

# Flourishing Professors and Staff Retention

May 17, 2017



The academic environment in South Africa has recently undergone significant restructuring, leading to problems with staff morale and difficulties retaining talented academic staff. Staff retention is necessary in order for academic institutions to meet their goals, so it is important to determine what influences employees to stay or leave their current positions. In a recent study published in the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, researchers Christine Janse van Rensburg (Vaal University of Technology) Sebastiaan (Snr) I. Rothmann (North-West University), Elsabe Diedericks (North-West University) investigated factors that influence faculty members' intention to leave their jobs. The researchers specifically examined two factors: Whether the employees are flourishing in their current jobs and the quality of the fit they have with their work environment.

What does it mean to flourish in a position? A review of several conceptualizations of flourishing suggests that people need emotional, psychological, and social well-being in order to do well.

In work contexts, emotional well-being is determined by a combination of job satisfaction (the degree to which employees perception of their job relates to their wants and expectations) and positive affect balance (the balance between the positive and negative emotions they experience at work).

Psychological well-being in work contexts consists of autonomy (the freedom of choice when making decisions), competence (experiences of mastery and control over outcomes), relatedness (connection and interaction with others), learning opportunities (the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills), meaning and purpose (the impression that work is seen as meaningful), and engagement (a connection to work).

Social well-being is comprised of social acceptance (a positive attitude toward diversity), social growth (whether individuals believe in the potential for development of components of the organization), social contribution (whether employees think that their daily actions add to the organization), social coherence (whether employees find their institution and social life to be meaningful and understandable), and social integration (whether employees feel a sense of relatedness, comfort, and support from their organization).

A person's well-being at work can also be influenced by the fit between that person and their work environment. This fit can be described on several levels and includes the compatibility between a person's goals, values, skills, and personality with an organization (person-organization fit), a group (person-group fit), or a specific job (person-job fit).

To examine how aspects of flourishing and person-environment fit influence employees' intention to leave jobs, the researchers recruited more than 300 employees from three universities of technology located in Gauteng and the Free State (two provinces in South Africa). Participants completed surveys measuring the various levels of person-work fit, flourishing, and their intention to leave their current position.

The researchers found the person-environment fit predicted flourishing at work and, in turn, employees' intentions to leave their current position. Person-organization and person-group fit were found to be especially important to overall person-environment fit, suggesting that human-resource practitioners focus on increasing these aspects as a way of reducing employee turnover. In addition, these findings highlight the need for making sure new employees are suited for the position for which they are being hired and for providing employees personal, career, and social growth opportunities in the workplace.

## Reference

[Rensburg, C. J. V., Rothmann, S. S. I., & Diedericks, E. \(2017\). Person-environment fit, flourishing and intention to leave in universities of technology in South Africa. \*South African Journal of Industrial Psychology\*, 43, 10-pages. doi:10.4102/sajip.v43i0.1422](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v43i0.1422)