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Employee Retention: Organisational and Personal Perspectives

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Abstract In this continuously changing contemporary economy, companies have to be able to anticipate technological innovations and to compete with other companies worldwide. This need makes important a company's ability to evolve through its employees' learning and through continuous development. Securing and retaining skilled employees plays an important role in this process, because employees' knowledge and skills are central to companies' ability to be economically competitive. Given that employee retention is very important for the functioning and competitiveness of a company, this study focuses on the organisational and personal factors that influence employee retention. A special interest is taken in employees' learning, because this is seen as a retention supporting activity. A questionnaire was administered to 349 employees, and 11 employees were interviewed. The interviews are used to illustrate and contextualise the quantitative results. The results show a large positive contribution of appreciation and stimulation of the employee to employee retention. This result is consistent with findings of earlier research. However, the retention benefits arising from personal development offer new possibilities when attempting to enhance employee retention. This study also showed that individual differences influence employee retention. Leadership skills and seniority have a positive relationship with employee retention and the level of readiness and initiative regarding learning are negatively related to retention.

Keywords Employee retention · Learning attitude · Learning and working climate

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Employee Development and Retention

The contemporary global economic environment has changed drastically and continues to do so. Social developments such as continuing globalisation, technological innovation, and growing global competition place pressure on companies and emphasise their need to maintain their competitive edge (Burke and Ng 2006), at least in part through maintaining the skills of their employees. Companies have to be able to anticipate technological innovation and be able to compete with other companies worldwide. This need makes important a company's ability to evolve through the continuous learning and development of the employees. Having and retaining skilled employees plays an important role in this process, because employees' knowledge and skills have become the key for companies to be economically competitive (Hiltrop 1999). Therefore, it is important that employers give employees the opportunity to develop and learn (Arnold 2005; Bernsen et al. 2009; Herman 2005) such that the workers maintain their capacities as effective employees, resist redundancy, and are retained by their companies. Beyond these economic pressures, companies also face some disturbing demographic changes. The average age of employees in Western countries is increasing constantly. In addition, the workers of the so called baby boom generation are gradually retiring (Burke and Ng 2006; Frank et al. 2004). With the retirement of this generation is a significant loss of skills and other capacities which are not being easily replaced by simply hiring new employees. The ending of the careers of the baby boom generation means that companies lose competence (i.e. knowledge, and skills), all of which are essential in the current economic environment in which companies have to compete (Hiltrop 1999).

Companies expect that the proportional rise in the ageing population will lead to a global competition for the 'best' employees. This 'competition' will be the most intense in the search for Chief Executive Officers (CEO) (Conner 2000; Harvey and Richey 2001). CEOs are considered by some to be the most important assets of a company. The fact that the majority of the current CEOs belong to the baby boom generation means that a shortage in the near future is highly likely. Companies with policies that are future oriented and strategic might be aware of this problem and can take action to address it. For instance, they may develop practices to identify, select, develop, and retain promising employees in order to ensure the presence of necessary skilled workers who can secure the quality and quantity of the goods or services they provide, and who can maintain their competitive advantage. These companies may also focus on employees with high potential who might have the ability to take on a higher (executive) function in the future (Dries and Pepermans 2008; Pepermans et al. 2003).

The increasing global competition for the 'best' employees brought about by the shortfall in new workforce entrants in many advanced industrial economies makes essential companies' ability to ensure that their employees will keep on working for them in order to maintain their competitive advantage. However, a large, and perhaps growing, number of employees nowadays do not want a traditional career within one company (Burke and Ng 2006). Consequently, they are less loyal and more opportunistic than workers in the past (Burke and Ng 2006; Hiltrop 1999). According to numbers provided by SD Worx, a large Belgian human resource and payroll company, in 2007 there was an employee turnover rate of approximately 17.46% in Belgium. For employees younger than 25 years, the employee turnover rate was 39% (SD Worx 2008). This statistic illustrates the fact that the employees of the 'new' generation at work do not have/want a

traditional career within the same company to the same extent as their older colleagues, and possibly have a greater choice in pursuing careers across companies. It follows that companies now have to make increasing efforts to retain their skilled employees. Losing such employees means a loss of investment in that employee and that a new employee has to be recruited and trained. Moreover, when skilled employees leave a company, they can take a lot of know-how with them, and thus the company is at risk of losing confidential information to competitors (Frank et al. 2004; Walker 2001).

Given that employee retention has proven to be important for the functioning of a company, this study focuses on the factors that are of influence in terms of employee retention. A special interest is taken in employees' learning, this learning has a strong positive effect on retention (e.g., Echols 2007; Gershwin 1996; Rodriguez 2008). Rodriguez (2008, p. 53) claims:

> If employees feel they aren't learning and growing, they feel they are not remaining competitive with their industry peers for promotion opportunities and career advancement. Once top employees feel they are no longer growing, they begin to look externally for new job opportunities.

Moreover, Collin (2009) found that learning and a work-related identity are related to one another in many ways, and, according to Dewey (1916), an individual's identity is formed by, among other things, that person's vocation. Dewey (1916) refers to a vocation as a calling that is central to an individual's identity. Furthermore, Collin's (2009) findings suggest that, besides the relationship between learning and the construction of a work-related identity, there also exists a relationship between organisational commitment and various learning processes.

This study investigates the learning and working climate as well as the learning attitude of employees. Because companies tend to focus on developing and retaining workers with high potential, it is important to know whether a difference exists between what support is afforded those kinds of employees compared with other employees. In making its case, the paper progresses as follows. Firstly, a theoretical background is provided in which the relevant concepts are defined and interrelationships that have been identified in the literature are explored. What is proposed here is that separately, but most importantly in combination, personal and workplace factors shape the prospects for employee retention. In particular, two polar approaches—the gap and the appreciative approach—are critiqued. Secondly, research questions, hypotheses, and methods are described, justified, and explained. After presenting the results of the analysis, the paper elaborates upon and discusses the meaning and implications of these results.

Conceptualising Approaches to Employee Development and Retention

Employee Retention

Previous research has identified several factors that have an influence on employee retention. A first important indicator of employee retention is their organisational commitment (Curtis and Wright 2001).

> Employees with a high organisational commitment are those who have a strong identification with the organisation, value the sense of membership within it,

agree with its objectives and value systems, are likely to remain in it and, finally, are prepared to work hard on its behalf. (Curtis and Wright 2001, p. 60)

This commitment is influenced by the organisation's norms and practices, especially the organisational climate (Kaliprasad 2006), and is not job specific (Bashaw and Grant 1994). Next to organisational commitment, personal commitment and the compliance with reciprocal obligations are important (Hytter 2007). Consequently, there is a need to consider both organisational and personal factors in considering employee retention.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover and found a clear negative relationship (e.g., Cotton and Tuttle 1986; Muchinsky and Morrow 1980; Tett and Meyer 1993; Trevor 2001), meaning that when employees do not feel satisfied in their job, the turnover is high and they are likely to leave the company. Walker (2001) identified seven factors that can enhance employee retention: (i) compensation and appreciation of the performed work, (ii) provision of challenging work, (iii) chances to be promoted and to learn, (iv) invitational atmosphere within the organisation, (v) positive relations with colleagues, (vi) a healthy balance between the professional and personal life, and (viii) good communications. Together, these suggest a set of workplace norms and practices that might be taken as inviting employee engagement. Hytter (2007) found that the personal premises of loyalty, trust, commitment, and identification and attachment with the organisation have a direct influence on employee retention. She also demonstrated that workplace factors such as rewards, leadership style, career opportunities, the training and development of skills, physical working conditions, and the balance between professional and personal life have an indirect influence (Hytter 2007). Moreover, Tang et al. (2000) found that earning more money has only an indirect influence on employee retention; it is of influence when the job satisfaction of an employee is low. Other researchers confirm that effective training and opportunities to learn and develop enhance employee retention (Arnold 2005; Herman 2005; Hiltrop 1999). High integrity and involvement on the part of the manager, empowerment, responsibility, and new possibilities/challenges are also important for employee retention (Birt et al. 2004). Finally, the positive influence of work experience and tenure has been confirmed by other researchers (Gunz and Gunz 2007). Birt et al. (2004) also found that the perception and experience of the employees with regard to these factors has the greatest influence on employee retention. Despite the fact that a company may try to bring all these factors into play to enhance employee retention, an employee can still choose to leave the workplace because of, for example, bad management (Kaliprasad 2006).

The relationship of different personal variables such as age, gender, number of children, and level of education to employee retention have yet to be fully investigated. However, a clear negative relationship has been found between the level of education and organisational commitment (Angle and Perry 1983; Glisson and Durick 1988). Expectations are that the level of education will relate to employee retention in a similar manner, since organisational commitment is an important positive indicator for employee retention (Curtis and Wright 2001). Research on the relationship between age and gender on the one hand, and job satisfaction and organisational commitment on the other, has not resulted in a clear conclusion.

Learning and Working Climate

In the literature, more and more attention has been paid to the learning and working climate (e.g., Birt et al. 2004; Bouwmans 2006; Verheijen 2005; Visser 2001). In considering this issue through the literature, the distinction between workplaces adopting a 'gap' and an 'appreciative' approach has been made.

In a company with a 'gap' approach in terms of organisational development (i.e., a gap between the skills needed and those available in the workplace), change and development happen because a problem needs to be solved (Verheijen 2005). This gap approach emphasizes what is wrong or what does not function well in the organisation, constituting a deficit model. It is based on the assumption that organisations are machines and, consequently, broken parts can be fixed or replaced. To solve problems employees are retrained from less skilled to more skilled, so that the organisational goals which were formulated in advance can be fulfilled. It is assumed that everyone can become somewhat competent in almost everything, and that weak points give the most opportunities to grow (Verheijen 2005). Problems can be fixed by following a step-by-step plan consisting of four parts (Visser 2001). Firstly, a problem is identified; an actual need has to be experienced. Secondly, a thorough analysis of the possible causes is undertaken. Thirdly, possible solutions are explored, and, finally, an action plan is developed. Visser (2001) states that this approach often leads to short-term solutions and often misses important topics, thereby causing new problems and worsening the initial situation (Visser 2001). Hence, a deficit attributed to skill shortages is to be redressed by a linear rational approach to skill development focusing on skills rather than the employees' vocations, as Dewey (1916) would have preferred.

The 'appreciative' approach is based on the assumption that the basis for the desired future is already present within the company (Cooperrider et al. 2007; Verheijen 2005). It is a person-centred approach, perhaps more in keeping with what Dewey (1916) proposed and is in contrast to the gap approach, which assumes that weak points can be transformed into strong points. The appreciative approach focuses on positive topics (Van der Haar and Hosking 2004). Employees appear to participate much more fully and effortfully when they can do more of what they are good at (Bouwmans 2006), and are interested in. Moreover, when applying an appreciative approach, a feeling of continuity is intended to arise in ways that avoid negative reactions and indifference. Visser (2001) and Rowden (2002) state that when employees are directly involved in organisational development, their participation is likely to increase. This participation contributes to the durable character of the organisational development and may arise from a continuous dialogue between employees concerning their mutual future, which enhances cooperation and team spirit (Hoogenboom 2002).

Five key distinctions can be made between the gap and the appreciative approaches. The first distinction is related to the selection procedure. The appreciative approach is interested in future employees' strengths that can make the company stronger, while the gap approach looks for a match between the shortages in the company and the competence of the future employees. A second distinction concerns the development of the organisation and the individual, and the motives for change. The appreciative approach focuses on what can make the

company successful. Individuals are supported in following their interests and in further developing their strengths (Cooperrider et al. 2007) in so far as they broadly contribute to the company. Within the gap approach, a problem that prevents the accomplishment of the organisational goals is the reason for change. Training of employees is possible only when there is a shortage in competence or skills. The third distinction is related to the way problems are solved within the company. The appreciative approach allows and even desires employees to take the initiative, while the gap approach relies on already existing rules and procedures. The appreciation of employees is a fourth area where the two approaches can be differentiated. The appreciative approach appreciates employees for their strengths and initiative, while the gap approach appreciates employees for fulfilling the expectations of the company. The final distinction concerns the degree of stimulation of reflection by the organisation and the content of those reflection processes. When these reflection processes focus on deficiencies, the gap approach is more dominant within the organisation. The appreciative approach focuses more on the strengths of the employees and is more directed towards new opportunities.

In summary, an appreciative learning and working climate contributes positively to employee retention because it makes people feel acknowledged for their strengths and it creates possibilities to develop people's qualities (Cooperrider et al. 2007; Visser 2001). This approach is consistent with what Dewey (1916) proposed about the importance of having a personal trajectory as part of the concept of vocation. The gap approach may lead to a decrease in motivation and engagement on the part of the employees and, thus, reduce employee retention (Visser 2001). It has to be noted that, in particular, the way employees perceive and experience the working and learning climate is found to be important for their retention (Birt et al. 2004). This finding underlines the need to consider both personal and organisational factors in considering initiatives to enhance the retention of skilled employees.

High Potential Employees

Understandably, the retention and further development of highly skilled (or valued) employees is often the key priority in terms of a company's human resource management strategy (Dibble 1999). Some companies have in place strategic policies to respond to the upcoming global competition for the most skilled employees, which include looking to the future. Presciently, Dibble (1999, p.3) suggested "*If you think that it is hard to retain your employees now, be aware that in the future it will be worse.*" Therefore, such companies may focus not only on high achievers at the present time, but also on those with potential to become high performance in the future. High potential employees are defined as those who are recognised by senior management as persons with the potential to fulfil an executive function within the company (Cope 1998; Dries and Pepermans 2008; Pepermans et al. 2003). The potential of these employees is such as these may differ from high achievers because the term potential denotes possibilities, promise, and latent action (Altman 1997). The scarce literature concerning high potential employees suggests that these employees have multiple characteristics: intelligence, team spirit,

negotiation skills, social skills, and proactivity (e.g., Conner 2000; Lombardo and Eichinger 2000; Pepermans et al. 2003; Snipes 2005). Further, other research studies have consistently found a number of characteristics: creativity (Pepermans et al. 2003), leadership skills (Pepermans et al. 2003), learning potential (Conner 2000; Lombardo and Eichinger 2000), and autonomy (Dries and Pepermans 2008; Snipes 2005). These characteristics can, therefore, be seen as possible core characteristics of high potential employees. Finally, some general characteristics are associated with high potential employees; these characteristics are the ability to cope with stress, flexibility, and the courage to take risks (Pepermans et al. 2003).

Previous research has shown that high potentials, in general, have a strong organisational commitment (Bennis and Nannus 1985; Dries and Pepermans 2007), and have a more traditional career path than do other employees, because companies prefer an internal successor when it comes to top management functions. This preference causes companies to invest more in these high potential employees than in other employees (Dries and Pepermans 2008). In summary, the literature shows that high potential employees are employees who are likely to become the future leaders of an organisation because they possess several core characteristics like creativity, autonomy, being able to cope with stress, et cetera. Since it is common for companies to invest more in these high potential employees than in other employees (Cope 1998; Dries and Pepermans 2008), it is expected that these employees will have a relatively high employee retention rate.

The Present Study

The present study focuses on the factors which have an influence on employee retention. Both organisational and personal factors are taken into account. On the organisational side, the focus will be on employees' learning and working climate, operationalised in terms of the two approaches discussed above: the gap and appreciative approaches. The expectation is that these approaches will have a different influence on employee retention, with an appreciative approach contributing positively, and a gap approach, negatively, to employee retention. On the personal side, we have speculated about the relationship between being a high potential employee and employee retention. The influence of level of education, number of children, seniority, age, and gender on employee retention is also investigated. It is expected that high potential employees will have a higher employee retention rate than non-high potential employees, because companies invest more in high potential employees and they experience more responsibility, career opportunities, and self-steering. The level of education is also expected to have a negative relation with employee retention because of its negative relationship with organisational commitment (Angle and Perry 1983; Glisson and Durick 1988). A positive relationship of age and seniority with employee retention is expected, consistent with Gunz and Gunz's (2007) findings regarding the influence of tenure. The association of gender and the number of children with employee retention will be explored, since previous research does not offer a clear conclusion regarding these relationships. These predictions are appraised through the research project, the method and findings of which are reported below.

Research Questions

To be effective in the current globally competitive economic environment, companies want to know how they can keep their highly skilled employees as long as possible, and need to understand the role that these employees' learning plays in their retention. This concern has been translated into the following question: 'What personal and organisational factors have an influence on employee retention?' On the basis of the theoretical background, this main question has been divided into three research questions:

1. What is the relationship between the perception of the learning and working climate, and employee retention?
2. What is the relationship between being a high potential and employee retention?
3. What is the relationship of the personal characteristics of level of education, number of children, seniority, age, and gender to employee retention?

Method

Participants

The sample in this study consisted of 349 employees from 57 different companies in the private sector. The participants were 50% male ($N=174$) and 50% female ($N=175$). The majority of the employees worked full-time (86.2%), only 8.9% worked part-time, and 2.4% had a temporary contract. The remaining 2.6% indicated that they were employed under another type of contract. For the qualitative part of the research study, 11 respondents—6 males and 5 females—were interviewed. All 11 interviewees have a full-time contract.

Instruments

The questionnaire on employee retention was constructed based on the literature and previous research on the motivation of employees with regard to their jobs. Egan et al. (2004) investigated the effects of the learning climate within the organisation and job satisfaction on employee's intentions to stay within the information technology (IT) sector. To measure intention to stay, the researchers used three items: "I intend to change job within this firm in the foreseeable future", "I intend to seek IT related work at another firm in the foreseeable future", and "I intend to seek work in a profession other than IT in the foreseeable future". These items were adjusted for this study. Participants were also asked if they would like to keep on working for their current employer and if they would look within the company when they wanted to change jobs or functions. Another point of interest was whether employees believed that they had future prospects within the company and if they were motivated in their job. The items were based on the operationalisations used in previous research (e.g., Arnold 2005; Hytter 2007; Kassim 2006; Lindsey and Kleiner 2005; Stone and Liyanearachchi 2006; Whitt 2006). For example, items included: "I foresee a future for myself within this company" or "It doesn't matter if

I work for this company or another, as long as I have work". In total, 12 items were formulated to measure employee retention intentions.

To measure the learning and work climate, 15 items from the questionnaire used by Bernsen et al. (2009) were selected. These items were used to examine the employee's perception of the guidance at the workplace (understanding, interest, and attention and advice from executives), the pressure of workload, and the freedom of choice concerning tasks. Twenty-seven items were formulated on the basis of the differences discussed earlier between the gap and the appreciative approaches in order to examine employees' perceptions of the dominant approach used in their company. For example, items included: "There is too much work to do in this company", "In this company they believe in me", or "Most of time we rely on prescribed rules and procedures to solve a problem".

Since, in general, employers are not willing to release information about their high potentials (Dries and Pepermans 2008), the employees themselves were questioned. Twenty-eight items were formulated to examine if employees perceived themselves to have the qualities that characterize a high potential. High potentials were identified based on the characteristics of creativity, leadership skills, autonomy, initiative, learning potential, and being stress proof (Conner 2000; Dries and Pepermans 2008; Lombardo and Eichinger 2000; Pepermans et al. 2003; Snipes 2005). Items concerning being a high potential included: "In a team I easily take on the role of leader" or "I'm able to make good decisions when I'm under pressure".

Participants scored all 82 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). All questionnaires included in the present study were translated from English to Flemish, the participants' mother tongue, according to the guidelines of the International Test Commission (Hambleton 1994).

Interviews

An interview guideline was developed based on and analogous to the premises for the questionnaire. The interviews were semistructured, leaving room for additional questions and topics. Each interview took aproximately 45 min. Because of the small number of interviewed employees, the qualitative data will be used in an illustrative and contextualised manner.

Analysis

Two explorative factor analyses of the quantitative data were performed to reduce the number of variables and to look for underlying constructs in the data. The validity of the constructs and the reliability of the scales were tested using data from the current sample. A first factor analysis was performed for the dependent variable of employee retention, and the second factor analysis was performed for the independent variables learning and working climate and high potentials. The data for the factor analysis of employee retention have a determinant of 0.004, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of 0.90, and a Bartlett's test of sphericity with a significance of $p=0.000$. The data for the second factor analysis of learning and working climate and high potentials have a determinant of 0.000, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of 0.88, and a Bartlett's test of

sphericity with a significance of $p=0.000$. These statistics shows that the data are suitable for factor analysis.

Next, correlations between the different variables were calculated to explore the cohesion between the variables. Finally, a multiple stepwise linear regression was used to determine the relation between the independent variables and the dependent variable of employee retention. Both backward and forward stepwise regression analyses were performed to examine the stability of the model.

Results

After an overview of the results of the factor analyses, each of those pertaining to the research questions are elaborated. Overall, the factor analysis of the items measuring employee retention resulted in one factor that explains 49.13% of the variance ($\alpha=.91$). The item "If I would win the lottery or inherit an important amount of money so that I can live comfortable, I would stop working" had to be dropped since it did not load significantly on the factor of employee retention. An important additional element that came out of the qualitative data and that is not reflected by the single factor is that some respondents made a distinction between commitment to the company and commitment to the field of work. A high level of either type of commitment is positively related to employee retention. When there is mainly a commitment with the field of work, respondents do not rule out leaving the company when a more interesting offer occurs. "When another company can offer me the same conditions and something on top of that. Yes then … […] but I am not looking actively myself." Another respondent said: "Today I mainly feel connected with the subject. Not yet really with the company. I enjoy working here, it is a very pleasant culture to work in, but I would also be able to do this in another company."

The second factor analysis of the items measuring learning and working climate and high potentials resulted in five factors that explains 44.77% of the variance. The first factor, Appreciation and Stimulation, ($\alpha=.94$) explains 16.91% of the variance and contains items concerning appreciative climate and stimulation of personal development. The second factor is Leadership Skills ($\alpha=.89$). The items loading on this factor elicited data about employees' communication competence, stress proneness, and interest in taking up a leader's role within the organisation. Leadership Skills explains 10.03% of the variance. The third factor is called Pressure of Work ($\alpha=.88$) and explains 6.59% of the variance. All items concern pressure of work. The fourth factor, Following Procedures ($\alpha=.81$), contains items about the procedures, rules, and working methods within the organisation. It explains 6.10% of the variance. The fifth and last factor is called Learning Attitude ($\alpha=.80$) and explains 5.14% of the variance. The items concern readiness to learn and the initiative to learn. An overview of all factor items and loadings can be found in Appendix. The factors that came out of the second factor analysis for the independent variables do not represent the two approaches with regard to the learning and work climate as they were found in the literature. However, they do represent aspects of the learning and work climate that can be attributed to one of the two approaches.

The multiple stepwise linear regression analysis was started with ten independent variables and one dependent variable. During the regression, four variables were excluded from the model: Following Procedures ($t=1.707$, $p=.089$, β In=.073), age ($t=1.167$, $p=.244$, β In=.080), number of children ($t=.758$, $p=.449$, β In=.039), and gender ($t=.695$, $p=.487$, β In=.030).

The final model is based on six variables that explain the dependent variable, employee retention (see Table 1). The model has an explained variance of 52.4% ($F=52.098$, df=(6, 272), $p<.001$). Appreciation and stimulation alone explains 44.9% of the variance, while the other variables add less.

Results concerning the first research question "What is the relationship between the perception of the learning and working climate, and employee retention?" show a significant positive influence of Appreciation and Stimulation on employee retention ($t=16.054$, $p<.001$, β=.670). Especially important were recognition, sincere interest in the employees and their work, and being stimulated, all of which were perceived to be positive in terms of keeping on working in the company. The high β-coefficient shows that Appreciation and Stimulation has a large predictive value for the dependent variable, employee retention. This result is confirmed by the very large correlation (ρ=.67, $p<.01$) between employee retention and Appreciation and Stimulation. The importance of this factor is illustrated as follows by a respondent: "I feel comfortable working for company X, I am being appreciated there. I am being followed up by personnel management. I am making progress here so in that way I do not have any reason to change." Another aspect of the work and learning climate is Pressure of Work. This factor showed a significant negative influence on employee retention ($t=-4.159$, $p<.001$, β=−.190). In effect, the outcome means the

Table 1 Multiple stepwise linear regression: model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. error of estimate	Change statistics			
					R^2 change	F change	Df	Sig. F change
1	.670[a]	.449	.447	.74850775	.449	225.600	1, 277	.000
2	.685[b]	.470	.466	.73542608	.021	10.942	1, 276	.001
3	.700[c]	.491	.485	.72217415	.021	11.222	1, 275	.001
4	.710[d]	.503	.496	.71433450	.013	7.069	1, 274	.008
5	.724[e]	.525	.516	.70028005	.021	12.109	1, 273	.001
6	.731[f]	.535	.524	.69403539	.010	5.935	1, 272	.015

[a] Predictors: (Constant), Appreciation and Stimulation

[b] Predictors: (Constant), Appreciation and Stimulation, Leadership Skills

[c] Predictors: (Constant), Appreciation and Stimulation, Leadership Skills, Learning Attitude

[d] Predictors: (Constant), Appreciation and Stimulation, Leadership Skills, Learning Attitude, Pressure of Work

[e] Predictors: (Constant), Appreciation and Stimulation, Leadership Skills, Learning Attitude, Pressure of Work, Seniority

[f] Predictors: (Constant), Appreciation and Stimulation, Leadership Skills, Learning Attitude, Pressure of Work, Seniority, Level of education

[g] Dependent Variable: Employee Retention

higher the pressure, the lower the level of employee retention. This conclusion is confirmed by the significant negative correlation between Pressure of Work and employee retention ($\rho=-.12$, $p<.05$). Several interviewees made negative associations with the pressure of work: "That's why I work a lot of overtime … I need do to do something about that, because either my psychological or physical health will suffer, and for what?" and "We are working late in the evening here and work weekends just to get our job done, not because we like it." The final aspect of the learning and working climate that came out of the factor analysis is Following Procedures. The correlation between this factor and employee retention is not significant and, as mentioned above, the variable was excluded from the model.

The second research question "What is the relationship between being a high potential and employee retention?" cannot be answered with any confidence, because the factor analysis did not provide a clear factor that captured the concept 'high potential'. However, there are two factors, Leadership Skills and Learning Attitude, that are associated with high potentials. On the one hand, Leadership Skills ($t=3.45$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.145$) has a significant positive influence on employee retention. If employees perceives themselves to be communicative and immune to stress and they have the interest in taking on a leader's role within the company, the likelihood of employee retention will be relatively high. However, it is important to realise that this concerns the perception of the employee, which can differ from the objective reality. This finding supports the expectation that high potentials lead to a higher employee retention rate. One interviewee, perceiving himself as reasonably immune to stress, said: "I would not make the transition (to another company) just like that because in itself it is going well here … I'm not actively looking for something else." But Learning Attitude has a negative influence on employee retention ($t=-2.044$, $p<.05$, $\beta=-.089$). The more eager employees are to learn, the less they are inclined to remain within the same company. This eagerness to learn, which is also generally associated with high potential employees, leads to a decrease in employee retention. A respondent illustrated this perfectly in his answer to the question "Did you ever think about looking for a job with another company?" He said: "Yes, yes, yes, yes in the beginning I have definitely thought that. I had the idea, I'm not learning anything here, I'm doing too much administration ... and then I did some job interviews". Another respondent stated that he would keep on working for his company "…as long as I get the chance to learn something new now and again". The correlations show the same results: Leadership Skills correlates significantly positively with employee retention ($\rho=.16$, $p<.01$) and Learning Attitude correlates negatively with employee retention ($\rho=-.14$, $p<.05$).

Finally, the third research question focuses on the relationship between the personal characteristics of level of education, seniority, number of children and gender on the one hand, and employee retention on the other. The multiple stepwise regression showed a significant positive influence of seniority on employee retention ($t=2.907$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.139$). Apparently, the longer employees work for a company, the more they lean towards staying. One interviewee said "I love doing my job (career) because I have developed it throughout the years". The results show a significant correlation between employee retention and both seniority ($\rho=.16$, $p<.01$) and age ($\rho=.19$, $p<.01$). In the stepwise regression, age was excluded from the model because of its high correlation with seniority ($\rho=.78$, $p<.001$). Level of

education also had a significant influence on employee retention ($t=-2.436$, $p<.05$, $\beta=-.110$). It appears that employees with a lower level of education have a greater tendency to stay, than those with higher levels of education. However, the correlation between these two variables was not significant. Besides age, gender and the number of children were also excluded from the model. Gender and employee retention do not correlate significantly, and, remarkably, the number of children and employee retention do correlate significantly ($\rho=.15$, $p<.01$). All information regarding the coefficients of the stepwise regression can be seen in Table 2.

Employees' Learning and Retention

This investigation tentatively shows that the perception of the importance of learning to employees and the quality of work climate is a strong predictor of employee intentions to remain with their current employer. The finding that appreciation and stimulation have a strong positive influence on employee retention in itself is not surprising. It is in line with earlier findings regarding employee retention (Cotton and Tuttle 1986; Muchinsky and Morrow 1980; Tett and Meyer 1993; Trevor 2001; Walker 2001). However, because of its focus on learning, this research is able to add something to our understanding of what motivates employees to consider leaving their current employment. Other authors have mainly focused on appreciation as a part of leadership, and have concluded that support, encouragement, respect, and an opportunity to be heard by the direct supervisor enhance employee retention (Butcher and Kritsonis 2007; Howard 1997; Howard and Gould 2000; Taylor 2004). In this research, however, we have not focused on the direct supervisor or leader alone. Rather, questions have been formulated for the entire organisation and the climate in that organisation. Moreover, the factor derived from our statistical analysis contains items regarding stimulation also contains items regarding, among other things, stimulation to learn, developing the worker's talents, and opportunities to learn. This factor has been underdeveloped in research aimed at furthering understanding of employee retention. Other research studies have investigated the

Table 2 Multiple stepwise linear regression: coefficients

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	95% confidence interval for B	
	B	Std. error	β			Lower bound	Upper bound
(Constant)	.267	.201		1.328	.185	−.129	.663
Appreciation and stimulation	.669	.042	.670	16.054	.000	.587	.751
Leadership skills	.143	.042	.145	3.450	.001	.062	.225
Learning attitude	−.086	.042	−.089	−2.044	.042	−.169	−.003
Pressure of work	−.190	.046	−.190	−4.159	.000	−.280	−.100
Seniority	.014	.005	.139	2.907	.004	.004	.023
Level of education	−.095	.039	−.110	−2.436	.015	−.171	−.018

relationship of employee learning with job satisfaction (Rowden 2002; Rowden and Conine 2005), but not with employee retention. Firstly, although job satisfaction is a key factor for employee retention (Meisinger 2007), job satisfaction is not the same as employee retention. Secondly, these researchers have investigated workplace learning, whereas this research has taken into account stimulation for personal development. In summary, the positive contribution of appreciation and stimulation is consistent with the findings of earlier researchers, but the current research has examined retention from another perspective. In particular, the importance of personal development to employees is contributing further to the understanding about employee retention and also creates new possibilities when attempting to enhance employee retention. Another aspect of the learning and working climate that was measured was pressure of work, which was shown to have a significant negative relationship with employee retention. This finding has a series of implications for workplace norms and practices, and is problematic, because potentially it could be used by employers to argue against the provision of skill development in workplaces. However, what is proposed here is that the inclusion in work practices and norms of a rich array of experiences and opportunities for learning may well assist increasing the retention of skilled workers. This finding was anticipated from the literature regarding earlier research, which has indicated that a healthy balance between professional and personal life is important for employee retention (Hytter 2007; Walker 2001). A high pressure of work does not contribute to a healthy balance.

Besides the organisational factors, personal factors can also play a role in the retention of employees. This study shows that individual differences can enhance or reduce employee retention. Self-perceived leadership skills and seniority are positively related with employee retention. It seems that respondents with a longer career within the company feel more strongly connected to the company and tend not to leave. The level of education and readiness and initiative to learn relate negatively to employee retention. This finding could suggest that employees with a readiness and the initiative to learn want to be challenged in their current job and want to have the opportunity to learn. A negative relation between the level of education and employee retention is in line with the findings of Angle and Perry (1983) and Glisson and Durick (1988).

Findings of this study show the importance of considering both the personal (level of education, seniority, self-perceived leadership skills, and learning attitude) and the organisational factors (appreciation and stimulation, and pressure of work) when investigating employee retention. The interplay between organisation and person is crucial when determining and meeting the needs of skilled employees in order to secure their ongoing engagement with the workplace.

The fact that employers were not willing to release information about their high potentials and the fact that the perceptions of the employees themselves were used in this respect could have blurred the results. Investigation of this aspect of the research question, using more objective measures for identifying high potentials, may be an interesting topic for future research. Prior research on employee retention with a focus on learning was limited, and therefore the construction of questionnaires used in the current study was based on the literature. The findings that have been described are very interesting and promising. However, further research is needed to verify the factor structure and the relationships found. Moreover, since all companies participated on a voluntary basis, most respondents received the questionnaire by

e-mail or the intranet and had the opportunity to participate in the quantitative part of this research. Future research could investigate whether results are different when employees in different functions participate, what the differences are between the different groups of employees, and whether their function has a predictive value for employee retention. It would also be interesting to expand this qualitative part of the research to make a systematic analysis of the data possible.

Appendix: Overview factor items and factor loadings

Factor items independent variables

Factor 1: **Appreciation and Stimulation** (explained variance 16.91%, α=.94)

5.   The executive staff try to understand the problems employees experience in their work.
6.   On the job I have sufficient opportunity to use my personal talents and use my initiative.
7.   The executive staff in this company seem to make an effort to be nice to the employees.
11. At work there seems to be an honest interest in the things I'm doing outside of work.
12. The executive staff in this company always appear to be ready to give advice about how I can learn something new.
14. We can criticise the work regulations and our criticisms are heard.
19. When reforms are implemented, it's because somebody had a good idea which was implemented.
28. My company gives me the opportunity to get training in subjects that interest me.
30. My company stimulates me to think about where I stand and where I need to get to achieve the company goals.
31. In this company they believe in me.
35. In this company people can really choose what work they want to do.
36. At work I am doing stimulates me to develop myself in things that I'm not yet very good at.
37. The company motivates me to develop, if possible, my own work-related interests.
38. In this company I have the opportunity to organise my work so that it fits the way I learn.
39. For a large part, I determine how I work.
43. There are lots of ways that I can choose to learn.
46. Our ideas and interests are taken serious by executive staff.
48. My company gives me the opportunity to specialise in my strengths.
49. Most executives make an effort to get to know us.
51. I have the feeling that I have to put my own ideas aside to meet the corporate strategy.
52. In my job I have the opportunity to do something with my skills and knowledge.
53. In my job I am stimulated to think about the skills that I am good at.
55. We have a lot of freedom of choice when it comes to the tasks we have to do.
56. My executive appreciates it when someone has a new way of looking at a problem.

Factor 2: **Leadership Skills** (explained variance 10.03%, α=.89)

1.   I can communicate, present and give a speech well.
8.   I can convince everyone of the correctness and necessity of the ideas and actions I propose and undertake.
9.   When doing my work I use my creativity and inventiveness.
15. I think of feasible and concrete actions that are in accordance with my personal vision and goals.
20. I can assign task to the right people in a clear manner.

22. When I'm speaking in a group, I draw everyone's full attention.
27. I'm able to motivate others to do their tasks as well as possible.
33. When I'm working in team, I easily take the lead.
34. I know very well what my strong points are.
40. I make good decisions, even when I'm under pressure.
42. I find myself capable of taking on an executive function in this company.
44. I have an executive function in this company.
50. Others in this company see me as someone who takes the lead easily.
57. When an unexpected situation occurs and people panic, I remain calm.

Factor 3: **Pressure of Work** (explained variance 6.59%, α=.88)

17. The work pressure is too high here.
21. I sometimes think that my job asks too many different things of me.
25. The constant pressure of work—things that need to be done, deadlines and competition—make me tense and sometimes depressed.
26. There is a lot of work to do.
41. Within the company a lot of the time the focus is on my weaknesses.
54. As an employee I am put under a lot of pressure.

Factor 4: **Following Procedures** (explained variance 6.10%, α=.81)

13. When I do my work, I follow the instructions closely, even when they are not in line with my own ideas.
16. When innovations are made, it is usually because management has decided on a corporate strategy and corporate goals and we then try to accomplish these goals as well as possible.
24. In my job it is very important that I do what is expected of me as closely as possible.
32. Usually when a problem occurs I rely on procedures that are dictated by the company.
45. In this company, expectations are that I should spend a lot of time on learning.
47. For most situations at work, procedures are enforced by the company.

Factor 5: **Learning Attitude** (explained variance 5.14%, α=.80)

2. When I want to learn something that can be useful in the workplace, I take the initiative.
3. To gain insight into a complex problem, I let my imagination run free, even when a solution does not seem to be close at hand.
4. I love undertaking activities on my own initiative.
10. Some subjects that arise during work are so interesting that I investigate them further, even when it is not necessary for my work.
18. I love to accept complex and challenging tasks.
23. If I get the chance to learn, I will definitely take it.
29. I think it is important to learn throughout my life.

Factor loadings independent variables

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
1.		,496			,402
2.					,422
3.					,483
4.					,487
5.	,604				

	1	2	3	4	5
6.	,656				
7.	,417				
8.		,478			
9.		,465			
10.					,628
11.	,432				
12.	,641				
13.				,616	
14.	,576				
15.		,424			
16.				,554	
17.			,786		
18.		,479			,444
19.	,533				
20.		,509			
21.			,628		
22.		,552			
23.					,599
24.				,690	
25.			,749		
26.			,712		
27.		,634			
28.	,583				
29.					,691
30.	,620				
31.	,683				
32.				,640	
33.		,711			
34.		,507			
35.	,567				
36.	,681				
37.	,704				
38.	,505				
39.	,423			−,431	
40.		,612			
41.			,480		
42.		,728			
43.	,655				
44.		,580			
45.				,439	
46.	,732				
47.				,718	
48.	,724				
49.	,713				
50.		,758			

51.	−,480		
52.	,669		
53.	,742		
54.			,816
55.	,555		
56.	,554		
57.		,427	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Values under .40 suppressed.

Factor items employee retention

Dependent factor: **Employee retention** (explained variance 49.13%, α=.91)

a. I'm planning on working for another company within a period of three years.

b. Within this company my work gives me satisfaction.

c. If I wanted to do another job or function, I would look first at the possibilities within this company.

d. I see a future for myself within this company.

e. It doesn't matter if I'm working for this company or another, as long as I have work.

f. If it were up to me, I will definitely be working for this company for the next five years.

g. If I could start over again, I would choose to work for another company.

h. If I received an attractive job offer from another company, I would take the job.

i. The work I'm doing is very important to me.

j. I love working for this company.

k. I have checked out a job in another company previously.

Factor loadings employee retention

	Component 1
a.	,791
b.	,789
c.	,621
d.	,768
e.	,494
f.	,820
g.	,658
h.	,734
i.	,534
j.	,815
k.	,586

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

1 components extracted.

Values under .40 suppressed.

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