

# AN EXPLORATION OF MIDDLE MANAGERS' INTENTIONS TO STAY AND LEAVE IN A SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZED RETAIL ORGANISATION

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines intentions to stay and intentions to leave as expressed by middle managers in a small to medium sized retail organisation. The concepts of employee retention and employee turnover have long been the subject of academic research, however, there is no available studies in this area that specifically focus on middle managers in the Australian small to medium enterprise supermarket retail sector. An exploratory case study methodology is used to qualitatively analyse factors that influence both intentions to stay and intentions to leave. The findings suggest that factors such as power and organisational support have a strong influence on intentions to stay, and personal factors have a strong influence on intentions to leave. In addition to this, several other findings are presented relating to other factors influencing middle managers' decisions to stay with an organisation or seek employment elsewhere. This paper also presents the implications of the study for both the academic research discipline as well as for managers and practitioners.

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## INTRODUCTION

Workforce retention is a 'hot topic' for all organisations. This is because employee turnover is costly and the loss of high performing employees (also known as, dysfunctional turnover) contributes to inefficient organisations through the loss of productivity and morale in the remaining employees (Allen et al., 2010; Dess & Shaw, 2001; Jones & Gates, 2007; Lambert & Hogan, 2009). Thus, much research has been conducted to examine the factors influencing employees' intentions to leave (Boxall et al., 2003; Rosen et al., 2011). More recently, the factors influencing employees' intentions to stay have also been investigated (Jones & Gates, 2007; Kyndt et al., 2009; Radford et al., 2014). This is because the factors influencing employees' intentions to leave are not always the same as those influencing their intentions to stay (Chan & Morrison, 2000; Mittal et al., 2009).

A review of the literature revealed only one study exploring the factors influencing employees' intentions to stay and leave in the supermarket retail sector (e.g. Esbjerg et al., 2010). However, that study was based on an investigation of Danish employees and no study was found exploring these factors within an Australian context. Moreover, the authors found no available research that investigated middle managers' intentions to stay and leave in small to medium sized grocery retailers. Thus, this study begins to fill this gap in the literature. In particular, this research conducts an exploratory case study analysis of a small to medium sized supermarket franchise in Australia to investigate three research questions:

- 1) *Why do middle managers stay in small to medium sized supermarket organisations?*
- 2) *Why do middle managers leave small to medium sized supermarket organisations?*
- 3) *Are there similarities and differences in the reasons why middle managers choose to stay or leave their organisation?*

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Employee Retention**

Employee retention “refers to the ability of an organisation to keep valued employees from leaving their organisation” (Radford, 2014, p.22). While, research investigating what makes employees’ stay is still emerging in the literature (Shacklock & Brunetto 2011; Radford et al., 2013), the research that has been published indicate both personal and organisational factors have a combined influence on employees’ intentions to stay (Al-Refaei & Omran 1992). Where, personal factors refer to individual traits of employees such as demographic variables and the location of the job in relation to their home, and organisational factors refer to any factor that organisations can influence such as job satisfaction and supervision (Radford, 2014).

The importance that personal factors, such as the location of job in relation to an employees’ home was highlighted by scholars such as Wheatley (2013), as well as Carter and Butler (2008) who argued that this was particularly important for females who desired a more equal work-life balance in order to ‘balance’ out their responsibilities at work and at home. This was also highlighted by Shacklock and Brunetto (2011) and Radford (2014) as an important factor related to nurse retention in Australia. While no study has investigated the influence of this factor on middle managers in small to medium enterprise grocery supermarket chains, the findings from other industries (such as nursing) suggest that it is likely to be an influencing factor in such an environment due to the nature of shift work in the retail sector.

In addition to the location of the job in relation to the employees’ home, another important retention factor identified in the literature is job satisfaction. That is, the extent to which employees’ like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs” (Spector, 1997 p2). Research examining the role of job satisfaction on turnover is extensive (Castle et al., 2007; Larrabee et al., 2010; McCarthy et al., 2007) and has generally found that when employees’ job satisfaction increases they are more likely to stay at their organisation and when their job satisfaction decreases they are more likely to leave (Castle et al 2007). Other factors relating to employee retention in the literature include supervisor support (Eisenberger et al., 2002) and leadership style (AbuAlRub & Alghamdi, 2012). However the extent of the influence that these factors have on small to medium enterprise grocery retail middle managers’ intentions to stay is largely unknown. Similarly, the influence that these factors have on both middle managers’ intentions to stay and leave is largely unknown. Thus, this study aims to extend the literature in this area.

Retaining high performing employees is essential for the competitive advantage of the organisation (Boxall et al., 2007). Thus, understanding the personal and organisational factors that influence why employees’ stay allows organisations to develop effective human resource management strategies to retain these high performing employees. However, an accurate understanding of the human resource management strategies required means that an understanding of the factors influencing employees’ intentions to leave is also needed. Thus, this study explores these factors as well.

### **Employee Turnover**

Employee turnover is a complex phenomenon that is broadly defined as the decision to discontinue a role at an organisation (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2010). Turnover can be either involuntary or voluntary in nature, where involuntary turnover is directed from an employer through the form of redundancies or termination due to poor performance and voluntary turnover is initiated from the employee. This study explores the factors that influence voluntary turnover.

Understanding turnover is important because the loss of a productive employee can cause severe disruptions in the workplace, including a loss of morale, loss of job satisfaction and compromised quality of work in the remaining employees (Coomber & Barriball, 2007; Dess and Shaw, 2001). In addition, turnover is costly to an employer through the form of direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include those that are directly incurred when replacing the employee such as recruitment costs and training (Dess & Shaw, 2011), whereas indirect costs are those that cannot be associated directly with the activity such as loss of morale, and impact on the organisations culture and stress (Lambert & Hogan, 2009). Combined, these expenses are costly to an organisation and as such exploring the factors that influence employees’ intentions to leave is important.

Similar to intention to stay, research examining employees’ intention to leave have found a range of personal and organisational factors as influencing variables. For example, organisational variables such as supervisor

support (O'Donnell & Hudson, 2011), job satisfaction (Castle et al., 2007), and working conditions such as undesirable rosters, lack of autonomy in decision making and lack of challenges and responsibilities (Brannon et al., 2007), poor role clarity (Allen et al., 2010), and lack of work-life balance (Pocock & Skinner, 2012) have all contributed to employees' intentions to leave.

However, only a few research studies have examined the similarities and differences between the factors influencing employees intentions to stay and leave (e.g. Chan & Morrison, 2008; Mittal et al., 2009; Radford et al., 2013). Thus, this study extends the research in this area to further examine the similarities and differences that employees' report as influencing factors in their intentions to stay and leave. This is important because if these factors are known, organisations can develop appropriate human resource management strategies to retain productive employees.

### **Middle Managers' Intentions to Stay and Leave**

Research investigating these factors has not, however, explored the factors influencing middle managers intentions to stay and leave. This is important to explore because middle managers hold a pivotal role in organisations in that they have knowledge of both the organisations' strategy and its social structures (Papeš et al., 2004). Consequently, the experience of middle managers is different from that of executive leadership who frequently live in a more abstract world (Turnbull, 2001) and that of lower level employees who encounter little of the more broadly shared organisational issues (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

As such, middle managers are often described as being 'the meat in the sandwich' (Turnbull, 2001) or 'squeezed' in the organisation (Gabel, 2002). This is because they are responsible for implementing and driving new changes from top management as well as overseeing the day to day operations of the business (Jackson, 1995). In addition, middle management are often at the forefront of criticism for providing little value to organisations (Balogun, 2003) and as such, are often the position that gets downsized before others within an organisation restructure (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Yet, it is the middle managers that hold important and valuable knowledge about the day-to-day operation of the organisation and as such, investing in exploring the factors that influence middle managers' intentions to stay and leave is particularly important.

### **Middle Management in Small to Medium Sized Franchised Retail Supermarket Organisations**

Understanding why middle managers' intend to stay and leave in small to medium enterprise grocery retail organisations is particularly important in Australia. This is because, small to medium sized organisations account for 99% of businesses (ABS, 2014) and the retail sector contributes 4.1% or \$53 billion AUD to the gross domestic product in Australia (Australian Government, 2011). In addition, while, little is known about the factors that influence the retention of middle managers working in small to medium enterprise grocery retail organisations, investigating these factors is particularly important in an Australian context. This is because, small to medium enterprises contribute significantly in the business sector and supermarket retail organisations provide employment for just over 281, 100 employees nationally (ABS, 2014; Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2014). Consequently, exploring the factors that influence middle managers' intentions to stay and leave within this sector is important, which is the aim of this study.

## **METHOD**

To investigate the two research questions, this study used semi-structured interviews supported by observations of 12 middle managers within a small-to-medium sized retail organisation, following the methods described by Yin (2011). These interviews generated over 120 pages with over 40,500 words of data to provide understanding of the participants' view of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). This represented over a third of the middle managers within this organisation. Interviews lasted 30-45minutes and the questions focused on the factors that influenced employee retention within their organisation. Examples of questions included in all semi-structured interviews include: "What are you favourite things about working for this company" and "what, if anything, do you think could cause you to leave your current role?".

### **Case Study**

A qualitative case study provided exploratory insight into the real-life relationship (Siggelkow, 2007) between the employees, employer, and subsequent attitudes to retention. Yin (2004, p. 4) argues the relevance of case studies as they maintain the "holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" and provide examples of

organisations and group performance. The importance of individual case studies within the interpretive paradigm works toward creating social awareness in the workplace (Yin, 2011).

The organisation examined is a small to medium sized franchised supermarket business, which runs five stores within one state of Australia. Employing less than 300 employees, the organisation prides itself on supporting local, community activities and operates as a “family business”. Each site is managed by one store manager, who are each responsible for five department managers and who report directly to the head office, which consists of a small team of area managers and a CEO. The retail sector in Australia is marred by low profit margins, increasing costs of living, long-term retail slowdown and other factors such as the growth of online consumption (Australian Government 2011). Within this industry, the supermarket sector is extremely competitive with ‘larger players’ Coles and Woolworths dominating the market (ABS, 2014). Thus, exploring the factors influencing small to medium sized supermarket middle managers’ intentions to stay and leave in an exploratory case study is particularly unique and important, as the ongoing survival of these ‘smaller players’ relies on the retention of its workforce.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview data was collected through manual and electronic audio recording devices that allowed the researchers to conduct semi-structured interviews and simultaneously record physical responses of the participants. The recorded interviews were then transcribed by the research team, to maximise familiarity with the data. Following this, a review of the transcribed interviews against the audio recordings was performed by two of the researchers.

The interview data was initially brush coded for common themes, as shown in table 1. Following this, a more in-depth thematic analysis was carried out following the suggested practice explained by authors such as Creswell (2003), and Braithwaite et al. (2008). The sub-themes derived from this second stage of analysis are also shown in table 1.

**TABLE 1. CODES USED IN QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>
Power	Autonomy Recognition
Personal Factors	Convenience Opportunity Money Family
Clarity	Role Clarity Organisational Clarity
Passion	Dedication to job role Dedication to industry Contribution
Variety	Retail Variety Small Town Stress
Support	Organisational support Supervisor support Community Support
Motivation	Living to work Working to live

*Notes: All interviews were brush coded, resulting in emergent themes as depicted by the overarching codes. Following this, all interview transcripts were analysed in detail, resulting in the sub-themes.*

## **Explanation of Themes**

**Power** – Participants' perception of their role (and its relative importance in the organisation) seems to be influenced by the degree to which they see both formal and informal recognition. This seemed an important theme, as organisations may be losing good employees by not providing them with a sense of power and control in the role they are employed in. Ensuring that systems are in place that formally provide managers with responsibilities and decision-making power from an early stage may help to improve retention.

**Personal Factors** – Given that the majority of staff employed in this area seem to be basing their employment decisions on lifestyle fit and general convenience, it may be worthwhile for organisations to promote flexible working arrangements as a key factor in their recruitment strategies, and be more open to modifying their roles to suit the needs of good candidates.

**Clarity** – A number of participants express concerns around how their position is defined within the organisation, and the degree of responsibility that their position either formally or informally requires. A clearer outline of the skills required for a management position may be useful to incorporate into the recruitment procedure, which will in turn hopefully lead to a more positive organisational culture, as managers won't face the same criticism and doubt if they don't have the skills that their employees and colleagues believe they should have. In addition, giving employees a clear idea of their prospective path up the company ladder may improve attraction, and a clear hierarchy of positions within the organisation will help employees to know their relative place within the company, ideally leading to better retention.

**Passion** – Included to analyse whether employees that expressed a particularly strong passion for either the organisation or the industry were any more likely to demonstrate intentions to stay. Ensuring that hired employees have a demonstrated track record of working in the industry, and verifying that they are interested in building a career with the company may be a good way of limiting turnover that results from employees who are only choosing the job based on convenience.

**Variety** – In the retail sector particularly, variety seems to be something that is readily available, and highly sought after. Different roles have different forms of variety though, so ensuring that each employee is able to recognise the variety they are looking for in the position they are employed in may help improve retention.

**Support** – Employees at a middle management level are typically looking for further involvement with the running of the organisation, and lose motivation when they are too distant from the upper levels of management. Ensuring a collaborative work environment, and pay rates that are competitive with the industry standard should help to improve attraction to the role, and retention of high performing employees.

**Motivation** – Speaks to the benefits associated with understanding the motivation of employees. An employee who has numerous priorities above and beyond their job will stay at an organisation only if they are able to simultaneously attend to those priorities. An employee whose work is their primary priority will have very different expectations and needs though. Given the type of employee that is attracted to the retail sector, and the large number of employees seemingly choosing their job out of convenience, retail organisations would likely benefit from a greater focus on meeting the needs of employees who are working to live, rather than living to work.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After analysing the themes which emerged from the data, consideration was given as to which factors seemed to be influencing middle managers' intentions to stay and intentions to leave. Table 2 presents the breakdown of how the identified themes were found to influence intentions to stay and intentions to leave.

**TABLE 2. FACTORS INFLUENCING INTENTIONS TO STAY AND INTENTIONS TO LEAVE**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Factors influencing intention to stay</b>	<b>Factors influencing intention to leave</b>
Power	Autonomy Recognition	N/A
Personal Factors	Convenience	Opportunity Money Family
Clarity	N/A	N/A
Passion	N/A	Contribution
Variety	Retail Variety	Small town
Support	Organisational Support Supervisor Support Community Support	Lack of organisational support
Motivation	N/A	N/A

### **Intentions to Stay**

In regards to the first research question, there were two factors found to exclusively influence middle managers' intentions to stay. These factors are discussed in the two sections below.

#### ***Power***

A finding that was common across nearly all of the managers interviewed was that the degree to which they perceived power (as expressed in terms of autonomy, recognition, and decision-making responsibility) had a strong influence on their intentions to stay within an organisation, supporting the findings presented by Shacklock (2006). Specifically, the more the participants felt that they had a desirable degree of power, the stronger their intentions to stay at the organisation seemed to be. This can be seen illustrated in the quote below from one of the participants.

“The reason for my decision to stay here is because I believe I’m good at my job. I’m achieving results. I find it easy to do my job. And I get recognition from the store manager” – Terry

Included in this excerpt is the importance of recognition, as the degree to which participants received recognition of their efforts within the organisation appeared to be strongly linked to their intentions to stay. The quote below highlights how the manager has had experience with previous companies that have not provided this recognition, and they have in turn left those organisations.

“But it’s a bit hard these days, you know. You do more, but you get...not...not that you get underpaid, but...you do get appreciated...and that’s one thing I have to give them. They do appreciate, if you do that extra...you get your thank yous...it’s not like some companies, where they don’t thank you, and you think why did I go out of my and do that for you. You know, they do appreciate their staff.” – Vicky

This finding partially supports existing research focused on retail workers in Denmark (Esbjerg et al., 2010). These authors found that store managers preferred to hire workers with first-hand experience of the retail environment, as they were more likely to understand the culture of the workplace, and therefore would be more likely to be productive employees. This relates to the finding discussed above, as it seems apparent that being able to express power through autonomy and decision-making responsibility is a key factor for both managers and employees. In addition, several of the middle managers indicated that having the power to set their own roster was an important factor in their decision to stay in their role.

“My hours. I get the choice of writing my own roster.” Terry

This finding complements the work published by Thornwaite (2004) and Skinner et al. (2011), who suggested that having the power to work flexible rosters had a significant influence on employees' intentions to stay.

### **Support**

Michela (2007) suggests that the behavior of managers and supervisors is critical to maintaining a positive culture within the workplace, which in turn has a positive influence on employees' intentions to stay. Nearly every manager interviewed in this study made comments that supported this notion, particularly in regards to the way the store owners supported the middle management level. Just one example of this positive attitude is shown below.

“You get corporate tickets to events, like football games, and music concerts if they're held at the stadium... They just look after you, you know, they're a small family, so you know, they invite you around for dinner, and you know...they really reward... reward you if you work really hard for them”  
– Oscar

In addition to the influence of power, the work of Esbjerg et al. (2010) further supports the findings of this study in regards to support networks within the workplace. These researchers suggested that employees placed a very large degree of importance on having good colleagues around them, which influenced their overall job satisfaction and intentions to stay within an organisation. This was a factor noted by several middle managers, as illustrated by the quote below.

“There's a good team here...well we're slowly building a good team. And when you work with people that you enjoy working with, it's always easier to stay...the people keep you here.” - Peter

The concept of organisational support is also discussed at length in the literature (e.g. Hill, 2011). The findings of this study are in line with research conducted in other industries, suggesting that the retail sector does have some similarities with other sectors. O'Donnell and Hudson (2011) emphasise the importance of providing consistent organisational support to staff in order to reduce turnover, and this concept was clearly expressed by several of the middle managers interviewed in this study.

“It's family-orientated. Because I have a family as well, if I need time off, they give me the time off. They're flexible, so I have no intentions of leaving any time soon.” – Aidan

An additional factor relating to support in general, was the influence that a supportive and familiar community environment had on middle managers' intentions to stay. The majority of managers interviewed made some reference to feeling like the community they were in was a factor in deciding to stay in the role they were in.

“I enjoy it here...I like the people who I work with. They're really nice and everything. I love just... how the neighbourhood is nice, and you start to know everybody and everything. Yeah, it's really nice”. – Wendy

Further to this, the factor of a supportive and positive community appears to not only influence intentions to stay, but also plays a big role in attracting employees into a middle management role within the retail sector.

“It's got a real vibe and a real local hub around it, and you see all the same faces all the time, you get to meet people, you get to know names, you get to learn personalities, and build relationships. So that's what I like. It's a lot more personable, and that was the other thing that probably attracted me to the job” - Rowan

While there was a clear majority of middle managers who indicated that the degree of support they received was more influential on their intentions to stay, two of the managers interviewed did suggest that a lack of support may influence their intentions to leave the organisation. This can be seen in the two excerpts shown below.

“It would be good to have a staff member on with me during the days, because every day I'm on my own. I only see the night staff, and fill is when I finish, so...it would be good to have some help now and then, because every other department's got loads of people, and I'm always on my own”- Bruce

“If my budget got constrained so much that I would be working by myself rather than having some staff, and that I was stressed, and under strain from those conditions, then I'd have to leave” - Terry

While these quotes suggest that a lack of organisational support influences middle managers' intentions to leave, it should be highlighted that both of these managers suggest that the real concern is being isolated at work. While a more in-depth analysis of the impact that isolation at work has on middle managers' within the retail sector is outside the scope of this study, it represents a potential area for future research to more thoroughly investigate.

### **Intentions to Leave**

In regards to the second research question, there was one primary factor that was found to influence middle managers' intentions to leave. This factor, and it's associated aspects, is discussed in the section below.

#### ***Personal Factors***

The key finding of this study in regards to intentions to leave relates to the influence that personal factors have on middle managers in the retail sector. The impact of personal factors on intentions to leave is widely discussed in the available literature, such as the study by Pocock and Skinner (2012), who suggest that a lack of work-life balance will have a significant influence on employees' intentions to leave. This was observed in the interviews of several of the participants of this study, and illustrated in the quote below.

"If my working conditions changed... E.g. someone said alright from now on, you have to work only nights...that didn't suit my lifestyle, then I'd have to look for another job." – Terry

Another influence related to personal factors is the consideration that middle managers have for their family. This particular consideration seems pertinent to middle managers due to the fact that many middle managers would be of an age where both children and ageing parents become pressing concerns. This was highlighted clearly by one of the participants of this study, who indicated that family concerns were really the only factor influencing their intentions to leave.

"Family. That's pretty bad to say, but it is family, because my dad's got throat cancer. And if he needs a full time carer...plus my mum's coming down ill as well. That's the only thing that would make me leave...is family. That's it." – Aidan

A further finding relating to personal factors is the influence that wages and monetary incentives have on middle managers' intentions to leave. The majority of managers interviewed suggested that higher wages would influence their decision to seek employment elsewhere. Interestingly however, a study of direct care workers in the US found that pay was not a significant predictor of turnover (Rosen et al., 2011). Similarly, Howe et al. (2012) found that only a small percentage of aged care workers in the US reported wage as important in their intentions to stay. The excerpts below however show that the intentions to leave expressed by managers in this study were clearly influenced by monetary reward.

"Money. If someone come up to me and said, we want you to do another job in town for more money, that would influence me to leave." – Terry

"[It would] have to be a money situation. It would have to be financial. Definitely financial, because you've got to have that stability, and that security to go elsewhere." – James

Several participants suggested that career opportunities would play a very influential role when it came to their intentions to leave. Again, this appeared to be a very important finding considering the volatile nature of middle management in the retail sector (Turnbull, 2001). The excerpts below illustrate an opinion shared by many of the managers interviewed in this study, specifically highlighting career opportunities as a factor that would influence their intentions to leave.

"Maybe if some more exciting job prospect or opportunity to learn...I'm still not even sure if I want to...I still think about going to uni." – Bruce

"I obviously want to go to the next level, so if something was available like that... I know it's very tough... I've only left three or four jobs in my life, and normally it was to progress my career." – Peter

There were some indications that personal factors may influence intentions to stay, however, all of these instances seemed to be largely a case of convenience. Specifically, middle managers being influenced to stay in their role due to personal factors suggested that it was the flexibility of the role that allowed them to manage other aspects of their life, as illustrated in the quote below. This influence was not seen as being particularly strong though, as the managers who suggested that these factors were influencing their intentions to stay also indicated that personal factors were an even bigger influence on their intentions to leave.

“Yeah it’s good because one week I can get weekdays off, so I get stuff done like, bank, pay rent and all that sort of stuff...it’s annoying when you only get weekends off, because nothing’s open here on the weekends.” – Bruce

### **Comparing Intentions to Stay and Intentions to Leave**

In regards to the third research question, there seemed to be a range of similarities and differences between factors that influence middle managers’ intentions to stay and intentions to leave. While the differences are apparent from the factors discussed above, there were a variety of factors that seemed to have a either a balanced influence, or minimal influence, and these factors are discussed in the three sections below.

#### ***Variety***

Interestingly, one of the identified factors seemed to have an almost balanced effect on middle managers’ intentions to stay and their intentions to leave. This factor was the degree of variety that the participants experienced in their role, and in their organisation. On the one hand, it seemed as though a role that provided middle managers with a high degree of variety was an influential factor when it came to their intentions to stay.

“Every day is different. Every day is. Which I love a lot.” – Sarah

On the other hand though, middle managers who felt as though their job was becoming too routine indicated that the lack of variety was just as influential towards their decisions to leave. Often there were extenuating circumstances around these comments, such as the size and location of the store that the manager is working in. In a UK study, inner suburb supermarket stores were found to have the lowest labour turnover across the industry (Nickson et al., 2004). This would suggest that employees working outside of the inner suburbs may be more likely to suggest that a lack of variety and challenge within their store may contribute to their decision to leave, as can be seen in the quote below.

“Maybe even just change location. I might get bored at [store name] pretty soon. I wouldn’t mind doing a similar sort of work, but somewhere else a bit more exciting” - Bruce

These contrasting quotes demonstrate the balanced nature of the variety factor when it comes to influencing middle managers’ intentions to stay and intentions to leave. Partial support can again be found in the literature for this finding, in the work presented by Broadbridge (2007), who focused specifically on factors influencing attraction rather than intentions to stay or intentions to leave. Still, the findings by Broadbridge (2007) suggest that a sense of challenge and stimulation was a fundamental part of attraction to a role, so it could be expected that this factor would also play a role in influencing middle managers’ intentions to stay and intentions to leave.

#### ***Clarity***

The findings of this study do not support those of researchers such as Allen et al., (2010), who suggested that role clarity had a significant impact on employees’ intentions to leave. There were no instances where participants overtly linked the clarity of their role to their intentions to stay or intentions to leave. This could be due to the industry context in which this study took place, suggesting that middle managers in the retail sector are not as concerned about a lack of role clarity as other types of employees. Alternatively, this factor may have not come up as a significant factor due to the size and scope of the current study. Either way, further research into this finding would help to determine the influence that role clarity has on middle managers’ intentions to leave.

#### ***Passion***

A factor which was only highlighted in one interview as a key influence on intentions to stay or intentions to leave was passion for the job. In this interview, passion was identified as the desire to be positively contributing

to the organisation due to a genuine interest in the work being carried out. An excerpt from the interview highlights how this passion played a strong role in influencing this particular middle manager's intentions to leave.

"No longer adding to the company, no longer growing with the company. [Being] in a position [that] is where you're going to be for the next ten years...if I feel like all my skills that I've learnt over the years, including university and all that just get put to waste...then I'll feel that it's time for me to move on and go somewhere else" - Oscar

However, while this appeared to be a very strong factor for this individual manager, this finding was not observed over a wider range of middle managers, which could suggest that the managers interviewed saw their job more as a means to an end. Further research should be conducted focusing specifically on the influence that passion for the work may have on middle managers' intentions to stay and intentions to leave.

Overall, the findings shown here provide support for the findings presented by researchers such as Brannon et al. (2007), Pocock and Skinner (2012), and Radford (2014). These researchers found that, among other factors, poor recognition, lack of autonomy in decision making, lack of challenge and variety, and an unsupportive work environment were all factors influencing employees' intentions to stay and intentions to leave. However, these researchers were exclusively examining the health care sector, and the findings of this study demonstrate how these factors influence middle managers' intentions to stay and intentions to leave in the retail industry.

### **Strengths**

This study represents the first dedicated analysis of retention factors for middle management within small to medium sized enterprise retail organisations in the Australian business environment. While further study is needed to more comprehensively fill this gap in the literature, this study provides a unique contribution to the field by establishing a foundation for future research in this area. In addition, the study uses qualitative research methods to reveal in-depth insights into the factors that influence retention and turnover in the middle management level of the retail industry.

### **Limitations**

The research presented represents an initial study of preliminary data acquired from middle managers in the retail sector. The intention of this study is to highlight the potential for future research and demonstrate the value in examining this area of human resource management. As such, there are several limitations and delimiters that are apparent with the research presented. First, data from a wider range of organisations, and industries could be utilised to provide further evidence for the findings presented, as discussed further in the section below. Second, the analysis presented here represents a purely qualitative approach to the research question, and this topic could be more broadly analysed with quantitative measures, which would enable the findings to be more widely generalised and validated. Third, the limitation of research bias, particularly with qualitative research, has been recognised, and actions have been taken to minimise the impact that this bias may have had on the findings. These actions include various forms of triangulation, such as triangulation of the theories applied, and the triangulation of multiple researchers involved with the data collection and data analysis procedures.

### **Implications for Future Research**

There are several directions in which future studies could build upon the findings presented in this paper. The most apparent opportunity lies in the extension of the research scope, including more organisations and potentially a variety of different industries. Furthermore, studies that look to expand on the research presented here could utilise a variety of additional research methodologies, in particular, quantitative research techniques, which would help to improve the generalisability, validity, and reliability of the findings shown in this paper.

The study has provided further support for the notion that the factors which influence an employees' intentions to leave an organisation will not always be identical to the factors that may influence their intention to stay within an organisation. However, while this finding seems to be generally accepted by the academic field, further studies could continue investigating this notion, and develop a clearer picture of how these two concepts are distinct from one another, and also how they are inter-related.

Further, while many of the findings presented correspond with previously presented studies, there were a few findings that either had not been previously discussed in existing literature, or contrasted with the findings outlined by other authors in the field. In particular, the finding that monetary reward seems to have an influence on middle managers' intentions to leave in the retail sector warrants further research, as this could have important implications for how organisations can more effectively structure middle management positions in this industry.

### **Implications for Practice**

In addition to the implications for researchers in the academic discipline, this paper presents a range of implications for managers and practitioners, particularly upper and middle managers within the retail sector. Primarily, owners of retail organisations can gain a better understanding of the factors that are influencing their middle managers' intentions to stay and intentions to leave. Specifically, if organisations are looking to maximise their employees' intentions to stay, they can focus on ensuring that their middle managers have an adequate amount of autonomy and recognition, as well as clear structures in place to provide organisational support. To minimise intentions to leave, organisations can ensure that they maintain communication with employees to increase awareness of any personal factors that could be influencing their decision to leave the organisation.

### **CONCLUSION**

Globalisation, technological changes as well as demographic shifts and financial needs have all changed the working milieu of employees today (Amundson, 2007). The increased dependence on skilled staff by organisations has resulted in a change of power from the organisation to the employees (Leana & Rousseau, 2000). Some argue, that this change has resulted in increased worker mobility, the "opportunity and willingness of an employee to seek employment elsewhere" (Rousseau & Shperling, 2003, p.559). This development puts significant pressure on organisations to develop appropriate human resource management strategies to attract and retain quality employees. Yet little is known about what attracts and retains middle management, particularly in supermarkets. This study began to fill this gap by presenting initial findings of a research project examining the intentions to stay and intentions to leave of middle managers employed in a retail organisation. While some of the findings discussed were supported by research into other industries, the retail sector presents a unique environment in which further understanding of middle managers' intentions to stay and intentions to leave is needed.

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