

Editor's comment

This is the first issue of the *SAJLR* for 2014, and I would like to thank our Editorial Committee, Professors Erasmus, Booysen, Anstey and Horwitz, the respected academics and practitioners in the field who serve on our Reviewers' Panel and all our authors who contributed to this edition for their vision and insightful contributions.

Although the level of unemployment in South Africa is one of the highest in the world, this does not mean that there is an oversupply of talented employees. The South African labour market is also characterised by low levels of education and limited skills. In an endeavour to remain competitive, organisations continuously compete for educated and skilled people. Given the resources spent on recruiting, appointing and training the best employees, organisations need to do everything in their power to retain them and therefore research on job embeddedness, or those forces that bind employees to their current jobs and organisations, is essential in employment relations management. Accordingly, this is the focus of the first two articles in this issue.

In our first article, **Job embeddedness, organisational commitment and voluntary turnover of academic staff at a higher education institution in South Africa**, Mensele and Coetzee focus on the challenge of recruiting and retaining academic staff in South Africa and internationally. The objectives of the study were to determine empirically whether job embeddedness and organisational commitment significantly predict voluntary turnover and whether people from different gender, race and age groups differ significantly in terms of these three variables. The measuring instruments used were the Job Embeddedness Scale (JES), the Organisational Commitment Scale (OCS) and the Voluntary Turnover Scale (VTS). A cross-sectional quantitative survey design was used to collect data from a random sample of (N=102) full-time academic staff at a South African higher education institution in Gauteng. The findings showed that organisational fit, community links and normative commitment significantly and positively predicted the participants' intention to stay at the institution. Female participants showed higher levels of organisational fit and sacrifice, hence a stronger intention to stay. White participants had stronger community links and fit, and the African participants had higher levels of normative commitment than the other race groups. The current study adds to the knowledge base on the turnover intentions of academic staff and makes recommendations for retention practices and possible future research.

In the second article, **Mission attachment and job embeddedness in the trade union sector of South Africa**, Pillay, Hofmeyr and Wöcke report on the research they conducted to glean a better understanding of the concept job embeddedness. In this article the applicability of mission attachment as a fourth dimension of job embeddedness is tested, thereby adding to our understanding of the construct. Data from 134 (trade union) and 30 (comparison group) respondents were analysed quantitatively and it was found that within a social organisation such as a trade union there is a strong, consistent and positive ranking between mission awareness and organisational job embeddedness. The results also show that the different dimensions of mission attachment had a significant impact on employees in the trade union sample. An additional finding was that employees in the trade union sector who are highly attached to the mission of the organisation tend to be those who have been employed in that sector for a relatively short period and that mission attachment declines over time.

In their research Dibey, Viviers and Van Zyl investigate what organisations, specifically those in high-risk occupations, can do to retain their employees and ensure optimal organisational performance. In their article, **A preliminary study: perceived transformational**

leadership and work engagement within the South African army, the authors set out to determine the relationship between the perceived transformational leadership styles of officers (as perceived by their followers) and their followers' levels of work engagement. Followers (n=307) were identified in units of the South African Army. They completed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Form 5X) for their specific leaders. Correlational analyses indicate significant correlations between the transformational leadership style of officers and their followers' work engagement. A small amount of the variance in the work engagement outcomes can be predicted by transformational leadership. The findings suggest that there is a relationship between idealised influence (attributed) and vigour and dedication. Furthermore, individualised consideration was shown to relate to absorption within the South African sample. Idealised influence was found to predict some variance in vigour and dedication and individual consideration to predict some variance in absorption.

A further factor that organisations need to consider is the changing demographics of the workforce. More and more women are joining the workforce and as a result different employee needs must be considered if organisations want to retain their talented female employees. Brand and Barreiro-Lucas focus on one of these aspects in their article **Return-to-work experiences of female employees following maternity leave**. They argue that corporate culture seemingly does not encourage talented women to return to the workplace or continue to operate effectively in the workplace, while managing their domestic responsibilities and that this has a direct influence on the progression of talented women to senior positions and their retention in those positions. Although many organisations have amended their policies in order to support work-family balance, there are still many underlying concerns regarding working mothers. The primary purpose of this study is to identify common themes arising from the return-to-work experiences of female employees following maternity leave in South Africa. The results of this study revealed that despite viewing work positively, the participants in the study found the return-to-work experience after childbirth difficult. A significant change in the attitudes of the participants towards their careers after childbirth was also identified. This change is not necessarily negative and should not be interpreted as an indication of loss of interest by the employees in their careers. It does, however, highlight the need for adequate management of the whole process, from "workplace pregnancy" to return to work, that female employees undergo. Employers open to the evolution of best practice for maternity leave will attract and retain high-calibre female talent.

Change is inevitable and, as we have seen in the previous article, change is often necessary to ensure better employment relations. Change should, however, not happen haphazardly. It should be effectively coordinated and managed. Although managers and employment relations practitioners are mainly responsible for coordinating and managing change in organisations, they rely on change agents to facilitate change initiatives. Van der Linde-de Klerk, Martins and De Beer make a valuable contribution in this regard in their article, **The development of a change agent identification framework for South African change agents**. The main aim of this research project was to develop a theoretical change agent identification framework that could enable organisational change management specialists to identify change agents more effectively in large organisations that are undergoing change. To date, little research has been conducted into the best way to identify change agents. Change agents can play a significant role in effectively assisting co-employees to adapt to change and in eliminating resistance. The sample of change agents utilised in this research project comprised employees at a large South African utility organisation who were affected by change themselves but nevertheless helped to communicate key messages to other affected employees and supported them throughout the change process. These change agents played a significant role in helping to develop a comprehensive change agent

identification framework that focuses on those elements to be taken into account when selecting individuals in an organisation to serve as change agents. A thorough 12-step empirical research process which included both a qualitative and a quantitative approach was followed. The qualitative process and results constitute the focus of this article. The literature findings contribute towards a comprehensive understanding of the role of change agents, as well as of the elements that should form part of a change agent identification framework to be used as a basis for selecting change agents.

Finally, in his article, **Factors influencing job satisfaction among public sector employees: an empirical exploration**, Mafini focuses on a sector which has been plagued by high levels of labour unrest and employee dissatisfaction in recent years. He argues that performance problems in public sector organisations in South Africa may be partially attributed to employee-related factors, including low job satisfaction levels. This study therefore set out to examine factors influencing the job satisfaction of employees in a South African public sector organisation. A two-section survey questionnaire was administered to 246 government employees based in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics of the sample and factor analysis to establish the factors that contributed to the job satisfaction of public sector employees. Reliabilities were measured with the aid of Cronbach's alpha. Five underlying factors that contributed to job satisfaction, namely working conditions, ability utilisation, teamwork, creativity and autonomy were identified. Among these factors, teamwork emerged as the highest contributor to respondents' job satisfaction. The findings suggest that to enhance employee job satisfaction levels, managers in public organisations should pay particular attention to each of the five factors identified in this study. This could be a solution to the problems of improving employee relations as well as meeting the performance challenges that currently face public organisations in South Africa.

My warmest appreciation to Ms Louise Oberholster, who does the layout and the general administration of the journal, as well as to the Language Editor, Ms Sandra Mills, for your contributions to this issue of the journal.

I hope you find this edition not only a valuable scholarly resource but also an interesting and thought-provoking read. Employment relations in South Africa are generally perceived to be at the crossroads following large-scale industrial action and far-reaching amendments to labour legislation. We would like to use the journal as a platform to engage with academics and practitioners in the field and stimulate discourse on employment relations and therefore we encourage you to send us your contributions.



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