

# Employee Retention Strategies: Views Of Senior Black South African Managers

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*The purpose of this study was to explore the views of senior black South African managers on the retention strategies used by a construction company in South Africa. Ten senior black South African managers working at a construction company in South Africa participated in this exploratory qualitative study. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants. The study found that a majority of participants view employee retention strategies used by the South African construction company as effective in retaining workers. The four main effective employee retention strategies that most of the research participants identified were superior work environment, employee development programmes, supervisory support and competitive rewards. Nonetheless, a few of the research participants indicated that some of the employee retention strategies used by a construction firm in South Africa are not effective in retaining workers. This study recommends that in addition to the various retention strategies available, the South African construction company should use a fair and consistent reward system as one of their employee retention strategies. This study also recommends that the South African construction company should consider employee participation as one of their employee retention strategy.*

**Keywords:** *employee retention, retention strategies, organisational support, compensation, support, incentives*

**JEL Classification:** *J22, J41, L61, M54*

## 1. Introduction

The issue of employee retention has gained attention from academics and human resource management professionals (Islam et al., 2022; Asif et al., 2022). The urge to retain employees is based on the idea that they are an organisation's lifeblood (Kurdi and Alshurideh., 2020; Al-Suraihi, et al., 2021; Ghani et al., 2022). Gupta et al. (2021) argues that an organisation's ability to achieve its business goals depends on its ability to retain employees. Similarly, Bharadwaj (2022) argues that organisations should aim to retain skilled workforce to ensure growth and goal attainment. Retention strategies are thus used by organisations to entice

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employees to work for them for an extended period of time (Haley, 2020). It is also pertinent to note the sentiments of Lee and Chen (2018), who contends that management, must use employee retention as a tactic to motivate staff to stick with the organisation. A number of studies related to employee retention have looked into the link between employee retention and organisational performance (Nethravathi et al., 2021; Prohimi, 2022; Kurdi and Alshurideh., 2020; Al-Suraihi, et al., 2021; Ghani et al., 2022; Kossivi et al., 2019). The researchers noted that there is scant research on how workers view and perceive retention strategies used to retain workers, notably in the South African construction sector. A South African study by Ngoma (2019) showed that South African organisations have been struggling to retain its skilled and critical staff. Similarly, Mokoena et al., (2022) found that the high-performing employee turnover in South African organisations was concerning and called for further investigation. Nzukuma and Bussin's (2021) empirical study revealed that organisations encounter numerous difficulties in keeping black South African managers. A study by Kashe (2022), which found that the financial services sector in South Africa has struggled to retain black South African managers due to a lack of a favourable working environment, progress, and growth, supports the aforementioned claim. Similar to other industries, the South African construction sector is struggling to retain highly qualified black management (Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), 2022). A report by the CIDB (2022) showed that the construction companies are struggling to retain senior black South African managers, despite having a plan for staff retention. Based on the identified study gaps in the literature and challenges faced by the South African construction companies, there is need for research to explore the views of senior black managers on the retention strategies used by their organisations. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the views of senior black South African managers on the retention strategies used by a construction company in South Africa. The study's question is classified as follows: What is your view on the retention strategies used by your organisation to retain managers?

## **2. Literature Review**

Theoretical framework guiding this study and various retention strategies are discussed in this section.

### **2.1. Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory**

The two-factor theory developed by Herzberg (1959) assumes that each worker has two sets of needs, referred to as motivational and hygiene factors that motivate and compel them to remain in an organisation. Motivational factors make employees happy and encourage them to perform better (Nyame-Mireku, 2012). Motivational factors assist in meeting the psychological needs of employees and are viewed as extra rewards associated to performance, responsibility, acknowledgment, and personal and professional progress. Herzberg (1959) further argues that motivational factors inspire workers to put in a lot of effort and stick with an organisation. On the other hand, hygiene factors do encourage employees to put in a lot of effort, but their absence demotivates employees and increases their desire to leave the organisation. The two-factor theory identified job security, fringe benefits, interpersonal relations, and compensation structure as hygiene factors. Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory is crucial for this study because it helps the researcher to unpack the identified factors that foster employee retention and classify them as motivational and hygiene factors.

### **2.2. Retention Strategies**

Knowing the causes of employees' voluntary departures from an organisation makes it easier for managers to adopt effective retention measures and lower employee turnover (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Bergman (2023) argues that high employee turnover shows challenges in retaining workers. Leaders are therefore required to retain employees because losing them can harm the organisation's brand, finances, and productivity. Chatzoudes and Chatzoglou (2022) define employee retention as the ability of the organisation to keep its staff. Alferaih (2017) further defines retention strategy as the measures an organisation takes to keep personnel for as long as possible. Researchers have discovered that when organisations adopt and put into practice effective employee retention strategies, workers are more likely to stick around and contribute to the achievement of organisational goals (; Kurdi & Alshurideh., 2020; Al-Suraihi, et al., 2021; Ghani et al., 2022; Kossivi et al., 2019; Chaminade, 2019; Willis, 2020). Pearsall (2018) argues that organisations must identify and meet the requirements of their employees if they want to keep them on board. Retention strategies for retaining workers are presented below.

### **2.2.1 Meaningful work**

Oprea et al., (2015) retention framework showed that meaningfulness of work influences how long employees stay with an organisation. Therefore, organisations must create meaningful jobs and provide the resources needed to perform given tasks (Iliescu, 2021). Employees who believe that their work is meaningful are more likely to view their occupations favourably and perform better (Steger & Dik, 2019). Research has shown that meaningful work and job autonomy are key ingredients for retaining workers (Igbino et al., 2022; Mabaso et al., 2021; Tan et al., 2019; Musah and Nkuah, 2019). Sharing the same sentiments is Sim (2019), who contends that meaningful job experiences are the cornerstone of employees' engagement and desire to remain at an organisation.

### **2.2.2. Hands-on Management**

Staff retention is mostly determined by management, and there is a clear link between management behaviour and employee retention (Kossivi et al., 2016). Kroon and Freese (2013) posit that supervisors who get involved in their workers' job have a significant impact on retaining them. Inclusive management style and management support are components of staff retention. Employees who feel like they are a part of the organisation and are involved in decision-making processes are more loyal and motivated to stay with the organisation (Noah, 2018).

### **2.2.3. Positive Work Environment**

Employee retention has been proven to be critically dependent on a work environment that is supportive of good performance (Kossivi et al., 2016). Zahid et al. (2017) state that employees are more likely to remain with an organisation for a long time if the organisation has a positive work environment which support employees' abilities to carry out their responsibilities and allows them to participate in decision-making. Additionally, it is crucial that businesses provide flexible and supportive work environments so that employees may complete tasks that fit into their schedules (Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, 2018; Salau et al., 2020; Idris, 2014; Keller et al., 2020). Employees who have a good match between their personal and professional lives can be flexible, find a balance between the two, and avoid feeling pressured to choose between their personal and professional lives (Osorio et al., 2014; Keller et al., 2020). Additionally, it is essential to establish a varied and inclusive work environment that honours many cultures (Chiou-Fen et al., 2019; Maheshwari and Vohra, 2015; Singh, 2019; Salau et al., 2020).

### **2.2.4. Growth Opportunity**

Employees value possibilities for professional development within their organisations (Houssein et al., 2020; Tucker et al., 2019). Career advancement inevitably involves taking on additional responsibility and, most of the time, developing new skills (Serrat, 2019). Van Dyk (2018) argues that organisations must help their staff members keep up their skills in order to compete in the employment market. It's crucial to help employees advance their abilities so that they perform better (Baker, 2019). To ensure that its personnel advance and do not stay in one position permanently, an organisation should have a strong learning culture, offer opportunities for growth, and have both official and informal programmes to encourage learning on the job (Serrat, 2019). Workers who believe they are progressing and growing within the organisation are less likely to leave it (Tladinyane, 2019).

### **2.2.5. Trust in Leadership**

Numerous academics have emphasised that an organisation's capacity to retain its workers is directly linked to the way it manages its workforce and the leadership style it employs. The capacity to listen, help, and encourage employees is a quality that managers must possess if they want to keep workers engaged with their organisation. Approachability, accessibility, trust, and respect are some qualities that managers must possess (Allen et al., 2008). In other words, leaders should direct subordinates in their tasks, acknowledge and reward effort, and maintain consistency in their actions.

### 2.2.6. Organisational Support

Perceived organisational support was described by Satardien et al. (2018) as the idea that an organisation cares about and values the contributions of its employees. Dawley et al. (2019) argue that organisational support is anchored on the social interaction and exchange principle. This means that in exchange for wages, benefits, and recognition, businesses expect their employees to put in a lot of effort, stick with them, and have no plans to leave their jobs (Satardien, 2014). The organisational support theory encourages the use of reciprocity in contracts between employers and employees (Eisenberger, 2002). This theory assumes that employees pay close attention to how their employers treat and support them (Aselage and Eisenberger, 2002). The theory further assumes that employees make every attempt to repay their employers' support by enhancing their efforts, staying at the organisation for a long period of time and ensuring that the organisation meets its objectives (Satardien et al., 2018). Organisations with intentional employee support initiatives are typically able to retain their staff for a considerable amount of time (Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019; Yogalakshmi, and Suganthi, 2020).

### 2.2.7. Supervisor Support

The perceived support that employees feel they receive from their supervisors is a key determinant of employee retention (Umamaheswari, 2014). Coetzee et al. (2014) define supervisor support as providing employees with constructive criticism, awards, acknowledgement, praise, and recognition for their performance. Supervisor support may be viewed as an extension of organisational support, as employees view their supervisors as representatives of their organisation, and subordinates frequently gauge organisational support based on the attitudes of their supervisors (Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019). In this article and context, organisational support and supervisor support are considered distinctly.

### 2.2.8. Appropriate Reward Strategies

A reward strategy is an approach to incentives, built on a set of consistent values that supports the objectives of an organisation (Rakhra, 2018). According to Vance (2019), incentive programmes should be used when they help employees develop positive attitudes, affective commitment, and employee advocacy. The main purpose of employee rewards is to recognise employees' contributions and value to the organisation while simultaneously inspiring them to increase their engagement (Presbitero, 2017). Employee rewards should be consistent with employee expectations and correspond fairly to the work employees put in (Rekha and Reddy, 2018).

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Setting and Participants

According to Walia (2019), a research setting describes the conditions in which data is collected. The current investigation was carried out at a South African construction firm. The study included fifteen purposively selected participants. Black South African managers employed in operations, engineering, and technical support services served as the basis for the inclusion criterion.

### 3.2. Profiles of Research Participants

The letter "T" was used to identify black South African managers who participated in the study. The research participants' profiles and interview length are summarized in Table 1 below.

*Table 1. Participants' profiles and interview length*

No.	Pseudonyms	Age	Sex	Experience	Highest Qualification	Interview time
1	T1	32	F	3years	Bachelor's degree	17mins

2	T2	42	M	6years	Master's degree	14mins
3	T3	29	M	10months	Bachelor's degree	15mins
4	T4	28	F	1year	Bachelor's degree	21mins
5	T5	27	F	9months	Bachelor's degree	20mins
6	T6	47	M	4years	Master's degree	15mins
7	T7	36	M	7years	Master's degree	14mins
8	T8	44	M	8years	Master's degree	11mins
9	T9	39	M	5years	Bachelor's degree	13mins
10	T10	40	M	3years	Master's degree	17mins

Source: Author's fieldwork

The participants' ages, which were shown in Table 1 above, ranged from 27 to 47. Five of the study participants were masters-degree holders, while the other five were bachelors-degree holders. Black South African managers had been employed by the construction company in South Africa for at least nine months.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were used by the researcher to gather data. Semi-structured interviews let the interviewer get in-depth information while allowing the researcher to speak with participants directly (Thissen and Myers, 2016). The same set of open-ended questions was posed to all research participants, and they were encouraged to freely react and converse.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic analysis method to analyse data. NVivo computer-based qualitative analysis system was also used to support thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), enables the researcher to identify important themes and patterns that regularly appear in the data.

### 3.5. Strategies to Ensure Data Quality

The researcher's parameters for measuring data quality included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher carried out a member verification process to ensure transferability. To ensure the validity of the study, the researcher kept an audit trail. Rich and detailed audit trails of the research procedure were provided to ensure the reliability of the current study. To ensure confirmability, the researcher-maintained reflection throughout the process of analysing the concerns brought up and themes found throughout the interviews.

### 3.6. Ethical Considerations

From an ethical perspective, several aspects were observed by the researcher. The research aims and nature of the study were communicated to all participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation was voluntary. Each participant's privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were respected and in no way invaded. Participants had the right not to answer any question, and to change the nature of their consent. Thus, the rights and dignity of all involved persons were considered. At all times, the researcher behaved objectively and with integrity, reporting findings systematically. Responses were documented, without interference, fabrication, or falsification. All participants' data were converted to non-attributable data.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

The study's findings were organised into themes and sub-themes, which emerged during data analysis. The findings related to the research question of the study which related to the views of senior black managers on the strategies used by the construction company in South Africa to retain them?. Themes and subthemes that emerged from the data are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
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Retention strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Working environment</li> <li>-Compensation</li> <li>-Career orientation practices</li> <li>-Training and development</li> <li>-Supervisory support</li> </ul>
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Source: Author's fieldwork

Table 2 above shows the themes and subthemes that emerged from the study. Subthemes that emerged from the study include working environment, compensation, career orientation practices, supervisory support, and training and development.

#### 4.1. Discussion of the Findings

This section presents a discussion of the theme and sub-themes that emerged from the study.

##### 4.1.1. Training and Development

Most of the research participants admitted that the case construction company has implemented a number of strategies to retain senior black managers. The participants revealed that their company retains employees through investing in their training and development. The quotes from the participants in relation to the aforementioned issue are shown below.

*“The company makes sure you receive the training and equips you with the needed skills to make sure that you better deliver and even go beyond the requirements. In this effect, the company keeps you for as long as they exist.”* (T5).

Another participant highlighted that the company sometimes provide training as a way of improving and developing workers. This participant submitted that:

*“I have been with this company since January; we have already been to two training sessions, we were supposed to go for another one as well, but because of COVID-19 unfortunately, it is something we cannot do. With regard to senior management, every year we have to go for some career development training.”* (T1).

The aforementioned points of view match the assumptions of Herzberg's two-factor theory. The two-factor theory assumes that empowering people through training and development enables them to stay with a company for a long time. Organisations that offer opportunities for personal improvement attract and keep individuals who are driven, productive, and self-assured (Tucker et al., 2019). Sharing the same sentiments is Houssein et al., (2020), who posit that individuals who feel that they are advancing and learning within the organisation are less likely to abandon it. In addition, Vance et al., (2020) state that training helps to improve workers' skills and loyalty to the organisation.

##### 4.1.2. Compensation

The participants acknowledged that they were getting some rewards and recognition in the form of promotions within their company. One participant explained:

*“The company does recognise and reward employees, and it depends on one's self-confidence and how your line manager monitors you. If you clearly plan and communicate, you will receive the rewards and recognition. Though reward system need to be consistent, systematic, fair and properly implemented.”* (T7).

The collective financial (monetary) and non-financial (non-monetary) benefits that organisations provide in exchange for the labour are referred to as compensation (Rakhra, 2018; Vance et al., 2019). Vance et al., (2019) argues that compensation, and in particular incentives, motivate workers to put in extra effort and go above and beyond in carrying out their responsibilities. Similarly, Presbitero (2019) asserts that the main purpose of rewarding employees is to recognise their hard work and the value they add to the company while also inspiring them to stay long and increase their participation. The above extant literature seconds the sentiment of the overwhelming majority of the participants.

While there was general acknowledgement that reward systems were in place, there was a feeling that these were primarily financial or materialistic. In other words, while the financial rewards were welcome, sometimes the employees wished to be recognised for their efforts in non-financial ways. In this regard, one participant said;

*“We have a traditional reward system which considers financial incentives only. A reward system for me will mean more than just money; it would mean just a small thing like my manager saying well done for your input. For me, recognition and giving feedback goes a long way in retaining workers.”* (T9)

Other participants' view was that the salary increase after promotion is questionable and it looks like just a token. This was mostly the case where the promotion did not come with an accompanying increase in salary. Below is an extract of one of the participant's words.

*"The reward system used by the company to retain workers is questionable. When I was promoted to Alternate Director, I realised that I earn the same salary as that of a Site Manager, a post below mine. The compensation system of the company is not fair and consistent."* (T8).

#### **4.1.3. Work Environment**

It is important to recognise that the majority of participants said their workplaces are welcoming and that their organisation pays attention to the issue of work-life balance. The company's work-life policy received praise from one of the participants who had this to say;

*"Workers decide with their line managers on flexible working flexible hours. The flexibility afforded by work-life policies is appreciated as it allows employees to access facilities (e.g., crèche and gym)." (T3)*

Participants' quotes are in line with the sentiments of Kossivi et al., (2016), who argue that positive work atmosphere is an essential component for retaining employees. Similarly, other authors state that workers are more likely to stay for a long time at a company with a favourable work environment (Keller, 2020; Zahid et al., 2017). It is also important to note the arguments of Salau et al.,(2020) who posit that it is crucial that businesses provide flexible and supportive work environments so that employees may complete tasks that fit into their schedules. Similar arguments supporting the study's findings also came from a number of researchers. They argue that it is essential to establish a varied and inclusive work environment that honours many cultures (Chiou-Fen et al., 2019; Maheshwari and Vohra, 2015; Singh, 2019; Salau et al., 2020).

#### **4.1.4. Career-orientation Plans**

Career-oriented people set themselves goals, and to achieve these goals, they keep on learning new skills. Characteristics of career-oriented people include being dependable and efficient (Hammond et al., 2020). Career-oriented employees consider each job as an opportunity to develop skills they can use in their next position or assignment. By implication, they plan their career path. The majority of the study participants indicated that their career path within the company was clear to them. Clear career path induces workers to remain with the company (Kossivi et al., 2016). Below are the viewpoints expressed by a participant who felt assured of a clear career path.

*"I was moulded from day one. I remember my first day on site. I was asked questions like how you see yourself in the next 30 days or five years from now. From that day, I was able to carve a clear career path for myself." (T4).*

#### **4.1.5. Supervisory Support**

In the context of the present study, supervisory support concerned workers' awareness of the support they received from their supervisors (Satardien, 2018; Radford et al., 2015). Supervisor support, seen from the employees' perspective, is the perceived support employees receive from their supervisors (Radford et al., 2018; Stoltz, 2014), and this support is a significant factor with regard to employee retention (Umamaheswari, 2014). When asked if they felt they were getting support from management, the majority of the managers answered in the affirmative. Some of the participants felt this way because their duties entitled them to attend some management meetings, and therefore they were in a position to have their views heard.

*"My manager is very supportive, he allows me to reach my goals. He is the type of manager who delegates work and, if I need guidance, he is there to guide and support me. Delegation of work allows me to learn how to do the work and other things." (T2)*

### **5. Contribution of the Study**

This study is essential given the strain South African organisations face to retain key personnel. Such a study would be beneficial to employers as well because it would make them aware of the causes of voluntary labour turnover and assist them in adopting best staff retention strategies to reverse the trend. This study could also help other organisations understand best employee retention strategies to retain critical staff. Managers at the case organisation would also gain from such a study because they would be made aware of the best

employee retention strategies that are effective in retaining their workers. For academics, this study serves as the cornerstone around which other comparable studies might be built.

## 6. Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

This study had its own shortcomings. The study used a qualitative research approach, and different results might have been found if other research approaches had been used. A small sample was used in this study and a larger sample size might offer different results. The findings of this study cannot be generalised to all construction companies in South Africa because it only took into account the views of senior black managers at one South African construction company. Future researchers must use mixed or quantitative methods when conducting studies on retention strategies.

## 7. Conclusion

The study's findings demonstrate that senior black managers view staff retention strategies used by the South African construction company as effective. Black managers are generally encouraged to stay with the construction industry thanks to the retention strategies utilised by the case construction firm in South Africa. A few participants did, however, point out that the construction company in South Africa must incorporate non-financial incentives as part of their retention strategies. Overall, it can be claimed that the South African construction company's employee retention strategies are effective in retaining key personnel. This study suggests that the South African construction company take into account non-financial incentives and use a fair and uniform reward system for all employees.

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