




The influence of leadership behaviours on talent retention: An empirical study



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Orientation: Top talent remains the main source of organisational competitive advantage. The ability to attract, motivate and develop Talent management and retention of high performing employees is imperative for organisations to survive and thrive in today's dynamic and volatile complex world of work. Studies reveal that employees' intentions to stay or quit are influenced by the leadership behaviours of managers.

Research purpose: The focus of this study was to identify the leadership behaviours that influence talent retention.

Motivation for the study: To determine the leadership behaviour preferences of South African employees, as well as the extent to which these behaviours influence talent retention.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative research approach was adopted utilising a non-experimental comparative research design. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the nature of the underlying factor structure that emerged from the Leadership Behaviour Importance and Leadership Behaviour Experience scales respectively. Snowball convenience sampling was used, attracting 711 useable responses.

Main findings: This study revealed that the retention of skilled, engaged employees requires leaders who can provide them with a sense of belonging, respect, empowerment, support their personal growth and development, and provide them with flexibility and freedom in executing their duties.

Practical/managerial implications: Leaders need to demonstrate certain behaviours which include providing a sense of belonging, respect, empowerment, support for personal growth, flexibility and connecting at the human interface. This is important in an increasingly technology-driven world, and more recently, under the working conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is believed that the ability of leaders to connect at the human interface will continue to significantly influence talent retention, in the future.

Contributions: This study will benefit future organisational leaders in better understanding the specific leadership behaviours that enhance talent retention and talent retention strategies.

Keywords: Leadership, leadership behaviour, talent retention, talent management strategy, South African organisations

Introduction

When human resource (HR) talent management processes and practices are evaluated, leadership frequently emerges as a key impact factor for employee talent retention (Meyer, 2016). Talent retention is simply defined as the organisation's ability to retain its skilled staff. This definition can be expanded to encompass all methods and systems created to attract, develop, retain and make use of skilled people to increase workplace productivity (Sinha & Sinha, 2012). Leadership is defined as the ability to influence people towards the achievement of organisational objectives (Grobler et al., 2017).

A Google search on the role of leaders in ensuring organisational success reveals in excess of 21 million results and shows that this is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent topics of research, publications, conferences, training programmes and general academic and non-academic dialogue. According to Veldsman and Johnson (2016), current debates concerning leadership and leadership excellence is a critical issue of the present time.

The call for effective leadership based on current realities is clear. Old recipes and conventional ways of leading no longer suffice and the future is based on the quality of current leadership, as they will either be the architects or dismantlers of the future (Veldsman & Johnson, 2016). This is true of leaders at all levels, from high profile global leader to front-line leaders in the workplace.

With the growing trend of shorter organisational tenure fuelled by global and national scarcities of certain critical skills, organisations are investing in strategies to enhance employee retention (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2017). Talent retention forms a key component of most talent management strategies and frameworks (Bluen, 2013; Meyer, 2016, 2018). Bluen (2013) identified key role players in talent management, ranking leaders at the top of this list. Meyer (2018) highlighted leading talent as one of the key components of his talent management framework and stated that effective HR talent management processes and practices will never replace high-quality leadership.

Leaders are the catalysts who bring any talent initiative to life. Without strong leaders taking ownership of the talent agenda, talent practices are reduced to HR driven, form-filling exercises, which do little to drive retention and certainly do not drive organisations results (Pandy, 2017). However, negligible research has been conducted to identify the specific leadership behaviours that influence talent retention. Porath (2015) found that the only leadership behaviour that had a significant influence on the career commitment of employees was the level of respect respondents had for their leaders.

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of research by establishing whether specific leadership behaviours influence talent retention and to determine this more specifically within the South African context.

Research purpose and objectives

Rodriguez-Sanchez, Gonzalez-Torres, Montero-Navarro and Gallego-Losada (2020) stated that effectively managing human talent in organisations provides competitive edge and therefore strategies directed at attracting and retaining talent must be an HR imperative. This is problematic for South African organisations as the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (2020) ranks South Africa at 106 out of 132 positions in its ability to retain talent (Insead Business School, 2020). South African businesses that wish to enhance their competitiveness must make talent retention a key priority. Failure to address talent retention issues may place businesses at the risk of having a shortage of qualified and high performing employees, which will negatively affect the productivity of these organisations (Knowledge Resources, 2017).

Research indicates that leaders have an important role to play in talent retention (Bluen, 2013; Tian, Shuja Iqbal, Qalati, Anwar, & Khan, 2020). Therefore, understanding the leadership behaviours that South African employees prefer is key to developing leadership skills that match the needs of the South African workforce and, in this way, enhance talent retention. The main purpose of this study was to determine the leadership behaviour preferences of South African employees, as well as the extent to which these behaviours influence talent retention.

This article is based on a broader study that was conducted to investigate the expectations and experiences of talent management across South Africa and the effect on Retention (Du Randt, 2019; Poisat, Mey, & Sharp, 2018). Following the statistical analysis conducted in that study it was decided to determine whether talent retention was influenced by certain leadership behaviours.

The research objectives of this study were: (1) to understand the influence of leadership behaviours on talent retention, (2) to identify specific leadership behaviours that enhance talent retention and (3) to determine the extent to which the expectations of employees with regard to leadership behaviours, which influence talent retention were being met by their employers.

Literature review

Human resource practitioners need to create a compelling business case for talent retention, an argument that is gathering increasing support through the notion of talent value management (Pandy, 2017). McKinsey calls on organisations to link talent to value (Barriere, Owens, & Pobereskin, 2018) and Ulrich argues that market value can be significantly impacted by demonstrating the value of an organisation's talent, particularly its leadership (Ulrich, 2016).

Talent retention

Retaining high performing talent is a critical business imperative. Makhubela and Ngoepe (2018) stated that the departure of highly skilled and fully trained employees is the most significant cost associated with employee turnover. Al Mamun and Hasan (2017) further observed visible and invisible costs related to turnover that is sometimes underestimated. These include the costs associated with recruitment and other costs that the organisation incurs in ensuring that a replacement employee is fully settled and developed in the organisation. There are also costs linked to the departure of a high calibre employee. These include the costs associated with finding temporary or replacement staff, reduced morale as employees work overtime, failure to satisfy the customers because of loss of productivity and insufficient production capacity.

A degree of organisational turnover is inevitable. However, a high rate of turnover as indicated is damaging (McCandless & Sauer, 2010). For this reason, it is important to instil a culture of retention through the implementation of an effective talent management system (Nadeem, 2009; Paul & Berry, 2013; Pyszka & Pilat, 2011). Leadership plays a very important role in this regard, as the leadership behaviours and type of values promoted by leaders will determine their actions and priorities. It is these specific leadership behaviours that may have an impact on the talent retention of an organisation that this article has focused upon.

The study aims to distil the critical leadership behaviours with the largest impact on retention by empirically controlling

for significant differences between the perceived importance ratings and the currently experienced ratings of employees.

Leadership behaviour and talent retention

Research into leadership behaviours emanated at Ohio State University in the 1950s and identified two leadership dimensions including consideration and initiating structure (DuBrin, 2016). Items of the consideration dimension are significant to this study and comprise emotional support, concern for the group, making personal connections and treating everyone as equals (DuBrin, 2016). The Ohio State University study provided the foundation for research into leadership behaviours including Blake and Moutons (1978) leadership grid that juxtaposed concern for production with concern for people. Current research into leadership dimensions and behaviour has evolved to incorporate core values, beliefs and moral standards into leaders' self-identities and influence on consistency of their moral and ethical behaviour (Veldsman & Johnson, 2016).

Emiliani (1998) pioneered the exploration of management behaviours in LEAN manufacturing, which provided the foundation for later studies (Camuffo & Gerli, 2018). Emiliani (2003) took his study further and linked a leader's belief to a behaviour and a competency. He found that the beliefs, behaviours and competencies of experienced LEAN leaders were significantly different from conventional managers. Denison, an expert of the Toyota Production System (cited in Orr, 2005), identified nine leadership behaviours significant to the LEAN manufacturing process and asserted that behaviours are universal and proved to be accurate in various organisations (Trenkner, 2016).

A South African study by Munyaka, Boshoff, Pietersen and Snelgar (2017), revealed that authentic leadership has a significant influence on psychological capital and climate and that this has a positive influence on organisational commitment and talent retention. A further South African study (Shabane, Schultz, & Van Hoek, 2017) found that although participants were generally dissatisfied with their remuneration, transformational leadership played a mediating role in the relationship between satisfaction with remuneration and their intention to stay at the organisation. Poisat and Grewan (2019) in a study on LEAN leadership behaviours, distinguished specific leadership behaviours required in LEAN manufacturing that promote employee engagement. In the same study, Poisat and Grewan (2019) cited various leadership behaviour studies that result in higher employee well-being and lower stress (Bester, Stander, & Van Zyl, 2015), improved employee satisfaction levels (Mendes & Stander, 2011), enhanced organisational support (Rothman & Stander, 2010) and a higher level of decision-making, innovation and problem-solving (Bester, Stander, & Van Zyl, 2015).

According to Tian et al. (2020), leadership behaviour influences talent retention. Organisational and employee outcomes, such as work engagement and turnover intentions, are significantly influenced by leadership behaviour (Paul &

Berry, 2013). This finding was strongly endorsed by Van den Berg, Bakker and Ten Cate (2013) and Yeh (2013) who identified that less engaged employees are more likely to leave the organisation and vice versa. Steele and Fullagar (2009) also alluded to the role played by leaders in talent retention by highlighting the importance of role clarity in the talent management process. A lack of work engagement and role clarity will increase the chance that an employee will leave the organisation, and it is thus the role of the leader to promote engagement, as well as clearly define the employees' roles (Steele & Fullagar, 2009). Work engagement refers to an employee being positively energised and attached to the organisation in a constructive and fulfilling manner (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). Role clarity is achieved when the leader clearly defines the roles associated with employees' work. Deiser (2012) contended that transformational leaders clarify employee roles more explicitly, as they themselves seek clarity regarding what they contribute to the organisation (Parry & Urwin, 2009).

Evidence also suggests that certain behaviours of transformational leaders, such as being respectful and empowering, encouraging participation in decision-making play a role in embracing and retaining talent (Alatawi, 2017; Parry & Urwin, 2009). Porath (2015) found that leaders' respectful behaviour towards their followers led to high levels of engagement and commitment and that this ultimately influenced employee retention. Northouse (2013) asserted that transformational leaders are engaging when assessing their followers in order to understand their expectations, intentions and what motivates them. They also put concerted effort into their endeavours to meet the needs of their followers. These findings suggest that the leadership behaviours associated with the transformational leadership style are relevant in retaining talented employees.

Rayton and Yalabik (2014) postulated that leaders who have empowering behaviours are highly likely to have the ability to influence talent retention positively. Mendes and Stander (2011) found a significant relationship between leader-empowering behaviour and talent retention. Van Dierendonck and Dijkstra (2012), Basford, Offerman and Wirtz (2012) and Kontoghiorghes (2014) pointed out that supportive and empowering leadership behaviours significantly assist in reducing staff turnover. These empowering behaviours include leadership practises of accountability, delegation, decentralised decision-making, coaching, information-sharing and skill development.

Research methodology

Research approach

This article is based on a quantitative research approach using a non-experimental comparative research design. Rationale for conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in the absence of hypotheses is provided together with the significance of leadership behaviour importance and leadership behaviour experience scales.

TABLE 1: Demographic profile of respondents.

Profile	Category	Category count	Category percentage	Total no of respondents
Gender	Female	319	44.9	711
	Male	392	55.1	
Ethnicity	African	288	40.5	711
	Asians	207	29.1	
	White	216	30.4	
Employment	Full-time	643	90.4	711
	Part-time	68	9.6	
Employment sector	Private	450	63.3	711
	Public	230	32.3	
	NGO	17	2.4	
	Other	14	2.0	

NGO, Non-Governmental Organisation.

Research participants and data collection

The target population for this study comprised of employees working in South African private and public organisations across a range of racial, gender and generational cohorts and employed at all organisational levels, including managerial, non-managerial, support and administrative employees. By means of snowball convenience sampling an online questionnaire was emailed to potential respondents. A total of 711 useable responses were received. Table 1 reveals the demographic profile of the respondents.

From Table 1, it can be deduced that the sample comprised of both genders of predominately African race. Most of the respondents were employed on a full-time basis and were employed in the private sector.

Data collection methods

Survey instrument

The survey instrument comprised a questionnaire consisting of three separate sections, namely biographical data, leadership behaviour and talent retention. The leadership behaviour scale was developed based on a literature review conducted by Parry and Urwin (2009) and studies conducted by Northouse (2013), Porath (2015) and Alatawi (2017). These studies were specifically consulted as they identified specific behaviours that had emerged from the literature review conducted in fulfilment of this study as having an influence on talent retention. The talent retention section of the questionnaire was based on a survey instrument developed by Kyndt, Dochy, Michielsen and Moeyaert (2009) and used in a study conducted by Poisat et al. (2018) in assessing talent retention. It comprised of 11 items specifically designed to measure both intention to stay and intention to quit. Both the leadership behaviour and the talent retention scales consisted of two separate five-point Likert-type response scales, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and required respondents to (1) rate the importance of each item to them and (2) rate their experience at their place of employment at the time of the study for each item. Providing two rating scales for each statement allowed for an analysis of the differences received between the rated importance and the actual experiences of the employees.

Statistical analysis performed

Various statistical methods were used to analyse the collected data. Descriptive statistical measures are used to describe both the importance of leadership behaviours to the respondents and how they were experienced by the respondents. The Mann–Whitney U test was used to test whether there was a statistically significant difference between these two sets of ratings. Exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the factor structure of the leadership behaviour importance, leadership behaviour experience and talent retention, as this study was exploratory in nature and the factor structure had not been previously confirmed.

Exploratory factor analysis was also used to determine whether the factor structures for leadership behaviour importance and leadership behaviour experience were equivalent. Correlation analysis and multiple linear regression were used to explore the relationships between the two variables.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

Description of leadership behaviours importance and experience

The leadership behaviours items were rated by respondents to determine both the importance and the experience of these concepts as encountered in the workplace. The importance ratings for the leadership behaviours had medians ranging from 4 to 5, which indicated that the general theme of the respondents' ratings ranged from 'favour' to 'strongly favour'. The experience ratings for the leadership behaviours had medians ranging from 3 to 4, revealing a general theme of 'average' to 'above average'.

The most notable differences between the medians for importance and experience were received for items B4.5 ('recognises my accomplishments at work') and B4.15 ('supports my personal growth and development'). Each of these behaviours had a median importance rating of strongly favourable with an experience median of average. Two leadership behaviours showed no difference in median for importance and experience ratings. These items were B4.1 ('acknowledges my background and experience') and B4.14 ('provides me with freedom and flexibility'). Both items had a median rating of favourable (above average) for both importance and experience.

Exploratory factor analysis

The Keiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO-MSA) and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to determine if the data pertaining to leadership behaviour importance, leadership behaviour experience and talent retention were suitable for EFA. The KMO index ranges from 0 to 1, with an index of 0.5 rendering the data suitable for

TABLE 2: Exploratory factor analysis results.

Exploratory factor analysis items	KMO-MSA (Significant Bartlett's test of sphericity)	Factors extracted	Variance extracted, %
Leadership importance ratings	0.921 ($p < 0.001$)	3	54.053
Leadership experience ratings	0.962 ($p < 0.001$)	1	58.341
Talent retention	0.893 ($p < 0.001$)	1	41.436

KMO-MSA, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy.

factor analysis, as it indicates that the data are sufficiently related. As all the EFA prerequisite measures were satisfied, EFAs were performed for leadership behaviour importance, leadership behaviour experience and talent retention. The summary of results is shown in Table 2, along with the number of factors extracted and the corresponding variance percentage extracted.

Based on the EFA results, the Cronbach's alpha values were obtained for each factor extracted and are included in parentheses after the corresponding factor label. Three factors were extracted for the leadership behaviours importance ratings, these being inclusivity/respect (0.888), engagement and empowerment (0.813) and social connectedness (0.750). A single factor was extracted for the leadership behaviour experience ratings, which was labelled experience (0.949). For the talent retention items, a single factor was extracted and was labelled as talent retention (0.887). Therefore, all the factors were deemed reliable. Convergent validity was assessed by using the variance extracted (VE) for each factor. A VE of 0.50 or higher indicates adequate evidence of convergence and each factor in this study satisfied this validity requirement (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square of the correlation estimates between any two factors with the VE of the two factors. If the VE value was found to be greater, then it indicates that the discriminant validity is adequate (Hair et al., 2011). All VEs in this study were found to be greater than the square of the correlation estimates therefore discriminant validity was deemed adequate.

As all the factors extracted were deemed reliable, the factor scores were calculated. Inclusivity/respect obtained a mean value of 4.381 (min. = 1.4, max. = 5, standard deviation [SD] = 0.61), engagement and empowerment a mean of 4.349 (min. = 1.67, max. = 5, SD = 0.669), and a mean of 3.823 (min. = 1, max. = 5, SD = 0.821) was obtained for social connectedness. For the experience factor, a mean of 3.249 (min. = 1, max. = 5, SD = 0.979) was revealed. Finally, talent retention attracted a mean value of 3.286 (min. = 1, max. = 5, SD = 0.887).

As the factor structures determined for leadership behaviour importance and leadership behaviour experience were not equivalent, with three factors extracted for the behaviour leadership importance ratings and only one factor extracted for the leadership behaviour experience ratings. Theoretically, it would be expected that the factors extracted for both leadership behaviour importance and experience would be

equivalent, however, the results did not support this. This result led to the investigation of the difference in ratings of each question for importance and experience to determine whether there was a significant difference between these ratings. This was important to the study as if there was a significant discrepancy between the ratings of importance and experience, it may affect the talent retention of the participants.

Mann–Whitney U test

Upon review of the items and the factor structures extracted, it was determined that this was not going to provide adequate information on the objective of this study. The authors felt that the differences identified between the importance and experience ratings of the leadership behaviours held important information relative to talent retention. For this reason, the responses in relation to the importance and experience ratings were tested to determine whether the differences observed were statistically significant. To this end, a Mann–Whitney U test was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference and whether this difference was related to the ordinal nature of the ratings. The results of the test are provided in Table 3. As discussed in the description of the leadership behaviours importance and experience section, the general trend in terms of the difference between the two ratings is that the importance of the behaviours was ranked higher than the experience thereof.

Importance-experience difference variable

The aim of the study was to determine the leadership behaviours that affect talent retention, with emphasis on how the difference between importance and experience ratings affected talent retention. Therefore, new variables were created that reflected the difference between the importance and experience ratings.

The differenced variables ranged from negative four (–4) to positive four (+4), where –4 indicated that the importance rating of that leadership behaviour was 1 (strongly oppose) and the experience rating was 5 (excellent). A +4 indicated that the importance rating of that leadership behaviour was 5 (strongly favour) and the experience rating was 1 (poor). A score of zero indicated that there was no difference between the importance and experience rating.

The mean values for the leadership behaviours was found to range from 0.7187 for item B4.6 ('gets to know me personally') to 1.3727 for item B4.3 ('finds out and understands the things that motivate me as an employee'). The result that every mean value is positive and above zero indicates that, on average, none of the leadership behaviours importance ratings were met in experience.

Correlation and regression analysis

To determine whether the difference between the importance and experience ratings of leadership behaviours affected the

TABLE 3: Mann–Whitney U test for difference between the importance and experience of leadership behaviours.

Leadership behaviours – My supervisor...	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Acknowledges my background and experience (B4.1)	137 960	-15.628	< 0.001
Consults with me before finalising action plans (B4.2)	126 186	-16.967	< 0.001
Finds out and understands the things that motivate me as an employee (B4.3)	97 427	-20.743	< 0.001
Respects his or her employees (B4.4)	131 757.5	-16.802	< 0.001
Recognises my accomplishments at work (B4.5)	119 562	-18.095	< 0.001
Gets to know me personally (B4.6)	168 402	-11.259	< 0.001
Involves me in the decision-making process and encourages participation (B4.7)	123 917.5	-17.34	< 0.001
Interacts face to face with me (B4.8)	157 192.5	-13.085	< 0.001
Emphasises the ‘fun side’ of the workplace (B4.9)	148 162	-13.923	< 0.001
Provides me with a variety of activities that I can enjoy (B4.10)	136 193	-15.476	< 0.001
Provides me with sufficient opportunities for socialising and building networks with colleagues (B4.11)	155 578	-12.944	< 0.001
Takes responsibility (B4.12)	131 675	-16.591	< 0.001
Treats me as an individual (B4.13)	143 837.5	-14.746	< 0.001
Provides me with freedom and flexibility (B4.14)	138 361	-15.477	< 0.001
Supports my personal growth and development (B4.15)	128 448.5	-16.818	< 0.001
Provides me with stimulation to maintain my interest at work (B4.16)	115 532.5	-18.388	< 0.001

level of talent retention correlations were calculated and a multiple regression analysis was performed.

The correlation coefficients were used to indicate whether there is a significant relationship between the differenced variables and talent retention. All the differenced variables for each leadership behaviour were found to be negatively correlated with talent retention. This indicates that as the difference between the importance and experience ratings increases, the level of talent retention decreases. The correlation coefficients range from -0.312 for item B4.6 (‘gets to know me personally’) to -0.463 for item B4.16 (‘provides me with stimulation to maintain my interest at work’).

To determine whether any of the leadership behaviours differenced variables were significant predictors of talent retention, a multiple regression analysis was performed. The following regression results were obtained (Table 4): Six leadership behaviour differenced variables were shown to be statistically significant predictors of talent retention. These items include B4.1 (‘acknowledges my background and experience’), B4.3 (‘finds out and understands the things that motivate me as an employee’), B4.4 (‘respects his or her employees’), B4.12 (‘takes responsibility’), B4.13 (‘treats me as an individual’) and B4.16 (‘provides me with stimulation to maintain my interest at work’).

The three statistically significant items that had the smallest effect on talent retention included B4.1 ($B = -0.085$, standard error [SE] = 0.035, $t = -2.404$, $p = 0.016$), B4.3 ($B = -0.085$, SE = 0.035, $t = -2.106$, $p = 0.016$) and B4.4 ($B = -0.086$, SE = 0.041, $t = -2.425$, $p = 0.036$). Therefore, these leadership behaviours regarding acknowledging the employee’s background,

TABLE 4: Employee importance and employee current experience model on talent retention ($F = 17.278$ [16, 694], p -value < 0.001).

Experience difference model	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	<i>t</i>	Significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity
	<i>B</i>	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.702	0.041	-	90.821	0
B4.1_diff	-0.085	0.035	-0.119	-2.404	0.016
B4.2_diff	0.035	0.036	0.054	0.972	0.332
B4.3_diff	-0.085	0.035	-0.139	-2.425	0.016
B4.4_diff	-0.086	0.041	-0.121	-2.106	0.036
B4.5_diff	0.062	0.039	0.093	1.605	0.109
B4.6_diff	0.021	0.032	0.032	0.662	0.508
B4.7_diff	0.032	0.036	0.047	0.874	0.382
B4.8_diff	3.12E-05	0.037	0	0.001	0.999
B4.9_diff	0.023	0.034	0.035	0.667	0.505
B4.10_diff	-0.038	0.038	-0.058	-1.015	0.31
B4.11_diff	-0.007	0.033	-0.011	-0.22	0.826
B4.12_diff	0.103	0.036	0.145	2.88	0.004
B4.13_diff	-0.138	0.04	-0.193	-3.46	0.001
B4.14_diff	-0.072	0.037	-0.107	-1.946	0.052
B4.15_diff	-0.02	0.037	-0.03	-0.524	0.6
B4.16_diff	-0.134	0.038	-0.209	-3.478	0.001

Statistical significant leadership behaviours that predict talent retention.

understanding the employees’ motivations and respecting the employees were significant predictors of talent retention, however, the effect on talent retention is not large.

The leadership behaviours that were shown to be statistically significant predictors of talent retention and had a larger effect on talent retention in comparison to the variables B4.3 and B4.4 were leadership behaviour B4.13 ($B = -0.138$, SE = 0.04, $t = -3.46$, $p = 0.001$) and B4.16 ($B = -0.134$, SE = 0.038, $t = -3.478$, $p = 0.001$). It is important to note that the leadership behaviour item B4.12 ($B = 0.103$, SE = 0.036, $t = 2.88$, $p = 0.004$) that relates to the leader taking responsibility was found to be a unique predictor of talent retention. For this item, the beta coefficient indicated that as the difference between importance and experience ratings increases by one unit, talent retention increases by 0.103.

The results of the regression analysis, thus reveal that the difference between the importance an employee places on certain leadership behaviours and their experience of those behaviours in the workplace does have a significant influence on talent retention.

Discussion

Outline of results

The positive, significant correlation between certain leadership behaviours and talent retention found in this article supports Munyaka et al.’s (2017) findings in their South African study. This study indicated that leadership has a significant influence on psychological capital and climate, resulting in a positive impact on organisational commitment and talent retention. In addition, Paul and Berry (2013) found organisational and employee outcomes such as work engagement and turnover intention to be significantly influenced by leadership behaviours (Yeh, 2013).

In this article, correlations of the leadership behavioural traits with talent retention showed that the talent retention factor correlated mostly with employee's current experiences of leadership behaviours. These behaviours were identified through factor analysis as comprising inclusivity/respect, empowerment and engagement ($r = 0.529$). With an r -value exceeding 0.5, this correlation is considered large (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014) and indicative of a relatively strong positive relationship, these behaviours are seen to embody the transformational leadership style ($r = 0.529$).

Six leadership behaviours were found to be statistically significant predictors of talent retention. These leadership behaviours are 'acknowledges my background and experience', 'finds out and understands the things that motivate me as an employee', 'respects his or her employees', 'takes responsibility', 'treats me as an individual' and 'provides me with stimulation to maintain my interest at work'. In examining the specific leadership behaviours that employees considered to be important in contributing to increasing talent retention, it was not surprising to note that engagement ('finds out and understands the things that motivate me as an employee and respects his or her employees') and empowerment behaviours (provides me with stimulation to maintain my interest at work) were found to be highly rated in driving talent retention. These leadership behaviours are aligned to leaders' good practices in creating a positive psychosocial environment for employees as originally identified by the Ohio State University study, structuring an attractive career management system, practicing empowering behaviour and putting in place mechanisms that promote employee engagement (DuBrin, 2016). Rayton and Yalabik (2014) suggested that leaders who demonstrate empowering behaviours have a positive influence on talent retention. Furthermore, plummeting engagement levels increase the decision to quit, whereas positive employee engagement levels drive positive talent retention.

Kontoghiorghes (2014) and Van Dierendonck and Dijkstra (2012) identified leadership empowering behaviours as accountability, delegation, decentralised decision-making, coaching, information sharing and skills development. In this article, engagement and empowerment, which are characteristic of the transformational leadership style, were noted as being significant in influencing talent retention. Deiser (2012) contended that managers who adopt a transformational leadership style ensure role clarity, and Alatawi (2017) regarded transformational leaders as supportive and empowering. Results of this study with predictive validity on retention (what motivates me, respect employees, treats me as an individual and what stimulates me at work) align with these studies and validate the conclusions of Northouse (2013), who found a strong correlation between transformational leaders' engagement behaviours and talent retention.

The importance of leadership behaviours to employees and employees' experiences thereof were compared, and the

importance ratings for all items was found to be higher than the experience ratings. These differences were seen to indicate that employees' expectations (importance rating) were not being met by their current employers (experience rating). Snelgar, Renard and Venter (2013) observed that it is concerning when employees' expectations of their leaders are not met by the employers. It is, therefore, important that organisations implement strategies to build leaders who can demonstrate the behaviours sought by their followers as this is important in enhancing the retention of top talent. Some recommendations in this regard are presented in the following section.

Practical implications

The study found significant differences between the ratings that employees provided on the leadership behaviours deemed important in promoting talent retention and their ratings of their current experiences of these leadership behaviours. This demonstrated that their experiences fell short of their expectations, which could suggest that whilst employers may have talent retention strategies in place, they are not aligning their actions with these strategies. This holds negative implications for the organisations, as staff turnover is likely to increase.

The results of this study demonstrate that employees who have leaders who (1) provide them with a sense of belonging, respect, empowerment and engagement, (2) provide support for their personal growth and development and (3) grant them flexibility and freedom in executing their duties are effective in driving a talent retention strategy. The behaviour of these leaders is seen to align with that of the transformational leadership style. These leaders influence their employees in a positive way and they are less likely to be enticed away by another organisation. From this discussion it seems apparent that leaders need to connect at the human interface with their employees as this study found this to be an important talent retention factor. In a technology-driven world this is particularly important and more so at a time when the workplace has experienced, and will continue to experience, a move to remote work.

For HR managers and practitioners, the results of this study point to the importance of a good talent management strategy, as the long-term sustainability of organisations is reliant on the retention of high performing human capital. The retention of skilled and engaged employees requires leaders to behave in a manner that effectively drives high performance in an ever-changing environment. One way of ensuring this is for leaders to use appropriate assessment tools to diagnose their leadership behaviours to determine whether they promote the behaviours that promote retention. Furthermore, organisations could develop an organisation-specific profile of the current leadership behaviour skill set sought by their employees through seeking the input of these employees. This profile could then be used, as in the context of this study, as a measure against which employees rate their

current experiences versus these expectations. This profile should not be regarded as a static measure and amended over time as employee needs and expectations evolve in response to an ever-changing workplace.

The use of diagnostic tools as described here could form part of an effective talent management strategy in assisting leadership to develop the behavioural skills that drive talent retention and promote a sustainable organisation. Understanding that the workplace is becoming more technologically advanced is important as this becomes a critical consideration as human beings will continue to seek leaders who promote human and social connectedness, engagement and empowerment in enhancing the positive nature of their working experience.

Limitations and recommendations

Unlike other studies (Bussin & Toerien, 2015; Snelgar et al., 2013) which directly asked respondents to rate the influence of different leadership behaviours in terms of their ability to retain employees, this study correlated the indirect responses of the respondents to retention. It did not investigate other factors that influence talent retention, such as the role played by the work environment and reward. Although the demographics of the respondents to the study were relatively well balanced, the sample was not proportionally representative of the South African working population. A more proportional sample would have allowed more meaningful inferences to be made from the results achieved from the study.

In terms of recommendations, managers should consider aligning their leadership behaviours with a transformational leadership style. As part of this, leaders should work diligently to improve employee engagement as a driver of talent retention. Employers should also seek to align their leadership actions with the expectations of their employees.

Finally, leaders should play an active role in guiding, supporting and empowering employees and designing an effective career management system. Human resource management should provide interventions to train and develop leadership in the behaviours that promote talent retention and, in so doing, contribute to a positive, empowering and engaging work experience for employees.

Conclusion

This study underlines the significant role played by managers in any talent retention strategy and the need for managers to engage in practices and actions supportive of employee expectations in relation to engagement, personal growth and development, respect and freedom and flexibility in performing their duties. These leadership behaviours, when supported by an enabling culture are central to effective talent management practices and a critical element in building and retaining a strong talent pipeline.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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