Full Length Research Paper

Engaging employees for improved retention at a higher education institution in South Africa

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Engaging and retaining valuable and skilled employees is a major challenge faced by South African universities. The main aim of this study was to measure the levels of engagement of staff at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and to determine whether labour turnover can be contained through effective engagement strategies. The methodology followed included a quantitative-descriptive survey distributed to 200 employees representing both academic and administrative departments at TUT. A 58% response rate was obtained. The main findings in terms of engagement levels were that the majority of the staff knew what was expected from them, felt their jobs were important and believed that they had the opportunity to employ their skills daily. A lack of feedback regarding progress and an absence of recognition of excellence, manifested as a concern for employees. The study contributes to the body of knowledge on employee engagement and turnover by providing line managers and human resources practitioners with insight into the specific workplace practices that will have a positive effect on the engagement levels of the entire staff component at TUT. Interventions that will address the existing shortcomings can be designed based on the findings of this study.

Key words: Employee engagement, turnover, higher education, university of technology.

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, retaining talented employees is even more of a challenge for organisations, than finding them in the first place. Engaging these employees to deliver maximum effort voluntarily is another major challenge. Although, research on the general theme of work engagement has been conducted by Bezuidenhout and Cilliers (2010), Bhatnager (2007, 2008), Bowes (2008), Buhler (2006), Cartwright and Holmes (2006), Frank et al. (2004), Ketter (2008), Ng and Tay (2010), Rothman (2002), Schaufeli (2004), Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), Seijts and Crim (2006), Smythe (2008) and Woodruffe

(2006), there is limited knowledge on specific human resource interventions that could improve employee engagement. Jorgensen (2005) suggests that, in seeking to improve workforce attraction and retention, a workforce policy approach that encourages flexible work, customised rewards and benefits, participation, autonomy, multiple career mobility, as well as challenging work assignments is a prerequisite. The focus of the research on which this article is based, was specifically on determining what the human resources function should do to improve the level of engagement among employees. Human resources (HR) departments, together with line managers, will have to redesign policies and practices to increase the percentage of high-performing, engaged employees.

Past research indicated that work satisfaction and organisational commitment are the main factors that influence turnover intention (Narimawati, 2007). As mentioned by Salami (2008), job satisfaction is found to predict

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Abbreviations: UoT, University of technology; **TUT,** Tshwane University of Technology.

organisational commitment significantly, and employees who are more satisfied with their jobs, are more committed to their jobs and less likely to search for alternative employment. The challenge however is that, for the first time in the history of the labour force, four different demographic groups are found working together, despite their different attitudes, beliefs and needs (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Phoenix et al., 2007). The differing attitudes and work styles between the younger and older generations remain a challenge to employers, especially the human resources department as custodians of policies and procedures. Consequently, the study being reported here, tried to establish whether employee engagement has an impact on turnover in addition to job satisfaction and organisational commitment. It is important to determine whether employee engagement will improve the level of retention among employees at TUT.

Bottos (2006) hypothesises that there is a discrepancy between what HR professionals assume and what employees actually indicate to be critical to their overall job satisfaction. In the same context, Woodruffle (2006) asserts that there are still executives and managing directors who believe that their employees will be motivated to give a great performance simply because the company has hired them. This however may not be true taking into consideration the different generational needs and expectations. To put employee engagement in context, it can be defined as a psychological state in which employees feel a vested interest and willingness to perform at a level that is more than that which is expected from them. Jones and Wilson (2009) maintain that engagement is a valuable measure of the role of attachment to the workplace.

While companies strive to engage and retain their skilled employees, it is the responsibility of line managers to ensure that 'key employees' are engaged, in order to promote retention. Although some managers acknowledge the difficulty in attracting and retaining valuable employees, some managers engage in practices that actually encourage staff turnover of top performers. The dilemma is that employees have different needs and expectations, which if not met, may damage their engagement level as well as performance (O'Connor and Fiol, 2004). Woodruffle (2006) posits that there are still executives who believe that employees will be motivated to give a great performance simply because the company has hired them.

Similarly, Robinson's (2008) research suggests, "pay can seem adequate to engaged employees but an insult to actively disengaged workers, even when the pay rate is essentially the same". Employees expect good quality management, the opportunity to do challenging work, reciprocal communication, the opportunity to reach their career goals, access to training and development, and clear, accessible HR policies and practices, which are consistently applied.

The Towers Perrin study (2007 to 2008) found that only 21% of the global workforce is engaged, while 38% is disengaged – leaving 41%, who are unsure whether they like their jobs or not (Ketter, 2008). Whilst some employers neglect the process of engaging employees, this is extremely counterproductive, as Lockwood (2007) found that employees who are most committed, perform 20% more (than their colleagues), and are 87% less likely to resign. In line with strategies used to retain employees, the Deloitte research (Deloitte and Tohmatsu, 2004) suggests that the develop-deploy-connect model should be at the core of an organisation's strategy, and will further enhance engagement and retention of employees.

The current study was conducted at a university of technology (UoT) in the Tshwane metropolitan area. As institutions of higher education are particularly vulnerable to losing their highly qualified staff to lucrative offers from the private sector and headhunting from other higher education institutions, the study is particularly relevant and important in the South African context. The main aim of the study was to measure the levels of employee engagement and turnover intention of academic and administrative staff at a UoT in the Tshwane metropolitan area and to determine whether labour turnover can be contained by introducing effective engagement strategies.

The article will firstly provide an overview of the most important literature in the field, secondly, the research methodology and statistical analysis will be explained, thirdly, the main findings will be provided, and the article will conclude with an explanation of the practical and managerial implications of the results of the study. The findings of this article are expected to assist human resources practitioners to find practical ways of improving the employee engagement of staff in higher education institutions, hence retaining them for longer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisational factors that impact engagement level

Organisational culture

From a management perspective, organisational culture refers to "how people feel about the organisation, the authority system and degree of employee involvement and commitment" (DelCampo, 2006). Organisational culture implies the shared values, beliefs and ideas of employees. These will obviously have a large impact on employee engagement.

Communication

Managers, in their role as leaders, are responsible to communicate a clear vision of the organisation and the goals of their different units (Seijts and Crim, 2006;

Smythe, 2008). Taplin and Winterton (2007) report that, workers indicated during exit interviews that a management style that provided open communication and an understanding of day-to-day problems would influence their engagement level, in turn impacting on their decision to stay with the organisation. Effective communication helps employees to integrate their work targets with the business strategy, develop their capabilities and assist them to understand how they are assessed and rewarded (Li and DeVos, 2008).

Individual factors that impact engagement level

Motivation

It is crucial for managers to understand the specific individual needs and goals of their employees (Bagraim, 2007). Li and DeVos (2008) note that, while money may be the motivator for older employees, younger generations may have different goals, such as fulfilling their personal potential, perceiving promotion opportunities and challenging assignments to motivate them.

Opportunities for growth and development

Previous research proved that where organisations fail to provide challenging work assignments, commitment levels tend to diminish (Bergeron, 2004; Jorgensen, 2005; Sujansky, 2007) and when employees perceive no opportunities for growth and development, engagement levels show a rapid decline (Seijts and Crim, 2006). Employees become frustrated quickly when their career path is blocked (Lesabe and Nkosi, 2007) and where such opportunities, tools and knowledge do not exist, staff turnover is likely to rise (Seijts and Crim, 2006).

Work–life balance

Employees' family commitments, family-related needs and other non-work obligations are important reasons for staff turnover (Deery, 2008). Work–life balance is important for male and female employees, but specifically for younger females who often bear the brunt of family and childcare responsibilities. According to the ILO (2008), 1.6 to 1.9 million jobs were occupied by females globally in 2006/2007. As a result, employers have to revisit their organisational work-life-balance policies for cultural and national diversity.

Supervisor–subordinate relationship

A poor relationship with a line manager, as a result of a lack of leadership, bullying or unfair treatment, is often the motivation behind an individual's decision to leave the organisation (CIPD, 2004). Taplin and Winterton (2007)

found that managers who are accessible and approachable, respected and trusted, and who listen and assist, encourage employees to remain fully engaged with organisations. Employees expect their supervisors to nurture and develop their talent, but this may consciously be ignored, as supervisors are reluctant to lose valuable employees (Field, 2008).

Forces driving employee engagement

Demographic changes

Different demographic groups, with different attitudes, beliefs and needs constitute the modern workforce (Phoenix et al., 2007; Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007; Beechler and Woodward, 2009). Most organisations invest time and resources into achieving diversity within the workplace. Different attitudes, worldviews, work styles and values between the younger and older generations remain a challenge to employers (Glen, 2007). In the war for talent, managers must understand these generation differences (Bergeron, 2004). Younger workers tend to choose jobs with promising opportunities for career development, although, the initial monetary rewards may not be that good (Berger and Berger, 2004; Combes and Duranton, 2006).

Competition

The global demand for skilled employees is creating a surge in the number of employees seeking to join 'employers of choice' and remain fully engaged. While organisations compete for critical talent, an improving economy increases employment prospects; thus, competitors continue to attract critical skills. The challenge to employers is that companies may succeed in attracting experienced candidates, while at the same time, they lose experienced employees to their competitors (Capelli, 2008). Drawing insights from researchers, Kock and Burke (2008) confirm that the war for talent is fierce, particularly in South Africa, which is in the midst of a skills crisis.

Skills shortages

Li and DeVos (2008) as well as McCauley and Wakefield (2006) warn that, as employees get older and retire, companies will be at risk of losing critical knowledge and skills, and key positions are likely to remain vacant. In terms of the skills shortage, Jinabhai (2005) refers to the World Competitive Yearbook (2000), where South Africa was ranked at the bottom of the league of 47 countries, in terms of skilled labour. According to Kock and Burke (2008), 35% of highly skilled positions between levels 13 and 16, and 60% of director-general positions remain

vacant in the public service. The skills shortage has been identified as a hindrance to economic growth and job creation in South Africa. Consequently, Jinabhai (2007) proposes that training and development be put in place to improve and facilitate the acquisition of new skills, knowledge and attributes, building on the existing competence levels of employees in an organisation. The development of internal talent may be a solution to skills shortages. Kock and Burke (2008) concur, and add that developing and growing the talent from within in the context of an increasing war for technical university graduates in South Africa may be a strategy to reduce the skills shortage.

Strategies for an effective engagement process

External recruitment

Sourcing and attracting employees from outside, rarely considering internal staff, is detrimental to the engagement process. This results in employees feeling neglected, demoralised, less competent and less committed and engaged (Gandossy and Kao, 2004).

Employer branding

Stahl et al. (2007) state that competition for talent enables companies to improve their self-marketing to potential recruits, in order to position themselves as employers of choice to succeed in attracting critical talent (Wheeler et al., 2007). Walker (2007) defines employer brand as "a set of attributes and qualities – often tangible – that makes an organisation distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience and appeal to those people who will thrive and perform their best in its culture". The influence of current employees on employer brand is crucial (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Barrow and Mosley, 2006; Rodriguez, 2006).

Training and development

According to Ingham (2006), 'employers of choice' focus on developing their employees' skills in order to gain competitive advantage. Extensive research supports the importance of talent development as a prerequisite for organisational success (Bowes, 2008; Bryan et al., 2006; Pollit, 2004).

Mentoring and coaching

Mentors and coaches assist individuals to create and negotiate an imaginative and sustainable development plan (Clutterbuck, 2005), and to receive valuable feedback (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Rothwell et al., 2005). Potgieter (2007) notes that a coach accompanies the protégé on their journey and keeps them focused on reaching their destinations.

Career development

Organisations should provide career development, or employees will feel stagnant and leave. According to Beechler and Woodward (2009), employers view employees as "free agents responsible for their own employability and employees now assume an active role in managing their own learning skills and career development". In relation to employee career mobility, Baruch (2006) confirms that there is a major shift from the traditional career form where employees used to remain with one employer. Today, employees opt for multiple careers with a short time spent in each career. Given these, the success of any career management initiative requires the support of line managers. While employees emphasise growth and development, it is the responsibility of both parties to jointly agree on career plans, as career development is a prerequisite for succession planning.

Succession planning

An employee's perception of internal opportunities for growth and development is one of the most important predictors of employee engagement. Tropiano (2004: 50) defines succession planning as "the strategic, systematic and deliberate effort to develop competencies in potential leaders through purposed learning experiences such as targeted rotations and educational training in order to fill high-level positions without favouritism". Buhler (2008) stresses the importance of succession planning in the war for talent. Opportunities for advancement in the form of successors for retiring staff members are a powerful tool to increase retention rates. Berger and Berger (2004) suggest that successful talent pool solutions should be initiated and designed by a senior executive team with strong input from CEOs.

While employers are planning to groom the possible successors to replace the retiring employees, Jones et al. (2009) warn that employee engagement merits greater investigation in line with the changing nature of the demographic composition of the workforce.

Role players in engaging employees

Firstly, the role of line managers in engaging employees must be emphasised. Morton (2005) asserts that organisations need leaders who know how to identify promising employees and who have the ability to motivate and develop such employees to build a workforce for the future. Secondly, human resources practitioners must effectively plan, hire, align, develop, reward, manage and

analyse a high-performing workforce. According to the 2004 Deloitte study, chief executive officers (CEOs) are likely to expect from their HR leaders to drive human capital performance (Lockwood, 2006), provide training, coaching and counselling, and to implement innovative work-life programmes in order to attract and retain key employees. Hence, it is essential that HR practitioners be equipped with thorough business knowledge (Li and DeVos, 2008).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Situational context

The main objectives of the research reported here were to determine the level of engagement among employees; and determine the key areas that need to be addressed in order to improve the level of engagement among employees.

Research participants

Sampling

A sample of 200 employees was randomly selected from the total TUT staff population. Efforts were made to ensure the diversity of the sample. All levels of academic staff, administrative staff and technical staff were included.

Measuring instrument

A self-report questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was compiled from a demographic section, the Gallup Workplace Audit (to measure engagement) and the turnover intention instrument (to measure the intention to leave the university in the near future). In total, 115 participants responded. A representative sample can be confirmed on account of the diverse nature of the respondents in terms of age, appointment category, job level, qualifications, experience and period of appointment within the same position.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained. The respondents were required to complete an informed consent form. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw their participation at any stage. The anonymity of all respondents was protected.

Research procedure

Questionnaires were hand delivered to respondents. Respondents were requested to complete the questionnaires as soon as possible and to return it to the researcher via the internal posting service of the institution.

Data analysis

Data analysis was done, using the SPSS (2003) statistical software, as well as STATA (version 11). While the study was aimed at determining whether there is any correlation between the demo-graphical characteristics and the tested construct, the Pearson chi-square correlation co-efficient was used to determine any possible statistically significant relationships.

Reliability of the study

Bless and Higson-Smith (1997) explains that the commonly used statistic for internal reliability is the Cronbach alpha, with an accepted internal reliability of 0.70. Cronbach's alpha was computed for each scale, and all of the scales demonstrated an acceptable level of reliability, with all alphas exceeding 0.75. The employee engagement instrument yielded a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.82. With the turnover intention instrument, a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.75 was obtained.

STATISTICAL RESULTS

The result analysis indicates that the majority of the employees (96%) are aware of what is expected of them at work. Of the respondents, 90% felt that the mission and purpose of TUT make them feel that their jobs are important. A further 80% felt that TUT affords them an opportunity to do what they do best every day. In contrast, the findings indicate negative views in terms of feedback and regarding progress, as 54% of the respondents did not agree that in the last 6 months someone had talked to them about their progress at work. The same applies to recognition expected by employees for good work. Alarmingly, 65% deny that they had received recognition or praise for doing a good job in the previous week.

Association between biographical variables and employee engagement

The findings of the current survey reflect a significant difference in the levels of employee engagement in terms of demographic variables on some of the items. Overall, 77% of the employees believed that the mission and purpose of TUT make them feel that their jobs are important. However, those above 60 years held a different view. The same applies to service periods with the organisation. Again, 77% of the employees were satisfied, except for those who had been appointed for between 26 and 30 years earlier – they disagreed that the mission and purpose had meaning for them, in terms of their jobs.

In relation to growth and development, the longer employees remained with TUT, the more they felt concerned about the lack of development. Employees who had been with TUT for between 16 and 20 years (64%) and 26 and 30 years (60%), respectively, were the most concerned that nobody encouraged their development at work. The perception may be that, in spite of their levels of commitment, there were no career plans during their tenures at the university. Lastly, the non-academics (82%) believed in having a best friend at work, as compared to the academics (59%), who did not see this aspect as important.

In relation to the findings of the survey, common concerns from respondents on matters of levels of satisfaction, commitment and engagement, and intentions to leave, included the following issues on which the recommendations are based:

i. lack of opportunities for growth and development;
ii. lack of recognition or praise for work well done;
iii. dissatisfaction in terms of policies and procedures;
iv. the way supervisors made decisions; and
v. amount of pay, compared to level of performance.

Based on the issues afore indicated, some of the respondents sounded a note of warning in terms of the following:

i. the possibility of searching for alternative employment in the near future;
ii. unwillingness to accept any job assignment in order to remain at TUT;
iii. little to be gained by staying at TUT;
iv. lack of inspiration at TUT in terms of job performance; and
v. reduced levels of loyalty among some employees.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Policies/practices

While all organisations are directed by policies and procedures, it may be necessary for HR, as custodians of most employment policies, to ensure that a human resource policy manual is provided to each employee. In addition, HR should further ensure that subjects covered by TUT HR policies address the basic human resources issues, as governed by legislature, for example, the Employment Equity Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, and the Health and Safety Act. Further recommendations would suggest that issues such as promotions and training, should clearly be stipulated, especially for line managers, as the implementers of most decisions that affect employees.

Recognition for work well done

Employee recognition should not be regarded as 'a nice thing to do', but rather as a communication tool that reinforces and rewards the most important outcomes employees create for the university. The 96% of employees who were committed to put more effort in, in order to help the university succeed, should be eligible for recognition.

In the absence of a performance management system, it is, however, crucial for line managers to take the opportunity to reward employees for their actions by simply acknowledging their success. While 80% of the employees believed that the organisation affords them an opportunity to do what they do best every day, it is the responsibility of their managers to ensure that something is done to acknowledge and praise individuals for their good work. In essence, managers should be able to comment on inappropriate work or actions, as well as to provide positive reinforcement for good practice.

Lack of feedback on progress

It is the responsibility of supervisors or line managers to provide feedback on an ongoing, year-round basis. A further recommendation would be to avoid the tendency to reserve feedback on progress only for poor performance; it will be important to address strengths and successes as well as deficiencies and failures.

Another key to employee engagement, satisfaction and retention is the need for employees to know what is expected of them, and to understand how their work contributes to the organisation's mission and success. To this end, it may be necessary for line managers to revisit each employee's job profile on a regular basis in order to determine any skills deficiencies for training interventions, where necessary.

Supervision

While a concern was raised by the employees regarding the ability of their supervisors to make good decisions, it is the line managers' responsibility to ensure that a working relationship exists between them and their subordinates.

It may also be necessary that line managers are trained in order to inspire the subordinates and to promote a good work ethic and increased production. The assertion is that many, who are employed in supervisory management, are never trained. However, training can really help supervisors employ effective strategies in their job. In this regard, line managers should act as the first point of reference for any concerns expressed by their colleagues. Through regular meetings, employees will be aware of new developments that affect their employment contracts.

Remuneration and benefits

In an attempt to have a common view, in terms of compensation, the salary structure should be made more transparent to all employees. It is the responsibility of the line managers, as well as HR, to educate staff on how different categories are remunerated, for example, the level of the job within the university system, the scarcity of skills and experience required for the job in the job

Table 1. Correlation between biographical variables and the tested instruments.

Variable	Employee engagement	Turnover intention
Gender	0.667*	0.834*
Age	0.890*	0.075*
Appointment type	0.349*	0.884*
Qualification	0.936*	0.891*
Period of service	0.097*	0.495*

*($p < 0.05$); ** ($p < 0.01$).

market, as well as factors within the university that might affect the salary offered, such as comparative jobs, and the university's promotion policy.

Another issue of concern was the lack of growth opportunities, as reflected where some employees had never been promoted since they joined the university. In this regard, further recommendations would be to consider the issues of succession planning, where employees with potential should be considered for promotion rather than advertise positions externally, as is current practice at TUT. The challenge is for HR to revise and implement succession-planning policies, and to ensure that line managers are fully trained to apply the policies fairly.

Growth and development

The study presented evidence to support the skills development initiatives, as enforced by government legislation (Skills Development Act). The data from this study would further suggest that policies be revised, in order to develop internal talent for succession-planning purposes. The university should also encourage the creation of talent pools, where employees who have been identified to have potential for growth, are made aware of plans ahead for them, in order to reduce turnover. Managers can use the findings of this study to help defend the proposition that positive attitudes can develop with employees when TUT commits itself to talent management initiatives, rather than traditional human resources practices.

In addition to the foregoing, such programmes will remain fruitless, unless line managers are trained to understand their roles, especially in times when the war for talent is fierce. In an attempt to retain the university's critical talent, efforts should be put in place to grow talent from within, and to coach and mentor talented employees to occupy critical roles in future.

HR practitioners should be in a position to provide reports in terms of workforce demand and supply. The additional challenge for HR is to see to it that an effective human resources information system is available, and also to ensure the accuracy of employee data. Effective workforce planning programmes should be implemented, whereby possible vacant positions on account of retirements are identified. In this regard, possible successors should be identified and effectively developed to fill such vacancies, rather than search for talent externally. Such initiatives will assist to reduce low morale, especially for employees, who have been with the university for between 21 and 25 years, or even between 26 and 30 years, without any growth opportunities. Table 1 reflects the correlation between the biographical variable and the tested instruments.

Employee engagement

In relation to the levels of employee engagement, there was a significant correlation between gender ($r = 0.67$; $p < 0.05$), age ($r = 0.89$; $p < 0.05$), and qualification (0.94; $p < 0.05$). The results also indicate a significant relationship, although minimal, between appointment type ($r = 0.35$; $p < 0.05$) and tenure (0.10; $p < 0.05$), with the level of employee engagement.

Based on these findings, it can be confirmed that age tends to be a determining factor for levels of engagement. In terms of the mission of TUT (item B4.8), the younger generations were still enthusiastic, and felt that the mission of the university inspired them in terms of job performance; however, with age, such a feeling tends to diminish. This means that managers need to ensure that all age categories are kept engaged, as disengaged employees tend to be demoralised, and quit. In terms of appointment type, good relationships (with friends) usually reinforce a sense of belonging.

Another correlation was found between qualification and engagement. This coincides with findings that a lack of challenging assignments may lead to boredom, as some employees may feel that their talent was wasted; hence, they would search for other alternatives. In this regard, the study confirmed that the more engaged employees are, the longer they would remain committed, and such employees also stay longer with the organisation.

Turnover intentions

Similar findings can be reported in the case of turnover intentions. Table 1 further highlights significant relationships between gender (0.83, $p < 0.05$), appointment type ($r = 0.88$; $p < 0.05$), qualification ($r = 0.89$; $p < 0.05$),

Table 2. Sub-scale correlations.

	Turnover intentions	Employee engagement
Turnover intentions	1	-0.269
Employee engagement	-0.269	1

Table 3. Hypothesis offered.

Hypothesis	Status
Employee engagement has a direct, positive relationship to turnover.	Although negative, and at a low level of -0.27, the hypothesis is accepted.

tenure (r = 0.46; p < 0.05) and turnover intentions. Age (r = 0.08; p < 0.05) and tenure (r = 0.50; p < 0.05) also indicated a significant relationship with turnover intentions, although at a relatively low level. The older employees get, the higher the possibility of losing knowledge and skills. This means that succession-planning initiatives need to be enforced in order to groom the younger generations who might still be planning to remain with the university. In line with growth and development, the more developed the employees, the more engaged they tend to be. The relation between the level of engagement and the intentions to leave the university is depicted below.

Relationship between employee engagement and turnover intentions at TUT

Table 2 gives a correlation between turnover intentions and employee engagement. Based on the literature reviewed, the hypothesis in Table 3 is offered.

Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to measure the levels of engagement of staff at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and to determine whether labour turnover can be contained through effective engagement strategies. As universities are particularly vulnerable to losing their highly qualified staff to lucrative offers from the private sector and "poaching" from other universities, the study is particularly relevant and important in the South African context.

The study also provides line managers and human resources practitioners with insight into specific workplace practices that will have a positive effect on the engagement levels and ultimately turnover levels of the entire staff component at TUT.

The main findings in terms of engagement levels were that the majority of the staff knew what was expected from them, felt their jobs were important and believed that they had the opportunity to employ their skills daily. A lack of feedback regarding progress and an absence of recognition of excellence, manifested as a concern for employees. An alarming finding was that the longer employees remained with TUT, the more they experienced a lack of personal and career development and an absence of career planning. As a significant proportion of the respondents have never been promoted during their employment at TUT, HR should revise and implement talent management and succession-planning policies and ensure that line managers are fully trained to apply the policies fairly. In order to retain the university's critical talent, talent should be nurtured and grown, and line managers should coach and mentor talented employees to occupy critical roles in future.

It is recommended that a human resource policy manual is provided to each employee, covering basic legislative issues, promotions, training opportunities and internal human resources policies and procedures such as the remuneration policy. In the absence of a performance management system, it is crucial for line managers to take the opportunity to comment on inappropriate work or actions, as well as to provide positive reinforcement for good practice. Essential for employee engagement, satisfaction and retention, is the need for employees to know what is expected of them, and to understand how their work contributes to the organisation's mission and success.

It is the line managers' responsibility to ensure that a positive working relationship exists between them and their subordinates, to inspire their subordinates and to promote a good work ethic. It is simply not good enough to merely be an excellent administrator. Line managers must consciously strive to become leaders with a "heart" for the people they are managing.

HR practitioners should be in a position to provide reports in terms of workforce demand and supply. The additional challenge for HR is to see to it that an effective human resources information system is available, and also to ensure the accuracy of employee data. Effective workforce planning programmes should be implemented, whereby possible vacant positions on account of retirements are identified. In this regard, possible successors should be identified and effectively developed to fill such vacancies, rather than search for talent externally. Such

initiatives will assist to reduce low morale, especially for long service employees, without any growth opportunities. Further research should focus on:

1. Career mobility and its effects on the retention of skilled employees in South Africa.
2. Succession planning, commitment, mentoring and coaching in order to assess their effectiveness in improving skills retention within institutions of higher learning in South Africa.
3. Determining the reasons for the common practice of "poaching" or headhunting among institutions of higher learning is the 'poaching' of talent.
4. Finally, future research may assist universities to improve problem areas, for example, low levels of staff morale, especially for employees who have demonstrated high levels of commitment, as well as a willingness to put more effort in, in order to assist the university to succeed, despite a lack of growth in their positions.

The research study has proven that there is a correlation between the level of employee engagement and staff's intention to leave the university. In the war for highly qualified staff members, this is something that both line managers and human resources practitioners have to take seriously and act upon. A university that does not manage to engage its people, might end up without their highly skilled and sought after people after all.

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