore approaches for attracting and retaining young academics.

Talent management is a key strategy considered by universities for achieving this goal (Khandelwal & Shekhawat, 2018). Such a strategy, Bussin (2014); Bussin and Thabethe (2018) highlights, will ensure that young and junior academic staff remain in their respective employment and progress to higher-level academic positions. The question now arises; how will talent management achieve this? One approach for achieving this is for universities to appoint the right academics into the right positions, and create appropriate work environments for effective functioning (Karodia et al., 2015). The creation of an appropriate work environment includes strategies such as performance management, recruitment, selection, training and development, mentorship, job coaching, career and succession management (Boštjančič & Slana, 2018). The implementation of these strategies can enable universities to employ, engage and retain talented young academics.

Succession planning is frequently mentioned in the literature as a critical strategy of talent management and thus deserves some attention. Succession planning is one of the key elements of HR risk assessment and retention strategies used at universities to ensure continuing effective functioning. Thus, universities often strive to appoint and retain capable successors with the right skills, knowledge and attitudes for any given academic position (Block, 2016; IoDSA, 2016). Simply, universities are required to employ capable academics in specific positions and prepare them to function

effectively in those positions (Blacker & McConnell, 2015). However, succession planning is not always successful, as it sometimes fails. For example, an identified employee may not be ready to take over an identified position, the succession programme might lack transparency, and HR managers do not invest enough time and effort in the succession planning exercise. Given these reasons, succession planning as a key strategic function in the context of risk assessment and academic staff retention needs the manager's time and attention regularly.

#### **3.6.1.6      *Mentorship and supervision***

Organisations often associate talent management with mentorship, coaching and supervision, as these approaches enhance skills and knowledge of employees (Oke, 2016). Some of the South African universities have structured mentorship and supervision programmes to promote consistency in teaching, learning and research practices (Van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2019). According to Unger and Hopkins (2018), mentorship is a learning and development process whereby a senior employee, guides a less experienced and less knowledgeable employee.

Supervision, on the other hand, is defined as guiding and aiding an employee and/or student in their work, in the form of moral and educational support (Gilliom & Monahan, 2012, p. 157). These two approaches promote employee compliance with organisational rules and standards in an acceptable manner (Grigoropoulos, 2019). Doing so would result in organisations to achieve their goals and objectives (Belcourt et al., 2017). The definitions of mentorship and supervision reveal key functions of these practices: provision of support and promotion of good communication.

Maintaining good communication plays a significant role in HR risk management and academic staff retention. The function of communication is to ensure clarity in the day-to-day function of universities. Stone and Deadrick (2015) report that clarity in this context can be ensured particularly when communication is transparent, timely, accurate, and relevant to the academic staff members. Supervisors and mentors discuss with mentees/supervisees university's vision, policies and procedures to ensure comprehension. What is also often discussed in mentorship/supervision sessions are roles and responsibilities of academics with a focus, again, on role clarity. Lack of role clarity may be a source of stress for academics, which may sometimes

result in role conflict (Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019; Enakrire, 2019). Thus, exposure to these sources of stress, particularly over a prolonged period of time, may lead to physical and mental health problems that in turn may lead to attrition (Lussier & Hendon, 2017). This indicates the need to manage conflict at work, its impact and the sources of stress that may lead to it.

### **3.6.1.7 Compensation and remuneration**

Compensation and remuneration are important HRM activities that can help to reinforce the culture and key values of organisations and facilitate the achievement of their strategic business goals and objectives (Bratton & Gold, 2017). Remuneration, on the other hand, is a source of motivation that will enhance organisational effectiveness and promote HR risk and academic staff retention (Mabaso & Dlamini, 2017). Therefore, a well-designed organisation's approach to remuneration must be adopted by organisations and communicated to all their employees (Nikolaou & Oostrom, 2015). This will assist organisations to attract, retain and motivate the "best" candidates in employment. It is probably for this reason that Theron et al. (2014); Venter et al. (2013) described compensation as a critical determinant for academics to leave or stay in an organisation.

Simply, compensation is a motivator that takes many forms, and examples of these include salaries, incentives, and rewards. These forms of compensation often enable employees to work hard towards achieving their respective organisational aims and objectives. This indicates that motivation has to do with the willingness to achieve the goals and objectives of the university (Lussier & Hendon, 2017). Thus, managers must develop favourable work environments that consistently motivate their employees. Academic staff need to be well remunerated, treated equally and allowed to perform their jobs with fewer obstructions (Schmidt et al., 2018). This points to the view that competitive, well-designed and attractive compensation packages are important aspects of academic staff retention since they motivate and fulfil their financial and material needs. The question now arises, are academic staff only attracted to their institutions by compensation?

A high salary is not the only sufficient condition to attract and retain academic staff members. Other factors may affect the HR risk and academic staff retention. Non-

monetary tools can be used as retention strategies to motivate experienced academics staff to feel valued and recognised (Mapolisa, 2015; Victor & Hoole, 2017). Hence, some of the universities have excellent HR risk management and academic staff retention strategies (Kiragu et al., 2019; Ng'ethe et al., 2012), even though academics still leave their respective institutions. An example of this includes free education for offspring and psychologically safe environments that promote open communication (Chew & Chan, 2008; Kipkebut, 2013). According to Tettey (2006), unhappiness leads to reasons for academic staff members to resign in South African higher education institutions. Thus, creating or developing a psychologically safe environment that promotes acceptance of all irrespective of race, sexuality, and socio-economic backgrounds, enhances happiness and subsequent retention.

#### **3.6.1.8      *Promotion of employee wellness***

The identification of ways to sustain and promote employee wellness is vital for academic staff members (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). The promotion of employee well-being is not only important for academic staff members, but it is also critical for HR staff, as poor well-being can have an adverse effect on the performance and productivity of institutions. Thus, when academic staff members experience a high level of stress, fatigue, and subsequent burnout, it negatively impacts on their performance at work, including their mental health (Ahmed et al., 2018). In relation to the latter, this is behaviourally expressed in many forms, such as increased absenteeism, and increased accidents, mistakes and attrition (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). This is a call for South African universities to adopt approaches for promoting the wellness of their academics, which includes mental and physical health.

The opportunities for flexible working can promote wellness for many academics, as it contributes to the prevention of role conflict (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Role conflict occurs when pressures in one role are incompatible with those of another, and is considered a major source of stress, and thus exposure to it, particularly over a prolonged period, may result in ill health (Davis et al., 2017). Therefore, the development of a wellness programme by universities should be embraced and prioritised by HR managers (Franco-Santos & Doherty, 2017). Such a programme is required to include strategies like mindfulness and resilience training that focus on individual characteristics and coping mechanisms. Such a programme is

also required to include strategies for fair workload allocation and creation of flexible work arrangements that are noted in the literature to alleviate ill-health and promote academic staff retention. A critical element of an academic wellness programme is meaningful involvement in academic activities and decision making (Mwangi et al., 2016). Involving academics in decision making does not only enhance positive relationships among academics, but it also ensures a better understanding of policies and procedures. Such outcomes contribute to improve and safeguard the well-being of academics.

Work-life balance is a critical factor for improving the well-being of academic staff members. It thus deserves a brief discussion here in relation to well-being and academics staff retention. In today's fast-paced society, HR professionals are seeking options to positively impact academics, improve their morale, and retain those with vast valuable knowledge (Malik et al., 2014). This has made work-life balance to become a predominant issue in the workplace given that academics are often exposed to conflicting responsibilities and commitments that take a large proportion of their time. Thus, a good work-life balance is one of the factors that offer a solution to these challenges (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015). The question now arises, does the university management take work-life balance seriously and understand its impact on the academic staff members? Apparently, this is the case, as most universities have adopted a flexible work pattern, career advancement opportunities, supervisor support and training development, to name but a few, to support their academic staff (Ahmed et al., 2018). Such approaches are reported to improve the satisfaction of academic staff with their career satisfaction (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015; Kossivi et al., 2016).

### **3.6.1.9 Professional development opportunities**

Professional development is vital for maintaining the skills and expertise of academic staff members in higher education institutions (Sitati et al., 2016). Universities and academic staff members must opt for long-term career plans for with an effort to achieve career needs (Hassel & Ridout, 2018). Career development is a plan used to match academics' goals with the needs of the university (Nyambura & Kamara, 2017). In other words, career development opportunities have to do with personal and professional growth that has a direct effect on academic staff retention. Thus, it is important that academic staff members must take responsibility of their career

developments and this may be a huge investment to both the academics and university as a whole (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

The career development needs of the academic staff members must be established so that they can adapt to change in the work environment (Butler & Waldrop, 2001). Armstrong (2020) agrees with this and noted that there is a need for continuous professional and managerial development of academics. A lack of a clear career progression pathway and feelings of being stagnant may lead to HR risk, such as attrition (Nyambura & Kamara, 2017). If these challenges are not timely addressed, the productivity of the university may be affected. Good strategies for talented and productive employees must be developed, in order to improve, motivate and cultivate their competencies and commitment (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). This will create opportunities for career growth and promotions and an increase in academic staff retention (Sitati et al., 2016). Therefore, universities must develop career advancement programmes to promote HR risk management and academic staff retention. Hence, (Theron et al., 2014) emphasised that the career paths and growth of the academic staff members should be a priority in higher education institutions.

### **3.6.1.10 Work environment**

The work environment is the conditions of employment and the physical surrounding that academic staff members work in (Stoewen, 2016). This has to do with a collection of physical, psychological and behavioural elements in the workplace. In other words, a work environment is a place where academic staff members work together and do their daily work activities (Shefer et al., 2018). Thus, the employer must create and maintain a positive work environment that attracts, retains and nourishes capable and talented academics to stay within the university (Msengei & Obwogi, 2015). It is, therefore, safe to state that employees' perception and experience about their working processes, structures, conditions of employment can positively or negatively affect their performance in the workplace (Noe et al., 2018).

A poor work environment relates to a setting where employees feel uncomfortable, unappreciated and undervalued which can negatively affect the employee's mental health and work performance (Akhmedova, 2019). Thus, a poor work environment may portray a depressing situation of how the university values its academic staff

members (Theron et al., 2014). Poor work environments may lead to HR risks such as lack of productivity, in-efficiency, mismanagement, bullying and attrition of academic staff members (Attri, 2012). Added to this, the work environment may become emotionally demanding and fragmented, which may negatively affect the well-being of the academic staff members. Acknowledging this, higher education institutions are to create supportive work environments (sometimes referred to as good work environments) with a view to attract and retain academic staff (Prieto & Pérez-Santana, 2014; Umamaheswari & Krishnan, 2016). A supportive work environment includes activities such as supervisory support, organisational support and co-worker support. The cumulative impact of these activities is increased job satisfaction and academic staff retention (Kundu & Lata, 2017; Lancaster & Di Milia, 2015). Therefore, the work environment needs to be taken into cognisance since academic staff spend a good proportion of their time at work.

### **3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter of the literature review focused on HR risks management. It included discussions on HR risks, risk assessment, risk predictions and how the identified HR risks are managed. It is noted in this review that HR risks are unavoidable and normal occurrences in organisations, and it is practically impossible to create a risk-free organisation. Thus, the term risk prevention used here, is often considered as a misnomer. It is therefore logical for HR personnel to expend energy and time on risk minimisation rather than risk prevention. Therefore, HR risks in organisations, including universities, must be timely identified and managed to minimise their negative impact. The next chapter is on research methodology and the design of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), all research studies are expected to include interrelated activities, such as research process, ethical issues, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and discussions of the philosophical underpinnings of a study. Therefore, this chapter, commences with discussions of the chosen paradigm of the study, followed by a critical discussion on qualitative methodology and methods used to achieve the research objectives as set out in chapter one.

This discussion led the researcher to identify and adopt a research design that is appropriate for researching the subject of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. The adopted research design is phenomenology, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) developed by Smith (2004). The IPA will be discussed in this chapter, as well as the explanation of how it is adopted in this study. The chapter ends with a summary that highlights the key research design and methodology of the study.

### **4.2 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

The research activities used in this study such as study setting, population, sampling data collection, data analysis and ethics will be explained in Table 4.1



Table 4.1: *The research process*

Research questions	Study setting, population and sampling	Data collection	Data analysis
<p>1. What are the perceptions of academic staff regarding HR risk factors that may influence academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa?</p>	<p>Academic staff members with three years' experience working at an ODeL institution in South Africa: Pretoria (Muckleneuk) and Johannesburg (Florida) campuses. Criterion purposive sampling approach is used in this study (Smith &amp; Eatough, 2019).</p>	<p>Individual interviews and focus group discussions guided by IPA semi-structured interview schedule were held. The first main question was asked and was only interrupted when probing and prompting further additional information needed.</p>	<p>IPA framework adopting case-by-case analysis of textual data was used developed by Smith and Shinebourne (2012). External coder was used for credibility and confirmability of data analysis.</p>
<p>2. What are the academic staff's perceptions of the practices of academic staff retention and HR risk management in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa?</p>			
<p>3. What is the evidence-based guidance (HR risk management conceptual framework) for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa?</p>			

### **4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

A paradigm is a set of beliefs that guide researchers through the research process (Morgan, 2014; 2018). There are several paradigms that inform qualitative research. Examples of these include post-positivism, advocacy or participatory, critical, pragmatism, constructivism, constructionism, and phenomenology (Speziale et al., 2011). This study adopts a phenomenological paradigm, as its assumptions are consistent with this study's methodology, methods of data collection and data analysis. A phenomenology paradigm, like other paradigms, consist of a number of interrelated assumptions: the philosophical assumptions about the nature of the truth or reality about a phenomenon (ontological), the researchers' position or stance in understanding the truth or reality of that phenomenon (epistemological), the nature of the research and the most suitable method used (methodological) and the values (axiological). The assumptions in this study are discussed in more detail below.

#### **4.3.1 Ontological assumptions**

Ontology, from a phenomenological standpoint, is about the truth or reality of a phenomenon that is often revealed in people's subjective expressions (Wagner et al., 2019). It is assumed from this perspective that the truth of a phenomenon is multiple, socially constructed and subjective (Silverman, 2016; Wagner et al., 2019). The researcher shares similar assumptions, as she believes that the truth of HR risk management and academic staff retention are multiple and exist in academic staff dialogue.

Followers of this paradigm claim that people's perceptions of reality or truth of a phenomenon may vary from person to person (Howitt, 2016). This is because people's perceptions are personal and socially constructed. The researchers agree with this claim by stating that people's perception of the truth or reality of the world is influenced by their experiences of that world, culture and context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Given that people have different experiences of the phenomenon or the world, arguably, their perceptions of the truth or reality relating to that phenomenon may vary with time and from person to person. It is therefore assumed, within this paradigm, that the reality of any phenomenon is limited to time and context. Acknowledging this, the reality or truth of a phenomenon cannot be generalised to a common or single reality. However, there

are individual and group realities of a phenomenon and these are reflected in this study in the academic staff's perceptions of HR risks and academic staff retention.

#### **4.3.2 Epistemological assumptions**

Epistemology is about “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). It is about determining the relationship between the knower (researcher) and what is known through the subjective experience of participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is assumed from a phenomenological paradigm that individuals and groups of individuals are trying to make sense within their world (Breakwell et al., 2012). The meanings which individuals or groups of individuals have about their world are varied and multiple, and researchers often seek to understand these meanings by engaging or interacting with individuals or groups of individuals. It is for this reason that Given (2008) claims that research is one of the primary approaches to understand the meanings individuals or group of individuals' attributes to a phenomenon.

The researcher of this study applies this assumption, as she engages with the researched or research participants through individual interviews and focus group discussions. The outcomes of this study are thus a function of the interactive process that takes place during the individual interviews and focus group discussions. Thus, within this paradigm, the researcher (observer) is considered part of the sense-making process (Schram, 2006). It is the perceptions of participants that provide the researchers with information about how an individual or group of individuals live in and react to the world or phenomenon (Schram, 2006). In this study, the researcher engages with individual and groups of academic staff members in an ODeL institution to explore their perceptions of HR risk management and academic staff retention. The researchers' intent is to understand academic staff's meanings of their lived experiences of HR risk management and academic staff retention. The researcher works in an ODeL institution and she has been doing so for over a decade. Thus, the researcher has some familiarity with the study subject and has a quest to enhance such familiarity.

### **4.3.3 Methodological assumptions**

The meanings of a phenomenon reside in the participants and not in the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). With this in mind, phenomenologists assume that participants can articulate the meanings of their lived experiences through conversations with researchers. Acknowledging this, the exposure of people's meanings of their lived experiences is an inductive and reiterative process that involves the use of specific interview techniques, such as questioning styles. The interview questions were generally open-ended, non-directive and focused on the process of acquiring the experiences and the consequences of the same. The interview questions evolved as the study progressed and the changes in questioning reflected the assumption of the multiple realities, which people hold of the phenomenon.

Phenomenologists assume that people can talk freely about their experiences, if trust is established. Thus, the researcher of this study established trust and respect during the individual interviews and focus group discussions. The rationale was to capture the meanings of the academic staff's lived experiences of HR risk management and academic staff retention. All the interviews were audio-recorded, and the participants' meanings about HR risk management and academic staff retention were revealed during the transcription and the IPA step-by-step analytical process.

### **4.3.4 Axiological assumptions**

Axiology relates to people's values, moral principles and how these may influence behaviours and the conduct of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It refers to the values that researchers may attach to the entire research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It is assumed within this paradigm that people live in their context or cultural settings, and that the truth of a phenomenon can be noted in participants' discussions about the phenomenon (Schram, 2006). Thus, to understand the participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon, researchers are required to enter the participants' contexts through engagement with the participants, including acceptance of the meanings they give to their experience of the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The research in this research study intended to interpret the meanings of the participants about the phenomenon and to develop a pattern of meanings. In so doing,

the participants were protected from all forms of harm, and their anonymity and confidentiality were respected throughout the research process.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section outlines the research methodology that underpins the study. The research methodology used in this study is qualitative. This methodology ensured similarity among elements of the research process, such as data collection and data analysis. An overview of this methodology is presented in this section. This section also includes several subsections such as: features and assumptions of qualitative research, rationale for using a qualitative methodology, the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research.

##### **4.4.1 Qualitative methodology**

One of the aims of this study is to explore and develop an understanding of the phenomenon of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. Such an understanding requires the use of a qualitative research methodology to explore the personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs and meanings, which individuals hold for this phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2016). This is because it focusses on describing and interpreting human experience so that social situations, such as HR risk management and academic staff retention, may be better understood (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research methodology, therefore, captures the concerns of the current research and resonates with the concerns of the HR risk management field because of its focus on people's unique lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

##### **4.4.2 Features of qualitative research**

Qualitative research is often utilised to investigate human behaviour, and how people make sense of their world, including their individual or unique experiences related to that world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This indicates that qualitative research focuses on understanding people's varied meanings and interpretations of their world using language, image and cultural artefacts (Schwandt, 2015). With this study, the 'world'

is the subject of HR risk management and academic staff retention in ODeL institutions.

From a qualitative point of view, people's subjective meanings and understanding of this world can be understood with the help of using specific data collection methods that promote expression of subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Examples of such methods, frequently used in qualitative research, include in-depth individual interviews, focus group discussions, and observations (Glesne, 2016). Given that qualitative research's main focus is on data collection methods and to understand subjectivity, this approach or methodology does not seek to achieve generalisation of its findings (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Thus, the sample size of this approach is generally small compared to that of quantitative research (Baker & Edwards, 2012). Added to this, this approach of research also employs non-probability sampling methods, such as convenience, snowball, and criterion purposive sampling. Therefore, the purpose of this research is not to generalise findings to the wider population, but it is about developing an understanding of people's subjectivity (Morgan, 2018). The features thus described are consistent with the chosen methodology of this study, qualitative, which is discussed below.

#### **4.4.3 Assumptions of qualitative research**

The qualitative research assumptions used in this research are the same as those proposed by Joubert (2012):

- People experience life in a unique way.
- The researcher works together with the participants to examine the latter's perceptions and lived experiences.
- The researcher is a participant as well as a data collector and analyser and plays a huge part in the credibility and quality of the research.

- The researcher selects and interviews academic staff members as participants until the point of category saturation when no new data emerged relative to the aims and objectives of the study.
- Conclusions of the research are drawn from the participants' experience.

#### **4.4.4 Rationale for using qualitative methodology**

In order to explore and develop an understanding of the phenomenon of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution, the researcher opted to use qualitative research methodology. This is because the development of such understanding requires the researcher to explore the personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs and meanings, which individuals hold for this phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2016). However, it is critical for the researcher to make conscious efforts not to allow her perceived view to influence the exploration process and its outcome (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The focus of the researcher should therefore be on describing and interpreting people's perception of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), which is the case with HR risk management and academic staff retention. This focus on describing and interpreting people's unique personal experiences, echoes with the intentions of the current research and that of qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative methodology has distinct characteristics; some of these relate to people's individual experiences and the uniqueness of their individual responses to social situations (Salkind, 2017). Similarly, HR departments subscribe to the view that employees have individual needs and state that each employee is required to have an individualised HR risk management plan (Meyer & Abbott, 2017). This stipulation re-confirms the concern of the research of this study, which relates to developing an understanding of the phenomenon of HR risk management and academic staff retention from the perspectives of individuals. The stipulation also re-affirms the relationship between HR and the underlying principle of qualitative research, namely the exploration of people's individual experiences and beliefs (Babbie, 2014). Mays and Pope (2020) echo this view and state that, the reason why qualitative research has so much to offer, for example, the HR discipline, is that both HR and qualitative research place great emphasis on offering employee-centred holistic support.

According to Bryman and Bell (2014), qualitative methodology is the only methodology that enables researchers to understand people's characteristic or personal experiences and perceptions. Any attempt to understand how academics perceive HR risk management, academic staff retention, and factors that influence them, must therefore be based on a methodology that is sensitive to the subjective-personal experience and how that may vary from one person to the other. Flick (2018) best captures the basis of this decision and notes that when exploring human experiences, little is derived from an indirect researcher-subject relationship characteristic of quantitative approaches. As a result, the focus of this study aligns itself primarily with qualitative research, which Schwandt et al. (1994, p. 2) describe as "an interpretive and a naturalistic approach to researching the world or phenomenon. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". To date, limited studies have been conducted on HR risk management using a qualitative methodology. This study, therefore, employs a qualitative methodology to examine HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

While qualitative methodology is considered suitable for this study, it is not free from limitations or disadvantages. It is therefore critical to offer some discussion initially on the advantages and then the disadvantages of this methodology.

#### **4.4.5 Advantages of qualitative research**

There are some advantages of qualitative research. It is critical to state that qualitative research is an approach that researchers use to explore the world with the view of developing a better understanding of the same (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This indicates that the primary focus of qualitative research is to discover or reveal the meanings people hold of a specific phenomenon (Polit & Beck, 2017). Communication using language is the principal means of revealing such understanding (Squires, 2009). Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008) agree with this and state that this approach helps the researcher to explore the insightful information about people's lived experiences of a phenomenon. To achieve this, the researcher has a critical role to play in constantly scrutinising the data to reveal its essence.



Given this, qualitative research is considered a more holistic process as researcher-participant interactions occur in the natural setting of the latter. Thus, the researcher is also a participant in qualitative research, and the activity of scrutinising and revealing the essence of a phenomenon is a reiterative process (Råheim et al., 2016). Acknowledging this, the outcome of the analysis is a joint product of the researcher and the participants' understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Polit & Beck, 2017). In qualitative research, rich and valuable data can be collected, and new or unexpected areas can be explored or pursued during the interviews (Flick, 2018). This emphasises the view that the interview process in qualitative research is flexible taking into account the questions asked at the interviews and the pace of these are dictated by the participants' response.

The utilisation of interview schedules during interviews offers some consistency in the data collection process and ensures quality data collection. In other words, the use of an interview schedule promotes or contributes to the trustworthiness of data and data collection process. This is in part, a function of the structured environment that the interview schedule creates. The interview schedules also enable the researcher to probe and prompt participants to express their subjective feelings relating to the phenomenon under study (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Such approach enables researchers to gather more and rich information about the phenomenon. The use of probes and prompts during interviews, and the general researcher-participant engagement also enables the researcher to develop relationships with the participants (Soeters et al., 2014). To add, such engagement in qualitative research may reveal new avenues or hypotheses for further research studies. Despite these advantages, qualitative research is not free from limitations.

#### **4.4.6 Disadvantages of qualitative research**

The quality of data collection skills may vary from one researcher to another (Burnard et al., 2008). Given this variability, the pace of data collection, and perhaps the quality of data collected may also vary from one study to another, and even from one researcher to another. Apart from the researcher's influence, the quality of data can also be influenced by the methods of recording data. The use of an audio-recorder to capture or record data is common in qualitative research (Stuckey, 2014). However,

the audio-recorder may sometimes not comprehensively or completely record the data because it may develop a fault while recording. Added to this, the audio-recorders are unable to capture the body language of the participants, which may help researchers to enhance their understanding of study phenomena (Silverman, 2016). To avoid this, the researcher made field notes during the interviews.

The sample size in this approach is generally small. Acknowledging this, the findings of qualitative research are not generalisable to the wider population of a study (Gheondea-Eladi, 2014). Although this is the case, the findings of research adopting this approach are transferable to populations similar to that of the original research study (Polit & Beck, 2017). However, the population of this study as well as the participants' personal information are provided in this research study, which will enable other individuals to make transferable judgments.

In addition to the sample sizes in qualitative research, its analytical approaches are generally time-consuming (Boddy, 2016). This is a function of their duplicative iterative nature, as previously coded transcripts, for example, are sometimes required to be revised and re-coded (Smith, 2016). This is also a function of the time required to transcribe an audio-recorded interview, and the inclusion, on occasion, some prosodic features (like pauses, stress & rhythm) required in some qualitative research designs (Silverman, 2016). This points to the researchers' ability to conduct interviews. This is critical as the quality of data collected at the interviews is depended on the researcher's interview skills or ability. This indicates that the weaker the interview skills of the researcher the poorer the quality of data that may be generated from the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The researcher has good interview skills that were acquired when pursuing her master's qualification and when attending qualitative data collection workshops.

#### **4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

There are different kinds of qualitative research designs available for researchers to choose from when engaging in qualitative research studies, for example ethnography, grounded theory, case study and phenomenology. For this specific study, a phenomenological design was chosen.

### **4.5.1 Ethnography**

Ethnography is a qualitative research design in which the patterns of behaviours, values, beliefs and language of a defined cultural group are described and interpreted by the researcher in a holistic manner (Flick, 2018). From this statement, the goal of ethnography is to learn and understand about human cultures. However, human cultures are sometimes difficult to understand. Even though this is the case, estimation is possible if the ethnographer (researcher) “an outsider” to the cultural group assumes “an insider” stance in order to understand the symbolic world in which people live, which often involve the use of interviews and observation as data collection methods (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004; Fielding, 2001). The focus of this study is on HR risk management and academic staff retention, not the cultures of the academics. Acknowledging this, an ethnographic design is not suitable for this study.

### **4.5.2 Grounded theory**

Grounded theory is about substantive theory development through a recursive process of data collection and analysis to provide comprehensive explanations of a phenomenon (Polit & Beck, 2017). This manner of the theory development brings the theory closer to reality relative to those derived from concepts, researchers’ personal experiences and literature. Glaser (2002); Creswell (2014) share the same sentiments regarding grounded theory.

The data collection process of the grounded theory requires repeated researcher participant contact and this renders this research design unsuitable for exploring HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. This is because academic staff members are usually subjected to busy routines in their respective work settings. Thus, such busy routines may lead the academic staff members to dislike the idea of being subjected to numerous interviews.

### **4.5.3 Case study**

Case study is a research design that examines a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, especially if its boundaries are not clearly evident (Yin, 2017). It allows the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events such as an individual and organisation at a specific time and place

(Klonoski, 2013). Case studies provide descriptive and interpretive accounts of a real-life context (Zainal, 2007). The phenomenon of HR risk management and academic staff retention in Africa is under-researched (Kissoonduth, 2017; Tettey, 2006). Acknowledging this, developing an understanding of this phenomenon requires a research design that will not only enable the researcher to obtain descriptive accounts from participants, but it also requires a research design that allows for an in-depth participants-researcher interpretative activity of the phenomenon using preconceptions. A case study design involves a single participant or a small number of participants (Yin, 2017). Therefore, a case study does not allow for a broader and in-depth participant-researcher interpretative activity and is therefore not suitable for this study.

#### **4.5.4 Phenomenology**

When exploring the literature on methodological cohesion, phenomenology was chosen as the most appropriate and suitable research design for this study. There are different phenomenological designs, which have several common features that often make it difficult for researchers to identify specific designs that are scientifically suitable and feasible for their respective studies (Van Manen, 2016). Examples of these similarities include the focus on human lived experience, meaning and how meaning arises in experience (Langdrige, 2017).

Phenomenology is about developing an understanding of people's subjective expressions of their lived experiences with a specific phenomenon (Titchen & Hobson, 2005). It is for this reason that supporters of this design claim that empirical observations are limited in understanding individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Eatough & Smith, 2017). From a phenomenological perspective, this indicates that the reality of a phenomenon (ontology) is grounded in people's lived experiences of that phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This truth can be accessed and revealed through participant-researcher engagement or interaction (Moran, 2005). Researchers adopting phenomenological designs have an active role in the co-construction of meaning and revealing the truth of phenomena. The truth is what sometimes (Alfaro-LeFevre, 1995, p. 74) is referred to as the "internal logic" of a phenomenon. Speziale et al., (2011) refer to the internal logic as the essence of a phenomenon; the concepts or characteristics for understanding that phenomenon.

Attempts to understand the essence of the phenomena has led researchers to group the variants of phenomenology into descriptive and interpretive theoretical frameworks (Polit & Beck, 2017).

#### **4.5.4.1      *Descriptive phenomenology***

Descriptive phenomenology focuses on describing a phenomenon, and very little attempt is made by researchers using this variant of phenomenology to reveal the underlying meaning or essence of the phenomenon at hand (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Researchers can develop an understanding of a phenomenon if they achieve epoché (bracketing) (Husserl, 1970). Bracketing can be defined as the initial process that requires “suspension of presuppositions and expectations, findings and clarifications allowing ourselves to be fully aware of what is actually before us” (Willig, 2013, p. 53). Bracketing has to do with the phenomenological reduction; this means different ways of thinking that can be achieved (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Some researchers, such as Creswell (2014) and Moustakas (1994) support the role of bracketing in promoting or enhancing an understanding of the phenomena. Though this is the case, they acknowledge the difficulty of achieving bracketing. The notion of bracketing has implications for this study. The researcher of this study claims that it is extremely difficult if not impossible for researchers to separate themselves and their preconceptions from the phenomena under investigation (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). The study intends to develop an in-depth understanding of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution, which can be achieved by the researcher actively engaging with participants in interpretive activities using preconceptions (Breakwell et al., 2012).

#### **4.5.4.2      *Interpretive phenomenology***

There are variants of interpretive phenomenology: hermeneutic phenomenology, template analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis (Larkin et al., 2011). These variants are discussed briefly here to identify the one that is most suitable for exploring HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

#### **4.5.4.2.1 Hermeneutic phenomenology**

Interpretation of lived experiences is one of the core principles of interpretative phenomenology or hermeneutics, a framework founded and developed by Heidegger et al. (1962). It is assumed within this design that people are inseparable from the world they live and interact in (Noon, 2018). This is what Heidegger et al. (1962, p. 344) refers to as “being in the world with others”. On examining this statement using one’s personal experiences, it is appropriate to say that people are social beings, as they are always interacting with one another (Smith, 2016). It is through these interactions or discourse that understanding of meanings given to experiences is manifested (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). However, such understanding is limited, as this strand of phenomenology only allows researchers to adopt an insider position in developing an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Gill, 2014). Hence, hermeneutic phenomenology is not a suitable design for this study.

#### **4.5.4.2.2 Template analysis (TA)**

Template analysis is another variant of interpretive phenomenology (Larkin et al., 2011). Template analysis is a form of thematic analysis that involves the analysis of a data set using predetermined themes or template based on a sub-set of the data (King, 2004). The use of a template is to guide the analytical process that may prevent researchers from taking a critical stance in interrogating the data set. Hence, this design is not appropriate for this study despite its call for flexibility in data analysis. Added to this, template analysis focuses on across case analysis rather than on within individual cases analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Thus, the outcome of template analysis may not include an in-depth understanding of individual accounts of participants. This also makes this design not suitable for this study, which seeks to understand participants’ explanations of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

#### **4.5.4.2.3 Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) design: a rationale**

The researcher of this study opted for IPA and used it both as a research design and as a tool of analysis for a wide range of reasons (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The

primary focus of IPA is to understand the meaning of participants' experience relating to a phenomenon, by enabling researchers to step outside of the participants' accounts and its wider social, cultural, psychological and asking critical questions of the participants' accounts (Howitt, 2016). This is because the meaning participants attribute to an experience can be understood in the socio-cultural context, a view that underpins or guides the analytical stages of IPA (Larkin et al., 2006). Critically, IPA encourages researchers to use their preconceptions during analysis and in making interpretations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The researcher agrees with such practise of preconceptions but acknowledges that they may distort the meanings of the phenomenon if not used appropriately. Preconceptions are to be used selectively to reveal the meanings of the phenomena (Breakwell et al., 2012).

IPA notes that the meanings that a phenomenon holds for people can be understood through active participant-researcher engagement. IPA further stresses that access to these meanings can be possible if researchers adopt both insider and outsider perspectives (Reid et al., 2005). The position of an insider requires researchers to use their preconceptions to understand participants' worlds and the meaning they attribute to them. Added to this, the insider perspective requires the researcher to assume the position of the participants, using the thoughts and beliefs they share in making interpretations (Smith, 2016). The position of an outsider requires researchers to ask critical questions of participants' accounts (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

IPA employs a double hermeneutic approach. This is a two-stage interpretation process that involves the participants to make sense of their world and the researcher made sense of the participants' world (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The double hermeneutic fits in well with this study since the researcher made attempts to make sense of the position and experience of the participants, using her preconceptions in making interpretations (Smith, 2016; Smith & Osborn, 2015).

The adoption of this double hermeneutic approach in this study will enable the researcher to generate comprehensive insights into the phenomenon studied, HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The double hermeneutic approach is part of a sustained qualitative mode of inquiry and serves as part of the motivation to use IPA in this research study (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Despite this, IPA is not free from limitations.

#### **4.5.4.2.3.1 Limitations of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Notwithstanding the advantages or strengths of IPA, it is important to note its potential limitations. Firstly, there is an assumption that participants offer their understanding of their thoughts, commitments and feelings by telling their own stories to the researchers (Reid et al., 2005). IPA relies on the participants to express their stories and experiences. This may be a limitation of an IPA study, as some participants may not tell their stories and experiences adequately (Howitt, 2016).

Secondly, there is an assumption in all IPA studies that language is the means of communication, as it enables researchers to capture the participants' experiences and the meanings they hold of a phenomenon (Smith, 2016). This indicates that the experience of participants who do not have good language skills may be misunderstood or not adequately captured (Willig, 2013).

Thirdly, the quality of an IPA study is in part dependent on the researcher's interview skills and ability to analyse the participants' narratives (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Thus, a researcher with an inadequate interview and analytical skills could result in outcomes that are not reflective of the participants' experiences and meanings of phenomenon.

Fourthly and finally, an IPA study is time-consuming, as its analytical stages require an unwavering commitment of the researcher (Noon, 2018). This suggests that failure to be committed to data analysis could result in outcomes that are not grounded in the participants' narratives.

## **4.6 RESEARCH METHODS**

Research methods are principles, procedures and strategies for collecting and analysing data (Flick, 2018). This section involves study setting, population, sampling, data collection, ensuring rigour and data analysis that were used in this study.



#### **4.6.1 Study setting**

A study setting refers to the physical location in which the researcher conducts the study (Holloway & Galvin, 2016; Walker, 2007). The study was conducted at an ODeL institution in South Africa. This university has regional service centres situated in all the provinces of South Africa. Examples of the locations include Polokwane, Cape Town, East London, Rusternburg, Durban and Pretoria. An ODeL institution where the research is conducted has 2900 academic staff members and most of these staff members work at the Pretoria (Muckleneuk) and Johannesburg (Florida) campuses. The Pretoria campus is the biggest campus of the ODeL institution followed by Florida campus.

#### **4.6.2 Population**

A starting point of selecting a sample for a study is to clearly define the target population, which is the population of the study (Wagner et al., 2019). Polit and Beck (2017); Etikan et al. (2016) refer to a population as the entire set of individuals who have common characteristics, sometimes referred to as the “universe”. De Vos et al. (2011) refer to a study population as a term that sets boundaries on the study units, which are in principle, considered as individuals or objects in the universe that possess certain characteristics. In other words, a population is the totality of all subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications or characteristics (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). In this study, the individuals in the universe, in other words, the study population, are all academic staff members employed at an ODeL institution in South Africa. The aim of this study is to be detailed about the participants’ perceptions and understanding of their views (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The population are mostly selected as they have access to a particular perspective of the phenomena under study (Breakwell et al., 2012).

The target population of this study was all academic staff of an ODeL institution who works at the Pretoria and Johannesburg campuses, respectively. The accessible population was all academic staff members employed at an ODeL institution in South Africa. The accessible population was that to which the researcher had reasonable access (Porter, 1999). The sample of this study was selected from this population with the help of the specific eligibility criteria. At the time of this research, the Pretoria

Campus had 2500 academic staff, while the Johannesburg campus had 400 academic staff members. The academic staff members at these campuses consisted of the following ranks: College Executive Deans and their deputies; School Directors; Chairs of Departments, Professors, Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers, Junior Lecturers, Researchers and Research Professors for different departments.

#### **4.6.2.1 Population and participants characteristics**

Most of the participants who participated in the study were between the age ranges of 40-50 years. About 10% of the participants fell in the age range of 50-60 years, and 5% were over 60 years of age. In relating to race, twelve of the participants were blacks, two were coloureds, three were whites, and three were Indians. Eight of the participants were professors in their respective disciplines, with over 10 years of experience in ODeL environments.

#### **4.6.3 Eligibility criteria**

The following eligibility criteria explain the guidelines or subjects that can and cannot be included in this study.

##### **4.6.3.1 *Inclusion criteria***

Permanent academic staff members with at least three years' working experience at an ODeL institution in South Africa. Three years was an adequate period that allows for professional socialisation and knowledge development on the subject researched. The inclusion of permanent academic staff members with this level of experience led to the generation of rich information on the subject researched.

Permanent academic staff members who are working at an ODeL institution: Pretoria and Johannesburg campuses.

Permanent academic staff members who were willing to participate in the study. This was because the willingness to participate enabled participants to share their experiences of academic staff retention and factors that might influence it.

#### **4.6.3.2 Exclusion criteria**

Permanent academic staff members with less than three years of work experience at an ODeL institution. Academic staff members who were not working at the Pretoria and Johannesburg campuses of an ODeL institution.

Permanent academic staff members who were not willing to participate in the study.

#### **4.6.4 Sampling and sample size**

A sample is a subset of a population selected to participate in a research study (Polit & Beck, 2017; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative study was not to generalise its findings but to develop a deep understanding of HR risk management, academic staff retention and factors influencing these in an ODeL institution.

Thus, the researcher employed a criterion purposive sampling approach to select and recruit participants for the study. Smith and Osborn's (2015) view and in the view of Larkin and Thompson (2012), criterion purposive sampling approach as an appropriate approach for IPA studies. This is a non-probability sampling approach in which the units observed were selected based on specific or defined eligibility criteria (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The sampling was mainly selected from participants with shared experiences of the phenomenon studied (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Hence, the need for a set of specific eligibility criteria to inform the sample selection, as it would not be methodologically feasible to interview all the members of the accessible population (Yin, 2015).

The participants of the study were approached in the following way: the researcher requested an ODeL institution's HR Department to provide the researcher's supervisors with a list of the permanent academic employees at the Pretoria and Johannesburg campuses who met the inclusion criteria of the study of three years of work experience. The list of academic staff that met the study's inclusion criteria was provided and the researcher sent emails to selected academic staff members of these campuses. The email had two attachments; (1) an information sheet; and (2) a letter of invitation for participants to express willingness to participation in the study. The information sheet provided explanations of the study's eligibility criteria, including the

aims and objectives of the study, its benefits, participants' rights of participation, and the researcher's contact details.

The researcher scheduled individual interviews and focus group discussions with those who clearly expressed their willingness to be interviewed. A follow-up letter was then sent to each of the participants eligible for participation confirming the date and time of the interview as well as indicating the venue of the interview for the entire duration of data collection.

Sampling and sample size of this study, like many other qualitative studies, were guided by the principle of category saturation (Flick, 2018; O'reilly & Parker, 2013). This suggests that sampling in this study continued to the point when data analysis was not generating new information relevant to the aims and objectives of the study. For the individual interviews, category saturation was reached during the 20th interview (N=20). With regards to the focus group discussions, category saturation was reached during the fourth focus group discussions (N=4×4). IPA studies agree with this sample size as it is generally conducted in small sizes (Larkin et al., 2011). Smith's (2016) view is that the richness of data is required, hence the researcher's commitment to individual cases.

#### **4.7 DATA COLLECTION**

To date, HR risk management and academic staff retention have been researched using single data collection methods (Kiragu et al., 2019; Ng'ethe et al., 2012). In this study, the researcher adopts a multi-method data collection approach within IPA design to enhance the understanding of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution (Smith & Eatough, 2019). Triangulation is also achieved when using multiple sources of data collection methods. The data collection methods in this research study are individual interviews and focus group discussions in line with IPA design (Smith & Osborn, 2015), which are discussed below together with a rationale for adopting these methods.

#### **4.7.1 Individual interviews: a rationale**

Individual interviews are forms of conversations that are conducted in line with the information that researchers need to elicit and the researchers' approach to eliciting the same (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Minichiello et al., 2008). Britten (1995) agrees with this and adds that researchers need to ask the participants critical questions with the view to accessing and acquiring the information required about a specific subject of inquiry.

The principal aim of the researcher of this study is to collect data for enhancing an understanding of the phenomenon of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. Achieving this aim requires the use of some degree or minimal amount of direction where necessary to generate data relating to HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. Given this, this study utilises a semi-structured interview format that allows participants to freely express themselves within the bounds of the aims and objectives of the study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The phrase 'within the bounds of the aims and objectives of the study' indicates that this category of interview imposes some control during the interview encounters (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 3).

In this study, the researcher was open to new and unexpected discussions, but imposed very minimal control to all the interview encounters towards the aims and objectives of the study. The researcher fulfilled a listener and observer role and only asked probing questions to gain insight and depth into the participants' lived experience. Taking such a position generated rich data of the participants' views of HR risk management and academic staff retention, as participants were encouraged to dictate the pace of the interviews (Bauman et al., 2011). Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) share a similar view by emphasising the need for a shift in control from the researcher to the participant. Such an approach enabled participants to feel in control of the interview encounter that in turn enabled them to feel comfortable and freely express themselves. Contradictory views of participants were noted between the individual interviews. Even though differential perceptions or views may add to the quality of data, clarifying them was practically difficult given the nature of the conduct of individual interviews. As a result of this, the researcher utilised another mode of

data collection, focus group discussions, to complement the data obtained from the individual interviews (Palmer et al., 2010).

#### **4.7.1.1 Advantages of individual interviews**

Individual interviews are described as useful tools of data collection in this study. This is because they enable researchers to obtain instant responses from participants (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the use of individual interviews in IPA studies allows participants to offer detailed first-person accounts of their experiences (Smith & Eatough, 2019). The interviews are sometimes audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The use of an audio recorder enhances the accuracy of data captured relative to note-taking. Added to this, it is easy for the researcher to determine if the participants understood a question, and when to use follow-up questions, prompts and probes to ensure understanding (Polit & Beck, 2017). Thus, the use of probes and prompts during interviews, and the general researcher-participant engagement also enables the researcher to develop relationships with the participants. Such a relationship will help to enhance researchers' understanding of participants' experiences of the study phenomena. Taking this into account, individual interviews promote researcher-participant discourse or engagement and clarification of issues discussed. This indicates that participants dictate the course and pace of the interviews (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Additional information of the participants can be obtained through the observation of the participants' behaviour during the interview (Flick, 2018). Despite these advantages, individual interviews can be fraught with disadvantages.

#### **4.7.1.2 Disadvantages of individual interviews**

The use of an audio recorder has its shortfall that can impact negatively on the quality of data collection (Opdenakker, 2006). For example, the recorder might be faulty and thus not record the interview. However, assuming the audio recorder is in good working condition, transcribing an hour of a recorded interview is time-consuming and this can take a minimum of two hours (Bryman, 2016).

The interviewer might unintentionally influence the participants during the interview. For example, participants may respond to questions that they think will satisfy the researcher. Added to this, the participants may sometimes not reveal their perceptions of a subject under exploration. This could be a function of not wanting to engage in discussion, or it could be the function of not wanting to annoy the researcher (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Thus, the success of the interview depends on the interviewer's ability to enable participants to freely express their experiences or feelings of subjects discussed.

#### **4.7.2 Focus group discussions: a rationale**

Focus group discussions are dynamic and interactive data collection methods that enable a small group of participants and researcher(s) to discuss the specific phenomenon of interest (Green & Thorogood, 2018; Silverman, 2016; Wilkinson, 2004). In other words, focus group discussions are planned discussions for allowing researchers to access the participants' perceptions and meanings of subjects of interests (Flick, 2018). There have been growing interest among IPA authors to investigate if focus group discussions can be truly phenomenological (Dowling, 2007; Noon, 2018). It is worth noting that several articles have been published using IPA and focus group discussions (Flowers et al., 2000; Flowers et al., 2001). There are no theoretical reasons why IPA could not be used in focus group discussions to collect and analyse data (Langdridge, 2017). Acknowledging this, the role of the researcher in this context was to facilitate the discussions between the participants and generate rich information about the phenomenon under exploration.

Thus, in addition to complementing data from the individual interviews, focus group discussions were also conducted in this study as they allowed the researcher to explore and clarify the differences and similarities concerning the participants' perceptions of HR risk management and academic staff retention (Smith, 2014). In this way, the focus group discussions enabled the researcher to better understand the phenomenon of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. Such an understanding was a function of the researcher's approach to utilising the different perspectives of participants that emerged during the discussions.

Developing such an understanding was in part possible because the participants found the focus group discussions both gratifying and stimulating (Polit & Beck, 2013). Such stimulation resulted in more participant discussions that subsequently led to the deeper and collective expression of emotions. Arguably, the focus group discussions provided safe environments for participants to react to and build upon the responses of other group members (McLachlan, 2005).

Although similarities may exist, academic staff may have varying accounts of professional socialisation. Thus, the researcher was cognisant of the view that academic staff members may have similar and dissimilar views about HR risk management and academic staff retention. The focus group discussions of this study allowed for the discussion of different and convergent views of participants, including the reconstruction of the opinions of individual participants.

Given the discussions on the rationale for the use of individual interviews and focus group discussions thus far, it would be erroneous to think that the integration of these data collection methods is a remedy for research problems relating to HR risk management and academic staff retention. Hence, the researcher adopted some strategies, such as the use of an interview schedule to enhance the quality or rigour of the study.

#### **4.7.2.1      *Advantages of the focus group discussions***

The focus group discussions are used to examine what people think, how they think, and their rationale for their thoughts about a given subject area (Kitzinger, 1995). It brings the researcher closer to the topic through its personal encounters with a group of participants. Focus groups can be useful for generating and evaluating data with different sub-groups of a population (Cohen et al., 2017; Curtis & Redmond, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Focus group discussions provide a safe environment for participants to share their knowledge, thoughts and feelings. Focus group discussions are a quick, easy and cost-effective method for gathering data from participants (Sofaer, 2002; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Sensitive topics may be raised and dealt with during focus group discussions. Fears and suspicions can be reduced through the establishment of an



open environment in focus group discussions (McLachlan, 2005). Despite this, a focus group discussion is not free from disadvantages.

#### **4.7.2.2 *Disadvantages of the focus group discussions***

Focus group discussions are unlikely to be successful when participants are not actively participating. This might be when there is an endangerment of personal, working and home relationships (McLachlan, 2005). The researcher has the responsibility to maintain group confidentiality but cannot be held liable for individual members of the group to do the same. Furthermore, the success of focus group discussions may be threatened by the group personal interests other than that of data collection for the research. With certain strong personalities, the participants may influence the group discussion (Hollander, 2004). In some cases, some group members may feel intimidated to speak.

The cost-effectiveness of focus group discussion depends on the depth and amount of data to be analysed (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). To ensure confidence in the data, focus group discussions may be combined with other data collection methods. According to Watts and Ebbutt (1987), the personal information needed in focus group discussions may not be achieved since people do not like to share their personal information in public. Data analysis and coding can also be a challenging task and time consuming (Lewis, 1992).

#### **4.7.3 Interview schedule: its development and structure**

Researchers need to conduct their studies in a manner that would ensure that the outcomes reflect the phenomena being studied (Flick, 2018). Taking this advice into account, the researcher developed and utilised a semi-structured interview schedule for both individual interviews and focus group discussions (Appendix F). The development of the interview schedule was informed by the aims and objectives of the study, the current literature relevant to the phenomenon of the study, guidance of experts in the subject of HR risk and academic staff retention, and the researcher's experience in these subjects' areas. Several versions of the interview scheduled were developed. However, the version that was subsequently subjected to a preliminary investigation or a trial run was developed following consultative discussions with

experts in the field. The supervisors provided comments and the interview schedule was re-drafted to accommodate the comments made about the questions. Some of the rationales for developing the interview schedule are to:

- Ensure consistency in the data collection process, and
- Ensure that the subjects related to the aims and objectives of the study, such as barriers to and facilitators of HR risk management and academic staff retention were discussed in both sets of interviews.

The interview schedule starts with the interview process and preparation for the interviews, including discussions of the participants' rights and informed consent. It contains a set of main questions, including follow-up questions and probing questions. The questions focused on five main areas, namely: (1) experience of academic staff in an ODeL institution; (2) academic staff perceptions of academic staff retention in an ODeL institution; (3) barriers to academic staff retention in an ODeL institution; (4) factors that may promote academic staff retention in an ODeL institution; and (5) the best practices for retaining academic staff in an ODeL institution. Given the need to generate detailed accounts of participants' experiences, all the main questions were open and exploratory in nature. It was assumed that some of the main questions might not be responded to adequately by the participants (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Hence, probing questions were included in the interviews to enhance comprehension of the participants' accounts (Smith & Osborn, 2015), and ensure exploration with participants of issues that may emerge during the interview encounters.

The interview schedule includes three categories of probes: detailed oriented probes, elaboration probes, and clarification probes (Given, 2008). The detailed-oriented probes are used here to enable the researcher to understand the meaning of the responses of the participants (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The elaboration probes are included to enable the participants to expand or elaborate on their responses to ensure comprehension (Schwandt et al., 1994). Clarification probes were included to enable the participants to clarify or explain some of their responses. Follow-up questions were also included in the interview schedule to allow the researcher to ask generic to

specific level questions that focus on participants' experiences and associated thoughts and feelings relating to the phenomenon explored.

Developing the interview schedule in this study enabled the researcher to think in advance about possible areas for exploration. Its preparation also led to the identification of a range of likely difficulties that could be encountered during and after interviews (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The development of the interview schedule lessened the researcher's anxieties experienced that in turn enabled her to be more engaged, attentive and flexible (Langdrige, 2017; Larkin & Thompson, 2012). This stance resulted in effective and friendly researcher-participant interactions.

After the interview schedule had been developed, it was time to operationalise it. Initially, this was carried out within a framework of pilot interviews and subsequently in the main body of the interviews.

#### **4.7.4 Pilot of the interview schedule**

Researchers should gather evaluative information of methods of data collection before embarking on the main study (Parahoo, 2014). Acknowledging this, the researcher of this study piloted the interview schedule to enhance its feasibility and efficacy (Polit & Beck, 2017). The interview schedule was piloted on four academic staff members and one focus group discussion that met the study's inclusion criteria and volunteered to participate. An open individual interview format was chosen for testing the schedule as it allowed the participants to offer their experiences. A sense of direction was still maintained towards the subject being investigated, while piloting this study (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The pilot interviews were conducted at the study site in Pretoria Campus, provided by the management team of the College of Economic and Management Science of an ODeL institution. The researcher started each of the pilot interviews with explanations of the purpose and process of the interview. This was followed by an emphasis on anonymity, confidentiality and participants' rights.

Digital recordings were conducted, and participants' consent was sought and obtained. The audio-recorder was tested before commencing the first interview, and it was noted to be in a good working condition. The researcher was comforted that the equipment was operational. On establishing this, the researcher commenced the first

interview and subsequent interviews by asking the participants the first question on the interview schedule.

The responses of the participants influenced the order in which the questions were asked. In other words, the questions in the interview schedule were often not followed in the sequence they were laid out. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) support this stance taken by the researcher by stating that the sequence in which the questions are posed should be dictated by the responses of the participants. Thus, the researcher moved back and forth between questions during the course of each interview. While such an approach was dictated by the responses of the participants, it also enabled the researcher to ask questions related to the aims and objectives of the study. Therefore, the sequence of questions in an interview schedule of an exploratory study of this nature is less important relative to the need to explore the phenomenon of interest. Hence, the back-and-forth questioning approach was adopted by the researcher in this research study.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview format. This format enabled the participants to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences related to HR risk management and academic staff retention whilst the researcher maintained a sense of direction towards the aims and objectives of the study. At the end of each interview, time was spent with the participants to evaluate the interview process and materials used. The participants were asked whether they understood the questions at the end of each interview. The feedback provided by the participants was positive. They reported that the questions were clear, and the probing questions made them clearer. Even though this was the case, the researcher was of the opinion that information could always be missed in a research study where an audio recording is employed.

The researcher made use of fieldnotes. The information from the fieldnotes could include non-verbal interactions between the researcher and participants. IPA supports the use of fieldnotes as a useful tool to be used when interpreting the data (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). This information could assist the researcher to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon explored. Even though this was not part of the interview schedule, the researcher engaged in a reflective intra-personal discussion at the end of each interview. This discussion focused on the interview process in its

entirety, including the participant's non-verbal behaviours. The researcher noted the discussion to be useful in enhancing understanding of the participants' narratives. Given this, the interview schedule was revised to include spaces for the researchers' reflective intra-personal discussion, and the reflective researcher-participant discussions after each interview. The reflective researcher-participant discussions were conducted first followed by the reflective intra-personal discussion (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The need to make fieldnotes was realised during this set of discussions. As a result, note-making was included in the interview schedule for the main body of interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In sum, piloting the interview schedule enabled the researcher to make appropriate revisions to this data collection tool prior to its implementation in the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

#### **4.7.5 The interviews: individual interviews and focus group discussions**

This section relates to the conduct of both sets of interviews: individual interviews and focus group discussions. The data collection of this study started with the individual interviews followed by the focus group discussions. A total of 20 individual interviews were conducted, and a total of four focus group discussions with four participants per group were conducted. The interviews were conducted at two campuses at an ODeL institution: Pretoria and Johannesburg campuses. The interviews were conducted from 01 February 2017 until 20 June 2017. Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes. As already mentioned, all the individual interviews were guided by IPA semi-structured interview schedule (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Focus group discussions were also conducted within an IPA perspective (Larkin et al., 2019).

The researcher spent about ten minutes interacting with the participants before commencing each interview. This interaction involved the provision of an information leaflet to the participant, explanations of the aim and objectives of the study, its benefits, and the participant's rights, discussions of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. The need to audio-record the interviews and the position to place the audio recorder were also discussed. All the participants agreed to be audio-recorded, and the audio recorder was positioned close to the participants in such a way that they could turn it off the time they wanted to. The rationale for these initial interactions or discussions was to gain the participants' trust and to enable them to feel relaxed. If participants are relaxed, the participants will be able to talk freely during the interviews

(Griffin & Phoenix, 1994). The participants' comprehension of the study and interview process was sought and established. On establishing this, the participants were asked the first main question on the interview schedule: 'please tell me about your experiences of academic staff retention in an ODeL institution'.

Participants were given time to give a full answer as possible to questions asked. Probing questions were used where necessary to clarify and elaborate on issues raised by the participants. The researcher utilised the assistance of a moderator in the focus group discussions to help with the generation of data, as outlined in IPA (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2018). The rationale for this was to assist in data capturing such as the non-verbal behaviour of the participants and monitor the discussion. The researcher made fieldnotes of these behaviours during the focus group discussions. This additional data source played a useful role in analysing the audio-recorded data. The researcher listened to all the audio recordings and transcribed them verbatim. A detailed discussion of the process of transcribing the audio-recorded data is presented in the analysis section of this chapter.

#### **4.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

Polit and Beck (2017) refer to data analysis as a systematic process of creating a structure and order and giving meaning to research data. Simply, data analysis is about ascribing meaning to textual, imagery and numerical data (Botma et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2013). This study involves qualitative data, and its analysis was guided by its aim, objectives and research questions using IPA framework of analysis (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This framework of analysis requires researchers to adopt a case-by-case analysis of textual data of individual study participants. This idiographic way of analysing data, which ignores the concept of category saturation, is one of the principles of IPA (Smith, 2014). Category saturation relates to the point during data analysis at which themes and categories in the data become repetitive even with further data collection (O'reilly & Parker, 2013; Shaw & Sandy, 2016).

IPA requires researchers to be innovative by adopting strategies that will enable them to achieve their studies' aim and objectives. The researcher of this study therefore adopted the concept of category saturation. The participants of this study had been professionally socialised for three and more years in an ODeL environment. This

period is considered adequate for the participants to share some common understanding of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL setting. This points to the possibility of achieving category saturation, and hence, this concept, including its principles is embraced in this study.

#### **4.8.1 Transcription of recorded data**

Transcription can take two different forms: verbatim and selective (Silverman, 2016). Verbatim transcription was opted for in this study because it offers the advantage of making all information collected during interviews available for analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). While this was the case, the researcher did not transcribe pauses and the non-verbal utterances of participants. This position is consistent with the principles of IPA (Smith, 2016). All spoken words of both participants and researcher expressed during interviews were transcribed. Notes taking during the interviews and the researcher's reflective summaries of the interviews after each interview enabled the researcher to transcribe more easily, especially where parts of the dialogue were unclear on the recording. On average, the researcher listened to audio-recorded interviews twice, and it took an average of three hours to transcribe each of the 45 to 60 minutes of interviews conducted. All identifiable information about the participants was excluded from the transcripts to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The following discussion focuses on how the transcribed data were analysed.

#### **4.8.2 IPA: A framework for analysis**

##### **4.8.2.1 *Application of IPA***

The analyses of the interview transcripts were conducted through several stages. Discussions of the analytical stages are presented below in the sequence in which they were applied.

##### **Step 1: Reading and re-reading**

This was the first stage of data analysis that involved reading of the transcripts. The rationale for this was to increase the researcher's familiarity with the transcripts of the participants. Each transcript was read twice. Each reading enhanced the researcher's

insights into the participants' stories (Smith & Eatough, 2019). Table 4.2 below illustrates an extract from a transcript of an interview with the first participant of the study.

### Step 2: Initial note-making

In this stage, the researcher created one margin on the left-hand side of the transcribed scripts of the participants that served as a space for notes making (Noon, 2018). In essence, this stage of data analysis is about making or jotting down notes of anything of interest to researchers (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The researcher of this study made notes from the underlined issues that interested her about the stories of the participants on the right margin when reading the transcripts (VanScoy & Evenstad, 2015). The note-making at this stage of analysis was exploratory as it involved the researcher asking critical questions of the transcript she read. Some of the questions asked, focused on the language and concepts observed (Langdrige, 2017). Such an analytical dialogue was applied with each transcript, ensuring a richer and deeper analysis (Breakwell et al., 2012).



Table 4.2: *Initial note-making*

Exploratory Comments	Original Transcript
<p>Benefits staff enjoyed whilst working at an ODeL institution. Some of these include financial support, travelling and study opportunities.</p> <p>Travelling benefits and outside and part-time work benefits. These opportunities have been at the university since the time it started.</p>	<p>R: Please tell me about your experience of academic staff retention in an open distance learning environment.</p> <p>P: The benefits I enjoy made me feel that I belong to the organisation. The university allowed me to do outside work even though this is dependent upon my performance and attendance to students' needs. Offering me this opportunity did not only help me to meet my financial needs, but it also made me realise a sense of belonging.</p> <p>R: Please describe the types of benefits you have enjoyed so far?</p> <p>P: The university used to have bus services during those days. And because I stayed in Centurion, we had about 5 buses at that time and a lot of staff stayed there. It was easy for me and other staff members to commute to work. These are some of the benefits that enticed me to be here. Apart from this, we were also allowed to do outside work. This is still happening.</p>
<p>What outside work entails? This involves consulting in one's profession. Outside work seems to be an incentive that attracts academics.</p>	<p>R: Can you please tell me more about the outside work you had.</p> <p>P: The outside work means employment such as, but not necessarily limited to, consulting, the practice of one's profession. As long as it does not affect my daily functioning at the institution. These enabled me to stay in the institution. Apart from this, there are other incentives that I am enjoying, and other colleagues as well at this institution.</p>

<p>There are many more incentives at the university. Examples of these include conference attendance and studying. These incentives serve to attract academics.</p>	<p>R: What do you mean by incentives?</p> <p>P: Academic staff retention is seen by many in this institution as an incentive and opportunity driven. Indeed, this is the case for me as I continued to stay because the university has developed me professionally: I recently completed my master's degree and had attended several local and international conferences. This played a part in academic staff retention.</p>
<p><b>Exploratory Comments</b></p>	<p><b>Original Transcript</b></p>
<p>ODeL institutions are a stressful work environment. Thus, academics will require support from their managers and the creation of conducive work environments. Achieving this will promote academic staff retention. Not achieving it serves as a barrier to academic staff retention.</p> <p>There are many more barriers to academic staff retention. Example of this include failure of managers to address the needs of the academic staff members. Poor</p>	<p>R: Please tell me more about academic staff retention.</p> <p>P: Working in an ODeL institution can be stressful, and the stressful experiences can be exacerbated if academics do not derive satisfaction from their day-to-day teaching and learning activities. So, this institution should create an environment where academics are happy, satisfied and develop the capacity to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Examples of such an environment include the ability to freely translate and share knowledge and skills, and feelings of being recognised for work well done. Feelings of being recognised or acknowledged even if it is small, play a massive role in promoting academic staff retention. Not recognising the contributions of academics serves as a barrier to academic staff retention. This is just one of the many possible barriers to academic staff retention.</p> <p>R: Can you please talk more about the barriers to academic staff retention.</p> <p>P: There was a strike two months ago. And when I went to the office the university entrance gates were closed. I tried to contact the School Director to report that I will not be able to go to my office since we were not allowed to enter the premises. However, I told him that I will be working at</p>

communication and lack of commitments on the part of managers are also contributing factors.	the national library since I had my laptop with me. After two days, the line manager reported me to the Dean of the College that I didn't come to work on that day. Of which, this was not the case. This implied that the line manager did not follow up with the office of the School Director to get a report of who was present and absent. He also failed to assess the risk that was exposed to harm academic staff members during the strike.
<b>Exploratory Comments</b>	<b>Original Transcript</b>
	<p>R: In your view, what do you think would promote academic staff retention in this open distance learning university?</p> <p>P: Good training and development programmes should be implemented for managers and supervisors.</p>

At the end of this stage of analysis, the researcher was faced with a large volume of data that contained both the transcript and notes made. This volume of data served as the data source for the next stage of analysis.

### Step 3: Development of emergent themes

This stage of data analysis involved the formation of themes from the exploratory comments made in the previous stage of the analytical process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Thus, researchers are required to return to the beginning of the transcript to commence the theme formation. The theme formation involved the researcher observing for interrelationships and patterns in the notes or comments made in stage one (Jeong & Othman, 2016). The notes which shared a common meaning, in other words, the interrelated notes were grouped to form themes. Acknowledging this, the emergent themes were grounded in the participants' narratives or data as they were developed from the exploratory notes (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The emergent themes were expressed as phrases or keywords, and they were noted in the right-hand margin of the transcribed data. The themes identified at this point are not definitive outcomes, but they are true reflections of the quality of what participants say in the text (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). So, care was taken not to omit any aspect of

the transcripts at this stage, as doing so might distract the researcher from understanding significant aspects of the study phenomenon.

Table 4.3: *Development of Emergent Themes*

Exploratory comments	Original transcript	Emergent themes
<p>Benefits staff enjoyed whilst working at an ODeL institution. Some of these include financial, travelling and study opportunities.</p> <p>Travelling benefits and outside and part-time work benefits. These opportunities have been at the university since the time it started.</p>	<p>R: Please tell me your experience of academic staff retention in an ODeL institution.</p> <p>P: The benefits I enjoy made me feel that <u>I belong to the</u> organisation. The university allowed me to do outside work even though this is dependent upon my performance and attendance to students' needs. Offering me this opportunity did not only help me to <u>meet my financial</u> needs, but it also made me realise a <u>sense of belonging</u>.</p> <p>R: Please describe the types of benefits you have enjoyed so far?</p> <p>P: The university used to have <u>bus services</u> during those days. And because I stayed in Centurion, we had about 5 buses at that time and a lot of staff stayed there. It was easy for me and other staff members to <u>commute to work</u>. These are some of the benefits that enticed me to be here. Apart from this, we were also allowed to do outside work. This is still happening.</p>	<p>Personal meaning of academic staff retention.</p> <p>Factors promoting academic staff retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial gains</li> </ul> <p>Personal meaning of academic staff retention</p> <p>Factors promoting academic staff retention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelling facilities</li> </ul>

Exploratory comments	Original transcript	Emergent themes
<p>What outside work entails? This involves consulting in one's profession. Outside work seems to be an incentive that attracts academics.</p> <p>There are many more incentives at the university. Examples of these include conference attendance and studying. These incentives serve to attract academics.</p>	<p>R: Can you please tell me more about the outside work you had.</p> <p>P: The <u>outside work</u> means employment such as, but not necessarily limited to, consulting, the practice of one's profession. As long as it does not affect my daily functioning at the institution. These enabled me to stay in the institution. Apart from this, there are other incentives that I am enjoying, and other colleagues as well at this institution.</p> <p>R: What do you mean by incentives?</p> <p>P: Academic staff retention is seen by many in this institution as an incentive and opportunity driven. Indeed, this is the case for me as I continued to stay because the university has developed me professionally: I recently completed <u>my master's degree</u> and had attended some <u>local and international conferences</u>. This played a part in academic staff retention.</p>	<p>Factors promoting academic staff retention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outside work</li> </ul> <p>Factors promoting academic staff retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and knowledge development</li> </ul>
Exploratory comments	Original transcript	Emergent themes
<p>ODEL institutions are a stressful work environment. Thus, academics will require support from their managers and the creation of conducive</p>	<p>R: Please tell me more about academic staff retention.</p> <p>P: Working in an ODeL institution can be stressful, and the <u>stressful experiences</u> can be exacerbated if academics do not derive satisfaction from their day-to-day teaching and learning activities. So, this institution should create an environment where</p>	<p>Factors hindering academic staff retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stressful environment</li> </ul>

<p>work environments. Achieving this will promote academic staff retention. Not achieving it serves as a barrier to academic staff retention.</p>	<p>academics are happy, satisfied and develop the capacity to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Examples of such an environment include the ability to freely translate and share knowledge and skills, and feelings of being recognised for work well done. Feelings of being recognised or acknowledged even if it is small, play a massive role in promoting academic staff retention. <u>Not recognising</u> the contributions of academics serves as a barrier to academic staff retention. This is just one of the many possible barriers to academic staff retention.</p>	<p>Factors hindering academic staff retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of recognition</li> </ul>
Exploratory comments	Original transcript	Emergent themes
<p>There are many more barriers to academic staff retention. Example of this include failure of managers to address the needs of the academic staff members. Poor communication and lack of commitments on the part of managers are also contributing factors.</p>	<p>R: Can you please talk more about the barriers to academic staff retention.</p> <p>P: There was a <u>strike</u> two months ago. And when I went to the office the university entrance gates were closed. I tried to contact the School Director to report that I will not be able to go to my office, since we were not allowed to enter the premises. However, I told him that I will be working at the national library since I had my laptop with me. After two days, the line manager reported me to the Dean of the College that I didn't come to work on that day. Of which, this was not the case. This implied that the line manager did not follow up with the office of the School Director to get a report of who was present and absent. He also <u>failed to assess the risk</u> that was exposed to</p>	<p>Factors hindering academic staff retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industrial actions</li> <li>• not meeting the needs of academics</li> </ul>

	<p>harm academic staff members during the strike.</p> <p>R: In your view, what do you think would promote academic staff retention in an ODeL institution?</p> <p>P: Good training and development programmes should be implemented for managers and supervisors.</p>	<p>Factors promoting academic staff retention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• skills and knowledge development</li> </ul>
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It is worth noting that the identified themes are true reflections of the participants' narratives or stories. It was vital not to omit important features of the transcripts at this stage, as this could distract the researcher's understanding of the study phenomenon. The next stage of analysis is searching for connections across the emergent themes and clustering them correctly.

#### Step 4: Searching for connections across the emergent themes

This stage of the data analysis involves the use of a critical eye to examine the themes that emerge in stage 3 of the analytical process and their interconnectedness (Smith & Eatough, 2019). Thus, the researcher grouped similar themes and subsequently assigned labels or names to each group of themes (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The assigned names or labels are what referred to as superordinate themes and themes from which they are developed are referred to as sub-themes (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The superordinate themes are abstract, but they reflect or portray the meanings of specific aspects of the participants' stories or narratives (Reid et al., 2005). Four superordinate themes emerged from the data analysis, and each of these has some sub-themes (Larkin et al., 2011).

Table 4.4: *Directory of Participant's Phrases or Statements*

**A. Superordinate theme: Personal meaning of academic staff retention**

Sub-theme: (Sense of belonging)

The benefits I enjoy made me feel that I belong to the organisation. The university allowed me to do outside work even though this is dependent upon my performance and attendance to students' needs. Offering me this opportunity did not only help me to meet my financial needs, but it also made me realise a sense of belonging. The meaning of academic staff retention varies from staff to staff.

**B. Superordinate theme: Factors promoting academic staff retention**

Sub-themes: (Financial gains, travelling facilities, outside work, skills and knowledge development)

The benefits I enjoy made me feel that I belong to the organisation. The university allowed me to do outside work even though this is dependent upon my performance and attendance to students' needs. Offering me this opportunity did not only help me to meet my financial needs, but it also made me realise a sense of belonging.

The university used to have bus services during those days. And because I stayed in Centurion, we had about 5 buses at that time and a lot of staff stayed there. It was easy for me and other staff members to commute to work. These are some of the benefits that enticed me to be here. Apart from this, we were also allowed to do outside work. This is still happening.

The outside work means employment such as, but not necessarily limited to, consulting, the practice of one's profession. As long as it does not affect my daily functioning at the institution. These enabled me to stay in the institution. Apart from this, there are other incentives that I am enjoying, and other colleagues as well at this institution.

Academic staff retention is seen by many in this institution as an incentive and opportunity driven. Indeed, this is the case for me as I continued to stay because the university has developed me professionally: I recently completed my master's



degree and had attended several local and international conferences. This played a part in academic staff retention.

**C. Superordinate theme: Factors hindering academic staff retention**

Sub-theme: (Stressful environment, lack of recognition, industrial action and not meeting the needs of academics)

Working in ODeL institutions can be stressful, and the stressful experiences can be exacerbated if academics do not derive satisfaction from their day-to-day teaching and learning activities. So, this institution should create an environment where academics are happy, satisfied and develop a capacity to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Examples of such an environment include the ability to freely translate and share knowledge and skills, and feelings of being recognised for work well done. Feelings of being recognised or acknowledged even if it is small, play a massive role in promoting academic staff retention. Not recognising the contributions of academics serves as a barrier to academic staff retention. This is just one of the many possible barriers to academic staff retention.

There was a strike two months ago. And when I went to the office the university entrance gates were closed. I tried to contact the School Director to report that I will not be able to go to my office since we were not allowed to enter the premises. However, I told him that I will be working at the national library since I had my laptop with me. After two days, the line manager reported me to the Dean of the College that I didn't come to work on that day. Of which, this was not the case. This implied that the line manager did not follow up with the office of the School Director to get a report of who was present and absent. He also failed to assess the risk that was exposed to harm academic staff members during the strike.

Step 5: Development of master tables of themes

This stage of the data analysis involved the development of a table of themes entitled 'a master table of themes' (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The master table of themes is required to contain superordinate themes, sub-themes, excerpts from the transcribed data and page numbers to indicate their source (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). The researcher developed a master table for the first transcript.

Stages 1 to 5 of the data analysis were followed or repeated by the researcher to analyse all of the transcripts. A master table was prepared for each transcript analysed. The master tables of the individual transcripts were used by the researcher to develop a consolidated master table of themes, which formed the final stage of data analysis (Smith, 2016).

Table 4.5: *Master Table of Themes of Interview 1*

<b>Superordinate themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Keywords</b>	<b>Interview and page number</b>
Personal meaning of academic staff retention.	Sense of belonging	I belong to the organisation.	1,1
		Sense of belonging	1,1
Factors promoting academic staff retention	Financial gains	Meet my financial needs	1,1
	Travelling facilities	Bus services	1,1
		Commute to work	1,1
	Outside work	Outside work	1,2
Skills and knowledge development		Master's degree	1,2
		Conference	1,2
Factors hindering academic staff retention	Stressful environment	Stressful experiences	1,2
	Lack of recognition	Not recognising	1,3
	Industrial actions	Strike	1,3
		Failed to assess the risk	1,3;1,4

	Not meeting the needs of academics		
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The master table thus far discussed the first transcript. This study involves 20 individual interviews and four focus group discussions, and each was analysed similarly.

Step 6: Development of consolidated master tables of themes

This is the final stage of the data analytical process. It involved a close examination of the similarities and differences between the individual master tables of themes to inform the final consolidated master table of themes (Jeong & Othman, 2016). In essence, the final table of themes includes superordinate themes, sub-themes and excerpts from participants’ descriptions and page numbers to indicate their source (see Appendix I and Appendix J for a consolidated master table of individual interviews and focus group discussions respectively). The consolidated master table of themes reflects the study findings which are discussed in the next chapter of this study.

**4.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS: ENSURING RIGOUR OF THE STUDY**

Rigour is a measure of the overall quality of research study, reflected in the stages of the research process that include data collection and analysis (Macnee & McCabe, 2008; Grove & Gray, 2018). According to Guba (1981, p. 90), “Rigor is judged by the logic of the emerging theory and whether the findings are adding to what is known about a phenomenon”. In other words, rigour has to do with thoroughness. Determining qualitative rigour, often called trustworthiness, is an interpretative process, involving researchers’ presentation of study reports and the readers’ judgment of the truth of the same (Porter, 2007).

Although some guidelines, such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) are available for ensuring rigour about the quality of research (Spencer et al., 2004). This study adopts the framework of trustworthiness posited by Guba and Lincoln (1994), as it fits in well with the qualitative world of multiple realities and ways of knowing. It includes five criteria namely; credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity.

#### **4.9.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the data and its interpretations (Polit & Beck, 2017). According to Creswell (2014), credibility is the strength of a qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) also mentioned that ensuring credibility is an important factor in developing trustworthiness. In this study, credibility was enhanced using the following approaches. All the interviews of this study were guided by an interview schedule, which was piloted. The interview schedule was revised based on the outcome of the pilot. The researcher established a relationship and trust with the research participants before asking the first question on the interview schedule. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Some transcripts were taken to some participants to determine their accuracy (member checking) (Leavy, 2014; Willig, 2013; Willig & Rogers, 2017).

Credibility was further achieved when the data was gathered, analysed and compared until no new categories emerged (Andrade, 2009). This process is known as category saturation, which relates to theoretical saturation or the sufficiency of data. The researcher used triangulation or multiple sources of evidence or data (individual interviews and focus group discussions of academics at different post levels) to further enhance this research study's credibility and confirmability (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Some of the study data (emergent themes) were validated by the supervisors and an independent researcher referred to in this study as co-coder. The supervisors carried out validity checks on the master list of themes. This approach ensured that the emergent themes and codes are relevant and evidenced in the study data. The researcher made notes of all the activities of the study process. In other words, the researcher established an 'audit trail'.

### **4.9.2 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the reliability of data over time and the conditions under which it was obtained (Anney, 2014). It is about whether the processes of the study are “consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods” (Miles et al., 1994, p. 278). Establishing dependability may be seen as a parallel process to that of confirming reliability in quantitative research (Macnee & McCabe, 2008).

Dependability in this research study was enhanced by validity checks, the use of an interview schedule, an audio recording of all interviews, and the use of an independent coder (external coder). Dependability was further enhanced in this study by the verbatim transcription and the step-by-step analysis adopted.

### **4.9.3 Confirmability**

This refers to a mechanism of ensuring that the data represents information that the participants provided (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). Confirmability relates to the objectivity of the study. It refers to the degree to which the outcomes could be confirmed by other people (Bryman, 2016). Confirmability also relates to the degree of agreement between two or more researchers about the accuracy, meaning and relevance of data.

Confirmability was ensured in this study by verbatim transcription of interview data. The outcomes of the analysis by the researcher and independent coder were compared for similarities and differences. Some differences were noted, and the researcher thus engaged in discussions with the independent coder relating to the same. Subsequently, independent coder and researcher agreed on the outcomes of the analysis. Confirmability was further enhanced by validity checks, and by comparing the notes taken during the interviews with the transcribed data. The audit trail of data, findings, interpretations and recommendations were critical in the process of ensuring confirmability, as it allowed the observer to trace the step-by-step course of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

#### **4.9.4 Transferability**

Guba and Lincoln (1994) pointed out that transferability is a degree to which the findings of a study may have utility or applicability in other settings similar to the study area. In other words, transferability is the use of the findings of one research study in another study or situation.

In this study, the researcher described the context of the research and processes involved, such as data collection and analysis as well as the population and personal information of the participants involved in this study. The researcher also provided a detailed report of the study, including its findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These approaches would allow readers to evaluate the quality of the study and the applicability of its findings in other contexts (Polit & Beck, 2017). The participants' lived experiences were adequately described for readers of the thesis to evaluate how the findings could be applied in settings other than where the study was conducted (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

#### **4.9.5 Authenticity**

This criterion requires researchers to provide detailed descriptions of a range of participants' lived experiences and feelings in relation to a phenomenon studied (Given, 2008). This criterion was assured by writing a report with detailed descriptions of the methods and context of the study, and participants varied lived experiences and meanings of HR risk management and academic staff retention (Flick, 2018). An authenticity of the study is only said to be achieved, if readers of the report of the study understand the lived experiences of participants, including the context of the lived experiences and how participants were feeling at the time.

#### **4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION OF THE STUDY**

Sanjari et al., (2014) define ethics as a code of behaviour that is considered correct. Research ethics refers to personal honesty and integrity when conducting a study. It starts with the identification of the study area or subject and continues through to data collection, and data analysis and the dissemination of study findings (Gray et al., 2017). According to Polit and Beck (2017), research ethics refers to the system of

moral values concerned with the degree to which the research procedures adhere to professional, legal and social obligations for the study participants. Ethics is typically concerned with morality, and both ethics and morality, pertain to the matter of right and wrong (Sanjari et al., 2014). Anyone involved in scientific research needs to be aware of what is proper and what is improper when conducting scientific enquiries (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). There are several issues the researcher of this study considered proper and these are discussed below.

#### **4.10.1 Informed consent**

Informed consent is an ethical and legal requirement for research involving the respect of participants' ability to make free choices about themselves (Nijhawan et al., 2013). In this instance, free choices refer to researchers empowering participants in making decisions to engage or not to engage in research.

All participants were informed of the aim and nature of the study. The researcher was aware that informed consent of academic staff members should be individually obtained before the interviews. They were informed that interviews would last for about 45 minutes. At the time of the interviews, each participant was given enough time to go through the information leaflet, to understand the purpose of the study, its benefits and potential risks. In instances where each participant verbally expressed willingness for participation, they were asked to complete a consent form. Copies of consent forms were retained by the researcher. It was made clear to participants that withdrawal from the study at any stage was legitimate. The researcher explained the need to maintain the confidentiality, privacy and anonymity to the participants (Polit & Beck, 2017). The researcher made the participants aware that the summary of the findings of the study would be made available at the completion of the study.

#### **4.10.2 Protecting the rights of the institutions involved**

Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that their research plans are ethically sound and acceptable. However, researchers may not be objective in assessing risk or benefit ratios or in developing procedures to protect participants' rights (Kaiser, 2009). Thus, it is a standard practice for the ethical dimensions of a study to be subjected to external reviews such as that provided by an institutional ethics

committee (Polit & Beck, 2013). The researcher received ethical approval and permission from the Ethics Committee to conduct this study at different levels of the study at two campuses of the study site (University of South Africa, 2016). The researcher assured all the relevant authorities that the confidentiality of participants and the university would always be respected throughout the study.

#### **4.10.3 Autonomy**

The right to self-determination is based on the ethical principle of respect for persons. Because human beings are capable of self-determination, or controlling their destiny, they should be treated as autonomous individuals, who have the freedom to conduct their lives as they choose without external control (Tai, 2012). Besides, participants had the right to withdraw from a study at any time without penalty (Gray et al., 2017). The participants in this research study were informed that participation was voluntary, and their rights to not-to-answer any part or all of the questions were respected (University of South Africa, 2016). Study participants were asked to give their written consent to participate in the study. The data collection commenced after participants expressed their willingness to participate, in other words, data was collected from a participant only after he or she signed the consent form. The participants were informed that they might withdraw from the study at any time, and this would not have any form of impact on them.

#### **4.10.4 Confidentiality and anonymity**

The anonymity of participants is often a requisite of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). A research project guarantees anonymity when the researcher cannot identify a given response with a given participant. A research project guarantees confidentiality when the researcher may identify a given participant's responses, but essentially promises not to disclose the same publicly (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Participants were informed at the beginning of their interviews that the information they provide would be used only for the research study. The names of the participants were not required during interviews; meaning data were collected anonymously.

Study participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that the findings of the study would not be linked to them. Researchers' behaviours



before, during and after data collection have the potential of harming the participant (Parahoo, 2014). In this study, the interviews were held at the Pretoria and Johannesburg campuses. Each study participant was given a unique identification code, which was used during data entry and names were not recorded. Additionally, all participants including the supervisors of this study were informed that the audio-recorded tapes and other data relating to the study would be kept securely in a protected cupboard at the researcher's place of work, accessible only to the researcher (Khankeh et al., 2015).

#### **4.10.5 The scientific integrity of the researcher**

Research in all fields is a significant feature of all societies and represents major commitments of researchers (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The findings from researchers sometimes form the basis of policy development and decisions at governmental levels. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the research is conducted with integrity and following high ethical standards (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016). The researcher of this study maintained professional ethics and scientific conduct throughout the study. It was the researcher's responsibility to consider whether any type of harm could occur as part of the research and to ensure that mechanisms are in place to alleviate the potential harm. The researcher negotiated with a psychologist to offer support to participants if harm in the form of distress was indicated.

It became apparent from this discussion that there are many ethical considerations which have to be accommodated to make a study ethically sound. These include issues such as protecting the rights of the institution involved, autonomy, confidentiality, anonymity and the scientific integrity of the researcher. These issues (e.g. autonomy, confidentiality, anonymity) are interrelated and interdependent.

#### **4.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter included a discussion of qualitative research designs that informs the chosen research design of this study. The researcher opted for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as it was considered to be the most effective to gain the view of the world from the perspectives of participants on HR risk management and academic staff retention. The chapter also included discussions on data collection

procedure and a report on analysis of the data. In essence, how data was collected and analysed are articulated in this chapter. The application of the data analysis stages has been illustrated with transcribed data of the first interview. The following chapter focuses on discussions of the findings or themes that emerged from the data analysis, which was guided by the principles of IPA. In the following chapter the research findings are discussed in full.

## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the qualitative findings of the study, as obtained from the individual interviews and focus group discussions with the selected research participants. Such an orientation coheres with both the study's overall aim that is to develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa, as well as the concomitant three objectives as articulated in Chapter 1 of this study. Therefore, in the context of the study, the objectives themselves were the most fundamental means to give effect to the main purpose of the research (Mertens, 2014). Furthermore, this chapter presents the critical and indispensable stakeholder perspective of factors that may influence academic staff retention in the self-same ODeL institutional environment in South Africa. Accordingly, five superordinate themes emerged from the data analysis of both the transcripts of individual interviews and focus group discussions; both of which served as a basis for developing a better understanding of academic staff retention in the ODeL institutional environment. Each of the superordinate themes consists of sub-themes, which further allocated a number of sub-thematic categories.

The narrative statements or excerpts emanating from the individual interviews and focus group discussions (shown in italics) throughout this chapter reflect a substantiation of the themes generated. The 'FG' and 'IN' abbreviations (or initials) at the end of each italicised excerpt respectively depict the source of the narrated statement as either the individual interviews (IN) or focus group discussions (FG). Additionally, the two numbers following the abbreviations (for example 4,2) represent the number of either the focus group discussion or individual interview session (that is '4'), as well as the transcript page number from which the excerpt was obtained (that is '2'). In some instances, some narrated statements appear more than once, indicating the inter-relatedness of the themes as representing the participants' perspectives as an integral aspect of the nature of human discourse (Walliman, 2015). Table 5.1 depicts the five superordinate themes together with their categorised sub-themes.

## 5.2 SUPERORDINATE THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

Table 5.1 below is a visual representation of both the superordinate themes and sub-themes categorised in terms of their emergence from the individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Table 5.1: *Participants' perspectives on academic staff retention*

Superordinate Themes	Sub-themes
1. Defining Academic Staff Retention	<p>1.1 <i>Personal Meaning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sense of belonging</i></li> <li>• <i>Fairness and equality</i></li> </ul> <p>1.2 <i>Professional Meaning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Talent management</i></li> <li>• <i>Academic staff retention strategy</i></li> </ul>
2. Determinants of Academic Staff Retention	<p>2.1 <i>Promoting Factors</i></p> <p><i>Intrinsic promoting factors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Feeling happy</i></li> <li>• <i>Self-fulfilment</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Extrinsic promoting factors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Opportunities to travel</i></li> <li>• <i>Annual salary increases</i></li> <li>• <i>Job promotions</i></li> </ul> <p>2.2 <i>Hindering Factors</i></p> <p><i>Intrinsic hindering factors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Negative emotions</i></li> <li>• <i>Low morale</i></li> <li>• <i>Professional jealousy</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of decision-making</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Extrinsic hindering factors</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Work overload</i></li> <li>• <i>Austerity measures</i></li> <li>• <i>Unfair promotions</i></li> <li>• <i>Discrimination</i></li> </ul>

Superordinate Themes	Sub-themes
3. HR Risk Assessment	<p>3.1 <i>Principles of Risk Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>A dynamic process</i></li> <li>• <i>Eclectic approach</i></li> <li>• <i>Uncertainty</i></li> </ul> <p>3.2 <i>The Practice of Risk Assessment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Subjectivity</i></li> <li>• <i>Actuarial principles</i></li> <li>• <i>Mixed/Multiple principles</i></li> </ul>
4. HR Risk Management	<p>4.1 <i>Risk Management Approaches</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Policies and procedures</i></li> <li>• <i>Promotion of employee wellness</i></li> <li>• <i>Orientation and induction programme</i></li> <li>• <i>Academic staff training and development</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentorship and coaching</i></li> </ul>
5. Cultural Influence	<p>5.1 <i>Organisational Culture</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Positive organisational culture</i></li> <li>• <i>Negative organisational culture</i></li> </ul>

Emanating from the findings of this study, Table 5.1 (Section 5.2) further shows the similarities between the superordinate and their associated sub-themes emerging from the individual interviews and focus group discussions. However, the thematic differences were also noted, induced by the fact that participants in the focus group discussions were more engaging than those in the individual interviews. This is because of the interactions among the four participants in each of the focus groups. The ensuing brief descriptions of each emerging superordinate theme below is discussed and explained in conjunction with its corresponding sub-thematic category.

### 5.2.1 Superordinate Theme 1: Defining academic staff retention

This superordinate theme relates to the participants' perspectives of academic staff retention in the context of an ODeL in South Africa. This superordinate theme yielded two sub-thematic categories, namely: ***personal and professional meanings*** to explain or describe their understanding of academic retention. Some of the

participants' explanations are based on their experiences in other ODeL higher education institutions. In the main, participants' explanations and their meanings of academic staff were similar, as aptly encapsulated in the excerpt below.

*Even though we have different experiences and different understanding of academic staff retention, I believe we still share common understanding of what it means to us. Some of our meanings are personal and professional in nature (FG: 1,3).*

#### **5.2.1.1 Sub-Theme 1.1: Personal meaning**

This sub-theme is premised on the participants' personal understanding of the meaning of academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. During the data analysis, this sub-theme further yielded 2 (two) categories, namely: a sense of belonging as well as fairness and equality, as indicated below.

*The meaning of academic staff retention varies from staff to staff. Despite the variations, the meanings are personal and often relate to a sense of acceptance and feeling as part of a team of an organisation (IN: 12,4).*

*Given that people are affected differently by academic institutions and react differently to the demands of the institutions, in my opinion, our meanings are bound to be different and personal. For instance, I see academic staff retention as a mechanism to promote personal development and subsequent sense of being part of an institution (FG: 4,4).*

##### **5.2.1.1.1 The sense of belonging**

A sense of belonging concerns participants' feelings of being respected and accepted by their colleagues, regardless of their status in their respective departments and teams. From the participants' narrated statements, it is very clear that their subjective expressions about their sense of belonging are varied and wide ranging. This is facilitated in the below excerpts of some of the participants.

*The staff opened their arms for me when I started here four years ago ... that made me to feel welcomed and valued as a person. Hence, I am still here and will continue to work here as the institution itself is also welcoming (IN: 17,1).*

*We all felt welcomed by the institution. If you could remember, we were inducted and orientated; and that went well for me, and my colleagues also claimed they enjoyed and benefitted from the induction and orientation programme. These positive experiences are bound to enable academics to stay here and feel part of the institution (FG: 2,1).*

A recurrent theme was also needed for higher education institutions to create environments that enable academic staff members to feel both accepted and valued. These are the personal gains to which some participants referred as poignant factors for the retention of academic staff members in ODeL institutions, as shown below.

*After working for over 14 years in a government department, I was attracted to become an academic at an ODeL institution in South Africa. What attracted me the most were the short and flexible working hours, sabbatical and research leave. Granting me leave to conduct research conveyed a message of me being accepted as an academic staff member. The flexible working hours also conveyed respect for me as an academic (FG: 2,4).*

*Apart from the flexible working hours, I do feel that I belong to the university's academic community, as it shares my personal values of respect, and free and open communication (FG: 2,4).*

According to the statements above, a sense of belonging (as a factor of personal meaning) was demonstrated by examples of critical retention mechanisms such as flexible working hours, respect, sabbatical and research leave. Most participants cited these as their principal reasons for remaining in the institution, poignantly described these strategies as the “things that make us to belong”. Similar support for the “sense of belonging” in the context of flexible working hours was also noted in the following individual interviews.

*I know many colleagues who have been at an ODeL institution in South Africa for many years because of the opportunities and benefits they enjoyed in the past. Examples of these benefits include flexible working hours, “working from home”, academic recess leave, attendance to national and international conferences. The colleagues in question continue to enjoy these benefits (IN: 2,4).*

*The benefits I enjoy made me to feel that I belong to the organisation. The university allowed me to do outside work even though this is dependent upon my performance and attendance to students' needs. Offering me this opportunity did not only help me to meet my financial needs, but it also made to realise a sense of belonging (IN: 1,1).*

Implied in the notion of benefits were discussions of abstract concepts such as integrity and values. Most participants alluded to these concepts on a number of occasions and associated them with the “sense of belonging”, as indicated below.

*My personal beliefs and values are critical. I accepted the job offer here because the institution shares my values of ensuring quality and integrity. Academic staff members of the ODeL institution in South Africa strive to adhere to quality work as they are guided by quality assurance and ethics related standards and procedures of the university. These are some of the key reasons why I continue to stay at this institution (IN: 2,3).*

*The ODeL institution in South Africa is a credible institution as it strives to promote open access to education for all in the continent of Africa and beyond. As an African, I share this value and commend this university for its commitment to promote open access and equitable education that takes into consideration people with disabilities (IN: 3,5)*

Fairness and equality were other important factors frequently mentioned by participants in relation to the “sense of belonging” and access to benefits.

#### **5.2.1.1.2 Fairness and equality**

The participants considered the recruitment and retention of academic staff as important for the university, and ODeL institutions in general. They attributed such importance to the potential of academic staff recruitment and retention to maximise the quality of academic staff members and the support they offer to students, provided the practice is operationalised fairly and equitably, as depicted below.

*Treating people equally and fairly with respect are factors that may make them to stay in any organisation. So, organisations should make effort to develop policies*



*and procedures for ensuring that academic staff members are treated fairly and equally (IN: 5,2).*

The participants considered the development of policies and procedures as a necessary condition for ensuring equality and fairness. However, such policies were inadequate. Hence, participants stressed that policies and procedures should not only be developed but should be implemented consistently to promote fairness and equality.

*In this institution, we are treated with respect and we have equal access to opportunities and benefits, such as training and personal development. This makes us to feel part of the institution (IN: 13,2).*

Opportunities for training and personal development could become important factors for promoting academic staff retention. Thus, the participants emphasised the need for academic institutions to offer these opportunities in order to attract and retain their staff and enhance the quality of support students.

*After working for over 14 years in a government department, I was attracted to become an academic at an ODeL institution in South Africa. What attracted me the most were the short and flexible working hours, sabbatical and research leaves. There were many opportunities to travel overseas and to pursue a masters and doctoral programmes almost free of charge. The university had bus services, and this made commuting to work easier for academic staff. These were some of the attractive things that enticed me to be here (FG: 2,4).*

Overall, the participants reported that understanding of academic staff retention could not be solely premised on a monolithic meaning. Similar to other human constructs, there were multiple meanings, including those that were predominantly professional in their nature.

#### **5.2.1.2 Sub-Theme 1.2: Professional meaning**

This second sub-theme emanating from the first superordinate theme during data analysis. These two sub-themes relate to the participants' professional understanding of the concept of academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The participants stressed that such understanding (which

premised on talent management and academic staff retention strategy) was a function of professional socialisation, as depicted in the narrative statement below.

*Over the years, I have been socialised into how to become an effective academic by very experienced mentors and colleagues. A great deal of time and energy were spent on how to recruit and retain academic staff in this institution and other institutions that I have worked for (IN: 5,1).*

#### 5.2.1.2.1 Talent management

According to the participants, managing the talents of academic staff is a critical factor of academic staff retention when assessing academics' strengths and weaknesses, with particular emphasis on supporting them to enhance aspects of their strengths. Participants reported that the adequate nurturing and management of the academics' talents would inevitably lead to their (academics') retention, to the benefit of the institution and the students.

*The focus has been mainly on how to retain academic staff, as this is key in maximising academic staff teaching and learning outputs. One of the issues we often talked about in this regard was how to assess and manage the talents of academic staff (IN: 5,1).*

*During my academic management training, one of the activities we did as Chairs of Departments was the discussion of academic staff retention as a pillar of managing talents. I took this seriously and I saw it from a professional point of view as the foundation for retaining and enhancing professional performance of academic staff members. This means that academic staff can be retained in an institution and their performance improved if the right approaches are adopted (FG: 2,1).*

The above excerpt reflects that nurturing academic staff and optimising their potential was contingent on academic institutions themselves adopting and implementing appropriate approaches and strategies. One of these approaches premised on the enhancement of their talents, which subsequently advances the purpose of academic staff retention. Exit interviews were posited as another approach for advancing and

promoting the objectives of academic staff retention through talent management, as shown below.

*With my experience as a Chair of Department and an Acting School Director, I feel that exit interviews should be part of talent retention. If talented academics want to leave, the staff must be interviewed to find out the reasons of wanting to leave and should be convinced to stay. This may involve discussions of opportunities and incentives (FG: 1,1).*

*Academic staff retention is seen by many in this institution as incentive and opportunity driven. Indeed, this is the case for me as I continued to stay because the university has developed me professionally: I recently completed my master's degree and had attended a number of local and international conferences (IN: 1,1).*

Insofar as the professional context is concerned, the participants mostly reflected on academic retention as a viable strategy for attracting and retaining academics at higher education institutions. This is particularly to those offering ODeL due to their core focus on asynchronous and lifelong learning - which increases their numerical advantage of students compared to the traditional (synchronous) mode of higher education institution (Carlsen et al., 2016).

#### 5.2.1.2.2 *Academic staff retention strategy*

There was broad consensus among the participants concerning the urgent need for ODeL institutions to adopt academic staff retention as a strategy for also enhancing their operational functions. The role of salary in retaining academic staff was highlighted, given that higher education teaching is not among the well-paying careers (Altbach, 2015; Dube & Ngulube, 2013; Robyn & Du Preez, 2013).

*The issue of money should form part and parcel of any academic staff retention strategy. As academics, we should not shy away from our need for money. Emm..., we need it to pay the bonds for our houses, and to take care of our families. So, making salaries of academics competitive, attracts and retains them (FG: 4,3).*

*As you are aware, many academic staff, particularly those in the School of Business Leadership (SBL) and College of Accounting Sciences can earn more money working outside of academia than in academia. So, offering attractive salaries can help to retain academic staff in higher education institutions (IN: 3,1).*

There was some degree of support for academic performance being linked to financial rewards. In this regard, the participants reported that academic staff were retained and rewarded financially according to a cumulative five-point performance system: teaching and learning, academic leadership, academic citizenship, community engagement, and research. However, participants also noted that academic retention was not only about financial gain, but it was also about work conditions and job satisfaction, which were their intrinsic values that enabled them to remain in the particular organisation.

*Generally, people are more likely to stay in an organisation if they feel happy with the conditions of service of that organisation. I am presently not permanently employed by this university despite my experience and qualifications. This is discouraging, unsettling and worrying as the future is not certain. So, offering permanent positions to academics, particularly those with huge experience would ensure retention and promote mentorship of young academics with a subsequent enhancement of teaching and learning (IN: 4,3).*

*Academics require resources to carry out their work effectively. The absence of this could lead to frustration and anger, which might culminate in unhappiness. This means that academics should be provided with the tools they need to carry out their jobs effectively (IN: 4,4).*

The findings pertaining to the first superordinate theme were largely premised on the participants' personal and professional meanings of academic staff retention. The findings also indicated multitude of factors in ODeL institutions of higher education that may promote or hinder academic staff retention. These factors are then presented below as the superordinate theme of determinants of academic staff retention.

## 5.2.2 Superordinate theme 2: Determinants of academic staff retention

This second superordinate theme premises on the reasons for academic staff deciding to continue or discontinue their employment at an ODeL institution in South Africa or any other ODeL institutions. The participants refer to these reasons as **promoting factors** and **hindering factors**. Accordingly, this superordinate theme consists of two thematic categories (promoting factors and hindering factors) that are further divided into two sub-thematic categories each; namely, intrinsic and extrinsic promoting and hindering factors respectively.

### 5.2.2.1 Sub-Theme 2.1: Promoting factors

The sub-themes consist of a set of both “intrinsic promoting factors” and “extrinsic promoting factors” that may enable or influence academic staff’s decisions to continue or discontinue their employment at the ODeL in question or any other higher education institution.

#### 5.2.2.1.1 Intrinsic promoting factors

According to the participants, the intrinsic promoting factors are the internally situated values or virtues within an academic (such as personal development and job satisfaction) that may have a motivating effect on remaining or not remaining at an ODeL institution in South Africa. Participants expressed the view that the degree of influence of these factors varied from one academic to the other, based on their (personal and professional) experiences and coping mechanisms.

*Working in ODeL institutions can be stressful, and the stressful experiences can be exacerbated if academic do not derive satisfaction from their day-to-day teaching and learning activities. So, this institution should create an environment where academics are happy, satisfied and develop capacity to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Examples of such an environment include the ability to freely translate and share knowledge and skills, and feelings of being recognised for work well done. Feelings of being recognised or acknowledged even if it is small, plays a massive role in promoting academic staff retention (IN: 1,2)*

*Stress is part and parcel of the work of an academic. But too much of it may lead to burnout, which may force an academic to leave for what he or she may perceive as a less stressful job. However, enabling academics to feel happy at work irrespective of the stresses they encounter may encourage them to stay in ODeL institutions (FG: 2,4).*

Despite the varying degree of Selesho and Naile (2014) among academics, the influence of job satisfaction on academic staff retention was repeatedly referred to by some participants. They further acknowledged the link between job satisfaction and self-fulfilment, which they believed could also enhance strategies to retain academics.

*When academics are confident in what they are doing, in other words, have feelings of self-fulfilment because of knowledge, skills and experience they have acquired, they often decide to stay and deliver good services (IN: 6,3).*

In one of the focus group discussions, the participants were unanimous that several factors working in tandem accounted for the decisions by academic staff whether or not, to remain employed at an ODeL institution in South Africa. The participants further stressed that a combination of factors (rather than a single factor) with an intrinsic profound influence included: personal and professional growth, self-confidence (as opposed to arrogance), and commensurately remunerated performance of allocated tasks. Additional to the intrinsic promoting factors, the participants further noted other external factors accounted for academics deciding whether or not to remain employed at an ODeL institution in South Africa.

#### **5.2.2.1.2 Extrinsic promoting factors**

This theme relates to external factors that may positively influence academic staff retention. Participants cited travel opportunities as an example of such external factors. This was further cited as a critical factor for attracting and retaining academics.

*Even though academia is a stressful profession, most of us enter it because it offers opportunities to travel to a wide range of destinations to attend local and international conferences and other academic related meetings (IN: 12,3).*

*In addition to travel opportunities, academia enables us to collaborate with other academic colleagues, and even with those in other professions, such as public and private sectors, non-governmental organisation and different government institutions. Such opportunities create fora for enhancing inter-personal relationships and for attaining bonuses through collaborative activities like publications (FG: 4,3).*

Some participants were unambiguous about their reasons for staying in academia. They considered the development of interpersonal relationships as a better attractive factor than bonuses and travelling opportunities. The same participants also associated academic staff retention with salaries. There was general agreement that the annual salary increases were a potentially attractive factor for those seeking employment and those staying in a higher education institution. Such a perspective was repeatedly mentioned, despite the general perception of low salaries that are disparate with the high workload often reported in academia (Shin & Jung, 2014).

*Academics are expected to do research, teaching and learning and participate in community engagement and academic citizenship. So, there is a lot of work in academia. But what we are being paid for is not what we deserve. We are paid less compared to what we are doing. But the annual increase in salaries attracts us to this profession (FG: 4,3).*

Satisfaction with salary increases was associated with opportunities for job promotion. Some participants reported that they were influenced to remain at an ODeL institution in South Africa by the available opportunities for promotions that were on offer. These opportunities were well acknowledged by academic staff members.

*I must tell you that, I am here because I have been promoted to the position of an Associate Professor. This has made me to feel appreciated. I did not get this chance in the institution where I previously worked (IN: 10,2).*

Satisfaction derived from available job promotion opportunities varied considerably among participants. Some participants reported that promotions were conducted fairly in accordance with academic standards. However, they alleged that promotion was largely influenced by nepotism, which was attributable to academic staff leaving the higher education institutions, including the ODeL institution under investigation.

*There are unfair promotions and rigid management styles in this institution. The promotions are based on “who knows who”. As a result, academics, including those with integrity and sound academic standing end up leaving the institution (FG: 2,4).*

### **5.2.2.2 Sub-Theme 2.2: Hindering factors**

Similar to promoting factors, the theme of hindering factors consists of “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” hindering factors as sub-thematic categories that may or may not influence academic staff’s decisions to leave or remain at the ODeL institution.

#### **5.2.2.2.1 Intrinsic hindering factors**

The abovementioned theme relates to internally situated and generated factors within academics that may have the effect to deter them from working in ODeL institutions. Examples of such factors include; negative emotions, low staff morale, professional jealousy, and non-involvement in substantive decision-making. With regard to negative emotions, some participants alluded to anger, anxiety and frustration; particularly in instances of students failing to understand the feedback relating to allocated tasks. The participants intimated further that the cumulative effect of these emotions sometimes compelled them to consider terminating their employment with ODeL institutions.

*Anger, anxiety and frustration always made us not to effectively carry out our duties as academics. We feel incompetent because students are failing to understand what we tell them to do. If it was a traditional contact university, we would be able to easily see where the problems are situated. Because of this, the option for some of us is to leave (FG: 4,3).*

*I do agree with my colleague that we are always frustrated and angry here. It is not just to do with students not understanding the feedback we give, but it is also to do with not having adequate resources (such as ICT support) to perform our duties (FG: 4,3).*

From the participants’ perspectives, the experiences of negative emotions were often a function of a number of factors in academic settings, such as low morale. Most participants reported that the morale of academic staff members was generally low



due to factors such as limited resources. Consequently, low staff morale negatively impacts on the achievement of institutional goals (Matsaung, 2014).

*My motivation to work has been depleted by the frequent unavailability of fundamental resources like the internet. Please remember that this is an ODeL institution and without the internet, we cannot contact our students and carry out other operational functions (FG: 2,4).*

*Apart from limited resources, some academics reported that other academics do not like them. This is what I refer to as professional jealousy. This means that an academic may be negative about another who may be performing well. This is something that you cannot control (IN: 13,3).*

The participants agreed unanimously that certain organisational aspects of academia were difficult, if not impossible, to control. An example in this regard includes interpersonal relationships among academic staff members. Participants reported further that professional jealousy was a stress factor whose prolonged prevalence could influence academics to leave their respective higher education institutions. They regarded such a stance as a cathartic approach to alleviation of stress and its resultant emotional 'overload' (Adams et al., 2014).

Feelings or perceptions of non-involvement in the daily work of academics was considered an influential factor that could discourage academics from remaining employed in ODeL institutions. The participants averred that they would continue to serve their institutions diligently and mooted for more involvement of academics in the decision-making process of all aspects pertaining to their daily work-related activities.

*I would be leaving soon. I cannot work in an environment where I am just told to do things. In this place, my values of an academic are not respected. I am not involved in making decisions (IN: 9,2).*

Apart from the intrinsic hindering factors, the participants repeatedly intimated on factors that reside in their external environments, and with the potential to influence their continuing loyalty to the ODeL institution for which they are working for.

#### 5.2.2.2.2 Extrinsic hindering factors

This theme is about external factors that may influence academics working for an ODeL institution to leave. Examples of these hindering factors include work overload, austerity measures (for example, on staff development and research), unfair promotions and discrimination, to name a few. Some of the participants were stressed by the work overload, as exemplified by the onerous and long working hours induced by increasing student-staff ratios; in terms of which they were expected to teach and mark both the examination scripts and assignments of students.

*When I started my job, I was promised a low teaching load so that I can focus on my studies. Now I am overloaded with my own work and they have added another module to my workload (IN: 7,2).*

*A lot is expected from us. We are expected to do academic work as well as research. The student numbers are huge. For example, I am leading a programme that has more than 80 000 students, with limited support (FG: 3,2).*

*We are under pressure to serve a huge number of students registered in our college, that is the College of Education. This causes stress on us particularly because of inadequate support from management (FG: 4,2).*

Participants were of the view that austerity measures such as restrictions on training and development; and research, contributed to academic attrition at an ODeL institution in South Africa.

*Following the “fees must fall” movement protests in the country recently, the university adopted “austerity measures” policy to cut on costs. Examples of these include daily allowances when attending conference and training and development programmes (IN: 6,2).*

*I guess this austerity measure could be one of the reasons why many academics are leaving. The institution is struggling to retain academics because some of the fringe benefits have been cut (FG: 3,2).*

With regards to discrimination, most participants were of the view that women and other minority academic staff members were facing more discriminatory practices than

their black and white male counterparts. Examples of such discriminatory practices included gender-based salary disparities and unfair promotions.

*Well... the university still has a long way to go to address discrimination against women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. Full Professorship positions are still male dominated. Management should stride to close the gender imbalances among academics (IN: 4,2).*

*In my department, male and female academics are not treated the same with regards to promotions, since most senior positions are occupied by male colleagues (FG: 3,1).*

Participants displayed divergent views regarding promotions. Some agreed, and some disagreed that promotions were often offered unfairly, and not meritoriously. There was unwavering reference to some academics who were promoted during the past few years but did not meet the minimum promotion criteria. This was cited as one of the foremost reasons for academics to leave the institution.

*Most of us have been subjected to promotion discrimination and rigid management styles. We have many cases of academics that have been prejudiced and not be promoted because of, for example, race, ethnicity and background (FG: 3,3).*

*I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience required for promotion. Added to this, the institution favours external academics. This approach frustrates internal academics, and their repeated quest to leave the institution (IN: 5,3).*

*Promotions are not done fairly.... just a few academics are promoted each year in my department and the process is extremely biased. It was better at my previous employment where they had annual comprehensive promotions for all the academics (IN: 4,2).*

The second superordinate theme focused largely on factors that determined and influenced academic staff retention. The following section addresses HR risk assessment in relation to the retention of academic staff at the ODeL institution.

### 5.2.3 Superordinate theme 3: HR risk assessment

This third superordinate theme in this study relates to factors associated with HR risk assessment as a factor in the retention of academic staff in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. In this regard, most of the participants highlighted several strategies to address the HR risks and asserted the need for risk assessment as a mechanism to address academic staff retention. Hence, this superordinate theme consists of two thematic categories, namely: **principles of risk assessment** and **risk assessment practices**. These two thematic categories further yielded three sub-thematic categories, which are discussed below.

#### 5.2.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Principles of risk assessment

Among the suggested strategies, the participants highlighted: adoption of principles of risk assessment and employing risk assessment tools, addressing transformation issues, application of an eclectic approach to mitigate the risk of academic attrition, and consideration of the dynamic process.

##### 5.2.3.1.1 The dynamic process

In both the focus group discussions and individual interviews, the participants agreed that there were extant workplace risk factors affecting academic staff on a regular basis. Risk assessment is not a once off process (Aven, 2013; 2016). Therefore, the participants believed there should be dynamic processes that regulate and assess workplace risk factors.

*As academics, our safety is always at risk, especially when we conduct research either in the field or laboratories and community engagements. In our individual departments, we encounter conflicts with other colleagues and/or line managers on a regular basis. The need to assess and resolve these problems must be done in order to avoid academic staff attrition (FG: 3,1).*

*There was a strike two months ago. And when I went to the office, the university entrance gates were closed. I tried to contact the School Director to report that I will not be able to go to my office, since we were not allowed to enter the premises. However, I told him that I will be working at the national library since I had my*

*laptop with me. After two days, the line manager reported me to the Dean of the College that I didn't come to work on that day. Of which, this was not the case. This implied that the line manager did not follow up with the office of the School Director to get a report of who was present and absent. He also failed to assess the risk that was exposed to harm academic staff members during the strike (IN: 1,6).*

According to the participants in both the focus group discussions and individual interviews, an eclectic approach was offered as a dynamic process to address risk assessment and mitigate academic attrition in the workplace.

#### *5.2.3.1.2 The eclectic approach*

Most participants agreed that a team approach and collateral information were required to address workplace risk assessment. They upheld the view that the workplace risk assessment process should involve multiple stakeholders from different professional and intellectual backgrounds, departments and ranks.

*Most academics with qualifications have been on contract for many years. Some academics may have the required qualifications for advertised permanent positions, yet, they continue to get contract appointments. My assumption is that HR and the university management do not have the same vision in terms of staff recruitment. Sometimes we are so confused maybe it's because we are not well informed, we don't know what is happening in this university and this can be frustrating. We end up having many questions that are not answered. This makes people to feel stressed and may wish to leave (FG: 4,7).*

*Our biggest barrier is lack of communication. Management communicates only when they want to know why things have gone wrong. They take academic decisions without consulting us. For example; the students' examination was postponed or moved because students couldn't register on time. This was because the Despatch Department delayed sending and posting study material to the students. Departments need to communicate with each other on a regular basis in order to minimise errors and confusion that frustrates us. We are now expected to be the one clearing the mess (IN: 8,5).*

That there was uncertainty in addressing workplace risk assessment as a dynamic process, was abundantly clear from participants in both the focus group discussions and individual interview sessions.

#### 5.2.3.1.3 *Uncertainty*

The recent austerity measures and lack of transformation at the university is creating uncertainty, poor decision-making, inability to predict future events, lack of partnership and a team approach to problem-solving.

*In my department, we have permanent vacant positions, but most of my colleagues are on contract and they don't really get reasons why they cannot be permanently employed. For example, there is one colleague with a PhD qualification, who is now thinking of finding other avenues. He applied for the position that was advertised and was invited to the interview. Subsequent to that, the interview was cancelled. This implies that, contract employees will never get permanent positions. This is frustrating, most of them are now looking for employment somewhere else (FG: 4,3).*

*Since I joined an ODeL institution, many bad decisions have been made due to unforeseen events in the country. For example, academics in science, engineering and technology were moved from Pretoria (Muckleneuk) campus to Johannesburg (Florida) campus. This move caused most of the academics to resign from the institution, since they could not relocate and buy new properties in Florida, whilst their families are staying in Pretoria. Personally, I feel that I waste a lot of time travelling from Pretoria campus to Johannesburg campus and back. Another recent example, of the "#FeesmustFall#" campaign has brought austerity measures in our university. This has resulted to the phasing out of good programmes such as Academic Qualification Improvement Programme (AQIP). This is unfair to the colleagues who want to apply (IN: 7,5).*

*When I joined an ODeL institution in South Africa three years ago, I used to mark 20 assignments and examination scripts per module but now we are told that, because of budget restrictions (austerity measures) we are expected to mark 100 scripts per module. Tomorrow, the number of scripts might increase, no one knows. So, when will I get time to do other work that is expected from me? I think*

*management is making things difficult for us. My worry is not about marking 100 scripts, it's about compromising quality on these scripts. But it seems the university is more concerned on increasing the student numbers (IN: 3,4).*

In general, majority of the participants expressed the need that is involved in the practice of risk assessment associated with academic staff retention in an ODeL institution.

### **5.2.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: The practice of risk assessment**

This theme relates to the practice of risk assessment associated with academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. Although most participants agreed that there were risk assessment policies in place to reduce the impact of risks, the implementation and effectiveness of such policies was most questionable. Three sub-thematic categories emerged insofar as influencing the implementation of workplace risk assessment policies were concerned. These are: subjectivity, actuarial applications and mixed or multiple principles, and are discussed below.

#### **5.2.3.2.1 Subjectivity**

The risk management approaches that emerged from the focus group discussions and individual interviews include: stress management, addressing discrimination and prejudice, promotion of psychological well-being, clarity of responsibilities/duties and communication lines, as well as a recovery approach plan. However, participants were also of the view that the implementation of the strategies was exposed to subjectivity, as reflected in the narrative statements below.

*The interpretation and implementation of policies lies with the Chairs of Departments, Line Managers and Management. Management makes decisions without involving academics and support staff. If management does not involve people who are doing the work, then there will be a tendency for bias, prejudice and lack of support. There is always lack of clarity on tasks assigned to us, mainly because our managers use their own discretions to assign these tasks (FG: 3,6).*

*When I joined the university three and a half years ago, the minimum requirement for promotion to Senior Lecturer was a master's degree, three years' work experience in teaching and learning or industry and be registered with Health*

*Profession Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as an Industrial and Organisational Psychologist and be an Assessor. Later, when I met all these requirements, I was told by the Chair of the Department that there is a new requirement that stipulates that one must have a PhD in order to be promoted to a Senior Lectureship position. Now I am thinking if I complete my PhD qualification, there will be additional requirements that I am not aware of. This sense of uncertainty kills our moral and commitment to the institution (IN: 4,7).*

*Opportunities for promotions are awarded based on favouritisms. This is done irrespective of how well we perform (IN: 10,1).*

#### 5.2.3.2.2 Actuarial principles

Participants expressed the view that actuarial principles should be employed in the implementation of risk assessment policies for purposes of mitigating academic attrition. These views were expressed in the following statements:

*According to the Employment Equity Act, a foreign national, who has a permanent residency, may be given a permanent employment in South Africa. In my department, there is a foreign national who has been working on contract for more than five years. My point is, he has scarce skills which the department doesn't have. Based on this, the university policy allows the department to keep such a skilled person. It will be understandable if he was not in possession of the scarce's skill, and maybe a South African citizen can easily do the job. He has the skills which we don't have, and this skill was not even taught to us at undergraduate level. So, policies and procedures are there to make the job more effective but not to hinder progress of the university. In this situation, the foreign nationals with scarce skills must be retained (FG: 2,7).*

*Things are done differently here. There is lack of uniformity in different Colleges. For example, the College of Economic and Management Sciences, should operate the same as the College of Science, Engineering and Technology. But it looks like management has given colleges different mandates, policies, rules and regulations that must be followed. For example, with promotions, the applicants are assessed based on their key performance areas, while in other College, they use the points system to count the applicants' research outputs. It can be stressful*



*after working for so many years, and yet we are denied opportunities for promotions whilst other colleagues in other Colleges get promotions easily (IN: 9,6).*

#### 5.2.3.2.3 *Mixed/multiple principles*

The participants further expressed the view that mixed or multiple risk assessment principles should be employed for policies intended for the mitigation of academic attrition. They augmented that several risk assessment principles should be adapted for an ODeL institution with risk factors, and the implementation team should be comprised of individuals from a multi-professional and inter-departmental background, as reflected in the excerpts below.

*I do agree that the university has good policies, but the problem is lack of consistency when implementing them. That is why the operational running of the university is different from one college to the other. This means some of the departments implement policies differently. Management should consider the background of academic staff members when implementing policies and procedures so that they don't become demoralised. The risk factors must be addressed and minimised (FG: 4,6).*

*The issues of humanity (botho) in the workplace, differs from one person to the other, due to their different cultural backgrounds. I had a funeral at home, whereby I lost my daughter and father. In my culture, if an employee lost his/her immediate family member, one qualifies to take compassionate leave. When I applied for this leave, my manager told me that "your daughter/mother/father died, you will not wake them up.....please be at work". That's being insensitive. These are the things one might think they are minor, but they can easily harm an employee. Therefore, a multi-pronged approach should be applied when assessing risk factors in the workplace (IN: 14,6).*

The findings associated with the third superordinate theme indicate that there are various risk assessment factors in ODeL institutions of higher education. These factors are pivotally grounded on the principles and practices of risk assessment, both of which are aimed at academic staff retention. Logically, it was also of interest to the study to determine the extent of management of the risk assessment policies and

strategies at an ODeL institution in South Africa. From a syllogistic perspective, the management of these factors is then discussed below under the superordinate theme of HR risk management.

#### **5.2.4 Superordinate theme 4: HR risk management**

The third superordinate theme (already discussed above) specifically focused on the assessments of HR risks. On the other hand, the fourth superordinate theme in this section relates to the management of HR risks, intended to enhance productivity and retain academic staff members in any higher education institution. The participants referred to several strategies to address the HR risks associated with academic staff retention in an ODeL institution. The participants further mentioned that the HR Professionals and the university management should take a lead in managing HR risks. From the various perspectives of the participants, a single superordinate theme emerged (risk management approaches), consisting of one thematic category and its five sub-thematic categories, all of which are discussed below.

##### **5.2.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Risk management approaches**

Many participants expressed the need for risk management approaches that fundamentally mitigate the risk of academic attrition. These approaches included implementation of policies and procedures relating to employee wellness, orientation and induction programmes, employee training and development, as well as mentorship and coaching. The participants envisaged that these policy-informed strategies and approaches would ensure compliance, quality assurance, efficiency/effectiveness/efficacy and profound decision-making regarding the day-to-day management of institutional activities.

###### **5.2.4.1.1 Policies and procedures**

Some of the participants attributed their predominant reasons for staying in the employment of the ODeL institution to effective and good leadership. They recommended that the Department of HR at an ODeL institution provide training on policy implementation and procedures that categorically outline rules, regulations and responsibilities pertaining to employees. The rationale is premised on the notion that policies act as guiding principles or frame of reference on institutional day-to-day

operations and management thereof. Participants also mentioned that they would be encouraged to remain in the employ of the ODeL institution on account of these policies being implemented fairly and effectively. Furthermore, performance standards should be consistent and standardised in order to reflect the work performed by academic staff members, as articulated below.

*Effective and efficient policies are more important in today's changing world of work. I believe the university has all the policies and procedures in place to address issues such as transformation, equality, bullying/harassment and staff performance, which are covered by good processes, policies and procedures. Management and staff members need to familiarise themselves with these policies (IN: 18,2).*

*It doesn't help having good policies and not effectively implementing them. The Department of HR must ensure that all employees are adequately trained to understand the terms and conditions of these policies (IN: 11,3).*

*During the orientation and induction programme, the university policies and procedures must be accurately explained to all new employees. For example, the employees must know what the institution expect from them, such as dress code, sabbatical leave, time offs, recess leaves, tea breaks and holidays (FG: 3,1).*

#### 5.2.4.1.2 Promotion of employee wellness

Most of the participants had clear understanding of the university's policies and procedures. They referred to the promotion of workplace employee wellness as vital. Most of the participants averred that the employee wellness programme should promote the emotional, physical, social, intellectual and psychological well-being of academic staff members, and stress related to institutional management issues affecting them both in the workplace and at home. Therefore, the wellness programme should principally be directed at addressing risk factors among academic staff members in order to ensure their retention in the ODeL institution. The following excerpts testify to views expressed in that regard.

*Oooops.... academia is a demanding profession. I always find it difficult to balance my work and my health. I am fortunate to work in an environment that encourages*

*wellness programmes to improve employee's health. This helps us to be more productive and healthier (FG: 4,5).*

*It makes sense that promotion of employee wellness encourages staff members to become motivated and productive in the workplace (IN: 10:1).*

*To keep academic staff member in employment, management must make sure they keep the wellness programmes new and exciting. This will lessen the possibilities of looking for fulfilment somewhere else (IN: 5,2).*

*Wellness programmes will cut on absenteeism and increase retention of academic staff members (IN: 7,6).*

#### 5.2.4.1.3 Orientation and induction programme

Participants were of the view that a good orientation and induction programme positively influences the attitudes of the academic staff members to stay in the institution. This is a process in terms of which academic staff members are welcomed on assumption of their duties and introduced to their university colleagues and other staff members. Subsequently, the policies, procedures, processes and activities are explained in detail to the neophyte academic staff members. In addition, the participants emphasised the need for clearly articulated communication lines with all academic staff members during the orientation and induction programme, as mentioned below.

*Phew.....first impression counts. New employees must be well inducted and be given the welcome packs on their first day of employment. Mentors must be assigned to new academic staff members, in order to orientate them to the university's policies, procedures, rules, regulations and facilities (FG: 4,3).*

*Planned and effective orientation and induction programmes help not only academic staff retention, but also to enhance our performance. This helped me to get my feet on the ground (IN: 16,4).*

*Managers and supervisors must be trained on how to conduct effective coaching and mentorship programmes. Resources must be provided to new employees to do their job well (IN: 8,3)*

#### 5.2.4.1.4 *Academic staff training and development*

This categorised sub-theme resonated with some of the participants' calls for fully functional training and development programmes that cogently focus on career advancement opportunities for academic staff members. These participants called for organisational justice to prevail so as to enable equitable access to training and development opportunities. Notwithstanding some of the organisational challenges, the participants expressed their gratefulness to the university and its management for providing them with a diverse range of developmental opportunities, including attendance of local and international workshops and conferences, as expressed below.

*We have fantastic training and development opportunities ... I have learnt and gained a lot since I have started working here. I really appreciate the on-going training and development opportunities I got from this institution, it helped me with presentation and computer skills (FG: 1,5).*

*During my probationary period, my supervisor arranged a coaching and mentorship programme that influenced me both personally and professionally. The fact that the university is willing to spend so much money on training and development, has increased my commitment to stay here (IN: 5,1).*

*Every quarter of the year, we get international experts from the business sectors to come and share their knowledge and experiences, such as members from BMW motor industry. This helped us to interact and ask questions relevant to our curriculum. We learned and gained a lot from this experience (IN:3,1).*

*Good training and development programmes should be implemented for managers and supervisors (IN: 1,4).*

#### 5.2.4.1.5 *Mentorship and coaching*

Participants mentioned that additional investment was needed in support of the academics' professional development and career progression through the provision of mentorship and coaching programmes, especially for young and female academic staff members (Van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2019). This was viewed as helping the institution to retain talented and skilled academics, making them to feel cared for, supported and engaged. Participants were also delighted that mentorship and coaching programmes have helped them understand available career paths, building good relationships and enhancement of their problem-solving skills; all of which were expressed as follows:

*When I started to work here, I was not assigned with a good mentor. He was always busy when I needed his assistance. In many occasions I had to figure it alone. Thus, due to the unwillingness of professors towards mentorship and coaching, this has not been freely offered to junior academic staff members. I had to learn to do the job without any guidance. Newly appointed staff members are supposed to get support throughout in order to achieve their professional development and career advancement. This will help them with personal growth and self-confidence (IN: 2,2).*

*I had an opportunity to participate in the university's mentorship and coaching programme that was organised for the young academics. This programme had a huge impact in my career. The fact that the university spent money to develop us, increased my commitment to stay in this university (IN: 3,5).*

*It makes me feel so appreciated when the knowledge and experience that I acquired is valued by my colleagues, supervisors and management of this institution. It is also heart-warming to see junior staff doing well (FG: 2,5).*

*I must say.....its good when such programmes are led by experienced academic staff members, who are well respected in this institution. Their professional responsibility is to make sure that they guide and support young and new academics (IN: 17,7).*

## **5.2.5 Superordinate theme 5: Cultural influences**

This fifth and final superordinate theme relates to the vital role of cultural factors (for example; values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes) influencing academic staff members regarding their decisions on whether to remain in the employ of the ODeL institution. Participants suggested strategies to address the cultural differences relating to academic staff retention in an ODeL institution.

### **5.2.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Organisational culture**

Participants mentioned that management plays a huge role in shaping and sustaining the culture of the institution among academic staff members. Such an organisational culture was also embedded and reflected in the policies, procedures and processes of the ODeL institution. In this regard, organisational culture emerged as the most dominant thematic sub-category of the cultural influences superordinate theme. It consists of two sub-themes: positive organisational culture and negative organisational culture.

#### **5.2.5.1.1 Positive organisational culture**

Participants were of the view that the ODeL institution shaped their behaviours and the manner they interact with one another. Some of the participants stressed on the role of the HR specialist in the context of instilling trust and confidence of the organisations they work for. The narrative statements below, are an encapsulation of some of the participants' perspectives in this regard.

*HR specialists must hold high standards for their profession. They have the social responsibility and accountability to instil and promote trust, and consistency in their institutions (FG: 1,5).*

*As academics, we come from different cultural backgrounds that makes it sometimes difficult to work together. When I started to work in this institution, I really felt out of place due to the cultural differences that I experienced. Some colleagues do not seem to accept me because of my sexuality. They were frequently discriminating against me. Such cultural depositions placed me in a dilemma; to stay or leave the institution (IN: 3,3).*

Another participant in the same focus group responded to the above expressed dilemma.

*HR leaders must work with the management team of the university to identify and implement an institutional organisational culture. Such a culture should communicate an attitude of acceptance, respect, empathy and willingness to work together. The absence of this culture will contribute to academic attrition. Thus, the converse is true. So, the institutional management team must constantly communicate to academic and support staff through different for a (like training, mentorship and coaching) the attitude of acceptance, respect, empathy and willingness to work together. The HR department has a critical role in the facilitation of such communication (FG: 2,7).*

Policy and procedural documents are potent means of promoting the cultures of organisations like those related to ODeL institutions. Some participants claimed that it was through reading and discussing policies and procedural documents that they assimilated the culture of their organisation.

*The organisation I work for advocates for all newly employed staff, be it academic or support staff, to participate in an organisational induction programme. The induction programme is organised by its HR Department. The facilitators stresses on the need for teamwork and demonstration of respect and unconditional positive regard for each other. This is positive experience and it enables me to stay in this organisation (IN: 3,7).*

*I must stress that I feel valued and respected by the colleagues I work with. They always offer to help me whenever I am in need. For example, two in particular explained to me the research and master's and doctoral programme procedures (IN: 2,4).*

The exposure to such experiences undoubtedly promotes academic staff retention. However, academic staff are not always exposed to such positive experiences. This now brings us to the negative aspect of organisational culture.



#### 5.2.5.1.2 Negative organisational culture

Some academic staff had negative experiences in the organisation they worked for.

*I was regularly asked by a very senior academic staff member in our department to do things that I am not familiar with. This always made me to feel anxious and unwell. It served as the catalyst that nearly made me to leave the institution. Thanks to the support I received from my mentor. I think the senior academic's behaviour was discriminatory as other newly employed academics were not exposed to the same behaviour (IN: 3, 3).*

Another academic highlighted a couple negative experiences she was exposed to.

*The way I was treated by colleagues of our department made me not to feel valued. I am not frequently involved in making decisions; my views are often ignored. On one occasion, I was asked to keep quiet at a meeting by another colleague (IN: 4.4).*

Exposure to such behaviours could lead to academics an increase in academic attrition. Thus, to promote academic retention, it is critical to alleviate the distress which academics experience.

The alleviation of mental distress, like anxiety that academic staff experience plays a critical role in the promotion of their retention. Thus, ODeL institutions are required to encourage the implementation of developmental activities like mentorship and coaching to promote positive but not negative organisational culture. Added to this, the recruitment and selection process requires delicate handling. This is to ensure that the academic staff that are selected are not only fit for purpose, but also culturally congruent with the organisational values, vision and mission.

*When recruiting new employees, the institution must make sure they select those who match with the culture of the organisation. Doing so, alleviates frustrations and promotes retention (FG: 4,3).*

### 5.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the findings of the study, which are inextricably linked to the purpose of the study, (1) to explore and develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that may influence academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. (2) to develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

The findings of this study are derived from the data of the individual interviews and focus group discussions of academic staff members at an ODeL institution in South Africa. Five superordinate themes emerged from the individual interviews and focus group discussions' data; 1) defining academic staff retention, 2) determinants of academic staff retention, 3) HR risk assessment, 4) HR risk management, and 5) cultural influences. Each of these superordinate themes has sub-thematic categories which are discussed and supported with *verbatim* excerpts from the transcribed data. Chapter six will focus on the development of a conceptual framework of HR risk management.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

It has been revealed in the existing literature, and particularly the outcomes of this study, that there is a limited understanding of HR risk management and academic staff retention in ODeL institutions in South Africa (Samuel & Chipunza, 2013; Shabane, 2017). It is this limitation that motivated the researcher of this study to develop a conceptual framework for enhancing academic staff retention in ODeL institutions in South Africa. Such a framework can serve as a guide for similar institutions in the continent of Africa, and it can also be useful for higher education institutions within this continent.

This section of the thesis focuses on the development of a conceptual framework using the outcomes from data analysis of the study, data from the existing literature reviewed, the researcher's practical experiences of HR risk management, and the opinions of experts in the field of HR risk management and academic staff retention. Walker and Avant's (2019) three-way model for conceptual framework development supported the development of the HR risk management conceptual framework of this study. Walker and Avant's (2019) three-way model has three different, but interrelated approaches: (1) derivation; (2) synthesis; and (3) analysis. These approaches also have three interrelated strategies each for framework development: (1) concepts; (2) statements; and (3) theories. According to Walker and Avant (2019), the development of a conceptual framework requires the researcher to select one of the approaches and its corresponding strategies. A closer examination of Walker and Avant's (2019) three-way model, convinced the researcher to opt for the synthesis approach to conceptual framework development. This is because the synthesis approach allows for researchers to use relevant information related to a subject, including the researcher's practical experience and the experience of others (experts on the subject) to develop new concepts, new statements and subsequently a new theory or framework (Bloom et al., 1956). It is appropriate in settings where little or no concept development exists (Walker & Avant, 2019). This is descriptive of the HR risk management system in the ODeL institutions, and therefore can be judged appropriate to this study. The framework was further evaluated using the following five criteria

proposed by Chinn and Kramer (2017) for framework evaluation:(1) clarity; (2) simplicity; (3) generality; (4) accessibility; and (5) importance..

A detailed discussion of the synthesis approach and its strategies are discussed in the sequence in which they are applied during the development of the 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework' (Figure 6.1).

## **6.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT**

The conceptual framework development is a reiterative process, as researchers are required to move back and forth between strategies, until the desired conceptual elements of the framework are developed (Regoniel, 2015). As already mentioned, this study opted for the synthesis approach to conceptual framework development. It has three different strategies: (1) concept synthesis; (2) statement synthesis; and (3) theory synthesis. These strategies are interrelated, and they were applied in the framework development process reiteratively to reach a suitable conceptual formulation. However, for clarity's sake they are discussed consecutively, starting with concept synthesis, through statement synthesis to theory synthesis.

### **6.2.1 Concept synthesis**

Concept synthesis is the first strategy for conceptual framework development under the synthesis approach (Walker & Avant, 2019). It is considered a useful strategy as it allows the use of a wide range of collateral information, such as the researchers' existing and relevant literature and experiences, to develop concepts with the subsequent aim of conceptual formulation (Walker & Avant, 2019). Given this, concept synthesis can be described as an inductive and mechanical strategy for framework development.

Concepts can be viewed as mental images, constructs, ideas, or symbolic representation of a thing or an action (Polit & Beck, 2013). In relation to this study, the concepts identified were constructs, and they enabled the researcher to identify and categorise the participants' experiences in a significant way. In developing the concepts of the conceptual framework of this study, the researcher immersed herself in the existing literature, and brought to the front her practical experiences (Gray et al.,

2017). This required the researcher to critically examine the literature and identify concepts. With the help of the researcher's practical experiences of HR risk management and academic staff retention, similar concepts were then clustered, and each cluster was assigned a name. The process of clustering was a tasking exercise as the researcher constantly moved concepts from one cluster to another. This was to ensure that each concept was appropriately placed under a cluster that best reflected its meaning. This process was adopted repeatedly until the point of theoretical saturation (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This was the point at which no new concepts emerged that were related or relevant to the aim of the study. Examples of the concepts identified include 'hygiene factors', 'motivators', 'work life balance', 'talent management', 'psychologically safe work environment', 'mentor-mentee relationship', 'academic support strategies', 'training and development', 'retention strategies' and 'recruitment and selection strategies' (See table 6.1). The table illustrates the sources from which the concepts were derived: the researcher's experience, the extant literature, and the study findings. These concepts were clustered according to their similarities and differences. Each cluster was then assigned a name that reflected the meanings of the concepts it contained (Walker & Avant, 2019).

While the naming of the clusters was a repetitive process, it required the researcher to be patient, creative and imaginative. Such an attitude resulted in assigning names to the clusters of concepts that were consistent with the phenomenon of interest, 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework'. Examples of these clusters and the concepts they contained include 'positive factors' (concepts: recognition, job satisfaction, salary increase, benefits and recognition), and 'negative factors' (concepts: low morale, loss of benefits, work overload, discrimination', 'HR risk factors', and 'HR risk management). The clusters and their respective concepts are useful for explaining HR risk management and factors that might influence academic staff retention. Added to this, they enabled the researcher to gain insight into participants' experiences in relation to factors that might influence HR risk management and academic staff retention. The interrelatedness of these clusters of concepts was examined, and this process is discussed in this study.

**Table 6.1: Concepts and sources**

Sources of concepts				
Types of concepts		Literature	Researcher's experience	Study findings
	Personal development	X		X
	Recognition	X		X
	Accomplishment	X		X
	Knowledge & Skills	X		X
	Job satisfaction	X	X	X
	Salary increase	X		X
	Bonuses		X	
	Benefits	X		X
	Interpersonal relationship			X
	Promotions	X		X
	Feedback		X	
	Negative emotions			X
	Low morale			X
	Academic jealousy		X	X
	High staff turnover	X		X
	Organisational culture	X		X
Loss of benefits			X	

	Wastage resource		X	
	Austerity measure		X	
	Work overload	X		X
	Lack/limited support		X	X
	Unfair promotions	X		X
	Discrimination			X

### 6.2.2 Statement synthesis

Statement synthesis is the second strategy of the synthesis approach to conceptual framework development (Walker & Avant, 2019). This strategy shows the relationships among the building blocks of conceptual frameworks, which, in essence, relate to concepts (Walker & Avant, 2019). In other words, the statement synthesis highlights the relationship between two or more concepts based on existing evidence and/or that gathered through observation. In this study, the theoretical statements about the phenomenon studied (HR risk management and academic staff retention) were obtained from the literature reviewed, the research findings and the researcher's observations in HR practice. Given this, this stage is regarded as both an inductive and deductive process of conceptual framework development. Below are examples of theoretical statements obtained from the literature review:

**Statement 1:** every academic staff member has an internal motivational energy that may enable him or her to either stay or leave an academic institution. The internal motivational energy is what is referred to as a factor.

**Statement 2:** every academic staff member has an external motivational energy that may enable him or her to either stay or leave an academic institution. The external motivational energy is what is referred to as a factor.

Theoretical statements are often required to be rephrased or rewritten to make their meanings clear. Given that the theoretical statements from the literature described two

sets of relationships about academic staff (academic staff and academic retention, academic staff and academic attrition), the statements were re-structured to clarify their meanings. Starting with statement 1, it was re-phrased into two theoretical statements:

Academic staff are influenced by internal factors (such as job satisfaction and recognition) that may enable them to stay in an academic institution.

And

Academic staff are influenced by internal factors (such as low morale and academic jealousy) that may enable them to leave an academic institution.

With regard to statement 2, it was also rephrased into two theoretical statements:

Academic staff are influenced by external factors (such as salary increases and bonuses) that may enable them to stay or remain in an academic institution.

And

Academic staff are influenced by external factors (such as discrimination and work overload) that may enable them to leave an academic institution.

The researcher noted in the study findings and during her observation in HR practice that the tendency of academic staff to stay or leave an ODeL institution was dependent upon concrete and abstract factors, which the participants of this study described as externally motivated and internally motivated factors respectively. The researcher put forward the following statements from her observation and study findings.

- Academic staff in ODeL institutions are influenced by two main factors: internally motivated and externally motivated factors.
- Each of the internally motivated and externally motivated factors has an intrinsic force and extrinsic force that may enable an academic staff to either leave or stay in an academic institution.
- The magnitude of the intrinsic or extrinsic force determines whether an academic will stay or leave an academic institution.



Common to these theoretical statements derived from the observation of HR practice are two concepts: the motivational factors and force. Using these commonalities, the researcher rephrased the theoretical statement, which read:

- Academic staff in ODeL institutions are influenced by internally motivated factors that have intrinsic forces that may enable an academic staff member to leave or stay in an academic institution.
- Academic staff in ODeL institutions are influenced by externally motivated factors that have extrinsic forces that may enable an academic staff member to leave or stay in an academic institution.
- It is the magnitude or degree of influence of the forces of the factors, not the factors themselves that may influence an academic to either stay or leave an academic institution.

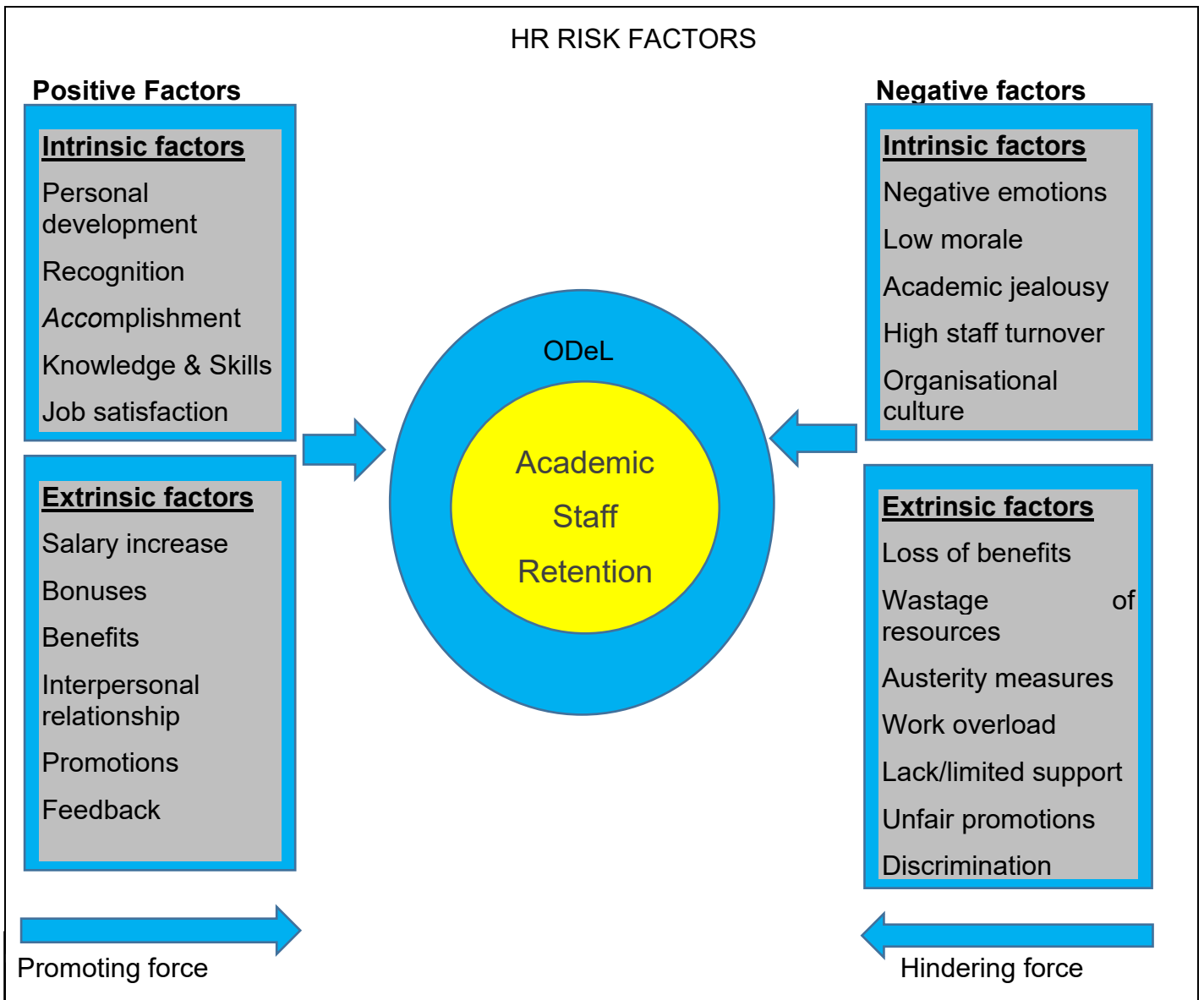
The theoretical statements derived from the literature reviewed, study findings and the researcher's observations are not unexpected discoveries, but real patterns of reality that exist in the field of HR risk management. While the theoretical statements derived are grounded in the findings of this study, they served as a bridge to theory synthesis, which is the next and final stage of the framework development process.

### **6.2.3 Theory synthesis**

Theory synthesis is the final strategy of the synthesis approach to conceptual framework development (Walker & Avant, 2019). It is the stage that allows the researcher to put together the concepts and theoretical statements into an integrated meaningful whole. Thus, theory synthesis involves a careful and detailed examination of the relationships between and among concepts and clusters of concepts of the study (Walker & Avant, 2019). Added to this, the theory synthesis also involves a careful examination of the theoretical statements developed, including their interrelatedness and relationships with the clusters of concepts. Acknowledging this, this stage is therefore considered inductive as a conceptual formulation or an integrated whole is developed from statements and concepts (Gray et al., 2017).

Given that concepts contain, within themselves, characteristics that make them unique or different from other concepts, understanding these characteristics and their interrelatedness would enhance the researchers' insight into the study phenomena. In this study, the researcher examined each cluster and its respective concepts and identified the influence that the clusters might have on one and another. This was a thorough exercise that involved frequent changing of the positions of the clusters and their respective concepts to match their direction of influence. The identification of the direction of influence is a deductive process (Bimenyimana et al., 2016). The outcome of this theory synthesis stage is a conceptual framework, entitled 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework' (Figure 6.1), which is a graphical representation of factors that may influence an academic staff member to either remain or leave an ODeL institution. What follows is a description of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework.

## HR RISK MANAGEMENT



*Figure 6.1: HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework (Source: own compilation)*

The boxes and circles in the ‘HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework’ represent different themes, which are in essence clusters of similar concepts. It is important to note that the arrows pointing to ODeL and academic staff retention indicate the direction of influence, and not relationships or associations among the HR risk factors. This suggests that the ‘HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework’ is not a statistical predictive, quantitative tool, but rather a diagrammatic representation of factors that may influence academic staff retention in ODeL institutions.

The 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework' contains 'HR risk factors' that may influence an academic staff member to leave or remain in an academic institution. The 'HR risk factors' are sub-divided into two thematic categories, namely 'positive factors' and 'negative factors'. The 'positive factors' are those that may enable an academic staff to remain in an academic institution. The 'negative factors' on the other hand, relate to those HR risk factors that may encourage academic staff to leave or quit an academic institution. Both the negative and positive factors are further sub-divided into intrinsic and extrinsic factors. As the name implies, the intrinsic factors relate to those HR risk factors that may emanate from within an academic staff member, which may enable the academic staff member to either remain or leave an academic institution. The extrinsic factors are those HR risk factors that have an external influence on academic staff. Similarly, they may enable an academic staff member to either remain or leave an academic institution.

According to the study findings and the researcher's observations in HR practice, each of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors has a force (sometimes referred to as push or pull factor) that may lead an academic staff to leave or remain in an ODeL institution. The force that may enable an academic staff member to remain in an academic institution is what is referred to in the 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework' as the 'promoting force' and force that may enable an academic staff to leave an academic institution is what is referred to in the 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework' as the 'hindering force' (Figure 6.2). According to the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework, if the cumulative strength or magnitude of influence of the positive factors is greater than the cumulative strength or magnitude of influence of the negative factor, an academic staff member will be motivated to remain in the institution (Figure 6.2). The contrary is also true. This means that an academic staff can leave an institution if the cumulative strength or magnitude of influence of the negative factors is greater than the cumulative strength or magnitude of influence of the positive factor (Figure 6.2). The degree of influence of the HR risk factors may vary from one academic staff to other. The degree of influence is dependent upon the academic's personal and academic experiences and coping mechanisms. This indicates that one factor may have more influence on one academic staff than another academic staff. It must however be stressed that it is not the factors per se that influence the academic's decision to remain or leave an academic institution, but it is the degree of influence of the forces of the factors on individuals. For instance, an

academic may leave an institution irrespective of high income when they consider, for example, being regularly exposed to an autocratic style of management. In contrast, another academic may continue to stay in an institution irrespective of being exposed to an autocratic management style.

It is worth reiterating that a factor with a greater strength of force can enable an academic staff to either remain or leave an institution. Given this, the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework' emphasises HR risk management strategies to focus on enhancing the strength or force of the positive factors. The rationale is to retain academic staff in an academic institution. Examples of the HR risk management strategies include performance appraisal, conflict management, training and development, reward and recognition and employee motivation.

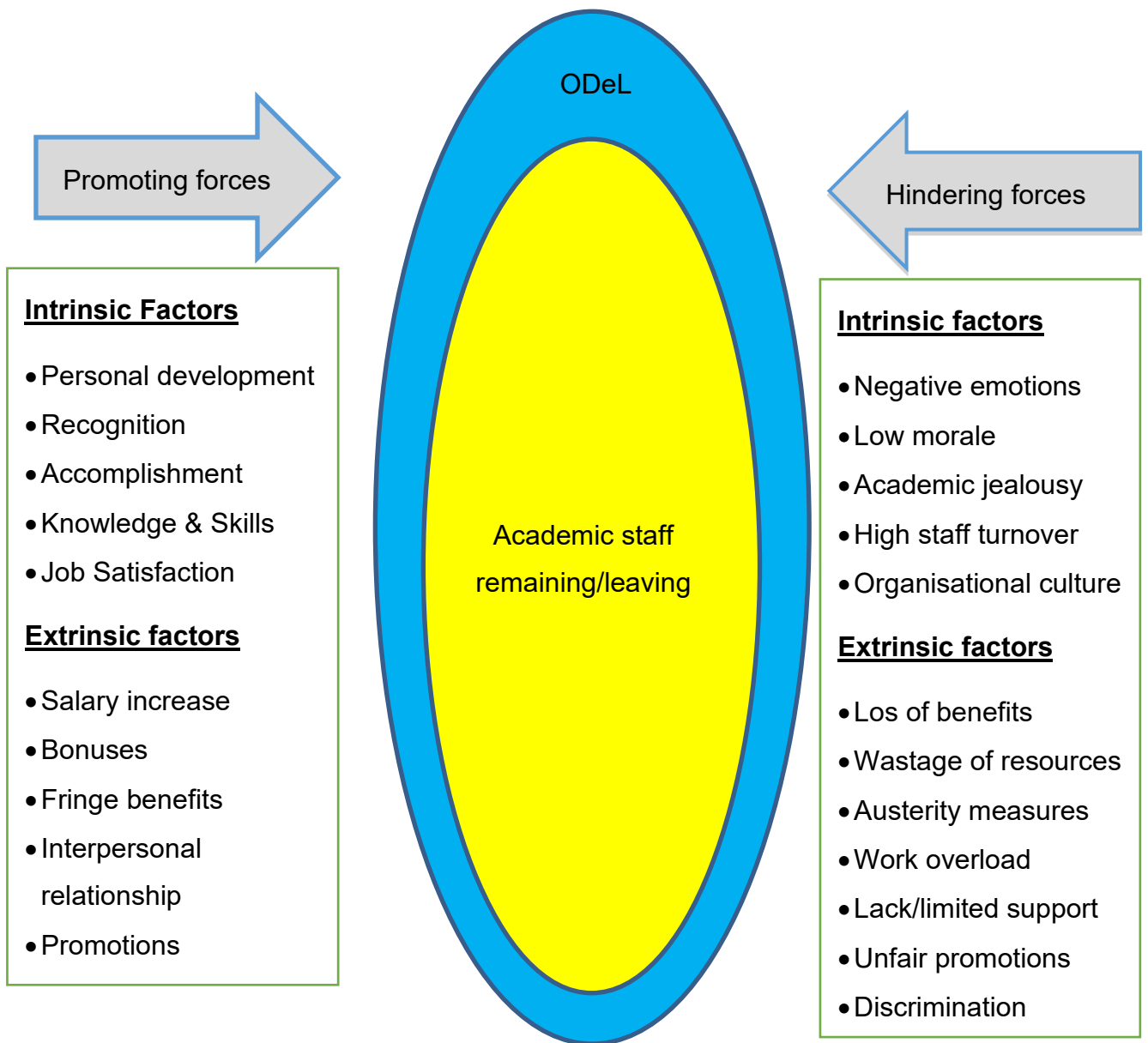


Figure 6.2: HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework - Academic Staff Remaining/Leaving (Source: own compilation)

## **6.3 EVALUATION OF THE FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT**

It is always a good practice to evaluate any newly developed model or framework before applying it in practice settings such as HR practice. The rationale for this is to identify the usefulness and applicability of the model or framework for the purpose it is developed. There are a range of tools available for evaluation of models or frameworks. Examples of these include Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006), Hardy's (1974), Fawcett's (2005); Chinn and Kramer's (2017) model evaluations. After careful examination of these evaluation tools, this study adopted Chinn and Kramer's (2017) critical reflection tool to guide the evaluation process of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework of this study. Chinn and Kramer's (2017) critical reflection tool has five criteria for framework evaluation: (1) clarity; (2) simplicity; (3) generality; (4) accessibility; and (5) importance. The criteria, which are discussed below, enabled the researcher of this study to establish the suitability and appropriateness of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework for enhancing the understanding of HR risk management and academic staff retention in ODeL institutions.

### **6.3.1 Clarity**

This criterion requires researchers to establish the degree of clarity of frameworks developed. In other words, this relates to how well a framework can be understood, including the degree of consistency in the conceptualisation of its ideas. Given this, Chinn and Kramer's (2017) critical reflection tool noted four categories of clarity: (1) semantic clarity; (2) semantic consistency; (3) structural clarity; and (4) structural consistency.

- Semantic clarity relates to the definition of concepts in frameworks, such as the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework developed in this study. According to Chinn and Kramer (2017), the clarity of a framework will be limited or poor if its concepts are not clearly defined. In relation to the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework, its concepts (e.g. low morale and job satisfaction) are clearly defined and explained.
- The category of semantic consistency relates to the usability of the concepts of framework and it is implicated with the clarity of definitions of concepts. In this

study, the concepts of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework are not only clearly defined, but they are also consistently used. The consistency in the use of the concepts is a function of the clarity of their definitions. Added to this, the clarity of definitions enhances understanding of the empirical meanings of the concepts.

- Structural clarity concerns the interrelatedness of the concepts of a framework. The concepts of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework are interrelated and organised into a cohesive whole (see Figure 6.1).
- The HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework also has structural consistency as its structural elements, such as the interconnectedness of the positive and negative factors and their respective sub-categories are used consistently in explaining academic staff retention in ODeL settings.

### **6.3.2 Simplicity**

Simplicity is about the number of categories of concepts of a framework. According to Chinn and Kramer's (2017), a framework can be described as simple or less complex, it comprises of small number of categories of concepts. The HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework has only two categories of concepts, and thus can be described as a simple framework. However, in the researcher's opinion, the simplicity of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework is a function of the view that it is easy to understand and apply in HR practice.

### **6.3.3 Generality**

This criterion relates to scope and the 'why' frameworks are developed (Alligood, 2017; Chinn & Kramer, 2017; Alligood & Tomey, 2010). Starting with the scope, the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework is developed to enhance the understanding of academic staff retention, including factors that may influence it in ODeL institutions. Though the scope appears to be narrow, the principles of this framework are applicable in non-ODeL institutions. The purpose of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework is clearly articulated, and this is even reflected in its components and structural elements.



### **6.3.4 Accessibility**

Accessibility refers to empirical indicators that was linked to the usability and testability of the theory (Chinn & Kramer, 2017). In other words, it is about the degree to which the purpose of the framework can be attained. Attaining the purpose of the framework can be influenced by a range of factors, and these include clarity of concepts, clarity of relationships among concepts and clarity of empirical indicators in HR practice that are associated with the concepts. As mentioned earlier, HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework is developed to enhance the understanding of academic staff retention about factors that may influence it in ODeL institutions. This is achievable given the clarity of concepts, their interrelatedness and the presence of empirical indicators (such as sickness rate and carer progress) in HR practice that are linked to the concepts.

### **6.3.5 Importance**

This is about the usefulness of the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework, and the judgement of the usefulness can be influenced by the personal and professional values of the HR practitioner applying the framework. Given the absence of framework to promote the understanding of academic staff retention in Africa, and the scarcity of research in this area of HR practice in this continent, HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework would bridge this gap (Kissoonduth, 2017; Tettey, 2006). It certainly has a practical value, as it will enable HR practitioners to develop a better understanding of academic staff retention and factors that may influence it.

## **6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has offered a clear explanation of the conceptual framework development and its evaluation. The conceptual framework was developed from data obtained in this study as well as the extant literature guided by the principles of Walker and Avant's (2019) methodology of developing frameworks. Although the framework was developed for the use within an ODeL context, it could also be utilised in face-to-face universities. This framework will ensure that academic staff members in an ODeL institution are retained. The following chapter focuses on the discussion of the findings

of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 6 presented the findings of the study. This chapter presents the discussions of the study findings using the extant literature. This study employed a qualitative methodology to examine HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The rationale for this was to explore the personal experiences, perceptions, beliefs and meanings, which the academic staff held for this phenomenon. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was adopted in this study as a research design and a tool of analysis. Data were collected using individual interviews and focus group discussions guided by an interview schedule. The data obtained from this set of interviews were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The chapter commences with a discussion of the participants' explanations of academic staff retention, followed by discussions relating to the determinants of academic staff retention, HR risk assessment and management, cultural influences and the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework, including its applicability and significance.

### **7.2 ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION: ITS MEANING**

The literature indicates the reasons why most ODeL institutions experience difficulty with retaining academic staff and the meanings which academic staff hold for academic staff retention. The participants of this study cite several meanings of academic staff retention in both the individual interviews and focus group discussions. They refer to it as a sense of belonging, fairness, equality, talent management and retention strategy. The multitude of meanings indicates the complexity of this phenomenon and the need for a universal meaning. Even though this is a challenging task, attaining a universal meaning of academic staff retention will promote understanding of this phenomenon and the strategies for the retention of academic staff in their respective institutions. While this is yet to be achieved, the meanings of academic staff retention presented here are however similar to those described in Selesho and Naile's (2014) (Section 3.6.1) study. The notion of a sense of belonging described by the participants relates to feelings of being respected and treated as valuable members of their institution. With regard to the participants' view of newly

recruited staff, academic staff retention seems to be related to being encouraged to attend induction and orientation programmes. Such positive experiences are often reiterated in the literature to result in academic staff retention, a view echoed by Armstrong (2016); Selesho & Naile (2014). However, Saurombe et al. (2017) (Section 3.6.1) note that it is not surprising for academic staff to have a sense of belonging in an institution, particularly if the recruitment process takes into account the right skills and experience in relation to specific positions. It is probably for this reason that Alonso (2015) (Section 3.6.1.2) stipulates for universities to always adopt meaningful recruitment and retention processes to appoint the right academics to the right positions. Doing so does not only generates a sense of belonging among academics, but it also may result in quality teaching and learning provisions which in turn will enhance students' success rates. Apart from this, the outcome of this study reports that the sense of belonging described by the participants is also a function of the university's incentives, which include, for example, flexible working hours, work from home, sabbatical and research leave.

The discussion thus far suggests that academic staff retention is a major concern in ODeL institutions and in higher education in general, given that academics are the front-line staff for the provision of quality education. Thus, in the participants' views, universities are required to recruit skilled and competent academics to achieve their primary goal, which is the provision of quality education (Lussier & Hendon, 2017). The question now arises, is recruitment of skilled and competent academics a panacea for academic staff retention? It is certainly a necessary but not a sufficient condition for academic staff retention given that it is influenced multiple of factors such as training and development (Lussier & Hendon, 2017) (Section 3.6.1.2). Adequate training and development of academic staff are often mentioned in the literature to contribute to knowledge and skill acquisition by academics, but also to prevent them from leaving their respective institutions (Noe et al., 2018) (Section 3.6.1.3). Thus, access to training and development, in the participants' views, needs to be available to all academics taking into account their individual educational needs. Such an assertion is a call for fairness and equity in the context of access to training and development activities at institutions. Adhering to this call often result in academic empowerment in the areas of skills and knowledge acquisition (Bajwa et al., 2014) (Section 3.6.1.3), which in turn may result in the attainment of the goals and objectives

of the institutions. Acknowledging this, ODeL institutions would require developing clear strategies for the prevention of academic staff attrition.

Participants of this study indicated several strategies in their discussions during the individual interviews and focus group discussions. They reiterated that adequate nurturing of the talents of academics, particularly novice academics, can ultimately lead to the retention of the same. This is a function of the view that novice and talented academics are often attracted to more lucrative incentives in the private sectors (Molotsi & Moloji, 2015) (Section 3.6.1.5). As a result, participants called for the employment and utilisation of experienced academics to assume a mentoring role for the novice academics in the areas of teaching, learning and research. The rationale here is to promote retention and the professional growth of this category of academics (Mapolisa, 2015; Theron et al., 2014) (Section 3.6.1.2). Therefore, talent management is considered a key strategy for the retention of academics irrespective of the length of experience (Khandelwal & Shekhawat, 2018) (Section 3.6.1.5). However, academics may sometimes leave their institutions because of limited or lack of incentives and opportunities for growth (Al-Qarshoubi, 2020) (Section 3.6.1 & 3.6.1.2). In relation to incentives, participants were of the view that higher education institutions can attract, retain and motivate academics using competitive remuneration packages, a view echoed by Nikolaou & Oostrom (2015) (Section 3.6.1.7).

### **7.3 ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION: PROMOTING AND HINDERING FACTORS**

The outcome of this study revealed that academic staff retention can be influenced by two sets of independent but related factors entitled promoting and hindering factors. The promoting factors, for example; personal development, recognition, accomplishment and promotions are those that may influence academic staff to remain in an institution. On the other hand, the hindering factors, for example; negative emotions, low morale, academic jealousy, high staff turnover, work overload and organisational culture (Table 6.1) are those that may motivate academics to leave an institution, sometimes for better opportunities. Such a classification of influential factors for academic retention is consistent with the Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (1959) (Section 1.5) of factors that may influence employees at the workplace. The classification of the influential factors of this study is also consistent with the HR Risk

Management Conceptual Framework developed using the outcome of this study, the extant literature and the researcher's practical experience as an HR specialist. Given this, it is therefore imperative that both theories are discussed here in line the outcomes of this study and the extant literature.

According to the Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (1959) (Section 1.5), employees are influenced by two factors: job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction, which are claimed to act independently of each other. The job satisfaction factors (e.g. achievement, recognition, work advancement and personal growth) are akin to what participants of this study and its HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework refer to as promoting factors (Figure 6.1). In contrast, the job dissatisfaction factors (e.g. working conditions, basic salary, supervisor quality and policies and procedures) are also akin to what participants of this study and its HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework refer to as hindering factors (Figure 6.1). This set of factors, promoting and hindering, each consists of intrinsic and extrinsic sub factors that may motivate an individual to either stay or leave an institution. In Herzberg's (1959) (Section 1.5) view, employees are always motivated by intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors. This indicates that academics' intentions to carry out a task or remain in an institution are internally motivated. This is a function of the view that it is the intrinsic factors that make the academic staff members feel satisfied with their work (Herzberg, 1959) (Section 1.5). These assertions enable the researcher of this study to raise the following question: are the academic staff not influenced by the extrinsic factors or they are influenced but the degree of influence is minimal?

According to the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework, each of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors has a force that may lead an academic staff to leave or remain in an ODeL institution (Section 6.2.3). This view is consistent with the researcher's practical experience of HR practice. The force that may enable an academic staff member to remain in an academic institution is what is referred to in the 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework - Academic Staff Remaining' (Figure 6.2) as the 'promoting force', and that which may enable an academic staff to leave an academic institution is referred to in the 'HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework - Academic Staff Leaving' (Figure 6.2) as the 'hindering force'. This suggests that an academic staff can only leave an institution if the magnitude of the hindering forces is greater than the magnitude of the promoting forces. A study by Blacker and McConnell

(2015) (Section 3.4) depicts this. Its outcome revealed that frustrations experienced by academic staff, a hindering force, made them to leave the institution they were employed by.

With regard to the promoting force, academic staff can remain in an institution if the magnitude of the promoting forces are greater than the magnitude of the hindering forces. This has implications for HR practice in the contexts for example, in the areas of recruitment and selection, training and development. Given this, HR practitioners are required by their academic institutions to adopt strategies for enhancing the magnitude of the promoting forces. The rationale here is to retain academic staff in their respective institutions. Examples of these include a comprehensive orientation and induction programme, and a training and development programme that reflects the learning needs of academic staff. It is, however, critical to note that the factors themselves do not have an influence on the judgement of academics to remain or leave an academic institution, but it is the degree of importance or value the academic staff have for that factor that influences their decision. For instance, a female employee with a core value for the education of her child would relocate to an area with schools that she thinks would meet the educational needs of the child.

#### **7.4 PROMOTING AND HINDERING FACTORS: RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT**

There is a range of factors that may influence the assessment of risk and its management. These factors are categorised as promoting and hindering factors, which are discussed in the ensuing sections.

##### **7.4.1 HR risk assessment of promoting and hindering factors**

The literature is consistent with the view that HR assessment of academic staff retention is a continuous and dynamic process that involves the assessment of factors that may influence academics to leave or stay in institutions of higher learning (Aven, 2016) (Section 3.5). Simply, HR risk assessment, like other forms of risk assessment, is not a once off process, but a reiterative activity for the identification of the severity of the risk and its associated risk factors. The participants of this study also believed in the dynamism of risk assessment given the fluidity of the risks of academic retention

and attrition. They, therefore, call for the risk assessment of risk factors associated with academic retention and attrition in ODeL institutions to be an ongoing process, a view echoed by Bailey et al. (2018) (Section 3.5.3).

The risks of academic staff retention and attrition, in the participants' view, are influenced by two independent but interrelated risk factors: promoting and hindering. Thus, the assessment of the risks of academic staff retention and its converse, academic staff attrition, focuses on the assessment of their respective risk factors. Given that risk assessment is an ongoing process, the researcher of this study assumed that risk is not a dichotomous variable that is either present or absent, but variable that exists on a continuum of severity. This view is consistent with that of the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (2015) (Section 3.5.4), which states that risk is a continuous variable that exists on a continuum of severity (low, moderate and high) for any target behaviour. Acknowledging this, the assessment of the promoting and hindering risk factors of academic staff retention is required not only to be consistent, transparent and continuous, but it is also required to adopt a multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach. Most participants agreed that a team approach and collateral information were required to assess the risk of academic staff retention. The assessment team, participants stressed, should include HR professionals, support staff, managers and the academics. Doing so would result in a comprehensive risk assessment information collection and identification of factors that may be suggestive of the level of risk of an academic leaving or staying in an institution. In other words, the information collated from different stakeholders would be required to be carefully analysed to inform the expression of risk, which could be low, moderate or high. In the researcher's view, the primary reason for collecting comprehensive information from different stakeholders is to produce reliable risk assessment outcomes and prevent or at least minimise the risk of false positive and false negative outcomes. It is for this reason that Bo (2014) (Section 3.5) claimed that a team approach will result in a positive outcome that may be beneficial to the institution (Bo, 2014). However, it must be stated that a team approach to risk assessment may on occasion result in false positive or false negative predictions.

A key risk assessment principle that was frequently talked about by the participants is uncertainty. The participants were of the view that the austerity measures at an ODeL institution evoked feelings of anxiety and uncertainty among the academics, resulting



in poor decision-making and inability to plan for their future. Hopkin (2018) (Section 3.3), however, claimed that the generation of uncertainty is inevitable in academic institutions, particularly those in the African continent that are opting for new modes of pedagogy, such as open distance education. Thus, risk assessment of academic staff retention, in addition to other factors, could focus on the identification of feelings of uncertainty and its associated psychopathology (e.g. anxiety, depression and psychotic disorder) academics may experience (Akomolafe & Omotosho, 2020; Hopkin, 2018) (Section 3.3.1). But it must be pointed out that risk assessment of any kind is a subjective activity that allows the assessors to draw on their prior experiences in interpretation and expression of risk. Therefore, the possibility of making erroneous expressions of risk exists (Aven, 2013) (Section 3.2). It is for this reason that proponents for the achievement of reliable risk assessment outcomes call for the use of actuarial methods of assessing risk in addition to the use of subjectivity. To the researcher's knowledge, there are no tools available in the continent of Africa for the assessment of risk of academic staff retention that are comprehensive and inclusive of mental health, drug and alcohol use, and collateral information. The development of such a tool would have practical utility in academic institutions in their efforts to assess the risk academic staff retention and how it can be managed.

#### **7.4.2 HR risk management**

HR risk management is about the identification and evaluation of possible areas of risk that may negatively affect organisations like ODeL institutions (Haime, 2016) (Section 3.6). This indicates that the management of HR risk of an institution commences at the risk assessment stage. Thus, any failure to conduct a correct and comprehensive risk assessment could result in poor risk management. The question now arises, what is poor risk management? This relates to that which may fail to mitigate the risk factors that could be contributing to the incidence of a specific risk such as academic staff attrition (Becker & Smidt, 2016) (Section 3.1). It is for this reason that Joseph (2014) and Mitrofanova et al. (2017) (Section 3.1) call for organisations such as ODeL institutions to prioritise HR risk management. To date, most universities have started to give HR risk management the attention it deserves. The rationale here is to ensure timely and accurate identification of HR risks and appropriate strategies for the management of the same. Doing so, could prevent adverse consequences such as litigations against institutions.

This study identified a range of HR risk management strategies, and examples of these include policies and procedures, promotions of employee wellness, orientation and induction programmes, training and development, and mentorship and coaching. Concerning policies and procedures, they act as guiding principles on the day-to-day operations and management of HR risk. So, if they are fairly implemented, they would enable academics to stay in their respective ODeL institutions. Thus, the participants of this study noted that policies and procedures are necessary but not sufficient conditions for ensuring equality and fairness amongst academic staff members. They, therefore, added for ODeL institutions to offer training to academics on the implementation of policies and procedures to ensure consistency in their usage.

The promotion of the mental well-being of academics was talked about repeatedly by the participants as a strategy for the promotion of academic staff retention. Failure to deal with this could result in increased absenteeism, accidents, mistakes and attrition (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017) (Section 3.6.1.8). One way for promoting the well-being of academics is to balance their work and personal life, which is often referred to as work-life balance. This involves ensuring that the academic's work roles do not interfere with their family responsibilities. When work responsibilities interfere with family responsibilities, stress and anxiety are experienced that may subsequently culminate to other forms of psychopathology, for example, depression and psychotic disorder (Akomolafe & Omotosho, 2020; Hopkin, 2018) (Section 3.3.1). Such experience could result in academic staff attrition. Arguably, experience of mental health problems is a hindering factor, a view consistent with the HR Risk Management Conceptual Framework and Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (1959). Given this, universities need to adopt strategies that promote work-life balance. Examples of these may include fair workload allocation, working from home, flexible working hours and management support (Ahmed et al., 2018) (Section 3.6.1.8).

One source of stress for academics that has been frequently mentioned in the literature is lack or limited knowledge and skills (Enakrire, 2019) (Section 3.6.1.6). Thus, exposure to this, particularly over a prolonged period, could lead to conflict in the work-family interphase that in turn could result in an increase in attrition. Academic institutions are therefore required to prevent attrition or at least reduce its rate through the implementation of a training and development programme that are relevant to the

needs of academic staff. The rationale here is to enable the academics to acquire knowledge and skills needed to execute their roles and responsibilities (Huang & Su, 2016) (Section 3.5). It is probably for this reason that the participants of this study noted that universities must offer on-going training and development opportunities for academic staff members to equip them with the right skills, knowledge and abilities to accurately perform their duties, a view shared by Noe et al. (2018) (Section 3.6.1.3). Narratives of the inquiry indicate that training and development motivate academic staff members with high levels of commitment and performance towards their work. Simply, training and development increases the job satisfaction, productivity, knowledge and skills of academic staff, and thus minimise the rate of attrition (Bajwa et al., 2014) (Section 3.6.1.3).

In this study, another strategy that emerged to promote academic staff retention was mentorship and coaching programmes. Some of the participants mentioned that they had an opportunity to participate in the university's young academics programme which helped them to adequately understand and plan for their academic professional development and career progressions. Mentorship and coaching programmes do not only provide guidance to the less experienced and less knowledgeable academic staff member, but it also promotes consistency in teaching, learning and research practices by the senior academics (Van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2019) (Section 3.6.1.6). This made some of the senior academics to feel appreciated by sharing their knowledge and experience with the junior academic staff members of the institution. Based on this, mentorship and coaching programmes will help the institution to retain talented and skilled academic staff members. The next superordinate theme 5 of cultural influence, is discussed below.

## **7.5 CULTURAL INFLUENCE**

The cultures of the universities undoubtedly play a huge role in influencing the academic staff to stay or not to stay in their respective institutions of learning (Taylor et al., 2018) (Section 3.5.3). This is the case of the setting of this study, as participants reiterated on several occasions that it is the culture of unconditional acceptance, respect and empathy they were exposed to that made them to stay in the institution. This is in keeping with the views of Shefer et al. (2018) (Section 3.6.1.10) who noted that people are more likely to work together if they feel respected and accepted by

others. Being exposed to such a psychologically safe environment promotes academic staff retention. The question now arises, what is a psychologically safe environment?

In the participants' views, this is an environment where people are accepted and respected irrespective of their sexuality, economic and socio-cultural background. In such environments, apart from promoting retention, academic staff are more likely to grow and achieve their full potential. It is for this reason that the participants of this study advocate for ODeL institutions to embrace an organisational culture that fosters acceptance, respect and empathy for all. The nurturing of such a culture is consistent with the promoting factors of the conceptual model of this study, entitled HR risk management conceptual framework. Simply, the culture of acceptance, respect and empathy serves as an intrinsic energy as well as an extrinsic energy that enables academics to stay in an institution. According to the Herzberg Two Factor Theory (1959), the culture of acceptance, respect and empathy is a motivating factor that improves the academics' satisfaction with their work environment, which in turn promotes retention. However, creating the culture of acceptance, respect and empathy for all is an equipoise act that requires delicate handling. Hence, according to the participants, the HR department, management team, including both academics and support staff need to work in partnership in the creation and promotion of such a culture. It must however be noted that the culture of acceptance, respect and empathy for all is not a cure for preventing academic attrition. Thus, ODeL institutions would be required to nurture such a culture and other approaches (such as training and mentorship) in their quest to promote academic staff retention.

## **7.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter provided discussions of the findings of the study using the extant literature. The chapter discussed participants' explanations of academic staff retention, followed by the academic staff retention: promoting and hindering factors, human risk assessment and management, as well as cultural influences. The following chapter eight, focuses on the conclusion and recommendation of the study.

## **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION**

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter presented and discussed the study's findings in respect of academic staff's perceptions on HR risk factors, as well as best practices for recruitment, retention and HR risk mitigation. It is based on these two categories of findings that the HR risk management conceptual framework was developed for academic staff retention. The current chapter, on the other hand, provides conclusive thoughts concerning the most critical aspects of the entire research processes. Accordingly, and based on the findings, the chapter synoptically focuses on the extent to which the study's aim and objectives were achieved; the potential contributions of the study to the existing body of knowledge within HR risk management and academic staff retention; as well as implications of the study for future research on HR risk management and academic staff retention. The chapter then concludes with a review of possible limitations and recommendations for HR practise, training and policy development.

### **8.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY ACCORDING TO THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The main purpose of this study is to explore and develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that may influence academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. Necessarily, such exploration culminated in the development of an HR risk management conceptual framework for staff retention in the self-same ODeL institution. The following objectives were articulated for purposes of actualising the above-cited study aim:

*Objective 1:* To identify, explore and describe academic staff's perceptions of HR risk factors that may influence the retention of academic staff of an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

*Objective 2:* To explore academic staff's perceptions of the practices of academic staff retention and HR risk management in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

*Objective 3:* To develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.

### **8.2.1 Achievement of objectives**

By their very definition, the study objectives particularise the specificity, measurability, attainability and time-bound effect of activities that were undertaken to actualise the purpose and reasons for conducting the investigation (Taylor et al., 2016). In this regard, the research objectives and attendant questions are the primary means by which the study ensured its adherence to its original purpose without any deviation (Walliman, 2015). Therefore, the extent to which the study objectives were achieved, is necessarily a reflection of the total of the extent to which the self-same study's research processes and ultimate findings could be trusted as being relevant and practical in actual real-life situations, while also making epistemological contributions to the particular field of knowledge being investigated (Yin, 2015). In the context of this study, Table 5.1 (Section 5.2) is the foundational reference point insofar as locating the extent to which the study's objectives were achieved.

#### **8.2.1.1 Achievement of objective 1**

The first objective of the study is:

- *To identify, explore and describe academic staff's perceptions of HR risk factors that may influence the retention of academic staff of an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.*

This objective has been achieved in this study and discussed in the findings' chapter under the superordinate theme of HR Risk Management (see Table 5.1, Section 5.2). Further discussion of this using the extant literature is included in the discussion Chapter.

### **8.2.1.2      *Achievement of objective 2***

The second objective of the study is:

- *To explore academic staff's perceptions of the practices of academic staff retention and HR risk management in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.*

This objective has been achieved and discussed in the findings' chapter under the superordinate theme of HR Risk Management (see Table 5.1, Section 5.2). Further discussion of this using the extant literature is included in the discussion chapter.

### **8.2.1.3      *Achievement of objective 3***

The third objective of the study is:

- *To develop an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa.*

This objective has been achieved and discussed in the conceptual framework development chapter. Further discussion of this using the extant literature is included in the discussion chapter.

## **8.3      IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY AND ITS UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RESEARCH FIELD**

The quality of any research study ought to be judged by its contribution and relevance to the body of knowledge in the particular disciplinary field, in this case, the practice of HR risk management and academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa (Baptista et al., 2015). From the ensuing discussions throughout this study, academic staff attrition is noted in the literature as a significant and perennial problem affecting higher education institutions, including ODeLs. Academic staff attrition has a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Despite the alarming rates of academic staff members' attrition, very little research has been conducted on HR risk management as an influential factor of academic staff

retention in South Africa (Manogharan et al., 2018). It is for this reason that the study was conducted to explore and develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence academic staff retention in an ODeL institution.

Thus, this study is intended to assist and guide HR practitioners and management in research organisations to better understand the HR risk phenomenon and its impact on academic staff retention. In this study, the understanding of academic staff retention and factors that influence it in an ODeL setting is of practical utility to HR professionals, academics and management in the prevention of attrition and enhancement of staff retention. In addition to its practical contributions, the study's value is also to be determined by its theoretical, methodological and practical contributions which will be discussed in more detail below.

### **8.3.1 Theoretical contributions**

This study explored and developed a better understanding of the phenomenon of HR risk management and factors that may influence academic staff retention. A conceptual framework was developed in order to enhance academic staff retention in an ODeL institution in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The theory presented a conceptual framework that could serve as a useful guide to similar ODeL institutions in Africa (see Chapter 6). The framework is the combined outcome of the analysed literature-based data and information, the present study's findings, the researcher's own practical experiences and the opinions of experts in the field of HR risk management and academic staff retention. The framework will be used as a strategy to ensure that academic staff members are retained at their respective universities with its advocacy for the training and development of HR professionals and management with clear guidance on the enhanced academic staff retention in ODeL settings.

### **8.3.2 Methodological contributions**

This study adopted a multi-method data collection approach that distinctively set this study apart from many previously published studies indicated in Chapter 4. As mentioned previously, HR risk management and academic staff retention research was generally limited to using single data collection methods (Kiragu et al., 2019;



Ng'ethe et al., 2012). In the present study, the researcher used individual interviews, followed by focus group discussions to ensure maximum clarification and in-depth discussion of issues that were not fully addressed in the individual interviews (Smith & Eatough, 2019). The multi-method approach enabled the researcher's comparison of any inherent advantages and disadvantages of each approach, and triangulation of the data sets of the individual interviews and focus group discussions.

Notwithstanding that the researcher was relatively new to the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodological approach, the researcher conducted an extensive reading of books and articles on IPA in order to enhance her knowledge and understanding on the phenomenon of IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Additionally, the researcher attended workshops organised by the College of Human Sciences at an ODeL institution before embarking on her research. Consequently, the study adopted a phenomenological research design approach, focusing specifically on IPA as both a methodology and analytic tool for the findings (Smith, 2019). Such an approach enabled the researcher to assume both an insider and an outsider position in relation to HR risks and academic staff retention (Noon, 2018). To date, no published study has used IPA to analyse HR risk management and academic staff retention, using individual interviews and focus group discussions' approaches. This helped the researcher to strengthen the credibility and rigour of the study, as well as the gathering of richer information based predominantly on the participants' lived experiences.

In addition, the researcher conducted a pilot interview schedule and one focus group discussion to enhance the study's feasibility and efficacy (Polit & Beck, 2013). The interview schedule was pre-tested on four academic staff members and one focus group discussion in terms of the study's inclusion criteria and volunteered participation. A semi-structured individual interview format was chosen for testing the schedule as it allowed the participants to offer their experiences (Smith, 2016).

The IPA methodological mode encourages researchers to use their preconceptions in collecting and interpreting data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The researcher agrees with such practice but warns that they may distort the meanings and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation if used inappropriately (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Thus, preconceptions must be used selectively in order to reduce

such distraction to take place. The study, therefore, employed “internal logic” of HR risk management and academic staff retention, which refers to the timely use of the evaluation of prior experiences in enhancing interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Alfaro-LeFevre, 1995, p. 74). To the extent that both the personal and social experiences of the participants constituted a significant and core aspect of the empirical data collection process, the researcher is confident that the current study is aligned with the following statement in IPA, that “it explores how the participants make sense in their social and personal world of experiences and events occurred” (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 53).

It is anticipated that master’s and doctoral students, as well as research organisations, will benefit from the IPA methodological approach in the investigation of HR risk management and academic staff retention in higher education institutions.

### **8.3.3 Practical contributions**

Academic staff recruitment and retention issues remain a huge global challenge (Bussin, 2014; Bussin & Thabethe, 2018; Makondo, 2015; Senevirathna, 2017; Shariffuddin et al., 2016). This is particularly the case in many African countries. Many African university leaders acknowledge the lack of enhancement in the financial base to sustain their academic institutions. The challenges include infrastructural demands, inadequate compensation, high student intake and staff shortages (Kiragu et al., 2019; Mushemeza, 2016; Ng’ethe et al., 2012; Yimer et al., 2017). It is cautioned that unless something urgent is done, universities will be unable to retain the academic staff members required in their respective countries by themselves (Kiragu et al., 2019; Ng’ethe et al., 2012; Smyth et al., 2017). Universities in Africa depend wholly on academic staff for their sustainability as they contribute to the socio-economic and technological development of their respective countries (Anzola-Pardo, 2020; Farr-Wharton et al., 2018; Ogunsanya & Govender, 2019). The researcher strongly believes that developing an HR risk management conceptual framework for academic staff retention in an ODeL institution is of great practical value, given the latter context.

This study has provided and developed a helpful conceptual framework to understand academic staff retention and HR risk management, which is a graphical representation of HR risk factors that may influence an academic staff member to either remain or

leave an ODeL institution. The conceptual framework must be used as a meaningful mechanism to guide HR professionals and management to improve, promote and manage HR risks and enhance the understanding of academic staff retention, including positive and negative factors that may have influence in ODeL institutions in the continent of Africa.

Once adopted and applied in an ODeL institution, the practical implications of the HR risk management conceptual framework developed by the researcher has the potential to improve on HR risk management strategies involving training and development, professional development, performance appraisals, promotions, talent management, mentorship and reward and recognition to attract and retain academic staff in order to alleviate attrition (Too et al., 2015). In this regard, practical implications are that academic staff member will be enabled more time to focus on their work for longer periods, with the potential to improve their personal and professional development over time. Additionally, succession planning is possible when staff is stable and retained for longer periods. When academics are retained for longer periods, they may produce more research outputs for an ODeL university, which in return will increase an ODeL institution's financial base and save money. Moreover, academic competitiveness will improve, and the production of graduates at undergraduate and postgraduate levels of high academic standards may be realised much easier than when staff do not stay at the ODeL university. HR professionals should not only focus and manage HR risk, but they should also build the strategic capability of the university in dealing with academic staff attrition and other risks.

For HR practitioners in academic settings, this study has positive implications for leadership, human capital and talent management, innovation, HR governance, training and development, performance and employee wellness. Concerns have been raised about limited knowledge on HR risk management and its effects on academic staff retention. HR professional and academic staff members ought to be trained and developed to adequately perform their work and help their universities in HR risk management. In this regard, the implementation of HR training and development programmes will enhance academic staff retention, and arguably, minimise academic staff attrition in ODeL institutions. The training of HR professionals and academic staff forms an important part of HR risk management in academic institutions, including those offering ODeL. According to Carpitella et al. (2018), providing academics with

the requisite of HR risk-related training will enable them to understand the rationale, expectations and procedures underpinning HR risk management.

#### **8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Some of the participants were unhappy with the HR practices that impacted negatively on academic staff retention, while others believed such practices had a positive influence in shaping the needs of the academic staff members to achieve the goals and objectives of the university. This study was done in one ODeL institution. It is recommended that the same study is conducted in other ODeL institutions as well as face-to-face universities. Further studies using larger samples of participants should be conducted to clarify these discordant views. A discussion relating to future research is discussed in the recommendations section, which also encapsulates practice, training, and policy development; all of which will help alleviate HR risks and academic staff attrition.

#### **8.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Several potential limitations have been identified in the study, as indicated below:

- The study used a criterion purposive sampling approach to identify and recruit participants. Although a reasonable number of academic staff members participated in the study, academic staff at the study sites may have been different from those at other ODeL institutions in the context of their experiences and perceptions regarding academic staff retention and HR risks.
- The findings of the study were based on retrospective accounts of experiences of staff retention and HR risks. Retrospective accounts are subject to memory bias. Participants were also potentially subjected to the social desirability effect, in terms of which participants may 'police' their responses in order to avoid negative judgments by researchers. Although the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the wider population of traditional (face-to-face) South African universities and ODeL institutions, they provide useful insights on understanding issues of academic staff retention and ways to improve it.
- During the individual interviews and focus group discussions, the participants' experiences and emotions were evoked by some of the researcher's questions.

In such instances, the researcher addressed the discomfort noted in some of the participants using some of the following approaches: termination of interview, referral for psychological support when indicated.

- Furthermore, the proposed HR risk management conceptual framework is not yet use in practice. Therefore, its efficacy is still academic and hypothetical.

Despite the abovementioned potential limitations, the findings of the study contributed immensely valuable knowledge in respect of HR-related issues affecting South African ODeL institutions. The researcher strongly recommends that there should always be HR risk management policies and procedures to address, manage, mitigate and leverage HR risk management in higher education institutions. HR professionals should be adequately trained to implement such policies and their concomitant policies.

## **8.6 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This section focuses on recommendations that emerged from the findings and research process. The recommendations pertain largely to practice, policy development and training.

### **8.6.1 Recommendations for practice**

The findings of this study suggest that HR risks and academic staff retention have an impact on the reputation of the university. The study found that HR risks and academic staff attrition are problems that may either weaken or destroy the university's business activities, goals and objectives. For these reasons, it is crucial for universities to develop adequate structures to avoid and manage these challenges. For universities to be successful in meeting their goals and objectives, they are required to actively seek ways to identify, prevent, avoid, mitigate and leverage HR risks (Reason, 2016). The university needs to learn from its mistakes and past experiences in order to avoid crisis and disastrous situation. This can be achieved through an HR risk management systems, policies and practices that focus only on HR risk mitigation (Anaraki-Ardakani & Ganjali, 2014). The university should be proactive in the recruitment and retention of academic staff members in order to achieve its goals and objectives.

This study further recommends the development and implementation of institutional HR risk management conceptual framework to be used as a meaningful mechanism to guide HR professionals and management to improve, promote and manage HR risks and enhance the understanding of academic staff retention, including positive and negative factors that may influence it in an ODeL institution. Examples of 'positive factors' include (recognition, job satisfaction, salary increase, benefits, recognition), and 'negative factors' include (low morale, loss of benefits, work overload, discrimination', 'HR risk factors', and 'HR risk management). These factors are useful for explaining HR risk management and factors that might influence academic staff retention.

Many university leaders, managers and departmental officials come from diverse academic disciplines, experience and dispositions, some have little, or no leadership skills. The study recommends that they be provided with continuous management capacity development programmes in order that they are abreast of current trends in people management, manage HR risks and enhance academic staff retention. Thus, these leaders will have a significant contribution to increase the culture of HR risk awareness and identify, advice and guide processes to manage HR risks and academic staff retention at an early stage. Good leaders ought to be fair, neutral, focused and be in a position to effectively control and manage HR risks and academic staff retention. Therefore, it is critical that managers should be able to address HR risks and academic staff retention.

### **8.6.2 Recommendations for training and development**

Since most South African universities are experiencing challenges to manage HR risks and to retain academic staff members, more emphasis should be put on the training of qualified HR professionals in the core and elective functions, processes and activities of their profession. Training and research impart to academic staff stocks of knowledge and experience that cannot be easily replaced with their departure. The starting point of training represents the quality of work that should be taken seriously by management. This will ensure fairness and accountability during implementation. Financial support for regular local and international conferences and workshop attendance should be increased for academic staff members in order for them to be

abreast of professional developments with their peers. This will also equip academic staff members with current trends and techniques in teaching, learning and research.

It is of vital importance that the components of staff development activities for trainees are well planned with timelines in order to complete a well-structured training programme. This will reduce anxiety and uncertainty during the training and induce a better understanding of the purpose and benefits of the training. Such initiatives will encourage and establish supportive relationships among academic staff members at the end of such training programmes. Gathering in one room engenders a sense of belonging, positive supportive relationship and socialisation among academic staff members.

It is further recommended that university staff development should be viewed as an integral component of academics' work. This will enable university management to integrate staff development policies as part of professional development activities throughout academics' careers. Such policies should encourage academics to support each other by sharing information, identifying common challenges and jointly celebrating their achievements in forums such as workshops and communities of practice groups.

Training and development policies and procedures are of paramount importance and should be updated and revised regularly to suit the recruitment and retention tools for academic staff members at the institution. As such, all professional development activities and experiences executed according to all the phases of the proposed framework should be arranged as such so that they promote communities of practice where professional experiences, successes and challenges can readily be shared among academics. This would shape the HR professionals and academics attitudes towards HR risks and academics staff retention.

### **8.6.3 Recommendations for policy development**

Both the literature review and findings highlighted the need for development and revision for policies and procedures that are simple and easily implemented by HR professionals, line managers and academic staff members. The responsibility to develop such policies lies mainly with the HR department. This will ensure that policies

and procedures are consistently and effectively implemented. Furthermore, the application and use of these policies and procedures should be flexible and pro-active.

Policy on financial incentives should be adopted and fairly awarded to supplement inadequate salaries. This means that a rewards-based system should be adopted, not based on punitive considerations. Therefore, remuneration equality issues should also be taken into consideration, in such a way that the university competitively adjusts salaries for academic staff in harmony with those of the private sector. This will help the university to compete with the private labour market and increase opportunities for the retention of its academic staff members. In this environment, distractions, for example; picketing and demonstrations related to remunerations would also be avoided or even reduced.

Consistent with democratic values and transformation practices, there should be transparent, consistent and fair promotion policies that are well communicated to all academic staff members without any hindrance of bureaucratic procedures and favouritism. The promotion criteria should be clearly outlined for both internal and external appointments. The policy should be revised and updated regularly, and inclusive of equitable and fair succession plans to avoid unnecessary external recruitment. Such a policy trajectory ensures that the most suitable academic staff members are placed in the proper positions in accordance with a sustainable culture of equity, fairness and transparency.

## **8.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study proposes the following recommendations for future research:

- Further studies using larger samples of participants should be conducted to clarify the discordant views;
- Since this study was conducted in one ODeL institution, it is recommended that the same study is conducted in other ODeL institutions as well as face-to-face universities;
- Since the subject area of this study is still poorly explored, further exploratory research is needed followed by mixed-methods research in order to develop a better understanding of HR risk management in other South African higher



education institutions. Adopting a mixed-methods research with a larger sample would help to enrich the knowledge base of HR risk management;

- A comparative study exploring HR professionals' perceptions, attitudes, behaviour and performance with regards to HR risk would also help to enhance an understanding in this field;
- Further research is needed to explore specific areas of this study. For example, identifying the problems and challenges of managing HR risk, risk identification, risk assessment, risk controls, risk management processes and systems and compilation of risk registers. These future studies would help HR professionals to effectively manage, avoid, mitigate and leverage HR risks;
- It is also recommended that future studies focus on the evaluation of academic staff members' readiness for e-learning as a teaching tool must be explored in ODeL since it is becoming popular in many higher education institutions across the globe, particularly in developing countries;
- The HR practices and influences on academics' intentions to stay should also be investigated; and
- The suggested conceptual framework is yet untested. Although much of the framework's usefulness will be determined through its use by the HR professionals to motivate employees to stay in the organisation. There is a need for future researchers to test its predictive validity, possibly using the quantitative methodology.

## **8.8 REFLEXIVITY**

The researcher concludes this study with particular focus on reflexivity, which in qualitative research, relates to the extent of self-awareness and self-monitoring necessitated by the researcher's active involvement in the research process (Lambert et al., 2010). Reflexivity is used as a strategy to examine and attenuate the extent of possible researcher subjectivity, assumptions, preconceptions and decision at every step of the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017, p. 427). For the specific purpose of this study, the aspect of reflexivity is critically important since it premises on the researcher's background and position, both of which had the potential to affect the researcher's choice of investigation and personal experiences accumulated during the research journey (Dowling, 2007).

The researcher's first awareness of the quantitative and qualitative research concepts was during the third-year level of her studies for a Bachelor's degree majoring in Public Administration and Industrial and Organisational Psychology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Parahoo, 2014). At the Honours level, the researcher found it difficult to differentiate between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Her interest in research methodology increased when she was studying for the master's degree at the University of South Africa's School for Business Leadership through a qualitative mini dissertation. After completion and obtaining the qualification, she developed more interest in qualitative research through the protracted reading of research methodology books by authors such as Creswell and Creswell (2017), Flick (2018); Silverman (2016). Additionally, she attended workshops on qualitative research methodology, academic writing, and data analysis as part of her doctoral training.

After a careful examination of the methodological fit with the aims and objectives of this study, the researcher opted for a qualitative methodology for a number of reasons. Accordingly, the researcher learnt specific issues related to qualitative research design and its related approaches, such as ethnographically oriented or naturalistic/ecological designs focusing on people's (participants/respondents) individual experiences and the uniqueness of individual responses to social situations (Salkind, 2017). Similarly, HR departments subscribed to the notion that employees have individual needs, and each academic employee is required to have an individualised HR risk management plan (Meyer & Abbott, 2017). Acknowledging this, qualitative methodology resonated with the focus of this study. The researcher's concern to understand academic staff retention from the perspectives of individuals re-confirms the affinity between HR and the underlying tenet of qualitative research, namely, an exploration of people's individual experiences and beliefs (Babbie, 2014). On balancing the viewpoints presented above, it is the researcher's unequivocal conclusion that a quantitative methodology of enquiry was inappropriate for the current research focus of exploring academic staff retention.

Notwithstanding that the researcher began her research journey relatively as a novice with little knowledge and experience of qualitative research methodology, concerted reading and studying of relevant literature enhanced and the researcher's understanding of pertinent issues related to qualitative research methodology. In this regard, the researcher's skills have been drastically developed in exploring individual

interviews and focus groups discussions with a better and informed understanding and appreciations of the inherent strengths and weaknesses of each interview mode.

For purposes of the current doctoral-level study, the researcher's accumulated research methodology knowledge and self-study was complemented by both her academic qualification (Bachelor's, Honours and Master's degrees) and professional experience of working with several colleges and departments at an ODeL institution as an HR Professional and Advisor. Her main role was to plan, coordinate and administer the quality management of the recruitment, selection, placements, transfers, redeployments, secondments and acting appointments for academic staff members. Recruitment and retention of academic staff members have always been a major challenge in academic departments. The high attrition rate was a huge challenge.

The researcher pursued a Doctoral of Commerce in Business Management, specialising in HR, to critically identify, explore and describe academic staff's perceptions of HR risk factors that may influence the retention of academic staff of an ODeL institution. HR best practices such as recruitment, retention, mitigation and leverage of HR risks were also explored. It was the researcher's primary concern to explore and understand the reasons for so many academics staff members resigning from this higher education institution. The intention of the study was not to question whether the HR best practices approach of the ODeL was suitable to manage academic staff retention and HR risks. Rather, the intention was to establish the reasons for less effective management of academic staff retention and HR risks in order to help the university managers and HR practitioners with alternative ways of resolving these challenges.

The researcher's personal and professional experiences at an ODeL institution have placed her at an advantage to appreciate the knowledge that she gained, with specific reference to insight into the functioning of academic institutions. Furthermore, her experience of working within an ODeL as an HR Professional and Advisor provided her with useful first-hand knowledge and experience about academic departments. Despite these advantages, based on the researcher's experience, she was most aware of the challenges and pitfalls related to the study area.

During the study's interviews, the researcher listened to the participants' stories, which generated both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. The researcher's experience as an HR professional helped her in encouraging some of the participants to discuss sensitive issues without being depressed. The researcher empathised with some of their stories as they directly related to some of her own experiences. Some of the participants were contemplating to leave the institution. It is specifically against such a backdrop that the researcher personally and unequivocally encountered and realised the salience of the issue of reflexivity. By its nature, the study has the outlook of practice research, in terms of which the researcher is also an active practitioner in the field of study being investigated, which in this case, is HR risk management. Hence, the prominence of reflexivity to mediate any possible elements of subjectivity and preconceptions during the empirical engagements with participants (Taylor et al., 2016).

In further pursuance of objectivity and not being overly involved and familiar with the empirical research proceedings, besides using audio recordings, a field notebook was used (in addition to the audio recorder) to document and diarise aspects such as events, processes, challenges and achievements; as well as participants' non-verbal communication and interaction during the focus group discussions (Gunawan, 2015; Muswazi & Nhamo, 2013). These fieldnotes, helped the researcher to remove herself from personal feelings, attitudes, perceptions regarding the study setting (Walliman, 2015). With each interview, the researcher managed to notice the level of repetition on the content of each interview process and the explanation she provided to the participants. The researcher was not sure of how the participants will respond to the questions, particularly for her newly adopted role of a researcher. Some of the participants found it difficult to adapt and adjust to her role as a researcher. To the researcher's surprise, both concerns did not affect the process of the study.

The researcher's interview skills eventually developed. Towards the end of each interview, she found herself not feeling exhausted by the process and enjoyed interacting with the participants (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). This structure also allowed the researcher to write notes and review every interview that was conducted with the participants. Although the dual role of taking fieldnotes from the participants' responses and interviewing them at the same time, presented some challenges, particularly with time management and ensuring that this process does not limit her

accuracy in taking fieldnotes. Had the researcher relied mainly on her memory, she would not have remembered the participants' responses. This helped the researcher to contextualise all the individual interviews and focus group discussions at the analysis stage. In contrast, some of the participant's feedback made her feel energised with prospects of wanting to do more research. The re-enactment of the ambience and course of the interviews is relevant here, in that it elevates the centrality of self-monitoring by the researcher throughout the empirical data collection stages.

Since the researcher was familiar with the participants, complete adherence to ethical principles were ensured and applied (e.g. confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, autonomy and beneficence). Such adherence further enabled the researcher to uphold the highest standard of professionalism possible by also detaching herself emotionally from the proceedings. As an HR specialist, working with confidential issues has always been part of the researcher's day to day functions. In this regard, trustworthiness (Section 4.9) was emphasised because the researcher could not risk the repercussions of divulging participants' personal information to other colleagues. Because of this experience, this research process shaped the researcher's thinking capacity in allocating a degree of credibility and dependability of the entire research process.

The researcher has grown and improved tremendously since the undergraduate years. The journey was both challenging and enriching. The current study has enabled her to gain better insight into academic staff retention and HR risk management. During the study, the researcher found it challenging to optimise her functioning as a full-time student. It was difficult to find a balance as a student, mother, wife, daughter, aunt, partner, church coordinator and a friend. Invariably, these conflicting roles and responsibilities provided an opportunity for some serious life lessons, by means of which the researcher efficiently harmonised her studies with the inevitable daily demands associated with work and family.

## 8.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study explored the perspectives of academic staff of an ODeL institution in relation to academic staff retentions and developed an HR risk management conceptual framework. The study adopted a qualitative methodology and utilised interpretative phenomenological analysis as a research design and as a tool of analysis. The themes that emerged following the analysis of the individual interviews and focus group discussions data were similar. Hence, the findings of these two data sets are presented under similar thematic categories in the findings' chapter. Five superordinate themes emerged from the data analysis: 1) defining academic staff retention, 2) determinants of academic staff retention, 3) HR risk assessment, 4) HR risk management, and 5) cultural influence.

In addition to the conceptual framework developed, the findings of this study, revealed two critical factors that may influence academic staff retention, which are echoed in the Herzberg Two Factor Theory. They are described here as promoting and hindering factors which are discussed under the superordinate theme of determinants of academic staff retention. Even though this study was conducted in one ODeL institution, which is acknowledged here as a limitation, its outcome has practical utility for the ODeL institution where this study was conducted.

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## **APPENDIX A: ETHICAL APPROVAL CERTIFICATES**

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH, ETHICS AND  
INNOVATION COMMITTEE

6 July 2016

Ref #: 2016 HRM\_004  
Name of applicant: Ms TK Molotsi  
Student #: 3485-930-6

Dear Ms Molotsi

**Decision: Ethics Approval**

**Name:** Ms Tebogo Molotsi. [molotk@unisa.ac.za, 012 429 4704/083 458 2134]

**Proposal:** Developing a human resource risk management framework for academic staff retention in an open distance learning university in South Africa

**Qualification:** D.Com Business Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance to the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics Innovation Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted for the duration of the project.

**Full approval:** The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee on 15 June 2016 and full approval of the projects is granted.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.
- 3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

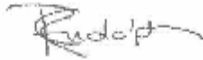




**Note:**

*The reference number (top right corner of this communiqué) should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication (e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters) with the intended research participants, as well as with the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee.*

Kind regards,



---

Mrs EC Rudolph  
DREC Deputy Chair  
Department of Human Resource Management  
[rudolc@unisa.ac.za](mailto:rudolc@unisa.ac.za)



---

Prof MT Mogale  
Executive Dean  
College of Economic and Management  
Sciences



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Pretor Street, Muldersburg, Ridge, City of Tshwane  
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**RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE SENATE RESEARCH,  
INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES AND COMMERCIALISATION  
COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)**

8 September 2016

Dear Ms. Tebogo Molotsi,

**Decision: Research Permission  
Approval from 1 February 2017  
until 30 June 2017.**

Ref #: 2016\_RPSC\_051  
Ms. Tebogo Molotsi  
Student #: N/A  
Staff #: 1126164

**Principal Investigator:**

**Ms. Tebogo Molotsi**  
Department of Human Resources Management  
School of Management Sciences  
College of Economic and Management Sciences  
UNISA  
[moloik@unisa.ac.za](mailto:moloik@unisa.ac.za), (012) 429-4704/ 083 458 2134

Supervisor: Prof. A. Bezuidenhout  
[bezuia@unisa.ac.za](mailto:bezuia@unisa.ac.za), (012) 429-3941/ 084 811 1721

Prof. Y. Joubert  
[joubeyt@unisa.ac.za](mailto:joubeyt@unisa.ac.za), (012) 429-3399/ 082 721 9862

**A study titled: Developing a Human Resource Risk Management Framework for  
Academic Staff Retention in an Open Distance Learning University in South Africa**

Your application regarding permission to conduct research involving UNISA employees in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 25 August 2016.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may:



1. Request the Human Resource Department to provide your supervisors with a list of Unisa permanent academic employees at Muckleneuk and Florida campuses with at least three years' service. Please note that the list cannot be made available to you in your capacity as a student.
2. You may draw a sample from the list in collaboration with your supervisors and invite the sampled employees via emails to voluntarily participate in focus group and individual interviews.
3. Please be aware that Unisa is an Open Distance and Electronic Learning (ODEL) institution and not an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution as referred to in the application documents. This change should be incorporated in your research manuscript.

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC@unisa.ac.za) within 12 months of completion of the study.

The personal information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties.

*Note:*

*The reference number 2016\_RPSC\_051 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.*

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards,



pp. Dr R. Visagie – Deputy Chairperson: RPSC

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**Prof L Labuschagne – Chairperson: RPSC**

Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-6368



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## APPENDIX B: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE



### **Re: A HUMAN RESOURCE RISK MANAGEMENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION IN AN OPEN DISTANCE ELECTRONIC LEARNING UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

I am a registered DCom (Business Management) student at the University of South Africa, Department of Human Resource Management. I am currently doing a research study on the above topic by exploring and developing an understanding of the factors that may influence academic staff retention and also aims to develop a human resource risk management framework for the retention of academic staff in an open distance e-learning university in South Africa.

Part of the study involves interviewing academic staff with at least three years' experience working at the University of South Africa, an open distance e-learning university. **You fulfil the three years' experience criterion.** I am therefore inviting you to participate in the study. Any information that you will provide will be anonymised and treated with the strictest confidence. The information that you will provide will not be disclosed to any unauthorised person and will be destroyed at the end of the study.

If you do agree to partake, please contact me as I need to provide you with more information about the study. It is important to note that you can withdraw at any time from the study and this will have no effect on you.

I am thanking you in advance and looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

*TK Molotsi*

Ms Tebogo Molotsi



## APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET



### A HUMAN RESOURCE RISK MANAGEMENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION IN AN OPEN DISTANCE ELECTRONIC LEARNING UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Dear prospective participant

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

#### The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is twofold:

- The proposed study intends to explore and develop an understanding of the factors that may influence academic staff retention in an open distance learning university in the Gauteng province, South Africa.
- The proposed study also intends to develop a human resource risk management framework for the retention of academic staff in a university for open distance learning in the Gauteng province, South Africa.

#### Why have you been invited to participate in this study?

You have been selected to take part in the study because of the following reasons:

- You are an academic at a distance learning institution
- You fall into the required age group for the study
- And we believe that you can make a valuable contribution to the study

### Do you have to take part in this study?

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. Kindly note that it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

### What will happen to you if you take part in this study?

The key aim of this study is to explore your understanding and meaning of academic staff retention. So, you may be required to take part in individual and focus group interviews. So, the researcher may ask you to clarify some issues during and/or after the individual and focus group interviews. This means that you will have a chance to say things that you may have failed to mention at the interviews.

### What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits for you if you participate in this study. The proposed study intends to develop a human resource risk management framework for the retention of academic staff. The framework will inform training and development interventions with clear guidance on how to enhance academic staff retention in open distance learning settings. Enhancing staff retention will benefit study participants in the following way:

- enable academic staff to focus on their work,
- promote succession planning, and
- enhance academic staff research outputs.

In relation to the wider university community, retaining academic staff and enhancing their knowledge and skills would benefit the same (the university community), and the societies and communities which the institution serves. Such benefits may involve:

- Sharing of research outputs
- Collaborating with community to inform teaching and learning
- Delivering of meaningful community involvement/engagement

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information obtained in connection with this study will be treated as privileged, confidential and with respect. Information will not be released to any unauthorised person (s) without your prior consent. The audiotapes will be kept safe in a locked cupboard in the researcher's place of work, recognised only by a code. The information you provide will not be used in a way connected with you and will never be disclosed to anybody. The information obtained in this study will be used in the researcher's DCom thesis and may be published in appropriate journals. Great care will be taken to change any information by which you could be identified. A copy of the thesis may be made available on request or may be obtained from the Unisa library once the degree has been conferred.

## WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The study will not include any personal or sensitive information. Therefore, it is not foreseen that participation will have any negative consequences.

## Who is funding the research?

I am conducting the research as a student and member of staff at the University of South Africa (Unisa), within its Department of Human Resource Management. I have applied for funding to the Academic Qualifications Improvement Programme (AQIP) of the University of South Africa (Unisa).

## Who has reviewed the study?

The research study proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Human Resource Management Departmental Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee.

## Contact for Further Information

Professor Adele Bezuidenhout (supervisor)

(012) 429 3941 or [bezuia@unisa.ac.za](mailto:bezuia@unisa.ac.za).

Professor Yvonne Joubert (co-supervisor)

012 429 3399 or joubeyt@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

*TK Molotsi*

Ms Tebogo Molotsi (researcher)

012 429 4704 or molottk@unisa.ac.za



## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

**Title of Research Project: A Human Resource Risk Management Conceptual Framework For Academic Staff Retention In An Open Distance Electronic Learning University In South Africa**

**Name of researcher:** Ms Tebogo Molotsi  
**Address of researcher:** University of South Africa, P.O Box 392, Pretoria, 0003  
**Contact details:** molottk@unisa.ac.za / 012 429 4704

**Purpose of the research:** The purpose of this study is twofold:

- The proposed study intends to explore and develop an understanding of the factors that may influence academic staff retention in an open distance learning university in the Gauteng province, South Africa.
- The proposed study also intends to develop a human resource risk management framework for the retention of academic staff in a university for open distance learning in the Gauteng province, South Africa.

**The expected duration for interview participation:** 45-60 minutes.

**Your participation:** Your participation will be much appreciated, as it is anticipated that the development of human resource risk management framework may assist with appropriate strategies to retain academic staff in an open distance learning university.

**Procedures:** The study will involve the completion of a consent form and participation at interviews.

**Risks involved:** It is not anticipated that participating in the study will harm you in any way. However, support would be provided should you encounter any distress as a result of your participation. Please feel free to contact the researcher should you require further information.

**Participant's rights:** Permission and approval has been granted by the ..... Your participation is however voluntary, and you are free, at any point in the process, to withdraw from the study without offering any explanation.

**Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity:** The information provided, and the findings of the study will be completely confidential and anonymous. The study is for research purposes only. The findings of this study will be utilised for thesis purposes and may be published in an accredited academic journal, where only the general patterns found in the findings will be discussed. Individual findings will not be reported on.

**Questions:** Please note that any questions concerning the study should be directed to Ms. Tebogo Molotsi, using this email address [molotk@unisa.ac.za](mailto:molotk@unisa.ac.za) and/or this telephone number: 0124294704.

**Willingness to participate and benefits:** Kindly indicate your willingness to participate by signing a copy of the Consent to participate in this study. By signing the form, you acknowledge that you understand the contents of the Consent Form, including the nature of the study. By signing the form also means that you agree to take part in the study.

**AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

I, .....  
agree to participate in the research project, as outlined in the accompanying letter,  
which is being conducted by Ms. TK Molotsi.

I clearly understand that:

- the information that will be gathered from the individual interviews and focus groups will be used for research purposes only.
- the information concerning me will be strictly treated as confidential. This means that the information concerning me will not be made available to any person, including members within my organisation.
- my participation in focus group interviews cannot be completely anonymous. However, I am aware that the need to maintain confidentiality is emphasized to all group members.
- individual feedback will not be provided to participants.

Signed: *TK Molotsi*

Ms Tebogo Molotsi (researcher)  
012 429 4704 or molottk@unisa.ac.za

## APPENDIX E: PERMISSION LETTER

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**TO: VP: RESEARCH, POSTGRAD STUDIES, INNOVATION & COMMERCIALISATION**

**FROM: MRS TK MOLOTSI**

**DATE: 04 APRIL 2016**

**RE: REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (MS TEBOGO MOLOTSI, REGISTERED DCOM STUDENT)**

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Dear Prof Phakeng

I am a registered DCom Human Resource Management student at the University of South Africa, Department of Human Resource Management. My student number is 34859306 and my research proposal to undertake the research has been accepted in January 2016 by the Departmental Research, Ethics and Innovation Committee. The title of proposal study is:

**A Human Resource Risk Management Conceptual Framework For Academic Staff Retention In An Open Distance Electronic Learning University In South Africa**

I am seeking ethical clearance from the College of Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee to commence a research project as part of a DCom Human Resource Management study on the above subject. The proposed study aims to explore and develop an understanding of the factors that may influence academic staff retention and also aims to develop a human resource risk management framework for the retention of academic staff in a university for open distance learning in the Gauteng province, South Africa. Part of the study involves interviewing

academic staff working at the University of South Africa. Apart from seeking permission from Research Ethics Review Committee, I am aware that you should be informed of projects going on in the university, particularly in instances where academics staff are to be involved. With regard to this, your agreement to conduct the study is needed. It is therefore important for me to fully inform you of the study and its methodological approaches. Hence, I have enclosed the study proposal for your perusal.

I would be grateful for a response agreeing for me to conduct the interviews. Your response will form part of my application to the Research Ethics Committee mentioned above.

I am thanking you in advance and looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,

*TK Molotsi*

Ms Tebogo Molotsi

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE– FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS



University of South Africa  
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
[www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

#### **Study Title: A Human Resource Risk Management Conceptual Framework For Academic Staff Retention In An Open Distance Electronic Learning University In South Africa**

The data for the proposed study will be collected using individual interviews and focus group discussions with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule. This means the same semi-structured interview schedule will be used for both sets of interviews: (individual and focus group) to allow for triangulation.

The interview guide contains a set of questions. The absolute minimum number of questions will be asked to allow participants to tell their stories relating to academic staff retention.

The researcher will commence the interview process by introducing herself, and clearly stating its purpose. Although confidentiality issues contained in the information sheet will be explained to the participants, these will be reiterated. Permission to record the conversation on audiotape will be sought underpinned by a clear rationale. Participants will also be encouraged to sign consent forms. This will be followed by the use of questions.

#### **Questions:**

- Please tell me about your experience and perceptions of academic staff retention in an open distance e-learning environment? Possible prompts:
  - Please tell me more about ....

- How did you feel?
  - What else?
  - What about that experience?
- Please tell me about your perceptions (views/opinions/observations) of academic staff retention in an open distance e-learning environment?
    - What do you mean?
    - How do you feel?
    - Can you tell me more?
- In your view, what are the barriers (obstacles) to academic staff retention in this open distance e-learning university?
    - Do you mean stress? How is it affecting academic staff?
    - Have you felt stressed at work? Please tell me more.
    - Are academics acknowledged for their efforts? what else?
- In your view, what do you think would promote academic staff retention in this open distance e-learning university?
    - Please tell me more about your relationship with your colleagues
    - What happened with your working conditions?
    - How did you feel when your colleagues left the institution?
    - What about the policies and procedures; do you think they contribute in staff retention?
    - What about incentives?
    - What else? (Mentorship, supervision, staff development etc)
- Can you please tell me about the “best practices” for retaining academic staff members in an open distance e-learning university?
    - Please elaborate on that point
    - In your view, is there anything else that can be done to improve staff retention?

# APPENDIX G: CONFIDENTIAL AGREEMENT – CO-CODER



## CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**Title Of Research Project: A Human Resource Risk Management Conceptual Framework For Academic Staff Retention In An Open Distance Electronic Learning University In South Africa**

**Researcher: Ms Tebogo Molotsi**

As a Co-Coder for this research project, I understand that I may have access to confidential information about study sites and participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.
- I understand that all information about study sites or participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons any of the study information, including participants, unless specifically authorized to do so by approved protocol.
- I agree to notify the local principal investigator immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this is on my part or on the part of another person.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the co-coder

2016/4/4  
Date

T. Matilla  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the co-coder

2016/4/4  
Date

T. Molotsi  
Printed Name



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**APPENDIX H: COMPREHENSIVE TABLE OF THEMES – INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

**COMPREHENSIVE TABEL OF THEMES - INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS**

<b>Super-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Keywords or phrases</b>	<b>Interview and page number</b>
<b>1. Defining academic staff retention</b>	Personal meaning	Belong to an organisation, acceptance, part of the team	1,1; 1,2; 2,1; 2,4;12,4
	- The sense of belonging	Belonging, accepted and valued, respected, ensured quality and integrity	1,1; 2,3; 2,4; 3,5; 5,1; 9,3; 10,3; 15,2; 17,1
	- Fairness and equality	Treated equally and fairly, respect, development of fair policies, equal access to opportunities and benefits	1,2; 2,2; 5,2; 7,1; 7,3; 8,3; 11,2; 15,2; 19,2
	Professional meaning	Professional socialisation	3,3; 3,5; 5,1
	- Talent management	Adequate nurturing of talent, incentives and opportunity driven, exit interviews	1,1; 1,3; 2,5; 4,3; 5,1
	- Academic staff retention strategy	Attractive salaries; staff stay if feeling happy, not permanent despite experience, future not certain, lack of resources may cause unhappiness	1,3; 1,5; 3,1; 3,3; 4,3; 4,4; 6,2; 9,3; 12,4; 14,5; 16,1; 18,3; 19,4; 20,1

<b>2. Determinants of academic staff retention</b>	Promotion factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrinsic promoting factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feeling happy</li> <li>- Self-fulfilment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Extrinsic promotion factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunities to travel</li> <li>- Annual salary increases</li> <li>- Job promotions</li> </ul> </li> </ul> Hindering factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrinsic hindering factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negative emotions</li> <li>- Low morale</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Financial gains, Job satisfaction, happy environment, capacity development, knowledge sharing, feeling recognized, professional growth  Feelings of self-fulfillment  Stressful profession, opportunities to travel overseas  Attractive salary increases, low salaries with high workload  Opportunities for job promotions, nepotism  Anger, frustration, stressful experiences, motivation to work is depleted, inadequate resources  No recognition, lack of resources	1,1; 1,2; 2,2; 4,3, 4,5; 13,3; 15,4; 18,2; 19,5  2,5; 3,3; 6,3; 14,5; 16,3; 17,4; 20,2  1,1; 1,6; 5,2; 6,5; 10,2; 12,3; 15,3; 16,1  1,1; 1,3; 3,2; 3,2; 4,6; 5,3; 8,4; 10,2; 11,2; 16,4; 17,2; 18,2; 19; 5; 20;3  2,3; 4,1; 5,5; 7,3; 10,1; 13,2; 17,1; 18,1;18,3; 17,2  1,2; 2,5; 3,2; 6,1; 8,1; 12,3; 13,3; 15,6; 16,4  1,3; 1,5; 2,2; 2,3; 2,4; 3,8; 6,1; 6,5; 8,5; 11;2; 13,3; 14,3; 15,1; 15,2; 19,6

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Professional jealousy</li> <li>- Lack of decision-making</li> <li>• Extrinsic hindering factors</li> <li>- Work overload</li> <li>- Austerity measures</li> <li>- Unfair promotions</li> <li>- Discrimination</li> </ul>	<p>Not being liked, negativity towards performers, emotional overload</p> <p>Not involved in decision making</p> <p>Stress, working long hour</p> <p>Policy to cut on costs, fringe benefits being cut</p> <p>Promotions not meritoriously, extremely bias, favouritisms</p> <p>Gender-based salary disparities, gender imbalances among academics</p>	<p>1,2; 13,3; 20,2</p> <p>6,1; 7,3; 8,7; 13,2; 9,2</p> <p>1,2; 1,5; 2,5; 3,6; 4,4; 4,5; 5,4; 7,2; 7,4; 9,4; 10,7; 13,6; 16,5; 17,2; 18,4; 19,6</p> <p>4,6; 6,2; 7,5; 8,7; 11,4</p> <p>2,4; 3,6; 4,2; 5,3; 5,5; 7,6; 8,4; 10,1; 13,2; 14,1; 16,2; 19,4; 20,6</p> <p>4,2; 20,2</p>
<b>3. HR risk assessment</b>	<p>Principles of risk assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A dynamic process</li> <li>- Eclectic approach</li> <li>- Uncertainty</li> </ul>	<p>Workplace risk factors, strike</p> <p>Lack of communication, decisions taken without consultation</p> <p>Lack of transformation, poor decision making, lack of partnership, move to Florida</p>	<p>1,6; 4,2; 6,3; 16,2</p> <p>8,5; 12,2; 17,3</p> <p>3,4; 7,5; 10,2; 12,2; 14,4</p>

	<p>The practice of risk assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subjectivity</li> <li>- Actuarial principles</li> <li>- Mixed/multiple principles</li> </ul>	<p>Stress management, clarity of responsibilities, sense of uncertainty</p> <p>Lack of uniformity within colleges</p> <p>Different cultural backgrounds</p>	<p>4,7; 10,1; 12,2; 17,3</p> <p>9,6; 17,2; 19,3</p> <p>12,4; 13,4 14,6</p>
<b>4. HR risk management</b>	<p>Risk management approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policies and procedures</li> <li>- Promotion of employee wellness</li> <li>- Orientation and induction programme</li> <li>- Academic staff training and development</li> <li>- Mentorship and coaching</li> </ul>	<p>Effective and efficient policies, adequate training of policies and procedures</p> <p>Wellness is vital, it helps with motivation and productiveness, wellness must new and exciting</p> <p>Welcomed to the institution, enhance performance, coaching and mentorship</p> <p>Organisational justice, commitment to stay, knowledge sharing with experts</p> <p>Retain talented and skilled academics, feeling cared, supported, personal growth</p>	<p>3,3; 3,6; 7,4; 8,2; 9,7; 18,2; 11,3; 13,2; 14,7; 15,2; 16,5; 18,2; 20,1</p> <p>5,2; 7,6; 10,1</p> <p>8,4; 10,3; 11,2; 12,7; 16,4; 8,3</p> <p>1,4; 3,1; 4,1; 5,1; 9,3; 10,4; 11,5; 16,2; 17,3; 18,5; 19,3; 20,1</p> <p>1,1; 1,5; 2,2; 4,2; 3,5; 8,1; 9,2; 10,4; 11,2; 14,4; 16,1; 16,5; 17,7; 18,5; 18,7; 19,5</p>
<b>5. Cultural influence</b>	<p>Organisational culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive organisational culture</li> </ul>	<p>Shaped behaviours, instilling trust and confidence, sexually discriminated, teamwork, valued and respected</p>	<p>2,4; 3,3; 3,7</p>

	- Negative organisational culture	Work that I am not familiar with, feeling anxious and unwell, not valued, often ignored, anxiety	3,3; 4,4
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## APPENDIX I: MASTER TABLE OF THEMES – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

# COMPREHENSIVE TABEL OF THEMES - FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Super-ordinate themes	Sub-themes	Keywords or phrases	Interview and page number
<b>1. Defining academic staff retention</b>	Personal meaning	Common understanding, react differently, being part of the institution	1,1; 1,3; 2,1; 4,4
	- The sense of belonging	Felt welcomed, flexible working hours, shares personal values	1,1; 2,1; 2,4; 3,1; 3,4; 4,1;4,2
	- Fairness and equality	Offered many opportunities, bus services	2,4; 3,3; 4,1
	Professional meaning		
	- Talent management	Enhances of professional performance, improves performance, exit interviews	1,1; 2,1; 4,2
	- Academic staff retention	Need for money, competitive salaries	1,5; 2,1; 2,2; 2,6; 3,1; 4,3
<b>2. Determinants of academic staff retention</b>	Promotion factors		
	• Intrinsic promoting factors		
	- Feeling happy	Stress is part of work	1,1; 1,3; 1,6; 2,4; 3,4; 3,
	• Extrinsic promotion factors		
	- Opportunities to travel	Collaborations with other colleagues	4,3
-			
- Annual salary increases	We are paid less, annual salaries attract us	1,3; 1,4; 1,7; 2,2; 2,6; 4,2	
- Job promotions	Unfair promotions	1,2; 1,5; 2,2; 2,4; 4,3; 4,5	

	<p>Hindering factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrinsic hindering factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negative emotions</li> <li>- Low morale</li> <li>- Lack of decision-making</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Extrinsic hindering factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work overload</li> <li>- Austerity measures</li> <li>- Unfair promotions</li> <li>- Discrimination</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Anger, anxiety, frustration, inadequate resources</p> <p>Lack of resources</p> <p>A lot is expected from us, large student numbers, limited support</p> <p>Benefits have been cut</p> <p>Rigid management style</p> <p>Males and Females not treated equally</p>	<p>1,2; 2,1; 2,4; 3,3; 3,5; 4,3</p> <p>2,1; 2,4; 3,1</p> <p>3,3; 3,5; 4,3</p> <p>2,3; 3,2; 4,2; 4,6</p> <p>3,1; 3,2; 4,2; 4,4</p> <p>2,1; 3,3</p> <p>3,1</p>
<b>3. HR risk assessment</b>	<p>Principles of risk assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A dynamic process</li> <li>- Eclectic approach</li> <li>- Uncertainty</li> </ul> <p>The practice of risk assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subjectivity</li> <li>- Actuarial principles</li> <li>- Mixed/multiple principles</li> </ul>	<p>Safety is at risk, conflicts</p> <p>Confusion, lack of information, frustration</p> <p>Contract employees don't get permanent positions</p> <p>Decisions are made without consultation, lack of clarity on assignments</p> <p>Foreign nationals with scarce skills to be retained</p> <p>Lack of consistency, policies are implemented differently</p>	<p>3,1; 3,6</p> <p>4,2; 4,7</p> <p>4,3</p> <p>3,6</p> <p>2,7</p> <p>4,6</p>

<b>4. HR resource risk management</b>	Risk management approaches - Policies and procedures  - Promotion of employee wellness  - Orientation and induction programme  - Academic staff training and development  - Mentorship and coaching	Policies to be explained to employees  Academia is a demanding profession, difficult to balance work and health  First impression counts, mentors to be assigned  Fantastic training and development opportunities  Felt appreciated	1,1; 1,3; 2,5; 2,7; 3,1; 4,4;  2,2; 3,4; 4,5; 4,6  1,4; 1,6; 3,1; 3,6; 3,7; 4,2; 4,3  1,5; 1,6; 2,2; 2,4; 3,5; 4,3; 4,4  1,2; 1,4; 1,5; 1,7; 2,1; 2,5; 3,1; 4,1
<b>5. Cultural influence</b>	Organisational culture  - Positive organisational culture  - Negative organisational culture	HR to instill accountability, promote trust and consistency, empathy, willingness to work together  Institution to select those marching the organisational culture	1,5; 2,7  4,3



# APPENDIX J: TURNITIN REPORT

## Turnitin Originality Report

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