

# **The relation between psychological empowerment and turnover intention, Windhoek.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Finding ways to reduce turnover within organisations is challenging, especially during economically difficult times and with high levels of skill shortages. The main aim of this study is to investigate the relation between psychological empowerment and turnover intention. Instead of using money only to retain employees, managers and organisations can find ways to reduce turnover intention of employees. Psychological empowerment is a set of cognitions regarding an individual's job orientation in relation to meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Psychological empowerment is linked to identifying and removing conditions from an organisation that increases powerlessness amongst the employees. Turnover intention is the subjective probability that an employee will leave his/her work within a certain period of time. Turnover intention was found to be the strongest predictor of actual turnover. It was found that when employees experience higher levels of psychological empowerment they will also experience lower levels of turnover intention and increased levels of productivity within the organisation. A cross-sectional survey was used to assess the correlation between psychological empowerment and turnover intention at a parastatal in Windhoek (n=101). Making use of Spearman's rank order correlation, psychological empowerment was negatively related to turnover intention ( $r = -0.46, p < 0.05$ ; medium effect). Removing disempowering practices from the organisation will reduce employees' level of turnover intention. The unique nature of this study, especially within the Namibian context, paves the way for future research on a large scale but also adds to the existing body of knowledge within industrial/organisational psychology and to aspects of employee retention within the world of work.

**Key words:** psychological empowerment, turnover intention.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A study in the United States of America found that in organisations where competent talented individuals are few and expensive to replace, reducing high levels of turnover is quite challenging (Soltis, Agneessens, Sasovova, & Labianca, 2013). This is the same scenario in Namibia where unemployment and high levels of unskilled employees makes it difficult for organisations to prosper and compete both locally and internationally (Van Schalkwyk, Du Toit, Bothma, & Rothmann, 2010).

Poor remuneration is said to be one of the biggest causes of turnover in organisations (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Nienaber and Masibigiri (2012) in a study on public servants in South Africa noted other factors like level of remuneration, lack of employee training, poor career advice and assistance from management and inflexibility with regard to employee work roles. However, keeping employees within the organisation does not ensure the effectiveness of the organisations. Apart from money, organisations can still enhance employees' job attitudes and reduce turnover within the organisations by improving employees' job attitudes.

Organisations need to encourage employees, ensuring that employees experience higher levels of worth within the organisation, but also organisations should be able to identify employees' ability to perform tasks (employee empowerment) (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined psychological empowerment as increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work role; these cognitions include meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

Boshoff and Mels (1995), Spreitzer (2008), Wong and Chad (2011) found a negative correlation between psychological empowerment and turnover intention. This means that the more psychologically empowered employees become, the less likely it will be that they will want to leave the organisation and the more likely they will be to positively influence productivity.

### **Psychological empowerment**

Psychological empowerment has been defined as “a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information” (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 474).

According to Spreitzer (1992) psychological empowerment requires a contextual analysis to be fully understood. According to the same author (1995, p. 144) empowerment reflects an active work orientation “in which an individual wishes and feels able to shape his or her work role and context”. The power being referred to does not necessarily refer to political power; it is simply the power to understand what choices one can make in different situations that the employee may encounter. Organisations should be able to empower their employees and these can result in the organisation’s increased productivity (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). To empower means to give power. Giving power, however, has several meanings, for example in a legal sense, it means to give authority, thus empowerment can mean to be given authorisation. Power also means energy, in other words empowering can also mean to energise an individual (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Conger and Kanungo (1988) explained that empowerment is when an individual’s self-worth is motivated and uplifted; psychological empowerment consists of concepts such as self-efficacy, self-determination and autonomy. Ford and Fottler (1995) regard empowerment as giving individuals the freedom to decide on how to manage their day to day activities. Informing employees about the performance needs of the organisation will help employees to use their knowledge and skills effectively. Organisations should make sure its employees have the necessary knowledge and skills needed to perform their jobs effectively. Employees can also be empowered through the introduction of training and development schemes and role clarification to avoid job ambiguity. Furthermore organisations should make sure their employees are given power to make rational decisions and that they are rewarded fairly (Ford & Fottler, 1995).

Spreitzer (1995) moreover adds the concepts of autonomy (self-determination), competence, meaning and impact as the sub-constructs that form psychological empowerment. These sub-constructs are designed to highlight personal experiences in the concept of empowerment.

#### **a) Autonomy**

This refers to the control individuals perceive they have in their work environments, the individual’s sense of choice about activities and methods they intend to use in task completion. Autonomy refers to the sense of choice one makes with regard to the intended action; with this is included deciding on how and when to carry out tasks. It also refers to the choice in behaviour; decisions should be associated with greater feelings of self-determination and impact for them to be regarded as autonomous (Verstuyf, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Boone, & Mouratidis, 2013).

## **b) Competence**

Competence is related to an individual's job performance and the confidence they express in performing to their best ability. Perceived competence refers to an individual's belief in his or her capabilities to perform activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008). It can also be referred to as the belief an individual have about performing a task successfully and competently, believing that they hold the required skills and abilities for task completion (Verstuyf et al., 2013).

## **c) Meaning**

Meaning refers to the meaning that the job has for the employee, referring to the value of and the purpose of the work being done in relation to the personal goals of the employee (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Meaning should involve an employee's personal beliefs, values and behaviours; an employee's task will only have a sense of meaning when they start caring for it (Spreitzer, 1996).

## **(d) Impact**

According to Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) impact refers to the extent to which an employee can influence organisational strategic plans/outcomes, administrative plans/outcomes and operating outcomes. Employees who experience impact are able to influence the outcome of the organisation; one of the influences of impact is the work context of an individual (Spreitzer, 1995).

Together, these four cognitions reflect a dynamic direction for work roles. The absence of one of these sub-constructs in an individual can decrease the level of empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Psychological constructs such as competence and impact are related to how managers manage their organisations effectively, while meaning is seen as the best construct to predict how satisfied employees are with their work (Spreitzer et al., 1997).

According to the Job Characteristic model, there are five characteristics that lead to worker motivation, performance and satisfaction. Namely **task identity**, this refers to the degree to which an employee can do his/her work from the beginning until completion. Second is **task significance**; this refers to the degree of perceived importance of one's work. Thirdly there is **skill variety**; this refers to the extent to which the job allows an individual to do different tasks. Fourthly there is **autonomy** which refers to the degree to which employees have control and can choose the methods of carrying out their work. Finally there is **feedback** which refers to the

degree to which the work or organisation provides an employee with feedback on his/her performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Based on these five job characteristics as explained by Hackman and Oldham, it was found to be positively related to work performance (Anjum, Fan, Javed, & Rao, 2014). This emphasises the importance of having these characteristics within each job.

Some people tend to think of empowerment as delegation and accountability, to them it involves a top-down decision making model where decisions are made solely from the top and distributed to the lower channels within an organisation. This also goes hand in hand with the organisation's goals; a lot of delegation takes place whereby management has greater control over what happens within the organisation (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).

Other people, however, believed that empowerment was about change, growth and taking risks, to them it was about trust and tolerance and believing in uncertainty, meaning that not everyone is perfect. For them empowerment meant empowering employee's behaviour by building teams to encourage cooperative behaviour, encourage intelligent risk-taking and trusting people to perform (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).

Empowered people have decision-making power, can choose how to complete their work tasks, and this is referred to as self-determination. Such people enjoy working collaboratively, their work has a personal importance in their lives and they care about their careers. They also have a sense of meaning (their work is significant to them and it satisfies a personal goal), they have a sense of impact (they are optimistic and believe they have an influence within the organisation, they contribute to the outcome of the organisation and believe their ideas are listened to in the organisation), they have a sense of self-determination (they are free to choose strategies in performing their tasks), and finally they have a sense of competence (they know they can perform their work task effectively, they are sure of their capabilities in performing tasks) (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997; Sieloff, 2004).

There are two ways of increasing psychological empowerment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). One is to change the employees' thinking processes and the other is to change the environment. The process of empowering work environments has to do with the ways in which leaders within an organisation exercise their leadership styles; employees should, however be able to trust these practices (Laschinger & Finegan 2005). Leaders in organisations who prove to be competent,

especially in their actions towards their employees, and those who do not abuse power but rather use it in a positive way for both the organisation and employees are most likely to produce mutual power amongst their subordinates (Sieloff, 2004).

Having a better understanding of the antecedents of psychological empowerment will better equip practitioners and managers to positively impact the psychological empowerment levels of employees within the organisation.

## **Antecedents of Psychological Empowerment**

### **a) Self-esteem**

Brockner (1988) defined self-esteem as a general feeling of self-worth; it is said to be related to empowerment. Individuals with a high self-esteem are likely to perform well at work (Bandura, 1977). Individuals with high levels of self-esteem seem to identify their value to the organisation; therefore they tend to be more active and productive in their work roles (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Individuals with low levels of self-esteem are not likely to see themselves as being able to make a difference or influence their work.

### **b) Locus of control**

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) suggested that locus of control is also related to empowerment. Locus of control has to do with the belief people have that they can determine what happens in their own lives (Rotter, 1966). Individuals with an internal locus of control regarding life in general are more likely to feel capable of shaping their work and work environments and feel empowered. People with an external locus of control will feel that most of the events happening in their lives result from some external forces and that they have limited to no control over it (Spreitzer, 1995). People with an internal locus of control are high performing employees who would willingly search for extra information in complicated environments (Spector, 1982).

### **c) Information**

Making information available to people within the organisation can empower employees (Kanter, 1989). Bowen and Lawler (1992) suggested that two types of information are significant to the process of empowerment: the first one is information about an organisation's mission and second is the information about performance. With regard to organisational mission, people will only put in effort if they know what the organisation has planned or is planning. This indicates

the direction in which the organisation is heading and its objectives, the specific areas of business it has ventured into, its target population, and its key customers/consumers (Kanter, 1989). Information about the mission of the organisation allows the employee to understand the meaning and purpose of the organisation's existence; as a result, employees can decide and perform in favour of the goals and missions of the organisation (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). On the other hand, information about performance is significant, and can be realised through feedback sessions between managers/supervisors and their subordinates. This method allows the employee to weigh his/her performance; see if he/she is performing as expected and, if not, interventions can be discussed to increase performance. If the performance is good, employees should be encouraged to maintain their performance levels or even look for more ways to increase performance (Bowen & Lawler, 1992).

#### **d) Rewards**

Employees need to be rewarded to feel empowered; through rewards their contributions are recognised. Rewarding employees individually is important for empowerment opportunities since internal and external rewards are tied to effectiveness (Lawler, 1986). Individual rewards increase empowerment and this can have a positive effect on an employee's decision-making process at the work place. Rewards include internal rewards such as feelings of self-worth and accomplishment while external rewards such as pay and promotions reinforce employee involvement and are directly linked to performance outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995).

#### **Psychological empowerment and biographical variables**

It was found that male and female employees experienced similar levels of work-role fit (competence) within the organisation (Ryan & Harden, 2014). This could be attributed to both male and female employees having the necessary skills to do their jobs.

Janik (2012) in his study in Namibia with teachers found that older employees (55 years and older) also tend to experience higher levels of work-role fit (competence). These findings were also supported by Marques (2013) whose study was also conducted in Namibia with academics, found employees aged 42 years and above experienced higher levels of work-role fit. This is an indication that employees who have worked longer in their lives are also more likely to have

reached the stage of skills mastery and perceive themselves to be more competent than the younger staff members with shorter tenure. Van Dyk, Coetzee and Tebele (2013) doing research in a medical and IT services organisation in South Africa found that employees that have worked for 15 years and longer experienced higher levels of work-role fit.

Single employees were found to also experience higher levels of job-role fit (competence) when compared to married or divorced employees (Van Dyk, Coetzee, & Tebele, 2013). This might be an indication that single employees might have more time available to improve their skill levels without being expected to attend to other requirements related to a marriage or divorce.

Educated employees would be more confident in their abilities about how to execute duties at work (perceived competence and autonomy) than less educated employees. Employees with higher educational qualifications are also more likely to be taken seriously and given an opportunity to decide and influence decisions within the organisation (Tongo, 2006).

Doing research at a tertiary institution in South Africa it was found that the higher your position within the organisation, the more you are expected to have autonomy and impact on what needs to be done within the organisation but also how these activities are executed (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009). It was also noted that the higher your position within the organisation, the more likely you would also want to remain within it.

Based on the literature discussed above the following hypothesis has been developed. *Hypothesis 1: Psychological empowerment is experienced differently based on sex, age, marital status, qualifications obtained, tenure, number of dependents and the different roles within the organisation.*

### **Turnover intention**

Turnover is defined by Greenberg and Baron (2003) as leaving one's job. When employees feel dissatisfied with their jobs, it can result in turnover. The dissatisfaction can come about as a result of dissatisfaction with regards to wages, working conditions and relationships with colleagues and supervisors. According to Allen and Meyer (1990) turnover intention refers to the employee's intention to leave the organisation that he/she currently works for. Turnover intention can be viewed as the total opposite of organisational commitment since employees who are strongly committed to both their work roles and organisations are those who are least likely to leave the organisations (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

In an international study on 24 countries it was found that turnover results from turnover intention (Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2004). This also indicates that if employees are experiencing turnover intention, they are more likely to leave the organisation. Staff turnover is a serious issue within organisations; it can be very expensive for organisations as the money has to be spent on termination of an employee and recruitment of a new employee. This includes advertising for the position that is now vacant, finding another employee to execute these unattended tasks and this is a costly process for the organisation. Because of turnover, the performances of other employees may go down and this might also influence organisational loyalty (Jha, 2009). Staff turnover may hinder or affect the organisation's ability to achieve its goals and missions (Abbasi, Hollman, & Hayes, 2008). Organisations are affected by turnover intention in numerous ways and it may hamper their regional and international competitiveness (Nienaber & Masibigiri, 2012). Regardless of the type of turnover, voluntary or involuntary, turnover is generally associated with negative effects (costs and disruptions) on organisational performance.

Leaving one's job may not always be an option, regardless of all the trouble one may experience in the work-place (Bothma, 2011). Factors such as the labour market conditions can influence one to leave an organisation. The perception that after leaving the current employer, chances of getting another job are good can greatly influence turnover intention (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Bothma (2011) concluded that staff turnover poses very high costs to the organisation; it includes the loss of valuable employees which can have a very negative impact on service delivery and employee productivity.

### **Turnover intention and biographical variables**

Demographic/Biographical characteristics seem to influence turnover intention differently in different countries and contexts; characteristics such as gender, age, income and tenure (length of service) have been negatively related to turnover intention (Podsakoff, William, & Todor, 1986).

There have been studies that indicated that there is no relationship between gender and intention to leave (Lee & Whitford, 2008) while other studies found that men are more likely to leave their jobs when compared to women (Dowding & John, 2008). According to Schwartz (1989, p. 65), "the rate of turnover in management positions is 2/2 times higher among top-performing women than it is among men".

Age is also related to the concept of turnover intention; there seem to be a positive relation between age and turnover, the older the individuals, the more likely they are to leave the organisation (Sousa-Poza & Henneberger, 2004). Jadoo et al. (2015) found that younger doctors were more likely to experience turnover intention when compared to older doctors. They argued that older doctors may have stronger personal ties with their careers in comparison to younger doctors.

Chughtai and Zafar (2006) found that there is no significant relationship between marital status and turnover intention, yet a study by Yin-Fah, Foon, Yeoh, Chee-Leong and Osman (2010) found a significant relationship between marital status and turnover. Akintayo (2010) also found that single employees tend to experience higher levels of turnover intention when compared to married employees.

According to Curry, McCarragher and Dellmann-Jenkins (2005) employees with a higher qualification are more likely to leave as they have more opportunities outside the organisation; they are more likely to get another employment opportunity, even soon after leaving. Salami (2008) found that educated employees are most likely to have better employment opportunities; they are more likely to occupy higher paying positions with greater organisational responsibilities making them less likely to want to leave.

Tenure refers to the period of service an employee had served the organisation in a specific post (Carmeli, 2003). The length of service in an organisation is said to be negatively related to turnover intention (Pfeffer & Lawler 1980). However, Smart (1990) found that the longer men stay with the organisation, the more likely they are to leave when compared to woman (Zhou & Volkwein, 2004).

No significant differences were found between the number of dependents and turnover intention (Xu, 2008). Lee and Maurer (1999) found a significant correlation between the number of dependents and turnover intention.

Salami (2008) indicated that employees occupying higher positions within the organisation tend to be more committed to their organisations and remain productive. Curry et al. (2005) found that there is a negative relationship between position and turnover intention. The higher employees advance within the organisational ranks, the less likely they will be to want to leave.

Based on the literature discussed above the following hypothesis has been developed, *Hypothesis 1: Turnover intention is experienced differently based on sex, age, marital status, qualifications obtained, tenure, number of dependents and the different roles within the organisation.*

### **Turnover intention and psychological empowerment**

Wong and Chad (2011) obtained significant results between empowerment practices and turnover intention in organisations. According to Spreitzer (2008) empowerment shows negative effects on turnover intention resulting in increased performance. An empowered employee demonstrates positive work attitudes and they are likely to be productive, work to their best of their ability in favour of the organisation. These employees also maintain close ties to the organisation and are less likely to leave the organisation. An empowered work force causes a reduction in turnover intention (Boshoff & Mels, 1995).

Work-role fit (perceived competence) of employees were found to be negatively related to employee turnover intention (Janik & Rothmann, 2015). When employees perceive their skills and abilities match the requirements of the job, then they are less likely to want to leave the organisation.

If the job does not provide sufficient autonomy to the employee, he/she is more likely to leave the organisation. When employees are not allowed to have an impact on the way and manner of executing their jobs, they are likely to search for jobs outside the organisation that can allow for autonomy (Rothmann, Diedericks, & Swart, 2013).

Based on the literature discussed above the following hypothesis has been developed, *Hypothesis 1: Psychological empowerment is negatively related to turnover intention.*

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research approach**

A cross-sectional survey design was used, employing questionnaires to collect data on the biography of employees, their psychological empowerment and their turnover intention (Creswell, 2003).

## Research method

### *Participants*

The organisation employs about 567 permanent employees, 345 employees working at the Windhoek office, with approximately 200 being employed at different sites in and around Windhoek. The researchers aimed at sampling a total of 120 employees from the available 145 employees. Having attachments with the organisation, the researchers approached the organisation and requested to conduct the study. Employees in the organisation were randomly selected making use of probability sampling. Matters regarding research ethics were discussed and all respondents gave consent before participation in the research. It was found that the larger group of respondents were females (55.4%), the majority of respondents are in the age range of 26-35 (26.7%), 54.5% of the sample are single, 47.5% of the sample have obtained bachelor's degrees, 28.7% have worked for the organisation between 4-6 years, 39.6% have between 1-2 children and 26.7% of employees are employed as skilled labourers. The rest of the biographical details are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1

Biographical information of sample (n=101)

	<b>Frequency:</b>	<b>Percentage:</b>
<b>Sex:</b> Male	45	44.6
Female	56	55.4
<b>Age(in years):</b> 18-25	20	19.8
26-35	27	26.7
36-45	21	20.8
46-55	20	19.8
56 and older	13	12.9
<b>Marital status:</b> Single	55	54.5
Married	41	40.6
Widowed	3	3.0
Divorced	2	2.0
<b>Qualifications:</b> High school	9	8.9

	Trade/Technical/Vocational training	15	14.9
	Associate degree	3	3.0
	Bachelor's Degree	48	47.5
	MA Degree	22	21.8
	Other	4	4.0
<b>Tenure:</b>	Less than 3 years	28	27.7
	4-6 years	29	28.7
	7-10 years	25	24.8
	10 years and more	17	16.8
	Missing values	2	2.0
<b>Dependents:</b>	no children	26	25.7
	1-2 children	40	39.6
	3-4 children	29	28.7
	5 or more children	6	5.9
<b>Role:</b>	Upper management	7	6.9
	Middle management	9	8.9
	Junior management	18	17.8
	Administrative staff	24	23.8
	Student	3	3.0
	Skilled labour	27	26.7
	Other	13	12.9
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>

### ***Measuring instruments***

The biographical questionnaire, forming the first section, was developed by the researchers; the Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire and Turnover intention scale were used to collect data.

The *Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire* (PEQ) developed by Spreitzer (1995), forms the second section and makes use of different questions to assess the four dimensions of

psychological empowerment as conceptualised by Thomas and Velthouse (1990). This questionnaire has 16 items: four items per factor (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact) with a response format from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree (7-point Likert scale). The sample items include “The work I do is meaningful” (meaning), “I am confident about my ability to do my job” (competence), “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job” (self-determination) and “My impact on what happens in my department is large” (impact) (Spreitzer, 2005). The validity of the instrument was proven by Sauer (2003) that reports an overall Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.9 and 0.89 for competence, 0.92 for meaning, 0.84 for impact and 0.91 for self-determination/autonomy.

The third section measured turnover intention making use of the Turnover intention scale (TIS) with three items adapted from Mobley, Horner and Hollingsworth (1978). The items in the instrument measured the probability of employee’s intention to leave the organisation with the following statements: 1) “it is likely that I will actively look for a new job next year”; 2) “I often think about quitting” and 3) “I will probably look for a new job next year”. Each item is represented with five point Likert response ranging from 1= “Strongly disagree” to 5= “Strongly agree”. A higher score indicated a higher intention to leave the organisation. Cronbach’s alpha was found in Namibia of  $\alpha=.75$  (Janik, 2012).

Considering that these instruments has been used in previous studies in Namibia and South Africa with a similar context, and obtained exemplary reliability results and have been used many times by other researchers, this study will also be making use of these instruments.

### ***Statistical analyses***

The statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS programme 17.0 (SPSS, 2009). In the first step descriptive statistics were employed to describe the data. The Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to assess the relations between the different biographical variables and psychological empowerment as well as between the biographical variables and turnover intention. Spearman’s rank order correlations were used to assess the correlation between psychological empowerment and turnover intention.

## RESULTS

### *Descriptive statistics and correlations*

The mean, standard deviation (SD), Skewness and Kurtosis, Cronbach alpha were analysed and recorded in Table 2.

Psychological empowerment recorded a mean of 85.18 and a mean of 10.59 for turnover intention.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank order correlation between psychological empowerment and turnover intention.

Item:	Total:		$\alpha$	1
	Mean	<i>SD</i>		
<b>1. Psychological Empowerment</b>	85.18	14.79	.92	-
<b>2. Turnover intention</b>	10.59	3.74	.92	-.46*+

\* Statistically significant:  $p \leq 0,05$

+ Practically significant correlation (medium effect):  $0,30 \leq r \leq 0,49$

++ Practically significant correlation (large effect):  $r \geq 0,50$

When making use of principal component analysis on the data for psychological empowerment, identifying factors with eigenvalues above 1.00, with factor loadings ranging from .46 to .78, the data suited a one factor model best. The percentage of variance recorded was of 45.07 for psychological empowerment and 79.43 for turnover intention. Turnover intention was also found to fit the data best with only one factor with the three items loading between .82 and .93. The correlation between psychological empowerment and turnover intention was recorded at -.46\*+ (negative correlation practically significant medium effect). Cronbach alphas were recorded of .92 for the psychological empowerment questionnaire and .92 for the turnover intention scale.

Making use of Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test, psychological empowerment was found not to be statistically significantly different for male and female employees. Statistically

significant differences were found for psychological empowerment and age groups (sig. .01), with employees aged 56 and older experiencing the highest level of psychological empowerment, followed by the age group of 46-55 years, 36-45 years, 26-35 years and 18-25 years. Married employees recorded statistically significant higher levels of psychological empowerment followed by widowed, single and divorced employees (sig. .01). Employees who had obtained Masters Degrees experienced statistically significant (sig. .00) higher levels of psychological empowerment followed by associate degrees, Bachelor's degrees then trade/technical/vocational training and then high school qualifications. Statistically significant differences were also recorded for employees who had children and their levels of psychological empowerment levels within the organisation. Employees with 3-4 children obtained the highest average levels of psychological empowerment followed by those with 5 or more children, 1-2 children and no children (sig. .02). Tenure was also found to be statistically significantly with regards to psychological empowerment. Employees who had worked for 10 years or more experienced higher average levels of psychological empowerment followed by employees who had worked for 7-10 years, 4-6 years and less than 3 years for the organisation (sig. .00). Employees working in upper level management were also found to experience statistically significant higher levels of psychological empowerment followed by middle management, junior management, skilled labourers, other positions, administrative staff, temporary employees and finally student employees (sig. .00).

Male and female employees were also found not to experience any statistically significant difference with regards to turnover intention. Statistically significant differences were recorded for age and turnover intention with employees aged 56 years and more experiencing the highest averages followed by employees aged 46-55 years, employees aged 36-45 years, employees aged 18-25 years and employees aged 26-35 years (sig. .00). Employees with different marital status showed no statistically significant differences with regards to turnover intention (sig. .08). Employees with higher qualifications were also found to experience higher levels of turnover intention. Employees with other qualifications experienced the highest average (88.0) levels of turnover intention followed by employees having obtained a Master's Degree, employees with trade/technical/vocational training, employees with Bachelor's degrees, high school certificates and associate degrees (sig. .00). The number of years worked (tenure) by employees recorded statistically significant differences with regards to their level of turnover intention (sig. .00).

Employees having worked for 10 years and more were found to experience the highest average level of turnover intention (79.91) followed by employees with other levels of tenure, namely in order employees who have worked for 7-10 years, employees who have worked for fewer than 3 years and employees who have worked for 4-6 years. The number of children employees had was statistically significantly different with regards to turnover intention (sig. .00). Employees with 5 or more children were found to experience the highest average (80.58) level of turnover intention followed by employees with 3-4 children, employees with no children and employees with 1-2 children. It was also recorded that employees having different positions within the organisation did not experience turnover intention that was statistically significantly different (sig. .07).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Psychological empowerment and biographical history**

The objectives of this study was to investigate not only the relationship between psychological empowerment and turnover intention but also whether the sample experienced psychological empowerment and turnover intention differently based on sex, age, marital status, qualifications obtained, tenure, number of dependents and the different roles within the organisation. The results confirmed that psychological empowerment is negatively related to turnover intention, that both psychological empowerment and turnover intention are experienced differently in terms of the biographical variables.

The result of this study supports the findings of Ryan and Harden (2014), indicating that males and female employees experience similar levels of psychological empowerment within this particular organisation. This could indicate that both males and females are treated equally within the organisation and how they experience autonomy, competence, meaning and impact within the organisation. Female employees experienced slightly higher levels of psychological empowerment when compared to male employees. It was also found that age influenced the level of psychological empowerment employees experience within the organisation, which is similar to the findings of Janik (2012) and Marques (2013). This could be an indication that being older, as an employee you have gained more experience and the opportunity to improve your skills and abilities. Being an older employee makes you also more likely to experience a higher level of

autonomy (fellow employees and management allowing you to guide the execution of your duties, but also allows you the opportunity to impact decisions within the organisation) and impact (believing that you can strategically impact and influence the future functioning of the organisation). Married employees experienced higher levels of psychological empowerment and that could be as a result of the social support from their spouses, indicating how good family relations positively impact on healthy work engagements. These findings were also supported by studies on work-home interference and how positive family relations influence work engagements and vice-versa (Jaga & Bagraim, 2011; Marais, de Klerk, Nel, & de Beer, 2014). Employees with higher qualifications also recorded higher levels of psychological empowerment indicating the necessity of a good education impacting on the autonomy, competence, meaning and impact of employees. Being more highly educated allows one to effectively guide the execution of one's work activities, make recommendations that are more likely to work for the better of the organisation, and experience higher levels of meaning in the work that one does and to have significantly higher impact in what one decides to do (Tongo, 2006). Employees that have worked for a longer period of time also experienced higher levels of psychological empowerment. This is an indication that tenure equips employees with the necessary skills and conviction that they are able to have an impact in the functioning of the organisation, experiencing higher levels of meaning and competence. This was also supported by the findings by Van Dyk, Coetzee and Tebele (2013). From the way in which the data is presented it seems that employees experience higher levels of psychological empowerment when they have more children; perhaps this is related to the meaning their work holds in relation to providing for their children. The more children employees have, the higher their levels of psychological empowerment. Occupying higher positions within the organisational hierarchy will allow employees better opportunities and authority to experience higher levels of autonomy, competence, meaning and impact. Managers and supervisors have more decision making power within the organisation that will also allow them to experience higher levels of competence and impact (Viljoen & Rothmann, 2009).

It was found that both males and female employees experienced similar differences with regards to turnover intention. Females were found to experience similar levels of turnover intention when compared to male employees. This was also found by Lee and Whitford (2008) which contradicts the findings of Dowding and John (2008). This might also be an indication that the

particular organisation is fairly gender sensitive in terms of working with employees, whether male or female. Ageing employees were found to experience the highest levels of turnover intention; it could be that they are no longer doing what they did when they started in the organisation or they are simply eagerly awaiting retirement, believing that they have contributed enough in their work-lives. These findings are also supported by the findings of Sousa-Poza and Henneberger (2004). Curry et al. (2005) also found significant differences between qualifications and turnover intention just as in this study. This is an indication that employees might believe they are more employable and competent and that having higher qualifications also allows for the best working opportunities within the job market. Employees having more years working experience (tenure) reported a higher level of turnover intention. These findings contradict those of Yin-Fah, Foon, Chee-Leong and Osman (2010). Just as with the findings of Lee and Maurer (1999), significant differences were found between number of children and tenure and the relation of these two variables to turnover intention. Employees within this study experienced significant higher levels of turnover intention when they had five or more children. Having many children to support might make all the effort seem close to futile or might result in employees believing they need to get better jobs outside the organisation. Curry et al. (2005) found significant differences between position and tenure and turnover intention; however this study found no significant differences. It seems that even though employees in higher position experience slightly higher levels of turnover intention, the rest of the employees in lower levels do not show significantly lower levels of turnover intention.

It was found that psychological empowerment negatively related to turnover intention (-.46\*+). According to Spreitzer (2008) psychological empowerment relates negatively with turnover intention, as a result the organisation will increase its productivity and employees' performance if they increase psychological empowerment of their staff. Having an empowered work force reduces turnover intention within the organisation (Boshoff & Mels, 1995). Wong and Chad (2011) also found statistical significant results that prove that there is indeed a relationship between psychological empowerment and turnover intention. An empowered workforce is found to have more positive work attitudes, and they are likely to be more productive and less likely to leave their organisations (Boshoff & Mels, 1995). These findings were also supported by Janik and Rothmann (2015) and Rothmann, Diedericks and Swart (2013). Experiencing autonomy,

feeling competent, experiencing meaning and impact will make the employee wish to remain with that particular organisation and work actively towards its goals.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between both psychological empowerment and turnover intention and the biographical history of employees as well as the relationship between psychological empowerment and turnover intention.

Since male and female employees experience similar levels of psychological empowerment, the organisation under study needs to continue with policies and practices that foster equality within the organisation. The findings of this study indicated that older employees are the ones who experience the highest levels of autonomy, competence, meaning and impact within the organisation. This indicates that organisations need to promote career development by allowing younger employees to act in different positions, and rotate jobs to improve competence and experience. Allowing employees to gain more skills and improve their levels of competence will likely be beneficial to both employees and the organisation, enhancing productivity levels, developing talent from within the organisation and also retaining and attracting the top talent. Since married employees experienced significantly higher levels of psychological empowerment, it would be advised that the organisation maintains a healthy work-life balance amongst employees, ensuring that the positive effects of a healthy home also positively impact on the workplace that is psychologically healthy and support employee wellness and vice-versa. This organisation is also known within the region to be very supportive with regards to educating young Namibians and they need to continue providing bursaries and staff development opportunities to their employees since this will make employees feel valued and appreciated. This will also benefit the organisation since they gain more competent employees, developing their talent and attracting employees that value this support. Tenure also influences the employees' levels of autonomy, competence, meaning and impact. Enhancing experience and levels of competence, the organisation can also continue to engage in career development, training and grooming employees for future positions through career planning. Considering that employees with five or more children also experience higher levels of psychological empowerment, perhaps through the fact that their jobs makes it possible to provide for their children, the organisation needs to ensure that these employees will continue to be able to

provide for their children both financially and emotionally. Since employees in higher positions experience higher levels of psychological empowerment, it is suggested that decision-making within the organisation to be more inclusive of employees at the lower levels to also experience higher levels of autonomy, competence, meaning and impact.

In terms of turnover intention and gender, the employees seem to be fairing quite well that both males and females experience similar levels of turnover intention. This also suggests policies and practices of equality within the organisation. It is advised that the organisation also look at retaining senior employees since they might have valuable experience that could be very useful for the organisation, to try and keep them more engaged in the passing on of skills and knowledge to other younger colleagues, since there is some concern that more experienced employees also display the highest levels of turnover intention. Understanding what highly educated employees want will also help the organisation to better prevent valuable employees from leaving the organisation. Further investigation should also be conducted into why experienced employees (those with longer tenure) also demonstrate the highest levels of turnover intention. Losing these employees could be a concern for the organisation since they hold key skills that cannot be taught academically but are mostly gained through experience. Since most of the employees have children, it is advised for the organisation also investigates and develops policies and practices to assist these employees since they are the ones showing higher levels of turnover intention. It could be that they are becoming desperate or frustrated since their income makes it difficult to provide for all their children. Perhaps the organisation can provide some family planning, guidance on budgeting, scholarships for these children or other forms of assistance to reduce this high intention to leave, perhaps in search of a job that attends to their needs.

Based on the findings, the organisation needs to continue enhancing employees' level of autonomy by including them in decision-making, allowing them the necessary autonomy to decide and direct their work activities. Through this process employees will experience higher levels of competence, impact and meaning. Sending employees for further training and providing development opportunities, inside and outside the organisation will increase their levels of competence. Allowing employees to act in different positions within the organisation, engaging in job rotation, learning how different aspects of the organisation impact the overall goals will influence employees' levels of competence but also increase their levels of skills and abilities.

Having higher skills and abilities will make employees feel more competent, wishing to engage in more challenging tasks and to do more for the organisation. When employees are included in decision-making, allowed to enhance their skills through training and development, they are also likely to experience higher levels of impact within the organisation. Having autonomy and experiencing competence, they would also feel more competent and experience higher levels of meaning at work. Increasing employees' levels of autonomy, competence, impact and meaning will allow the organisation to develop its employees, attract and retain the most competent professionals (top talent) within the job market, and achieve higher levels of profit.

When interpreting the results of this study, one should take into account the sample size and also that it was done on one organisation.

### ***Recommendations for future research***

This study confirms that psychological empowerment is negatively related to turnover intention. It is recommended that future research also focus on productivity and levels of engagement of employees who experience psychological empowerment.

Considering the specific focus of this study, which looked at employees only in this one parastatal in Windhoek, Namibia, it is suggested to also test these hypotheses in a bigger sample across different industries.

Further research may also be done to identify what will help retain older employees and employees with higher qualifications, and investigate what employees expect from the organisation, especially those with more children, and develop effective interventions to retain these critical human resources within an organisation.

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