

THE IMPACT OF LOW EMPLOYEE MORALE ON LABOUR TURNOVER: A CASE OF KWAZULU-NATAL LIQUOR AUTHORITY

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Abstract

As a state-owned entity mandated to deliver public value, the KwaZulu-Natal Liquor Authority (KZNLA) has faced challenges and constraints due to high labour turnover and subdued employee morale, negatively affecting productivity and organisational performance. The study's significance and rationale were to examine the impact of low employee morale on labour turnover and attrition within the organisation to mitigate and de-risk its pervasiveness that negatively affects employee morale and organisational performance or productivity. The study used a quantitative, positivism-oriented, and deductive-inclined approach, and data collection was done through a questionnaire. The target population encapsulated the permanent and fixed-term employees of KZNLA, totalling 167. Data analysis was undertaken using the SmartPLS 4 statistical tool. The SmartPLS 4 statistical and structural equation modelling (SEM) collaboration was undertaken for the partial least squares (PLS) path modelling method. The study findings indicated that KZNLA employees currently are subjected to low morale levels and are responsible for labour turnover and low productivity. The study also revealed that KZNLA experiences unabating proportions of employee attrition, work overload, subdued recognition, non-competitive rewards and remuneration, perceived lack of benefits, skewed organisational culture and structure, and poor consultative communication from leadership or top management. Furthermore, the study's findings recommended that KZNLA undertake a benchmarking exercise that compares and contrasts the rewards system, culture, and strategic thrust of similar state-owned entities regarding employee motivation and retention strategies to bolster employee morale and reduce labour turnover. The rationalisation process's prioritisation aims to improve employee morale by creating a conducive motivational environment.

Keywords

Employee Morale, Employee Turnover, Organisational Performance, Productivity

1. Introduction

Productivity is critical for any organisation to realise its top and bottom lines while remaining sustainable and relevant from a long-term perspective (Adeyeye et al., 2015). The motivation of employees, regarded as the main component of the factor of production, relies on their self-belief that both the individual and organisational motivation and the associate staff morale are intact for the organisational strategic impetus and survivability (Leet al, 2021). Therefore, within the context of institutional parameters, productivity could be described as the employee labour contribution to the overall organisational success through their expertise, skills, experiences and dedication to the collective good of the organisation in which they are under-employed. The motivation phenomenon acts as the cornerstone in providing the employees' morale under the auspices of human capital, and any subtle omission and gap in motivation could result in labour turnover with catastrophic and damaging impacts on the organisational well-being (Massoudi & Hamdi, 2017). Morrell (2016) describes labour turnover as a function of the employee's value-adding contribution, commensurate with their crucial performance expectation measured in a given financial year.

Employee disengagement in an organisational context could be attributed to a universal constraints challenge within human resources and organisational behaviour (Barros et al., 2016). The diverse nature of employees in a society such as in South Africa propels the organisational leadership and decision-makers to treat this challenge in its merits and demerits to harmonise the working relationships between employees and the

resultant expected organisational productivity (Loukik & Namratha, 2021). While there is an avalanche of workforce diversity, such as general family inclinations, cultural differences, social upbringing, educational backgrounds, sexual orientation and religious convictions, the organisation must find its peculiar and unique collective identity. Ahmed and Bukth (2019) extended the concept of diversity beyond the immediate organisational parameters. They included customer diversity as another dimension to consider within the broad spectrum of organisational societal equilibrium. KwaZulu-Natal Liquor Authority (KZNLA), as a Section 9 state-operated institution which has been mandated to act as the regulatory body that deals with licence authorisation, has also not been spared from the high labour turnover due to the concomitant staff morale engagement, which has alerted the leadership and management to take corrective and appropriate course of action. The organisation had to navigate its trajectory in the past five years and beyond as more and more staff personnel resigned to seek greener pastures from the employment perspective (KZNLA Annual Reports 2022/2023). The research signifies many insightful contributions that could be considered in de-risking and mitigating the high levels of staff disengagement and high labour turnover and steering the employees into the motivational and inspirational mode that directly benefits the organizations' productivity and sustainability.

This article places a significant emphasis on the turnkey strategic and leadership intervention. It defines the critical leadership and managerial attributes and plan of action that could be adopted in turning the tide against low staff morale and positive engagement scourge while also illuminating the contributory factors that could make a constructive and meaningful contribution in bolstering motivation and the ultimate reduction in labour turnover. The study pursued a quantitative approach to explain and predict employee disengagement and low morale, resulting in reduced productivity and the ultimate labour turnover due to indirect operations that negatively affect the organisation's financial results and balance sheet.

The study objectives and purposes

The research aims to explain and predict the role of low staff morale, which results in low productivity and staff turnover, as the ultimate eventuality in the organisation. To this effect, the research focused on the following objectives: formulation namely: -

- 1.5.1 To investigate the impact of personnel morale on staff turnover at the KwaZulu-Natal Liquor Authority.
- 1.5.2 To examine the causal relationship between personnel morale and productivity and high labour turnover at the KwaZulu-Natal Liquor Authority.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Employee labour turnover

Employee labour turnover is appropriate in an employer-employee interaction and a normative element of complexities in an institutional working environment (Davidson et al., 2010). The turnover concept is a natural phenomenon fuelled by organisational cultural intricacies (Dwesin, 2020). Employee turnover is 'the voluntary and involuntary resignation and exit by an employee from an organisation under which he or she was employed (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022). The distinction between voluntary and involuntary labour turnover has been explicated by Verma and Kesari (2020). The former is a natural attrition in an organisational context due to the complex nature that regulates human relations in this modern age.

Some factors that could be attributed to voluntary labour turnover range from rewards or remuneration, such as salary and wages, while benefits and work environment could also be counted in this mix. On the other hand, involuntary labour turnover could manifest from factors beyond the employee's push, such as emotional aspects, dissatisfaction with the working environment and the general complexities in life, such as an imbalance of work-life – satisfaction.

2.2 Leadership and Management Perspective

When confronted by the rampant turnover culture among its employees, the next challenge for the leadership and management is to make a concerted attempt to keep a lid from spiralling out of control and diagnose the root causes that might be triggering it (Da, 2014). The role of organisational leadership in identifying and promoting the culture of heightened staff morale has been identified by scholars as one of the pertinent strategies and remedies that could be prioritised before it becomes endemic (Ngambi, 2011). The affective nature of employee uncertainty and anxiety in comprehending how they are valued and treasured in the organisation in minor instances points to how they interpret how their leadership treats their aspirations and endeavours (Reina et al., 2018).

The researcher concurs with the idea contributed by Ghazzawi et al. (2017) and Calvert (2020) on approaching the leadership duality style of transformational and servant leadership in effectuating an organisational culture and environment that has features of relations to intellectualism and cultural sensitivity while being productivity inclined. The external factors that affect the employees from the internal and organisational challenges are also exacerbated by the exogenous factors such as inflation, personal relations, financial uncertainties, socio-

economic realities such as crime, substance abuse and the general deterioration of the quality of life. Disengagement, disenchantment, and discontentment are not linear problems; they require organisational agility and adaptability, which should be leadership-driven to curtail matters from getting and turning for the worse (Jung et al., 2020).

2.3 Employee morale at a closer look

Employee morale could be construed as positive and affective attitudes resonant with emotional feelings peculiar to the individual employee. Added attributes range from moods, individualised perceptions or cognitive consonance that personnel are subjected to within a particular organisation (Cui et al., 2016). Salas-Vallina, Alegre and Fernandez (2016) postulated that when personnel are satisfied in an organisation, both innate and overt expression exudes affirmation of their behaviour and productivity within their mandatory work expectations with the resultant diminishing turnover frequencies, which is tantamount to reduced grievances from those members of staff within the organisation.

Thus, employees' subjective interpretations should be escalated to the broader organisational context within the scope of their perceived moral propensity, which is in sync with their performance contribution to the company (Oswald et al., 2015). Oswald et al. (2015) posited that the positive contribution of overall employee performance has a direct proportionality to the aggregate organisational achievements of strategic and operational goals and could be described as a win-win scenario. Against this background, KZNLA must set both the strategic and cultural platform and environment conducive for employees to express their optimal competencies and skills that would receive cordial appreciation from management and leadership alike (Hassan & Jagirani, 2019). Furthermore, KZNLA should espouse a diversity-sensitive culture that accommodates various characters who might be coming from various walks of life but could seamlessly transcend into a performing institution as a collective from both a strategic and operationalisation perspective (Adzoyi, 2018; de Waal, 2018).

2.4 Productivity and organisational performance

According to Abubakar, Elrehail, Alatailat, and Elci (2019), there is a direct relation between the employees' performance and the organisational productivity actual results, which should correspond with the strategic deliverables that are predicated on the organisation's mission, vision and tangible objectives. Thus, organisational performance is premised on how management or leadership coordinates, leads and controls it. At the same time, the active alignment with appropriate onboarding and assimilation of the employees in fulfilling their expected tasks and deliverables should form a cornerstone of the mutual and symbiotic employer-employee relationship (Brix, 2017).

The ability to comprehend cognition aspects and knowledge spill-over effects of the organisation, such as sustainability and long-term aspirations, are of significant importance in channelling the strategic vision into measurable performance constructs and the appropriate capabilities, processes and efficiencies for such accomplishment by the employees (Li et al., 2019).

2.5 The nexus between employee morale and productivity

According to Choudhury, Dutta, and Dutta (2021), the intrinsic nature of positive benefits is the bedrock of employee morale that yields positive results both culturally and institutionally, and this phenomenon is exhibited in an organisational context. This could demonstrate and manifest itself in satisfied employees and illustrate the building blocks of constructive and amicable social relationships, culminating in the inspiration and motivational impetus for other employees to stay longer while contributing optimally and productively to the organisation (Delmas & Pekovic, 2018). On the same token, employee morale can boost optimism, self-confidence, higher self-esteem, a sense of belonging and a contagious effect on the rest of the employees (Ford et al., 2016). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) suggested that job satisfaction has a coherence to positive qualities such as desired work employee contribution to the organisation; job dissatisfaction, on the contrary, could yield harmful elements such as labour turnover eventualities and realities.

According to Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017), employee morale manifests into three alternatives: the enjoyable organisational life, the harmonious or engaged work experience and the meaningful perception of being an employee valued and appreciated within the organisation. These dynamics of employee morale, productivity and job satisfaction are the ingredients of organisational success and sustainability. Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2017) mentioned that the collaboration of these dynamics of employee morale is measured by job satisfaction, engagement, and constructive contribution to the organisational wellbeing.

3. Research Methods

According to Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, and Bristow (2019), the research design involves a plan that articulates how the researcher solicits raw data from the research participants and encapsulates the research questions in the study. Lewis-Beck and Bélanger (2015) mention that a research design is a set of pros and cons regarding research protocol processes and procedure adherence that involves all the elements in managing data collection and associate analysis. This study employs a positivist philosophical approach predicated on theoretically testing the relationships between the variables while applying the deductive approach that utilises statistical and numerical analyses. At the same time, quantitative tools such as bar charts, frequencies, and tabulations further examine the social phenomena under investigation (Yin, 2003). The analysis was undertaken in collaboration with the structural equation modelling by applying the SmartPLS 4 analytical technique.

The paradigmatic stance of epistemology (knowledge acquisition), ontology (phenomenological nature of social reality), axiology (rationale of value in research) and methodology (chosen research modalities) further guided this study to the rigorous and robust conversion of raw material to empirical findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The target population is derived from the KZNLA's current permanent and fixed-term employees. The demographic profile included executives, top management hierarchy, senior managers, technical personnel, and middle and lower managers, while those that offer elementary and basic skills were also considered. The aggregate target population of KZNLA stands at 167 employees (KZNLA Report, 2022/23). The study adopted a probability sampling procedure where all the participants had an equal and equitable opportunity to participate. The research instrument was used as the data collection tool, comprising structure questions, and was segmented between the demographic analysis and research questions. The ethical clearance to undertake the study was obtained from the University of KwaZulu Natal research ethics committee: HSSREC/00005938/2023.

4. Empirical Results

4.1 Demographical Profile

Section A: Biographical data	
Age group	
>21-<30	16 = 9.58%
>31-<40	46 = 27.54%
>41-<50	64 = 38.32%
>50<65	41 = 24.55%
Years of service	
Between 1-5 years	18 = 10.79%
Between 6-10 years	69 = 41.32%
Between 11-20 years	48 = 28.74%
> 20 years	32 = 19.16%
Highest qualification	
Matric (NQF 4)	8 = 4.79%
Post Matric Certificate (NQF 5)	0=0%
Post Matric Diploma (NQF 6)	60 = 39.52%
Degree (NQF 7)	58 = 34.73%
Post Graduate Diploma or Honours Qualification (NQF 8)	25 = 14.97%
Masters Degree (NQF 9)	10 = 5.99%
Position	
Elementary Positions	15 = 8.98%
Technical Specialists	65 = 38.92%
Lower Management	41 = 24.55%
Middle Management	21 = 12.57%
Executive/ Senior Management	25 = 14.97%

Source: Authors compilation

4.2 Validity and reliability of the study

	Mean	Median	Observed min	Observed max	Standard deviation	Excess kurtosis	Skewness	Number of observations used	Cramér-von Mises test statistic	Cramér-von Mises p value
MPo/EmMR3	3.396	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.425	-1.409	-0.272	134.000	1.220	0.000
MPo/EmMR4	3.097	3.000	1.000	5.000	1.298	-1.259	0.066	134.000	0.946	0.000
MPo/EmMR5	3.201	3.000	1.000	5.000	1.331	-1.333	-0.012	134.000	0.956	0.000
SLwEmpMR1	3.888	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.262	-0.604	-0.846	134.000	1.819	0.000
SLwEmpMR7	3.485	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.063	-0.955	-0.281	134.000	1.184	0.000
SLwEmpMR8	3.478	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.164	-0.701	-0.520	134.000	1.267	0.000
SLwEmpMR9	3.313	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.230	-1.009	-0.303	134.000	0.964	0.000
EmpMR/OP5	3.978	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.143	0.899	-1.231	134.000	1.665	0.000
EmpMR/OP6	3.903	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.227	0.302	-1.112	134.000	1.672	0.000
MPo/EmMR3	3.396	4.000	1.000	5.000	1.425	-1.409	-0.272	134.000	1.220	0.000
MPo/EmMR4	3.097	3.000	1.000	5.000	1.298	-1.259	0.066	134.000	0.946	0.000
MPo/EmMR5	3.201	3.000	1.000	5.000	1.331	-1.333	-0.012	134.000	0.956	0.000

Table 2: Manifest variable analysis

Source: author compilation

Table 2 above indicates the distribution of variables such as kurtosis, standard deviation (SD), median and mean from the participants in the study, which usually depict distributed values ranging between +/-1 and 5.

A) **Descriptive Analysis:** Assessing the impact of employee (personnel) morale on labour turnover

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Emp MR	0.849	0.855	0.899	0.692
Lab TOver	0.893	0.895	0.933	0.824

Table 3: Construct reliability and validity

Emp MR: Employee (personnel) Morale, Lab Turnover: Labor Turnover

Table 3 above indicates variability values of construct reliability (CR) upwards of 0.7, which signifies appropriate reliability and concomitant Cronbach alpha values ranging between (0,849 and 0.893) not succeeding in meeting the internal consistency on this objective. For the research instrument to be plausible, convergent validity typically depicts the extent to which variables reflect consistency and is benchmarked with a standard value loading upward of the variable value of 0,5. Therefore Table 3 has convergent upwards of 0.5, which depicts consistency legitimacy.

	Emp MR	Lab TOver
Emp MR	(0.832)	
Lab TOver	0.730	(0.907)

Table 4: Factor AVE and correlation measures

Source: Author compilation

Table 4 reveals that the values of employee morale and labour turnover indicate 0,832/0,730, while the value of 0,907 reflects a close similarity between the two variables.

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.081	0.081
d_ ULS	0.182	0.182
d_ G	0.117	0.117
Chi-square	89.403	89.403
NFI	0.861	0.861

Table 5: Model fit summary**Source: Author compilation**

Table 5 indicates the (AVE) Average Variance Extracted depicting discriminant credibility, which requires upward of the square root of inter-variable relationships and, as per Table 5, reflects the legitimacy of the constructs. The empirical data, therefore, signifies the validity of the research instruments and reflects appropriate reliability as per AVE (Ringle et al.,2023).

The values for the reliability estimations for objective 3 meet threshold points of 0.5, illustrating the reliability of the research instrument.

Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
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Table 6: Construct reliability and validity

4.3 Descriptive Analysis: Assessment of the relationship between employee morale and productivity

	Emp MR	Org PERF
EmpMR/OP5		0.966
EmpMR/OP6		0.969
MPo/EmMR3	0.902	
MPo/EmMR4	0.924	
MPo/EmMR5	0.896	

Table 7: Cross-loadings and reliability values estimations**Source: Author compilation**

Table 7 indicates the reliability values that meet the minimum threshold of 0,5 which depicts the reliability of the research instrument.

Emp MR	0.893	0.895	0.933	0.823
Org PERF	0.931	0.933	0.967	0.936

Table 8 Construct reliability and validity**Source: Author compilation**

Table 8 indicates Cronbach alpha values of this variable that analysed the relationships between employee morale and productivity. The Composite reliabilities (rho_c) and (rho_a) Raykov & Calantone (2014) while the Average variance extracted (EVE) are displayed in Table 9 below.

	Emp MR	Org PERF
Emp MR	(0.907)	
Org PERF	0.631	(0.967)

Table 9: Factor AVE and correlation measures**Source: Author compilation**

Table 9 indicates correlation measures in the diagonal (in the brackets), which shows the efficiency of the variable's measurement model.

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.052	0.052
d_ ULS	0.041	0.041
d_ G	0.089	0.089
Chi-square	76.555	76.555
NFI	0.848	0.848

Table 10: Model Fit

Source; Author compilation

Table 4.12 depicts the values of the model for the relationship between the variables, which is also plausible and requires no redesign.

4.4 Structural Model

The structural model analysis illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 was produced and tested utilising the SmartPLS 4 in adherence with confirmatory factor analysis of reliability and validity tests. The variance (R^2) of each dependent (endogenous) factor illustrates the goodness of fit model. R^2 shows the composite of variance in a dependent variable elucidated by the measuring instrument, and the analysis confirms the goodness of fit of the model's validity. The overall goodness of fit and confirmatory factor analysis reliability was analysed and examined with the relative consistency of the individual causal path pertinent to the values and statistics.

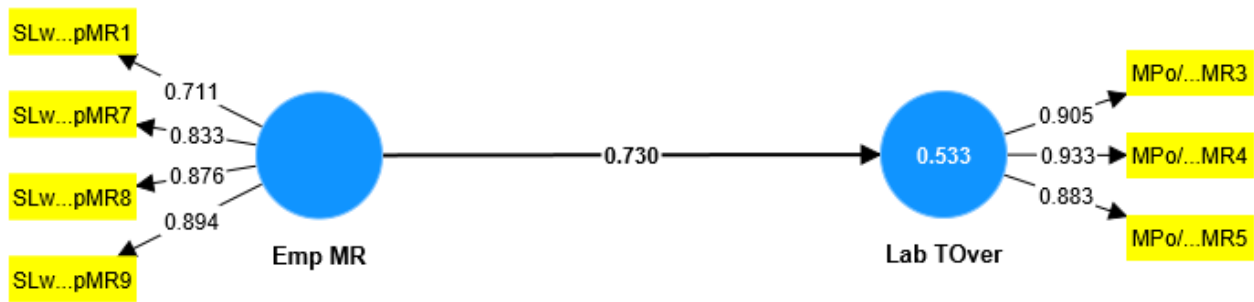


Figure 4.1: Impact of employee morale on labour turnover

Source: Author compilation

The plausibility of the sources analysed empirically is suggested by the support each path contributes to external sources and statistical significance.

Structural model for the relationship between employee morale and productivity

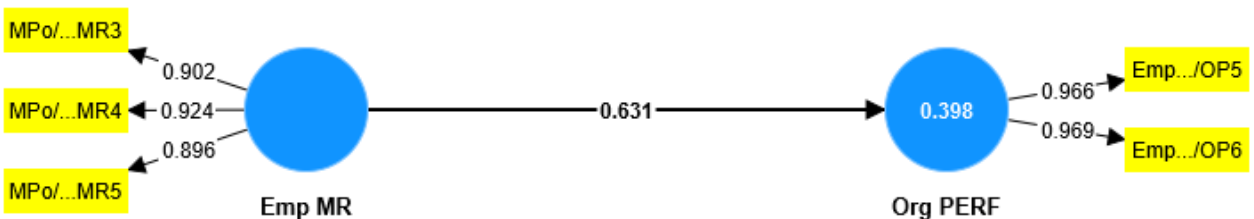


Figure 4.2: The relationship between employee morale and organisational performance

Figure 4.2 shows the SmartPLS-SEM illustration demonstrating that employee morale analysed in the study strongly influences productivity.

5. Conclusion

Low employee morale is a challenging problem that affects many organisations across the entire universe. Suppose the problem remains a headwind for management and leadership within the human capital fraternity as the low employee continues. In that case, organisations will continue to be confronted with this scourge of high labour turnover. Thus, crippling productivity and expected organisational competitive performance (Smith, 2018). Employee morale appears to have the opposite effect on organisational performance, and productivity seems to be an existential, systemic, and endemic problem for organisations (Belete, 2018). The ability of an organisation to create an organisational culture and a positively constructive environment for retaining valuable and highly skilled personnel is of strategic significance for management and leadership since employees are an integral part of factors

of production and long-term sustainability of an enterprise's success and its associated (Alkahtani, 2015). Hence, employee retention and mitigating employee turnover should be a high priority for the decision-makers in the organisation.

Literature also accentuated many sources of employee morale, such as the direct place of employment within the social-oriented context, strategic and leadership context, human capital context, and myriad human institution-wide sources (Salas-Vallina et al., 2018). While the bucket list of employee disengagement, discontent and discouragement might range from rewards or benefits or incentives, organisational culture, leadership style, other exogenous factors such as high cost of living, reduced disposable income due to current persistent inflation warrants management and leadership to value employees and embrace their effective, emotional and monetary or material aspirations

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