

Cultivating Academic Excellence: Exploring The Ideal Leadership Approach For Retaining Talent In Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Talent retention in HE has become highly significant in recent years as HEIs find it challenging to attract and retain academic talent in a competitive environment. Academic leadership significantly impacts the promotion, attraction, and retention of academic talent in HEIs. This study aims to determine the optimum leadership style for talent retention within a faculty at a South African HEI. A qualitative descriptive research design with interpretivism as its foundation was employed to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of leadership and talent retention within a faculty in a HEI. Data were collected from eight lecturers within the faculty at the HEI using purposive sampling. Individual interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams. The data source consisted of these interview transcripts. The population studied included lecturers from the faculty of the South African HEI. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis to identify several major themes related to leadership and talent retention. These themes include the current leadership style of managers contributing to academics wanting to leave their current jobs, as well as the leadership style that academics prefer to prevent turnover. The findings revealed that the leadership style of current managers contributes to academics wanting to leave their current employment and that specific leadership styles were identified as factors preventing academics from leaving the organization. Based on the findings, pertinent recommendations for institution management concerning retaining talented academics within the framework of South African higher education could be made.

KEYWORDS: Charismatic Leadership; Democratic Leadership; Participative Leadership; Talent Management; Talent Retention; Transformational Leadership.

ABBREVIATIONS

HEI: Higher Education Institutions; HE: Higher Education;

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic talent management in the HE sector is gaining significant importance in the 21st century. The sector's success depends heavily on the availability of many qualified, experienced, and skilled academic staff. Moreover, human capital may be an organization's only strategic advantage in an ever-changing and competitive workplace environment [1]. The latter is considered an organization's most significant asset, making talent management and employee retention a necessity [2]. Talent management is, therefore, a key area requiring consistent leadership attention.

The terms human resource planning, talent management, talent strategy, and succession management are frequently used interchangeably. Globally, talent management is one of human resource management's most significant and urgent aspects. It remains one of the most pressing concerns for many large organizations [3]. According to Gupta [4], talent management is the systematic identification, development, attraction, commitment, retention, and deployment of highly talented and efficient employees to occupy critical positions that have a significant impact on the organization's sustainable competitive advantage. Rumawas [5] refers to talent management as the totality of an individual's abilities, experiences, capabilities, attitudes, and behavior as they relate to organizational performance. Talent management, according to the author, is a set of long-term organizational objectives that utilize human capital to the organization's competitive advantage, in addition to a portfolio of integrated human resource initiatives that result in the placement of the right people with the right competencies in the right position at the right place and the right cost. Singh [3] describes talent management as a mission-critical process that ensures organizations have the right number and caliber of individuals to accomplish current and future business objectives. The process encompasses all essential components of the life cycle of an employee, including selection, development, succession planning, and performance management. According to the authors, organizations utilise talent management to

acquire, leverage and safeguard their unique strategic assets. Therefore, talent management can be categorized as a supporting human resource strategy. According to Singh [3], a variety of factors, including talent shortages, demographic and societal trends, corporate social responsibility, diversity, the ongoing transition to a knowledge-based economy, and the increasing significance of emerging markets, have contributed to the growth of talent management.

A talented employee is a person who stands out due to their intellectual ability, or in the case of academics, their rigorous academic qualities, their scientific knowledge, and academic expertise. Talented employees are analytical and possess a keen intellect [6]. Furthermore, talents are distinguished by their intrapersonal characteristics, which include being highly motivated and ambitious, having a strong passion for science, and being willing to work extremely hard. In addition, a talented employee's record of success demonstrates good grades, numerous publications in high-impact journals, the acquisition of renowned scholarships and grants, and proof of scientific work experience [6].

The changing nature of the workplace environment in the current era has made it difficult for organizations to attract and retain talented and skilled employees from the labor market [1]. When employees quit or lose their jobs, or there is an increased turnover rate, it is commonly an indication that something is not right within the workplace environment [2]. Therefore, staff retention has been a significant challenge for all economic sectors, including the public and private HE sectors. Given the ongoing academic staff shortages in HE, academic talents must be retained. Leaders' functions and specific leadership styles are essential for talent management and retention. A leader's capability to create a sustainable vision for the organization and to influence others positively is essential. Various studies indicate that leadership behaviors influence employees' intentions to leave an organization [7, 8]. Moreover, how leaders treat their employees is one of the most significant factors in talent retention in an organization [9]. Since leadership assists in forecasting an organization's future direction, its leader's practices and behaviors motivate their employees to accomplish their objectives [10]. In the increasingly competitive markets in the HE sectors, leaders must navigate their organizations through this highly competitive environment [2]. Moreover, leaders should adopt a new talent retention mindset inspired by modern leadership methods, unique business strategies, and innovative leadership skills [8].

Given the importance of HE in the SA context, several research studies have been conducted on the relationship between talent management and employee retention [10]. However, these studies did not address the optimum leadership styles associated with talent retention in HEIs. Managers have been concerned about employee retention and turnover for many years, particularly the loss of exceptional talent. For organizations in general, attracting and retaining high-performing employees is both a concern and a challenge. Due to an aging workforce and limited opportunities for attracting and maintaining young, talented employees, talent management has become a key challenge for managers in the HE sectors. In addition, an institution's strength is derived from its human capital. Therefore, addressing and managing leadership and management styles, human resource policies, and processes is critical to recruiting and retaining skilled employees [11, 12]. Effective leadership styles and employee retention need purposeful activities to keep academic employees engaged and focused for them to choose to stay employed and contribute fully to organisational success [13]. The difficulty in managing talent in South Africa's higher education industry has resulted in the absence of a sustainable group of academics for the next generation. To increase competitiveness, organisations should therefore make talent retention a top priority. Failure to manage talent retention concerns may put organizations at risk, resulting in a lack of skilled and high-performing staff. This may harm the organization's productivity and output [7]. A possible solution to this challenge is implementing an efficient workforce talent management strategy that includes efficient leadership techniques. Research indicates that leadership plays a pivotal role in retaining talent. Understanding the preferred leadership behaviors of South African employees is essential for developing leadership abilities that correspond to the needs of the South African workforce and, therefore, increase talent retention [7].

Considering the study's background and the problem statement, this study is designed to (a) explore the optimum leadership style that is required for academic talent retention within a HEI and (b) to understand the influence of different leadership styles on talent retention within an HEI.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership issues have resonated repeatedly within the context of corporate discourse. This is due to its significance in achieving the aims and objectives of organizations. It is argued that the purpose of any organization is to achieve a predetermined objective and that leaders have a decisive influence on organizational success. The capacity of management to execute collaborative endeavors is, therefore, contingent on effective leadership. A leader can be defined as an individual tasked with directing one or more followers toward the attainment of a predetermined goal. While doing so, the leader must be aware of each follower's strengths and identify opportunities for improvement [14]. Consequently, a strong leader not only inspires the key potential of subordinates to increase productivity but also addresses their needs in the process of accomplishing organizational objectives [15].

Sembing and Damayanti [16] define talent attraction as the capacity to attract prospective employees who have the qualifications for available positions. The authors further identify recruitment and selection, employer branding, value proposition, and various employment options as integral components of talent attraction. The objective of talent retention, on the other hand, is to ensure that talented employees remain with the organization for an extended duration. This requires the implementation of targeted strategies designed to retain top talent within the company [16]. As leadership plays a vital role in talent retention, [17] assert that trust, good communication, coaching, and empathy are key characteristics of an innovative and good leader. The interaction between the leader and the employees plays an essential role in employee retention since employees need to feel socially connected and valued [18]. Therefore, leadership is one factor that influences employee retention and should be treated with the highest priority.

Mwita *et al.* [18] describe leadership as the process by which an individual encourages others to achieve a goal and drives the organization to become more unified and purposeful. According to Nwokocha and Iheriohanma [15], leadership is the practice of motivating other individuals to perform to the best of their abilities to achieve the desired outcome. According to the authors, this necessitates formulating and communicating a compelling vision for the future and motivating and soliciting individuals' participation. Genza [19] defines leadership as the capacity to influence and develop individuals, teams, and organizations to realize a vision that fulfills the current needs of everyone and everything affected by their work. Jais *et al.* [20] describe leadership as a relational, transformational, process-oriented, educated, and change-directed phenomenon.

When referring to leadership in HE, the terms educational leadership, school leadership, and academic leadership are most used [19]. Academic leadership is demonstrated by academics who are influential experts in their respective fields and engage in meaningful activities. Academic leaders pursue science and research with the utmost integrity, whether they are developing new concepts and theories or instructional innovation and driving substantial social engagement [20]. Moreover, academic leadership includes demonstrating leadership in research, professional practice, or teaching and learning, as well as mentoring others to achieve academic success. Institutional leadership refers to the top and middle management of a HEI who perform management activities and encourage the accomplishment of the institution's mission and vision. Institutional leaders exhibit managerial skills by being adaptable, flexible, strategic, and, most importantly, efficient. They excel in academics and inspire others by fostering, preserving, and promoting situations that encourage talent development. To advance the well-being of students, staff and the community, institutional leaders integrate their strategic and management skills with human values [20]. The authors further highlight that leadership in HE consists of five major groups, including (1) personnel effectiveness, (2) cognition, (3) leading, (4) impact and influence and (5) achievement and action.

A leadership style can be defined as the conscious means by which a leader influences a group of individuals within an organization toward a future state that is commonly perceived to be distinct from the present state [21]. Since leadership aids in shaping an organization's potential direction, its leaders' practices and behaviors motivate its employees to accomplish the organization's objectives. As a result, employees typically follow their leader's behaviors when executing their tasks. It is therefore important to recognize that the adopted leadership style can substantially impact job satisfaction, behavior, and, eventually, the retention of employees. A leader should be able to adapt their leadership style depending on the organizational and external conditions in which the organization functions to be more efficient, enabling followers and earning their trust and respect. Consequently, adopting an appropriate leadership style is crucial for talent retention and guiding organizations to success, especially during times of uncertainty. There are many different types of leadership styles, including autocratic, participative, servant, transformational and ethical leadership styles [10]. Different situations, constraints and challenges in higher education may necessitate the use of various leadership styles. The five major leadership functions, according to Sethuraman and Suresh [14], are (1) creating a vision and focusing on it, (2) maintaining team motivation, (3) maintaining a positive relationship with employees, (4) establishing a high-performing team and (5) increasing employee satisfaction to reduce turnover and increase retention.

While numerous factors influence employee retention, an organization's leadership considerably impacts talent retention. Leadership styles affect organizational culture, employee engagement, inspiration, and motivation. The ability of leaders to foster a culture of retention has become a determining factor as to why employees remain with a firm and what typically causes them to leave [17]. The retention of a company's most valuable resource should, therefore, be the top priority for any organization. This is because people quit organizations because of their managers, not the organizations themselves. The impact of leadership on employee retention can be evaluated from two distinct angles, namely, management's support and the leadership style of current organizational leaders [22]. The way an organization's employees are led and managed, in addition to the leadership style itself, are major factors determining whether an employee will remain with the company. Employees' levels of work satisfaction and motivation are substantially impacted by leadership as well as the relationship they maintain with their top management [22]. The volatility in an organization's leadership can thus contribute to high employee turnover [23].

Encouragement and support from leaders and managers are significant factors in employee retention. When a manager and employee create a positive and resilient relationship, the trustworthiness and attachment to the organization will increase,

allowing the organization to retain such individuals. This is because employees' perceptions of their jobs are strongly influenced by their relationship with and affinity with their manager [17]. Moreover, fluent and open communication between employees and their managers motivates them to perform effectively in the workplace. In addition, this courteous relationship between managers and employees fosters the growth of staff capabilities and innovative abilities among employees. Conversely, the absence of transparency with the managers may result in more strain on employees and stress among co-workers, resulting in a loss of productivity and performance. Therefore, managers and employees must establish a compassionate, trusting, and engaging relationship to increase retention rates and enhance organizational performance and efficiency [24].

The concepts of employee and talent retention have a strong resonance with leadership. Nwokocha and Iheriohanma [15] posit that ineffective or inadequate leadership styles directly impact the performance and retention of employees in modern organizations. Mwita *et al.* [18] discovered a substantial association between leadership styles and academic talent. This indicates that the perceived quality of a leadership style can impact employees' decisions to stay within or leave an organization. The findings are supported by a study by Nwokocha and Iheriohanma [15], which sought to investigate the relationship between leadership styles, employee retention, and employee performance. According to the findings of this study, an effective leadership style is critical for accomplishing organizational goals. Furthermore, numerous factors such as job satisfaction, autonomy and ownership, recognition, and organizational commitment mediate the association between leadership styles and academic talent retention [16]. This suggests that leadership is vital in assisting organizations in achieving their stated objectives, one of which is retaining employees since organizations cannot thrive and sustain themselves without human resources [18].

3. METHOD(S)

3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM, APPROACH AND DESIGN

A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological research design was employed for this study to address the specific research questions pertaining to textual data. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence of specific leadership styles on academic talent retention. A phenomenological research design, grounded in an interpretive paradigm, was used because it aligns well with qualitative research and focuses on individuals' interpretations of their experiences [25, 26]. Phenomenology is specifically tailored to facilitate inquiry and was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence of specific leadership styles on academic talent retention [27]. The latter aimed to grasp the perceptions and views of individuals concerning leadership and retention. More simply stated, phenomenology refers to an individual's interpretation of the significance of an experience, as opposed to the phenomenon, as it exists independently of the individual [28, 29]. The researcher, therefore, examined the participants in their natural surroundings and aimed to understand and interpret the influence of leadership styles and behaviors based on the meanings that academics assign to them. The research employed literature, text, and discussions to generate concepts that improve the comprehension of social phenomena. The phenomenological design has strong philosophical foundations and typically involves conducting in-depth interviews with a relatively small and selective group of participants [30].

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

Two types of data collection procedures were utilized in this study. First, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to acquire information on the leadership styles that influence academic talent retention within a HEI. This information was used to compare the data acquired in this study with other South African and international studies on similar topics. The second technique involved conducting semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams using open-ended questions with ($n = 8$) academics working within a faculty at a HEI. The Microsoft Teams interviews were conducted at a convenient and pre-determined time, as indicated by the participants. Kabir [31] asserts that semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with a clear set of instructions that can yield trustworthy, comparable qualitative data. Moreover, interviews using a semi-structured format permitted the participants to express their opinions in their own words. The data collection instrument, hereafter referred to as the interview protocol, was designed to align the research questions with the study objectives by making use of open-ended questions and probing techniques. The objective of the interview protocol is to explore the various leadership styles that have an impact on academic talent retention within the higher education industry. Questions were prepared in advance, allowing the researcher to be adequately prepared for the interviews. The order of the questions was predetermined, and the sequence of the interviews was primarily determined by the availability of the participants and the progress of the interviews. The researcher alternated between the questions as the discussion unfolded [32]. The researcher maintained a steady pace and direction throughout the interview to avoid distraction. Further, the researcher employed probing techniques like clarification, refinement, and follow-up questions. To ensure validity, the researcher avoided using leading questions, as suggested by Nieuwenhuis [33].

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis is performed to derive meaning from the textual data collected through interviews, as described by Creswell and Creswell [30]. The process calls for a sequence of steps to be performed, from the specific to the general, requiring many levels of analysis, including (1) organizing and preparing the raw data, (2) coding the data into themes and descriptions, and (3) interpreting the meanings of the themes and descriptions.

The raw data was organized and prepared by transcribing the interviews and categorizing and structuring the data according to the sources of information. The researcher became acquainted with all the data to gain an overview of the information and assess its overall significance. Microsoft Teams transcribed the interviews while they were taking place. After the interview, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions to see whether it was done accurately. All the data was transcribed verbatim, as everything said was preserved for analysis. After a detailed review of the data, it was categorized and coded into themes. The coding process involved labeling significant sections of the data with terms that encapsulated their essence. An experienced coder was employed to assist in transforming the raw data into a structured and reliable narrative [30, 34]. The coding technique is employed to describe the setting or individuals, as well as categories or themes for analysis. After the data had been coded into textual and structural data, the participant's experiences were described in writing. The data was then categorized into meaningful themes using a thematic analysis strategy. The researcher characterized the themes of the participant narratives that describe the perceptions and experiences that are pertinent to the optimum leadership style for academic talent retention. After that, the themes were analyzed and shaped into a general description. The description presented differing perspectives from different individuals and was supported by a variety of quotes and specific examples. To validate previously published findings and contribute new insight to the body of knowledge, the analyzed data was placed within the framework of existing theory and literature. Furthermore, content analysis was used to analyze the coded data for this study. The content analysis assisted the researcher in comprehending the data by transforming how the data was presented to account for fresh information and new insights [35].

4. RESULTS

This study, which explored the optimum leadership style for academic talent retention within a faculty at an HEI, aimed to address the following empirical research questions:

- a) What type of leadership style is required for talent retention of employees within a faculty in an HEI, and:
- b) What is the influence of different leadership styles on talent retention within a faculty in an HEI?

The results, which will hereafter be discussed, show that poor leadership styles influence whether employees are loyal to their employer [36] or that they contribute to academics' turnover intention. Desirable leadership styles mentioned by the participants are detailed below:

4.1 UNSUPPORTIVE MANAGERS

Most participants indicated that their manager's current leadership style contributes to their wanting to leave their current job. This is supported by Maaitah [37], who reports that leadership characteristics are seen as an important component that influences organizational commitment and directly impacts turnover intention. Three participants revealed that an unsupportive manager is one of the reasons why they would leave their current employment, as they mention that:

P2: "If you do not have a supportive manager, that's maybe a reason why academics leave".

P3: "Not being given support, you are not being understood; it makes it hard for you to stay within such an environment".

P8: "The foremost reason is the lack of support systems".

It is imperative to recognize that ineffective leadership increases the rate of turnover. According to Dawson's findings [38], a lack of leadership support leads to an increase in employees' intentions to leave their jobs over and above a decline in their level of performance. Therefore, by adopting the proper leadership and managerial styles consistent with strategic initiatives, organizations can increase employee retention and performance and decrease turnover intention [37].

4.2 LOW MORALE AND DEMOTIVATION

Low morale and demotivation at work can be attributed to various factors, which differ from one individual to the next. Lack of interaction between managers and their employees has been identified as one of the key contributors to low employee motivation. In addition, employees do not perform at their best since they feel that their efforts are not valued, and they receive no recognition at all for their input.

P2 and P4 indicated that managers who make their employees feel unworthy and demotivated contribute to them wanting to leave their jobs. The direct excerpts of the participants are as follows:

P2: "I don't feel worthy enough".

P4: "There is no motivation to come to the office anymore".

According to Tran [39], turnover intentions can be reduced by building sound relationships between managers and employees and supporting employee motivation in the workplace. This is further emphasized by Khan [40], who asserts that motivation and turnover intention have a significant relationship.

4.3 LACK OF RECOGNITION

The absence of recognition for work performed may induce insecurity in employees, which may result in excessive feelings of stress. This may lead to low morale, which is detrimental to the company. A total of five participants pointed out that a lack of recognition from their managers would contribute to them wanting to leave their current job, as evidenced by the following verbatim quotations:

P2: "Nobody recognizes how you really try to keep the organization's name high".

P3: "It's lack of recognition. If you don't get the credit for your outputs, it becomes frustrating".

P4: "I have never received recognition".

P7: "I don't get any recognition for my work".

P8: "For me would be the lack of recognition from the institution".

According to a study by Elstad and Vabo [41], a lack of recognition in the workplace has a distinct and significant effect on employee turnover intention. Formal methods of managers recognizing their employees include public acknowledgment of an employee's performance and offering incentives to high-performing employees. Therefore, leaders must strive to recognize their employees.

4.4 UNSYMPATHETIC MANAGER

When attempting to balance work and family responsibilities, it is beneficial to have an understanding and sympathetic manager. Employees value managers who show empathy for the difficulties that they face and who are encouraging and understanding during trying times. P3 indicated that an unsympathetic manager could also be a reason why academics would want to leave the organization.

P3: "Most of the time, she is not sympathetic".

According to Barcan [42], leaders are guided by their personal qualities and relationships with employees, through which they acquire support and sympathy. Unsympathetic behaviour can cause detachment between leaders and employees. Therefore, these characteristics and interactions have a profound effect on employee retention.

4.5 AUTOCRATIC LEADERSHIP STYLE

Under autocratic leadership, there is often no opportunity for flexible decision-making, and autocratic leaders unknowingly make their employees unhappy by denying them autonomy. Two participants revealed that the autocratic leadership style contributes to academics wanting to leave their current employment. The direct quotations of the participants are as follows:

P6: "Leadership should not be controlling, like the autocratic leadership style".

P7: "If your leader is rigid and not flexible, people will resign. I do not prefer an autocratic or laissez-faire leader, as that style comes with its own problems".

According to Puni [36], there is a substantial relationship between autocratic leadership style and turnover intentions. The result of the study suggests that the greater the perception of autocratic leadership styles among employees, the greater their intention to leave their positions.

The study also sought to understand the influence of different leadership styles on talent retention within a HEI. It should be noted that the responsibility for an organization's success in achieving its goals and objectives rests on its leaders and their leadership behavior. In other words, leadership must create activities to inspire employees and establish roles for an individual or group toward goal achievement. The style is the pattern of behavior that defines a leader's approach to organizational problems. Numerous distinct styles can be identified among diverse leaders. Every style has its own set of positive and negative

characteristics [37]. The participants were also asked what leadership qualities or characteristics they consider important for retaining academic employees in the faculty.

4.6 DEMOCRATIC, PARTICIPATIVE, AND CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

A total of three participants indicated that a democratic and participative leadership style would promote academic retention within the organization, as evidenced by the following verbatim quotations:

P2: "I like a democratic leader and a leader who fosters participation. I feel everybody's input is important".

P6: "more of a democratic style where decision-making is shared. They should be guided, and they should communicate clearly. They should also encourage participation. They should allow employees to share their ideas, and they should make one feel at home, sort of creating a sense of belonging".

P7: "We need leaders who will be understanding and flexible".

The democratic leadership approach is often referred to as participative leadership. It is a style of leadership that encourages employee participation in the decision-making process within an organization. A democratic leader shares decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities with their employees and informs them of anything that impacts their work. A participatory leader is a leader who encourages the participation of employees in problem-solving and decision-making for ongoing operational matters. Before making decisions, the leader will solicit the staff's ideas, suggestions, and comments [15]. The latter is supported by Olayisade and Awolusi [43], who argue that participative leadership fosters innovation and creativity by allowing every team member to contribute to decision-making, which facilitates the adoption and implementation of decisions made.

Two participants emphasized that a charismatic leadership style would impact their decision to remain with the organization, as evidenced by the following participant quotations.

P3: "So, I would say a democratic, a participative and charismatic leadership style".

P5: "I would prefer charismatic leadership. A leader who doesn't force things on people. You know, a leader who gets people's views and considers those views before making decisions. Charismatic leaders have good communication skills, and they listen to their employees".

The literature supports these statements, noting that the charismatic leadership style focuses on attracting followers through the leader's personality and conduct. This results in increased dedication to the leader's mission and increased follower output [43].

4.7 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Employees place a high value on leaders who are willing to accept responsibility, are receptive to novel and original ideas, and provide employees with the latitude to develop their work habits and the ability to be creative in their work. Transformational leadership centers itself on current challenges, establishes new benchmarks, fosters awareness, and encourages and influences the behavior of subordinates to effectively achieve organizational goals.

Three participants reported that they prefer a transformational leadership approach in the organization. The verbatim quotations of the participants are as follows:

P4: "Leading by example and inspiring colleagues also resonates with the transformational leadership style".

P7: "She leads by example, and you value her leadership. If my leader follows a transformational leadership style and she inspires me, then I might stay at the institution".

P8: "displays qualities of a transformational leader. She encourages intellectual stimulation and life-long learning. She motivates me into continuous learning".

All three participants indicated that leading by example is a significant retention driver. P7 noted that a leader who inspires them would motivate them to stay at the institution, as indicated by the preceding statement. In addition, P8 stated that a transformational leader encourages intellectual stimulation and life-long learning. These statements are supported by the literature that posits that transformational leaders are individuals with inspirational qualities. Transformational leadership also focuses on the ability to discover the potential in followers and shows leaders how to encourage and motivate subordinates to reach their maximum potential [44].

These leaders motivate their subordinates to exceed their abilities and capabilities to attain organizational objectives [45]. The authors [45] confirm that the ability of leaders to define a compelling vision, the ability to express confidence in achieving objectives and new perspectives on issue solutions and invest time in the training and development of the team have a significant impact on employee retention. Therefore, it may be inferred that transformative leaders can assist in promoting employee retention [46]. According to Tian [45], the role of every manager in a company is to be a leader, not just a manager.

The results show that the above leadership styles help to create a work atmosphere that attracts employees to an organisation. They tend to persuade individuals to remain with the organization despite the availability of alternative employment possibilities [47].

5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the discipline's body of knowledge by identifying the optimum leadership styles for academic talent retention and providing various talent management strategies to enhance the retention of academic talent in the HE environment. The published articles from this study also significantly contribute to the academic body of knowledge by supporting the institutions' management and the HR department in understanding the factors influencing retention and identifying the most effective leadership styles for retaining talent.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION OF THE STUDY

As far as limitations are concerned, the researchers acknowledge that the availability of a variety of resources, inclusive of access to participants as well as sufficient time contributes to the success of a research project. With this particular research, due to time constraints and participant availability, the researchers failed to include academics from all schools within the faculty of the HEI. Moreover, the researchers could also not interview academics from all the campuses of the HEI, and as a result, the study's findings cannot be generalised. However, the following recommendations are proposed for future research:

- Participants in this study were employed in one faculty within the larger HEI, thus limiting the generalization of the findings of the study. It is therefore recommended that the researchers include data from other faculties within the institution in future studies to increase the generalisability of the results to the institution and, in turn, offer data for comparison.
- This type of research to determine the ideal leadership style for academic talent retention throughout the HE sector can be conducted at other HEIs; therefore, more academics should participate in studies of this nature.

7. CONCLUSION

The democratic, participatory, charismatic, and transformational leadership styles have been identified as the primary drivers for increased retention. From the outcomes of the research, organizations with authoritarian leaders have higher employee turnover and absenteeism, and the newer generation of employees has been shown to be particularly resistant to this leadership style [40]. Participants indicated a preference for leaders who foster participation, share decision-making and develop a sense of belonging. In addition, the findings pointed out that employees favor adaptable, empathetic leaders who demonstrate effective communication skills. Leadership styles can indeed promote employee retention at an organization or may cause employees to leave their employment altogether.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors contributed equally to the article and approved the submitted version.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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