



**Factors that determine support staff motivation, retention and organisational commitment at the
University of KwaZulu-Natal**

by

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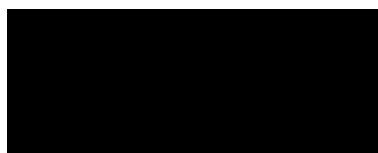
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DECLARATION

I, **Mandlenkosi Dlamini**, declare that:

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DEDICATION

To my mother, who instilled in me the values of perseverance and integrity, and whose love and encouragement have been my constant anchor. Your belief in my potential provided the foundation upon which this achievement rests. I am eternally grateful.

To my partner, whose understanding, patience, and steadfast support have been a source of strength throughout this journey. Your unwavering belief in me, your sacrifices, and your encouragement during both the challenging and triumphant moments have meant more than words can express. Special thanks to my daughter, whose innocent joy and love have been a light in my life, motivating me to strive for a better future.

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ABSTRACT

Support staff are integral to the functioning of higher education institutions, yet their motivation, retention, and organisational commitment often receive less attention compared to academic staff. This study explores the factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A qualitative research design was adopted, utilising semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights from ten support staff members across various roles. The purposive sampling ensured a diverse representation of support roles. Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to staff motivation and performance, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to work environment, recognition, career development, workload and organisational support. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of transparent communication, a strong sense of belonging and responsive managerial support in cultivating loyalty to the institution. In contrast, factors such as inadequate remuneration, constrained upward mobility, inflexible institutional policies and bureaucratic inefficiencies were cited as key impediments that diminish morale and heighten turnover intentions. In response to these challenges, the study highlights the need for the University of KwaZulu-Natal to implement strategies that address the specific motivational factors of support staff. Enhancing professional development opportunities, recognising staff contributions and fostering a supportive organisational culture can improve retention and commitment. Addressing these areas may lead to increased job satisfaction and performance among support staff, contributing to the overall effectiveness of the university. This study provides a contextualised understanding of the motivation and retention factors within academic support settings. Moreover, it offers practical guidance for university management to improve staff satisfaction and commitment, with lessons that can also be useful for other higher education institutions and the education sector at large.

Keywords: Support Staff, Motivation, Retention, Organisational Commitment, Higher Education, South Africa

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Support staff play a pivotal role in the functioning of universities. However, their motivation, retention, and organisational commitment receive less attention than those of academic staff. This study examines the factors influencing these crucial aspects among support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), a leading South African institution. Amidst growing challenges in higher education, including resource constraints, workload pressures, and evolving institutional priorities, understanding the dynamics of staff engagement is essential for sustaining operational excellence and fostering a supportive work environment. By exploring variables such as job satisfaction, workplace relationships, career development opportunities and organisational culture, this research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of what drives support staff to remain committed and motivated. The findings of this study will not only contribute to academic literature but also inform UKZN's human resource policies, ensuring alignment with the needs and aspirations of its support workforce while promoting institutional resilience and effectiveness.

1.2 Background

Universities operate as complex systems that rely heavily on the effectiveness and dedication of their support staff. These individuals play a critical role in ensuring the seamless functioning of academic and administrative processes. Recent studies emphasise that factors such as workload management, job characteristics, and organisational support significantly influence staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment (Gelencser et al., 2023). Furthermore, physical work environments and talent development initiatives have emerged as pivotal in fostering employee satisfaction and loyalty, highlighting the importance of creating supportive and growth-oriented workplace cultures (Mensah et al., 2024). Recognising these factors is crucial for higher education institutions like the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where the contribution of support staff is foundational to the institution's success.

The role of compensation, recognition, and management support in staff retention remains critical, with recent evidence highlighting the need for equitable and transparent reward systems. Okafor and Mthethwa (2025) argue that employees are more likely to remain committed to institutions that acknowledge their contributions and create inclusive recognition structures. In addition,

workplace culture and professional commitment continue to shape employee loyalty, with workplace belonging and purpose emerging as significant predictors of motivation in the post-pandemic higher education context (Zhou & Patel, 2024). These insights suggest that retention strategies must be holistic, addressing not only material incentives but also psychological and emotional needs of support staff.

Leadership has also been identified as a determining factor in influencing job satisfaction, reducing work stress, and improving retention. Afolabi et al. (2023) show that supportive leadership styles in African higher education institutions foster stronger organisational commitment and mitigate stress-related disengagement among support staff. Similarly, Nkosi and Mahlangu (2024) demonstrate that leadership communication, empathy, and opportunities for professional growth directly affect job satisfaction and institutional loyalty. At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, exploring these leadership dynamics can provide actionable insights for enhancing organisational stability and support staff performance.

Finally, broader institutional dynamics, including digital transformation, funding structures, and strategic alignment, have increasingly shaped staff motivation and satisfaction. Mensah et al. (2024) found that the integration of digital tools and streamlined administrative systems improved the efficiency and motivation of support staff across South African universities. Internationally, Zhao and Bennett (2023) highlight that hybrid work models, combined with mental health support, have become essential to sustaining motivation and reducing turnover in higher education institutions. For UKZN, these findings underscore the need to consider financial, developmental, and technological strategies holistically in order to build a motivated and resilient support staff workforce.

1.3 Motivation for the Study

The motivation for this study stems from personal observation and professional interest in the overlooked yet essential role of support staff in higher education institutions. While academic staff receive significant attention in discussions on motivation and retention, support staff who are critical to administrative continuity and service delivery are often underrepresented in scholarly literature. During interactions within university environments, it became apparent that support staff frequently encounter challenges such as limited career development, lack of recognition, and inconsistent support systems, leading to low morale and high turnover. Additionally, existing

studies primarily focus on academic personnel, leaving a critical research gap concerning support staff. This study aims to address that gap by exploring the factors that influence their motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The research is further driven by institutional concerns around workforce stability and the need for inclusive human resource strategies that support all categories of staff.

1.4 Research problem statement

Numerous studies have examined employee retention and motivation in higher education, but most of them have focused on academic staff. For instance, Matimbwa and Ochumbo (2019) conducted a study on academic staff motivation and retention in Tanzanian institutions of higher learning. Their study identified workplace conditions, promotional techniques, feedback mechanisms, recognition and appreciation, and training and development as essential strategies for enhancing employee engagement and retention. Similarly, Mabaso (2017) investigated job satisfaction and organisational commitment among academic staff in South African universities. He found that attracting and retaining outstanding employees is a critical concern for universities due to increasing competition for limited capabilities. Consequently, universities are under pressure to develop systems that attract and retain staff. Building on these studies, the present research aims to investigate the factors that influence support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment, focusing on the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Support staff include non-academic roles critical to administrative, technical, and student services (For example, human resources, finance, information technology, risk management, student counseling), as classified by UKZN's professional awards.

Recent research has uncovered the critical role that support staff play in ensuring the success of universities, as highlighted by studies conducted by Judson and Finkelstein (2019) and Kehoe and Wright (2013). However, despite this recognition, there remains a significant gap in knowledge regarding the factors that influence support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment, particularly in the South African context, as identified by Bryant and Allen (2018) and Engelbrecht et al. (2019). This lack of understanding poses a significant challenge for university management, as it can hinder their ability to attract and retain skilled support staff, thus impacting the overall performance and outcomes of the institution.

More recent evidence underscores the urgency of this inquiry in the post-pandemic context. The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped workplace dynamics, introducing remote and hybrid work models, heightened stress levels, and new expectations around flexibility and digital competence that directly affect motivation and retention. For example, Mbambo (2024) found that flexible scheduling and wellness support became key determinants of organisational commitment among South African university support staff during and after the pandemic. Likewise, Zhao and Bennett (2023) reported that hybrid work arrangements and enhanced mental-health initiatives significantly reduced turnover intentions in higher education support roles worldwide. Gilliam (2024) further highlighted that leadership communication and digital infrastructure upgrades are now critical to sustaining engagement and loyalty among non-academic personnel. These findings reveal that pandemic-era shifts have permanently altered support staff expectations, making it imperative to investigate how universities like UKZN can adapt their policies to maintain motivation and retention in this evolving environment.

As such, there is a need for further investigation into the factors that determine the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff in institutions of higher learning. By building on previous research, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how universities can improve the work environment and support systems for these employees, ultimately benefiting both the institution and its support staff.

1.5 Research aim

The study aims to investigate the key factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment within the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

1.6 Research Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the factors that influence the motivation of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
2. To explore the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
3. To identify the barriers that hinder the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

1.7 Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence the motivation of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
2. What is the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
3. What are the barriers that hinder the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?

1.8 Significance of the study

This research is significant as it addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the specific context of support staff within a university setting. Organisational commitment is a crucial aspect that influences employees' motivation and retention within an organisation. Employees' perception of organisational support plays a vital role in shaping their commitment to the organisation. Investigating the interrelationships between components of organisational commitment and knowledge sharing intentions among academics can also provide valuable insights into enhancing commitment levels among support staff (Fayda-Kınık, 2022).

Furthermore, the research fills a crucial void in understanding employee engagement within academic institutions, with a specific focus on support staff. By investigating the factors influencing motivation, retention, and organisational commitment among support staff, the study offers insights that are vital for improving the overall effectiveness and efficiency of UKZN. A motivated and committed support staff is essential for fostering a conducive work environment, which in turn positively impacts organisational outcomes and effectiveness. Additionally, the research aims to enhance the well-being and job satisfaction of support staff members by comprehensively exploring the determinants of motivation and commitment. Addressing these factors can lead to improved job attitudes and reduced turnover intentions, thereby promoting a healthier and more satisfied workforce.

Also, the study's findings have the potential to inform human resource management practices within academic institutions, particularly UKZN. By understanding the unique motivational drivers and retention factors of support staff, tailored recruitment, training, and retention programs can be developed to optimise employee engagement and commitment. Moreover, by addressing

retention challenges through evidence-based solutions, such as effective retention strategies, the research contributes to organisational stability and continuity.

In addition, the study provides practical recommendations for policy formulation and strategic planning at UKZN. By offering evidence-based insights, it can guide the development of inclusive human resource strategies that prioritise equity, recognition, and professional growth for support staff. This ensures that the institution not only attracts but also sustains a competent and satisfied workforce, ultimately strengthening institutional resilience and service delivery. The findings may further serve as a valuable reference for other South African universities facing similar challenges, thereby extending the study's relevance beyond UKZN and contributing to broader higher education policy and practice.

Ultimately, by shedding light on the factors influencing support staff motivation and commitment, this research fosters a culture of inclusivity and support within the university community while also enriching academic scholarship in the fields of organisational behaviour, human resource management, and employee engagement.

1.9 Assumptions

This study is based on several assumptions. It is assumed that participants will respond to interviews honestly and accurately, providing insights that reflect their true experiences and perceptions. It is also assumed that support staff across different departments within the University of KwaZulu-Natal face both shared and unique challenges, but that common themes can be identified across the institution. Another assumption is that organisational policies and leadership practices directly or indirectly influence staff motivation, retention, and commitment. Furthermore, it is presumed that support staff have sufficient awareness of institutional culture and human resource practices to provide meaningful input on the study's topics. These assumptions guide the research approach and interpretation of findings.

1.10 Overview of the dissertation

The summary, below, indicates the flow of each chapter and gives an analysis of its key ideas. The dissertation is structured in the manner described below:

The first chapter introduces the study and covers the study's background, the research problem, the study's goal, the research objectives, the research questions, and the study's relevance and dissertation structure. Chapter two explores the literature review, while Chapter three presents the research design and methodology, encompassing data collection, processing, analytic techniques, methodologies, philosophies, instruments, and sample strategies, primarily employing qualitative methodology, and discussing key informant interviews, data collection processes, and analysis tools. Chapter four presents the findings and discussions and Chapter five concludes by drawing insights and suggesting recommendations based on the study's findings.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided context for the study, outlined the research problem, research objectives, and research questions. It highlighted the research gap concerning support staff motivation and retention within the South African higher education sector. This chapter provided a summary of the issue under consideration, explanations in the following critical areas: research challenges; the motivation for the study; and objectives. The theoretical grounding will be developed in the next chapter through a detailed literature review.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to critically examine existing theories and studies related to motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff in higher education, to identify gaps in the literature and guide the current study. This chapter begins by discussing the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, namely Human Capital Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. It then reviews literature on the role and significance of support staff in higher education institutions. The chapter proceeds to explore factors affecting motivation, the relationship between retention and organisational commitment and barriers to motivation, retention, and commitment. These themes provide the conceptual basis for understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with support staff engagement at UKZN.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in two key theoretical perspectives: Human Capital Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. These frameworks provide an analytical lens through which the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal can be understood. Both theories emphasise the importance of investing in people as critical drivers of organisational effectiveness, particularly in dynamic institutional environments such as higher education.

2.2.1 Overview of Human Capital

The concept of human capital was introduced in the 1960s by economists such as Schultz and Becker from the Chicago School of Economics. Although initially met with some scepticism, the concept has gained widespread acceptance in both academic and professional circles. Globally, the phrase is continuously becoming acknowledged at the corporate and individual levels. Human capital is defined as the investment in education, training, and advancement of individuals, staff, or interns, aimed at enhancing their abilities and leading to improved job performance (Gruzina et al., 2021). Such investment can be undertaken by individual employees or by institutions across various organisational contexts (Chu et al., 2021). According to Sabuhari (2021), human capital encompasses investments in health, professional development, and education elements that are

intrinsically linked to the value an individual brings to an organisation. It represents an enduring quality that employees carry into their roles and cannot be separated from them. Alolayyan et al., (2021) define human capital as the collective knowledge and skills embedded in a nation's workforce. Tiurina et al. (2022) further suggest that experience, talents, values, and social competencies can be enhanced through education and capacity-building initiatives, ultimately benefiting employee productivity and job satisfaction. Rezaei et al., (2021) argue that both innate and acquired skills should be considered integral to the growth and development of human capital.

Employers may adopt different perspectives on human capital, as reflected in Becker (1964), rather than focusing solely on remuneration. Becker emphasised the organisation's role in supporting the personal development of employees through investment in their skills, education, and values. Such investment has been shown to enhance productivity, increase job satisfaction, and reduce employee attrition. Furthermore, provisions for employee well-being such as access to healthcare, are not only beneficial to the individual but also contribute to the overall health and functioning of the organisation. In this view, organisational underperformance is often a symptom of underdeveloped human capital rather than structural inefficiency. As Lin and Huang (2021) note, individual attributes such as dispositions, vitality, and innate capabilities enhance the value employees bring to their roles. According to Alolayyan et al. (2021), human capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies individuals acquire, retain, and apply, which in turn contribute to both individual advancement and broader socioeconomic development.

All these scholars above converge on a single point, for businesses and public institutions to thrive in today's competitive environment, significant investment in education, skills development, and ongoing training is essential. The literature consistently underscores that organisations which neglect the development and preparedness of their human capital are unlikely to remain sustainable in the long term. Simply put, insufficient attention to workforce development compromises institutional performance and may ultimately lead to organisational failure.

2.2.2 Human Capital Theory

Building on the recognition of the strategic importance of investing in people, Human Capital Theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding how knowledge, skills, and abilities function as valuable organisational assets. In classical economic theory, capital, whether physical or financial is traditionally viewed in terms of its capacity to generate returns through labour

exploitation. However, Human Capital Theory repositions labour itself as a form of capital, where productivity is driven not merely by effort but by accumulated expertise, education, and experience (Alolayyan et al., 2021).

Tiurina et al. (2022) distinguish between human resources tailored for specific organisations and those that are more broadly applicable. Firm-specific human resources refer to knowledge and skills acquired through education, employment, and training that are directly aligned with the operations of a particular institution such as accounting procedures, management information systems, and administrative processes. In contrast, general-purpose human resources encompass transferable skills obtained through formal education and workshops, which are applicable across a range of organisations, including foundational competencies in human resource development (Hung & Ramsden, 2021).

Human Capital Theory, which underlines the significance of learning capacity and skill formation, has been widely applied to assess skills development initiatives in both developed and developing contexts. According to Alolayyan et al. (2021), this theory posits that all forms of employment should be categorised based on either general or specialised training, with the resulting benefits accruing to both the public sector and individual employees through training investments. Central to the theory is the assumption of market efficiency, it maintains that the economy is free of structural weaknesses, and thus, direct government intervention is viewed as unnecessary. Instead, it advocates for capacity development through mechanisms of open and competitive markets (Tonini, 2021). The theory further suggests that in a truly competitive market, adequate investment in skills development will naturally occur, rendering state involvement potentially counterproductive.

2.2.3 Relevance of Human Capital Theory to Support Staff Motivation and Retention

The application of Human Capital Theory provides a robust analytical lens through which support staff motivation and retention at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) can be examined. Human Capital Theory emphasises the importance of investing in employee development through training, education, and health as a means to improve productivity and satisfaction (Tiurina et al., 2022). Within the UKZN context, enhancing the capabilities of support staff through structured capacity-building programs could lead to increased loyalty, improved performance, and reduced

turnover. When employees perceive that their institution values their growth and well-being, they are more likely to remain committed and motivated (Alolayyan et al., 2021).

One of the fundamental tenets of Human Capital Theory is that, like any other business investment, returns on investments in skills development are maximised when employees remain with the organisation over time. As Mueller (1982, p. 94) contends, “an investment in skill-building would be more profitable and more likely to be undertaken the longer the period over which returns from the investment can accrue.” Employee retention is thus critical to realising the full value of such investments. Human Capital Theory uses tenure as a proxy for accumulated job-relevant knowledge and capability, which, in turn, influences wages, promotion opportunities, and role differentiation (Becker, 1975; Hulin & Smith, 1967). This view suggests that knowledge and skill alone are insufficient unless accompanied by an employee’s willingness to remain and contribute meaningfully.

2.2.4 Limitations of the Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory is often used to explain how education and training can improve productivity. It assumes a straightforward link, more investment in learning leads to better outcomes at work. But this view has its limitations. Scholars note that it tends to ignore the broader realities many people face, like unequal access to quality education, bias within institutions, or the lack of supportive networks that can help turn skills into real opportunities for progress (Rezaei et al., 2021; Lin & Huang, 2021). For instance, in South Africa’s higher education sector, where support staff often face disparities in access to professional development due to socio-economic backgrounds or institutional resource constraints, the theory’s optimistic assumptions may not fully hold (Korbmacher & Tordeux, 2022). These structural barriers limit the equitable distribution of training opportunities, undermining the potential for skill acquisition to translate into motivation or career advancement.

Others have raised concerns about the Human Capital Theory’s emphasis on individual economic returns, arguing that education may function less as a direct contributor to productivity and more as a positional good or a signal of social status (Spence, 1973; Tiurina et al., 2022). From this perspective, educational attainment becomes a means of social differentiation rather than an investment in skill acquisition. However, proponents of the theory maintain that while signaling effects exist, the broader correlation between education, skills development, and improved job

performance remains robust across sectors (Becker, 1993; Alolayyan et al., 2021). Particularly in organisational contexts, structured investment in staff training and development has been linked to enhanced employee engagement, organisational commitment, and reduced turnover, thereby reinforcing the practical utility of Human Capital Theory in workforce management.

In developing countries, the application of Human Capital Theory has also been criticised for overlooking contextual realities such as limited institutional resources, structural inequalities, and policy gaps that constrain the effective absorption of skills into the labour market (Korbmacher & Tordeux, 2022). Despite these criticisms, the theory remains a widely used framework in higher education policy analysis, particularly in studies concerned with skills development, workforce readiness, and labour market integration (Mazur et al., 2023). Its continued relevance lies in its capacity to link individual educational attainment with broader organisational and economic outcomes, even as scholars call for its contextual adaptation in developing countries.

2.3 Herzberg's Theory of Motivation

Inspired by Maslow's hierarchy of demands, Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman published the two-factor model of work motivation in 1959 and created the motivation-hygiene theory (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023). Herzberg developed a two-dimensional model of the variables affecting how individuals feel about their jobs. Herzberg and his associates first postulated that job satisfaction and discontent were influenced by two distinct sets of characteristics, and as a result, they could not be accurately measured on the same continuum (Herzberg et al., 1959; Alam, 2021). Research on job satisfaction was carried out to identify the elements of an employee's workplace that contributed to their level of satisfaction or discontent. His idea was refined and extended following two pilot investigations, one with thirteen laborers, clerical workers, foremen, plant engineers, and accountants, and the other with thirty-nine middle managers (Marsudi, Ahadiat & Jimad, 2022). Herzberg (1966) and Herzberg et al. (1959) surveyed over 203 engineers and accountants employed in nine factories in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area of the United States to ascertain the elements that impact the work environment of employees and lead to their level of contentment or discontent.

Herzberg's theory's primary tenet was that some circumstances foster favorable attitudes toward work while other circumstances foster unfavorable attitudes. According to the other theories, there were differences between the causes and effects of long- and short-range event sequences,

respectively (Herzberg et al., 1959; Alam, 2021). The two-factor theory of job satisfaction was developed from the original Herzberg study hypothesis, which was repeated in light of their research findings. Two categories were created from the two criteria that affected job satisfaction. The first category, which came to be known as the motivation factors, was linked to "the need for growth or self-actualisation." Achievement, acknowledgement, the task itself, accountability, progress, and room for improvement were all motivating aspects (Marsudi et al., 2022). The other group of elements, referred to as hygiene considerations, has to do with "the need to avoid unpleasantness." Workplace administration and policies, supervisor relationships, interpersonal interactions, working circumstances, and pay were all considered hygiene elements (Herzberg, 1966).

Hygiene considerations surrounding the "doing" of the work and motivational aspects produced favorable working attitudes (Herzberg et al., 1959; Alam, 2021). The distinction between motivation and hygienic factors, or intrinsic and extrinsic variables, lies at the core of the two-factor theory (Alam, 2021). Herzberg distinguished between elements that are external to the job and internal to motivation. Therefore, although hygiene aspects assist to lessen job dissatisfaction, motivation factors only serve to enhance and boost job happiness.

According to Ibrahim et al. (2023), job dissatisfaction arises when sanitation variables decline below an acceptable level for employees. Conversely, excellent work environments do not necessarily guarantee job satisfaction, but they can contribute to favorable attitudes, primarily through "motivators" (Alrawahi et al., 2020). While improved hygiene factors may mitigate dissatisfaction, their absence does not ensure contentment. Marsudi et al. (2022) suggest that the absence of job dissatisfaction is not equivalent to job satisfaction. Additionally, Herzberg (1966) argues that not having a job is fundamentally different from having one.

Motivators and hygiene factors are the two categories into which the two-factor theory splits job-related aspects (Hoque, Rabbany, Anny & Akter, 2021). Benefits for employees and compensation are examples of extrinsic aspects that make up hygiene factors. According to Tomlinson and Jackson (2021), sanitary elements include workplace regulations, the standard of supervision, interactions between coworkers and employees, one's own life, income, job stability, and working circumstances. On the other side, internal incentives like praise and appreciation are known as motivators. These consist of success, professional advancement, personal development, passion

for one's work, acknowledgment, and accountability. Yousaf (2020) asserts that total rewards might be utilised to satisfy the hygienic and motivational needs of staff members, hence raising motivation. Figure 2.1 below illustrates Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory that affects job satisfaction, employee commitment, and employee motivation. Mnyani (2022) identifies three alternative outcomes: positive motivation and contentment, no motivation and satisfaction, and dissatisfaction and demotivation. Because they impact how much one feels like they've accomplished and appreciate their work, hygiene considerations are an essential part of the job itself. If companies want their workforce to be motivated at work, they must concentrate on creating activities that are interesting, stimulating, and rewarding.

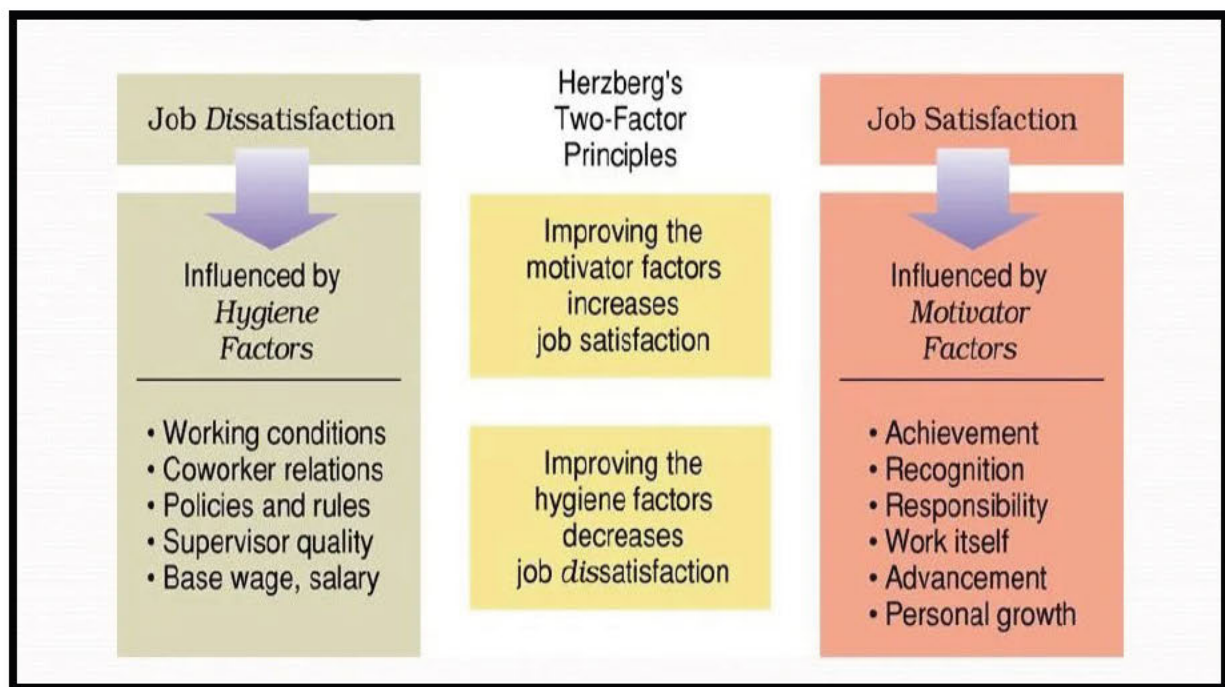


Figure 2.1 Herzberg's theory: factors affecting job satisfaction, employee commitment and motivation (Source: Mnyani, 2022:67).

Two hundred engineers and accountants in the Pittsburgh region were surveyed to determine their sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The two-factor theory was applied (Herzberg et al., 1959). On a Likert scale ranging from terribly awful to exceptionally good, respondents were asked to describe their job experiences and opinions. These variables were separated into extrinsic (hygiene) and internal (motivator) variables. According to the hypothesis, motivational elements result in favorable job attitudes or job content, which in turn contribute to appropriate performance

at work. Nevertheless, the absence of these elements does not demonstrate a significant degree of discontent (Miah & Hasan, 2022). These elements include responsibility, work itself, growth, acknowledgment, achievement, and advancement. Conversely, hygienic variables have to do with how the work is done or the context of the job, including connections with coworkers and superiors, job security, finances, working conditions, and organisational policies. These variables deal with the surroundings of the work, which could have an indirect impact on the work itself. Moreover, hygienic considerations are necessary to prevent unhappiness and can be the source of motivation (Peramatzis & Galanakis, 2022). The theory's main conclusions were that sources of satisfaction were motivational elements. However, there were reasons for discontent with the hygienic concerns (Miah & Hasan, 2022).

2.3.1 Hygiene Factors (Extrinsic Factors) affecting job satisfaction, commitment and motivation:

The term "hygiene" originates from the Latin word referring to "medical hygiene," which functions to eliminate health hazards from the environment (Herzberg et al., 1959:113). Analogously, workplace hygiene factors serve to prevent employee dissatisfaction in the same way proper hygiene prevents illness. Unlike motivator factors which directly influence employee satisfaction and intrinsic motivation (hygiene) factors primarily address the avoidance of dissatisfaction (Siruri & Cheche, 2021). These factors are external to the work itself and pertain to the conditions under which work is performed. Herzberg posited that hygiene elements are environmental in nature and, while they may not actively promote satisfaction, their presence mitigates dissatisfaction by responding to the human need to avoid discomfort or unpleasantness (Marsudi et al., 2022). Hygiene factors include the physical and social context of the job, such as interpersonal relationships, salary, organisational policies and administration, supervision, and working conditions (Miah & Hasan, 2022). When these extrinsic conditions are inadequate, employee dissatisfaction tends to increase. Thus, while hygiene factors alone may not motivate employees, their absence can significantly hinder job satisfaction and organisational commitment. The next subsections will give an overview of hygiene factors and explain how they relate to this study.

2.3.1.1 Interpersonal relations

Interpersonal relations refer to the quality of a worker's professional and social interactions with supervisors, peers, and subordinates (Herzberg, 1966; Ganesh & Liu, 2022). These relationships encompass both formal work-related communication and informal social exchanges that occur within the organisational environment, including during work breaks or collaborative tasks. According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, positive interpersonal relations mitigate job dissatisfaction by creating a supportive work environment, though they are not sufficient on their own to generate high levels of motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959; Mnyani, 2022). Supporting this, a study on employer branding and talent retention in Ugandan higher education institutions found that when university management cultivated a workplace characterised by openness, friendliness, and sincerity, employees expressed a greater willingness to remain with the institution. The study further noted that such an atmosphere promoted daily engagement and long-term commitment among staff (Matongolo, Kasekende & Mafabi, 2018).

2.3.1.2 Salary

This covers all types of pay received at one's place of employment, including raises in wages or salaries as well as unmet expectations for such increases or decreases (Ghadernejad, Devin, Moghaddam & Ghandhari, 2024). As a hygiene factor in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, salary does not directly motivate employees but plays a crucial role in preventing job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1966). Moreover, several studies have found that while financial compensation is important, it is not the most significant determinant of job satisfaction. Salary may prevent dissatisfaction, but it does not inherently lead to sustained motivation or enhanced organisational commitment. As Nuzulia and Saputra (2022) argue, a competitive salary in the absence of intrinsic motivators such as achievement, recognition, personal growth, increased responsibility, opportunities for advancement, and engaging work may encourage basic willingness to work but will not inspire higher levels of performance or deeper organisational loyalty.

Drawing on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, salary is further divided into base pay and contingent pay, both of which fall under the category of hygiene factors. Base pay is the amount of money used to determine the rate for a given employment (Mohammed, Abdulaziz & Hananu, 2021). It is the lowest salary a worker in a particular position is eligible to get and it excludes incentive pay

and benefits (Ihensekien and Joel, 2023). Hoque et al. (2021) state that base pay is stable and predictable. This implies that workers are assured of receiving their base salary as long as they show up for work and give satisfactory performance.

Contingent pay on the other hand refers to any type of financial compensation that is tied to an employee's performance, abilities, competence, and contributions to the company and paid in cash as a bonus or increased to the base rate is referred to as contingent pay (Alam, 2021). Organisations use contingency pay to reward employees who reach and surpass predetermined goals (Ghadernejad et al., 2024). The level of performance or the employee's position within the company are the factors used to calculate the amount of contingency pay. Furthermore, it may depend on the professional growth, proficiency, and skill level of each employee (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Alrawahi et al. (2020) argue that contingent compensation plans are now crucial parts of human resource policy everywhere in the world. This is due to the significant role they play in making sure firms are more successful in reaching their objectives. According to Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022), workers who get sizable bonuses are inclined to increase their dedication in order to get bigger bonuses. Therefore, contingency pay serves as a tool for employee motivation, which helps a company accomplish its goals. Toytok and Acar (2021) suggest that contingent pay is thought to be the most effective way to inspire employees within a company.

According to Büyükbeşe, Dikbaş, Asiltürk, and Çavuş (2023), contingency compensation gives a company the ability to specify and establish performance standards. This is due to the fact that compensation functions as a tool for reinforcement, supporting, and encouraging the desired behaviors inside an organisation. Nonetheless, contingent pay plans may increase employee unhappiness in a company if staff members believe they are unfair, poorly managed, or both (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Since there are no trustworthy and exact ways to gauge employee performance and competencies, contingent pay plans rely on managers' discretion. As a result, they may be prejudiced and inconsistent, which demotivates workers.

2.3.1.3 Employee Benefits

Alam (2021) defines employee benefits as the assortment of extra advantages that a firm offers to its workers as part of their overall compensation package. These are payments given to employees in an indirect manner, such as health insurance, pensions, corporate vehicles, paid time off, and

sick leave. Ibrahim et al. (2023) stress that in addition to various kinds of cash pay, employee perks also include components of compensation. The benefits enhance both the general quality of an employee's life and security. Alam (2021) points out that by giving workers a pleasant workplace, benefits are provided in an effort to deter job switching. Additionally, firms can draw in skilled workers by offering employee advantages. This is due to the fact that an employee's decision is greatly influenced by the advantages offered by their employer. According to Alrawahi et al. (2020), the majority of workers are drawn to workplaces that offer significant advantages. Benefits for employees are, therefore, crucial to the growth of a company and the enhancement of corporate labor relations.

2.3.1.4 Company policies and administration

This comprises an explanation of the company's management policies and standards as well as descriptions of how well or poorly it is organised (Hoque et al., 2021). This element includes organisational rules that impact employees, whether they are positive or negative. These might, for instance, consist of inadequate policies and procedures, a lack of authority delegation, and inadequate communication. According to Herzberg (1966), unclear or overly bureaucratic administrative processes contribute to job dissatisfaction, especially when employees perceive policies as unfair, inconsistently applied, or irrelevant to their daily responsibilities. In the context of university support staff, poorly communicated policies on promotions, training opportunities, and workload distribution may lead to feelings of exclusion and undervaluation. Conversely, transparent, inclusive, and well-implemented administrative procedures can help reduce frustration, reinforce organisational trust, and create a more supportive work environment and indirectly support motivation and commitment.

2.3.1.5 Supervision

Tomlinson and Jackson (2021) argued that supervision is related to the supervisor's fairness or injustice as well as their competency or incompetence. This covers the supervisor's fairness, work expertise, and readiness to assign tasks or impart knowledge. An effective manager, or having access to one, is crucial to raising an employee's degree of job satisfaction. Workplace job satisfaction may be negatively impacted by ineffective management or leadership (Yousaf, 2020). A study by Babalola (2016) found that job satisfaction, supervisor-employee relationship, and

laissez-faire leadership style had a significant influence on organisational commitment. It is suggested that the management of the organisation under study should develop programmes and continue to engage in activities that encourage not only job satisfaction but also good working relationships between superiors and subordinates, as these factors contribute more to organisational commitment in the absence of strong leadership.

2.3.1.6 Working conditions

Working conditions include the physical surroundings of the work environment and the quality of the facilities. The quantity of work, available space, ventilation, tools, temperature, and safety are examples of working conditions (Peramatzis & Galanakis, 2022). Employee satisfaction and pride are higher in a positive work environment than in a negative one. A conducive work environment is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational pride, and employee retention. For instance, a well-designed office layout can promote collaboration and effective communication, whereas a cluttered, noisy, or poorly ventilated workspace may contribute to distractions, fatigue, and reduced productivity (Zhenjing et al., 2022). As such, maintaining optimal working conditions is essential for fostering a motivated and committed workforce.

2.3.2 Justification for Integrating Human Capital Theory with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

While Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory is the primary lens for analysing motivation and retention of support staff, the inclusion of Human Capital Theory adds a necessary, complementary dimension. Herzberg explains how motivation operates by distinguishing between hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction and motivators that foster satisfaction. However, Herzberg's framework does not fully capture why an institution should systematically invest in the education, training, and health of its workforce.

Human Capital Theory fills this gap by providing an economic and developmental rationale. It posits that expenditure on employee training, education, and well-being is not merely a cost but a capital investment that yields measurable returns in productivity, innovation, and organisational performance (Agbodo-Otinpong, 2022). For tertiary institutions like the University of KwaZulu-

Natal, this is crucial: the university's decision to allocate resources for staff development hinges on recognising employees as valuable assets whose skills and knowledge appreciate over time.

By integrating Human Capital Theory with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the study achieves two objectives:

i). Macro-level justification of investment

- Human Capital Theory explains why funding staff development enhances institutional competitiveness and sustainability.
- It frames training and capacity-building as strategic investments, aligning with policy and budgeting decisions.

ii). Micro-level understanding of motivation

- Herzberg's theory clarifies how those investments translate into motivation and retention through motivators (growth, recognition) and hygiene factors (working conditions, pay).
- It shows the psychological mechanisms through which development opportunities and supportive conditions influence commitment.

In short, Human Capital Theory provides the economic rationale, while Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides the motivational mechanism. Together they create a comprehensive framework where one justifies the need to invest and the other explains how that investment fosters motivation and retention. Removing Human Capital Theory would narrow the analysis to individual motivation alone and overlook the strategic organisational perspective that is essential for a holistic understanding of support staff retention in higher education.

2.3.3 Motivation Factors affecting job satisfaction, commitment and motivation:

An early definition of motivation was provided by Whiseand and Rush (1988), who described it as a person's willingness to act in response to a need they are driven to satisfy. Scholars have since debated and refined the concept of motivation, generally framing it as a factor that enhances job satisfaction, while hygiene elements function to mitigate job dissatisfaction. Yener (2021) defines motivation as a force that compels individuals to act and is linked to the choices they make in the pursuit of goal-oriented activity. Fuller et al. (2008) describe motivation as the intensity, direction,

and persistence of an individual's efforts toward achieving a specific objective. Similarly, Hipos and Benavides (2023) define motivation as the willingness to exert high levels of effort, further conceptualising it in terms of need, effort, and alignment with organisational goals.

According to Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022), motivators, also known as satisfiers, are the elements that lead to emotions of fulfillment at work. These elements also cause the nature of the work to change. They push someone to reach their full potential and hone their talents. For instance, giving employees more responsibility and giving them the chance to learn at a higher level might result in improved performance in all tasks that they are expected to complete, especially if the reason for any potential bad performance is boredom with the work they are intended to do. Motivational elements include responsibilities and learning opportunities, but they also include acknowledgment, achievement, advancement, and growth. If these elements are absent, it does not make a difference; nevertheless, if these are given importance, employee satisfaction is likely to increase (Yener, 2021). Unhappiness can be prevented when hygiene factors are upheld. However, motivation cannot exist when discontent is most likely to occur. The next subsection discusses the motivational factors in detail.

2.3.3.1 Advancement

According to Siruri and Cheche (2021), advancement refers to the attainment of a favourable and progressively elevated position or status within one's job or organisation. It signifies upward career mobility, often accompanied by increased responsibilities, recognition, and remuneration. In contrast, negative progression, where there is stagnation or regression in role or responsibilities can significantly impact employee morale and lead to disengagement or turnover intentions. A study conducted by Erasmus (2018) on the perceptions of administrative staff regarding career advancement at a South African university revealed widespread despondency among participants due to the limited promotional opportunities, particularly among professional and support staff. Many respondents reported remaining in the same post level for several years without progression, despite participating in various training and development programmes. This stagnation contributed to a growing sense of frustration and demotivation. The study further highlighted a perceived disconnect between talent management initiatives and the actual evaluation and promotion of staff, suggesting that existing development efforts are not effectively translated into tangible career advancement opportunities.

2.3.3.2 The Work Itself

The nature of the work itself significantly influences employee motivation and satisfaction. Job tasks and responsibilities can affect employees either positively or negatively, depending on their complexity, meaningfulness, and alignment with individual competencies and interests (Miah & Hasan, 2022). Factors such as the level of challenge, autonomy, variety, and perceived purpose of the work play a critical role in shaping attitudes toward one's job. When tasks are engaging and intellectually stimulating, they tend to enhance motivation and job satisfaction. Conversely, monotonous, overly repetitive, or unchallenging work may lead to boredom, dissatisfaction, and disengagement, particularly among support staff whose roles may be narrowly defined in hierarchical institutions such as universities (Chebon, Aruasa and Chirchir, 2019).

2.3.3.3 Possibility of Growth

Possibilities for growth refer to opportunities for personal development and career progression within an organisation (Siruri & Cheche, 2021). These opportunities foster professional advancement by enhancing employees' ability to acquire new skills, gain exposure to innovative practices, and expand their knowledge base. Similar to job advancement already mentioned above, employees perceive that the organisation is committed to their continuous learning and growth, which enhances their motivation and organisational commitment.

2.3.3.4 Responsibility

This component encompasses the level of authority and accountability associated with one's role. According to Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022), the ability to exercise authority and autonomy in decision-making contributes positively to job satisfaction, as it fosters a sense of ownership and control over one's work. On the other hand, a misalignment or deficiency in authority and responsibility often leads to dissatisfaction, as employees may feel undervalued or powerless, which negatively impacts motivation and organisational commitment. Empowering employees with appropriate levels of responsibility not only increases engagement but also strengthens their identification with institutional goals.

2.3.3.5 Recognition

Employees receive positive acknowledgment when they meet objectives, meet deadlines, or create excellent work; on the other hand, negative recognition at work consists of assigning blame and offering criticism for a job well done (Ganesh & Liu, 2022).

2.3.3.6 Achievement

According to Siruri and Cheche (2021), positive achievement is accomplishing a certain goal, including finishing a challenging task on schedule, resolving a work-related issue, or witnessing favorable outcomes from one's efforts. Poor decision-making or a lack of growth at work are examples of negative achievement.

2.3.4 Understanding employee motivation from Herzberg's Theory of Motivation

Building upon Herzberg's Theory of Motivation, it is essential to delve deeper into the broader concept of motivation as it applies to organisational settings. The next section provides a detailed discussion of motivation, highlighting its various dimensions, underlying theories, and relevance to employee performance and satisfaction. Numerous research articles describing different motivational theories and their interpretations, critiques, and support are available on the subject of motivation. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Vroom's expectation theory, Adam's equity theory, and Herzberg's two-factor theory are some of the ideas that can be studied (Mohammed et al., 2021). Numerous studies on motivation are framed by these theories as their foundation. In particular, Herzberg's two-factor theory was chosen to serve as the study's main focus. Two main elements prompted this decision. First of all, this study attempts to fill a research vacuum on generational dimensions of motivation. Second, the contentious dichotomy of the theory has attracted a lot of interest from both supporters and detractors, which has sparked a desire to add to the continuing conversation.

2.3.4.1 Herzberg's Two Factor Theory

The Two Factor theory, developed by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959), postulates that motivation is influenced by two primary kinds of attitudinal elements. These categories include "Dissatisfiers," often called "Hygiene" factors, and "Satisfiers," sometimes called "Motivators." Ihensekien and Joel (2023) emphasise that these categories are essentially different and function independently of one another. Six Motivator elements were found in Herzberg's original research; these factors are organically influenced by the employee. These motivators include the nature of the work itself, responsibility, growth prospects, progress, and acknowledgment. Motivators also known as "job content" are distinguished by the inherent benefits they offer (Ghadernejad et al., 2024).

Conversely, an employee's job's extrinsic elements have an impact on hygiene issues. Ten hygiene factors were found in Herzberg's original study (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). These factors include things like salary, how people interact with peers, supervisors, and subordinates, technical supervision, working conditions, administrative policies and company policies, personal life factors, status, and job security.

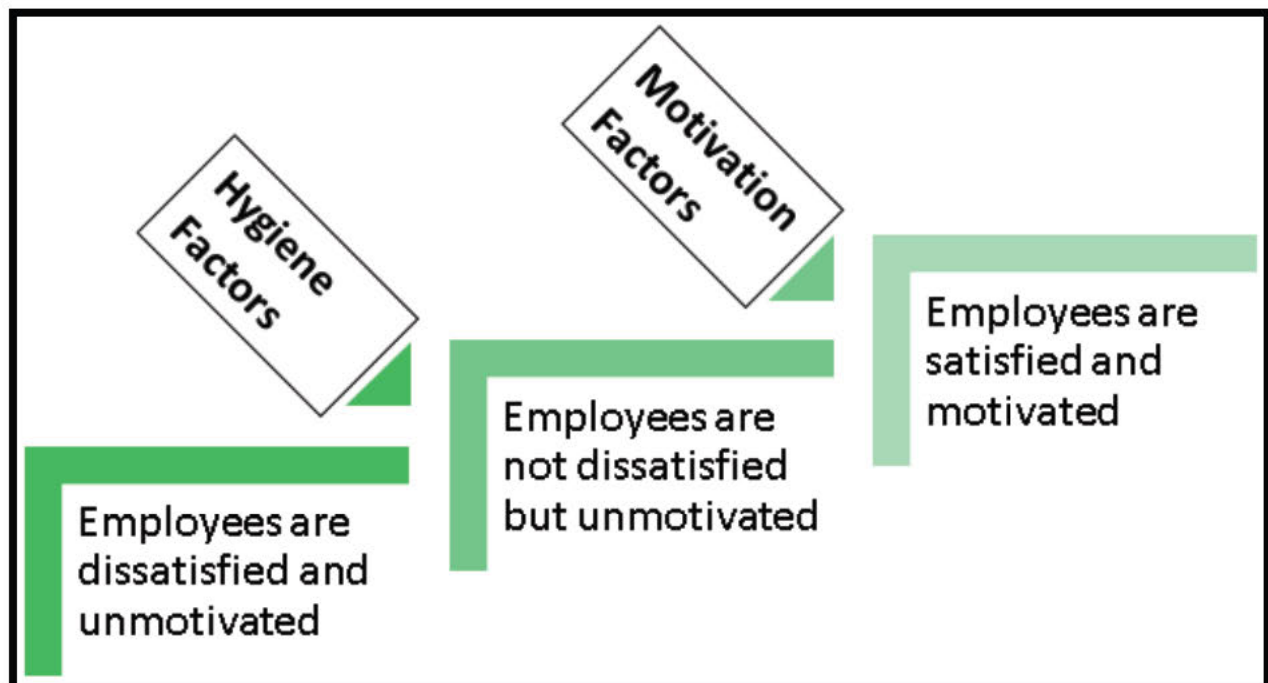


Figure 2.2 Hygiene factors, motivator factors, and their relationships with job satisfaction
(Source: Tezel, 2023:19).

According to Hoque et al. (2021), a fundamental proposal of the Two Factor theory is that each employee's motivators and hygiene aspects are evaluated on separate continua. Schwab et al. (1971) claim that motivators are rated on a spectrum from neutrality to high satisfaction, while hygiene elements are rated on a spectrum from neutrality to high displeasure. As a result, neither job happiness nor job discontent are impacted by motivator elements nor by hygiene variables.

Schwab et al. (1971) argue that the goal of a theory of motivation should be to identify the attitudes that influence employee behavior. Their interpretation of Herzberg's theory holds that Motivators, henceforth referred to as "motivators" are more likely to be associated with performance impacts than Dissatisfiers. The main purpose of the hygiene components, often known as "hygienes," is to maintain performance levels (Ibrahim et al., 2023). While talking to motivators, respondents spoke of increased productivity or favorable job results; conversely, while speaking of hygiene issues, they talked about sustaining productivity levels. Herzberg's idea of motivation is based on the statistical relationship between performance impacts and satisfaction.

International recognition for Herzberg's two-component theory as a theory of motivation has been achieved (Mnyani, 2022). It has, nevertheless, also drawn a great deal of criticism since it was first published in 1959. Only one out of every three investigations substantiates the results drawn by Herzberg, despite the fact that a considerable number of studies have failed to offer convincing evidence in favor of the hypothesis (Alam, 2021). With the exception of the critical incident technique, critics contend that Herzberg's methodology for gauging employee happiness is method-dependent and inconsistent across various data collection techniques. Herzberg's approach to measuring employee satisfaction has drawn a lot of criticism (Ghadernejad et al., 2024).

Table 2: Comparisons between the two factors of Herzberg's theory

	Motivation Factors	Hygiene Factors
Absent	The outcome is no satisfaction	The outcome is dissatisfaction
Present	The outcome is satisfaction	The outcome is no dissatisfaction
Herzberg described	Intrinsic to the job	Extrinsic to the job
Important to job satisfaction	Strong	Poor

(Source: Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl & Maude, 2017:13)

2.3.4 Application of both Theories to Support Staff Motivation and Retention

The application of Human Capital Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory provides a robust analytical lens through which support staff motivation and retention at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) can be examined. Human Capital Theory emphasises the importance of investing in employee development through training, education, and health as a means to improve productivity and satisfaction (Tiurina et al., 2022). Within the UKZN context, enhancing the capabilities of support staff through structured capacity-building programs could lead to increased loyalty, improved performance, and reduced turnover. When employees perceive that their institution values their growth and well-being, they are more likely to remain committed and motivated (Alolayyan et al., 2021).

On the other hand, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors such as salary, working conditions, and job security and motivators like recognition, personal growth, and achievement (Herzberg, 1968; Bibi, Ahmad & Majid, 2022). For UKZN's support staff, addressing hygiene factors through improved job conditions and fair policies may prevent dissatisfaction, while enhancing motivators through recognition, training opportunities, and clear career progression pathways can actively increase motivation. The integration of both theories suggests that while basic needs must be met to reduce discontent, long-term commitment and high performance require continuous investment in the psychological and professional development of staff (Rezaei et al., 2021). By aligning wellness programs, training initiatives, and performance incentives with the principles of these theories, UKZN can foster a work environment where support staff feel valued and empowered, which is critical for sustainable motivation and retention. Having examined the various approaches to human capital and their relevance to organisational productivity and skill development, it is important to contextualise these theoretical insights by focusing on a specific group within higher education institutions, support staff. The next section explores the role, classification, and challenges of support staff, highlighting their significance in driving institutional effectiveness.

2.3.4.1 A Holistic Understanding of Support Staff in Higher Education

Many experts have identified the large and diversified group of non-academic staff personnel working in higher education. Authorities, educational institutions, and governmental organisations have commonly used terms such as non-academic staff, general staff, administrative staff, and

support staff (Sell, 2023:42). Higher education colleges provide a variety of career options that vary from one institution to the next. For instance, academic and professional staff members work in Australian higher education institutions. The term professional staff was introduced in Australia in 2011 by the Association for Tertiary Education Management (ATEM) through a sector-wide engagement process (Bossu et al., 2018). The professional award encompasses a broad spectrum of roles, including administrative work, student support (including counseling), teaching support, librarianship, lab work, senior management and leadership responsibilities, and IT and infrastructure chores (Lochtie, McIntosh, Stork & Walker, 2025). There is no differentiation in the award itself between those that work directly with students and faculty and jobs that are more back-of-the-house.

Subsequently, the phrase support staff was adopted more broadly in South Africa and the UK to refer to university employees who are not hired as academics. This term was expanded even further in the 1997 Dearing report to include administrative and support staff, basically mirroring the way Australian institutions classify their professional staff, without distinguishing between the various kinds that comprise this category (Mellander & Florida, 2021). These jobs, which help academic staff carry out their programs, are also referred to as administrative and support staff in the United States of America (USA) (Hansen, Shneyderman, McNamara & Grace, 2021). On the other hand, there are many other functional categories in the USA context that link to various prizes that employees are working under. Professional personnel should be kept apart from those in managerial roles and those who are directly involved in university administration in order to distinguish them from support workers, who are more directly involved in aiding academics (Elsafy & Oraby, 2022).

Matete (2021) observed conflicts that arise when academics are requested to take on responsibilities that would often be handled by other professionals in education (counselors, learning center managers, etc.), as opposed to employing support workers. Their observations were based on Mexico's higher education system. The traditional teaching/research nexus may be breaking down in certain cases where professional staff members are criticised for performing traditional academic tasks (such as curriculum design) for a variety of reasons, including flexibility (Hansen et al., 2021). The fact that professional and support workers are growing faster in several industries including the UK, Finland, and Norway, makes the last argument even weaker

(Ayenalem, Abate, Mohammed & Desta, 2022). Rather than concentrating just on the job title, it is feasible to distinguish between the functions performed by these staff members according to their location within a Faculty, an academic institution, or a central administrative body.

A relevant case study highlighting the application of support staff motivation strategies is the University of Cape Town's Professional and Administrative Support Staff (PASS) development initiative. In response to post-pandemic challenges, UCT introduced a structured framework focusing on inclusive performance reviews, career development plans, and mental wellness support. These interventions were aligned with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, aiming to address hygiene factors like job security and working conditions, while simultaneously promoting motivators such as recognition and advancement (UCT HR Annual Report, 2022). As a result, the institution reported improved morale, decreased turnover, and increased staff participation in decision-making structures. Similarly, the University of Nairobi implemented a staff mentorship programme that enhanced engagement among support staff, reinforcing the Human Capital Theory's emphasis on upskilling for institutional productivity (Mutua & Kimathi, 2021). These examples affirm that theory-driven staff development initiatives can yield tangible outcomes in support of staff motivation and organisational commitment.

2.4. Challenges and Opportunities for Support Staff in Higher Education

Support staff in higher education institutions play a critical role in ensuring institutional functionality, yet their professional identity, career progression, and recognition often remain underdeveloped. One key challenge is the ongoing professionalisation of support roles, which has yet to catch up with the increasing complexity of their functions (Sell, 2023). As the boundaries between academic and non-academic roles blur, support staff frequently take on responsibilities traditionally associated with academic roles such as instructional design, student advising, and quality assurance without corresponding recognition or opportunities for advancement (Matete, 2021; Hansen et al., 2021). This shift has led to role ambiguity and feelings of marginalisation, impacting morale and job satisfaction.

Organisational support is another critical concern. Limited access to training and development opportunities, along with exclusion from institutional decision-making processes, contributes to a sense of disconnect between support staff and the broader institutional mission (Elsafty & Oraby, 2022). According to Ayenalem et al. (2022), lack of recognition, minimal involvement in policy

formulation, and inequitable reward systems are common demotivators among support staff in universities across Africa. These factors can adversely affect employee engagement and retention, particularly in times of organisational change or crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conversely, opportunities exist to enhance the motivation and retention of support staff. Initiatives such as targeted skills development, inclusive performance appraisal systems, and well-structured career pathways can significantly boost morale (Bossu et al., 2018). Institutions that invest in the professional development of support staff and recognise their contributions alongside academic colleagues report higher levels of organisational commitment and lower turnover (Lochtie et al., 2025). Emphasising equitable access to wellness programs and leadership training can also foster a culture of inclusion and continuous learning, aligning with broader institutional goals. Therefore, addressing these challenges and leveraging the available opportunities is crucial for fostering a motivated, competent, and resilient support staff cohort in higher education. Having established the critical role and challenges of support staff in higher education institutions, it becomes imperative to explore the theoretical framework underpinning their motivation, commitment, and retention. The following section introduces Herzberg's Theory of Motivation as the guiding lens through which support staff experiences can be analysed and understood.

2.5 Understanding Employee Retention in Organisational Contexts

This subsection explores the underlying factors influencing employee retention, drawing on theoretical models and empirical evidence relevant to the motivation, commitment, and retention of support staff in higher education institutions.

2.5.1 Antecedents of Turnover Intention

Turnover intention, which can be used as a useful predictor of actual turnover, is the behavioral attitude of an individual who wishes to leave a company (Ghadernejad et al., 2024). The recruitment, management, and retention of personnel are the main factors that determine the performance of the hospitality sector. Furthermore, Miah and Hasan (2022) claim that a major contributing factor to the high turnover rates in the hotel business is still its seasonal nature. Hotel managers frequently make hiring and firing decisions based on seasonal variations but remain uninformed about the labor-versus-demand notion and hence are ill-equipped to match labor to demand (Ali & Anwar, 2021). The usage of social media, branding, personalisation/customisation,

and service management presents unique problems that may have an impact on turnover rates. Effective management strategies are crucial for industry leaders to implement in order to retain the best, most skilled workers and keep the sector competitive in the hospitality market (Kanchana & Jayathilaka, 2023). Several factors contribute to turnover intentions:

2.5.2 Job Satisfaction

One of the key factors contributing to turnover intentions is job satisfaction. An employee's decision to remain in or leave an organisation is often influenced by their overall level of satisfaction at work (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022). Supervisory behavior, in particular, has a significant impact on job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and the likelihood of retention or departure. Drawing from Herzberg et al. (1959), motivation at work is shaped by a set of intrinsic (motivators) and extrinsic (hygiene) factors. Their seminal study involved asking employees to reflect on aspects of their work that made them feel either satisfied or dissatisfied. They found that employees were more motivated when they perceived opportunities to achieve, grow, and take on greater responsibility. In contrast, dissatisfaction often stemmed from hygiene factors such as poor supervision, rigid administrative procedures, and weak interpersonal relations. As Ahmed et al. (2023) explain, the mere presence of these hygiene elements does not automatically lead to satisfaction but their absence can cause dissatisfaction.

Scholars such as Sabuhari (2021) have continued to emphasise the centrality of job satisfaction in driving individual performance within organisations. Human Resource Management Practices (HRMP) play a vital role in fostering satisfaction by enhancing self-esteem, encouraging employee involvement, and aligning work with personal passions and interests. This, in turn, improves overall performance and supports organisational goals (Gruzina et al., 2021). Furthermore, job satisfaction is closely tied to employees' attitudes and beliefs, which affect their behavior, performance, and relationships in the workplace. It is also shaped by broader factors that influence the quality of working life (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021).

Both social exchange theory and signal theory offer useful frameworks for understanding how HRMP can influence employee perceptions and behaviors. According to the social exchange perspective, employees reciprocate support from the organisation with loyalty and effort. Riyanto et al. (2021) argue that high levels of perceived organisational support through HRMP can increase job satisfaction and organisational attachment. Signal theory, on the other hand, focuses on how

employees interpret the messages conveyed by HR practices. When HR processes are perceived as transparent, equitable, and responsive to employee needs, they serve as positive signals that promote job satisfaction and performance (Lin & Huang, 2021).

2.5.3 Employee Engagement

Another key factor contributing to employee retention is employee engagement, which refers to an employee's level of interest in and commitment to the organisation and its values. Engaged employees understand their role in achieving organisational objectives and often inspire others to work toward the same goals (Hechbaia et al., 2020). As noted by Gruzina et al. (2021), confidence and trust between employees and the organisation foster opportunities for growth, improved productivity, and enhanced performance.

Employee participation also promotes innovation and informed decision-making by expanding organisational knowledge (Ahmed et al., 2023). Engaged employees are less likely to perceive unfair treatment and more likely to commit to organisational ideals (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2021). Consequently, achieving strategic objectives depends heavily on fostering employee engagement (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022). Over the past decade, job engagement has received increasing theoretical attention, particularly its distinction from burnout (Jufrizen et al., 2022). Defined as a positive, fulfilling psychological state, work engagement consists of three core components: vigor (high energy and resilience), dedication (a sense of significance and enthusiasm), and absorption (being fully immersed in one's work) (Heslina & Syahrini, 2021; Ramlawati et al., 2021). Highly engaged workers persist through challenges and exhibit pride and passion for their work (Satata, 2021). Research consistently links job engagement to reduced turnover intentions. Scott et al. (2021) highlight how engaged employees demonstrate stronger organisational loyalty and are less likely to leave. Similarly, Du Plooy and Roodt (2010) and Gruzina et al. (2021) report negative correlations between engagement and intention to quit. Work engagement also correlates positively with outcomes such as job satisfaction, employee well-being, customer loyalty, and organisational profitability (Riyanto et al., 2021).

Opoku-Dakwa et al. (2018) identify four reasons why engaged employees outperform others: they experience greater job satisfaction, are more confident and optimistic, enjoy higher well-being, and can generate their own personal resources. Supporting this, Abarantyne et al. (2019) found

that high engagement is associated with traits like optimism, self-efficacy, and organisational self-esteem among highly skilled workers.

2.5.4 Work Environment

Decisions to stay with or leave an organisation are often influenced by how employees perceive the organisational environment and the level of support they receive. Satata (2021) notes that relational organisational contracts, as opposed to transactional ones, are more likely to impact turnover intention, with emotional support from coworkers inversely correlated with employee turnover. In their study on Indian workplaces, Heslina and Syahrani (2021) found that turnover intentions were significantly affected by perceptions of organisational support, especially in the context of relational rather than transactional contracts. Employees who believed their supervisors were supportive tended to perceive the organisation more positively, reducing their likelihood of leaving.

Jufrizen et al. (2022) reinforce this finding by suggesting that relational contracts have the potential to enhance organisational support, whereas transactional contracts showed no significant impact on turnover intentions. Further supporting this, Satata (2021) examined emotional and instrumental peer support among 188 service employees in the U.S. hospitality sector and found that only emotional support had a significant negative correlation with turnover. Employees who experienced emotional support from colleagues were more likely to stay, underscoring the importance of workplace relationships.

Michael and Fotiadis (2022) conclude that promoting collaborative, emotionally supportive environments is more effective than relying on rigid hierarchical structures.

2.5.5 Employee Motivation

Employee motivation is another critical factor in enhancing retention and fostering engagement within organisations. Sustaining positive workplace relationships can reduce employee turnover and promote a more committed workforce (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022). In service-oriented sectors such as hospitality, where employees interact directly with clients and tourists, motivation plays an essential role in staff retention (Miah & Hasan, 2022). Higher levels of motivation are associated with improved employee well-being, productivity, and service delivery, which in turn enhance overall organisational performance (Ali & Anwar, 2021).

Motivated employees often perceive their work as meaningful beyond routine transactions. For example, they may feel that their interactions with customers create lasting impressions that influence customer loyalty, thereby fostering a sense of empowerment (Kanchana & Jayathilaka, 2023). From a theoretical perspective, Susanto et al. (2023) link increased psychological capital to various factors, including organisational support, transformational leadership, employee empowerment, and job engagement. Effective leadership can thus empower employees, encouraging positive behaviours and personal fulfilment. This dynamic is particularly relevant in the hospitality sector, where a motivated, engaged workforce directly impacts customer satisfaction and retention. As Scott et al. (2021) note, the quality of employee-client interaction plays a pivotal role in shaping the service experience.

2.6.Strategic Responses to Turnover and Retention

High staff turnover and declining retention rates present significant challenges for the sustainability and effectiveness of higher education institutions. In the context of South African universities, these challenges are compounded by global competition, shifting labour market dynamics, and increasing mobility of skilled professionals. As such, strategic responses to staff turnover must go beyond short-term recruitment interventions and focus on holistic retention frameworks that prioritise motivation, organisational commitment, and knowledge continuity. This section explores how institutions, particularly in the higher education sector, are adopting targeted strategies to mitigate the impact of turnover and strengthen institutional resilience.

2.6.1 Staff Retention and Knowledge Management:

Staff retention remains a critical strategic priority for higher education institutions, particularly given their pivotal role in knowledge production and talent development for national and global competitiveness. According to Ali and Anwar (2021), higher education is essential for nurturing future talent and driving socioeconomic progress in South Africa. However, the capacity to retain skilled academic and support staff is increasingly threatened by socio-economic pressures and political strategies adopted by governments competing in a globalised knowledge economy (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021).

The sector faces a growing risk of talent erosion as skilled professionals are lured by more lucrative opportunities in the private sector or through international recruitment efforts (Elsafty & Oraby, 2022). This reality is particularly acute in South Africa, where globalisation, shifting labour demographics, and competitive imperatives place increasing pressure on institutions to retain high-performing staff. As Saeed et al. (2019) argue, success in a knowledge-driven economy is now tied to how well organisations adapt to these dynamics and manage their human capital. Given the central role of academics in training future leaders, conducting research, and sustaining institutional knowledge, the loss of experienced personnel not only disrupts internal operations but also weakens the institution's intellectual capital. In this context, Ghadernejad et al. (2024) emphasise the need for deeper empirical investigation into turnover trends within the higher education sector. A comprehensive knowledge management strategy focusing on the identification, development, retention, and transfer of institutional expertise is therefore essential to mitigate the effects of staff attrition and to enhance organisational resilience and continuity.

Since institutional knowledge is essential to the knowledge economy, higher education institutions must manage knowledge through identification, acquisition, development, transfer, and retention (Hoque et al., 2021). Furthermore, in addition to producing highly qualified and intelligent intellectual capital for a country's social and economic development, these institutions also need talented human capital for their core business operations, which include research and development, in order to provide students with high-quality educational experiences (Ihensekien & Joel, 2023).

Higher education institutions must identify the factors that keep talented people in their existing roles in order to recruit and retain them (Camilleri, 2021). Talented employees make better decisions, have better curricular programs built on best practices, provide better academic services, and have lower turnover costs (Mohammed et al., 2021). Therefore, by holding onto the vital human capital that enables higher education to be accessible to all stakeholders, including students and society at large, higher education institutions may successfully contribute to the socioeconomic growth of South Africa (Landa, Zhou & Marongwe, 2021). An organisation's turnover can have a big impact on it because of things like the possible expense of losing human capital and the disruption of existing operations (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2024). According to research, work engagement and job embeddedness have become important factors in the modern workplace that may have a big impact on workers' intentions to leave (Sell, 2023; Lochtie et al., 2025).

Employees who exhibit low degrees of job embeddedness and work engagement are particularly likely to intend to leave the organisation as well as actually do so.

As an organisation's human capital increasingly becomes the primary source of competitive advantage, talent retention is becoming more and more important (Mellander & Florida, 2021). Organisations are being urged to pay greater attention to retaining skilled workers, keeping them fully engaged, and integrating them into their roles due to a rising awareness of changes in the characteristics of the workforce. Therefore, it is critical for organisations to be able to make well-informed decisions regarding the creation of retention strategies that lower turnover (Matete, 2021).

2.6.2 Job Embeddedness as a strategy for staff retention

Job embeddedness refers to the set of factors that discourage an individual from leaving their employment, functioning as a form of retention mechanism within organisations (Setthakorn, Rostiani & Schreier, 2024). It encompasses two primary dimensions: organisational embeddedness and community embeddedness. However, research has consistently shown that the organisational dimension which includes links to colleagues, alignment with organisational culture, and perceived sacrifices associated with leaving is a more significant predictor of employee retention than community factors, particularly when relocation is not a pressing issue (Setthakorn et al., 2024; Chen, 2022).

According to Khalid, Mushtaq, Khan and Mahmood (2021), the essential elements of job embeddedness are related to the connections people make at work, how well they fit in there, and what they would have to give up or forfeit if they were to think about quitting. Peltokorpi and Allen (2024) suggest that an employee's official or informal relationships with other individuals at work constitute the link components of embeddedness. The likelihood that an employee will remain with the company rises with the number of these links. A higher fit indicates a higher level of embeddedness since "fit" relates to an employee's perceived compatibility with the organisation and with their employment (Obeng et al., 2024). Lastly, "sacrifice" refers to the perceived costs of benefits material or psychological that one would lose by quitting their employment. Accordingly, embeddedness will increase with perceived cost (Hassan et al., 2021).

Many individuals continue to work for an organisation because of the relationships they have with coworkers, network groups, projects they are participating in, or sponsorship of community involvement initiatives (Khalid et al., 2021). Jia et al. (2020) opine that an individual's likelihood of remaining in their organisation is positively correlated with their level of professional and social connectedness. Accordingly, quitting a job frequently means giving up benefits, daily schedules, or social networks in endeavors that one has become accustomed to (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022). According to a number of studies, people who are engaged in their work are less likely to quit than people who are not (Chatzoudes & Chatzoglou, 2022; Elsafty & Oraby, 2022).

According to Chatzoudes and Chatzoglou (2022), because job embeddedness analysis concentrates on staff retention rather than employee turnover, it departs from conventional models for forecasting turnover. Camilleri (2021), who discovered that job embeddedness predicted turnover more accurately than the conventional job attitude models, lends support to this theory. Thus, rather than preventing workers from leaving for other organisations, the notion of job embeddedness concentrates on maintaining people within the company (Elsafty & Oraby, 2022). Studies have indicated a noteworthy inverse correlation between job embeddedness and the intention to leave one's job (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022; Setthakorn et al., 2024). Furthermore, work embeddedness appears to be a stronger predictor of turnover than a combination of perceived attractiveness and ease of mobility metrics (such as job search, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and career alternatives). Chen (2022) draws attention to the fact that deeply ingrained and contented workers are less inclined to look for other jobs. However, since they fear losing ties to the workplace or what they would have to give up if they were to consider leaving, embedded employees may feel trapped in unfavorable positions, become frustrated, or lose motivation (Setthakorn et al., 2024). The favorable elements of job embeddedness, or the factors that maintain people's job satisfaction and engagement, are the main emphasis of the current study.

2.7 The global and National experience of employee motivation, retention and organisational commitment in Higher Education

Globally, higher education institutions face challenges in motivating, retaining, and fostering organisational commitment among these employees, influenced by the interplay of economic, political and institutional contexts. According to Bernard (2012), the demand for highly qualified

personnel within the higher education sector has intensified, driven by rising global competition and the growing centrality of knowledge in the global economy. Increased workforce mobility and changing demographic profiles have made it progressively more difficult for institutions to attract and retain skilled and experienced employees across various occupational levels. In this context, Takawira, Coetzee, and Schreuder (2014) argue that intellectual capital has emerged as a key source of competitive advantage. As the global skills shortage deepens, more institutions are recognising the importance of investing in their human capital to remain competitive in an increasingly knowledge-driven economy. Thus, staff retention has become not only a human resources concern but also a strategic imperative.

In Malaysia, the need to retain skilled professionals within public universities has become increasingly urgent amid rising concerns over talent migration. The country faces a significant brain drain, with an estimated diaspora of 1.5 million Malaysians living abroad (Puteh, Nor, & Zulkifli, 2012; Supian et al., 2018). This outflow includes not only academics but also technical and administrative professionals critical to institutional functioning. The migration trend is often driven by limited career advancement, rigid organisational hierarchies, uncompetitive remuneration packages, and perceptions of political interference in public institutions. Consequently, institutions are under pressure to create more enabling environments that support employee development, autonomy and recognition, particularly for non-academic staff who are frequently excluded from strategic human resource planning (Supian et al., 2018).

In the African context, Mogwere (2014) highlights similar patterns, noting that higher education institutions across the continent often struggle to attract and retain a qualified support workforce. This is largely due to systemic issues such as poor working conditions, limited employee engagement, lack of professional development pathways, and inadequate reward systems. Support and administrative staff frequently experience occupational stagnation, are overlooked in capacity-building initiatives, and are excluded from core decision-making processes, contributing to low organisational commitment and high turnover intention. These challenges are exacerbated by broader structural constraints, including underfunded education systems, deteriorating infrastructure, and policy environments that prioritise academic output over institutional sustainability and workforce well-being (Mogwere, 2014).

Even private higher education institutions are grappling with the complex challenge of motivating and retaining skilled employees, including administrative and support staff. Nagar, Singh, and Saxena (2019) shed light on this subject in their study on job satisfaction and retention within private universities in India's National Capital Region (NCR), illustrating how these institutions are not immune to broader structural and institutional issues. Their research highlights gendered discrepancies in job satisfaction, particularly noting that female employees frequently face barriers such as limited career advancement opportunities and strained work-life balance. These challenges mirror patterns across both public and private institutions globally, where rigid organisational cultures and patriarchal work environments continue to undermine inclusivity and employee well-being. Similarly, in Ghana, Kwegyir-Aggrey (2016) observed that many private institutions are increasingly vulnerable to losing their highly qualified academic and administrative personnel to public universities or better-resourced private institutions. This mobility is not merely a reflection of individual career aspirations but also speaks to deeper systemic inequalities between institutions in terms of remuneration, job security, access to research opportunities, and long-term career development.

Nationally, much like their global counterparts, South Africa's higher education is also confronted with challenges related to the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of skilled employees. These challenges significantly undermine institutional effectiveness and continuity, particularly in light of increasing global competition and shifting labour market dynamics. The scarcity of skilled academic and support staff, coupled with high turnover rates, poses a serious threat to the stability and quality of teaching, research, and service delivery. Evidence by Theron et al. (2014) found that 33.8% of employees in South African HEIs exhibited a strong intention to leave, signalling a concerning trend of attrition within the sector. This intention to leave is often rooted in systemic institutional weaknesses that diminish employee satisfaction and engagement.

2.8 Chapter summary

The chapter covered various key areas related to skill development, capacity building, and employee motivation in organisational contexts. The theory underpinning skills development was explored, alongside discussions on the crucial role of support staff. A theoretical framework based on Herzberg's theory of motivation was presented. Additionally, the chapter examined employee turnover intentions and delved into the relationship between job embeddedness, work engagement,

and turnover intention. The review laid a solid foundation for understanding these complex concepts and their implications for organisational success. The next chapter will focus on the research methodology, outlining the approach, methods, and techniques employed to carry out the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology employed to conduct the study, aiming to provide a systematic process for investigating the research topic. Research requires adherence to a structured approach guided by theory and/or hypothesis (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). The chapter begins by discussing the overall research design, followed by a detailed exploration of qualitative research design. Next, the target population is defined, and the sampling strategy is outlined. Subsequently, the chapter probes into the data collection procedures and data analysis methods employed. It also addresses the measures taken to eliminate bias and the ethical considerations involved in conducting this research. This chapter intends to provide a clear understanding of the methodological framework used in this study and its significance in generating credible and valuable findings.

The research methodology was selected specifically in order to answer the following research questions;

- What are the factors that influence the motivation of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
- What is the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the barriers that hinder the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?

3.2 Research approach

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2023), a research design includes the entire plan for carrying out an investigation, including the methodological foundations, investigative strategies, and particular protocols. It describes the methodology of the research, including who will provide the data and when (Ansari, Rahim, Bhoje & Bhosale, 2022). The particular study topic or issue being addressed informs the choice of research design and methodology (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). It provides precise recommendations for research activities and acts as a framework for connecting theoretical research topics to real-world empirical studies (Gregar, 2023). Before beginning data collecting and analysis, researchers make sure that the study objectives are properly achieved by following a step-by-step process.

The strategies and methods utilised in research, including planning and decision-making in many areas, including data collection and analysis, are referred to as research designs (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). The choice of design is influenced by various aspects, including the research problem, the research background, and the intended audience. There are three types of research designs: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies. Research design's main goal is to turn research questions into data that can be analysed, allowing researchers to find quick and precise solutions. It entails developing a strategy and plan of study that are well-organised in order to gain understanding of the research questions while keeping control over factors. Gregar (2023). The research method, which outlines the procedures for gathering, analysing, and aligning data with the research questions, establishes the kind of analysis necessary to yield the intended conclusions. It might be challenging or impossible to accomplish the research purpose if variables affecting the study design and data collection are ignored. This can result in poor and unconvincing conclusions (Borusyak, Jaravel & Spiess, 2024).

The framework for how researchers approach phenomena is known as the research design (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022). This study utilised a qualitative case study to explore the factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at UKZN. The study adopted a case study approach to investigate these factors specifically within UKZN. Data for the study were collected through online interviews with ten participants from the College of Law and Management at UKZN. Therefore, the collected data is qualitative in nature.

3.2.1 Qualitative research approach

The origins of qualitative research approach can be traced back to the modifications made in sociology and anthropology. The qualitative line of inquiry has been referred to by a number of names, including postmodernism, post-positivism, natural inquiry, cultural investigations, constructivist paradigm, phenomenological investigation, and post-structuralism (Maxwell, 2022). Like quantitative research, qualitative research is rigorous, systematic, disciplined, and often provides a useful substitute for quantitative research methods (Muzari et al., 2022). Both of the qualitative methodologies share these two characteristics. First, there is a focus on events that occur in real world environments, or natural settings. Additionally, they entail investigating those occurrences in all of their complexity in the second one. However, in a quantitative perspective, these facts are the opposite (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023).

Investigating and understanding the meanings that people or groups assign to social or human circumstances is the main goal of qualitative research (Gregar, 2023). Qualitative research has historically been built upon the foundations of disciplines like sociology, anthropology, the humanities, and assessment. Open-ended research questions are used in this method to collect non-quantifiable data. By examining the unique situations and interpretations that participants provide, it enables researchers to acquire new perspectives on issues (Gregar (2023). Finding meaning, purpose, or truth in the ideas and experiences of participants is the main goal of qualitative research (Hou, 2021).

According to Kekeya (2021), qualitative research methodologies are a collection of methods that provide interpretation by deciphering, describing, translating, and providing the meaning that arises spontaneously rather than as a result of frequent events. Gregar (2023) assert that qualitative research approaches are those that focus on social or organisational behavior and yield insights that cannot be obtained using other quantification methods or statistical procedures. Its meaning and experiences are always expressed verbally, and it is subjective in nature. Salter (2023) defines qualitative data as observational or interactive records that are intricate and difficult to reduce to numerical form. Qualitative methods are used to study people's behavior through observation and interviews (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). A greater comprehension of the subject issues as they exist in their own distinct surroundings is made possible by qualitative techniques. Open ended questions allow participants to submit information without feeling compelled to share their opinions, which is one way to acquire qualitative data (Hirose & Creswell, 2023). The most popular and well-known qualitative research methodologies are focus groups, interviews, ethnographic research, and observational methods. This study utilised interviews.

3.2.1.1 Case study

An extensive examination of a particular instance, such as a process, an animal, a person, a house, an organisation, a group, an industry, a culture, or a nationality, is conducted as part of the case study design of inquiry. According to Hancock, Algozzine, and Lim (2021), it comprises carefully analysing a person, group, institution, or phenomena in the context of real life, particularly when there are minor variations between the event and its surroundings. Within this specific context, depth refers to thoroughly examining every aspect of the case. Case studies provide in-depth analyses of a phenomenon, but the information they present is subjective rather than objective.

Although they offer a thorough comprehension of the occurrence, they prevent extrapolation from the particular instance (Creswell, 2021). Creswell (2021) opines that case studies are defined as a comprehensive examination of a particular unit under investigation that is limited by time and acts. An explanation, comprehension, prediction, and/or management of the unit under study are the goals of a case study (Hancock et al., 2021). In the present research, the case study design was used to explore the factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at UKZN. The researcher selected one college at UKZN, the college of Law and Management, as the specific cases for investigation.

3.2.2 Research Philosophy

The study is guided by the interpretivist philosophy, which emphasises understanding human experiences through participants' subjective meanings (Hou, 2021). Interpretivism aligns with the qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews because it focuses on rich, contextual insights rather than numerical generalisation (Gregar, 2023).

3.2.3 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm for this study is exploratory. An exploratory paradigm is appropriate for investigating issues that require a deeper understanding of new or complex phenomena (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). This study explores staff motivation, retention, and commitment in a real organisational setting to generate new insights.

3.2.4 Rationale for Research design

The qualitative case study design was chosen for this study due to its suitability for exploring complex human experiences in real-world contexts. The central aim of the research, to examine the factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at the UKZN, requires an in-depth understanding of perceptions, meanings, and lived experiences. According to Creswell (2021), qualitative research is best suited for capturing participants' subjective perspectives, especially when the research questions are exploratory in nature. A case study design allows for rich, contextualised insight into specific institutional environments, facilitating the investigation of phenomena bounded by time and place (Hancock, Algozzine & Lim, 2021). This design aligns with the study's objectives by enabling the researcher to probe deeply into the attitudes and challenges faced by support staff within UKZN's College of Law and

Management. Through open-ended interviews, the study can generate data that quantitative methods may overlook, thus enhancing the validity and relevance of the findings to real organisational settings (Kekeya, 2021).

3.3 Target population

According to Willie (2024:75), a target population is defined as ‘those units for which the survey findings are intended to be generalised.’ Willie (2024) define the population as ‘includes all the constituents that constitute the planned unit of analysis’ and is defined as ‘the larger pool from which the sample is formed and on the basis of which generalisations of the findings are sought.’ The target population comprised 460 support staff from the UKZN College of Law and Management, including support staff from three university campuses: Westville, Howard, and Pietermaritzburg.

The target population refers to the entire group that the researcher is interested in (Willie, 2022). For this study, the target population includes all support staff of UKZN working under the College of Law and Management. The accessible population is a part of the target population that can be accessed by the researcher during the study (Lund & Matthews, 2024).

3.4 Sampling

Rahman (2023) defines a sample as a representative section or subset of a larger group or population that is chosen by researchers in order to study and make inferences about the group as a whole. In this study, the sample consisted of support staff in the UKZN College of Law and Management who were available and accessible during the study period.

3.4.1 Sampling strategy

A sample is a representative subset of the complete population that is used by a researcher to gather data (Hossan, Dato’Mansor & Jaharuddin, 2023). According to Staller (2021), sampling is the methodical process of selecting a smaller group of people from a larger collection in order to look at particular patterns and behaviors in that representation in order to make conclusions. Probability sampling and non-probability sampling are the two main forms of sampling that are employed. Participants in this qualitative study were chosen using a non-probability selection technique. Because this method concentrates on particular participant characteristics and availability, not all sampling units were taken into account when calculating sample size (Hossan et al., 2023).

3.4.1.1 Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling is used when it is not practical to select every member of the population selected for the sample (Kekeya, 2021). Among the methods used in this strategy are convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling, sequential sampling, anomalous case sampling, theoretical sampling, and adaptive sampling. Because every technique has advantages and disadvantages of its own, researchers select the most appropriate methodology based on the goals and constraints of their specific study. Due to the qualitative character of the study, non-probability sampling was used for conducting the interviews. Convenience sampling is used when randomisation is not feasible. Convenient, deliberate, snowball, modal, expert, diversified, and proportionate tactics are all employed by this biased strategy (Halkias et al., 2022). The researcher employed purposive sampling to select interview subjects. Researchers can concentrate on particular demographic groups in order to get specialised data for their studies. Purposive sampling reduces the margin of error in the data because the data sources closely resemble the study environment (Fuyane, 2021).

‘Judgmental sampling’ is a purposive sampling technique in which particular places, persons, or events are picked on purpose in order to collect crucial data that cannot be found anywhere else (Spolarich, 2023). A focused and effective data collection method is made possible by the researcher's careful selection of participants based on their knowledge and proficiency in the field of inquiry. In order to ensure that the study's objectives would be effectively fulfilled and that respondents could be conveniently contacted, a purposive sampling method was employed. Information from the respondents was gathered through interviews, which made it possible to thoroughly examine the study question as well as the perspectives of the participants.

3.4.2 Sample size

According to Lund and Matthews (2024), the sample size represents the minimum number of participants necessary to represent the entire population. A total of ten (10) participants, including administrators, technicians, and managers, were involved in interviews. Staff in the following positions were selected: two human resources/finance administrators, two technicians, two school operations managers, two higher degree administrators, and one participant each from postgraduate and undergraduate administrators. This process continues until data saturation is

reached, indicating that additional interviews no longer provide new insights. The specific sample size for the interviews is presented in Table 3.1.

The decision to limit the sample to ten participants within the College of Law and Management was guided by the principle of data saturation, which occurs when no new information or themes emerge despite additional interviews (Bekele, 2022). For an exploratory qualitative study, the goal is to achieve depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization. The College of Law and Management was purposively selected because it is one of the largest colleges at UKZN and encompasses a diverse range of administrative functions and staff roles, thereby offering a rich and representative context for investigating the research objectives. This focused approach enabled the researcher to explore participants' experiences and perceptions in depth while remaining feasible within the resource and time constraints of a master's-level study (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

Table 3.1: Sample size

Position	Interview sample
Human resources and Finance Administrators	2
Technicians	2
School operations managers	2
Higher degrees Administrators	2
Post-Graduate administrators	1
Under-graduate administrators	1
Total sample	10

Source: (Researcher's compilation, 2024)

3.4.2.1 Characteristics of the included participants

The sample is composed of administrators and accountants from UKZN's three campuses who work under the College of Law and Management. Additionally, participants were presently working and available during the interview period. All participants were actively engaged in the College of Law and Management of UKZN.

3.5 Data collection procedures

A 'data collection procedure' is a method of acquiring information in order to evaluate or offer responses concerning the variables included in the problem statement, research questions, and hypotheses (Kazdin, 2021). The researcher's data collection strategies aligned with the study's objectives. This study utilised primary data because the information was obtained through online interviews. Semi structured interviews were the main technique used to collect data.

3.5.1 Research instruments

3.5.1.1 Development of Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and existing literature on motivation and retention. Open ended questions were designed to align with the study's themes. The guide was reviewed by two HRM experts for validity and piloted with one participant to test clarity and relevance (Monday, 2020).

3.5.1.2 Interviews

Oben (2021) defines data collection as the procedure through which researchers compile information from relevant sources in order to formulate and test hypotheses, analyse study findings, and respond to research questions. Open-ended questions were asked during online interviews for this study. Direct and indirect data collection are the two categories identified (Ovan & Saputra, 2020). While indirect data gathering is achieved by looking through textual sources, direct data collection involves actual people interacting with one another. Monday (2020) argues that the use of in-depth interviews in this study is justified by the fact that these methods enable researchers to gather data directly from participants in qualitative research. According to Muzari et al. (2022), qualitative research approach is a method that studies the research problem in its natural environment as opposed to using laboratory subjects. By using this method of information collection, it is possible to compile data from many sources in order to comprehend the problems as perceived by the respondents or other relevant audience members. Islam and Aldaihani (2022) have reiterated that in-depth interviews are a valuable tool for researchers to gain insight into the attitudes, experiences, ideas, and other aspects of the population they are studying.

Interviews were specifically chosen over other qualitative methods, such as focus groups or ethnographic observation, because they provide participants with a confidential and flexible

environment to share personal experiences and insights (Dahal et al., 2024). Focus groups, while beneficial for generating interactive dialogue, may have limited participants' openness due to the sensitivity of workplace issues and hierarchical dynamics within the university setting (Khan et al., 2025). One-on-one online interviews encouraged candid and detailed responses, ensuring the collection of rich, nuanced data directly aligned with the study's aim of exploring factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment. This method also allowed the researcher to adapt follow-up questions in real time, enhancing the depth and relevance of the findings (Lim, 2025).

The interview guide's questions were based on the study questions that the chosen participants had to answer (see to Appendix B). The selection of participants included both male and female staff, as well as those in managerial positions within the four schools under the College of Law and Management, who have adequate knowledge of staff performance. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each. This study utilised online interviews to understand the views of university staff regarding staff motivation and performance.

3.5.2 Operationalisation of Key Variables

Operationalising key variables is essential for ensuring conceptual clarity and consistent data interpretation. In this study, **motivation** refers to internal and external factors influencing an employee's willingness to perform tasks effectively. It includes intrinsic aspects such as job satisfaction, responsibility, and recognition, and extrinsic elements like salary and working conditions, in line with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959). **Retention** is defined as the organisation's ability to maintain support staff over time and was explored through questions about career development, institutional support, and job stability (Matete, 2021). **Organisational commitment** pertains to an employee's emotional attachment and loyalty to the institution, captured through inquiries on institutional culture, value alignment, and involvement in decision-making (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021). **Job embeddedness** was explored as the extent to which staff are connected to their work environment, colleagues, and professional roles, using dimensions such as fit, links, and sacrifice (Peltokorpi & Allen, 2024). These variables were examined through semi-structured interviews designed to elicit detailed perceptions and lived experiences from participants.

3.6 Data analysis

Several methodologies that can be applied to assess and validate qualitative research are mentioned in relation to qualitative research. Taherdoost (2022), for instance, point forth characteristics of qualitative research that can be utilised to guarantee the validity of qualitative research. The degree to which the researcher gives the reader enough information to understand the context and meaning of the material offered is another indicator of validity in qualitative research (Osman, Nordin & Abd Rahman, 2021). Therefore, the degree of transparency with which the data collecting and analysis processes are given determines the validity of the results. In a similar vein, Aguas (2022) contend that the degree to which the study yields information and the methodology employed to produce the final result may be used to assess the reliability of the research process.

To acquire knowledge and comprehension of a phenomenon, qualitative analysis entails looking through and analysing textual evidence, such as transcripts of interviews (Maxwell, 2022). Rather than forecasting or explaining an event, the focus is on comprehending it and making meaning of it. It necessitates the use of a range of analytical techniques to explore and interpret the data, a participant-in-context mindset where the researcher takes into account the perspectives and experiences of the participants, and an ethically aware perspective to ensure that the research respects the participants' rights and well-being (Muzari et al., 2022). In order to answer research questions or investigate a particular issue, the researcher must immerse oneself in the data, look for themes, patterns, and connections, and then derive meaningful conclusions from the data. This process is known as qualitative analysis.

The researcher used content analysis to examine interview data. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse qualitative data. Thematic analysis groups together themes that are similar in order to analyse data. The data was analysed thematically using NVIVO 12 software system analysis, exposing recurring themes. The reason thematic analysis is chosen is because it is a detailed and extensive method of organising and describing data into themes (Muzari et al., 2022). The data's patterns, or themes, were identified, examined, and documented using thematic analysis. These patterns will be used to address the research questions that form the basis of the study and to characterise the phenomena that is being studied (Maxwell, 2022). The data analysis procedure that is appropriate for qualitative studies is depicted in Figure 4.1.

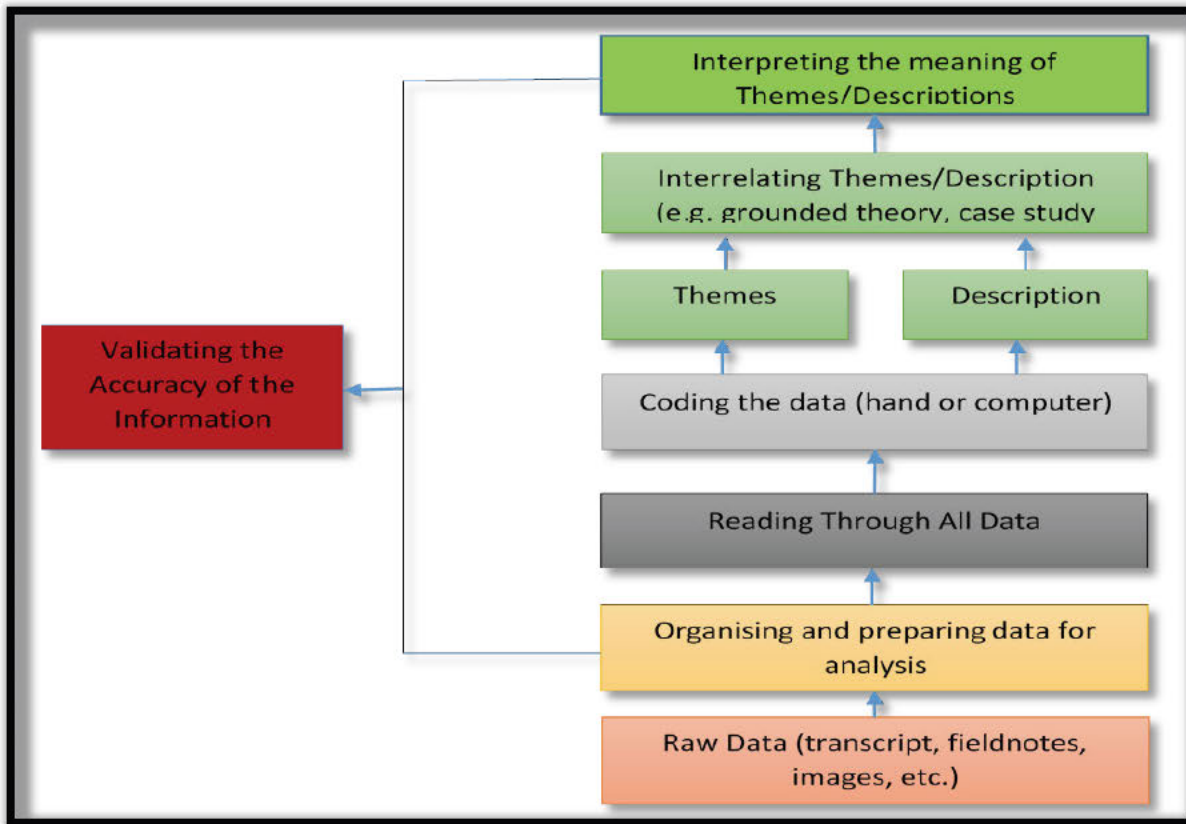


Figure 3.1 Data analysis in qualitative research (Source: Ishtiaq, 2019: 24)

Figure 3.1 above illustrates the six steps recommended for data analysis in a qualitative study.

These steps include:

3.6.1 A six-phase approach to thematic analysis

Phase 1: Familiarising with the gathered data

In order to complete this phase, the researcher must thoroughly and actively engage with the data by first transcribing the interactions, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and/or listening to the recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher must be fully conversant with all facets of the data and must possess a clear grasp of the interaction's core concepts. The groundwork for further analysis is laid in this phase. It is vital to use analytic software that enables the researcher to code both transcripts and audio recordings (Aguas, 2022). Software NVivo (version 12) was chosen because it complied with these specifications.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

In NVivo, the imported audio-file takes the form of an audio wave, which can be listened to and divided up into audio excerpts. The author followed the NVivo audio coding process described by Wainwright and Russell (2010). After becoming familiar with the data, the researcher started looking for preliminary codes, which are aspects of the data that seem interesting and pertinent. These codes are more frequent and specific than themes, yet they nevertheless act as a context indicator for the discourse. To begin the analysis, two source folders were created in NVivo: one for audio recordings and the other for transcripts. The word-formatted transcript was easily imported into the NVivo program. Following the transfer of all required files, the next step was coding, which involved grouping extracts from the various documents that were related to one another into nodes. The transcripts and audio files were reviewed and listened to in detail, and any noteworthy sections were coded to free nodes (Aguas, 2022).

Phase 3: Searching for themes

The process then moved on to the next step, which was to start interpreting the gathered codes. Broad themes are created by mixing or dividing pertinent data extracts. The relationship between codes, sub-themes, and themes should be acknowledged in the researcher's argument (Muzari et al., 2022). Audio files were listened to, and relevant audio excerpts were coded to new and/or existing nodes. The content of the nodes was constantly reviewed by simply double clicking them. Coding stripes were also turned on to help manage the coding process by providing some insights; for example, where the densest parts or coding were, and so on. When this was done, nodes associated with each source were created with the relevant details (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). Apart from coding to nodes, the researcher was also able to connect ideas emerging from two or more sources using 'see also links'.

Phase 4: Theme review

The themes were next examined in further detail, after which the researcher chose whether to integrate, enhance, separate, or reject the initial ideas. According to Muzari et al., (2022), the information contained in the themes should make sense, but there should be clear distinctions between them. Typically, this is completed in two stages: the first phase involves validating the

themes in relation to the coded extracts, and the second phase involves validating the full data set. During this stage, a themed map is produced.

Phase 5: Theme definition and naming

The themes and potential sub-themes of the data must be ‘refined and defined’ at this step. The prominent topics must be strengthened by more research (Osman et al., 2021). The researcher must provide topic headings and pithy working summaries that clearly and simply communicate the essence of each subject. At this point, the concepts must coalesce into a cohesive story about the facts. Annotations were created for both audio files and transcripts but they were particularly important when coding audio files because they were also acting as a reminder or clarification of audio excerpts.

Phase 6: Report production

Braun and Clarke (2021) asserted that the researchers must then add precise examples that are fascinating and vivid and link to the research topic and material in order to turn their analysis into a piece of writing that is intelligible. The report’s conclusions must convince the reader of the report’s value and veracity. It must include an evaluation based on actual facts and should explicitly address the research issue, going beyond a simple explanation of the ideas. When the analysis process reaches an advanced stage, a broader picture and/or a visual representation of the data and progress of the work becomes a necessary prerequisite for the development and testing of the theory (Muzari et al., 2022). At this level, reports, queries, charts and models were created.

3.6.1 Data Analysis Techniques

This study adopted thematic analysis as the primary technique for analysing qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), thematic analysis involves systematically identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. It is particularly suited to research that seeks to understand participants’ perspectives and experiences in context. This study followed Braun and Clarke’s six-step approach to thematic analysis. These steps include familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and reviewing themes, and writing the final report. NVivo 12 software was used to manage and analyse qualitative data efficiently, aiding in the coding process and enhancing data transparency and traceability (Aguas, 2022). This approach ensures that themes are derived inductively from the data and are closely

aligned with participants' narratives. Thematic analysis is well-suited to addressing the research objectives of exploring support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at UKZN.

3.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through member checking and peer debriefing. Rich, thick descriptions support transferability. An audit trail was maintained for dependability, and reflexive journaling ensured confirmability (Taherdoost, 2022).

3.8 Elimination of bias

In study, bias can infiltrate all stages, including planning, data collecting, analysis, and publication (Ansari et al., 2022). Identifying potential biases and taking steps to reduce their impact are crucial for ensuring the study's credibility and reliability. Throughout the entire research process, the researcher in this study was especially careful to eliminate prejudice and ensure neutrality. By doing so, the findings can be critically and objectively examined, preventing any harmful or poor-quality judgments.

- **Non-use of gender aligned words**

A type of linguistic prescriptivism known as gender-neutral language seeks to exclude or minimise gender connotations when describing people (Jabarov, 2023). One way to refute the idea that language unintentionally reinforces gender and gender stereotypes is to use gender-neutral pronouns. Through the use of this methodology, the study sought to minimise the reinforcement of established gender roles in language and to advance inclusivity.

- **Avoiding the classification of individuals according to their racial or ethnic background**

According to Rahman (2023), people have a strong need to preserve and create identities that are important to their sense of self. Popular social identities play a significant role in boosting self-confidence in individuals (Ansari et al., 2022). Vocabulary that categorises people according to their race or ethnicity was purposefully avoided in this study. This step was done to avoid any ramifications of racial and ethnic inferiority or supremacy. Preserving impartiality and minimising any biases in the study were the objectives.

3.9 Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in strict compliance with the UKZN research ethics guidelines to safeguard the rights and welfare of all participants. Prior to the commencement of data collection, formal ethical clearance was obtained from the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Annexure B), and written permission to conduct the research was secured from the relevant institutional authorities.

Before each interview began, participants received a detailed information sheet and consent form (Annexure A), explaining the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the potential benefits and risks. Participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded solely for transcription and analysis purposes, and explicit consent for recording was obtained before proceeding.

To protect confidentiality, all personal identifiers were removed from transcripts and final reports. Audio recordings and electronic transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer, while any hard-copy notes were kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Data will be retained securely for five years as per UKZN policy and then permanently destroyed.

Participants were clearly advised of their right to withdraw at any stage of the study without providing a reason and without any negative consequences. They were also assured that their responses would be used exclusively for the stated research objectives and would remain anonymous in any publications or presentations arising from the study.

3.10 Chapter summary

This chapter covered various aspects of the research design and methodology. It addressed the research design, including qualitative research design, defined the target population, outlined the sampling strategy, explained data collection procedures, detailed data analysis methods, addressed bias elimination measures, and explored ethical considerations. The thorough coverage of these areas lays a strong foundation for the subsequent chapter, which will focus on presenting and discussing the findings derived from this research methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an in-depth overview of the research methodology applied in this study, detailing the study population, sampling methods, as well as the data collection and analysis processes. This chapter presents the qualitative findings based on insights gathered from interviews conducted with support staff at the UKZN. The primary aim of these interviews was to examine the key factors affecting support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at UKZN. The chapter begins with an exploration of the interview participants' demographics to contextualise the findings, followed by an analysis of the main themes identified in the study. It then discusses the findings in relation to the study's objectives, specifically addressing the following three research objectives that guided the interviews:

- i). To identify the factors that influence the motivation of support staff at the UKZN.
- ii). To explore the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff at the UKZN.
- iii). To identify the barriers that hinder the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the UKZN.

4.2 Interview participants' demographics

Table 4.1 presents the demographic profile of the ten interview participants involved in this study. The group comprised support staff from diverse administrative and technical roles across the university, with ages ranging from 28 to 50 years.

Table 4.1: Interview participants' demographic

Participants	Position	Age	Gender	Years of Experience	Qualification
1	HR Administration	45	Female	10	Bachelor's Degree
2	Finance Administrator	38	Male	8	Bachelor's Degree
3	IT Technician	32	Male	5	Diploma

4	Maintenance Technician	29	Female	4	Diploma
5	School Operations Manager	50	Female	15	Master's Degree
6	School Operations Manager	43	Male	12	Bachelor's Degree
7	Higher Degree Administrator	34	Female	7	Bachelor's Degree
8	Higher Degree Administrator	36	Male	9	Bachelor's Degree
9	Postgraduate Administrator	40	Female	11	Bachelor's Degree
10	Undergraduate Administrator	28	Female	3	Bachelor's Degree

(Source: Field work, 2024)

The demographic composition of participants in this study provided a comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing motivation, retention, and organisational commitment among support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The participants came from diverse roles, including HR administration, finance, technical support, and educational management. This range in positions enabled the study to explore various experiences and challenges faced by support staff across different departments and functions, directly aligning with the research objectives. The age range of participants spanned from 28 to 50 years, capturing a broad spectrum of career stages. This diversity in age was beneficial for identifying motivational factors that varied based on career longevity and life circumstances, such as family responsibilities or career growth aspirations. For instance, younger participants were likely focused on career advancement, while older participants prioritised job stability and a supportive work-life balance. This range supported Objective 1, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the varying factors that influenced motivation.

Furthermore, participants' years of experience at the university, ranging from 3 to 15 years, provided insights into how long-term and newer employees viewed retention and organisational

commitment. Participants with longer tenure offered valuable perspectives on loyalty, engagement, and retention factors (Objective 2). Their insights helped explore how organisational practices and policies influenced long-term commitment and revealed areas where the university could enhance its strategies to retain staff effectively. The educational backgrounds of participants, from diplomas to master’s degrees, reflected different skill levels and professional expectations within the support staff. This diversity helped in understanding specific barriers that hindered motivation, such as limited career growth or recognition for advanced qualifications (Objective 3). Those with higher degrees may have experienced frustration over restricted advancement opportunities, highlighting potential areas for improvement in career development.

In conclusion, the varied demographics of the participants—including age, gender, tenure, and educational background—contributed to an understanding of the factors affecting support staff at the university. This diversity enabled the study to meet its objectives effectively, providing an inclusive insights into the motivators, retention factors, and barriers experienced by support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

4.3 Themes of the study

Guided by the participants responds, the main themes identified are presented in Figure 4.1, below:

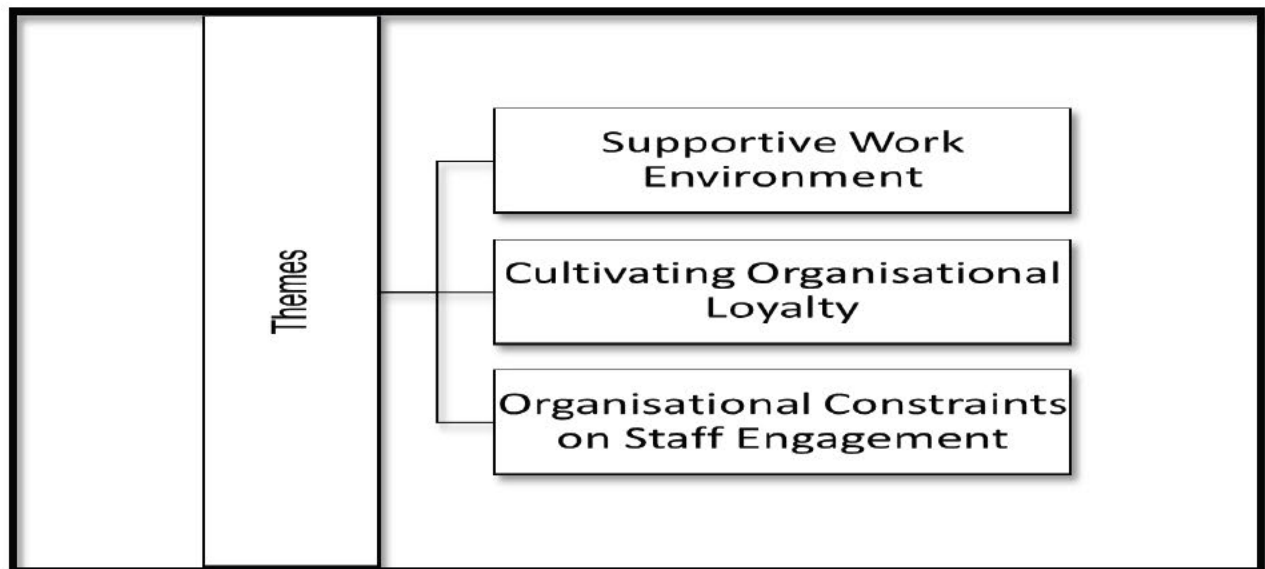


Figure 4.1. Identified main themes (Source: Field work, 2024)

To facilitate easy reference, the analysis was aligned with the three key themes discussed, as outlined in Figure 4.1 above. The analysis of the interview data was organised according to the following themes:

4.3.1 Supportive Work Environment (Research Question 1)

The main theme emphasises the support that staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal receive to maintain their motivation. This theme addresses factors influencing motivation, such as recognition and career development. It was informed by various subthemes summarised in the diagram below;

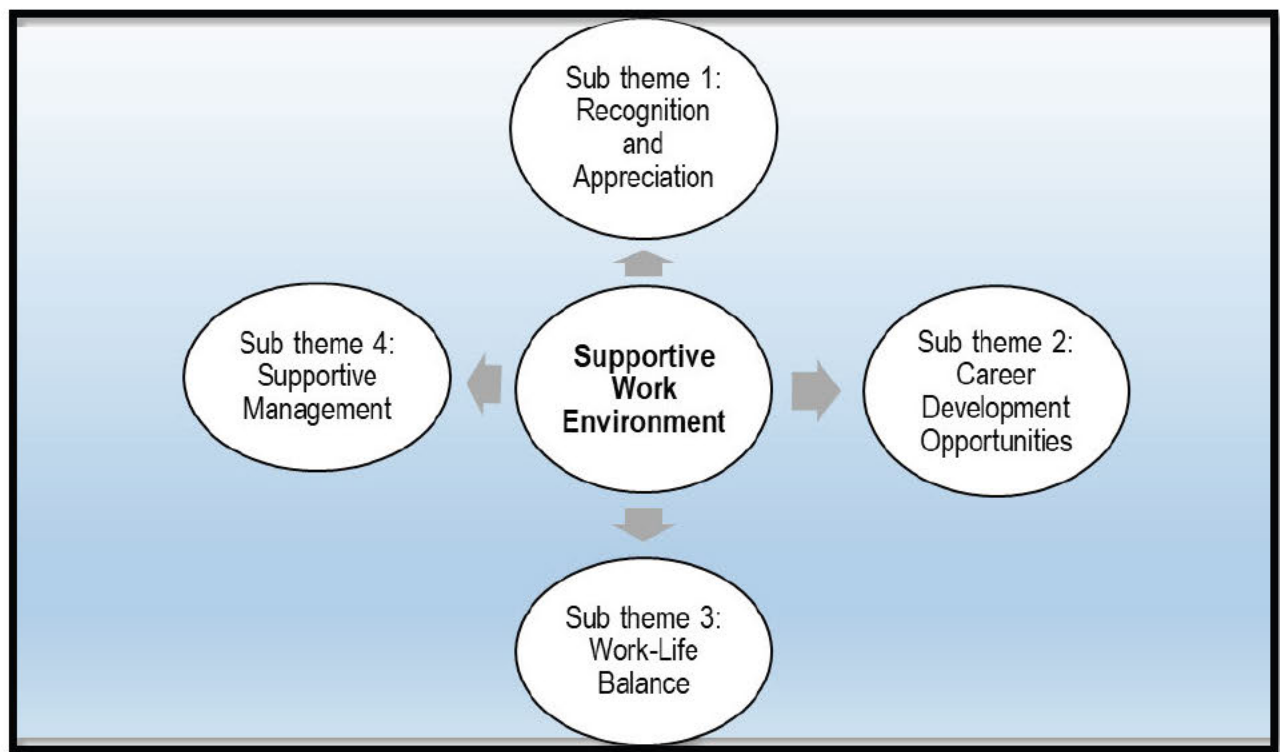


Figure 4.2. Sub-themes for main theme 1 (Source: Field work, 2024)

4.3.1.1 Recognition and Appreciation

This sub-theme highlights a key motivational factor for support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. When support staff receive appreciation for their contributions, it reinforces their sense of value within the organisation and motivates them to continue performing at high levels. The participants consistently emphasised that feeling recognised and appreciated by the organisation

significantly influences their morale and job satisfaction. This is confirmed by the following participant:

Recognition and fair compensation are the biggest motivators. When staff feel appreciated and well compensated, it really boosts their morale (Participant 1).

This result concurs with the findings of Miah and Hasan (2022), who identify recognition as a primary factor in job satisfaction, as it addresses employees' intrinsic motivational needs. When employees feel appreciated, their morale and performance increase, which aligns with Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022), who assert that consistent recognition fosters a supportive work environment and enhances employee engagement. Mnyani (2022) further emphasises that acknowledgment of contributions promotes commitment, reducing turnover rates by reinforcing employees' sense of value within the organisation, which is essential for maintaining a motivated workforce.

Furthermore, some participants noted that when feedback lacks acknowledgment of effort, it can lead to decreased motivation, as seen in cases where negative feedback was given without any balancing recognition. The following participant, who expressed the same opinion, attests to this:

A colleague once received negative feedback without any positive reinforcement, which hurt his morale. Recognition of effort goes a long way (Participant 4).

This outcome also aligns with the findings of Chen (2022), who emphasise that feedback should balance constructive criticism with recognition to sustain motivation. Ibrahim et al. (2023) highlight that an absence of acknowledgment during negative feedback can diminish morale and commitment, as employees may feel undervalued. Yousaf (2020) supports this by suggesting that positive reinforcement in feedback is crucial for building a respectful and supportive culture. Consequently, combining recognition with feedback is essential for motivating staff and fostering a productive and engaged work environment.

4.3.1.2 Career Development Opportunities

The desire for personal and professional growth drives support staff to seek roles where they can advance for support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. A work environment offering skill development, promotions, and clear career pathways is essential for sustaining motivation and long-term commitment. Participants stressed that career progression opportunities are essential for

maintaining motivation, as feeling ‘stagnant’ in a role can lead to disengagement. This is confirmed by the following participant, who conveyed the same position, supported by the following comment:

Opportunities for growth and advancement motivate support staff. No one wants to feel stagnant in their role. Again, career development is key. Without growth opportunities, many people lose interest in their roles (Participant 2).

This outcome concurs with the findings of Ganesh and Liu (2022), who emphasise that opportunities for career advancement are pivotal in motivating employees and reducing turnover. When organisations provide skill development and clear paths for progression, employees are more engaged and committed to long term goals (Yousaf, 2020). Herzberg’s Theory of Motivation also supports this, asserting that career growth opportunities are key to sustaining intrinsic motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959). Without these opportunities, employees may feel ‘stagnant,’ which can result in decreased engagement and lower morale (Peramatzis & Galanakis, 2022).

Leadership development programs are a significant motivator for support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Many participants view these initiatives as positive steps toward career growth, noting that they foster a sense of value and potential within the organisation. By offering structured opportunities for advancement, the university encourages support staff to stay engaged and motivated, as they feel their career aspirations are recognised and supported through meaningful development pathways. This is confirmed by the following participant:

The university has started offering leadership development for support staff, which is encouraging. It’s a good start for career growth. The university offers some flexible scheduling, which has helped many staff feel more balanced and motivated (Participant 10)

This result aligns with the findings of Ramlawati et al. (2021), who highlight that leadership development programs enhance employees' perception of value within the organisation, fostering loyalty and motivation. Structured advancement opportunities, such as leadership training, are shown to increase job satisfaction, as they offer a clear future within the institution (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2021). By investing in career development initiatives, the university reinforces its support

for staff growth, promoting a balanced and motivating work environment that aligns with staff's career aspirations and organisational commitment.

4.3.1.3 Work-Life Balance

This sub-theme highlights that flexible work arrangements significantly boost motivation for support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Participants appreciate the university's willingness to accommodate personal needs, such as adjusting hours during family emergencies, which reinforces a supportive and individualised work environment. This flexibility signals that the university values its staff beyond their professional roles, fostering loyalty and engagement. This is confirmed by the following participant who conveyed the same opinion:

I felt really motivated when I was allowed to adjust my work hours to handle a family emergency. It showed that the university values us as individuals. Work-life balance helps keep burnout at bay (Participant 5).

This result concurs with the findings of Hipos and Benavides (2023), who suggest that flexible work arrangements contribute to higher levels of motivation by accommodating employees' personal needs. Flexibility, such as adjusting work hours for family emergencies, strengthens loyalty and reinforces a supportive work environment where employees feel valued beyond their professional roles. Similarly, Alam (2021) highlights that work-life balance prevents burnout, enhancing job satisfaction and commitment. Herzberg's Theory of Motivation supports this, indicating that a flexible work structure meets intrinsic motivational needs, fostering long term engagement.

Moreover, a combination of job security, recognition, and flexibility creates a motivating and positive environment for support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Participants noted that this blend fosters a sense of stability and acknowledges their contributions, while also providing personal flexibility. Flexibility is particularly valued, as it helps balance work demands with personal needs, showing that the university respects and supports their wellbeing. This is confirmed by the following participant:

Having a mix of job security, recognition, and flexibility keeps me motivated. They all contribute to a positive work environment (Participant 10).

This result was consistent with the findings of Yousaf (2020), who asserts that a combination of job security, recognition, and flexibility creates a positive and motivating work environment. According to Chen (2022), this blend fosters a sense of stability and respect, as employees feel acknowledged for both their professional contributions and personal needs. Moreover, Mnyani (2022) emphasises that such flexibility helps staff balance work demands and personal responsibilities, boosting morale and commitment. Providing flexibility thus aligns with creating a work environment that supports wellbeing and sustained motivation.

4.3.1.4 Supportive Management

This sub-theme highlights the importance of management's role in providing resources and guidance to motivate support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Feeling supported by management not only enables staff to perform their roles effectively but also strengthens their commitment to the organisation, showing that management support is essential for retaining motivated staff. Participants expressed that when managers ensure access to necessary tools and actively support their teams, it fosters a sense of stability and engagement. This is confirmed by the following participant:

Support from management is essential. It's hard to stay motivated without the tools you need to do your job effectively. Again, if staff feel supported, they're more likely to stay (Participant 3).

This result concurs with the findings of Ganesh and Liu (2022), who highlight that supportive management providing resources and guidance is essential for maintaining staff motivation and engagement. When managers ensure that employees have the necessary tools and actively support them, it fosters a sense of stability and reinforces commitment to the organisation. According to Herzberg's Theory of Motivation, management support is a crucial hygiene factor, preventing job dissatisfaction and contributing to retention (Marsudi et al., 2022). Ghadernejad et al. (2024) further suggest that managerial support is key to reducing turnover by enhancing staff morale.

Additionally, effective communication and collaborative support from management are also key motivators for support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Participants emphasise that when management maintains clear and open communication, especially during stressful times, it fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose. Supportive leadership that promotes successful team

collaboration boosts motivation and creates a positive work atmosphere, where staff feel valued and connected. This is confirmed by the following participant who stated:

I've noticed that staff feel more motivated when management communicates effectively during stressful times. When we have successful team collaborations, it motivates all of us. It feels good to work together toward common goals (Participant 8).

This outcome also aligns with the findings of Chen (2022), who emphasise that clear communication and collaborative support from management are powerful motivators, especially in challenging times. Effective communication fosters unity and a shared sense of purpose, which strengthens staff morale and enhances teamwork. Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022) indicate that leadership that encourages open communication and successful collaboration creates a positive work environment where employees feel valued. Such supportive management practices are essential in cultivating an engaged, connected, and resilient workforce, as confirmed by the positive impact of collaborative efforts on team motivation.

However, constructive feedback from management plays a crucial role in motivating support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, contributing to a respectful and encouraging workplace culture. Participants noted that when management provides feedback in a positive, supportive manner, it fosters a sense of value and confidence in their abilities. This approach not only boosts staff morale but also strengthens motivation, as employees feel respected and understood. This is confirmed by the following participant who conveyed the same opinion:

Staff feel more motivated when they receive constructive feedback in a positive way (Participant 10)

This outcome concurs with the findings of Yousaf (2020), who emphasises that constructive feedback from management is essential for building a motivating and respectful workplace. When managers deliver feedback in a positive and supportive way, it reinforces employees' confidence in their abilities, enhancing their sense of value within the organisation. Ganesh and Liu (2022) further note that constructive feedback fosters trust between staff and management, improving morale and commitment. According to Setthakorn et al. (2024), feedback that respects employees'

contributions helps create a positive culture, supporting motivation and sustained engagement within the workplace.

4.3.2 Cultivating Organisational Loyalty (Research Question 2)

This main theme reflects the elements that foster long-term commitment and retention among support staff. This theme explores the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff. Cultivating organisational loyalty was informed by the following sub-themes: job security and stability, sense of belonging, career advancement prospects and loyalty and engagement.

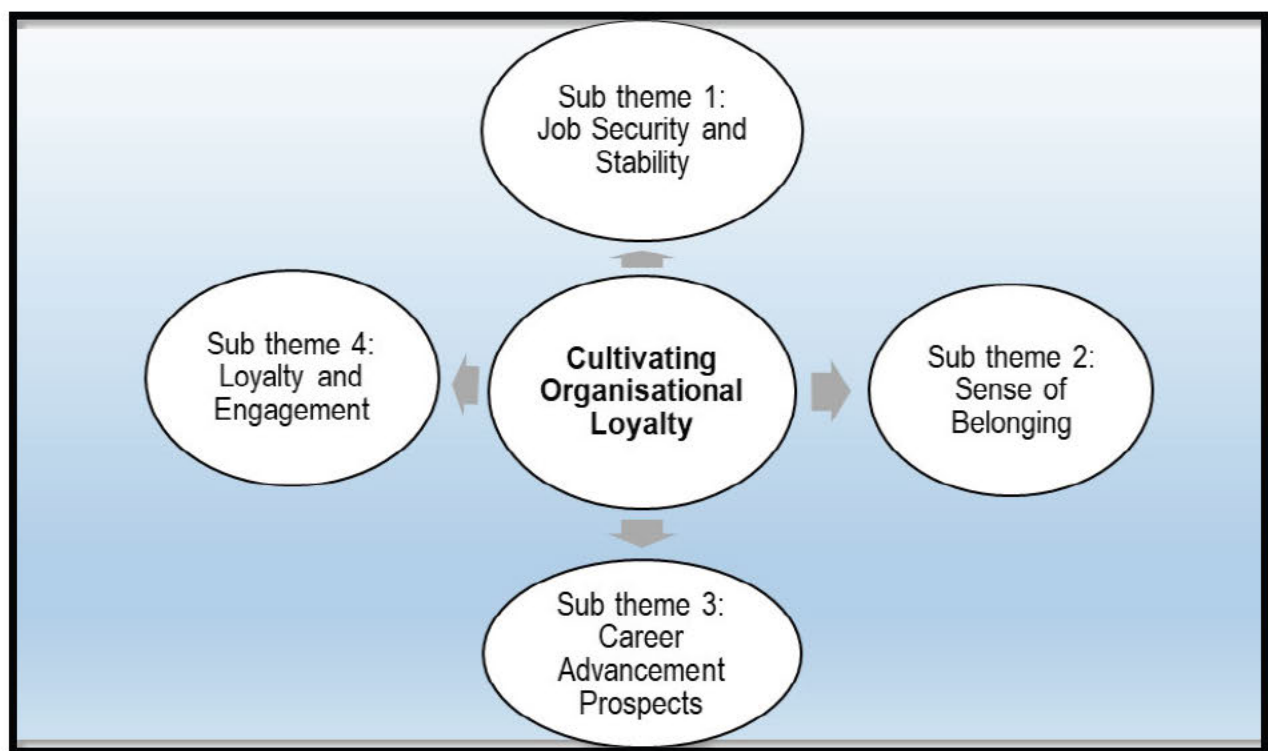


Figure 4.3. Sub-themes for main theme 2 (Source: Field work, 2024)

4.3.2.1 Job Security and Stability

The sub-theme job security and stability highlights that stable employment and benefits are crucial for fostering long term commitment among support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This stability encourages staff to invest in the organisation's goals and align with its mission, reinforcing their loyalty.

The participants emphasised that knowing their jobs are secure allows them to focus more effectively on their responsibilities without the distraction of job uncertainty. This is confirmed by the following participant:

Job security and the benefits offered are key. Knowing they have stable employment motivates staff to commit long-term. If I know my job is safe, I can focus better on my work (Participant 4).

This conclusion agrees with the findings of Ihensekien and Joel (2023), who suggest that job security and stability are central to fostering organisational commitment, as employees who feel secure are more likely to focus on their responsibilities without the distraction of job insecurity. Similarly, Alam (2021) argues that stable employment encourages employees to align with the organisation's goals, enhancing loyalty and long-term commitment. Herzberg's Two Factor Theory also supports this, asserting that job security is a crucial factor in sustaining motivation and reducing turnover (Marsudi et al., 2022). Ensuring stability within the workforce strengthens commitment by providing a stable foundation for professional engagement.

Another crucial point was that, while job security is essential for retaining support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, it must be balanced with recognition and work life flexibility to foster genuine commitment. Participants observed that a combination of stability, appreciation, and flexibility contributes to sustained motivation and engagement. This blend allows staff to feel valued and supported in both their professional and personal lives, deepening their loyalty to the organisation beyond the assurance of job security alone. This is confirmed by the following participant who conveyed the same opinion:

Job security alone isn't enough; staff also want recognition and work-life balance to remain engaged. Having a mix of job security, recognition, and flexibility keeps me motivated (Participant 7).

This outcome also aligns with the findings of Yousaf (2020), who asserts that while job security is essential, it must be paired with recognition and work-life balance to fully engage employees. Hipos and Benavides (2023) emphasise that a combination of stability, appreciation, and flexibility enables staff to feel valued in both their professional and personal lives, leading to sustained motivation. Chen (2022) adds that this blend encourages employees to remain engaged and loyal,

as it acknowledges their diverse needs and aspirations beyond job security alone. This multifaceted approach to engagement adopts a deeper commitment among support staff.

4.3.2.2 Sense of Belonging

This sub-theme highlights that strong alignment with the University of KwaZulu-Natal's mission cultivates loyalty and enhances staff retention. Participants noted that when staff feel committed to the university's goals, minor issues become less significant, fostering resilience and long term dedication. This sense of shared purpose not only builds loyalty but also strengthens their connection to the institution, making them more likely to stay. This is confirmed by the following participant:

Retention and commitment go hand in hand. If people are truly committed to the university, they're less likely to leave for minor reasons. Commitment builds loyalty, and loyalty helps with retention. If staff believe in the university's mission, they tend to stick around (Participant 3).

This outcome concurs with the findings of Hipos and Benavides (2023), who emphasises that when employees feel aligned with an organisation's mission, they develop a stronger sense of loyalty and resilience. According to Herzberg's Theory of Motivation, this intrinsic connection to an organisation's goals enhances commitment by addressing employees' psychological needs (Marsudi et al., 2022). Yousaf (2020) also found that a shared sense of purpose reduces the impact of minor issues, fostering dedication and a long term orientation. Thus, alignment with the university's mission strengthens support staff's loyalty, making them more likely to remain committed.

Furthermore, it was revealed that commitment is fundamental to retaining support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Participants suggested that when staff feel a strong sense of belonging and dedication to the institution, they are less likely to pursue other opportunities. This reciprocal relationship, where commitment leads to retention and retention, in turn, reinforces commitment, promotes stability within the workforce. This is confirmed by the following participant:

The relationship is mutual. Staff who feel committed are more likely to be retained. Commitment is like a foundation for retention. Without it, staff would leave at the first sign of a better opportunity (Participant 8).

This result agrees with the findings of Mnyani (2022), who argue that commitment and retention are mutually reinforcing factors in organisational stability. Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022) support this, noting that when employees experience a strong sense of belonging, they are less likely to consider alternative opportunities. Riyanto et al. (2021) further suggest that commitment forms a foundation for retention, as dedicated employees prioritise their connection to the institution over external options. This reciprocal relationship between commitment and retention promotes a stable, loyal workforce dedicated to the university's long term success.

4.3.2.3 Career Advancement Prospects

This sub-theme underlines that opportunities for growth are essential for fostering commitment and retention among support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Staff are more likely to stay committed when they see clear, attainable career pathways, as this prevents stagnation and keeps them motivated. Participants noted that the ability to advance within the organisation strengthens their loyalty by meeting their professional aspirations and affirming their value within the institution. They emphasised that career advancement is key to building a loyal, motivated workforce. The following participant, who expressed the same opinion, attests to this:

Career growth opportunities within the university make a big difference. People feel committed when they can advance. Career growth opportunities keep staff motivated. No one wants to be in the same position indefinitely (Participant 6).

This result concurs with the findings of Ihensekien and Joel (2023), who argue that career advancement opportunities are fundamental to fostering employee commitment, as they prevent stagnation and keep employees motivated. Herzberg's Theory of Motivation emphasises that growth opportunities satisfy intrinsic motivational needs, reinforcing employees' sense of value within the organisation (Herzberg et al., 1959). Marsudi et al. (2022) further assert that a clear path for progression strengthens loyalty by aligning employees' professional aspirations with organisational goals, thus creating a motivated and dedicated workforce committed to long term retention.

However, some participants emphasised that structured pathways and leadership development programs at the University of KwaZulu-Natal significantly enhance staff commitment. They felt that these opportunities provide clarity on career progression, helping staff envision a long term future within the organisation. This is confirmed by the following participant who conveyed the same opinion:

There are now more structured paths for career advancement. It gives staff a clearer view of their potential future here. Also, seeing leadership development programs offered to support staff encourages long-term commitment (Participant 7).

This outcome also aligns with the findings of Ganesh and Liu (2022), who highlight that structured career pathways and leadership programs enhance staff's vision of a future within the organisation, which promotes sustained commitment. Hipos and Benavides (2023) suggests that visible, structured advancement pathways improve organisational loyalty by providing employees with clarity on growth opportunities, which is essential for retaining talent. Similarly, Chen (2022) emphasise that leadership development initiatives show institutional support for staff growth, further deepening their dedication to the organisation by fostering a sense of long term value and potential.

4.3.2.4 Loyalty and Engagement

Key factors like loyalty and engagement highlight that a strong sense of commitment is essential for retaining support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, particularly during challenging times. Participants emphasised that loyalty and engagement are closely intertwined, committed employees are more resilient and less likely to leave over minor issues. Fostering organisational commitment, therefore, becomes a foundation for effective retention, as it builds both an emotional and professional connection that keeps staff engaged. This was confirmed by the following participant:

When support staff feel committed, they're more likely to stay even when challenges arise. It's hard to separate the two. If you want to retain staff, you need to foster their commitment to the organisation first. (Participant 5)

This result concurs with the findings of Yousaf (2020), who argues that a strong sense of loyalty and commitment is crucial for retaining employees, particularly in challenging situations. According to Herzberg's Theory of Motivation, organisational commitment enhances engagement by creating both emotional and professional bonds within the workplace (Miah & Hasan, 2022). Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022) further note that when employees are committed to the organisation, they are more resilient and likely to remain despite minor issues. Cultivating this sense of commitment provides a solid foundation for retention, as it deeply connects employees to their organisational roles.

Additionally, some participants observed that when staff feel genuinely invested in the organisation, they are naturally more inclined to stay. This sense of commitment fosters loyalty, strengthening the effectiveness of retention efforts. This is confirmed by the following statement:

Commitment makes retention strategies much more effective. Retention flows naturally from commitment. When staff feel invested, they're more inclined to stay (Participant 9).

This outcome also aligns with the findings of Mnyani (2022), who suggests that commitment fosters a natural inclination to stay, thereby strengthening retention strategies. Ramlawati et al. (2021) highlight that when employees feel genuinely invested in their organisation, retention flows more seamlessly as staff develop a loyalty rooted in shared goals. Alam (2021) supports this, noting that an invested workforce directly impacts the effectiveness of retention efforts, as motivated staff are less likely to leave. A commitment-driven approach to retention thus creates a loyal and stable workforce dedicated to the organisation's mission and success.

4.3.3 Organisational Constraints on Staff Engagement (Research Question 3)

This main theme highlights the structural and managerial limitations that impede support staff's engagement and commitment. This theme addresses the barriers that hinder the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff. It covers inadequate compensation, limited career growth, rigid work policies, lack of management support, and procedural obstacles that hinder motivation, retention, and organisational loyalty.

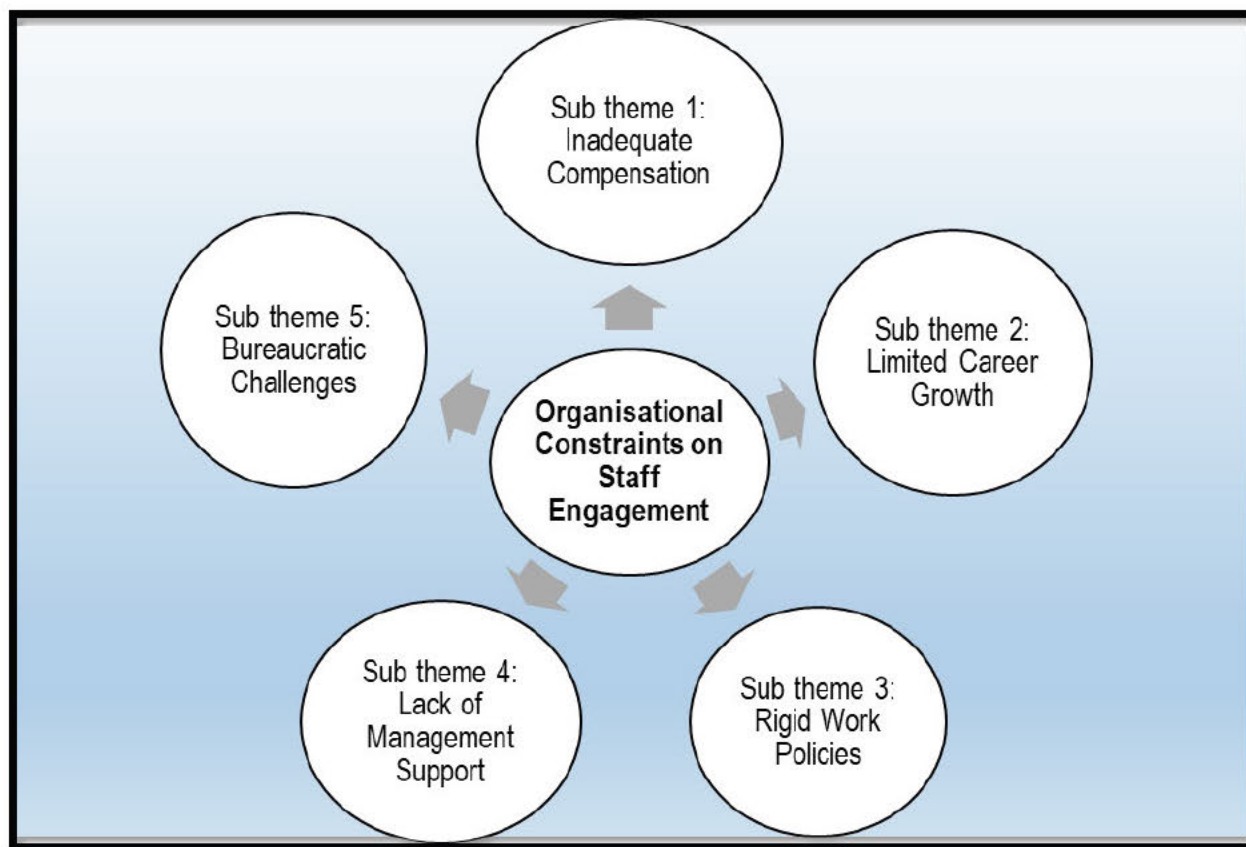


Figure 4.4. Sub-themes for main theme 3 (Source: Field work, 2024)

4.3.3.1 Inadequate Compensation

This sub-theme reveals that insufficient pay is a significant barrier to motivation and retention among support staff at the UKZN. Competitive and fair salaries are viewed as essential to acknowledging the effort and skills that staff contribute, while inadequate compensation often leads to frustration and disengagement. Participants expressed that when their compensation does not align with their responsibilities, it creates a sense of undervaluation, making it difficult to sustain commitment. This is confirmed by the following statement:

Inadequate compensation is a big issue. Many support staff feel that their salaries don't reflect the work they do. If salaries aren't competitive or don't reflect the work we do, it's hard to stay committed (Participant 8).

This outcome concurs with the findings of Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022), who emphasise that fair and competitive salaries are fundamental for sustaining motivation and commitment.

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory categorises compensation as a key hygiene factor that, when inadequate, can lead to dissatisfaction and decreased engagement (Miah & Hasan, 2022). Yousaf (2020) also supports this, noting that compensation reflecting employees' efforts and responsibilities promotes a sense of value and organisational loyalty. Inadequate pay, conversely, fosters frustration and disengagement, as staff feel their contributions are not properly acknowledged, which negatively impacts their commitment to the organisation.

Furthermore, participants indicated that when compensation falls short of their expectations, many staff members are inclined to seek better-paying opportunities elsewhere. They emphasised the need for a review of the current pay structure to better align salaries with the demands of their roles. Fair compensation is seen as essential for retaining motivated staff, suggesting that competitive wages would strengthen commitment and reduce turnover. This is confirmed by the following statement:

Staff eventually leave for better-paying positions elsewhere. A review of the compensation structure is essential. Fair wages would help retain staff and improve commitment (Participant 2).

This result aligns with the findings of Ramlawati et al. (2021), who assert that insufficient compensation prompts employees to seek better-paying opportunities elsewhere, as competitive wages are critical for retention. Tomlinson and Jackson (2021) highlight that regular reviews of pay structures ensure that compensation aligns with job demands, reducing turnover and strengthening staff commitment. Hipos and Benavides (2023) further suggests that aligning compensation with role expectations is essential to retaining skilled and motivated employees. Thus, a fair pay structure that reflects staff contributions would likely foster a committed, stable workforce, minimising turnover at the university.

4.3.3.2 Limited Career Growth

This sub-theme highlights that limited advancement opportunities are a major barrier to motivation and retention for support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The lack of clear career paths and growth opportunities significantly hampers motivation, contributing to high turnover as staff may seek employment elsewhere where advancement is possible.

Participants expressed that being in the same position for years without clear prospects for progression leads to disengagement and demotivation. Without visible career development opportunities, it becomes difficult for staff to envision a long term future with the organisation, weakening their commitment. This is confirmed by the following participant:

Limited opportunities for career growth. People get stuck in the same position for years, which can be very demotivating. The lack of growth opportunities is a big factor in turnover. If people feel there's no future here, they won't stay long (Participant 4).

This outcome concurs with the findings of Yousaf (2020), who emphasises that clear career development opportunities are essential for sustaining employee motivation and reducing turnover. Herzberg's Theory of Motivation identifies advancement as a critical factor for engagement, as it meets employees' intrinsic desires for growth and development (Marsudi et al., 2022). Riyanto et al. (2021) similarly highlight that when organisations lack visible growth pathways, employees often become disengaged and seek advancement elsewhere. Limited career growth, therefore, contributes to high turnover as staff look for employers that prioritise their professional development.

Moreover, some participants noted that limited growth prospects create a sense of stagnation, making it challenging for staff to stay motivated. When employees cannot envision a future within the organisation, they are more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere where career development is prioritised. This emphasises the need for transparent advancement paths to foster long-term commitment and engagement within the workforce. This is confirmed by the following participant:

When there aren't clear career paths or advancement opportunities, staff feel stagnant. If staff don't see a future here, they'll eventually look elsewhere (Participant 2).

This result also aligns with the findings of Ganesh and Liu (2022), who suggest that visible career progression fosters a sense of purpose and long term commitment among staff. Hipos and Benavides (2023) argue that when employees experience career stagnation, their motivation decreases, as they struggle to envision a future within the organisation. Alam (2021) supports this, noting that transparent advancement paths provide staff with a clear sense of direction, enhancing

retention and overall engagement. Providing structured career opportunities is thus essential for cultivating a committed workforce focused on long-term contributions to the university.

4.3.3.3 Rigid Work Policies

The lack of flexibility is seen as demotivating, as staff feel constrained and unable to manage personal and professional demands effectively. Implementing more adaptable work policies could significantly improve staff morale, enabling them to better balance their responsibilities, which would, in turn, enhance their commitment to the organisation. Participants expressed that strict policies, with little room for flexibility, hinder work-life balance, particularly for those with family responsibilities. This sentiment was echoed by a participant who shared a similar perspective:

Rigid work policies with no flexibility are demotivating. Staff need a bit of freedom to manage their work-life balance. Inflexible working conditions make it hard for people with families to manage work and personal life (Participant 5).

This outcome concurs with the findings of Yousaf (2020), who suggests that rigid work policies hinder employee engagement by limiting their ability to balance personal and professional responsibilities. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory underlines that work environment factors, like flexibility, influence job satisfaction, especially for employees with family responsibilities (Herzberg et al., 1959). Marsudi et al. (2022) further assert that a lack of flexibility can lead to dissatisfaction, as employees feel constrained and unable to manage personal demands, which demotivates them and weakens their organisational commitment.

Moreover, these rigid structures hinder productivity and impact morale, as staff feel constrained by unnecessary delays. Many participants expressed frustration with inflexible schedules that prevent them from addressing personal needs and noted that excessive bureaucracy slows down tasks, adding to their stress. Greater flexibility and streamlined processes could enhance motivation, enabling staff to balance work responsibilities more effectively. This sentiment was confirmed by a participant who shared a similar view:

Rigid working hours also create challenges. We could benefit from more flexible arrangements to accommodate personal needs. Processes are overly

bureaucratic, with too many layers of approval, which creates unnecessary delays and frustrations (Participant 10).

This result was consistent with the results of Tomlinson and Jackson (2021), who found that bureaucratic structures and rigid schedules reduce productivity and morale. When processes become overly bureaucratic, employees experience delays and increased stress, which diminishes their overall satisfaction and motivation (Mnyani, 2022). Setthakorn et al. (2024) also note that streamlined work processes and flexible arrangements allow employees to manage responsibilities effectively, reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction. Implementing adaptable work policies would thus positively impact motivation and commitment by allowing employees to balance their duties more efficiently.

4.3.3.4 Lack of Management Support

The sub-theme of lacking management support reveals that inadequate backing from supervisors significantly impacts motivation, retention, and commitment among support staff. Without supportive leadership, staff morale declines, often leading them to seek more positive and encouraging work environments elsewhere. Participants indicated that poor management practices, such as insufficient support and lack of respect, create a negative work environment that can ultimately drive staff away. They emphasised the need for managers who actively support and value their contributions, as this fosters a sense of belonging and respect. This sentiment was confirmed by a participant who shared a similar perspective:

Poor management practices can drive people away. Staff need to feel respected and supported by their supervisors. If management isn't supportive, it creates a negative environment that pushes people to leave (Participant 4).

This outcome concurs with the findings of Mnyani (2022), who argues that poor management support diminishes employee morale and can lead to increased turnover. According to Herzberg's Theory of Motivation, insufficient supervisory support and respect are detrimental to job satisfaction, as they create a negative work environment that impacts employee commitment (Marsudi et al., 2022). Peramatzis and Galanakis (2022) further emphasise that managers who actively support and value employee contributions foster a positive organisational culture,

enhancing employees' sense of belonging and reducing their desire to leave for more supportive environments.

Furthermore, effective and communicative leadership is essential for motivation, as supportive management strengthens commitment, while indifferent or disconnected managers leave staff feeling isolated and less engaged with the organisation's goals. Some participants observed that while some managers are supportive, others show a lack of involvement, creating an uneven work environment. They emphasised that this inconsistency, coupled with poor communication, fosters feelings of disconnection and undervaluation among staff. This sentiment was confirmed by a participant who shared a similar view:

Inconsistent management support is a barrier. Some managers are very supportive, but others are indifferent. When management isn't communicative, it makes people feel disconnected (Participant 9).

This result also aligns with the findings of Ramlawati et al. (2021), who highlight that inconsistent and indifferent management weakens employee engagement by fostering a sense of isolation. Hipos and Benavides (2023) supports this, noting that supportive and communicative leadership is essential for maintaining motivation and organisational commitment, as disconnected management practices can lead to feelings of undervaluation and disengagement. Tomlinson and Jackson (2021) suggest that when employees experience supportive and consistent management, their connection to organisational goals strengthens, resulting in increased commitment and loyalty within the workplace.

4.3.3.5 Bureaucratic Challenges

This sub-theme highlights that excessive bureaucracy significantly demotivates support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Such challenges foster dissatisfaction, as employees experience a disconnect between their efforts and meaningful outcomes. Reducing bureaucratic barriers and streamlining approvals would enhance motivation and engagement, allowing staff to work more efficiently and with greater satisfaction. Participants reported that even simple tasks are burdened by multiple layers of approval, creating unnecessary delays and frustrations. This bureaucratic structure slows down work processes, diminishing productivity and morale as staff feel hindered

by procedural obstacles. This sentiment was confirmed by a participant who shared a similar perspective:

Too much bureaucracy is a major demotivator. Simple tasks require so many approvals. Bureaucracy slows everything down and creates frustration (Participant 10).

This outcome concurs with the findings of Marsudi et al. (2022), who note that excessive bureaucracy creates a disconnect between employees' efforts and meaningful results, diminishing their motivation and engagement. According to Herzberg's Theory of Motivation, procedural obstacles are dissatisfying hygiene factors that can frustrate employees and lower their morale (Miah & Hasan, 2022). Yousaf (2020) supports this, indicating that reducing bureaucratic barriers enhances productivity by allowing staff to focus on their roles without unnecessary administrative delays, thereby improving workplace satisfaction and commitment.

Moreover, excessive red tape and multi layered approval processes frustrate support staff, negatively impacting their morale and engagement. Streamlining these processes and reducing bureaucratic hurdles could improve staff satisfaction and productivity, fostering a more supportive work environment. Some participants described how overly bureaucratic procedures slow down task completion and create unnecessary delays, making it difficult to work efficiently. This sentiment was echoed by a participant who shared a similar view:

The bureaucracy can be frustrating. Excessive red tape makes it hard to accomplish tasks and affects morale. Processes are overly bureaucratic, with too many layers of approval, which creates unnecessary delays and frustrations (Participant 9).

This result aligns with the findings of Riyanto et al. (2021), who argue that streamlining approval processes reduces frustration and increases staff productivity, creating a more supportive work environment. Miah and Hasan (2022) suggest that removing excessive red tape fosters a sense of empowerment among employees, as they are able to complete tasks efficiently. Alam (2021) also emphasises that simplifying procedures not only enhances satisfaction but also contributes to a culture of trust and efficiency, making it easier for employees to stay motivated and engaged.

4.4 Synthesis of Findings

To consolidate the study's results, Table 4.2 provides a one-page synthesis of the key themes, sub-themes, and illustrative participant quotes. This summary captures the relationships among motivational factors, organisational commitment, and barriers to retention, offering a concise overview of the findings presented in Sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.3.

Table 4.2: Consolidated Themes, Sub-Themes, and Key Quotes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Illustrative Key Quotes
Supportive Work Environment	Recognition and Appreciation	"Recognition and fair compensation are the biggest motivators. When staff feel appreciated...it really boosts their morale." (P1)
	Career Development Opportunities	"Opportunities for growth and advancement motivate support staff. No one wants to feel stagnant in their role." (P2)
	Work-Life Balance	"I felt really motivated when I was allowed to adjust my work hours to handle a family emergency. It showed the university values us as individuals." (P5)
	Supportive Management	"Support from management is essential. It's hard to stay motivated without the tools you need to do your job effectively." (P3)
Cultivating Organisational Loyalty	Job Security and Stability	"Job security and the benefits offered are key. Knowing they have stable employment motivates staff to commit long-term." (P4)
	Sense of Belonging	"Retention and commitment go hand in hand. If people are truly committed to the university, they're less likely to leave for minor reasons." (P3)
	Career Advancement Prospects	"Career growth opportunities within the university make a big difference. People feel committed when they can advance." (P6)

	Loyalty and Engagement	“When support staff feel committed, they’re more likely to stay even when challenges arise.” (P5)
Organisational Constraints on Staff Engagement	Inadequate Compensation	“Inadequate compensation is a big issue. Many support staff feel that their salaries don’t reflect the work they do.” (P8)
	Limited Career Growth	“Limited opportunities for career growth...can be very demotivating. If people feel there’s no future here, they won’t stay long.” (P4)
	Rigid Work Policies	“Rigid work policies with no flexibility are demotivating. Staff need a bit of freedom to manage their work-life balance.” (P5)
	Lack of Management Support	“Poor management practices can drive people away. Staff need to feel respected and supported by their supervisors.” (P4)
	Bureaucratic Challenges	“Too much bureaucracy is a major demotivator. Simple tasks require so many approvals.” (P10)

(Source: Field work, 2024)

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter explored the qualitative findings of the study, focusing on the factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at the UKZN. By examining the demographics of the interview participants and analysing key themes, the chapter provided a detailed look into the experiences and perspectives of support staff. Each theme addressed a specific research objective, revealing insights into how supportive management, job security, career development opportunities, and organisational challenges impact staff engagement and commitment. These findings offer an understanding of the support staff’s needs and expectations. The next chapter will outline the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented an analysis of the interview findings, highlighting key insights from the support staff at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter draws conclusions and offers recommendations grounded in both the literature review and empirical findings, focusing on factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment. The chapter begins with a summary of the literature review from Chapter Two, establishing the study's contextual foundation. It then reviews the empirical findings, structured around the study's primary objectives, and distills the study's key insights. Further, the chapter discusses contributions to the body of knowledge, synthesises a comprehensive study conclusion and provides recommendations for enhancing engagement and commitment among support staff at UKZN. The chapter concludes by identifying limitations within the study and suggesting areas for future research to broaden the understanding of support staff engagement in higher education contexts.

5.2 Summary Based on Literature Chapter

The literature review provided an in-depth examination of factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment, particularly within tertiary institutions like the UKZN. Drawing from Herzberg's Two Factor Theory, the chapter explored essential theories and frameworks that informed the understanding of these factors, offering insights into how employee motivation and commitment could be fostered. The chapter began by explaining foundational theories related to skills development and human capital, noting how educational investment and training enhanced productivity and job satisfaction (Gruzina et al., 2021). Schultz and Becker's Human Capital Theory further reinforced this by emphasising that investing in employees' skills, health, and development was integral to building a productive workforce. This approach, particularly relevant for tertiary institutions, highlighted the value of continuous staff growth in driving overall institutional success.

Herzberg's Theory of Motivation underpinned this study, distinguishing between hygiene and motivational factors as vital to job satisfaction and engagement. Hygiene factors such as salary, working conditions, and interpersonal relationships were identified as extrinsic elements that could prevent dissatisfaction but did not inherently motivate employees. In contrast, intrinsic motivators,

such as recognition, achievement, and growth opportunities, significantly drove job satisfaction and commitment. This distinction was crucial for UKZN's support staff, as it highlighted the need for an environment that not only addressed basic needs but also fostered personal and professional development.

Exploring the first objective, identifying factors that influenced motivation among UKZN's support staff, the chapter highlighted how motivation was intricately tied to organisational support, skill development and a positive work environment. Literature reviewed in this chapter suggested that professional growth opportunities were essential for engagement and motivation, echoing Herzberg's emphasis on self-actualisation and achievement as powerful motivators. The review also emphasized that support staff, often underappreciated, required consistent acknowledgment to build morale, further underlining the significance of recognition in employee motivation.

The chapter examined the relationship between retention and organisational commitment, aligning with the study's second objective. Retention was often threatened by high turnover, particularly if staff felt undervalued or perceived limited career advancement. The literature suggested that commitment stemmed from a sense of belonging and alignment with institutional goals. For UKZN's support staff, building loyalty required addressing job embeddedness, connections within the organisation that created personal and professional attachment. The work environment and job security further influenced staff's commitment, as employees were more likely to stay when they felt secure and saw a future with the institution. Commitment to the organisation's mission was shown to act as a buffer, keeping employees engaged even in challenging circumstances.

Addressing barriers to motivation, retention, and commitment, aligned with the study's third objective, the literature identified challenges such as rigid work policies, inadequate compensation, and limited career progression. These factors, if unaddressed, could lead to dissatisfaction and turnover, as they restricted the staff's ability to achieve a balanced and fulfilling work life. The review suggested that tertiary institutions like UKZN needed to offer flexible work arrangements, competitive compensation, and clear pathways for career development to overcome these barriers. By recognising and addressing these constraints, organisations could create a supportive and engaging work environment that not only retained staff but also motivated them to contribute meaningfully.

Finally, the chapter highlighted the relationship between work engagement, job embeddedness, and turnover intention, suggesting that engaged and embedded employees were more likely to remain committed and less likely to leave. Turnover intentions were lower when employees felt a strong connection to their roles and the organisation. This connection was particularly important in tertiary institutions where high turnover could disrupt institutional goals and diminish the quality of service provided to students and stakeholders. The literature review established a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the study by examining the factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and commitment within a university setting. The chapter integrated Herzberg's insights with current research on human capital and employee engagement, highlighting the importance of recognising and supporting staff to achieve long-term institutional goals.

5.3 Conclusions on the Empirical Findings

The research involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, supplemented by secondary data from sources like annual reports and policy statements. The target population comprised 460 support staff from the UKZN College of Law and Management, specifically from the Westville, Howard, and Pietermaritzburg campuses. Non-probability purposive sampling was employed to select participants, ensuring relevance to the study's focus. Data collection included ten in-depth interviews with selected participants. Thematic data analysis was conducted using the NVIVO 14 software, enabling systematic examination of themes related to support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at UKZN.

5.3.1 Objective One

To identify the factors that influence the motivation of support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

The findings revealed that support staff motivation at UKZN was strongly influenced by a supportive work environment characterised by recognition, career development opportunities, work-life balance, and constructive management practices. Recognition and appreciation were highlighted as critical for reinforcing staff morale and commitment, as appreciation made employees feel valued. Career development opportunities, including leadership training, emerged as key motivators, preventing stagnation and fostering long term commitment. Flexible work arrangements contributed to work-life balance, allowing staff to address personal needs and

reducing burnout. Supportive management, including effective communication, resource provision, and constructive feedback, was found to be crucial for engagement and motivation. Such management practices helped cultivate a positive, respectful workplace culture, enhancing staff commitment. Overall, the findings emphasised that when employees felt valued, had growth opportunities, and received management support, their motivation was significantly strengthened.

The findings reveal that organisational commitment is not just about job security but a deep seated sense of alignment with institutional values and long term professional prospects. Retention is reinforced when staff feel a future exists for them at UKZN, both personally and professionally. This implies that retention strategies must go beyond preventing turnover, they must actively cultivate institutional belonging and advancement. In higher education, where change and competition are constant, fostering such commitment is essential for stability and operational continuity.

5.3.2 Objective Two

To explore the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

The findings highlighted that organisational loyalty among support staff at the UKZN was fostered by elements like job security, sense of belonging, career advancement, and engagement. Job security and stability encouraged staff to focus on their roles and commit long-term, as a secure environment reduced the distraction of job uncertainty. Additionally, a strong sense of belonging and alignment with the university's mission motivated staff to remain resilient and dedicated, even when faced with minor challenges. Career advancement opportunities prevented stagnation and promoted long-term commitment, as participants felt their professional growth was supported. Finally, loyalty and engagement were closely linked; committed staff were more resilient and less likely to leave, particularly in challenging times. Overall, these factors were fundamental in reinforcing both the emotional and professional bonds that kept support staff connected to the university's goals, promoting a stable and committed workforce.

These findings underline that structural barriers, such as poor compensation, rigid policies, and inconsistent management, create a compounding effect that erodes both morale and loyalty. The persistence of these obstacles implies that motivation and commitment cannot be repaired with

isolated initiatives. For UKZN and similar institutions, it is critical to dismantle these systemic issues through strategic reforms. This means creating enabling environments where policies and practices reinforce, not undermine, the motivational structures meant to retain skilled support staff.

5.3.3 Objective Three

To identify the barriers that hinder the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

The findings revealed several barriers hindering the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the UKZN. Inadequate compensation emerged as a significant obstacle, with participants expressing that uncompetitive salaries led to frustration and disengagement. Limited career growth opportunities also demotivated staff, as the lack of clear advancement paths contributed to high turnover and a sense of stagnation. Rigid work policies further affected morale, as inflexibility limited employees' ability to balance work and personal responsibilities, particularly for those with family needs. Lack of management support was another notable barrier; participants reported that inconsistent or indifferent management weakened their connection to the institution and fostered feelings of undervaluation. Excessive bureaucracy, with multi layered approval processes, hindered productivity and satisfaction, as simple tasks were often delayed by procedural red tape. These barriers collectively discouraged engagement and loyalty among support staff, highlighting the need for structural changes to enhance employee motivation and commitment at the university.

From the convergence of literature and empirical insights, it is evident that sustainable motivation and retention require a dual focus: removing institutional barriers and embedding enabling structures. While Herzberg's theory effectively explains staff responses to intrinsic and extrinsic factors, its practical application at UKZN calls for balance recognition and support must be reinforced by tangible rewards and opportunities. Therefore, commitment is not only an outcome of positive experiences but also the absence of chronic demotivators. For higher education institutions, this calls for deliberate cultural and structural transformation that aligns operational practices with human centric values.

Table 5.1: Conclusions on the Empirical Findings

Research Objective	Key Conclusions
Objective One: To identify the factors that influence the motivation of support staff at UKZN.	Motivation was driven by recognition, career development, work-life balance, and supportive management. Feeling valued and having opportunities for growth were crucial motivators.
Objective Two: To explore the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff at UKZN.	Retention and commitment were linked through job security, belonging, career advancement, and engagement. Committed staff showed greater resilience and were less likely to leave
Objective Three: To identify the barriers that hinder the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at UKZN.	Barriers included inadequate compensation, limited career growth, rigid work policies, lack of management support, and excessive bureaucracy. These hindered motivation and increased turnover risk.

(Source: Field work, 2024)

5.4 Summary of the Key Findings

The study revealed key findings across three primary research objectives regarding support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at UKZN. Under the first objective, examining factors influencing motivation, the study found that support staff were motivated by a supportive work environment characterised by recognition, career development opportunities, work-life balance, and management support. Recognition and appreciation played a crucial role in enhancing morale, as staff felt valued for their contributions. Opportunities for career advancement also emerged as a significant motivator, preventing stagnation and fostering commitment. Flexible work arrangements were appreciated as they contributed to a positive work-life balance, reducing burnout. Additionally, supportive management practices, including effective communication and constructive feedback, were essential for building a respectful, motivating workplace.

For the second objective, exploring the relationship between retention and organisational commitment, findings emphasised the importance of job security, a sense of belonging, career advancement, and engagement. Job security and stable employment benefits were crucial in encouraging staff to align with the university's mission and commit long-term. A strong sense of belonging was fostered by alignment with UKZN's goals, which encouraged resilience and loyalty even during challenges. Career advancement opportunities strengthened staff loyalty by aligning their aspirations with institutional goals, while engagement and commitment were found to be mutually reinforcing, with engaged staff displaying higher resilience and less inclination to leave.

Regarding the third objective, identifying barriers to motivation, retention, and commitment, findings highlighted structural and managerial constraints. Inadequate compensation led to frustration, as uncompetitive pay made staff feel undervalued. Limited career growth opportunities contributed to a sense of stagnation and disengagement, as staff lacked clear paths for progression. Rigid work policies affected morale by limiting flexibility, impacting work-life balance, particularly for those with family responsibilities. Additionally, lack of consistent management support and excessive bureaucracy were demotivating, as they hindered productivity and fostered a sense of isolation. Generally, the findings highlight that fostering a supportive, flexible, and growth-oriented work environment, coupled with competitive compensation, can significantly improve motivation, retention, and organisational commitment among support staff at UKZN.

5.5 Comparative perspective within South African HE

UKZN's findings mirror patterns reported across South African universities such as UCT, Wits, UP and UNISA: persistent concerns about below-market compensation, slow promotion pathways for professional/support staff, rigid HR policies, and heavy bureaucracy. Post-pandemic shifts (hybrid work, digitised workflows) improved flexibility but exposed uneven managerial support and communication, echoing sector trends. As elsewhere, job security and benefits bolster commitment but are insufficient without recognition and clear progression. Where UKZN stands out is the salience participants placed on day-to-day managerial communication and feedback, and on streamlining approval systems; institutions with mature shared-services models report fewer bottlenecks, suggesting process redesign as a high-leverage priority.

5.6 Contributions to the Body of Knowledge

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on employee motivation, retention, and organisational commitment within higher education by addressing the specific experiences and needs of support staff, an area often overshadowed by a focus on academic staff (Ochumbo & Matimbwa, 2019; Mabaso, 2017). Unlike previous research which predominantly focused on academic staff, this study explored the lived experiences of support staff at UKZN, thereby filling a notable gap in the literature. By focusing on this often-overlooked group, the study provided an understanding of the structural, managerial, and motivational dynamics that shape support staff engagement.

5.6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study extends Herzberg's Two Factor Theory by applying it to the understudied context of university support staff, revealing that recognition and career development function dually as motivational drivers and retention enablers. By incorporating Human Capital Theory, the research also demonstrates how investment in non-academic personnel can yield organisational commitment similar to that of academic staff. The study adds to existing frameworks by showing that hygiene and motivator factors are not binary but interdependent in higher education settings. This insight challenges the assumption that extrinsic factors merely prevent dissatisfaction, they can also serve as retention levers when integrated with intrinsic rewards.

5.6.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for UKZN Human Resources and leadership practices. The results highlight that recognition, transparent career pathways, and supportive management behaviours are central drivers of support staff motivation and retention. This implies that institutional systems which foster visibility of employee contributions and clarify advancement opportunities are likely to increase morale and strengthen organisational commitment.

The study also underscores the influence of managerial communication and leadership style on staff engagement. This suggests that enhancing the capabilities of line managers in providing feedback and support could have a direct positive effect on employee satisfaction and overall productivity.

Furthermore, the evidence points to the impact of administrative efficiency on job satisfaction. Streamlined processes and reduced bureaucratic delays are likely to improve staff experiences and operational effectiveness, reinforcing a culture of responsiveness and trust.

Overall, these findings imply that strategic attention to recognition, career development, leadership quality, and process efficiency can yield higher levels of loyalty, lower turnover intentions, and improved institutional performance. (Specific actions to achieve these outcomes are presented separately in the Recommendations section.)

5.7 Study Conclusion

This study provided valuable insights into the factors influencing support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment at UKZN. The research, driven by the recognition of support staff's critical role in university operations, highlighted key motivational factors, the relationship between retention and commitment, and the organisational barriers affecting these aspects. It underlined the importance of a supportive work environment, where recognition, career development opportunities, work-life balance, and management support play central roles. The findings affirmed Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, showing that both hygiene factors (e.g., job security and compensation) and motivators (e.g., recognition and growth) are essential for fostering a motivated and committed workforce. The study also established that job security, a sense of belonging, career advancement prospects, and engagement are vital for nurturing organisational loyalty. When employees feel aligned with the institution's mission and have clear career pathways, they are more resilient, committed, and likely to stay long-term. Additionally, the mutual reinforcement of commitment and retention emerged as a crucial theme, highlighting that engaged staff are more resilient to challenges and less likely to leave.

Furthermore, the research identified significant organisational constraints that hinder motivation and retention. Inadequate compensation, limited career growth, rigid work policies, lack of management support, and bureaucratic challenges were identified as barriers, leading to disengagement and high turnover intentions. Addressing these barriers is essential for universities like UKZN to maintain an effective, loyal support staff that contributes to institutional goals and stability. The study demonstrated the importance of a structured, supportive work environment for fostering motivation, retention, and commitment among support staff. By addressing the specific needs and challenges of support staff, universities can cultivate a stable, engaged workforce. The

findings encourage university leaders to implement tailored retention strategies, competitive compensation, and career development pathways to strengthen organisational commitment and motivation. This study contributes to the broader understanding of staff engagement within higher education, emphasising that recognising and supporting support staff's unique needs is essential for overall institutional success. Future research can further explore these dynamics across various university settings, expanding on factors influencing support staff wellbeing and productivity in diverse educational contexts.

In summary, this study affirms that support staff are not peripheral but central to the operational and strategic success of higher education institutions. Their motivation and commitment arise not only from material conditions but from meaningful engagement, growth opportunities, and institutional respect. By centering their voices, this research advances the broader agenda of inclusive transformation within South African universities, reminding stakeholders that equity in higher education must extend beyond academics. The findings call for urgent and deliberate action from university leadership, policymakers, and HR practitioners to co-create environments where all staff, academic and support alike, are valued and empowered. This study serves not just as analysis, but as a catalyst for rethinking how institutional culture and policy can foster dignity, loyalty, and long-term excellence.

5.8 Recommendations for enhancing the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

Based on the study's findings and conclusions, several recommendations can be made to enhance the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff at UKZN.

i). Recommendations Based on Objective One: Support Staff Motivation

- Introduce a performance-based recognition system – Regular feedback and visible acknowledgment of staff contributions can significantly boost morale and enhance commitment by making employees feel valued and motivated to perform at their best.
- Invest in capacity-building and leadership workshops – Supports the finding that professional development prevents stagnation and enhances motivation through continuous learning.

- Implement flexible work policies (e.g., hybrid or staggered shifts) – Responds to staff desire for improved work-life balance, which was shown to reduce burnout and elevate motivation levels.
- Enhance managerial communication and feedback mechanisms – Strengthening how managers communicate and provide feedback can foster a more positive workplace culture, improve trust, and increase staff engagement and motivation.

ii). Recommendations Based on Objective Two: Staff Retention and Organisational Commitment

- Revise and formalise career advancement frameworks – Addresses the finding that lack of progression contributes to staff turnover and disengagement. Transparent pathways can strengthen long-term commitment.
- Foster participatory decision-making spaces for support staff – Involving staff in shaping institutional goals can enhance their emotional and professional loyalty by making them feel heard, respected, and integral to the organisation’s success.
- Enhance job security measures and contractual clarity – Findings highlighted that staff with stable, predictable employment were more likely to commit long-term.
- Encourage team building and alignment with institutional mission – Reinforces the idea that a strong organisational identity fosters resilience and commitment, especially in challenging contexts.

iii). Recommendations Based on Objective Three: Addressing Barriers to Motivation, Retention, and Commitment

- Conduct annual salary benchmarking and offer performance based incentives – Tied to the barrier of “Inadequate Compensation,” this would prevent disengagement and align with retention goals.
- Digitise bureaucratic systems to streamline processes – Findings revealed that excessive red tape demoralised staff and hindered productivity. Workflow automation could increase efficiency and satisfaction.

- Implement emotional intelligence and leadership training for line managers – Directly responds to complaints about lack of management support, promoting a culture of empathy and fairness.
- Establish mentorship programmes for career guidance – Addresses barriers related to unclear progression by offering structured growth support and institutional continuity.

By implementing these targeted strategies, UKZN can strengthen its institutional culture, enhance support staff engagement, and build a committed workforce that contributes meaningfully to the university's operational success.

5.9 Limitations of the Study

This study was subject to several limitations that may have influenced the depth, scope, and generalisability of its conclusions. Firstly, the research employed a relatively small sample size of ten participants, which, although appropriate for a qualitative inquiry, limited the breadth of perspectives captured. As a result, the findings may not be representative of the entire support staff population at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, particularly those from departments or units not included in the sample.

Secondly, the study was confined to support staff from a single college within the university, which reduced the diversity of institutional contexts. This narrow focus may limit the applicability of the findings to other faculties, especially those with different operational demands, such as STEM-focused colleges where technical roles and infrastructure-related challenges may influence motivation and organisational commitment differently. Consequently, the conclusions drawn should be interpreted with caution when extrapolating to other units within the university.

Another limitation was the sole use of qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. While this method provided rich, in-depth insights into the participants' lived experiences, it inherently involved subjective interpretation. Despite employing NVivo 12 for thematic analysis to enhance rigour, the risk of researcher bias remained, particularly in the coding and categorisation of responses. This could have influenced the emphasis placed on certain themes.

Additionally, several interviews were conducted via online platforms due to scheduling constraints. The virtual format occasionally limited the ability to observe non-verbal cues and to

probe follow-up questions as naturally as in face-to-face settings. This may have reduced the depth and nuance of some responses, potentially affecting the richness of the data collected.

Time constraints further affected the study. Limited availability of participants delayed interviews and reduced opportunities for extensive follow-up probing, which might have yielded deeper insights. Additionally, the cross-sectional design did not allow for longitudinal tracking of changes in motivation or commitment, thereby restricting the understanding of how these factors evolve over time.

Lastly, the study did not account for broader external factors, such as national economic conditions or policy shifts within higher education, which may have indirectly impacted participants' perceptions and experiences. Despite these limitations, the research provides a valuable platform for future studies exploring support staff dynamics across varied institutional and disciplinary contexts.

5.10 Suggestion to Further Studies

Future research on support staff motivation, retention, and organisational commitment in higher education could benefit from a broader sample size across multiple institutions. Expanding beyond a single university, such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal, would enable comparative analysis and improve the generalisability of findings across diverse academic contexts. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to observe how motivational factors and commitment levels evolve over time, providing insight into the long-term impact of university policies and support structures.

Additionally, incorporating quantitative methods alongside qualitative data could yield a more comprehensive understanding, combining statistical rigor with in-depth personal perspectives. Exploring the impact of specific variables, such as management practices, compensation packages, and career progression opportunities on motivation and retention, could offer clearer guidance for targeted interventions. Further research might also examine the role of external factors, such as economic conditions and policy changes, to understand their influence on employee motivation and institutional loyalty in the South African higher education landscape.

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Appendices

Annexure A: Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 21 October 2024

Greetings,

My name is Allen Mandlenkosi Dlamini (213559007@stu.ukzn.ac.za) from the school of Management, IT and Governance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville Campus). You are being invited to consider participating in a study that I will be conducting with the topic (Factors that determine support staff motivation, retention and organisational commitment at the University of Kwazulu-Natal).

The target population comprised 460 support staff from four schools in the College of Law and Management, these includes support staff from three university campuses: Westville, Howard, and Pietermaritzburg. A total of ten (10) participants, including administrators, technicians, and school operations managers, will be involved in the interviews. Staff in the following positions were selected: two human resources/finance administrators, two technicians, two school operations managers, two higher degree administrators, and one participant from postgraduate and undergraduate administrators.

The study will use a purposive sampling technique. Since the study will involve the use of interviews, the expected duration of your participation will be around 45 minutes should you choose to enroll. The study is not funded by any organization /entity.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts (disclosing areas that may hinder your motivation, retention and organizational commitment in the institution). We hope that the study will create the following benefit (Identify appropriate strategies that will help improve support staff wellbeing in institutions of higher learning.)

The research will not pose any severe risks and discomfort that may end up warranting compensation nor counselling. In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (213559007@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or the Supervisor (kubhekaz1@ukzn.ac.za). UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Your participation in the study is voluntary and by participating, you are granting the researcher permission to use your responses. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. Your anonymity will be maintained by the researcher

Annexure B: Ethical Clearance



21 October 2024

Allen Mandlenkosi Dlamini (213559007)
School of Man Info Tech & Gov
Westville Campus

Dear AM Dlamini,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007586/2024
Project title: Factors that determine support staff motivation, retention and organisational commitment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 27 August 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 21 October 2025.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hialele (Chair)
/nng

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/1557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

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Annexure C: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Factors That Determine Support Staff Motivation, Retention and Organisational Commitment at the University of Kwazulu-Natal

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your insights will be invaluable in understanding the factors affecting motivation, retention, and organisational commitment among support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal.

This interview will take approximately 15 minutes. Your responses will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

Before we begin, could you please confirm your role and tenure at the University of KwaZulu Natal?

Objective 1: Identifying Key Factors Influencing Motivation

1. What do you believe are the primary factors that influence the motivation of support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal?
2. Could you share any personal experiences or observations regarding factors that have significantly impacted your own motivation or that of your colleagues?
3. In your opinion, how do factors such as recognition, career development opportunities, work-life balance, and job security influence the motivation levels of support staff?
4. Have you noticed any specific initiatives or programs implemented by the University to enhance the motivation of support staff? If so, could you describe their effectiveness?

Objective 2: Exploring the Relationship Between Staff Retention and Organisational Commitment

1. How do you perceive the relationship between staff retention and organisational commitment among support staff?
2. What factors do you believe contribute to high levels of organisational commitment among support staff members who choose to remain at the University long-term?

3. Conversely, what factors might lead to lower levels of organisational commitment and eventual turnover among support staff?

4. Have you personally experienced or observed any strategies or practices implemented by the University aimed at improving staff retention and fostering organisational commitment?

Objective 3: Identifying Barriers to Motivation, Retention, and Organisational Commitment

1. From your perspective, what are some of the main barriers that hinder the motivation of support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal?

2. How do these barriers affect staff retention and organisational commitment?

3. Are there any systemic or institutional challenges that you believe contribute to these barriers?

4. In your opinion, what measures could the University take to address these barriers and improve the motivation, retention, and organisational commitment of support staff?

Thank you for your valuable insights and participation in this interview. Your input will contribute significantly to our understanding of the dynamics affecting support staff at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Is there anything else you would like to add or any additional comments you have regarding this topic?

END

Annexure D: Gatekeeper's Letter



16 August 2023

Mandlenkosi Dlamini (SN 213559007)
School of Management, IT & Governance
College of Law and Management Studies
Westville Campus UKZN
Email: 213559007@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Mandlenkosi

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Factors That Determine Support Staff Motivation, Retention and Organisational Commitment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample as follows:

- With a request for responses on the website. The questionnaire must be placed on the notice system <http://notices.ukzn.ac.za>. A copy of this letter (Gatekeeper's approval) must be simultaneously sent to (govenderlog@ukzn.ac.za) or (ramkissoobh@ukzn.ac.za).

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



Mr MA TUFTS: Director Governance & Administration

Office of the Registrar

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