Intention to quit amongst Generation Y academics in higher education

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Orientation: For a higher education institution (HEI) to maintain a long-term trajectory of excellence, a strong focus on retaining a younger generation of skilled academics is needed.

Research purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate intention to quit amongst Generation Y academics in HEIs.

Motivation for the study: Higher education institutions are more dependent on the abilities and commitment of their staff than most other organisations. More than 4000 academics will retire and need to be replaced by 2018, providing justification for the study of intention to quit of academics.

Research design, approach and method: An ex post facto quantitative research design was followed. Academics at six HEIs in South Africa were sampled. Measurement instruments included abridged versions of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Arnold and Feldman Intention to Quit Scale, Job Descriptive Scale and Chew's reward scale.

Main findings: Employee engagement, job satisfaction, remuneration, reward, recognition and transformational leadership were significantly related to intention to quit. In the partial model, three of these variables explained 45% of the variance in intention to quit. Partial least square path modelling revealed that employee engagement and job satisfaction have significant negative impacts on intention to quit.

Practical/managerial implications: The findings serve as input for the development of efficacious strategies to retain Generation Y academics at HEIs in South Africa.

Contribution/value-add: This study contributes to our knowledge of intention to quit amongst Generation Y academics. It provides evidence of the complexity and inter-relatedness of variables in the phenomenological network of intention to quit.

Introduction

Talent retention is currently an international challenge across industries, and especially amongst academic personnel at higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. In the current war for talent, turnover in particular is problematic when an organisation loses its most talented and skilled employees (Boshoff, Van Wyk, Hoole & Owen, 2002; Grobler & De Bruyn, 2011; Taplin & Winterton, 2007). Organisations will have to acquire an interest in more than mere profitability should they aim to be dominant in a global economy. These interests will include the attraction, development and retention of talent (Boninelli & Meyer, 2004). According to Bergiel, Nguyen, Clenney, and Taylor (2009), there is a need for a strategic approach regarding talent management and the effective management of employee turnover to avoid negative implications, such as high economic costs and disrupted social and communicative structures. Therefore, management expects that money invested to recruit, select and develop the next generation of employees will yield a return on investment. Retention of human resources is critically important in organisations where financial sustainability and survival depend on scarce human and specialist skills (Pienaar & Bester, 2008). To aggravate the problem of retaining young employees, job mobility is increasing and organisations are finding it more difficult to retain skilled employees. Knowledgeable employees display high levels of mobility, as the psychological contract has shifted from a previous emphasis on job security and loyalty to the current emphasis on employability and loyalty to one's own career and experience (Sutherland, 2005).

Bakos (2007) reports that South African organisations face a scenario in which the demand for highly skilled employees is far greater than the supply. This phenomenon is compounded by the fact that most organisations are in search of this scarce resource, and talent pools are rapidly becoming exhausted as globalisation increases and talented employees become more

mobile (Botha, Bussin & De Swardt, 2011; Grobler & De Bruyn, 2011; Mendes & Stander, 2011; Minchington, 2010). Given the high demand for talent globally, employees with scarce skills have various career alternatives, and even in difficult economic times have a choice about where, for whom and for how long they work (Waldman & Arora, 2004). According to Hellman (1997), whilst healthy turnover in an organisation can be affirmative, stimulating and helpful in initiating innovative ideas and techniques that can move the organisation to greater levels of success, turnover amongst highly productive employees is costly. Even though employees may intend to leave willingly due to the relocation of a spouse, a redefined personal role (for example, primary caregiver for an aging parent or staying home with a child) or retirement, of particular apprehension to the employer and human resources is when highly productive employees intend to leave based on reasons often within the control of the employer (Berry, 2010). Berry emphasises that, from a practical point of view, the examination of an employee's turnover intent provides human resource departments with the opportunity to take a proactive approach to increasing retention and delaying turnover in an organisation, as opposed to obtaining the same information from an exit interview associated with voluntary turnover.

Talent retention and Generation Y

Smola and Sutton (2002) note that organisations in the new millennium are faced with baby boomers exiting the workplace, but are also confronted with the task of attracting and retaining a younger workforce that may differ significantly from previous generations. Various experts define Generation Y, the young or next generation of employees, in several ways, but generally include those born between 1980 and 2000. Each generation possesses unique characteristics that affect their work ethic, relationships, how they manage change and their perception of organisational hierarchy (Glass, 2007). Generation Y individuals look to develop new skills, are progressive thinkers, are able to process information quickly, are eager to embrace change, and are constantly looking for new approaches and seeking the next challenge (Botelho, 2008; Herbison & Boseman, 2009; Wordon, 2009). Henry (2006) explains that Generation Y individuals:

> are self-confident, outspoken, passionate, opinionated, loyal and impatient. They are easily bored and happily move on to other things and interests. They have high expectations of their parents, friends, colleagues and managers. They are ambitious, in a hurry and expect work and life to co-exist harmoniously, even though they are not sure how to make it work yet. They are in demand in the workplace and they know it. (p. 1)

Henry (2006) emphasises, moreover, that Generation Y individuals are motivated by opportunities for self-improvement and engage in training, learning and development activities. These opportunities for growth motivate Generation Y employees to work harder and achieve their goals as effectively as possible; in return, they hold high expectations of their employers in terms of benefits, flexibility and compensation. According to Lieber (2010), Generation Y employees have a unique, flexible work style that managers may find challenging. They value flexibility in the workplace and will challenge the status quo. Lieber concurs with Henry that flexibility and the opportunity to pursue personal growth are highly motivational to Generation Y employees.

A generation is defined by Strauss and Howe (1992) as a given cohort group of members born in a limited span of consecutive years – approximately 22 – and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality. The authors further interpret peer personality as a generational persona recognised and determined by common age and location, shared beliefs and behaviour and perceived membership of a common generation. Different generations demand a different style of management and will have a definite impact on human resource policies and procedures (Horgan, 2008).

Higher education in South Africa

The National Development Plan (NDP) – Vision 2030 has two guiding objectives: the eradication of poverty and promotion of equality. Higher education is a critical role-player in the achievement of these objectives through inter alia quality learning and teaching, teaching professionalism in higher education, technology in support of research, learning and teaching and the overall increase in research outputs, access, participation, throughput and graduation rates as indicators of quality higher education (Republic of South Africa, 2012). The academic profession is central to these initiatives as well as the functioning of any HEI. Without well-qualified and committed academic staff, no academic institution can really ensure sustainability and quality contributions over the long term (Pienaar, 2005). According to numerous sources (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua & Stough, 2001; Martin, 1999; Oshagbemi, 2000; Rowley, 1996), HEIs therefore are even more dependent on the intellectual and creative abilities and commitment of their academic staff than most other organisations.

The current core workforce of HEIs in South Africa typically comprises mature and experienced academics. Statistics show that, as of 1 April 2011, the percentage of academics younger than 35 at HEIs in South Africa was approximately 30% (Boughey & Botha, 2011) of the academic workforce (refer to Table 1). Badat (2008), estimates that, based on the current retirement age of 65, 4000 academics (27% of academics) will retire and need to be replaced by 2018. For professors and associate professors, who constitute the best qualified and most experienced academics, the percentage rises to almost 50%. Academics older than 50 have increasingly come to bear the responsibility of publishing. Thus, Generation Y academics will need to be equipped to take responsibility for conducting research and publishing, so that the knowledge needs of South Africa are met effectively (Badat, 2008).

In order for an institution to have a continuous cycle of research and teaching excellence, a focus on retaining newly recruited and developed academic staff is crucial. Evidently, the retention of academics should be a strategic priority, since it is difficult to replace the knowledge, skills and experience of academic staff (Simmons, 2002). The statistics

illustrated in Table 1 also reveal the unequal distribution of race and gender amongst academics at HEIs in South Africa. Pienaar and Bester (2006) highlight the fact that an academic career is probably no longer as desirable and attractive as was previously believed, which aggravates the challenge of retaining academics in South Africa. According to Anderson, Richard and Saha (2002), a decline in the image and status associated with an academic career is evident.

Badat (2008) adds three unique challenges for HEIs in South Africa. Firstly, the higher education sector has to compete with industry to retain young skilled academics. A second challenge is ensuring that the next generation of academics possesses the teaching and learning capabilities that are essential to produce high-quality graduates and to enhance equity of opportunity and outcomes for students (Badat, 2008; Pienaar & Bester, 2008; Simmons, 2002). Thirdly, Badat argues that the next generation of academics also has to contribute to the transformation of institutional cultures, especially at historically White institutions.

Inadequate remuneration for South African academics, relative to occupations in the public and private sector that require similar levels of qualifications and expertise, adds to the dilemma. According to various researchers, the remuneration differentials between HEIs and the public and private sectors are significant and widening (Badat, 2008; Du Plooy & Snyman, 2004; Oshagbemi & Hickson, 2003; Pienaar & Bester, 2006). Koen (as cited in Pienaar & Bester, 2006) concurs that insufficient financial remuneration is also one of the most important reasons that young, competent academics cannot be recruited or retained for higher education in South Africa.

Badat (2008) is in agreement with Naidu and Govender (2004), who predicted an increasing shortage of academic staff at South African HEIs due to the 'brain drain' and more attractive options in the private sector. The public and private sectors, together with emigration, yield a powerful pull for current academics as well as master's and doctoral graduates. This situation results in a minimal flow of highly qualified graduates from the private and public sectors to HEIs, to the detriment of the institutions, the economy and society. This concurs with the recommendations of Du Plooy and Snyman (2004) and Gillespie *et al*. (2001).

In addition to the preceding challenges, it also is important to bear in mind that institutions have to provide quality education (Jacobsz, 2012) that is flexible and innovative enough to cater for the changes in the workforce. These changes include the advancement of globalisation, liberalisation and technological expansion (Shirley, n.d.). According to Pienaar and Bester (2006), the successful management of the careers of academic staff, amidst all the demands and changes, influences the success, functioning and sustainability of any HEI. Substantial commitment on the part of administrators and academics to foster a positive emotional or affective attachment to their job and workplace is required in order to effectively bear these added roles and responsibilities (Shirley, n.d.). Turnover rates at HEIs may be lower than in other industry segments, but the loss of a single individual can be more costly, as scientific professionals are very valuable. Unlike for-profit firms, which are profit maximisers, HEIs are prestige maximisers, competing for rank and status in the academic world (Leslie & Rhoades, 1995; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). The employees of HEIs therefore face different challenges from employees working in the corporate environment, which means that standard organisational theories that apply to the corporate sector are inadequate in describing organisational behaviour in higher education (Jo, 2008).

Higher education institutions are dependent on external funding from government and organisations; therefore, they need to exist as centres of excellence in order to broaden their national and international recognition, which will in turn attract financial assistance. Branding the institution as a centre of excellence and a knowledgeable enterprise will attract more national and international students. If HEIs continue to lose academics, their national and international image and competitive advantage, as well as their ability to generate new knowledge in a specific field, may be affected adversely (Pienaar & Bester, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative to identify and address antecedents of intention to quit amongst Generation Y academics to ensure that the quality and sustainability of HEIs are not jeopardised (Pienaar, 2005; Ssesanga & Garrett, 2005; Trotman, Bennet, Scheffler & Tulloch, 2002). De Bruin and Taylor (2005) highlight that studies focusing on this unique sector are scarce. Due to the lack of information concerning Generation Y academia in South Africa, there have been missed opportunities for growth and development. This could have affected the organisational performance and staffing in organisations and academia, particularly in the light of the forecasted shortages in higher education. The notion that an academic career is less attractive may have far-reaching consequences for higher education and society as a whole, as well as for the economy of the country. If South African HEIs want

TABLE 1: Total number of permanent full-time academics within higher education on 01 April 2011.

Occupational category	Male				Total male	Female				Total female	†Total male and female	Age groups		
	A	M	I	W		A	M	I	W			<35	35–55	>55
Professors	124	22	16	700	**862**	17	8	4	207	**236**	**1098**	62	583	757
Associate Professors	170	13	18	419	**620**	32	3	16	262	**313**	**933**	81	671	397
Senior Lecturers	383	29	32	582	**1026**	175	18	28	625	**846**	**1872**	358	1329	498
Lecturers	822	70	77	923	**1892**	561	79	129	1233	**2002**	**3894**	1355	1982	1006
Junior/Assistant Lecturers	170	12	3	71	**256**	131	16	9	182	**338**	**594**	359	200	28

Source: Adapted from Boughey, J., & Botha, L. (2011). *Mini Sector Skills Plan (SSP)*. Unpublished manuscript. Public Higher Education (HE) Constituency, p. 17
A, African (Black); I, Indian; M, mixed-race; W, White.
†, Totals exclude Walter Sisulu University, Tshwane University of Technology and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

to attract, manage, retain, develop and utilise their most expensive commodity, namely human resources, whilst ensuring growth and continued existence at the same time, they should understand the career phases of academics as well as the antecedents that lead to intention to quit amongst employees – Generation Y academic employees in this instance. By increasing the understanding of employees' intention to quit, management will be able to retain talented human capital that is committed to the goals of the institution (Shirley, n.d.). If the career obstacles of young academics are not addressed, there could be a variety of negative outcomes for HEIs in general, as well as for South Africa as a whole. The numerous challenges facing higher education in South Africa reinforce the importance of the current study to add to the body of literature on higher education in the country. The next generation of academics brings about additional challenges for HEIs to apply innovative human resources and organisational development theories and processes, based on the uniqueness of this sector in South Africa in comparison to the private and public sector.

Research objectives

It is against this background that the research question for this study was formulated as: *What are the antecedents that influence Generation Y academics' intention to quit at HEIs and how do those antecedents contribute to intention to quit?* The following literature and empirical objectives were set:

1. To investigate the scope of antecedents that influence intention to quit and to propose a theoretical model of variables influencing intention to quit.
2. To empirically determine the relative importance of the different variables in predicting intention to quit.
3. To empirically determine the relationships between the identified variables and intention to quit.
4. To investigate how HEIs can shape their human resource policies and practices to retain employees and reduce the intention to quit amongst Generation Y academics.
5. To make recommendations to human resources and senior management at HEIs on rationally and purposefully monitoring and managing the retention of Generation Y academics.

The literature review focused on the identification of antecedents that influence intention to quit (objective 1). The identified variables are discussed in the following sections and the resulting hypotheses are stated.

Employee engagement and intention to quit

This study supports Schaufeli and Bakker's (2003) definition of employee engagement as:

> a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour. (p. 4)

According to Jamrog (2004), organisations must create strategies in order to build a culture that retains and engages

their skilled employees and relies less on traditional pay and benefits and more on the creation of a work environment that allows employees to grow and develop. Through growth and development, employees are enriched, which will enhance their satisfaction levels. Direct line managers and supervisors will be key stakeholders to ensure employee engagement through providing training and career development opportunities, feedback and communication related to the organisation's mission and value statements.

A 2003 attitude survey of more than 10 000 employees in 14 organisations by the Institute for Employment Studies confirmed several positive reactions to engagement, namely a positive attitude towards, and pride in, the organisation, a belief in the organisation's products and services, a perception that the organisation enables the employee to perform well, and a willingness to behave altruistically and be a good team player (Marshall, 2011). It furthermore reported that an understanding of the bigger picture and a willingness to go beyond the requirements of the job are also vital characteristics of an engaged employee. The contribution of engaged employees to organisations is undisputed. It is believed that engaged employees who experience high levels of job satisfaction are a great asset to any organisation. Therefore it is possible to formulate the first hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 1: Employee engagement has a significant positive influence on job satisfaction.

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) argue that engaged employees are likely to have a greater attachment to their organisation and a lower tendency to leave their organisation. Furthermore, employee engagement positively affects operating income, operating margin, net profit margin, employee retention, absenteeism and quality errors, providing evidence that engaged employees can have a significant positive effect on the organisation's success (Cook & Green, 2011). Clayton (2011) confirms that engaged employees are willing to portray a variety of behaviours that add to organisational success, namely commitment, participation, enthusiasm, initiative, honesty, advocacy and creativity. However, in return the engaged employee expects relationships with their line manager and colleagues, respect, adequate leadership, meaningful work, recognition, and feeling valued and supported. Employee engagement has been found to be positively related to organisational commitment and negatively related to intention to quit, and is believed to also be related to job performance and extra-role behaviour (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Sonnentag, 2003). The question could be posed whether employee engagement manifests differently for various age cohorts. In her book, *Meet the Millennials*, Leigh Buchanon wrote that 'almost 70% of Generation Y employees stated that corporate social responsibility and being civically engaged are their highest priorities' (as cited in Gilbert, 2011, p. 26). Therefore, it is important that organisations pay attention to employee engagement, as well as to civic engagement. According to Gilbert (2011), it can be concluded that, when it comes to employee engagement, generational differences do exist and it is important that employers adopt the belief that, in order

to sustain prolonged engagement and decrease the intention to quit amongst their employees, they must understand and carefully manage the engagement drivers and threats. This gives rise to the second hypothesis:

• Hypothesis 2: Employee engagement has a significant negative influence on intention to quit.

Job satisfaction and intention to quit

Job satisfaction is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon with numerous antecedents, which can include satisfaction with the work itself, pay, promotion opportunities, supervision and co-workers. Furthermore, job satisfaction represents an effective response to specific aspects of the job and is defined as: 'a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job including facets of that job' (Silverthorne, 2005, p. 171).

Regardless of the population being surveyed, most researchers tend to agree that employers benefit when employees experience high levels of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has also been tied to increased productivity, creativity and commitment to the employer. It is believed that one of the primary variables that influence retention is job satisfaction. Pienaar and Bester (2008) and Oehley (2007) reiterate this relationship by reporting that there are various studies that link low levels of job satisfaction with increased labour turnover.

However, Steers (1977) argues that there is an unresolved debate as to whether job satisfaction has a direct effect on turnover intention, or whether it is moderated through organisational commitment, which might still be unresolved, as many researchers are continuously investigating the linkages. It is very likely that high levels of dissatisfaction could influence employees to consider alternative job options. Whether an employee will really leave an organisation in such a case, or should an intention be apparent, is in most cases determined by alternative opportunities in the labour market (Spector, 1997). Job dissatisfaction not only has an effect on the organisation, as it increases the intention to quit of employees, but it also reduces the contribution of the employee to the organisation, which has a direct effect on the organisation's success (Lok & Crawford, 2003). Therefore:

• Hypothesis 3: Job satisfaction has a significant negative influence on intention to quit.

Remuneration, reward and recognition and intention to quit

Remuneration, reward and recognition can be monetary or non-monetary and influence the recruitment and retention of employees (Highhouse, Stierwalk, Bachiochi, Elder & Fisher, 1999; Parker & Wright, 2001). However, these studies recognise that remuneration in isolation will not be sufficient to retain employees and that, ultimately, employees stay because they are fond of their colleagues, and are engaged and challenged by work that improves their skills and abilities.

Irvine (2010) reports that the recognition of success in the workplace requires a strategic initiative with actionable objectives and measurable results that integrate positively with the organisation's culture. Irrespective of the industry, senior management should continuously explore how to best reward and recognise the achievements of employees, as employees perceive recognition as a sign of appreciation of their contribution.

A survey by Salary.com reported that 34.2% of employees felt that there was insufficient recognition or appreciation of their work, talents and capabilities, and provided this as the reason for leaving their jobs (Janas, 2009). Rosser (2004) argues that perceptions of work life, including rewards, have a direct impact on job satisfaction and intentions to leave. Giles (2004) suggests that managers should aim to understand employee motivation and the role of recognition in order to retain their key employees. When employees feel they are appreciated and a priority to their organisation, it might contribute to a positive organisational culture. In order for an organisation to implement a successful reward and recognition policy, it is important to determine from their employees what they value, and to align the policy in order to be sound, fair and competitive.

Park, Erwin and Knapp (1997) argue that, although compensation provides some recognition, non-monetary recognition is also important. Employees may express greater commitment and tend to remain with the organisation when they feel their capabilities, efforts and performance contributions are recognised and appreciated (Davies, 2001). Line managers also play an important role in the perception by employees of remuneration, reward and recognition, as Tulgan (2003) acknowledges that employees rely on their immediate line manager or supervisor to consider, recommend, advocate and convey employees' recognition, raises, promotions and other rewards. A survey conducted at Prudential Financials confirmed that recognition is not only an important part of the employee performance equation, but is equally important in the retention equation (Parus, 2002).

Every generation wants to earn more money, although money is not always the most important part of retaining Generation Y employees (Cave, 2002; Fallon, 2009). Earning a great deal of money appears to be less of a motivator for this generation, whereas contributing to society, parenting well, and enjoying a fulfilled and balanced life appear to be more motivating (Burmeister, 2009; Fallon, 2009; Ferri-Reed, 2010). Dinnell (2007) affirms that remuneration is important to Generation Y employees, but that they also yearn for non-monetary recognition, as it feeds their self-esteem. Roy and Kreiss (2008) highlight that the next generation workforce does not believe in the old equation of time put in equals promotion, but rather looks at their individual contribution to the organisation and to the team as a metric for promotion and merit rewards. According to Tulgan (2009), the critical element in rewarding Generation Y is to communicate clearly that rewards are tied to concrete actions within their

own direct control, thereby replacing the previous reward method, in which employees were paid based on the work they completed. As mentioned by Irvine (2010), strategic recognition must be frequent and timely in order to meet the needs of Generation X and Generation Y employees whilst avoiding the micro-management pitfalls. Subsequently, this study links reward and recognition to remuneration in order to recognise that remuneration alone will not be sufficient to retain and satisfy employees, and that remuneration, reward and recognition could be viewed as an antecedent of job satisfaction and intention to quit. Therefore:

• Hypothesis 4: Acceptable remuneration, reward and recognition have a significant positive influence on job satisfaction.

Transformational leadership and intention to quit

Transformational leaders are regarded as active leaders and have four distinct characteristics, according to Bass and Avolio (1994): idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. These four characteristics will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Idealised influence: The leader instils pride and faith in subordinates, provides a vision and a sense of mission, gains respect and trust and sets high standards for emulation. This stimulates strong emotions and identification with the leader in the subordinates.

Inspirational motivation: The leader inspires subordinates to accept challenging goals, provides meaning for engaging in shared goals and arouses team spirit through enthusiasm and optimism. The leaders effectively communicate an appealing vision, using symbols to focus subordinates' efforts and modelling appropriate behaviours. Therefore, a transformational leader can increase intrinsic motivation by increasing the perception amongst subordinates that task objectives are consistent with their authentic interests and values.

Individualised consideration: The leader recognises individual uniqueness, links the individuals' current needs to the organisation's needs, and provides mentoring and growth opportunities. Individualised consideration can also include providing support, encouragement and coaching to subordinates.

Intellectual stimulation: The leader encourages subordinates to approach problems in new ways and to creatively think of new ways to carry out their daily responsibilities. Therefore, the leader increases subordinates' awareness of problems and influences subordinates to view problems from a new perspective (Mester, Visser, Roodt & Kelle, 2003; Schlechter, 2005; Schlechter & Engelbrecht, 2006; Yukl, 2006).

Managers are responsible for driving the organisational culture, and their ability to influence the development of engagement or disengagement is immense. According to Buckingham and Coffman (1999), engagement within an organisation can thrive in environments in which employees feel cared about and valued, which translates into meaningful and safe environments. This is an integral part of a transformational leader. Therefore it can be argued that leaders can influence engagement levels by formulating an engaging vision statement that gives meaning to employees (Cook & Green, 2011).

• Hypothesis 5: The experience of positive transformational leadership has a significant positive influence on employee engagement.

Transformational leadership is known for empowering subordinates by delegating significant authority to individuals, developing subordinate skills and self-confidence, creating self-managed teams, providing direct access to sensitive information, eliminating unnecessary controls, and building a strong culture to support empowerment (Yukl, 2006). By empowering subordinates and increasing their self-confidence, managers can increase their job satisfaction. Job satisfaction in this study is seen as a multidimensional phenomenon that also places emphasis on the satisfaction that employees experience with their supervisors. Thus:

• Hypothesis 6: The experience of positive transformational leadership has a significant positive influence on job satisfaction.

Schlechter (2005) states that numerous scholars have found transformational leadership to be empirically related to a variety of organisational success and performance variables. These include employee satisfaction, organisational commitment, satisfaction levels with line managers, employee effectiveness, lower turnover intent, organisational citizenship behaviour, overall employee performance, effective leadership and trust. Thus, research has proven a distinguished relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, as well as organisational commitment. A study conducted by Larrabee et al. (2003) reports that job dissatisfaction was a major predictor of intention to quit. As noted, transformational leadership has been linked to job satisfaction (Firth, Mellor, Moore, & Loquet, 2004; Tepper, 2000) and it is believed that transformational leadership may reduce the intention to quit of employees by creating a working environment in which employees experience job satisfaction. These findings have led to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

• Hypothesis 7: The experience of positive transformational leadership has a significant negative influence on intention to quit.

These variables can be depicted in the Partial theoretical model of antecedents of intention to quit. (Refer to Figure 1.)

Research design
Research approach

The ex post facto quantitative research design included a self-administered Web-based questionnaire. Ethical clearance was obtained from Stellenbosch University's ethical committee.
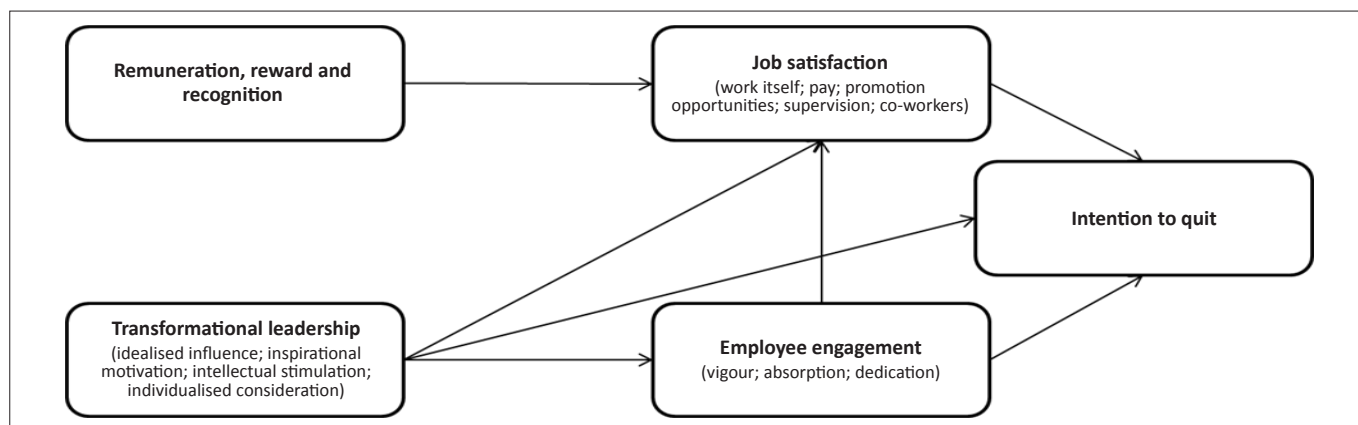
FIGURE 1: Partial theoretical model of antecedents of intention to quit.

Research method

Research participants

The sample population (*n* = 189) consisted of Generation Y academics between the ages of 20 and 30 years at six HEIs in South Africa, three of which are situated in the Western Cape, two in Gauteng and one in North West. The percentage of female respondents (60%) was higher than that of male respondents (40%). This result contradicts the gender profile of academics at the 23 HEIs in South Africa compiled in April 2011, which showed a female representation of 45% and a male representation of 55% (Boughey & Botha, 2011). The majority of the sample belonged to the White population group (78.31%, followed by the African population group (12.17%). The ethnic group representation concur with one of the challenges raised by Badat (2008), namely that Generation Y academics will have to contribute to the transformation of institutional cultures, especially at historically White institutions. The respondents predominantly held a master's degree (56%) and were in the early career stage (junior lecturer and lecturer, 82%) with a tenure of between zero and three years (65%). The sample is a very good representation of the different faculties (according to size) at most of the HEIs in South Africa. Therefore, it strengthens the confidence that the results can be cautiously generalised to the Generation Y academic population at HEIs in South Africa.

Measuring instruments

The research utilised a combined questionnaire consisting of six sections. Each of the measurement instruments was selected for the purpose of this study based on the reported psychometric properties and guidelines for acceptable psychometric properties as proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Section A of the questionnaire consisted of questions regarding the demographic profile of the sample population.

Employee engagement: Section B measured employee engagement based on the shortened version of Schaufeli and Bakker's (2003) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). The UWES-9 consists of nine statements with three highly correlated sub-scales, namely vigour (three items), dedication (three items) and absorption (three items). Extensive previous

testing (that included almost 12 000 respondents from various countries (including South Africa) of the UWES-9 by Schaufeli and Bakker produced good reliabilities for the three employee engagement sub-scales ($0.79 < \alpha < 0.89$) and thus the scale was deemed appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Transformational leadership: Transformational leadership was measured in Section C by using an adapted version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5) as developed by Bass and Avolio (1994) and reported by Engelbrecht, Van Aswegen and Theron, 2005. The MLQ5 includes three sub-scales, namely transactional, transformational and laissez-faire leadership (Bass, 1997; Pillay, Williams, Low & Jung, 2003). Only items relevant to transformational leadership were chosen for the composite questionnaire employed in this study. The transformational leadership scale consists of four sub-scales that measure transformational leadership behaviours, namely idealised influence (eight items), inspirational motivation (four items), intellectual stimulation (four items) and individualised consideration (four items). Engelbrecht et al. report satisfactory internal consistency for the transformational leadership subscales with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.75 and 0.87. Schlechter and Strauss (2008) report the Cronbach's alpha value of the sub-scale as being 0.95.

Intention to quit: The shortened version of the Arnold and Feldman (1982) scale was used to measure intention to quit (four items) in Section D of the research study. Oehley (2007) reports an alpha coefficient of 0.85 for the four-item intention to quit scale and it was therefore deemed acceptable for use in the current study.

Job satisfaction: Section E measured job satisfaction, based on Gregson's (1990) 30-item Likert-type converted job descriptive index (JDI). Buckley, Carraher and Cote (1992) report satisfactory internal consistency for the converted JDI, with alpha coefficient values ranging between 0.65 and 0.98. This was regarded as satisfactory for the purposes of this study.

Remuneration, reward and recognition: Section F measured remuneration, reward and recognition using Chew's (2004)

synthesised five-item scale (focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic rewards). Chew reports a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76 for the scale.

Research procedure

Data collection was done by means of a self-administered Web-based questionnaire. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete and access to the questionnaire was secured by an username and password. An email request was sent to all full-time Generation Y academics at the participating institutions. The initial request was followed up by three follow-up emails within four weeks. Of the 210 responses that were recorded, 189 met the respondent parameters of the sample. A response rate of 27.7% was achieved.

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was performed using the STATISTICA 10 software program (developed and supported by Statsoft) and LISREL 8.80. Data analysis on all scales included: item analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation analysis, regression, structural equation modelling (SEM) and partial least squares path modelling (PLS).

Results
Psychometric properties of the measuring instruments

The psychometric properties of the measurement instruments were investigated. The coefficient alphas, as set out in Table 2, for all the scales and sub-scales were found to be acceptable and ranged between 0.73 and 0.96. No further corrective steps were undertaken to increase alpha values.

Variance extracted (VE) and construct reliability (CR) were also calculated (refer to Table 3). Variance extracted provides an estimate of the variation explained amongst items, and the cut-off value was set at 0.5. Construct reliability was used to further assess the reliability and internal consistency associated with the measurement items of each scale. The criterion was set at greater than 0.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). A VE of less than 0.5 indicates that a greater amount of variance in the items is explained by measurement error than by the underlying dimension. Thus, VE provides evidence to determine whether some measurement items should be considered for deletion.

Job satisfaction: The VE for the work itself sub-scale was recorded at 0.40 and did not meet the set criterion of greater than 0.5, which implies that further analysis with this sub-scale should be interpreted with caution. The CR met the set criterion (CR = 0.78).

Remuneration, reward and recognition: The VE for the scale was recorded at 0.42 and did not meet the set criterion of greater than 0.5. Further analysis with this scale should also be interpreted with caution. Construct reliability was calculated as 0.77, which met the set criterion of greater than 0.7.

The VE and CR of all the other scales and sub-scales (employee engagement and transformational leadership) met the set criterion of greater than 0.5 and 0.7 respectively. This indicates that all the other scales and sub-scales did not record a higher amount of variance in the items, as captured by measurement error compared to the underlying dimension. The CR results indicate that the items provide a reliable measurement of each scale.

Confirmatory factor analysis

According to Chew (2004) and Hair *et al*. (2006), factor analysis is best suited to identify relationships between a set of items in a scale, all designed to measure the same construct. To further test the construct validity of the various scales, CFA was performed for employee engagement, transformational leadership, intention to quit, job satisfaction and remuneration, reward and recognition.

The goodness-of-fit (GFI) statistic assesses how closely the covariance of the implied model reproduces the observed covariance matrix. It is based on the relevant amount of variance and covariance accounted for by the model. The

TABLE 2: Summary of the psychometric properties of the measuring instrument.

Scale and sub-scale	Number of items	M	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Employee engagement	**9**	**15.74**	**2.76**	**0.90**
Vigour	3	10.87	1.84	0.87
Dedication	3	10.18	1.87	0.87
Absorption	3	10.43	1.94	0.79
Transformational leadership	**20**	**16.92**	**4.5**	**0.96**
Idealised influence	8	12.61	3.45	0.92
Inspirational motivation	4	12.52	3.43	0.92
Intellectual stimulation	4	12.87	3.35	0.90
Individualised consideration	4	12.76	367	0.88
Intention to quit	**4**	**9.44**	**4.15**	**0.90**
Job satisfaction	30	18.78	2.69	0.75
Work itself	6	22.69	3.50	0.70
Pay	6	17.84	5.52	0.90
Promotion	6	19.81	4.86	0.85
Supervision	6	22.50	4.51	0.87
Co-workers	6	23.84	4.14	0.83
Remuneration, reward and recognition	5	15.77	325	0.73

M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 3: Variance extracted and construct reliability of scales.

Scale	Sub-scale	Variance extracted	Construct reliability
Job satisfaction	Work itself	0.40	0.78
	Pay	0.69	0.93
	Promotion	0.55	0.88
	Supervision	0.63	0.91
	Co-workers	0.58	0.89
Employee engagement	Absorption	0.60	0.81
	Dedication	0.76	0.90
	Vigour	0.79	0.92
Transformational leadership	Individualised consideration	0.70	0.90
	Idealised influence	0.65	0.94
	Inspirational motivation	0.79	0.94
	Intellectual stimulation	0.77	0.93
Remuneration, reward and recognition	-	0.42	0.77

TABLE 4: Confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement models.

Model fit indices	Employee engagement	Transformational leadership	Job satisfaction 1 (W & P)	Job satisfaction 2 (PR, C, S)	Remuneration, reward and recognition	Intention to quit
Absolute fit measures						
Root mean square error of approximation	0.105	0.092	0.066*	0.063*	0.13	0.234
Goodness-of-fit index	0.99	1	0.99	0.98	0.98	1
p-value for test of close fit	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.05	0.01	0.00
Adjusted goodness-of-fit index	0.99	0.99	0.98	0.97	0.95	0.99

C, co-workers; P, pay; PR, promotion; S, supervision; W, work itself.
*, $p > 0.05$

adjusted GFI (AGFI) measure attempts to account for the different degrees of model complexity by considering the degrees of freedom in the model. The GFI value for all the scales exceeded the cut-off value of 0.9, suggesting good model fit (Kelloway, 2008). The AGFI criterion of greater than 0.9 for all the scales was also met.

The results shown in Table 4 indicate that the model does not adequately reproduce the observed data. Only the job satisfaction scale indicated acceptable fit based on the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) measure. No items were deleted based on the CFA results as all the scales met the set criteria for the GFI and AGFI measures. Partial least squares path modelling was performed on all the total scales to confirm the CFA results (which in most cases reported norms that fell outside the set criteria) or to gain new insight into the goodness of fit of the model.

Correlation analysis: The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is a standardised measurement of the strength of the relationship between variables. It was used in the current study to determine the strength of the relationships between the constructs: employee engagement, transformational leadership, intention to quit, job satisfaction and remuneration, reward and recognition.

Employee engagement is positively related to job satisfaction ($r = 0.56$; $p < 0.01$), representing a large effect. This means that the more an academic is engaged in their position, the higher the level of job satisfaction. Employee engagement is also negatively related to intention to quit ($r = -0.44$; $p < 0.01$), which is a medium effect size. This therefore implies that an engaged academic would have less intention to quit their current position.

Transformational leadership is positively related to both job satisfaction ($r = 0.52$; $p < 0.01$) and employee engagement ($r = 0.52$; $p < 0.01$), and both correlations are of a medium effect size. This means that an increase in experiencing transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and employee engagement. Transformational leadership is also negatively related to intention to quit ($r = -0.37$; $p < 0.01$), representing a medium effect size. Thus, an increase in the experience of transformational leadership will result in a decrease in intention to quit.

Job satisfaction: is significantly negatively related to intention to quit ($r = -0.68$; $p < 0.01$), representing a large effect size. This means that the more satisfied academics are within their position, the lower their intention to quit.

Remuneration, reward and recognition: are significantly positively related to job satisfaction ($r = 0.72$; $p < 0.01$), and the coefficient represents a large effect size. This is an indication that an increase in acceptable remuneration, reward and recognition is associated with higher levels of job satisfaction. Remuneration, reward and recognition are also significantly negatively related to intention to quit ($r = -0.55$; $p < 0.01$), which represents a large effect size.

Even though Table 5 (total scores) illustrates that all the independent variables are significantly related to the dependent variable (intention to quit), their unique contribution to the explanation of intention to quit is still unclear. In order to determine whether each of the independent variables contributes significantly to the prediction (i.e. variance) of intention to quit, multiple regression analysis was performed.

Standard multiple regression

The advantage and power of multiple regression is that it enables the researcher to estimate the effect of each variable, controlling for the other variables. That is, it estimates what the slope would be if all other variables were controlled (Salkind, 2007). These results will assist in predicting intention to quit. The regression model includes employee engagement, transformational leadership, job satisfaction and remuneration, reward and recognition as the predictors (independent variables), and intention to quit as the criterion (dependent variable). The results of the multiple regression analysis are explicated in Table 6.

TABLE 5: Summary table of correlations.

Psychometric properties	EE	TL	JS	RRR	ITQ
EE	1	-	0.56*	-	-0.44*
TL	0.52*	1	0.52*	-	-0.37
JS	-	-	1	-	-0.68*
RRR	-	-	0.72*	1	-0.55
ITQ	-	-	-	-	1

EE, employee engagement; TL, transformational leadership; JS, job satisfaction; RRR, remuneration, reward and recognition; ITQ, intention to quit.
*, $p \leq 0.05$ – statistically significant

TABLE 6: Multiple regression model summary ($N = 189$).

Psychometric properties	b*	Standard error of b*	*p*-value
Employee engagement	-0.18	0.07	0.01
Transformational leadership	0.01	0.07	0.83
Job satisfaction	-0.50	0.09	<0.01
Remuneration, reward and recognition	-0.07	0.08	0.34

b*, standardised beta coefficient; $R^2 = 0.45$; F(4,184) = 37.624; Standard error of estimate: 0.78836. The dependent variable is: intention to quit.
$p < 0.0000$

In the multiple regression summary for the dependent variable, intention to quit, it was found that $R^2 = 0.45$, which means that approximately 45% of the variance in intention to quit can be explained by the three variables in the partial model.

The standardised beta coefficient (b*) indicates that remuneration, reward and recognition have an insignificant negative effect on intention to quit (b* = -0.07; $p = 0.34$). Based on the b* it is also evident that transformational leadership has an insignificant relationship with intention to quit (b* = 0.01; $p = 0.83$). The latter finding ties in with the previous negative relationship found by Griffith (2003) and Schlechter (2005).

Employee engagement has a negative effect on intention to quit (b* = -0.18; $p = 0.01$), which means that the more engaged an academic is, the less they will experience the intention to quit. Job satisfaction has a negative effect on intention to quit, (b* = -0.50; $p < 0.01$), therefore the higher the job satisfaction levels, the lower the intention to quit. This model is significant ($p < 0.00$). The latter two variables (employee engagement and job satisfaction) appear to be the strongest predictors of intention to quit. The negative relationship between employee engagement and intention to quit and the negative relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit are supported by the correlation analysis.

When considering all the results, it is clear that there might be mediating factors within the model, considering that remuneration, reward and recognition and transformational leadership were significant as single variables, but not within the entire proposed partial model (refer to Table 2 and Table 5).

Evaluating the structural model

The SEM path model was fitted using LISREL and was found to result in unacceptable fit (RMSEA = 0.123). No further interpretation or reporting will be done on the SEM results. The structural model was also evaluated by using the soft modelling approach to SEM, which involves the use of the partial least squares approach. Partial least squares path modelling is normally used for exploration and prediction, and used especially to avoid problems related to small sample sizes. It can estimate very complex models with many latent and manifest variables and has less stringent assumptions about the distribution of variables and error terms (Roux, 2010). According to Henseler, Ringle and Sinkovics (2009), the purpose of PLS path modelling is not to test a theory, but rather to facilitate prediction. In order to determine which paths between the different variables are significant, the bootstrapping method was used. The bootstrapping procedure provides confident intervals for all parameter estimates, building the basis for statistical inference. Commonly, the bootstrap technique provides an estimate of the shape, spread and bias of the sampling distribution of a specific statistic (Roux, 2010) and it treats the observed sample as if it represents the population (Davison & Hinkley, 2003; Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). (See Table 7.)

The PLS results suggest that, by including employee engagement, job satisfaction and remuneration, reward and recognition in the prediction of intention to quit, 45% of the variance will be explained. The PLS path coefficients produced significant paths between:

- Employee engagement and job satisfaction (accept Hypothesis 1)
- Employee engagement and intention to quit (accept Hypothesis 2)
- Job satisfaction and intention to quit (accept Hypothesis 3)
- Remuneration, reward and recognition and job satisfaction (accept Hypothesis 4)
- Transformational leadership and employee engagement (accept Hypothesis 5)
- Transformational leadership and job satisfaction (accept Hypothesis 6)

The findings of the PLS path modelling analysis are supported by the Pearson product-moment correlation findings, which reported significant relationships for all of the above paths. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis further showed a significant relationship between transformational leadership and intention to quit, which was not corroborated by the PLS path modelling analysis (reject Hypothesis 7).

Discussion

Employee turnover remains a concern in the current workplace, and even more so in HEIs. The results of the current study suggest that efforts to curb intention to quit in HEI should focus on the specific antecedents found to have a significant relationship with intention to quit. The strongest relationships were evident between employee engagement and intention to quit, as well as between job satisfaction and intention to quit. However, it is suggested that HEIs consider following a holistic approach to the study of phenomena (Darity, 2008; Strickland, 2001) to retain Generation Y academics as no single variable could explain a significant proportion of the variance.

TABLE 7: Partial least squares path modelling results.

Path	Path coefficient	Bootstrap lower (95%)	Bootstrap upper (95%)	Significant
Employee engagement to intention to quit	-0.18	-0.34	-0.02	Yes
Employee engagement to job satisfaction	0.31	0.20	0.42	Yes
Job satisfaction to intention to quit	-0.56	-0.69	-0.41	Yes
Remuneration, reward and recognition to job satisfaction	0.55	0.45	0.63	Yes
Transformational leadership to employee engagement	0.51	0.41	0.61	Yes
Transformational leadership to intention to quit	0.01	-0.13	0.15	No
Transformational leadership to job satisfaction	0.12	0.00	0.25	Yes

Higher education institutions should investigate the retention of Generation Y academics from a holistic perceptive, and not only on the basis of certain individual aspects. The substantial proportion of the variance explained in intention to quit by employee engagement, job satisfaction, remuneration, reward and recognition suggests that the variables included in this model have good predictive utility in understanding the intention of the current sample with respect to quitting. Therefore, HEIs should consider paying attention to all these antecedents. However, it may be neither practical nor possible to address all of these concerns at once. Nevertheless, when considering intention to quit, the management of HEIs should prioritise action plans in the short, medium and long term. Therefore, this study recommends that job satisfaction and employee engagement interventions take precedence over the short term.

Employee engagement and Generation Y academics: The management of HEIs should systematically attend to the employee engagement levels of academic staff by measuring them (for example, by conducting interviews or compiling an employee engagement questionnaire). The resultant interventions should address the most important aspects that have an impact on the employee engagement levels of Generation Y academics. Five focal areas that can be addressed in South African HEIs were identified in previous research (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006; Rothmann & Jordaan, 2006). Firstly, it is important to ensure that academics have variety, learning opportunities and autonomy in their jobs. These characteristics will contribute to the meaningfulness of an academic's work, which is an important consideration in the current management culture of HEIs. Secondly, academics must have the resources to do their work. Resources include, but are not limited to, challenging tasks and the availability of assistants. Thirdly, it should be acknowledged that academic leaders play an important role in promoting employee engagement. In addition, interventions should be implemented to ensure organisational support, including role clarity, good relationships with supervisors, clear communication of information and participation in decision-making. Lastly, advancement opportunities should be provided that include the remuneration, promotion and training of academics.

Schabracq (2003) has highlighted five ways in which transformational leaders can enhance employee engagement and, potentially, job satisfaction: (1) acknowledge and reward good performance instead of exclusively correcting sub-standard performance, (2) be fair towards individuals, (3) put problems on the agenda and discuss these in an open, constructive and problem-solving manner, (4) coach the staff by helping them with setting goals, planning their work, pointing out pitfalls, and giving advice as necessary and (5) interview staff members on a regular basis about their personal functioning, professional development and career development. On the basis of these recommendations, institutions should also focus on improving and developing line managers' skills through careful recruitment and development processes (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005; Maccoby, 2007).

Accountability is a robust way to build an engagement culture (Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009). Shuck and Wollard (2010) suggest that accountability could be developed by linking performance appraisals to data-driven metric systems that include equally weighted measures of business performance and organisational culture performance. Should the institution choose to use engagement in this way, two pieces of communication take on great importance, as reported by Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002):

1. It must be communicated that the intended use of performance appraisals are to be constructive, not destructive, and they should be used as one of the ways in which engagement is developed, but not the only way.
2. Managers must be provided with the resources and tools they will need to improve low-level scores, such as access to human resource development professionals, training and development or time away from day-to-day responsibilities to focus on improving performance.

On a national level, the management of HEIs should ensure that their strategic human resource plans focus on the retention of Generation Y academics throughout their career cycle. To develop an effective retention strategy for HEIs, cognisance should be taken of the central importance of communication. No strategy within human resources can effectively be executed without purposeful communication. This is even more important for Generation Y academics, as they prefer to understand clearly how they contribute to the success of the institution, what parameters they are working within, and in which direction they are working.

Job satisfaction and Generation Y academics: In this study, job satisfaction is regarded as a multidimensional construct, as it contains several factors, such as satisfaction with work itself, and with pay, the supervisor, promotional opportunities and co-workers. The management of HEIs may need to evaluate the job satisfaction of their academics in order to determine specific factors that either cause dissatisfaction or reduce satisfaction. The institution's context may result in the identification of unique factors between faculties within the institution, or between different institutions.

From the current study it was evident that the job satisfaction of Generation Y academics could improve if attention was paid to the following managerial and job related aspects:

• Involvement in teaching modules that fall within their field of interest and expertise.
• Granting them autonomy in determining the direction of their own research.
• Providing opportunities for continued learning, which should include the availability of research leave and flexible working hours in order to complete their further studies.
• Fostering positive interpersonal relationships between colleagues by providing ample opportunity for discourse.
• Good representation of all age groups within the department, faculty and institution.
• Preserving and building the reputation and status of the HEI.

Promotional opportunities in an academic's early career are regarded as an indication of growth and development, which could lead to an increase in job satisfaction. Therefore, focus should also be placed on performance management and promotion opportunities. Regular feedback sessions should be held with young academics regarding their performance and to determine their personal development goals. Normally, promotion and growth in the academic field are dependent on obtaining a PhD qualification, having a sound research record and actively being involved in community interaction. The attainment of these criteria is influenced by the availability of time. Most junior academics carry a large lecture load, resulting in very little time for research. Higher education institutions should caution against becoming 'greedy' institutions (Coser, as cited in Franzway, 2000) that place unmanageable pressure on academics to perform equally well in all three key performance areas, namely teaching, research and community interaction. It is recommended that performance contracts be developed based on the individual's career phase and that these are reflective of realistic career goals, enabling Generation Y academics to take ownership of modules at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, which might serve as motivation. Opportunities could be created for Generation Y academics to form academic communities, where like-minded Generation Y individuals can learn from each other, engage in discourse and form a community of practice.

As Generation Y employees strive for their work to contribute to the greater good of society (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009), HEIs should re-visit their vision, mission and values in order to attract and retain Generation Y academics. The academic profession exists in order to contribute to the body of knowledge in South Africa and internationally. Therefore, creating a vision, mission and value system that emphasises the contribution the institution makes to the greater good of society could influence the retention levels of Generation Y academics.

Managerial implications of the findings

Faculties and support divisions in HEIs can no longer work in silos; they need to work in partnership if they wish to retain the next generation of academics. It is also imperative that the management of HEIs establish whether their institution is receptive to Generation Y academics and, if not, why not. Corrective steps should be viewed as a matter of priority to attain the educational goals of the National Development Plan – Vision 2030.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

Although this investigation provided promising results and positive methodological strengths, a few limitations regarding the sample, research design and proposed partial model deserve specific mention as these could hamper the generalisability of these results. The sample included only six HEIs (five traditional universities and one comprehensive university) out of the 23 HEIs in South Africa (excluding universities of technology). A more comprehensive study in the sector should include all types of HEI and increase the sample size.

Due to the delineation of the study, only four variables were included in the partial model. The model did not make provision for mediating or moderating variables and non-cognitive factors that could influence intention to quit (for example the psychological capital construct, which includes hope, resilience, optimism and self-efficacy), all of which could be included in future research together with socio-economic and situational variables. In order for South African HEIs to progress in achieving continuous improvement in their quality, research should be conducted on retention mechanisms and the results should be circulated to the wider higher education community (Mammen, 2006).

Conclusion

This study contributes to our knowledge of intention to quit amongst Generation Y academics in HEIs. It furthermore provides evidence of the complexity and inter-relatedness of variables in the phenomenological network of intention to quit. It is evident that improving both job satisfaction and employee engagement amongst Generation Y academics is important for the continued growth of HEIs in South Africa. The findings of this study can inform the modification of human resource policies and procedures to retain the new generation of academics in South African higher education institutions.

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Authors' contributions

A.R. (Stellenbosch University) is the first author of the article and it is based on her Master of Commerce research. R.d.P. (Stellenbosch University) was the supervisor of the study and approved all the various stages of the research.

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