



Exploring turnover intentions of employees at a South African government education council



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Orientation: Public sector organisations in South Africa, including educational institutions, experience high employee turnover. There is a general need for public sector organisations to retain valuable talent.

Research purpose: This study aimed to explore the reasons behind turnover intentions at the government education council.

Motivation for the study: Studies on employee turnover in the public sector focused on government departments and municipalities, with a scarcity of research studies on government education councils.

Research approach/design and method: An exploratory qualitative research approach was followed which allowed for the usage of semi-structured interviews to collect data from employees (N = 11). Data were analysed using content analysis. The inductive coding method was used to get to themes and subthemes.

Main findings: Employees may leave the government education council because of the micromanagement leadership styles, lack of trust by management, inadequate communication, poorly implemented performance management system, persistent workload, low pay and lack of work–life balance. However, they currently remain within the employment of the council because of its reputation, sense of belonging (teamwork), conducive work environment and career growth prospects.

Practical/managerial implications: The government education council should promote autonomy and prioritise leadership skills, team building and other interventions to enhance trust, communication and work–life balance. The government education council should ensure the buy-in of the performance management system and its remuneration policy by employees.

Contribution/value add: This study's findings provide insights into the turnover intentions of employees at the government education council and then assist the organisation in strengthening its retention strategies.

Keywords: turnover; turnover intentions; employee turnover; government education council; education council.

Introduction

Understanding turnover intentions and actual turnover of highly skilled or executive employees is of crucial importance because these employees have high knowledge, skills, experience and abilities necessary for running the organisation and general productivity in the organisations (Poon et al., 2022; Rajan, 2013). We argue that public sector organisations, departments and institutions should be privy to reasons that might lead to employee turnover to minimise the turnover. It is so because studies have shown the importance of being able to retain highly skilled employees because of the value they have to the organisational success (Ogony & Majola, 2018; Poon et al., 2022). Being aware of the reasons for high turnover and taking preventive measures, organisations minimise the detrimental direct and indirect effects of high employee turnover on their operations (Kwame et al., 2017; Mokoena et al., 2022; Teng et al., 2019).

There are various factors that are worthy of consideration because they have been found to lead to reduced turnover intentions and the actual turnover, namely, meaningful and challenging jobs, work–life balance, conducive working environment, open communication, open door policies, supportive leadership styles and talent management, among others (Anderson, 2020;

Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Bright, 2020; Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Dahlan et al., 2022; Ezaili Alias et al., 2018; Tirtaputra, 2018). Inevitably, when all the above-mentioned factors are in place, employees are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, becoming engaged and then consequently committed to the organisation (Heneman et al., 2018; Wynen et al., 2019).

Like any government public institution, the government education council has been recently experiencing high employee turnover, especially on higher-level employees (Ogony & Majola, 2018). The highly skilled or executive employees leave the council for similar government entities or private sector organisations (Ogony & Majola, 2018; Satgoor, 2015). The main aim of this study was to explore and understand the reasons for the turnover intentions of employees at the government education council and to recommend mechanisms to prevent or reduce high turnover at the council.

Orientation

The South African education system is divided into three spheres, namely, general education and training, further education and training, and higher education and training. Each sphere has public education entities responsible for running its affairs. They are the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI), the Council for Higher Education (CHE) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). The council where the study is based has been experiencing high employee turnover recently, and the council had at that time no recourse to the high turnover scourge; hence, this study became relevant and crucial (Crous, 2012; Ogony & Majola, 2018). Just like in Canada, Spain, Norway and Sweden, South African public sector organisations struggle to retain skilled employees (Aijala, 2001; Mabindisa, 2013; Mnukwa, 2016; Ogony & Majola, 2018). It is also known as dysfunctional employee turnover, when rife employee turnover affects organisations both internally and externally (Ezaili Alias, 2018). Internally dysfunctional or high employee turnover leads to increased hiring costs, employee morale, employee dissatisfaction and weak performance for the remaining employees (Alatawi, 2017; Belete, 2018; Khaola, 2015; Mafini, 2016). On the organisational level, dysfunctional employee turnover leads to high recruitment costs and reduced productivity for the entire organisation (Al-Qahtani & Gadhoum, 2016; Ezaili Alias, 2018; Shropshire & Kadlec, 2013). Externally, high employee turnover ruins the organisation's image and affects the overall performance of the organisation in that cycle (Al-Qahtani & Gadhoum, 2016; Shropshire & Kadlec, 2013).

Across the world, public or government organisations seem to lack proper employee retention strategies (Heneman et al., 2018; Meintjes, 2019; Wynen et al., 2019). Notwithstanding that, it is vitally important for organisations to retain their high-performing and valuable employees at all costs to minimise the detrimental effects of employee turnover, thus

bringing growth and stability within the organisation (Heneman et al., 2018; Meintjes, 2019; Wynen et al., 2019).

As a public entity, the government education council is faced with the risk of losing its talented workers to the private sector, which lures them with huge salaries and benefits (Mabindisa, 2013). The council needs solutions on how to prevent the massive exodus of its employees, which leads to its failure to provide services to the country (Schlechter et al., 2016). This study aims to help the council understand why its employees leave and why others stay and then be able to improve on and build retention strategies based on the reasons given by the participants suggested by Heneman et al. (2018).

Specific to this study, it was therefore imperative to theoretically and empirically understand why there is high employee turnover at the government education council, as currently there were no context-specific studies about turnover and turnover intentions of employees in the public education councils in South Africa.

Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore employees' reasons for turnover intentions to gain an understanding of how turnover may be reduced in the council investigated. To determine the cause of high employee turnover in the council, questions were designed to explore the reasons why employees joined, stayed and intended to leave the council. Therefore, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Explore reasons why employees joined the government education council.
2. Identify the reasons that might lead to staff turnover at the government education council.
3. Evaluate the current strategies that assist to reduce staff turnover at the government education council.
4. Make recommendations on the retention strategies that can be utilised to prevent and reduce turnover at the government education council.

Literature review

Turnover intentions and employee turnover

The two concepts, namely, turnover intentions and employee turnover, might be easily confused with each other. Turnover intention refers to an employee's willingness or intention to voluntarily quit their job or leave a company (Hongvichit, 2015). They have not left the organisation yet, but they are contemplating or thinking of leaving the organisation. Employee turnover refers to the actual number of employees who left the organisation within a specific time and must be replaced (Dhanpat et al., 2018; Lazzari et al., 2022; Mathis & Jackson, 2003; Mokoena et al., 2022). While employee turnover refers to the total number of employees who left an organisation, turnover intentions tell us how many employees intend to leave (Cohen et al., 2016).

Studies on turnover intentions and employee turnover have been subjected to research for many decades in both human resource management (HRM) and psychology (Hom et al., 2017; Ngo-Henha, 2017). Turnover is described as the rate at which employees leave the employer and are replaced (Lazzari et al., 2022). It is a costly exercise, and organisations should attempt to avoid or reduce it at all costs.

There are two types of employee turnover, namely, voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover (Holtom et al., 2008). With voluntary turnover, an employee resigns from their duties, and with involuntary turnover, the employee gets terminated or dismissed (Mokoena et al., 2022). Voluntary turnover itself has two dimensions, namely, the functional and the dysfunctional (Ahmad, 2022). The functional situation in employee turnover is when low-level and low-performing employees leave the organisation (Ahmad, 2022). A dysfunctional employee turnover situation is when high-performing and valuable employees terminate their employment relationship with the employer. The former is favourable to the employer, while the latter is not favourable to the employer (Ahmad, 2022).

According to Lazzari et al. (2022), employee intentions can assist in exploring actual employee turnover. Turnover intentions are triggered, influenced or predicted by various reasons such as wages, a lack of recognition and job dissatisfaction, which seem to be the major reasons for employees to leave (Mabindisa, 2013; Oladapo, 2014). They are also triggered by communication at the workplace, work environment, an assignment given, salary and benefits received (Qureshi et al., 2013) and because of external factors, such as characteristics of the company, financial concerns, personal conflicts or opportunity to have an advance in a career (Abdien, 2019; Ganco et al., 2015), like the actual employee turnover (Lazzari et al., 2022). High employee turnover can be the result of the following reasons: demographic factors such as gender, age and marriage; economic reasons such as working time, wages, fringe benefits, firm size and expectations; and psychological or personal reasons such as commitment levels and job insecurity (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022; Shibiti, 2019, 2020).

A Malaysian study found that a lack of work engagement, a lack of job satisfaction and a lack of organisational commitment lead to high employee turnover (Ezaili Alias et al., 2018). Oladapo (2014) concluded that the reasons for employees to leave an organisation are unsatisfactory pay and benefits, relationships with supervisors, work-life balance, work content, career path and trust in senior management and the opportunity to join an organisation for a better position. In South Africa, Ogony and Majola (2018) found that a lack of career advancement, a lack of promotion, unsatisfactory salary and working conditions, and work stress are the main reasons for the high employer turnover in a KZN public sector organisation. Another study at a South African municipality found a lack of recognition, low pay, no

performance rewards, lack of consultation during policy development, lack of performance assessments, poor communication, better career prospects elsewhere and no training and development by managers to be contributing to high employee turnover in the municipality (Mnukwa, 2016). Studies also found high turnover in South African education institutions and made valuable recommendations such as training and development, high pay and improved organisational climate (Erasmus et al., 2015; Govender, 2009; Masango & Mpfu, 2013; Netswera et al., 2005; Shibiti, 2019, 2020).

Research design

This section provides information on the research approach, research strategy and research methods used in this study.

Research approach

The study took the form of an exploratory study, to explore the phenomenon of turnover intentions in the government education council. To explore this phenomenon, the study was approached from the qualitative perspective, which allowed the usage of both the interpretive and constructivist research paradigms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to interpret the data and construct meaning from it.

Research strategy and method

This study was performed once to gather specific information about the phenomenon when the phenomenon was being experienced at the organisation as advised by Sutton and Austin (2015). The research strategy was to get the remaining employees to share their own opinions or 'narrate' their reasons for joining, staying or possibly leaving the organisation. Semi-structured interviews with probing were used to enable participants to express themselves in-depth and share as much as possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Research process

Research setting

The primary researcher approached the council for permission to collect data or interview staff members at the council. The organisation is based in Gauteng Province, Pretoria.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The researchers obtained permission from the government education council to conduct the interviews or collect data, before commencing. The primary researcher was an employee at the government education council, which made the participants accessible to the researcher. However, an e-mail was sent from the HR department informing staff about the primary researcher's master's research project, so that the primary researcher will conduct the interviews as a student, not as a colleague, to allow for the collection of fair and honest answers.

Research participants and sampling methods

All 11 sampled participants were employees at the council. A purposive non-probability sampling technique was employed to interview only those employees who met the inclusion criteria, who were willing to be interviewed and who were available for the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were as follows. Inclusion criteria included any department within the council, any gender, race and any employee aged from 25 to 58 years and those who worked at the council for more than a year. The excluded participants included interns, who have been employed for less than a year, who are within their last year at the organisation and employees within the HR department at the council.

Data collection methods

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted until the saturation point was reached. Data collection and analysis were performed simultaneously to identify patterns, and saturation was declared when no new information was coming through. Saturation was reached after the interview with Participant 11. The semi-structured interviews were conducted online, and questions were open-ended; probing was performed to get more information from the participants. The selected participants were approached by the researcher individually, and times and dates convenient to the participants were set and agreed upon. The participants signed informed consent and were informed that participation is voluntary and that they have a right to decline or withdraw from participation at any point.

Once saturation was declared and interviews stopped, data analysis continued, and with the help of a co-coder and the second researcher, the results were affirmed. This process is called triangulation.

Data recording

With permission from the participants, each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data analysis was carried out during data collection (the interviews) when the saturation point was not reached yet and continued after the saturation point was reached when interviews or data collection ceased.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

As advised by Creswell (2013) and Johnson et al. (2020), researchers in qualitative studies must ensure rigour, data quality and integrity. A thorough literature review, in-depth semi-structured interviews (with notes) utilising probing, audit trails, as well as appropriate research methods, designs and analysis were undertaken to ensure rigour, data quality and integrity in this study (Gunawan, 2015; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Data analysis

As advised by Kyngäs et al. (2020) and Mayring (2019), content data analysis was used to analyse data by following the step-by-step approach: decontextualisation, recontextualisation, categorisation and compilation. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim using the Otter software transcriber. The researcher listened to the recorded interviews and read through the transcribed data several times (decontextualisation); extracted text, signs and meaning from the decontextualised data (recontextualisation); and classified the text into smaller content categories (categorisation). A structured categorisation matrix was developed and data were inductively coded to form categories and themes. A report on the findings of the identified themes was produced (compilation) (Bengtsson, 2016; Kyngäs et al., 2020; Mayring, 2019).

Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained permission from the council to conduct the interviews or collect data. The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of South Africa's Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology Research Ethics Committee (IOP-REC), and the approval was granted (ERC Reference:2019_CEMS_IOP_016) to continue with the study as it was deemed ethical and non-harmful to the participants. A written informed consent was issued to the participants to sign or consent to be interviewed. The de-identifier such as pseudonyms was used to identify the participants and hide their real identities as mentioned in the informed consent. The council is one of the three education councils in South Africa, and hence, precautionary measures were taken to protect its name and the participants.

Results and discussion

For a comprehensive exploration and rich-contextual analysis, the researchers before asking the participants about reasons they might leave the council asked the participants why they joined the council in the first place and the mitigating factors for not leaving, if possible. This was performed so that the researchers could track and see if the absence of attractions leads to high employee turnover at the government education council. Table 1 depicts the themes and subthemes from all three questions, namely:

TABLE 1: Themes and Subthemes.

Questions	Themes	Subthemes
1. <i>Why did you join this government education council?</i>	1. Attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prestige and reputation • Career management and development policies
2. <i>What makes you stay or remain with the government education council?</i>	2. Current turnover strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork and relationships • Sense of belonging • Career growth and exposure
3. <i>What might make you leave this government education council now or in the future?</i>	3. Turnover reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro-management • A lack of trust • Inadequate communication • Poorly implemented performance management system • Workload • A lack of satisfactory remuneration • A lack of work–Life balance

1. Why did you join this government education council?
2. What makes you stay or remain with the government education council?
3. What might make you leave this government education council now or in the future?

While responding to all three questions, the following themes and subthemes (Table 1) emerged.

In the next paragraphs, each of the themes and subthemes will be discussed in more detail.

Theme 1: Attractions

Subtheme 1.1: Prestige

Findings showed that prestige or the reputation of the council attracted most employees to the organisation initially. Participants iterated on the importance of the respect the organisation has for the outside world and the impact that has on their reputation:

‘The organisation had always been a respected organisation. So, I had this perception about the organisation as a reputable organisation, an organisation that I could work for.’ (P1, Male, 50 years)

Moreover, the core mandate or activities of the organisation were held dear by the participant and that became an attraction for the participant:

‘So, what attracted me to the organisation was to be part of the core mandate of the organisation, the education system.’ (P4, Female, 52 years)

The existing literature shows that the reputation of an organisation becomes a major attraction point for potential employees (Bright, 2020; Carmeli & Freund, 2002). No employee wants to work for a negatively rated or perceived organisation because of fear of what that might do to their career because of the negative perceptions. Once people join reputable organisations, it might be difficult for them to leave (Bright, 2020; Carmeli & Freund, 2002).

Subtheme 1.2: Career management and development policies

Besides the attractive nature of the company organisation and its core functions, some participants’ findings indicated that they were attracted to the council because of its career management and development policies. They viewed the organisation as providing better promotional opportunities than their current (previous) employers:

‘The position was a promotional post because from the previous employment, I was at junior level position. And then also I needed to change, I had been with the previous employer for more than four years. And I felt like stagnant and there was no growth from where I was working before. And so, I saw it as a growth opportunity to join the organisation.’ (P7, Male, 36 years)

While others saw the organisation as the greenest pasture in the sector:

‘I have been in the classroom and in management of the school and college sector, specifically for many years. And I thought to extend my scope of expertise, I was always interested in quality assurance, and assessment of tasks of the whole education system.’ (P8, Female, 58 years)

These findings are supported by previous results on similar studies by Dhanpat et al. (2018) and Yildiz (2018), who found that organisations offer attractive career prospects to attract more potential employees.

Theme 2: Current turnover strategies

Subtheme 2.1: Teamwork and relationships

Participants remained at the council for several reasons. The most evident reasons were around teamwork and/or relationships which were generally categorised under feeling a sense of belonging within the organisations:

‘Well, maybe another thing that the organisation is doing well is that we are working together within the organisation.’ (P1, Male, 50 years)

‘I feel that I belong in anything that is happening in the organisation, whether it’s affecting me or all the staff, we feel free, that we are belonging to the organisation ...’ (P3, Male, 31 years)

‘To be honest with you the organisation is one of the places where having worked at different places in the past I find myself still enjoying what I do.’ (P1, Male, 50 years)

‘I love the work that I do, I feel that I make a difference out there in terms of my interaction with the stakeholders in the education system.’ (P4, Female, 52 years)

Previous research studies on retention and turnover intentions concluded that teamwork or positive relationships with both coworkers and line managers discourage employee turnover and employee’s intentions (Anderson, 2020; Madden et al., 2015). When employees feel emotionally supported and valued by the organisations, they stay (Anderson, 2020; George, 2015). Teamwork or positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors serve as a great retention strategy that the council should consider. Research studies found that meaningful relationships between employers and employees create a sense of belonging on the employee’s side and encourage increased trust, loyalty, commitment and employee retention (Anderson, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2015; Carter & Walker, 2018). It can then be concluded that a positive employer–employee relationship is currently a functional working retention strategy at the council.

Subtheme 2.2: Sense of belonging

According to the participants, one of the reasons they stay with the council is their experience of a conducive work environment at the hands of colleagues, supervisors and management of the council as observed from the following quotes:

‘The support that I get from the supervisor is something that keeps me motivated to remain in the organisation and the relationship that has been developed between me and my colleagues and the supervisor.’ (P9, Male, 33 years)

'There is a positive and collegial work environment in the organisation, and that has contributed to me staying for longer than five years because, before my current employer, I never stayed in any position for longer than five years.' (P1, Male, 50 years)

'All I can say is a joy, but also the family of within the organisation, the humanistic family, they are wonderful people. We are a wonderful team. And the spirit of human receipt is, is really positive and encouraging and, and good, good to be around people.' (P8, Female, 58 years)

Positive relationships with colleagues create a conducive working environment. These findings are similar to having a sense of belonging; however, this one involves not only positive relationships between co-workers but also a healthy working environment between managers and employees, flexible work schedules, supportive management and excellent communication, whereby employees are provided with tools that can enhance their skills and knowledge performance (Anderson, 2020; Jaworski et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2015). It can then be concluded that employees who are given opportunities to excel in their duties by the organisation are less likely to leave such an organisation.

Subtheme 2.3: Career growth and exposure

Lastly, career growth and exposure to other activities at the council serves as a desirable reason for the participants to stay as observed from the following quotes:

'The organisation, unlike the previous employers, has given me enough room to show my ability in the work that I do, and has also given me opportunities to also grow in terms of my professional growth.' (P2, Male, 37 years)

'Personally, what's making me to stay despite the workload, is that you get to learn more. That's a big plus for me because now you want to get to learn on these platforms that one normally would not be had I been in my previous employer. So exposure, I might say exposure and with exposure comes experience, it's a learning curve as well. So that is why I am still here.' (P6, Female, 35 years)

Different employees have varying career expectations and needs, however all employees, when they feel stagnation in one position with less chance of being promoted, they leave as shown by Anderson (2020) and Naim and Lenkla (2016).

It can thus be concluded that the council creates a sense of belonging for its employees through teamwork and positive working relationships, a conducive work environment and career growth prospects, and currently, these functional retention strategies are benefitting the council.

Theme 3: Turnover reasons

Subtheme 3.1: Micro-management

While responding to the question about what might make them leave the government education council now or in the future, the participants indicated that micro-management style is one of the main reasons they may leave:

'Well, I think the issue here is a management styles, I think my concern is a management style that, as far as I'm concerned, does not give you the space to be who you are, to excel in what you do. The top management is too involved at an operational level, which makes one to be scared at a stage to come up with some innovation around his work. I feel that there's too much a micromanaging, where I'm coming from, I used to manage myself, and maybe it's because also of my personality, I know that I'm a very a responsible person, very accountable. The organisation does not acknowledge that you know, it doesn't acknowledge that it's a there's too much a micro-managing and is something that really doesn't sit well with me in this organisation.' (P4, Female, 52 years)

'Another thing is, people should have to not work with their consciousness, people should not work with fear of making mistake, or if I happen to make a little mistake. It's like that will be my exit and affects how I deliver on my tasks.' (P3, Male, 31 years)

Previous studies support these findings by affirming that poor leadership styles contribute highly to high employee turnover (Anderson, 2020; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018; Tian et al., 2015). Leadership style is a great determinant of any organisation's success and ability to retain highly skilled and valued employees (Anderson, 2020). It can thus be concluded that the current leadership style at the government education council contributes to high employee turnover.

Subtheme 3.2: A lack of trust

Participants shared that the government education council shows a lack of trust in their abilities to execute their duties as professionals and that it might lead them to leave the council:

'... When I'm not trusted on the job that I was appointed to do. Because my understanding is when you appoint someone, you have seen something in them, you have seen the potential in that person. But if you are not acknowledging, or not having trust into the work that you have given that particular person, it's discouraging. That's the reason why I would leave the organisation.' (P3, Male, 31 years)

'... Lack of trust from management and believing in you and what you do gives me second thoughts on why I am still working for this organisation.' (P4, Female, 52 years)

These findings are in line with the existing findings that when they perceive trust from their employer, employees reciprocate with commitment and loyalty (Ogbonnaya et al., 2017), and the lack of perceived trust leads to employee turnover. These findings relate to earlier findings on leadership skills or micro-management. It seems that the transformational leadership style can build trust between employers and employees. Trusted employees tend to share all their professional knowledge with their employers (Anderson, 2020; Chang et al., 2016).

Subtheme 3.3: Inadequate communication

There seems to be a lack of adequate communication at the government education council. This is another reason why participants might leave the government education council as their employer:

'I don't think there is enough communication from the employees going back to senior management and executive management and most of the time communication rounds one way, it is communication from senior management to staff below senior management. So, I would like to see more two-way communication you know, where opportunities are created for staff to vent their experiences, frustrations, if there are any frustrations, and so on so that senior management, and executive management can always be aware of what employees are experiencing on the ground, because that, to me is very, very important. So communication is not just about telling people what to do. But it is also about hearing from them and getting some advice from them about how best we can do things. And so that, to me remains a gap. And I think that that is something that an organisation needs to work on.' (P1, Male, 50 years)

According to Salleh et al. (2012) and Ezaili Alias et al. (2018), open communication creates a positive climate among employees such as increased trust levels, good communication and cooperation. It can thus be concluded that the government education council lacks proper communication means to keep employees with a sense of belonging and commitment to the government education council.

Subtheme 3.4: Poorly implemented performance management system

Although it exists, there is a visibly poorly implemented performance management system at the government education council, which makes employees or the participants to leave the government education council:

'During my first year of appointment, the performance assessment instrument or agreement that I was using was far better than the one I'm using now. So the one I'm using now was just revised in 2018. It doesn't work in our favour. I was getting performance bonuses. Yes. Then after it was revised I'm not getting performance bonuses. This is disadvantaging employees. You see the difference? Bonus is not a big thing. But even if even if it is one rand it motivates one to do better.' (P5, Male, 51 years)

Poorly implemented performance management system is one of the reasons for high employee turnover in organisation all over the world (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). It can thus be concluded that the government education council's performance management system is not currently effectively implemented to serve as a retention strategy.

Subtheme 3.5: Workload

The government education council seems to be understaffed, as participants voiced workload as one of the reasons they want to resign from the government education council:

'Because of the growing mandate of the organisation, and sometimes we feel a bit stretched in the work that we do. So sometimes I feel like the people who work under me, have to do double the work now and work long hours because the work and the mandate, and the scope of the work done by the organisation has increased over the years. And so that that is a challenge for us. Because we always have to do things within the capacity that we currently have.' (P1, Male, 50 years)

'Like, everybody's just expected to do everything. And they would say, well, there's nobody else to do it. But you will be

required to do it, because there's nobody else to do some functions within the organisation. For example, there is no project office, there is no legal office. So you would be expected to do things that you wouldn't normally do. And it's because of the size of the organisation like I am just going to be generic, there's no internal audit, or there's no risk-free so somebody else has to play that role who might not be able to due to lack of knowledge and experience in that specific role.' (P7, Male, 36 years)

Workload is defined as a situation whereby an employee's number of demands, tasks or activities are beyond the available mental and physical capacities of such employee. Studies conducted on workload and turnover found that too much workload may lead to high employee turnover (Qureshi et al., 2012; Tirtaputra, 2018; Xiaoming et al., 2014). Contrarily, other studies showed that the stress caused by too much work is the one that leads to employee turnover, not the workload itself (Dahlan et al., 2022; Mentjies, 2019). It can thus be concluded that the current workload at the government education council, which emanates from the government education council being understaffed, creates job stress enough for employees to think of leaving the government education council.

Subtheme 3.6: A lack of satisfactory remuneration

Just as was mentioned in the literature review (Mnukwa, 2016), as a government education council, the government education council seems to underpay its employees, thus leading to unsatisfactory remuneration:

'The issue of salaries. So we tend to compare ourselves with other organisations but our salaries still do not match with those organisations that we are comparing with.' (P5, Male, 51 years)

'At this organisation you obtain a Master's degree, you still remain at the very same level as the person with an undergraduate degree. It doesn't encourage people seek more knowledge, because when you graduate, you are bringing more change and new skills into your work area. And here, the managers are not on the same level, in the same organisation, yet others are having lesser qualifications. It's also problematic to some of us who have studied. We just feel like you're being insulted. It's like your Master's degree does not mean anything compared to a teacher's diploma.' (P3, Male, 31 years)

'I mean, for the type of work that I do now and competitively out there. And, you know, it gets more benefits than what the organisation offers. So, that will be in terms of the salary and then as well as other perks. In terms of the salary, one at a particular department are at a certain salary level whereas what we get here tends to be a bit less. So those are some of the things that and maybe also for me, in one way or the other, I've reached the ceiling within the organisation, so there isn't any further growth than this.' (P2, Male, 37 years)

These findings are in line with the existing literature that proper financial rewards decrease voluntary turnover (Anderson, 2020; Gallus & Frey, 2016; Kundu & Lata, 2017). It can thus be concluded that the government education council's current remuneration structure is not competitive enough to keep its staff.

Subtheme 3.7: A lack of work–life balance

Because of the government education council being understaffed, the workload piles up and employees end up working overtime or long hours, impinging on their work–life balance as seen in the following notable quote:

‘The work must be done, and I work hours more than I can perhaps do what I want to do, you need to have a balanced life. You need to have family time; you need to have work time. You need to have leisure time. You know, you need to have reading time and do household chores, which is impossible under the current environment.’ (P8, Female, 58 years)

Employee well-being should be at the forefront of every employer, and its absence has been proven to lead to low job satisfaction, which in turn leads to high employee turnover (Anderson, 2020). It can thus be concluded that the current workload at the government education council is too much that employees contemplate leaving the government education council because of a lack of work–life balance.

Based on the findings and following the existing literature, employees are attracted to the council because of its reputation and career growth prospects (Bright, 2020; Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Dhanpat et al., 2018; Yildiz, 2018). Currently, a sense of belonging to the organisation through teamwork and conducive working relationships (Anderson, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2015; Carter & Walker, 2018; George, 2015; Madden et al., 2015), and a conducive working environment (Anderson, 2020; Jaworski et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2015) and perceived positive career prospects (Anderson, 2020; Naim & Lenkla, 2016) contribute immensely to the retention or retention of employees at the council. Despite the attractions and the effective current turnover strategies, the government education council might lose employees if poor leadership and experienced micro-management persist (Anderson, 2020; Breevaart & Bakker, 2018); there is a lack of trust between employees and management (Anderson, 2020; Ogbonnaya et al., 2017), there is poor and inadequate communication at the council (Ezaili Alias et al., 2018), the implemented performance management system is perceived negatively by employees (Stone & Deadrick, 2015), there is too much workload (Dahlan et al., 2022; Mentjies, 2019; Tirtaputra, 2018), the salaries are perceived unsatisfactory (Anderson, 2020; Kundu & Lata, 2017) and employees suffer a lack of work–life balance because of one or more aforesaid factors (Anderson, 2020).

Moreover, it should be noticed that most of these people attracted to the council were middle-aged educated black male employees. Even though they joined because of the council’s prestige, these employees value the perceived career growth prospects, a sense of belonging and a conducive or supportive workplace. Most of these male employees are in what is known as the ‘establishment’ career stage (26–45 years old), whereby they try to reach the highest level in their career (Hommelhoff et al., 2020), and hence, career growth prospects are critical for them. It appears that these educated professionals are not enthusiasts of micro-management

leadership style, a lack of trust, inadequate communication, poorly implemented performance management system that might misrepresent their talents and abilities, workload, low pay and a lack of work–life balance.

Practical implications

These findings provide valuable insights for the government education council. The council should maintain the current reputation and the perceived career growth prospects that make it the employer of choice. There should be freedom and autonomy as well as talent management or succession planning at the council, especially for highly skilled professionals. There should be transformational leadership training at the council to curb poor communication and a lack of trust and improve employee well-being. This can also be performed through training in management and team-building interventions. The remuneration policy should be revised to be at the same level as similar government education councils or other similar organisations. The attainment of a new and higher qualification should be rewarded by the government education council. More staff needs to be hired to minimise workload and improve work–life balance (well-being). Employees should be involved in the planning and implementation of new performance management systems. The council should have employee well-being programmes introduced to assist employees when work demands become too stressful.

These findings contribute new information to the limited literature on turnover and turnover intentions at government education councils.

Limitations and recommendations

This study was conducted at only one government education council, using qualitative methods. As a result, the sample was small and skewed in terms of gender and race, factors that might negatively influence the generalisability of these findings. It is thus recommended that a similar study be conducted at other government education councils for a larger and more diverse sample using different research methods to make comparisons between various councils.

Conclusion

These findings contribute new information to the limited literature on turnover and turnover intentions at government education councils. The study aimed to explore reasons why employees joined, would leave and why employees remain at the government education council. Findings reveals that reputation and career prospect are attractions to the council, employees may leave the council if retentions strategies are not in alignment with their needs, meanwhile, employees also stay with the council because they are pleased with the current retention strategies. Through training and development, climate surveys as well as organisational, team and individual development sessions, the council should pay attention to the workplace challenges that might make employees leave and reinforce their commitment to the current strategies that make employees stay.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

R.A.S. is a master's student and M.A.M. is a supervisor.

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Data availability

Data collected and used in this study are available, and they will be available until 2025 as per the university's 5-year policy.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

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