

Relationship between organisational determinants and turnover intentions of librarians in public libraries in Gauteng province

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Public libraries across the globe, and particularly in developing countries, are faced with challenges in the mitigation and management of the complex turnover intention phenomenon. The situation is further exacerbated by ineffective retention strategies, retiring baby-boomers, and the millennials not being attracted to the public libraries due to ineffective retention strategies or unmet expectations. Therefore, turnover intention is a matter of grave concern for libraries, as it is associated with deleterious effects such as loss of knowledge, shortage of skilled librarians, indirect and direct costs to the library. This quantitative study used the census method and adopted the cross-sectional survey design, including the use of a structured questionnaire to collect data from 174 librarians at the City of Johannesburg Libraries in South Africa. Data were analysed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences. The results reported significant and negative relationship supervision, personal interpersonal and training to develop and utilise new skills, and turnover intention. The results further revealed an insignificant relationship between perceived alternative employment opportunity and leadership, and turnover intention. It is recommended that in order to decrease turnover intention and increase talent retention, effective measures should be developed which could integrate the variables such as supervision, personal interaction and training programmes. It is critical to revisit the library retention strategy at least once a year to stay abreast of best human resources or retention practices in public library sector.

Keywords: voluntary turnover; turnover intention; employee retention; public libraries; librarians; South Africa

1 Introduction and background to the study

An examination of literature reveals that employee turnover intention has become a serious concern for the public libraries. Turnover intention often predicts actual quitting behavior (Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner 2000; Windon, Cochran, Scheer & Rodriguez 2019). This situation is accentuated by the fact that baby-boomers are retiring, and the millennials are not attracted to the public libraries due to ineffective retention strategies, among others (Aruna & Anitha 2015). Librarians are considered as a valuable asset bearing in mind their contribution to the strategic planning and effectiveness of the library sector by aligning library services with the future trends, which include digitisation projects and establishing makerspace to enrich creativity and learning (Els, Brouwers & Lodewyk 2021; Pietersen 2021). The organisations, with no exemption of public libraries, that attract, develop, and retain top talent will thrive; those that do not, will face significant struggles to deliver and maintain quality library services and will suffer decreased organisational performance (De Sousa Sabbagha, Ledimo & Martins 2018:136). According to Nkomo, Maluleka and Ngulube (2021), public libraries with specific context to South Africa, in order to remain service-oriented in the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), library managers need to manage its human capital through internal recruitment programmes for middle and senior management positions to mitigate against the impact of high turnover of librarians.

Numerous studies were conducted to examine the relationship between organisational determinants (e.g., leadership styles, perceived alternative employment opportunity and supervision) and turnover intention (e.g., Albalawi, Naughton, Elayan & Sleimi 2019; Albaqami 2016; Els et al. 2021; Ergado & Gojeh 2015; Jerome 2017; Ogony & Majola 2018). However, most of the studies focused on Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Nigeria using mainly the context of academic libraries and private institutions, and not the context of South African public libraries. The study by Masenya, Ngoepe and Jiyane (2020) focused on determinants of turnover intentions of librarians. This study investigates the relationship between organisational determinants and turnover intention of librarians at public libraries in South Africa, taking the dearth of research in this sector into consideration as a matter of practical concern. Turnover intention is described as the conscious and deliberate wilfulness of librarians to leave the library organisation voluntarily, and thus are seeking perceived alternative job opportunities (Tett & Meyer 1993:262). Turnover intention is shown to be the best predictor of actual turnover (Martin,

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Nguyen-Thi & Mothe 2021; Mobley 1977). Price (2001) proposes that turnover intention construct as an alternative in measuring actual turnover.

The literature review on variables predicting turnover intention is categorised as employee demographics, current job conditions, organisational factors, and the external environment (Albalawi et al. 2019; Griffeth et al. 2000). In the context of the present study, the following organisational determinants were investigated namely: (a) location of workplace, (b) personal interaction, (c) perceived alternative employment opportunities, (d) supervision, (e) leadership and (f) training to develop and utilise skills.

Librarians decide to willingly leave an organisation for countless reasons, including poor compensation, lack of job satisfaction, lack of career growth opportunities and lack of autonomy (Ngo-Henha 2017:2756). A study by Masenya, Ngoepe and Jiyane (2020) showed that high incidents of the turnover intention in the public libraries are attributed to unsatisfactory salary and fringe benefits, working environment: flexi working hours (work-life balance), lack of promotional opportunities and recognition, poor leadership styles and dissatisfaction with the location of the workplace. As suggested by Shaw and Shi (2017), moderate turnover rates bring new ideas, innovative practices, and improvement of organisational performance.

The appointment of inadequately trained librarians or non-professionals to positions for which they are not developed, eventually leading to deterioration of library services and low morale. In this contemporary age, talented and loyal librarians are critical in building a reading nation, implementing digital transformation programmes, and promoting children's reading services to the previously disadvantaged communities (Masenya et al. 2020).

Empirical studies have been conducted and revealed that employee turnover intention, exacerbated by ineffective retention strategies, has negative effects on the knowledge economy, which includes the productivity and performance of organisations in the context of public libraries (Heavey, Holwerda & Hausknecht 2013). There is concurrence among researchers such as O'Connor (2018), Bhatnagar (2014) and Hom, Lee, Shaw and Hausknecht (2017) that a high turnover could have deleterious effects with respect to the regression of library services such as access to knowledge and information, leveraging of the bridging of the digital divide, recruitment and training costs and depletion of the library's intellectual capital.

The scarcity of professionals, which is exacerbated by an "underfunded mandate" in most of the public libraries as reflected in the proportion of vacancies, is highlighted as one of the biggest challenges to achieving organisational efficiency and effectiveness (Masenya, 2019; Nasurdin, Tan & Khan 2018). Munshi and Ansari (2021) support these sentiments that most of the library automation projects, development of the library collections and services in line with IFLA Public Library Service Guidelines (Koontz & Gubbin 2010) within the context of Indian's public libraries are hampered by a shortage of librarians because no recruitment process has been carried out since 2010 year. Holtom, Mitchell, Lee and Eberly (2008) indicate that there is a need to examine the effect of employee turnover at an organisational level such as public libraries within local government sphere. Therefore, it is imperative to comprehend organisational factors contributing to turnover intention of librarians in order to cushion the impacts of dysfunctional turnover on library productivity, innovation and effectiveness. Similar observations of the negative effects of voluntary turnover or lack of real causes of actual turnover were observed by one of the researchers with 18 years spent in the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services (COJLIS).

March and Simon (1958) and Mobley (1977) were among the most prominent and leading scholars in turnover research. Mobley's employee turnover model explains librarians' withdrawal behavior based on the cognitive process of understanding job satisfaction and intention to quit the job. There are three variables that depict withdrawal behavior: (i) "thinking of quitting" refers to when an employee considers quitting; (ii) "intention to search" refers to a librarian's search for job alternatives outside the library; and (iii) "intention to quit" refers to a librarian's decision to quit the library sometime in future (Windon et al. 2019). This study was underpinned by the conceptual framework supported by the Mobley's (1977) employee turnover process model. This is due to the fact that there is no one fixed theoretical framework or model which can pinpoint one specific reason for librarians to decide to resign (Lee and Mitchell 1994). Therefore, the understanding of the relationship between organisational determinants and turnover intention of librarians at COJLIS could expectantly lead to the development of turnover risk management and retention strategies aimed at reducing turnover. In addition, this study seeks to contribute to the emerging body of research in public librarian turnover by addressing a previously neglected aspect of empirical study (Cohen, Blake & Goodman 2015).

2 Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the determinants of the turnover intention of public librarians at the City of Johannesburg Libraries in the Gauteng province in South Africa. The specific objectives were to:

- analyse the association between organisational determinants and turnover intentions.

- determine the implications of turnover intentions to the provision of library services.
- recommend the strategies that could be implemented to avert turnover and increase retention.

3 Literature review

The literature in this study pertains to the relationship between organisational determinants and turnover intention. The present study focuses on avoidable or voluntary turnover in the public libraries. Furthermore, the implications of turnover intention for the provision of library services are presented.

3.1 Relationship between organisational determinants and turnover intention

Location of workplace: Alkahtani (2015) indicates that workplace location can potentially have a negative impact on employees', such as librarians', level of job satisfaction and, in turn, increase their turnover intentions. Nair, Mee and Cheik (2016) found the location of the workplace to be a significant predictor of turnover intention. Masenya et al. (2020) conducted a study in the public libraries, and their findings revealed that location of workplace is a predictor of turnover intention.

Perceived alternative employment opportunity: The review of the literature detects that librarians leave the organisation based on the number of perceived available job opportunities external to the library organisation (Mobley 1977; Price 2001). The empirical studies conducted by Uitzinger, Chrysler-Fox and Thomas (2018) and Hwang and Kuo (2006) revealed a significant positive correlation between perceived alternative employment opportunities and turnover intention. Albalawi et al (2019) affirm that both satisfied and non-satisfied employees including librarians in the public sector are more likely to develop turnover intention when perceived alternative job opportunities are high. However, it is imperative to note that employees with no exception of librarians often compare the costs and fringe benefits between current and alternative jobs before making a final decision to quit or remain with the library (Albalawi et al. 2019; Mobley 1977). This may imply that librarians may decide to remain with their current organisation considering unknown risks (e.g., job security, career growth opportunities and fringe benefits) associated with the new organisation.

Personal interaction: Yamazakia and Petchdee (2015:26) state that employees who have positive experiences when interacting with their supervisors are thought to increase their satisfaction with their supervisor. Singh and Luthra (2018) discovered that personal interaction shares a significant negative relationship with turnover intention, while Albaqami (2016) discovered that there is no significant relationship between personal interaction (e.g., interpersonal relationships) and turnover intention. Els et al. (2021) posit that human capital with specific reference to skilled and talented librarians should be treated with respect and dignity to decrease turnover intention and discomfort in the work environment. Thus, at the library organisation level, positive interactions could enhance librarians' work performance, library service, healthy relationship with library patrons and lower absenteeism and turnover intention (Gallup 2015; Hamid & Younus 2021).

Supervision: Kim, Kim and Rhee (2017) point out that although supervisory justice does not affect turnover, it indirectly affects employee turnover through organisation-employee relationship quality. Yamazakia and Petchdee (2015) and Tapola (2016) found that negative and significant correlation exists between supervision and turnover intention. A productive relationship between supervisors and employees such as librarians can create a hostile-free environment and healthy work environment and help in decreasing intentions to quit the library (Town 2019).

Leadership style: Leadership in the public libraries can be described as the ability to organise and influence librarians with relevant skills and knowledge to achieve library mandate and goals (Breed, Downing & Ally 2020). Ng'ethe, Namusonge and Iravo (2012) concur that employees would leave or stay with the organisation depending on their leader's leadership style. Aiyebilehin, University and Odiachi (2020) discovered positive correlation between leadership style and turnover intention of librarians. Jerome (2017) reported negative correlation between leadership style and turnover intention of academic library staff. In same vein, Monama (2015) reported a significant positive relationship between autocratic management style and employee turnover intention. This finding provides support for the research that posit that autocratic leadership is not associated with employee turnover intention in certain organisations.

Training to develop and utilise new skills: Training is considered a good source of gaining competitive advantage and is an important foundation of staff promotion (Onah & Anikwe 2016). Tariq and Ahmed (2014) found a positive significant correlation between training and employee turnover intention. The results of the study conducted by Mitchell and Zatzick (2015) reported that skill under-utilisation is positively related to turnover. Kesen (2016) found a significant and negative correlation between training and turnover intention. For instance, when librarians with potential to assume senior management positions in near future are provided with developmental programmes in the areas of strategic planning, leadership, collection development within the international guidelines and practices and risk management, the probabilities of leaving the library organisation could be reduced significantly.

3.2 Implications of turnover intentions to the provision of library services

A high rate of employee turnover and turnover intentions compounded by a lack of retention strategies in the public library sector is becoming a primary concern for library leaders to address (Masenya et al. 2020). Employees are important assets of an organisation as they contribute to its development, success, and the achievement of its mandate. Conversely, a high turnover is destructive for any organisation (Biswakarma 2016).

Recent studies revealed that employee turnover is a major problem for all organisations, including public libraries, as loss of employees leads to loss of skills and knowledge (Szulanski, Ringov & Jensen 2016). Makhubela and Ngoepe (2018) emphasise that organisations are losing organisational knowledge because of employees resigning or retiring.

The review of the literature showed that a high levels of employee turnover and turnover intention lead to decreasing morale and productivity (Ngo-Henha 2017), disruption of library organisational operations (Pepra-Mensah, Augustine & Oteng 2017), decreasing customer service and quality of library service (Ekabu, Kalai & Nyagah 2018), shortage of skilled and qualified librarians (Fourie & Meyer 2016), and direct and indirect costs for the library organisation (O'Connor 2018).

4 Research methodology

Research approaches are plans and procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell 2018). A quantitative approach adopted a case study, with an embedded survey as a research design was applied in the current study. This study was conducted in the City of Johannesburg's public libraries. The principal reason for selecting COJLIS was that it is the only municipality in South Africa with 89 public libraries and a high turnover intention. The target population of this is entire population consisted of 174 librarians with a minimum of six months' experience. There was no sampling in this study; the census method was employed.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire which was e-mailed and self-administered to the respondents. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa. The pilot study was conducted from 7 to 22 May 2019, and 18 questionnaires were distributed to the public libraries within the local government sphere in various South African provinces. The City of Johannesburg (CoJ) provided permission to conduct the research study in the Library and Information Services directorate. The researcher solicited the informed consent of the respondents before administering the questionnaires. Data for this study were collected from 18 June 2019 to July 2019 by the researchers. The response rate for the study was 102 (59%).

Validity and reliability are two fundamental elements in the evaluation of a measurement instrument such as a questionnaire (O'Connor 2018). The respondents self-reported their demographic information, namely: age, tenure and job designation level. The respondents also completed the Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) (Viator 2001), which was used to measure the level of turnover intention among librarians, which is a dependent variable.

The modified Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) (Spector 1997) was used to measure the association between factors such as personal interactions and supervision (independent variables) on turnover intention. In addition, Leadership Questionnaire (Jerome 2017), Location of Workplace Scale (Nair et al. 2016), Training and opportunity to utilise skills (Price 2001) and Perceived Alternative Employment Opportunities Questionnaire (Hwang & Kuo 2006).

The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above were reported in these measurement instruments. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale as well as a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. Moreover, the reliability of the questionnaire used to collect data reported a coefficient correlation of 0.869, which is above the average of 0.700, which shows that the items in the questionnaires used had high levels of internal consistency. The data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and descriptive statistics summarised the means and standard deviations.

Linear regression and Pearson correlation statistical test were utilised to validate the existence of the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables.

5 Findings and discussions

The findings and discussions of this study are presented as detailed below. The researcher used the Pearson correlation analysis was used to establish the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables as depicted Table 1. and implication of turnover intention is shown in Table 2.

5.1 Correlation analysis of organisational and turnover intention

The findings of the relationship between organisational determinants and turnover intentions are presented in Table 1 for the current study.

With regard to the location of the workplace and turnover intention ($r = -.091$, $p = .181$), the results reported that there is no significant relationship between the variables. This implies that the location of the workplace does not have significant effect on the independent variable which is turnover intention. However, it is not advisable for the library organisation to place the librarians far away from their homes considering long travelling time and transport costs. This finding of this study is inconsistent with the results of the study done by Nair et al. (2016), which revealed a negative and significant correlation between the location of workplace and turnover intention. This implies that the location of the workplace may not be a main consideration in the decision whether to quit the COJLIS or not.

This study found no significant relationship between perceived alternative employment opportunities and turnover intention ($r = .133$, $p = .091$). This finding is unexpected, considering that librarians normally develop turnover intention due to perceived alternative job opportunities. The results could imply that librarians are satisfied with job security and future promotional opportunities, and not considering quitting the library. Although, the results have not established that librarians may not leave the organisation if good salaries and benefits are offered. The external benchmarking of compensation structures and other human resources practices are key to decrease high levels of turnover intention. The findings were not consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Nair et al. (2016) that found a relationship between perceived alternative employment opportunities and turnover intention. The findings are also not in line with the findings of Uitzinger, Chrysler-Fox and Thomas (2018) and Hwang and Kuo (2006) which found a significant and positive association between perceived alternative employment opportunities and turnover intention.

Regarding personal interactions and turnover intention ($r = -.262$, $p < 0.004$), the results of this study revealed an inverse relationship. This result shows that library managers must improve their personal interaction skills to decrease turnover intention. Singh and Luthra (2018) state that personal interaction or communication competencies share a significant negative relationship. From another point of view, Griffeth, Hom and Gaertner (2000) indicate that good interpersonal skills lead to a decrease in turnover intention. These findings imply that a lack of respect and miscommunication could lead to discord among librarians and contribute to intention to quit unless it is improved.

The findings of this study revealed that there is a negative correlation between supervision and turnover intention ($r = -.189$, $p < 0.029$). This may imply that employees such as librarians leave managers, not organisations because of the stressful relationships with their supervisors or managers supervision. The findings were congruent with the literature reporting an inverse relationship between the variables (Tapola 2016; Yamazakia & Petchdee 2015). This invariably suggests that a supervisor who treats employees with respect may contribute to lower turnover intention as supported by Al Mamun and Hasan (2017).

The findings revealed that there is an insignificant relationship between leadership and turnover intention ($r = -.071$, $p = .240$). This is an interesting and noteworthy finding because the librarians indicated their dissatisfaction with certain elements of the job such as promotion and recognition, working environment, and personal interaction, among others. The results are inconsistent with the findings of Singh and Luthra (2018) and Aiyebilehin, University and Odiachi (2020) who report a relationship between leadership styles and turnover intention.

According to the correlation results, a negative relationship was reported between training to develop and utilise new skills and turnover intention ($r = -.289$, $p < 0.002$). The results are in conformance with Kesen (2016) which indicated that there is a significant and negative correlation between training and turnover intention. The findings of this study are in line with the finding of Danish, Shahid, Bano and Ali (2019) which stated that there is a relationship between the availability of training (training to develop and utilise new skills) and turnover intention. This suggests that providing training and other developmental interventions could reduce turnover intention of talented librarians.

Table 1: Correlation analysis (n-102)

Correlations	TI	LOW	PAEO	PI	SUPE	LEAD	TDUNS	
Pearson Correlation	TI	1.000	-.091	.133	-.262	-.189	-.071	-.289
	LOW	-.091	1.000	.019	-.019	.125	.101	.218
	PAEO	.133	.019	1.000	.045	-.053	.243	.117
	PI	-.262	-.019	.045	1.000	.756	.399	.328
	SUPE	-.189	.125	-.053	.756	1.000	.416	.364
	LEAD	-.071	.101	.243	.399	.416	1.000	.325
	TDUNS	-.289	.218	.117	.328	.364	.325	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	TI	.	.181	.091	.004	.029	.240	.002
	LOW	.181	.	.424	.427	.106	.156	.014
	PAEO	.091	.424	.	.326	.299	.007	.120
	PI	.004	.427	.326	.	.000	.000	.000
	SUPE	.029	.106	.299	.000	.	.000	.000
	LEAD	.240	.156	.007	.000	.000	.	.000
	TDUNS	.002	.014	.120	.000	.000	.000	.

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Location of workplace (LOW), perceived alternative employment opportunity (PAEO), personal interactions (PI), supervision (SUPE), leadership (LEAD) and training to develop and utilise new skills (TDUNS) and turnover intention (TI)

(Source: Survey data 2019)

5.2 Implications of turnover intentions to the provision of library services

The analysis of ITI = implications of turnover for the provision of library services and turnover intention as a dependent variable, a specific scale was applied in this study. The actual scale was divided into three levels, namely: (a) weak agreement is shown to be 1 to 2.33, (b) good agreement is shown to be 2.34 to 3.66, and (c) strong agreement is shown to be 3.67 to 5.00 (Sekaran 2003).

Regarding turnover intention ($M=3.27$, $S.D=1.121$) as indicated in Table 2 below, the results found that a significant proportion of librarians think of quitting. The findings of this study confirmed that turnover intention is high in libraries, and it seems to suggest that no or ineffective strategies are in place to prevent future incidences of turnover (Albaqami 2016).

The findings confirmed that the turnover intention has negative consequences for the provision of library services. From the findings, it was established that the turnover intention may lead to loss of knowledge and knowledge transfer challenges ($M=3.34$). The findings of this study were consistent with the findings of a study by Makhubela and Ngoepe (2018) who reiterate that resignation of employees with expertise and talents may risk destroying valuable organisational knowledge. In relation to decreasing morale and productivity ($M=3.54$), the results are in line with the findings of Heavey et al. (2013) which concluded that turnover intention could inhibit both short-term and long-term performance, and productive capacity of the organisation.

The results of this study, with reference to disruption of library organisational operations ($M=3.20$) agree with the findings made by Tapola (2016) who state that turnover intention impacts negatively on the disruption of library organisational operations. With regard to decreasing customer service and quality of library service ($M=3.32$), the results of this study were in congruence with the findings of a study done by Ekabu et al. (2018) that revealed that turnover would lead to incoherence in the delivery of service standards.

Furthermore, the results revealed that turnover intention may contribute to the shortage of skilled and qualified librarians ($M=3.44$). The findings of this study were in agreement with the findings of a study by Fourie and Meyer (2016) that concluded that the shortage of skilled and qualified librarians may compromise the significant role that libraries play in fighting various forms of illiteracy. In the context of direct and indirect costs ($M=3.35$), the findings of this study supported the results of the study conducted by O'Connor (2018) that turnover intention impacts negatively on both direct and indirect costs.

Table 2: Implication of turnover intentions

Independent variables: Implications of turnover (IT)	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Loss of knowledge and knowledge transfer challenges	102	1	5	3.34	1.147
Decreasing morale and productivity	102	1	5	3.54	1.105
Disruption of library organisational operations	102	1	5	3.20	1.186
Decreasing customer service and quality of library service	102	1	5	3.32	1.228
Shortage of skilled and qualified librarians	102	1	5	3.44	1.140
Direct and indirect costs on library organisation	102	1	5	3.35	1.078
Turnover intention (dependent variable)	102	1	5	3.27	1.121

6 Conclusion and recommendations

The study established that turnover intention has negative and devastating consequences such as decreased morale and productivity and direct and indirect costs to library organisation. It is critical to revisit library retention strategy at least once a year in order to stay abreast of the motivation-enhancing HR practices in the context of the public library sector.

Aside from this study, further research is required to cover organisational factors influencing the turnover intention of public librarians within the provincial and local government spheres. This would improve external validity and ensure that the findings could be inferred on the greater public library sector in South Africa.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are presented in this section. Hence, it is imperative for library leaders to develop turnover intention mitigation strategies and effective talent retention interventions, which ultimately may mitigate the devastating impact of turnover intention on the provision of library services. In view of these probabilities, this current study makes the following recommendations:

- Improvement of personal interaction skills to build a cordial working relationship, taking into account that a lack of respect and miscommunication could lead to discord among librarians, poor work culture and conflicts. For instance, if librarians feel that their organisation is disrespectful towards them, they will express their intention to leave it (Martin et al. 2021).
- Improvement or variation of supervision styles from autocratic and democratic leadership style or vice versa depending on the situation or circumstances. Therefore, it is recommended that democratic decision-making practices, transformational leadership, and participative management styles should be adopted.
- Increase training, learning and development opportunities and support for employees for skills utilisation (e.g., secondment).

This study examined the effects of the determinants of the turnover intention of public librarians at the COJLIS. The results of the current study revealed that the simultaneous implementation of the “bundle” of HRM practices (e.g., appropriate supervision styles and good interpersonal skills) could have the potential to decrease turnover intentions among librarians.

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