Henley Business School

University of Reading

The Influence of Organisational Purpose on Employee Retention in the South African Energy Sector

By R. Ponnen

Student number: 28020477

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Executive Summary

Employee retention is a significant focus for businesses globally to maintain a competitive edge, as employees are seen as valuable resources who can contribute to the performance and sustainability of organisations. Employee work preferences have been evolving over time which exacerbates the challenge of retention. Organisational purpose has received much attention in management practice yet although it has been associated with positive benefits for employee retention, it is underutilised in practice. The concept is scarce in academic research and is still an evolving concept. The aim of this study is to explore, "How and why does organisational purpose influence employee retention in the South African energy sector."

The study was conducted at a large South African power utility in the energy sector, where employee retention is currently a challenge. A qualitative approach to the study, involved interviewing fifteen energy sector employees generated much insight to afford a practical understanding of the relationship between organisational purpose and retention for the sector. The key findings of the study show that organisational purpose positively influences employee retention by influencing employees' basic needs, the meaningfulness in their work, organisational commitment, and their fit within the organisation. Leadership emerged as a crucial factor for embedding and driving purpose to achieve positive outcomes for employee retention, additionally the impact of the economic climate on need fulfilment should be considered for organisational purpose to have a sustainable positive impact on retention. The study makes practical recommendations focussing on *embedding organisational purpose*, *recruiting for person-organisation fit, job design, branding, post hire employee development*, and *leadership development.*

Dedication

For my late *Mum,* who taught me the value of a good education.

and

Dad, for providing a stable foundation for learning to flourish.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose…"

(Ecclesiastes 3:1)

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To God, for giving me the strength to make it through. All things are possible.

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My dear husband, Jairus for encouraging me to embark on this journey and for believing in me. If it were it not for you, I could not have done this. You have been a pillar of strength. Thank you for all your support and dealing with the stresses of life when I was not able to.

My darling son Joshua, for your hugs, little notes and gifts of encouragement and your patience. I am sorry for all those moments I missed and look forward to making up for those. My aim was to inspire you to never stop learning and acquiring knowledge.

To family and friends who have supported me throughout, I have appreciated it so much.

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1 Introduction

This study aims to investigate the influence of organisational purpose on employee retention within the South African Energy Sector. The chapter describes the overall context and importance of the research by framing the problem statement and indicating the scope and research objectives, which aims to investigate how organisational purpose influences retention so that it may be utilised as a tool to increase employee retention within the energy sector.

1.1   Background

There are many reasons why employees are attracted to organisations, and they will likely stay with their employer until such time that the advantages for leaving, as appraised by the employee, outweigh their current situation (Rose and Gordon 2010). When employees leave, it is disruptive for both the organisation and other employees, as it may result in the loss of skilled employees, and disturbs teams and work relationships (Ghosh et al., 2012). Many organisations are confronted with the issue of employee turnover; however, they are more concerned with the problem of voluntary turnover because they want to retain their best employees (Shakeel and Butt, 2015). Organisations are finding it increasingly difficult to retain skilled and high performing employees, especially those that are in high demand (Allen et al., 2010). For decades, retention has been a key focus for organisations, as employees are valuable assets and organisations have employed various means to ensure that they retain them (Lee et al., 2022). Many individuals are re-evaluating their lives, including the organisations they work for, which has resulted in a shift in attitudes toward work (Scroggins, 2008). Demographic and market changes have resulted in a demanding workforce, which has made employee retention a challenge and organisations need to work hard to retain their employees' loyalty (Anitha and Begum, 2016).

The socio-economic development of a country depends on its skilled workforce to drive growth, and brain drain has been a challenge for South Africa as the country is losing skilled professionals to other countries, negatively impacting economic growth (Mlambo and Adetiba, 2019). Another phenomenon that has received significant attention is the "Great Resignation," a term used to describe the voluntary mass

changing of jobs, which was heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic particularly in the western world and gained traction in other parts of the world (Larson, 2023). This is not a recent phenomenon as unhappy workers had over the years been signalling their intentions to look for more suitable working conditions, which prioritises fair income, respectful and safe work environments, and well-being (Montaudon-Tomas et al., 2023). There is an abundance of professional management literature to support that employees want to feel valued, a sense of belonging and connection, and experience a meaningful career (De Smet and Schaninger, 2021). The impact of global issues has exacerbated these needs, with employees now reconsidering their employers, expecting their jobs to provide a significant sense of purpose, and if employers are unable to meet this need, they risk losing their talent to competitors (Dhingra et al., 2021). Individuals may be as motivated by intrinsic meaning and making a worthwhile contribution, as they are by financial motivation (HBR, 2015). A sense of belonging, culture, a shared sense of identity and relationships at work are what employees are looking for (De Smet and Schaninger, 2021).

As several organisations are still recovering from the devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic, amidst the pressures to address climate change, technological advancements and economic downturn, there is a purpose gap that is resulting in a disconnect between the public, business and its employees (McKinsey, 2021). One of the ways in which companies are trying to create a sense of purpose for their employees is by implementing programmes that can fulfil employees' purposeful pursuits, such as community projects or offering paid time off for purposeful pursuits. However, better solutions start by helping employees find personal meaning in their daily work (Dhingra et al., 2021). When employees get the purpose that they want out of work, outcomes at work and in life appear better as compared to employees who are not as satisfied (Appendix 1). Although organisational purpose has received much positive attention in professional management literature, academic research that connects organisational purpose with employee retention is scarce, and empirical evidence is very nearly non-existent. This dissertation presents an opportunity to explore this connection, to understand what are the influences of organisational purpose on employees, *how* and *why* is it so? What are the individual and organisational benefits, and how can these be harnessed to improve employee retention in the South African energy sector.

1.2   Problem Statement and Scope of the Research

The energy sector is vital to the country's economy with electricity being the preferred option in rural and urban areas (Department for Mineral Resources and Energy, 2021). The industry is facing considerable global pressure to reform and transition toward renewable energy (United Nations, 2021). The transition will introduction competition as more independent power producers join the industry. The focus for the study is a large power utility in South Africa (SA), a monopoly owned by the SA government. The utility supplies almost 90% of the country's electricity as well as to other parts of the African continent. Amidst this transition, the power utility is experiencing a financial crisis. The company is unable to generate sufficient revenue and has limited control over electricity pricing which is regulated and set independently by the country's national energy regulator. As a result, the utility has resorted to cost recovery mechanisms, such as the reduction of employee benefits, training and development budget cuts and limited or no salary increases. Staff morale and the skills shortage require urgent attention (SA Power Utility Integrated Report, 2022). Operational performance has also deteriorated due to low morale, the loss of experienced workers, as well as inability to attract critical skills (Integrated Report, 2022). Additionally, there is an ageing workforce, and much experience and skills are being lost through attrition (SA Power Utility Integrated Report, 2022).

Despite investments in retention strategies in the SA energy sector over the past years, the industry is still unable to retain its experienced and core workers (Mabuza and Proches, 2014). In SA, organisations are compelled to compete for skilled workers, which is difficult and costly, given the increasing skills shortage (Schlechter et al., 2016). The deficit in technology workers such as engineers and skilled trade workers is a longstanding problem in the country, and the effects are not only limited to the struggling economy, but also impact heavily on dependent industries (Siwela and van der Bank, 2021). Employee retention in SA is a challenge due to the shortage of skills, competition for talent, impending retirement of the 'baby boomers' (Generation X), all of which negatively impacts the performance and sustainability of organisations (Masibigiri and Nienaber, 2011). Organisations are therefore left with the options of either becoming a preferred employer, that can attract and retain the required employees or to improve and retain their existing pool of employees (Kotzé and Roodt, 2005). The future of the sector is uncertain as it moves away from coal to

more renewable sources of energy. The organisation provides funded training and development for all employees and limited further study options, which are open to all employees. It therefore impacts heavily when employees leave, especially amidst the dire financial situation, as it will involve time, cost and effort to recruit and train new employees. The power utility provides a good fit for this study because the organisation will need to identify non-financial and non-traditional strategies to encourage employees to remain committed and loyal, given the financial challenges. The utility has recently made strides toward defining an organisational purpose more than its longstanding mandate, vision and mission statements, but is yet to fully explore the concept of organisational purpose and the potential for this concept to improve employee retention. This study is therefore important for providing leadership with insight into the connection between organisational purpose and employee retention from the perspective of its employees, so that suitable retention strategies can be developed to retain employees.

1.3   The Research Question and Objectives

There are several contributing factors to employee retention, and it has not yet been explored whether organisational purpose is a contributing factor for employees in the SA energy sector. This investigation will therefore provide insight into this, in line with the research question and objective below.

Research question:

How and why does organisational purpose influence employee retention in the SA energy sector?

Research objective:

To investigate and understand the influence of organisational purpose on employee retention in the SA energy sector, for industry leaders so that they can be able to develop organisational purpose that will help to retain employees within the industry.

1.4   Personal Objectives

My objectives for this research project are to develop new skills and to gain knowledge into an area that is outside of my field of work. As the audit manager of a specialist team for the power utility, I am confronted daily with the challenges of keeping the workforce motivated, committed, engaged and ultimately retained in the absence of financial incentives. Gaining deeper insight and understanding of the complexities of employee-related issues will help me better understand what employees' requirements are for fulfilment at work. My objective in choosing this research topic is to be of assistance to my organisation and the sector and provide insight from this research for management consideration.

The research skills and tools and techniques for information gathering and analysis can contribute positively to enhance my decision-making abilities in the workplace as well as in my personal life. In addition, I am hopeful that this research can contribute to the existing body of literature as academic research on the influence of organisational purpose on employee retention is scarce.

1.5   Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 – This chapter introduces the management research challenge and provides the overall context, problem statement, scope of research and states the research question and research objectives.

Chapter 2 – Provides a detailed review of current literature on the topic.

Chapter 3 – This chapter explains the research methodology that was followed and the tools and techniques that were used to collect and analyse the data.

Chapter 4 – The results of the fieldwork are discussed in this chapter including an analysis and synthesis of the findings.

Chapter 5 – In this chapter a discussion of the key findings from the analysis is discussed and compared with the literature.

Chapter 6 – This chapter concludes the research project and provides recommendations that are aligned with the key findings from the study.

Chapter 7 – This chapter provides a personal reflection of the author's MBA journey and MRC project.

2 Review of Knowledge and Practice

2.1 Introduction

Employee retention is an important part of an organisation's human resources strategy. Through decades there have been common traditional employee factors that have been utilised by organisations to retain employees; however recent employee work preferences show a leaning toward non-monetary and non-traditional preferences. This chapter provides a review of extant literature and forms a theoretical basis for the study.

2.2 Employee Retention

The global economy has changed significantly, and ongoing developments such as globalisation, technological advancements, and global competition creates pressure for organisations to maintain a competitive edge (Kyndt et al., 2009). Employees are valuable assets and organisations would not want to lose such skills in a constantly changing world where such resources are key for the sustainability of organisations (Singh 2019). There are various definitions of employee retention in the abundance of academic literature. One of these definitions explains employee retention in terms of emotional-cognitive retention constructs such as *identification, commitment, trust, and readiness to recommend.* For the purposes of this project, a general definition of employee retention, is *the actions or plans of the organisation that motivate and encourage the employee to stay for a maximum time* (Shakeel and Butt, 2015).

Most organisations are concerned with retaining their high performing and skilled employees who are in demand and difficult to replace as it may have implications for organisational competitiveness (Allen et al., 2010). However, some companies are preparing for future increasing global competition, and are also focusing on employees with the potential to become high performers (Kyndt et al., 2009). This is understandable given the employee retention challenges that organisations are facing, such as competition from rivals, migration of skilled labour and difficulty in predicting future preferences of a changing workforce (Singh 2019). The South African energy sector is faced with a shrinking supply of engineers and trade workers along with an ageing workforce (Mangisa et al., 2020). This is consistent with global trends where

companies are expecting that the ageing population will result in a global competition for the best employees (Kyndt et al., 2009).

There are many factors for management to consider as the impact on employee retention is not restricted to a single factor (Das and Baruah, 2013). Some of the more common factors in literature are *compensation in the form of financial benefits; supportive work environment; social support in the form of good working relationships with colleagues and career development opportunities* (Bharath, 2023). Apart from these, factors such as *employee fit, roles and responsibilities, team dynamics and job features*, are less common (Bharath, 2021). In the public sector, government adopts various human resources strategies aimed at increasing remuneration and benefits, training and development and flexible work schedules to improve employee retention, however strategies for balancing employees work and family life remain challenging due to demographic trends (Al-Emadi et al., 2015). Employees are more focused on career development, social atmosphere, job content, financial rewards and work-life balance (De Vos and Meganck, 2009) while factors such as training, career perspective, financial reward, performance management and communication are important to HR managers. Employees cannot willingly be retained if this is based on monetary incentives alone; rather it is imperative that organisations provide goals and opportunities for personal and professional balance (Tsai et al., 2021). Ramlall (2004) acknowledged the effect of employee motivation on retention and synthesised employee motivation theories to develop a list of critical motivational factors for employee retention, summarised in Table 1 below. *Motivation* is defined as the significant effort exerted willingly toward the achievement of organisational goals, to satisfy an individual need (Ramlall, 2004). Among the critical factors, the satisfaction of employees' basic needs, creating a conducive working environment, the quality of employee relationships and the development of employees were listed as important motivating factors that can influence employee retention.

Critical factors	Implications
Needs of the employee	Employees needs are based on individual, family, and cultural values. Feeling of satisfaction with current and desired state.
Work environment	Respectful and inclusive work environment.
Responsibilities	Employees feel competent and seek additional responsibilities and fair reward.
Supervision	The need to develop others. Often prevalent for managers and leaders who seek to influence organisational goals, objectives and strategies.
Fairness and Equity	Employees want to be treated fairly and rewarded accordingly. Effort and performance is influenced by individual goals and objectives unique to each employee.
Effort	Higher levels of effort for reward may be short-term if tasks are not challenging and satisfying.
Employees' Development	Employees prefer environments with a challenge, and opportunities for advancement and development.
Feedback	Ongoing, timely and transparent feedback from employee and supervisor, not limited to performance reviews.

Table 1: Critical motivating factors for employee retention (Ramlall, 2004)

2.3   The Changing World of Work

According to a Millennial Employee Study, 64% millennials will not work for companies that do not have a good Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy, and 83% would be more loyal once hired if the company assisted them to make a positive impact on social and environmental issues (Cone Communications, 2016). Generation X employees represent a wealth of knowledge and experience and retaining these individuals in both the private and public sectors is important (Masibigiri and Nienaber, 2011). Their sense of security is grounded in career progression and their loyalty to an organisation can easily be challenged if they do not have access to opportunities for development (Kotzé and Roodt, 2005). Generation Z will make up 30% of the US workforce by 2024 and prioritises *purpose* over money; they are driven by *meaningful work*, *authenticity* and are a problem-solving generation (WeSpire, 2020). According to the Gallup Global Workplace Report for 2023, most employees globally are *quiet quitting*, which means that these employees are psychologically not engaged at work and are basically minimally productive (Gallup 2023; Larson, 2023). These employees do not know why their work matters or have healthy work relationships with their co-workers, managers and the organisation (Larson, 2023). They also have the potential

to be highly productive and contribute positively to the performance of the organisation, but they need to be actively engaged, inspired and guided by leadership (Gallup, 2023). To address the requirements of a workforce that prioritises *purpose, social and environmental issues* and non-monetary factors over traditional retention factors, organisations will need to reassess their employee retention strategies to be more responsive to such preferences.

2.4   Organisational Purpose

Organisational purpose has received much attention in business practice recently and has been gaining in popularity for its positive prospects such as wellbeing of stakeholders, job satisfaction, and the fulfilment of human needs of belonging, meaning and direction in life for employees (Jasinenko and Steuber, 2022). Although a clear consensus on the definition of organisational purpose has not been reached among scholars, there are recurring themes and common explanations in literature to suggest that in general it is defined as a higher purpose, that is not only focused on generating profit, but also embodies the beliefs about an organisation's core reason for being and the meaning it provides to stakeholders, including employees (Hollensbe et al., 2014; Henderson and van den Steen 2015; van Ingen et al., 2021; Gartenberg et al., 2016). Recently, there has been a renewed focus on organisational purpose toward an organisation's role in society and it has been linked to emerging themes of meaningfulness, transcendence and contribution to societal issues (van Ingen et al., 2021; Hollensbe et al., 2014).

Fuelled by Larry Fink's call to a "Sense of Purpose" in his 2018 letter to Chief Executive Officers, organisations are renewing their commitment to organisational purpose that benefits society (Jasinenko and Steuber, 2022). The concept of organisational purpose addresses a business's sense of purpose at a core level in terms of what are its shared identity and goals and is more than generating profit (Hollensbe et al., 2014). According to Bartlett and Ghoshal (1994), organisations that assert a clear purpose attract and retain employees who become very committed, because they identify with the values of the organisation. A clear purpose could also achieve better financial performance than other firms by enhancing the identity and reputation of employees (Henderson and Van den Steen, 2015). Defining an organisational purpose enhances employee engagement and organisational performance and can be important for

attracting and retaining workers, appealing also to the younger generation with different workplace value preferences (van Tuin et al., 2020). Organisational purpose is generally associated with the company's mission and vision statements, although it can be considered more as a reflection of the interdependencies between business and society (Rey and Malbašić, 2019). A company will usually define its purpose as a brief inspirational idea or message that explains how it wants to impact the rest of the world (Rey and Malbašić, 2019). Table 2 below provides specific examples of the purpose for some well-known Fortune 500 companies.

Fortune 500 Companies	Purpose Statement
BlackRock	To help more and more people experience financial well-being.
Coca-Cola	Refresh the world. Make a difference.
Ford Motor Co.	To drive human progress through freedom of movement.
Hewlett Packard Enterprise	To advance the way people live and work.
Mondelez International	We empower people to snack right.
Procter & Gamble	We will provide branded products and services of superior quality and value that improve the lives of the world's consumers, now and for generations to come.

Table 2: Purpose Statements (Purpose Brand, 2023)

The organisational purpose as recently defined by the power utility in scope is:

"Powering growth…sustainably"

Source: (SA Power Utility, 2023)

In a SA study of the retention of high performing employees in a financial institution, Letchmiah and Thomas (2017) found that organisational purpose was a major influence on their retention. Employees were highly motivated by the societal impact of the firm which influenced them to remain with their organisations. The SA power utility could benefit immensely from having employees who identify with the organisation, are motivated, committed and performing optimally as this can significantly improve and stabilise the overall performance of the organisation to achieve better financial results. Springett (2004) proposes that an organisational purpose that is aimed at providing value to customers is morally uplifting and

meaningful to employees as opposed to one that is focused on shareholder value. Despite the positive attention organisational purpose has received in management practice, it is surprisingly underutilised as organisations struggle to embed purpose in their operations due to its intangible nature (Deloitte, 2022). As a result, employees may perceive organisations as inauthentic and not living up to their purpose.

2.4.1 Organisational Purpose and Need Fulfilment

Abraham Maslow developed one of the earliest employee retention models, the *Hierarchy of Needs,* a motivation theory which is still widely used in research (Wikipedia, 2023). According to Maslow, there are 5 basic needs or sets of goals, *physiological; safety; social; esteem; and self-actualisation*. People, including employees are motivated by the desire to achieve the conditions upon which these basic needs are dependent and by intellectual desires (Ramlall, 2004). Maslow explained that even when all needs were satisfied, an individual may develop a restlessness unless they are doing what they are best fit for, which is the need for self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). Figure 1 below provides an overview of Maslow's hierarchy including how it can work in an organisation setting.
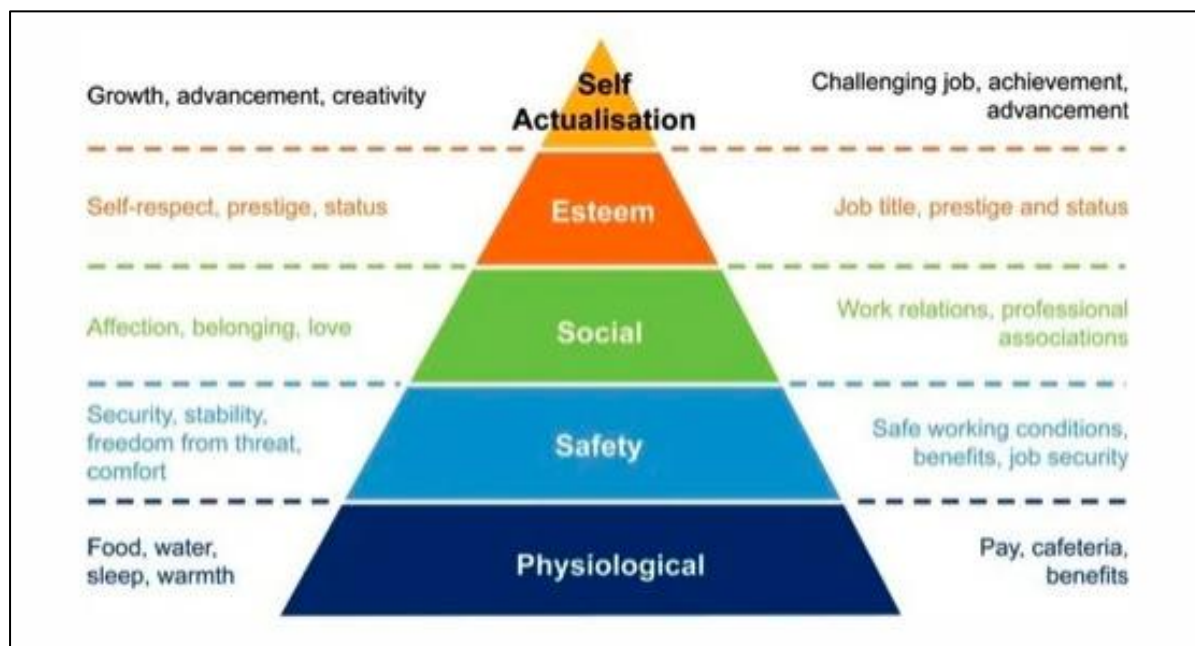

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Source: (Pluxee,2023)

Once employees physiological and safety needs are met, then organisations should try to meet their individual needs for self-actualisation, progress and growth as they are then motivated by these higher order needs (Haslam et al., 2000). Employees have a need to transform themselves as well as the world as they progress towards states of purpose and achievement (Fairlie, 2011). For employees, organisational purpose means making a positive contribution to their lives as well as people in society and is related to fulfilling human needs (van Ingen et al., 2021). Employees spend a large portion of their time at work, and it is therefore the primary environment for them to pursue their aspirations (Lysova et al., 2019). A decade ago, work-life balance was understood as balancing work with the rest of one's life, whereas now it has evolved into the need for a meaningful existence where work is an aspect of one's life and being able to bring the 'whole self' to work. 'Self' encompasses identity, *purpose* and the capacity to act independently (Chalofsky and Cavallaro, 2013). Organisational purpose is often associated with positive effects on employee well-being and job satisfaction because it should create a trustworthy work environment for employees to satisfy basic needs for belonging, meaning and direction in life (Jasinenko and Steuber, 2022). An organisation's purpose should succinctly and clearly articulate how it will meet basic human needs and should not be a mere description of what the organisations does. It is apparent that there is a connection between purpose, need fulfilment and meaningfulness in work. An article by McKinsey (2021), calls for profound reflection on what companies really represent as purpose and purpose can lead to improved financial performance, build trust, improve employee motivation as well as provide a leading edge in the retention of excellent staff.

2.4.2 Organisational Purpose and Meaningful Work

Meaning involves the meaning of life, purpose and coherence, and the common dimensions are purpose, personal alignment with one's goals and values, autonomy, control, challenge, achievement, experience and skill, mastery, commitment, engagement, serving others, realising one's potential and growth (Fairlie, 2011). Kahn (1990) described psychological meaningfulness as a feeling that one is receiving a return on investment on oneself where physical, emotional and cognitive energy is seen as the currency. Individuals spend a large portion of their lives at their place of work; employers are therefore morally obliged to provide individuals with work that is

meaningful or the possibility to choose meaningful work (Martela, 2023). According to Pratt et al., (2003), meaningfulness in the workplace is when work is perceived to be purposeful and significant, where this perception is derived from the values, goals and beliefs that the work itself serves or from the organisation where the work is performed. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) identified four sources of meaningful work: *developing and becoming self*; *unity with others*; *serving others* and *expressing self*. These culminate to provide an experience of meaningfulness where employees can *be true to themselves at work*, *contribute to the organisation and society*, *identify* with others through shared values, feel a sense of *belonging*, bond with colleagues through *purpose* and express one's *full potential* through *mastery and creativity* (Lips-Wiersma, 2009).

Pratt et al. (2003) distinguish between meaningfulness in work, and meaningfulness at work, where the former is encouraged through *job design*, *task significance*, and nurturing employees' *authentic self* at work; while the latter involves promotion of workplace goals, values, beliefs and workplace culture that builds relationships. The *Job Characteristics Model* developed by Hackman and Oldham, 1976 is an important model that was developed to assist companies with redesigning jobs to facilitate better fit between employees and their roles (Goštautaitė and Bučiūnienė, 2010). The three job characteristics that bring about meaningfulness of work relate to *skill variety,* which involves the utilisation of different skills and talents; *task identity*, identification with the task from beginning to outcomes (Goštautaitė and Bučiūnienė, 2010); *task significance*, the extent to which the task impacts the organisation as well as the broader society (Ramlall, 2004). In a South African study of high technology workers, Döckel et al. (2006) identified that skill variety has a positive influence on employees' commitment and relates to feelings of belonging and attachment to the organisation, whereas if employees feel their skills are being underutilised, they will leave. Although meaningfulness may not be dependent on the achievement of goals, the pursuit of valued goals may promote a sense of purpose (Pratt and Ashford 2003). Kahn (1990) described the experience of meaningfulness as people feeling worthwhile, useful and valuable and being able to contribute to others and the work itself through their roles at work. Research supports that meaningful work has a positive influence on work engagement, job satisfaction and career development, which is why organisations have begun to acknowledge its importance for engaging and *retaining* employees

(Lysova et al., 2019). Bailey et al. (2019) provides an interesting view that the possible negative aspects of meaningful work should be considered, where employees well-being may be affected when they are unable to balance work and personal life due to becoming too immersed at work because they find it very meaningful. Meaningful work speaks to the subjective experiences of employees, that their jobs, work or career is purposeful and important, and that they are empowered to serve the greater good through their work (Steger, 2017).

(Steger and Dik, 2012) propose a model of *work as meaning,* Figure 2 below, where understanding of oneself, the organisation, and one's fit within the organisation, creates comprehension in work. This drives the desire to pursue purpose in work. When employees can make sense of their experience, acquire a sense of purpose and serve the greater good, this gives rise to meaning (Lysova et al., 2019). Working towards a purpose in work strengthens identification with the organisation; therefore, organisational purpose is seen to encourage transcendence where employees will want to work to serve the greater good (Steger and Dik, 2012). Employees within organisations where purpose has been embedded are more productive, satisfied and innovative which is made possible through being intrinsically motivated by the positive influence of an authentic purpose in creating meaningful work (Henderson, 2021).
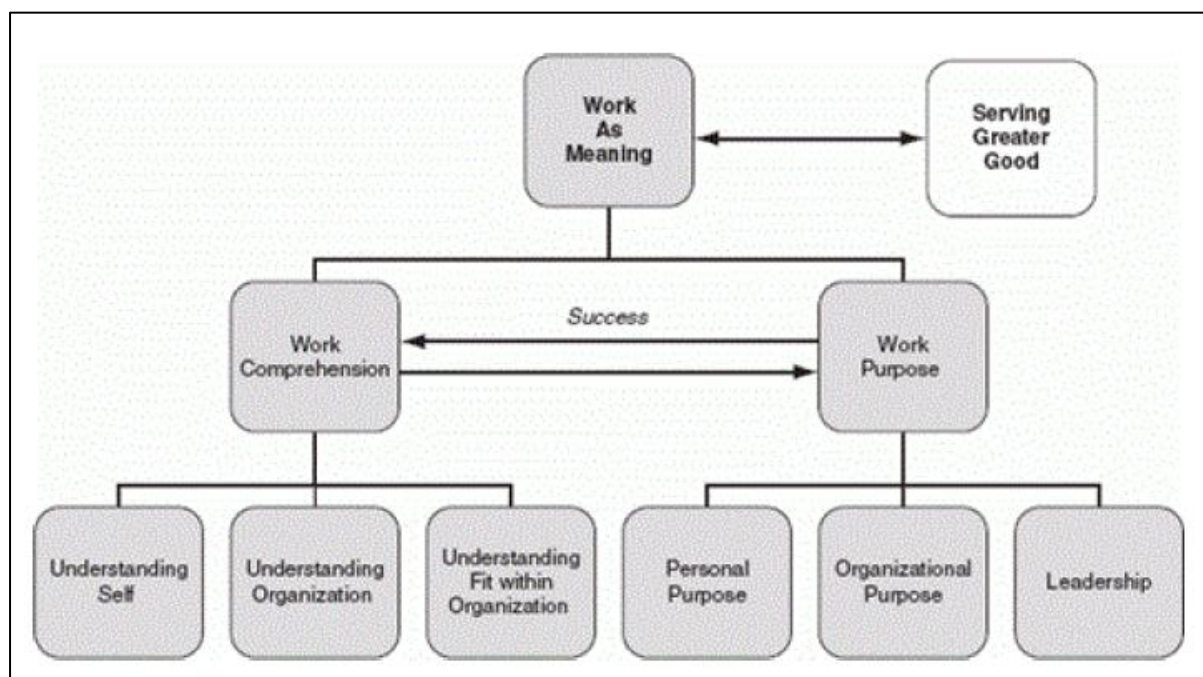

Figure 2: A Model of Work as Meaning

Source: Steger and Dik (2012)

2.5　Person-Organisation Fit

Person-Organisation (P-O) fit theory refers to the level of alignment of personal and organisational values and goals between individuals and employers (Kristof, 1996; van Ingen et al., 2021). A high P-O fit is seen as key for retention and organisational commitment (Kristof, 1996) and increases employer attractiveness, for example in a CSR context (Klimkiewicz and Oltra, 2017). Collins and Porras (2008) describe organisational purpose as an extension of the organisation's core values and beliefs and that a purpose that is clear will attract people who are aligned with the organisation's purpose while conversely, some employees may leave when they identify that their personal purpose is being contradicted. The alignment of individual and organisational values can determine the degree to which employees will be committed which is important for employee retention (Glaserová, 2019). Work that is meaningful and purpose-driven should extend to fit the broader context of employees' lives, while employees' lives should fit within the workplace and society at large (Chalofsky and Cavallaro, 2013). This implies that organisations need to create the culture and environment that can support increased fit for employees because employees strive for meaning and purpose at work, through relationships, the community as well as through their values and beliefs (Chalofsky and Cavallaro, 2013). Individuals are likely to be attracted to organisational purpose that fits their own sense of self, and a good person-organisation fit helps employees relate well with the organisation by satisfying basic psychological needs and feelings of belongingness (van Ingen et al., 2021). Rey and Malbašić (2019) proposes that organisations should be attentive to their employees' purpose from the recruitment phase onward so that it develops in line with the organisation's purpose. When employees align with the organisational purpose it fosters organisational unity, which increase as each employee connects personal purpose with organisational purpose (Rey and Malbašić, 2019). It may not be easy for new employees to determine organisational values at the recruitment stage; therefore, organisations should ensure this is prominently featured as employees who have an awareness of their own goals and values will mostly likely look for those characteristics in organisations (Kristof 1996).

2.6   Leadership

Leaders who draw meaning from work can develop organisational purpose that is practical and needed for their organisation (Steger and Dik, 2012). The role of leaders is important for creating an understanding of purpose in the workplace, which is particularly key for employees who are involved in specialised work and are unable to relate their work to the organisational purpose (Lysova et al., 2019). Employees are influence by their work environment and organisational culture; therefore, the way leadership portrays the organisational purpose can significantly influence employees' sense of their responsibility toward the broader community (Hollensbe et al., 2014). Leaders can inspire, form effective relationships and demonstrate how the mission, organisation and employees are all linked (Steger and Dik, 2012). Leadership-member exchange theory refers to the quality of relationships between leaders and members (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995 cited in Tummers and Knies 2013:859). High quality *relationships* are characterised by trust and employees feeling valued by their managers, and generally results in job satisfaction, high performance and low turnover (Tummers and Knies, 2013). According to Quinn and Thakor (2018), organisational purpose provides meaning to employees through the difference they are making in being part of an organisation, and leadership generally resorts to purpose during a crisis. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) propose that rewards, security and balance of life roles are as important as values management, for the creation of healthy workplaces and society, and these concerns should be addressed by leadership with consideration for the economic climate.

2.7   Organisational Commitment

Building organisations that employees are willing to commit to, involves the company's strategic priorities being entrenched in its organisational purpose so that they prompt emotional attachments. In this way organisations become places that employees can identify with (Bartlett and Goshal, 1994). Organisational commitment is made up of three components, *affective* which refers to the emotional connection that an employee forms with the organisation, and their identification with and involvement in the organisation, *continuance* which considers the cost of leaving *and normative* which is experienced as a moral obligation (Tummers and Knies, 2013; Ansari, 2011). Individuals with high affective commitment remain with the organisation because they

want to in comparison with those with continuance and normative commitment who remain because they need to or ought to respectively (Allen and Meyer, 1990). When employees experience meaningful work, it increases their organisational commitment, which has a positive effect on their effort and commitment (Tummers and Knies, 2013). Organisational commitment appears to be possibly linked with organisational purpose in the sense that both concepts have characteristics that relate to employees' acceptance of and belief in the organisational goals. Research indicates there is also a positive correlation between meaningful work and organisational commitment (Jasinenko and Steuber, 2022). *Organisational commitment* has received much focus in literature, and research has shown that employees who have a strong commitment to the organisation are likely to stay (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Anitha and Begum (2016) provide a different view from their study of Indian organisations, where employee retention was not significantly impacted by affective commitment but rather employees remained due to benefits and their sense of obligation in giving back to the organisation.

2.8   Summary

The literature review provides insight into extant research on organisational purpose and the connection with employee retention and the possibility for organisational purpose to positively influence employee retention through need fulfilment, meaningfulness in work, identifying with purpose through person-organisation fit and enhancing organisational commitment through alignment of personal and organisational values.

3 Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research strategy that was adopted, the appropriateness of the methods, the sampling approach and how these were executed during the fieldwork for this study.

3.1   Research Design

An interpretivist epistemology seeks to make sense of human actions and *understand* human behaviour in contrast to positivist research which focuses on *explaining* human behaviour (Bell et al., 2019). Interpretivism emphasises the 'how' and 'why' of social actions, the processes that inform these actions and acknowledges the importance of understanding the social world through interpretation thereof (Bell et al., 2018, Leitch et al., 2010). Interpretivist studies are concerned with an authentic representation of lived experiences (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). This philosophy suits the research question well, which seeks to understand *how* and *why* does organisational purpose influence employee retention. It will allow the researcher to address the complexity and dynamism of organisational purpose and employee retention by stepping into the realities of participants that work within the energy sector and interpret their perceptions to view the research problem holistically (Leitch et al., 2010). The advantage of using the interpretivist philosophy is that it allows for the collection of rich, meaningful data based on the unique experiences of the data subjects and affords opportunities for probing areas that arise during the research; it is argued as appropriate for business situations that are unique and complex in areas such as human resource management (Saunders et al., 2019).

The study adopted primarily an inductive approach to allow the theory to emerge from the data and consider the literature gap, but also had an element of deduction as extant literature on the subject matter was analysed (Bell et al., 2018). The benefit of an inductive approach is the flexibility and allowance for alternative explanations of what is transpiring (Saunders et al., 2019). An inductive approach provides rich insights and is often considered effective for studying concepts that are complex and difficult to measure (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). This approach for the study, was accompanied by a qualitative research method, where emphasis is placed on words

rather than numbers and focuses on description, context and flexibility, in contrast with a quantitative approach which generally focuses on the measurement of concepts (Bell et al., 2019). Qualitative research is concerned with the meanings that emerge from words which are often multiple and require clarification and exploration with participants (Saunders et al., 2019). It is helpful for studying the experiences of individuals in social settings where not much prior research has been performed; can assist with uncovering new insights and is generally associated with an interpretivist philosophy and inductive approach (Cho et al., 2022; Saunders et al., 2019). As organisational purpose is still a developing concept and scarce in academic literature, the study takes on an exploratory nature (Bell et al., 2019). To the author's knowledge such a study has not been conducted for the power utility. A qualitative method was accompanied by a mono method data collection technique through semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2019). The semi-structured interview approach was appropriate for this study as the researcher wished to explore certain themes from literature to guide the interviews and have the added flexibility to ask further probing questions based on the responses of the interviewees (Bell et al., 2019).

3.2   Sampling approach

The research was conducted within a large SA power utility in the energy sector, a monopoly owned by the SA government and the researcher's place of employment. Clarke et al., (2012) propose that it is important to study the lived realities of one's own environment. The study of this organisation is important because the economy and the country at large are dependent on its success. Another advantage of conducting the study within the researcher's own organisation is that it provides for opportunistic sampling (Clarke et al., 2012). A purposive sampling approach was used, guided by the unit of analysis, and the research question which gives direction regarding the units to be sampled (Bell et al., 2019). The unit of analysis and population in this study is the employees of the SA power utility in scope. As the organisation is a monopoly in the energy sector, it is therefore representative of the industry and fits the purposive approach. Maximum variation sampling allowed for variation within the unit of interest, breadth of coverage and to gain perspectives from different roles (Bell et al., 2019).

The organisation is structured into three core divisions and strategic functions that render services to enable or support these divisions as indicated in Table 1 below:

Business Area	Description of Business Areas
1. Division (A)	Core business area responsible for the generation of electricity.
2. Division (B)	Core business area responsible for transmitting electricity.
3. Division (C)	Core business area responsible for the distribution of electricity to direct customers and municipalities.
4. Strategic Divisions/Departments	All key strategic and support functions which are important for enabling and providing internal services to the core divisions.

Table 3: SA Power Utility high-level organisational structure

The sample consisted of fifteen permanent employees working for the power utility. The organisation is currently trying to reduce contract work, and conduct more work in-house to save costs, therefore only full-time workers were interviewed. The sample of fifteen participants was suitable for the study as it is a homogenous population; in-depth interviews lasting between forty-five minutes to an hour were conducted; the sample is representative of the population and data saturation is generally evident at twelve interviews (Boddy, 2016). The sample was selected to ensure that employees from all core business areas were included, and available participants from support functions. Table 4 below provides an overview of the participants in this study, which included male and female participants. The approximation of years of service is provided to further enhance anonymity. The researcher used their internal network of contacts to initiate contact telephonically with potential participants to provide a brief overview of the topic and gauge their interest in the topic, availability and willingness to participate (Saunders et al., 2019). Once willingness to participate was affirmed, the researcher emailed an information sheet and consent form (Appendix 2; Appendix 3) and scheduled the interview appointments. Availability of the participants was a key consideration because the organisation is currently amid a financial crisis and many employees have unpredictable working hours due to work pressure and deadlines.

Participants	Role	Approximate Length of Service (years)	Gender	Business Area	Location
Participant 1	Engineering	15 -25	Male	A	Johannesburg
Participant 2	Support Functions	20-30	Female	D	Johannesburg
Participant 3	Finance	20-30	Male	D	Johannesburg
Participant 4	Information Technology	20-30	Male	D	KwaZulu-Natal
Participant 5	Engineering	15-25	Male	B	Johannesburg
Participant 6	Information Technology	10-20	Male	D	Johannesburg
Participant 7	Finance	10-20	Female	B	Johannesburg
Participant 8	Engineering	25-35	Female	D	Johannesburg
Participant 9	Support Functions	10-20	Female	C	Western Cape
Participant 10	Finance	10-20	Female	C	Johannesburg
Participant 11	Engineering	10-20	Female	C	KwaZulu-Natal
Participant 12	Engineering	20-30	Male	B	Johannesburg
Participant 13	Support Functions	10-20	Female	C	KwaZulu-Natal
Participant 14	Support Functions	20-30	Female	C	KwaZulu-Natal
Participant 15	Engineering	10-20	Female	D	Johannesburg

Table 4: Overview of Interview Participants

3.3   Data Collection

Interviews are generally the method that is most used for qualitative research (Bell et al., 2019). Therefore, this approach was decided to be more suitable for capturing the participants points of view and provide rich, detailed responses for ease of coding (Bell et al., 2019). Two pilot interviews were conducted with individuals who did not form part of the fifteen participants in the study. Both participants answered the questions well within the hour. No changes were made to the questions from the pilot interviews; however, the participants feedback on areas of improvement on style of interviewing was noted and incorporated. Post the Covid-19 pandemic the organisation afforded employees the opportunity for hybrid working arrangements. This created both an

opportunity and challenge to the interview process as not all employees are required to be in the office on the same days. Face-to-face interviewing was therefore not suitable as logistically it may have constrained and delayed the research process which was subject to a cross-sectional time horizon (Saunders et al., 2019).

For a consistent approach across all participants, interviews were conducted on the Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) audio/video platform accessible to all participants, used by them daily, and included recording functionality. The choice of platform made it possible to broaden the sample population to three of the largest geographical areas where the power utility operates in SA. Travelling to these areas would not have been practical during the limited research period. The hybrid working arrangement also influenced the decision to perform individual interviews and not focused groups. However focused groups were mainly not selected because the researcher does not have expertise in facilitating focus groups and it would be potentially challenging to control reticent and dominant speakers which may impact on the feedback not being representative of all participants views (Bell et al., 2019). Table 5 below provides the list of interview questions which were mapped to the corresponding theory emergent from the literature review. The researcher developed an interview guide for assistance in ensuring all the relevant themes were covered during the interview, as included in Appendix 4.

Interview Questions	Theoretical References
1. What is your understanding of the organisation's purpose and how do you identify with it? Why?	Bartlett and Ghoshal (1994) Ansari (2011)
2. How does the organisation's purpose influence you in carrying out your work? What makes you think so?	Hurth et al., (2018) Springett (2004) van Ingen et al. (2021) Henderson (2021) Al-Emadi et al., (2015)
3. In what ways does the organisational purpose influence your commitment to the organisation? Why?	Quinn and Thakor (2018) Chatzoudes and Chatzoglou (2022) Fletcher et al., (2018)

Interview Questions	Theoretical References
	Al-Emadi et al., (2015)
4. In what ways can the organisation use its purpose to encourage retention? What makes you think so?	Das and Baruah (2013) Hurth et al., (2018) Tsai et al., (2021)
5. In what ways do the organisation's purpose affect your sense of belonging within the organisation. Why?	Collins and Porras (2008) Döckel et al., (2006)
6. Do you feel that your work is meaningful, and how does it align with the organisation's purpose? What makes you think so?	Hurth et al., (2018) Quinn and Thakor (2018) Henderson (2021) White et al., (2017) Springett (2004).

Table 5: Interview Questions

The interview platform enabled the participants to have complete control of the location to ensure their privacy and minimise disruptions (Bell et al., 2019). Majority of the sessions lasted on average forty-five minutes to an hour. In line with an interpretivist approach, all questions were posed, although not in the same order for all interviews, as this depended on the conversation (Saunders et al., 2019). Handwritten notes were taken as a contingency to any technical malfunctions. All interviews were successfully recorded on the platform.

3.4   Data Analysis and Results

The recorded interviews were downloaded from MS Teams, and each was transcribed and formatted in MS Word. The interview transcripts were then imported into the NVivo qualitative data analysis tool. Each of the transcripts were analysed and coded using the NVivo software as reflected in the code book (Appendix 5) which was extracted from NVivo. Thematic analysis, a common approach to qualitative data analysis was used to identify themes (Bell et al., 2019). This was done searching the data for repetitions, similarities and differences, metaphors, analogies, theory-related concepts, causal connections using the words 'because' and 'since' (Ryan and

Bernard 2003 as cited in Bell et al., 2019:519). The data was then re-analysed to identify broader themes and concepts to reduce any, similar or overlapping themes and minimise duplication. This process was iterative until no new themes were identified. The effect of organisational purpose on identity, commitment, meaningful work and sense of belonging, which were identified from literature were analysed and identified several factors which enable organisational purpose to influence employee retention. A summary of the recurring themes is presented in Table 6 below, which were then further grouped into the broader themes of *alignment to organisational purpose*, *need fulfilment*, *meaningful work*, *leadership* and *organisational commitment* as reflected in the analysis.

Interview Questions	Themes
❖ **Understanding and Identifying with Organisational Purpose**	Service Delivery and Customer Satisfaction
	Individual alignment with organisational purpose
❖ **Influence on Work**	High performance
	Knowledge and experience
	Governance
❖ **Influence of Organisational purpose on Commitment**	Societal contribution
	Technology and innovation
	Benefits and Remuneration
❖ **Meaningful work**	Adding value
	Recognition and appreciation
	Organisational culture

Interview Questions	Themes
❖ **Sense of Belonging and Relatedness**	Challenging work
	Job security
	Leadership and management support
	Collaboration and teamwork
❖ **Proposed Factors for Purpose to Encourage Retention**	Communication and employee engagement
	Branding and Image
	Employee well-being and work-life balance
	Organisational Values
	Training
	Trust

Table 6: Themes

3.5 Data Quality

Saunders et al., (2019) propose that dependability, credibility, transferability and authenticity are important criteria for assessing qualitative research. To ensure that the results of the study are reliable, evidence and supporting documentation for all phases of the research process were retained (Bell et al., 2019). To establish credibility, sufficient time was scheduled with participants to build rapport and allow sufficient time for data collection; information about the study was shared with participants prior to the interview to address preconceived expectations; responses were respectfully challenged during interviews where required to ensure correct understanding and interpretation of information; data was analysed in an iterative manner to ensure analysis and interpretation (Saunders et.al., 2019). The researcher acted in good faith by ensuring professionalism during the interviews and considering the views of all participants to promote fairness (Saunders et al., 2019). The

researcher was cognisant of personal bias and maintained awareness thereof throughout the process (Leitch et al., 2010).

3.6   Limitations

Naturalism is key to qualitative research, yet qualitative interviewing disrupts the natural flow of outcomes and is therefore less naturalistic (Bell et al., 2019). The everyday language, used by participants which qualitative research is concerned with may have been influenced by the study resulting in participants adjusting their language to be perceive more acceptable to the study. Interviewee bias may have influenced the data to be skewed positively for fear of their views being judged. Although the intention was to use video recording, not all participants were comfortable with this approach, hence audio call was consistently opted for all participants. It was therefore not possible to observe body language which is important for gauging reactions of discomfort or confusion to the questions (Bell et al., 2019). This was mitigated by pausing during questions to check that participants were comfortable with the line of questioning. The power utility is a large organisation, and the number of roles in the organisations exceeds the number of participants. Due to the complexity of the subject, the context being the energy sector which included the unique experiences and responses of employees within this sector, this study cannot easily be replicated, however generation of rich data provides for the assessment of possible transferability (Bell et al., 2019). Obtaining secondary data was a challenge due to the confidentiality of information for the sector.

3.7   Research Ethics

This project obtained ethical approval from the institute of study, prior to the commencement of data collection. An information sheet was prepared (Appendix 2) and participants were requested to sign a consent form (Appendix 3) to give their express permission to be involved. Transparency regarding the nature and context of the research was maintained (Bell et al., 2019) and participants were invited to ask questions at the end of the interviews. Interviews proceeded with all participants who had agreed to participate in this study. Interviewees had the option to not answer questions if they so desired, the anonymity of the organisation and participants was

maintained. As confidentiality and sensitivity is high priority for the sector, secondary data and demographic information of participants was kept to a minimum.

4 Analysis

This section provides an explanation of the results of the interview analysis. The interviews that were transcribed were coded and then analysed for recurring themes using thematic analysis. The key emerging themes are discussed below to answer the research question, *How and why does organisational purpose influence employee retention in the SA energy sector?* Direct quotes from statements made by participants during the interviews are referenced in support of the findings.

Key Themes

4.1   Alignment to Organisational Purpose

During the process of conducting the interviews, the organisation had not yet defined the organisational purpose. Participants were requested to explain their understanding and interpretation of the organisational purpose to obtain their views. Each participant provided a unique explanation, with key words emerging relating to *people, sustainability a*nd the *economy*. Figure 3 below represents a word cloud of the key words emerging from participants interpretation of organisational purpose.

Figure 3: Word Cloud Understanding of Organisational Purpose

It was evident that discussing the organisational purpose invoked feelings of personal accountability and responsibility in the participants. Identification with the purpose was seen by them as significantly important for retention.

"Do you identify with that purpose?" (Researcher)

"Definitely. If I did not, I would have jumped ship a long time ago."

(Participant 8)

Identifying with organisational purpose was expressed in two distinct ways: *1) Alignment of personal purpose with organisational purpose; 2) identification with purpose through work*. Interestingly, one participant mentioned that they were using skills that they were strong on to fulfil the purpose. This might imply that when personal and organisational purposes are aligned, employees are using their dominant or best skills which results in personal and professional fulfilment toward one's full potential.

Based on the interviews, a close connection between organisational purpose and participants value systems emerged which they expressed was key for alignment with purpose and employee retention.

"…also, their belief systems…once those are aligned, rest assured, you find employees that are very much loyal." (Participant 5)

Many participants expressed that the purpose should not just be for society but also for the employees, because employees that are content are important for enabling the purpose. There were common sentiments from several interviewees that the organisational values should be entrenched in the purpose. It was evident from the discussions that values were a significant way in which the participants identified with the organisational purpose.

Strategy documents, and organisational policies were seen as a formalised way of making the purpose practical for employees to integrate with their work, and a way of translating the purpose. When organisational values were not practiced, it was perceived by participants as a misalignment to the organisational purpose and the organisational documents were then viewed as superficial documentation. A key point that emerged from the discussions was implementation, monitoring and achievement of the organisational purpose because employees needed a way to assess if their

work was aligned with the organisational purpose and if their work performance was on track. Lack of this creates confusion and takes away meaning from the work performed.

4.2   Need Fulfilment

Physiological

Work-life balance emerged as being important for participants to balance work and family needs. Many of the interviewees identified with the organisational purpose as being one of caring for people and affording people with a better quality of life. They felt that this same approach to purpose could be used to retain employees,

> *"I always want to go back to, better life for people…If your employees are happy, your customers will be happy…"   (Participant 9)*

As many companies are now providing hybrid work options, interviewees felt that their loyalty would be challenged if they were offered better benefits by the market and flexible working conditions. It emerged from the study that organisational purpose has a diminishing or reduced effect on employee retention when remuneration, benefits and opportunities for work-life balance are not competitive with the rest of the market.

Safety

The significance of the purpose was seen to influence job security. Most participants felt stable and secure in their jobs because the economy is very dependent on the organisation and hence its purpose. As a traditional retention factor, job security was still viewed by interviewees as important for long term retention in a struggling SA economy with high unemployment rates. Job security emerged as very important for creating a sense of belonging and dispelling any sense of uncertainty or confusion about the future of the sector.

> *"…if there is no clear message about the security of employment of the people, then the people will automatically jump off the boat." (Participant 6)*

The general sentiment was that, with no incentives and salary increases, time is running out for the sector as employees could only endure so much and soon salaries may not be competitive with the rest of the market. Some interviewees were mindful of operating as "global citizens" and hence not only available to the SA market. As much as they expressed their commitment to the purpose, the poor economy and rising costs presents a challenge. One participant mentioned global head-hunters that would pay whatever the employee would negotiate, making it difficult to refuse.

> *"…we may be losing that salary benefit to the rest of the market."*
>
> *(Participant 7)*

Social

The need for belonging emerged from the interviews, as having a significant impact on morale and employee retention. Belonging was impacted by the type of work being performed. Participants did not have a sense of belonging in instances where they were performing work that was not interesting or challenging. In these instances, organisational purpose had no influence as those participants could not identify with the purpose. The participants stayed because they were able to move on to find work that was more interesting and challenging in other areas of the organisation. Teamwork was seen as very important for collaborated effort in fulfilling of the organisational purpose and creating a sense of belonging. Particularly for a large organisation which had traditionally operated in silos, it emerged that there should be collaboration across business areas so that there is a common understanding of the purpose and alignment of work.

> *"…and being in that particular team and working in collaboration…it gives me also that particular interest that we are always aligned to what we want to achieve." (Participant 5)*

Participants expressed that trust between themselves, and their managers empowered them to do the job and creates a sense of urgency to fulfil the organisational purpose.

> *"you've got to have more urgency and trust in those people that are actually actioning those tasks that will keep that purpose alive."* (Participant 4)

It was evident that a deeper connection with team members was needed especially as a hybrid work model had been adopted. Particularly new employees would struggle to have a connection with other employees which impacts negatively on their retention.

Esteem

It appeared that poor organisational performance and non-delivery of organisational purpose challenged participants belonging because of the negative image and reputation which makes it difficult to identify with the organisation.

> *"…when things are not going too well… it is difficult to identify with the organisation …and then it does affect really that sense of belonging in a way."* (Participant 12)

The study's participants felt strongly that a positive image of the organisation should be portrayed given that there is much negative publicity currently. It emerged that a proactive stance and initiative should be taken to promote positive brand and image.

Self- actualisation

Aspirations emerged as an important factor for retention and if this need is unfulfilled, it has the potential to create misalignment to the organisational purpose reducing the positive effects of purpose.

Harnessing technology and innovation emerged as an important factor for retention because not adapting to technological advancements could erode organisational purpose as it threatens the sustainability of purpose and job security.

> *"…it feels like there's nothing more that could keep me back… there's no space for me to be innovative and creative".* (Participant 7)

Opportunities for learning and development and career advancement were key for participants in deciding to stay as this impacted on their ability to reach their full potential and consequently their identification with the organisational purpose and it

conflicted with the organisational values of being a learning organisation. Exposure to learning and career advancement opportunities was perceived by the interviewees as the organisation equipping and empowering them to fulfil the organisational purpose and helped them to embrace changes in the sector which is important for the sustainability of the sector.

Rewards and recognition were central for interviewees feeling valued, appreciated, and acknowledged for their work. Lack of rewards and recognition impacts the sense of belonging and commitment to the purpose.

> *"People want to move to where they feel appreciated." (Participant 9)*

4.3   Meaningful Work

Societal contribution - The Bigger Picture

There were strong sentiments from all interviewees that they wanted to contribute positively to the economy and to improve the lives of people, and the organisational purpose enabled them to do that. Association with the greater good through purpose came across as positive indicator for retention even if salaries and incentives were being cut.

> *"…my job is meaningful and it's adding value to the organisation at large" (Participant 10)*

South Africa, as a developing economy as well as the poor state of the economy played a huge factor, enhancing the patriotism of participants and they deeply expressed wanting to help the country reach its full potential and make a positive contribution to eradicate societal issues such as high crime and unemployment. There appeared to be a trade-off however, because the financial impact passed onto employees was highlighted as not being sustainable and could challenge employees' loyalty. It was found that a purpose that contributes to broader society issues invokes feelings of excitement about one's work, being present, and has a positive influence on job satisfaction and employee retention.

> *"I'm adding value and contributing to that purpose, I think that is satisfying at an individual level." (Participant 1)*

Influence on tasks

The study found that the *significance* of the organisational purpose enhances the *significance of the task* and organisational purpose invokes a sense of responsibility that contributes to high performance. Most participants consistently mentioned wanting to perform their work to a high standard and going the extra mile. The organisational purpose seemed to influence the performance, quality, efficiency and execution of their tasks. Feeling appreciated influenced whether one's work had meaning, and meaningful work was found to be satisfying for all participants.

Organisational purpose was seen as the equaliser of all roles and tasks. There was a strong sentiment from all participants that all jobs are important as all employees are working toward one purpose, therefore employee retention should be focused on all employees. The importance of being engaged in work that is *challenging* and not mundane emerged repeatedly from the discussions as this was seen to enhance the meaning of their work and keep them committed and engaged. It emerged from the discussions that a sense of belonging would be negatively impacted if work was meaningless. It was evident that a strong connection exists between meaningful work and a sense of belonging.

> *"If the work is mundane, then the purpose doesn't mean much" (Participant 12)*

Participants welcomed the opportunity for developing and utilising all their skills in interesting tasks to reach their potential, but there appeared to be a fine line between role clarity and utilisation of skills. This was particularly evident amongst the technical and engineering participants, some of whom felt there is not a clear distinction in their roles, and work being performed is not in line with their job description. Interestingly the study found that work that is influenced by a significant organisational purpose can still be meaningful even when it is routine. *Length of service* was seen to increase the influence of organisational purpose on work. One interviewee mentioned that when they had first joined the industry they had to mature and gain an understanding of the business which increased the meaningfulness of their work.

4.4 Leadership

Leadership was expressed as being very important for the translation of the organisational purpose at all employee levels. It seemed significantly important for *leadership* to drive employee retention by engaging employees and clearly articulating the organisational purpose to all employees. Organisational purpose should be made practical and relatable so that even employees at the lower or junior levels could understand.

> *"…it's in those actions of senior leadership driving the purpose through in any means..." (Participant 5)*

The importance of visible, felt *leadership* and *employee engagement* emerged as being key for creating alignment to organisational purpose, building trust, providing reassurance, direction and guidance to create a sense of security and belonging for all employees. Continuous reaffirmation and communication of the purpose was viewed as an avenue for creating awareness of purpose at all employee levels.

> *"…staff are looking to us, all the management, for guidance, for direction to make them feel secure." (Participant 2)*

Internal communication from senior leadership was emphasised as crucial for creating a sense of belonging for employees. Communication was also seen as a means of creating security and reassurance about uncertainties and viewed as important for establishing job security and improving employee retention.

There was a consensus amongst interviewees that the ideas, voice, expertise and learnings of experienced employees should be acknowledged, which also enhances the connection with organisational purpose.

> *"There also needs to be a bottom-up approach on how we solve things".
> (Participant 7)*

It was important for all participants that they were provided an opportunity to provide input to the organisational purpose through their ideas and by voicing concerns to leadership.

4.5   Organisational Commitment

Across several interviews there was a sense that many participants had a strong emotional attachment with the organisation. In these instances, it was employees who had been with the organisation for more than 15 years. They expressed feeling that they are part of a family and felt cared for. This might suggest that organisational purpose may have a greater influence with increased length of service. These were also the same individuals who expressed that they were happy to work for the company even though salaries were not being increased and benefits had been cut.

> *"…we didn't get increases for a long time and then they even stopped bonuses but I'm going to still be prepared to carry on working for the organisation."* (Participant 2)

One individual stated that although their skills were very marketable, and they would not struggle to find employment elsewhere they were committed to remaining through the challenges because they understood the bigger picture in terms of what the organisation was trying to achieve and wanted to be part of the transformation because of the significant impact on the lives of people if electricity was not delivered. This was a sentiment echoed by many of the participants, that they really wanted to contribute to turning the situation around. In contrast there were participants who felt that their commitment was eroding because they could not see a financially sustainable future against the backdrop of a high cost of living, and the negative publicity and reputational issues are challenging.   These individuals were still committed to the organisational purpose and remained because of benefits accumulated, no other available opportunities, and the job security afforded by a significant purpose.

4.6   Summary

The section summarises the key findings for each of the areas discussed from the analysis of the data. In respect of *need fulfilment*, organisational purpose satisfies the need for job security and encourages a sense of belonging. When there is no sense of belonging, there is no identification with the organisational purpose, hence no connection with the organisation. Alignment of personal values with organisational values is crucial for identification with the purpose and for employees to remain with the organisation. When work is not meaningful this has a significant negative impact on employees' sense of belonging and negatively impacts retention because employees do not understand how their work fits into the purpose. A sense of belonging is enhanced through regular engagements with leadership and internal communication where employees feel included and involved in the organisational purpose.

In SA, a developing country where crime is high and organisations are cost cutting through remuneration and benefits, the power utility may not be able to compete adequately for skilled and scarce resources who can easily be poached by developed or first world countries, which can offer better pay and security. Organisational purpose appeared strongly intertwined with the performance of employees and implies a positive influence on overall business performance. From an employee retention point of view, the organisation needs to perform well and achieve its purpose otherwise employees will feel demotivated as though they are investing their effort in a failing organisational purpose. This erodes meaningfulness of work and creates a negative image of the organisation for potential employees. From the results of this study, organisational purpose has a positive influence on employee retention; however, it needs to be supported and enhanced by traditional retention factors such as fair remuneration, job security, and a supportive organisational culture. The study also highlighted that employees are influenced positively but to varying degrees based on their personal circumstances and needs.

5 Discussion of Theory and Findings

5.1   Alignment to Organisational Purpose

The results of the study indicated that alignment of personal purpose and values with organisational purpose and identification with purpose through work were the key means by which employees align themselves with organisational purpose. Employees are influenced by their personal goals and a higher level of performance can result if the outcome is perceived to be significant and important (Ramlall, 2004). Employees who shared the same values of the organisation were found to be committed and had long service with the organisation and at the time of the study, had no intention to leave. This is consistent with research on person-organisation fit theory where employees are likely to remain with organisations when their values and beliefs are aligned with those of their organisation (Presbitero et al., 2016). In addition, this study concurs with research that employees are attracted to an organisational purpose that aligns with their own sense of self, and they relate well with the organisation (van Ingen et al., 2021). Apart from the positive effects on retention, a good fit between values and purpose will result in more effective and productive employees, who are loyal and become attached to the organisation (Presbitero et al., 2015). This implies that the energy sector can retain employees and improve performance in this way.

The study also found that the achievement of the organisational purpose becomes challenging when all business areas are not aligned to the purpose. Organisational policies and procedures which are perceived as *"governance"* for the organisational purpose are important for translation of the purpose so that it has meaning in employees' work. When organisational goals and strategies are clearly defined, employees are better able to understand the contribution of their work (Lysova et al., 2019). Organisational policies can create an environment where employees find their work meaningful if these are perceived to be authentic; it enables clear line of sight of alignment of their work to organisational values. Conversely, if employees perceive organisational policies to be inauthentic it can erode meaningfulness of work (Bailey et al., 2017 as cited in Lysova et al., 2019:381). The study's findings are therefore consistent with theory, where participants felt challenged by strategy and policies that did not align with organisational purpose which they found demotivating and impacted

their performance negatively. Organisations that are authentically purpose-driven create an environment for intrinsic motivation to flourish, where employees are willing to go the extra mile (Henderson and Serafeim, 2020).

5.2   Need Fulfilment

Employees who are satisfied are likely to be more productive, creative and committed (Das and Baruah, 2013). In terms of the influence of organisational purpose on the fulfilment of employees' basic needs it was found that organisational purpose has the most significant influence over employees needs for self-actualisation, in terms of career development, rewards and recognition and reaching one's full potential through technology and innovation and being involved in challenging work as this has a positive impact on the need for belonging. The study revealed that organisational purpose influences the needs for esteem, which could be either positive or negative, as this influence is through the organisation's brand and image. Job security was directly influenced by the significance and sustainability of the purpose, whereas remuneration and benefits were seen to reduce the positive influence of organisational purpose on the retention of employees. In a study on retention practices for engineers and technical workers in the public sector, Rose and Gordon (2010), highlight the challenges of scarce resources and limitations on remuneration, and position job security as an incentive that is offered in the public sector. Notably the economic climate and the market was a factor in this study. Not all participants in the study were influenced by financial factors to the same extent. Physiological needs were least affected possibly due to the hybrid working conditions that have been implemented where employees do not depend on the organisation for these needs to be met.

Employee *recognition* encourages organisational commitment and has a substantial effect on employees' intention to remain in their jobs (Al-Emadi et al., 2015). Individuals who feel that their contributions are appreciated are more likely to experience meaningful work (Lysova et al., 2019). A focus on purpose can provide support for *innovation* and sustainability. Through being a good steward of resources and showing authentic respect for all stakeholders, employers can build a committed workforce, where innovation is encouraged (Hollensbe et al., 2014). Creative ideas give rise to innovation, and organisational factors such as motivation, resources, and management practices are important for creating the environment for these to flourish

(Amabile et al., 1996). Successful organisations in the future will be characterised by adaptable organisational behaviour which is hinged on innovation, creativity, and flexibility (Sinha and Sinha, 2012). Job design refers to theory that emphasises the work itself as being key for employee motivation, therefore challenging work enhances employee motivation and has a significant effect on retention (Ramlall, 2004). A study conducted in the manufacturing and services sector for a developing country found that compensation has a significant moderating effect on retention (Khalid and Nawab, 2018). Traditional HRM strategies are not sufficient, and organisations need to find other avenues to compete in a global market (Khalid and Nawab, 2018).

An organisation's *brand* in this context is the perceived image by potential and current employees and communicates the organisation's value proposition to employees, also establishing the organisation as the employer of choice, which can attract, retain and motivate employees (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016). Corporate identity is the *meanings* that a company wants to be known for and which allows people to relate to the organisation (Wheeler et al., 2006). For employees to identify with the brand, the organisation's actions and decisions taken daily communicates its core values which becomes entrenched in the employees (Wheeler et al., 2006). The findings are therefore consistent with the study in terms of how employees are influenced by the organisations brand.

Ghosh et al., (2013) recommends that organisations should create a more holistic experience for employees by enabling balance between work life and home life. Work-life balance has been linked to meaningful work in research (Byrd, 2022). Organisational purpose contributes positively to *employee wellbeing* as it is perceived to provide an environment centred on trust, fostering belonging, meaning and direction for employees (Jasinenko and Steuber, 2022). The study's findings support the literature where the participants felt that their needs for work-life balance should be an enactment of the organisation's purpose towards its employees.

5.3   Meaningful work

Meaningful work is positively linked to organisational outcomes such as employee retention (Lysova et al., 2019). Employees preferences are changing, and some prefer involvement in corporate social initiatives for less pay which is seen to increase their intention to remain with a company (Singh 2019). The key findings of the study identified that organisational purpose has an influence on the meaningfulness of employees work through the impact of the purpose on societal contribution, the type of tasks performed, and employees' sense of belonging and the study found that these were important influences on employee retention for the SA energy sector. Belonging is discussed under *5.1.2 Need Fulfilment* as it forms part of employees' basic needs, and it was also found to be closely linked to meaningful work in accordance with literature.

In a South African study of high-performing individuals, participants found it satisfying working for an organisation that makes an impact on society and found it to be a highly motivating retention factor (Letchmiah and Thomas, 2017). The ability to make a positive impact can serve as a source of key value derived from one's work, and when it is realised, it can lead to meaningful work. The study identified that the significance of the purpose and the contribution to society increased the commitment of the employees because they were working towards a meaningful purpose which made their work feel meaningful. When works serves a prosocial goal, it instils value, whereas work perceived to be of no use to society is associated with high turnover (Martela, 2023). Participants in this study mentioned the uniqueness and magnitude of the purpose as there are not many jobs that have an impact nationally due to the monopoly of the sector. The economic situation weighed in on the discussion with participants expressing that they wanted to make a positive contribution toward the improvement of the economy. In a study about millennial job seekers attitudes toward CSR (Klimkiewicz and Oltra, 2017), potential hires are not attracted to employers with a bad reputation, whereas CSR may attract prospective employees. The study's findings are in line with the *Work as Meaning Model* theory where performing work for a societal purpose has been shown to be a source of encouragement to workers and they are willing to work towards such a cause because they believe it will help them reach their full potential (Steger and Dik, 2012).

The significance of the organisational purpose seemed to elevate the *significance of the tasks* performed by the study participants. It was found to be a source of encouragement and motivation for employees to carry out their work. This also resulted in their work being meaningful. This is in line with the literature on *task significance* within the Job Characteristics Model. In line with theory the participants identified with their task and had a good understanding of how their work fitted into the organisation and the impact that it had on the broader society (Ramlall, 2004). Although some of the participants were eager to be exposed to a variety of work where they could use different skills, organisational purpose did not appear to have a significant impact on the skill variety component of meaningful work as employees viewed this as role conflict. This resulted in reduced meaning in their work because they felt their work did not align with the purpose. In these instances, they also felt that they were being given work that did not align with their skills or job compact. This finding is more consistent with Herzberg's theory where he referred to this as job loading (Ramlall, 2004). Participants also expressed that one had to find meaning in their own work which implied that employees also had to believe that their work was meaningful. Role conflict also appeared to affect employees' sense of belonging. Interestingly the study found that employees could still find their work to be meaningful even when they did not feel a sense of belonging; however, when they performed work that was not meaningful, they did not feel a sense of belonging. This might imply that organisational purpose may have varying effects on the four sources of meaningful work where belonging is described as a source by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009).

5.4   Organisational Commitment

Organisational purpose had a significant positive impact on the organisational commitment as well as the retention of several participants in the study. In these individuals, it was the affective component of the organisational commitment that was positively influenced. The affective component is when the employee experiences a strong emotional connection with the organisation because the employee identifies with and shares the same values and goals as the organisation (Tummers and Knies, 2013; Ansari, 2011). There were a few participants that felt they had no options either personally or in the job market, except to remain in the organisation. In these individuals', continuance commitment was affected. Participants who had received

study bursaries prior to working for the organisation felt an obligation to remain with the organisation even once they had worked their required time. In this instance the normative component was affected by organisational purpose. The study's findings therefore support Tummers and Knies (2013) that when affective commitment is positively influenced, it in turn has a positive influence on sustained employee retention. The study differs from Anitha and Begum (2016) where it was found that affective commitment does not significantly impact employee retention; instead in this study, organisational purpose positively influenced affective commitment and had a positive influence on employee retention.

5.5   The Importance of Leadership

Literature reveals that organisational leaders assume that the existing culture is applicable for a remote work environment as well; however, such a change can result in erosion of relationships and human connection in the workplace if it is not managed sustainably; therefore, inclusion should be integrated with *organisational culture* and perceived as a value (Byrd, 2022). Interviewees emphasised *communication* and affirmation of the purpose by senior leadership as being vital. Clear and concise communication of purpose is important for how purpose is perceived by stakeholders (van Ingen et al., 2021). Leadership enables effective communication, and transparent communication fosters employee commitment because employees feel valued and important to the organisation, leading to improved retention (Letchmiah and Thomas, 2017). Participants specifically and unanimously expressed the need to be engaged by senior leadership, inclusive of intermittent face-to-face engagements. Particularly in view of the recent hybrid work implementation and requiring reassurance in view of imminent changes in the sector. Communication by executives has been found to improve employee engagement (Singh, 2019).

Leadership-member exchange theory refers to the quality of relationships between leaders and members (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995 as cited in Tummers and Knies 2013:859). High quality *relationships* are characterised by trust and employees feeling valued by their managers, and generally results in job satisfaction, high performance and low turnover (Tummers and Knies, 2013). Individuals who have a good understanding of the mission they want to achieve with an organisation can make

great *leaders*. They can inspire others and form effective relationships, demonstrating how the mission, organisation and employees are linked (Steger and Dik, 2012). Hollensbe et al. (2015) points out the responsibility of employers to be committed to building relationships, treating employees with respect and dignity, and setting a purpose that *supports* them in reaching their full potential. These are in line with the sentiments echoed by participants in this study. The participants in this study repeatedly raised uplifting those with experience and knowledge in the business, listening to them and taking their views and inputs irrespective of their levels. *Subsidiarity* refers to the promotion of accountability at all levels to make the right decision, rather than depending on hierarchical decision-making. This gives employees a voice, autonomy and support to make decisions that are driven by purpose (Hollensbe et al., 2014). Involving employees in decision-making processes can reduce turnover intentions as employees will feel listened to, valued and respected (Al-Emadi et al., 2015).

5.6   Summary

The study reveals that organisational purpose has a positive influence on employees and a positive influence on employee retention. Regarding *why* it influences retention in the energy, one of the significant factors that emerged is the significance of the purpose and the contribution to society, which employees wanted to be a part of. However, in isolation of traditional monetary employee retention factors such as remuneration and benefits, rewards and job security; organisational purpose may have a diminishing effect on employee retention and not be able to sustain employee commitment in the long term. It emerges as an especially important part of a whole package to encourage employee retention. For it to be truly effective for retention purposes, organisational purpose should be clearly articulated by leadership, and fully comprehended by employees.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of organisational purpose on employee retention in the SA energy sector, and to answer the research question in 1.3,

How and why does organisational purpose influence employee retention in the SA energy sector?

An exploratory research based on emergent themes in literature regarding employee preferences for work, mainly encompassed within the concepts of needs theory, and meaningful work formed the basis for the approach. The study's results draw a parallel to *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, a well-known theory linked with employee motivation and employee retention. Table 6 below represents a summary mapping of the influence of organisational purpose on the various needs within the categories of the hierarchy. The study also revealed that organisational purpose influences employee retention through aspects of meaningful work, the employee's fit within the organisation as well as employees' desire to contribute to societal causes through the work that they are performing.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Mapping of the study's findings
Self-actualisation	❖ Alignment of individual purpose with organisational purpose
	❖ Societal contribution
	❖ Aspirations
	❖ Learning and career development
	❖ Challenging Work
	❖ Technology and Innovation
Esteem	❖ Knowledge and Experience
	❖ Recognition and Rewards
	❖ Branding and Image
Social	❖ Belonging

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Mapping of the study's findings
	❖ Organisational Values
	❖ Teamwork
	❖ Management Feedback and Support
	❖ Collaboration
	❖ Trust
	❖ Communication and Employee engagement
Safety	❖ Job security
	❖ Governance
	❖ Benefits and Remuneration
Physiological	❖ Work-life balance
	❖ Employee Wellbeing

Table 7: Mapping of Study's Findings to Needs Hierarchy

6.2   Recommendations

The following recommendations are in line with the key findings raised in chapter 5 above.

Organisational Strategy and Policies

Organisational purpose can serve as a guiding concept for strategy alignment, alignment of subgoals, decision-making and can provide stability and direction in complex and uncertain times (Jasinenko and Steuber 2022; Hollensbe 2014). It is recommended that the power utility launch an internal project to clearly communicate the organisational purpose to all employees. An implementation plan should be developed that will include various organisational initiatives that will be impacted by this implementation. Organisational policies and strategies that need to be revised and updated to align with the implementation of purpose should be identified. Documents that intend to communicate the purpose should be practical and simple to understand.   Key performance measures should be identified and developed for specific measuring and monitoring of the achievement of the organisational purpose. As part of this project the organisational culture should be assessed to develop a culture that closely aligns with the organisational purpose and one that can support

the retention of employees over a long period. Employees should be invited to share their inputs into the organisational purpose so that they feel part of the initiative and can relate to the organisational purpose.

Recruitment and post onboarding

Recruitment policies and strategies should be enhanced to communicate the purpose, and the goals and values of the organisation as part of the recruitment process so that it may encourage a better fit between potential employees and the organisation and ensure that employees will remain with the organisation post appointment. Psychometric testing should be redesigned to include assessing whether potential employees are a good fit for the purpose, goals and values of the organisation. This represents a proactive approach to employee retention where both the organisation and employee can benefit from a good P-O fit. Good working relationships can encourage belonging and bonding and helps employees experience a common purpose (Lips Wiersma and Morris, 2009). Implementation of mentorship programmes can contribute to meaningfulness in work (Lysova et al., 2019). New recruits as well as established employees may be afforded the opportunity to transfer skills both ways, encouraging a sense of identity and belonging for new employees to help them identify and connect with the purpose and established employees who will feel appreciated and acknowledged for their knowledge and experience.

Job design

Job profiles should be revised to clearly indicate the alignment to the organisational purpose and how each specific role contributes toward the achievement of the organisational purpose. Jobs may be redesigned to increase collaboration, belonging and address organisational interdependencies (Pratt et al., 2013). Job roles should be redesigned to align closely with job profiles and avoid role conflict and confusion as to the purpose of the task. Tasks should match the level of skill and qualifications of employees so that work is challenging, interesting and meaningful. A comprehensive induction process should be re-introduced for all new employees with specific training on the organisational purpose and core business functions. All employees should be trained on the changes and enhancements that follow post implementation of the organisational purpose. The sector should also make allocation

for formal skills and knowledge transfer of retiring 'baby boomer' employees especially where skills are rare. A holistic active retention policy which considers factors that influence meaningful work and satisfaction of basic employee needs should be developed. Career development emerged in the study as important to address the need for self-actualisation. The organisation could conduct job analyses that can identify the job profile, specific tasks, relationships involved, outcomes of the job and rewards linked to the tasks Scroggins (2008). This can result in a better match between employees and tasks, and can also be done post-hire, in the form of career planning, progression and job design.

Work-life balance

The organisation should consider flexible work strategies apart from just a hybrid work that can benefit both the organisation and employees and encourage retention. Changing work preferences and changes in the competitive job market signal that various forms of flexible work is being offered as attractive work packages in the market which will make it difficult for the sector to retain employees. A supportive organisational culture is important for creating the conditions to improve work-life balance and employee well-being and can enhance employees' connection with the organisational purpose to improve commitment. To address employees' social needs for connecting with co-workers, internal social clubs such as sporting, health and fitness clubs amongst others can be introduced or revived. Employees should be encouraged to volunteer for organisational corporate social initiatives and for roles that are outside of their jobs, should they desire. This can fulfil needs of belonging and relatedness and strengthen identification with the organisation and its purpose.

Corporate Branding

The power utility should adopt a proactive focus on branding and image that can encourage positive identification with the organisation's purpose with current employees as well as potential employees, given that there is currently negative publicity and an unsavoury perception of the sector. The organisation can benefit from purposeful embedding of CSR within its strategy and operations which can encourage congruence between the image of the organisation and employees' work (Lysova et al.,2019). CSR work that is being done in the community including major projects that

are successfully completed in the sector should be publicised to uplift the image of the organisation and demonstrate alignment and fulfilment of the purpose. This can enhance employee retention and motivate employees who feel overwhelmed by the negative public image to revive their sense of belonging and identification with the organisation. Communication within and external to the organisation should be specific, timely and provide reassuring feedback of current and future changes or events to encourage a sense of job security for employees and potential employees. Platforms where employees can share their experience, ideas for innovation and provide input to initiatives should be created to further entrench a sense of belonging.

Leadership

Research shows that leadership can redefine organisational purpose to increase moral leadership (2004) and propose that *leadership styles*; *leadership behaviour*; *leadership skills* for influence, bringing about culture change, sharing the organisation's vision and focusing on leader followership are important aspects for leaders to consider (Springett, 2004; Van Seters and Field, 1990). The power utility can obtain benefits by focusing on leadership development of managers and senior leaders to strengthen embedding of organisational purpose. The study revealed that all levels of management are important in terms of clearly articulating the purpose to their subordinates, and senior leadership was especially key regarding engagement. The organisation will benefit from regular employee engagement sessions that will enhance communication, transparency, organisational culture and provide a source of support and encouragement to employees. These sessions should be collaborative and include employees at all levels to enhance fairness.

6.3   Final Conclusion

Figure 4 below provides a high-level framework of the recommendations made in this study. It reflects the alignment that is required between organisational purpose and organisational strategies and processes as well as the image and well-being of employees, and the importance of the role of leadership in driving and communicating the purpose. These can have beneficial outcomes for the organisation and employees and enhance employee retention for the sector.
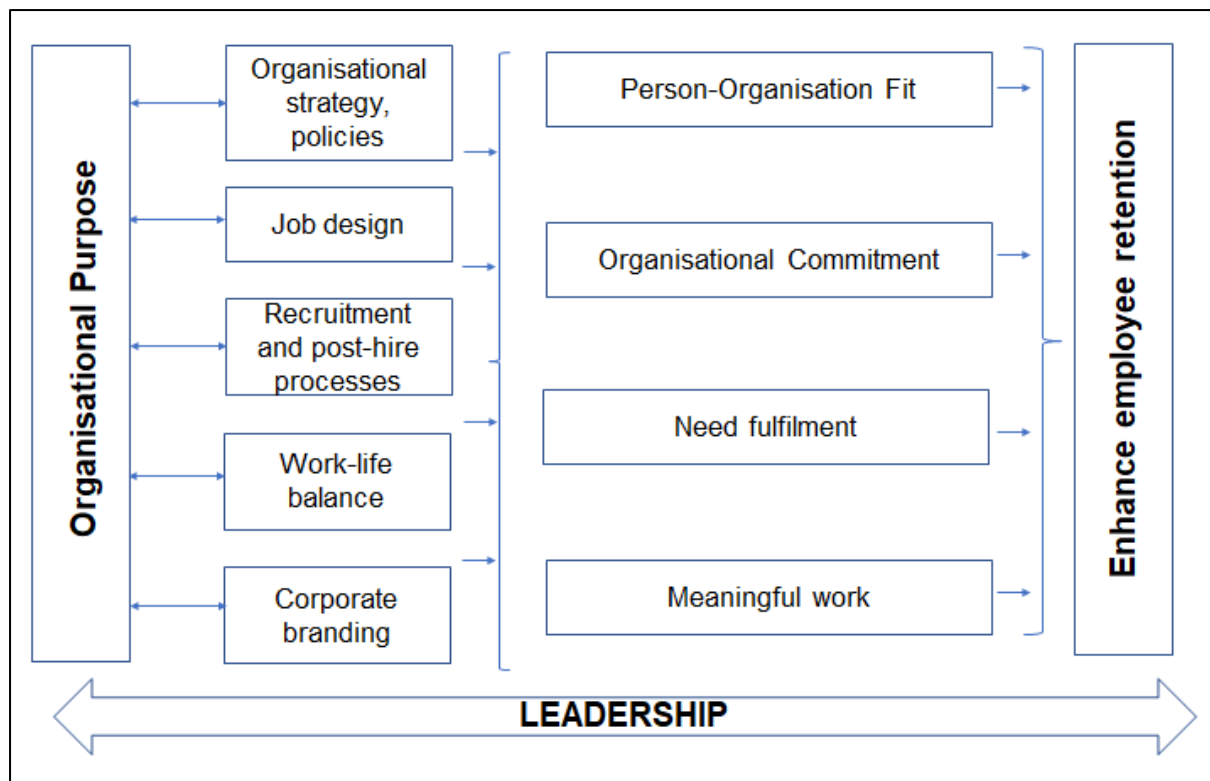
Figure 4: Proposed Framework for Recommendations

7 Personal Reflection

This section provides a personal account of my reflection throughout the MBA journey, MRC project, the skills I have acquired through and my aspirations for progression into the future.

7.1 The MBA Journey

My goals at the onset of the MBA were simple, or so I had presumed. Investing three years of my life to acquire another degree did not seem as daunting at first because I have always been somewhat of an academic and was looking forward to the prosect of career progression. I was also in search of more fulfilment professionally and hopeful that my personal and professional purpose in life would at some point coincide and that the MBA journey would be instrumental in bringing this about. The journey has been overwhelming at times, trying to balance personal life, work and studies however, the skills that I acquired early in the programme helped me to be more self-aware and develop tools and techniques to manoeuvre through the challenges. One of the most difficult things was finding balance which ironically brought about the most profound and effective changes in both my personal and professional life. The intensity of the programme assisted me with developing creative and effective ways of accomplishing more with my time and to let go of mindsets and traditions that were causing me to stagnate. Time felt like my greatest enemy, there was never enough of it, and I have come to appreciate, value, respect and use it wisely as though it were a precious commodity. My first year of study was heavily impacted personally and professionally by the aftereffects of the Covid-19 pandemic and it was tempting to delay to a time that was more suitable. Marshalling all my resilience and determination, I strongly resolved that I would stay focused and complete the program as planned. As I stand at the completion of my MRC project, I am proud of myself for having made it this far and have no regrets on having taken this challenge.

7.2　Skills and Knowledge Acquired

Several times I felt completely out of my depth, as I am from an information technology background and although the process of learning the subject matter of my research was interesting and exciting, I had underestimated the time and planning involved and the magnitude of this project. My timelines were also impacted when my son was hospitalised, and I had to completely reengineer my plan so that I could still finish within time. With hindsight I realise I could have been more diligent with engaging with the research module more effectively prior to the commencement of stage three.

I have challenged myself to learn something new and have acquired new skills. I have completely enjoyed and identified with the qualitative research process. It has afforded me with the opportunity to practice and improve so many other skills that are important for me as a manager. It has allowed me to improve my listening and communication skills, so that I can also listen to what is not being said because often those are the 'unsaid' issues that require attention. This process has also taught me resilience and to improve my skills at balancing the demands of work and life. I have found this to be a completely immersive experience. The MRC and the MBA is an opportunity to use one's voice and to make a difference in the workplace, society and the world by being able to use one's voice through research.

7.3　Evaluation of personal objectives

The objectives I had established at the start of the MBA journey, in summary was to learn new skills; be of assistance to my organisation in providing insights into the problem of employee retention; gain deeper insight into understanding what makes employees feel fulfilled at work; and contribute to the body of literature. As I review these objectives at the completion of my MRC, I feel privileged that I have been allowed to step into the realities of employees within the energy sector. I now realise that initially I had a narrow focus on myself and what I would achieve and accomplish from the MBA. But as I progressed, I started to develop a deep desire for having a broader impact and influence in society. The MRC has really assisted me with insight on how to be more purposeful. I feel a sense of fulfilment at having chosen a topic that allowed me to be true to myself while still allowing me to be of service to my organisation.

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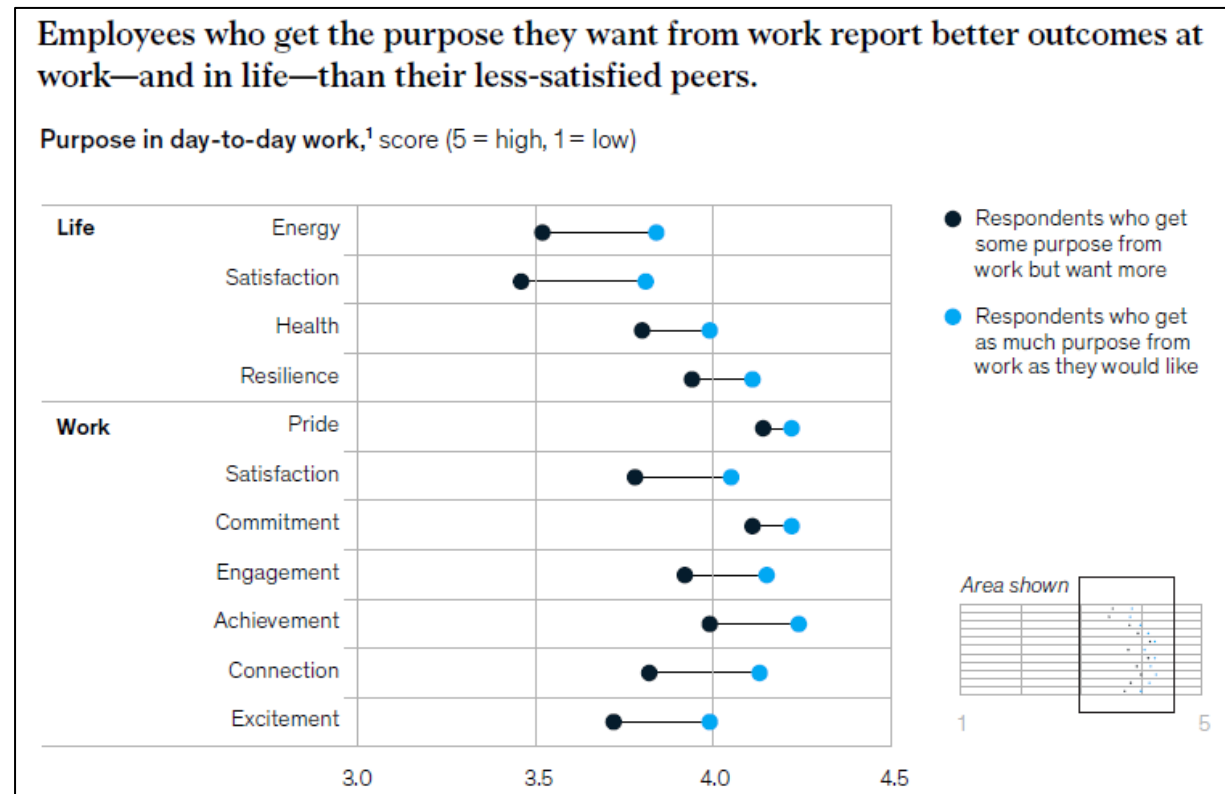
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APPENDIX 1 – Purpose in Work

Purpose in work and life comparisons

Employees who get the purpose they want from work report better outcomes at work—and in life—than their less-satisfied peers.

Purpose in day-to-day work,[1] score (5 = high, 1 = low)

Life	Energy	
	Satisfaction	
	Health	
	Resilience	
Work	Pride	
	Satisfaction	
	Commitment	
	Engagement	
	Achievement	
	Connection	
	Excitement	

Respondents who get some purpose from work but want more

Respondents who get as much purpose from work as they would like

Area shown

(Source: McKinsey 2021)

APPENDIX 2 – Information Sheet

Information sheet

Title of research project: *The Influence of Organisational Purpose on Employee Retention in the South African Energy Sector*

Background

Dear Participant,

My name is Rosanna Ponnen, and I am carrying out a research project on the influence of organisational purpose on employee retention in the South African (SA) Energy Sector, to understand whether a focus on organisational purpose for this industry will help leadership to retain skills.

The research forms part of my MBA qualification at Henley Business School, part of the University of Reading.

Part of the research involves interviewing people who work within the SA energy sector; and for this reason, I would like to invite you to take part.

What participation means for you

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a video or face-to-face interview. The interview will last between 45 minutes to 1 hour. During the interview I will ask you questions relating to your identification with the organisation's purpose, how it influences the workplace and retention.

In general, Employee Retention relates to the actions or plans of the organisation that motivate and encourage the employee to stay for a maximum time. Organisational purpose has evolved through the years and encompasses more than the mission or purpose statement. It extends to the beliefs about an organisation's core reason for being and the meaning it provides to its employees.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can choose not to answer any particular questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview and take notes for later analysis. The data will be kept securely and destroyed after the completion of the project.

At every stage your identity will remain confidential. Your name will not be included in the final report. The identity of your organisation will not be included in the final report.

The project has been subject to ethical review in accordance with the procedures specified by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

How you could benefit

A copy of the completed project will be available on request. Your participation will assist the researcher in identifying the influences of organisational purpose on retention in the energy sector. This feedback can contribute positively to the organisation.

If you have any further questions about the project, please feel free to contact me by email, using the address below.

Name of researcher: Rosanna Ponnen

Email address: r.ponnen@student.henley.ac.uk

Date: 30 June 2023

APPENDIX 3 – Consent Form

Consent form

Title of research project: *The Influence of Organisational Purpose on Employee Retention in the South African Energy Sector*

1. I have read the accompanying information sheet relating to the research on the influence of organisational purpose on employee retention.

2. I have had explained to me the purposes of this research and what will be required of me, and any questions I have had have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the information sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

3. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from this project at any time, and that this will be without detriment.

4. I grant permission for my interview(s) to be audio-recorded, and for the research data to be used in the process of completing the research project.

5. I have received a copy of this Consent form and of the accompanying Information sheet.

6. I am aged 18 or over.

Name of participant: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 4 – Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Hi *(Name of Participant)*

My name is Rosanna Ponnen, I am from the internal audit department. Welcome to the interview and thank you for meeting with me. Before we commence could I please ask if you are willing for me to record this interview and your permission to use the transcript for analysis. Your permission is important for ethics purposes. Also, thank you for the signed consent form, it is appreciated.

I will now start the recording and will ask you again for permission once the recording has commenced so that it is included on the transcript for the research ethics purposes. I would like to just recap a bit on the information sheet that was emailed to you with the interview appointment. So, the focus of this interview is to understand your experience and views on the topic of the *Influence of Organisational Purpose on Employee Retention.*

In general, employee retention relates to the actions or plans of the organisation that motivate and encourage the employee to stay for a maximum time. Organisational purpose has evolved through the years and encompasses more than the mission or purpose statement. It extends to the beliefs about an organisation's core reason for being and the meaning it provides to its employees.

To assure you once again, your identity will remain confidential. Your name will not be included in the final report. The raw data will remain confidential. The research has been approved by the University of Reading and supported by the organisation.

Introductory Questions

1. **Could you briefly describe your role in the organisation?**

   Memory prompt: Have you worked in different roles?

2. **How many years have you been with the organisation?**

Thank you for responding to the questions that provide me with insight into your experience and role in the organisation. I have prepared some questions I would like to discuss, so I will now commence with those.

1

Interview Questions
1. What is your understanding of the organisation's purpose and how do you identify with it? *Why? How does it make you feel?*
2. How does the organisation's purpose influence you in carrying out your work? *Why?* *Memory prompt: Connection with the organisation's purpose, emotions felt.*
3. In what ways does the organisational purpose influence your commitment to the organisation? *What makes you feel that way?*
4. In what ways can the organisation use its purpose to encourage retention? *What makes you think so?* *Memory prompt: Positive and negative impacts of organisational purpose; what should be emphasised?*
5. In what ways do the organisation's purpose affect your sense of belonging within the organisation. *Why?*
6. Do you feel that your work is meaningful, and how does it align with the organisation's purpose? *What makes you think so?* *Memory prompt: Effect of organisational purpose on the experience of meaningful work.*

2

APPENDIX 5 – Code Book

How does Organisational Purpose affect sense of Belonging

Name	Files	References
Complacency	1	1
Covid Pandemic	1	1
Direction	1	2
Job Security	6	10
Leadership	3	6
Management support	4	7
Politics	2	2
Reporting structure	3	6
Reputation	3	6
Rewards and Recognition	5	7
Social activities	2	2
Team connection	5	6

Identifying with purpose

Name	Files	References
Alignment of individual and organisational purpose	9	14
Belief system	2	4
Bigger picture	7	14
Caring organisation	2	2
Economic growth and development	4	5
Feedback loop from departments to organisational purpose	2	3
Implementation	1	1
Sense of family	4	6
Sense of responsibility	1	1
Service delivery on mandate and purpose	10	18
Understanding of purpose	3	6
Value chain	3	6

Influence on commitment

Name	Files	References
Age	2	2
Alignment of Roles to Job Profiles	3	3
Alignmment of business objectives with organisational purpose	7	17
Bureaucracy	2	5
Clear mandate	1	1
Company Benefits	5	7
Contribution to society	6	11
Economic situation	3	5
Global headhunting	1	1
Meet business objectives	2	2
Pride	3	4
Sense of responsibility	1	2
Targets conflicting with organisational values	2	2
Technology and Innovation	5	15
Transformation	1	1
Transparency	1	1
Upskilling	1	2
Work life balance	3	5

Influence on work

Name	Files	References
Adding value	8	12
Collaboration	4	8
Efficiency and cost effectiveness	1	2
Employee knowledge and experience	7	13
Governance	6	8
High performance	7	12
Inspiring	1	2
Remuneration	4	7
Silos	2	4
Sustainable	3	4

Meaningful work

Name	Files	References
Appreciation	5	7
Building relationships	1	3
Career progression	5	7
Challenging work	6	7
Energized	1	1
Greater good	4	5
Organisational Culture	4	5
Positive feedback	1	1
Role clarity	1	2
Skill variety	1	2

Organisational Purpose definition

Name	Files	Reference
Caring for employees and the communities where they do business	1	2
Existence of an organisation for the benefit of citizens	1	1
Improvement in the livelihood of South Africa	3	3
Keeping the lights on	2	2
Provide electricity to enable the economy	4	4
Providing a commodity to the people for the development of the countr	2	2
Reliable, stable electricity for SA society	2	2
Sustainable, affordable electricity	5	6

Using Organisational Purpose to encourage Retention

⊕ Name	▲ Files	References
○ Branding and Image	6	14
○ Communication and awareness	6	8
○ Employee engagements with Leadership	6	8
○ Employee well-being	5	7
○ Learning organisation	6	11
○ Organisational Values	5	5
○ Sense-making of Organisational Purpose	1	3
○ Talent pipelining	1	1
○ Training	6	10
○ Trust	5	8