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Report 2: Primary research findings

# Responding to turnover in DES

Byron W. Keating, Asha Worsteling, and Amanda Beatson

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>01</b>	Table of Contents
<b>02</b>	Executive Summary
<b>03</b>	Introduction
<b>04</b>	Study 1A: Turnover intentions in DES
<b>11</b>	Study 1B: Job demands, resources and turnover intentions
<b>18</b>	Study 1C: Moving from intentions to action
<b>20</b>	Study 2: The impact of day to day changes in job demands and resources
<b>25</b>	Recommendations and conclusions

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

02

This report investigates the causes of employee turnover in Disability Employment Services (DES) using the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. The report presents evidence from an online survey of 475 DES employees, and a daily diary method with 209 participants to examine the impact of daily fluctuations in job demands and resources on turnover intentions and behaviours. The findings highlight the critical roles of job demands, job resources, and personal resources in influencing burnout, motivation, and turnover intentions. The report concludes with evidence-based recommendations for reducing turnover rates and fostering a more sustainable and resilient workforce.

#1

## **Burnout and Job Demands**

Higher job demands significantly increase burnout, which in turn raises turnover intentions. A unit increase in job demands leads to a 29% increase in burnout, and higher burnout increases turnover intentions by 18% per unit. Organisations should manage job demands by implementing workload management strategies and providing adequate support to reduce burnout and subsequent turnover intentions.

#2

## **Role of Job Resources**

Enhancing job resources decreases burnout and boosts motivation. A unit increase in job resources reduces burnout by 44% and increases motivation by 44%. Organisations should invest in work-life balance, organisational support, and professional development opportunities to improve employee retention by creating a more engaged and satisfied workforce.

#3

## **Impact of Personal Resources**

Personal resources like resilience and self-efficacy significantly reduce burnout and increase motivation. Employees with higher personal resources experience a 31% reduction in burnout and a 45% increase in motivation. Providing training programs focused on building personal resources can help lower turnover intentions and retain a motivated workforce. Organisations should offer workshops on resilience, stress management, and personal development.

# INTRODUCTION

## Aims of the report

Turnover within employment services remains a pervasive challenge, exerting significant ramifications on organisational efficacy, financial stability, and employee well-being. This report endeavours to understand the causes of turnover through the lens of the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, a well-recognised model within organisational psychology.

This report outlines the outcomes of a series of studies designed to explore the causes of turnover within employment services. Employing the JD-R model as the theoretical backbone, these studies dissect the differential impacts of job demands and resources on turnover intentions and actual turnover behaviours.

The overarching aim is to illuminate the underlying drivers of turnover within disability employment services, and to provide evidence-based recommendations to reduce turnover rates and cultivating a more sustainable and resilient workforce. Specifically, we will address the following questions:

- *Is turnover in the disability employment services setting different from the broader disability services setting?*
- *What are the characteristics of a good employment consultant?*
- *How do job demands and personal and job resources impact turnover intentions?*
- *What factors drive the translation of turnover intentions into action?*
- *Do daily fluctuations in work conditions impact on turnover intentions and voluntary turnover?*

## Method

We undertook a series of three studies to address the aims of the study and investigate turnover in employment services. The first study aimed to understand the specific job demands and resources impacting turnover. The second study was a three to six-month follow-up that investigated how current turnover intentions and job demands and resources predict future turnover intentions. Finally, a third study investigated the impact of day-to-day changes in job demands and resources on daily turnover intentions and turnover behaviour.

An overview of the method used to collect data for the three studies is provided below:

- **Study 1:** Online survey of 475 DES employees which asked about job demands, job resources, personal resources, job engagement, burnout and turnover intentions. Six months later, turnover behaviour was gathered from employing organisations.
- **Study 2:** A daily diary method was used, whereby 209 participants were asked to respond to a one-minute survey every weekday for a month. Participants responded between three and twenty times over the course of the month. The survey asked participants to report how high their job demands and resources were that day and their turnover intentions on the day.

STUDY 1A:

# ***Contextual understanding of turnover in DES***

Demographic Characteristic	DES	NDIS	Demographic Characteristic	DES	NDIS
<b>Age:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. &lt;30 years</li><li>. 30 - 39 years</li><li>. 40 - 49 years</li><li>. 50 - 59 years</li><li>. 60+ years</li></ul>	22%	13%	<b>Educational Attainment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Year 10 and below</li><li>. Year 11/12</li><li>. Trade/Vocational training</li><li>. Undergraduate</li><li>. Postgraduate</li></ul>	9%	9%
<b>Gender:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Male</li><li>. Female</li></ul>	22%	25%	<b>Country of Origin</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Australia</li><li>. Overseas</li></ul>	78%	78%
<b>Regionality</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Metro</li><li>. Regional</li><li>. Rural</li><li>. Remote/Very Remote</li></ul>	34%	35%	<b>Employment status</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Full time</li><li>. Part time</li><li>. Casual</li><li>. Other</li></ul>	94%	46%
<b>Time in DES/NDIS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>. Less than 12 months</li><li>. 1 –5 years</li><li>. 6 –10 years</li><li>. 11 –20 years</li><li>. More than 20 years</li></ul>	30%	9%		6%	33%

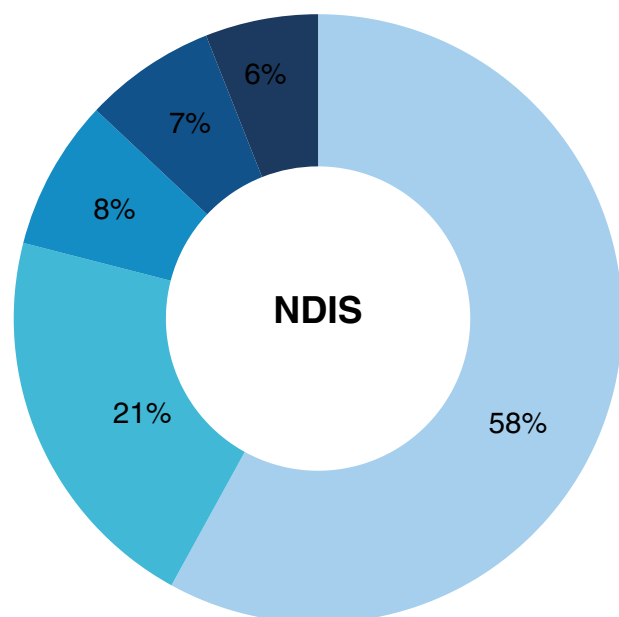
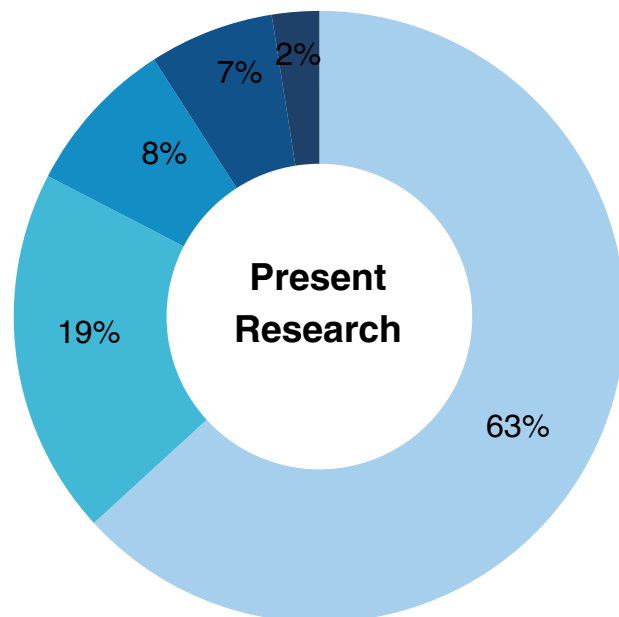
**Turnover intentions in DES are lower than in the NDIS, with average yearly turnover intentions at 21%**

### Turnover Intentions in DES

Two-thirds (63%) of participants reported no intentions of leaving their current positions within the next three years. Of the 37% who reported intentions to leave their current role, only 2% plan to leave their role as soon as possible. A further 7% plan to leave their role within the next three months, while the other 33% plan to leave their roles in a year's time or more. Turnover intentions are lower than those found in a similar 2022 NDIS report on turnover.

Turnover intentions are higher (38%) among newer employees who have been with the organisation for less than a year or two. Comparatively, only 24% of employees who have been with the organisation for more than four years report turnover intentions. Similarly, turnover intentions are higher among more junior employees, such as ECs (34%), compared with managers (19%). This suggests that interventions are particularly required to retain junior employees.

Turnover intentions are slightly lower in for-profit organisations (31%) than in non-for-profit organisations (38%). Subsequent sections of this report will examine this result further.



- I have no plans to leave my current job within the next 3 years
- I plan to leave my current job within the next 1 to 3 years
- I plan to leave my current job within the next 12 months
- I plan to leave my current job within the next 6 months
- I plan to leave my current job as soon as possible



<b>Leave the DES workforce</b>	<b>38%</b>
Pursue a job outside of the care and support sector	17%
Pursue a job in the wider care and support sector (e.g. aged care, veterans' care)	15%
Retire	5%
Pursuing further education or temporarily leaving workforce e.g. maternity leave or travel (no intention to return to the sector)	1%
<b>Stay in the DES workforce</b>	<b>13%</b>
Pursue another job within the employment services sector	11%
Pursuing further education or temporarily leaving workforce e.g. maternity leave or travel (with intention to return to the sector)	2%
<b>Undecided</b>	<b>49%</b>

## Intentions after leaving job

Most people (49%) who report an intention to leave their current positions remain undecided about what they intend to do afterwards. This proportion is substantially higher than was found in the recent NDIS report, which suggested that 25% of workers who intended to quit their jobs were uncertain. Very few people (13%) report intentions to stay within the DES workforce after leaving their current positions, compared with 27% in the NDIS. Although people may not feel their experience is bad enough to be certain to leave DES, improvements should be made to make it more appealing.

The fact that most people are undecided suggests that there is an opportunity to target interventions to retain workers within DES. Considering the value of experience in ensuring the delivery of high-quality service, organisations stand to profit from retaining employees within DES even if they move to other organisations.

**Only 38% of people who intend to leave their current jobs intend to leave the DES workforce. Targetted interventions can help retain the other 62% within the workforce.**

## Reasons for leaving the DES workforce

Many workers in the DES sector cited dissatisfaction with pay and benefits (67%) as the main reason for wanting to leave their jobs. The NDIS sector identified high workload as the primary cause for turnover, whereas in DES, this was not considered a significant concern. Other common reasons for turnover included negative culture or management issues (42%) and a lack of learning and career opportunities (40%). Addressing these concerns could help organisations retain more of their staff. These issues will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

Potential reasons for leaving the DES workforce	DES	NDIS
The pay and/or benefits	67%	31%
Negative workplace culture or management issues	42%	32%
Lack of learning or career progression opportunities	40%	24%
Risk to my health, safety and/or wellbeing	30%	29%
Paperwork or compliance issues	28%	41%
Disability work is not what I thought it would be	28%	4%
Workload is too high	26%	42%
Concerns about the quality of service	19%	41%
Personal reasons e.g. study, family responsibilities	19%	13%
I saw the DES sector as a temporary career choice	16%	5%
Job insecurity	12%	14%
The rostering and/or work hours	9%	20%
Poor induction/training experience	7%	8%
Other	12%	17%

## Reasons for staying in the DES workforce

The most important reasons for staying in DES included having a positive impact on the community (71%), using skills and knowledge (71%), and the nature of the work (65%). These top three were the same as was found in the NDIS. Relationships with clients (41%) and colleagues (47%) were also cited as important reasons for wanting to stay in DES.

Potential reasons for staying in the DES workforce	DES	NDIS
Positive impact on people or the community	71%	63%
Utilises my skills and knowledge	71%	55%
Nature of the work (e.g. interesting, enjoyable, challenging)	65%	65%
Job security	53%	34%
Relationships with colleagues	47%	20%
The relationship I have established with the clients	41%	53%
Opportunity to build relationships and interact with people	41%	42%
Positive workplace culture	29%	35%
Flexibility of work hours (e.g. weekly rostering)	24%	36%
Learning or career progression opportunities	24%	30%
There is a high demand for employment service workers	24%	19%
The pay and/or benefits	12%	27%
Lack of suitable alternative job prospects	6%	6%
Other	0%	3%

## What are the characteristics of a good employment consultant?

Respondents were also asked to provide information on the qualities of a good employment consultant. The word cloud below shows a summary of the key qualities from 442 responses. The larger and bolder words represent the more frequently mentioned qualities, providing a quick and intuitive overview of the important traits, skills, values, knowledge, and qualifications identified by the respondents. Key insights are provided below along with data on the frequency of mentions:

- **Skills (154 mentions):** the most frequently mentioned quality, with a strong emphasis on communication, coaching, time management, negotiation, and problem-solving.
- **Personality traits (116 mentions):** qualities such as friendliness, patience, reliability, empathy, and assertiveness are also highly valued.
- **Values (76 mentions):** qualities like dedication, integrity, respect, professionalism, and commitment are considered important.
- **Qualifications (55 mentions):** certifications, training, experience, and degrees were also reflected in a significant number of responses.
- **Knowledge (10 mentions):** the least mentioned quality related to knowledge, with those responding highlighting the need for industry-specific knowledge, labour market, regulations, career pathways, and job matching.



**Job engagement in DES is high while burnout remains relatively low.**

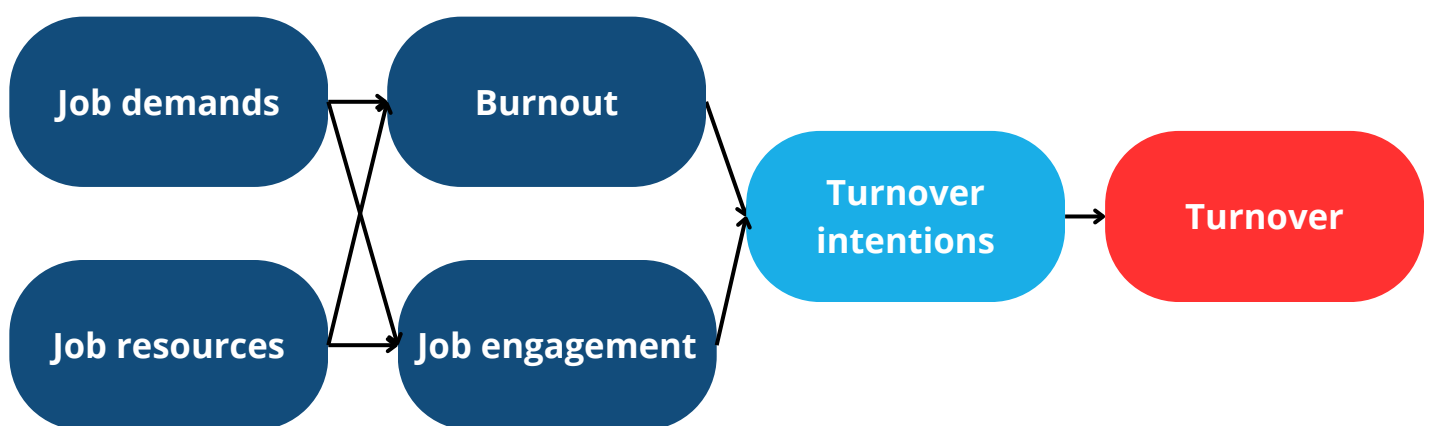


STUDY 1B:

***Job demands,  
resources and  
turnover intentions***

## Primer: Job demands-resources model

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model posits that the levels of both job demands and resources influence employee well-being and performance outcomes. Job demands encompass the psychosocial, physical, or organisational aspects of work that require sustained physical or psychological effort. In contrast, job resources encompass those aspects that facilitate goal achievement, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development. While job demands exert a strain on employees, resulting in burnout and turnover intentions, job resources encourage job engagement, which motivates employees to remain in their current positions. By examining these factors in tandem, the JD-R model provides a nuanced understanding of the dynamics driving turnover, elucidating the pivotal role played by organisational contexts in shaping employee experiences and behaviours. ***More information on the JD-R model is provided in Report 1.***



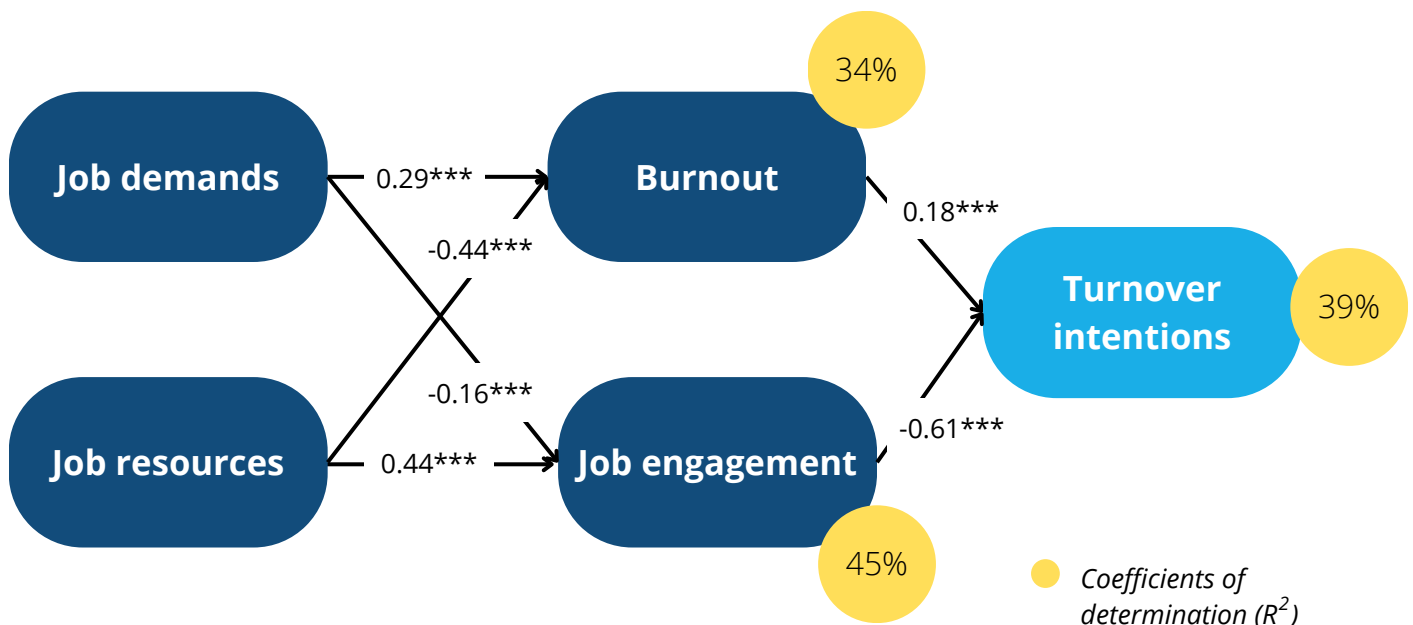
Source: Bakker & Demerouti (2007)

## How do job demands and resources impact burnout, job engagement and turnover intentions?

Consistent with the JD-R model, our research investigated the impact of job demands and job resources on perceptions of burnout and job engagement, and the subsequent impact of burnout and job engagement on turnover intentions. From our survey of 487 employment consultants, we observed the following:

- **Burnout to Turnover Intention:** Higher burnout increases turnover intention by 18% for each unit increase in burnout.
- **Job Demands to Burnout:** Higher job demands increase burnout by 29% for each unit increase.
- **Job Demands to Job Engagement:** Higher job demands decrease motivation by 16% for each unit increase.
- **Job Resources to Burnout:** Higher job resources decrease burnout by 44% for each unit increase.
- **Job Resources to Motivation:** Higher job resources increase motivation by 44% for each unit increase.
- **Motivation to Turnover Intention:** Higher motivation decreases turnover intention by 61% for each unit increase.

Increasing job demands significantly raises burnout and reduces motivation, whereas enhancing job resources substantially lowers burnout and boosts motivation. Consequently, reducing burnout and improving motivation are essential strategies for lowering turnover intentions among employees.



***These findings underscore the critical role of managing job demands and enhancing job resources.***

## What was the impact of specific job demands?

The job demands with the largest impact (in order) on burnout were change, personally confronting situations, role ambiguity, and health and safety risks. Too high a workload and insufficient hours were lower predictors of burnout. On the other hand, the job demands with the greatest impact on job engagement were role ambiguity, role conflict, and risks to health and safety. Admin and red tape, bullying and discrimination, job expectations, and rostering did not impact burnout or job engagement. There was no difference between for-profit and not-for-profit organisations or metropolitan and regional and rural sites in terms of the impact of demands on burnout and job engagement.

On the other hand, managers felt the negative impacts of bullying and discrimination on burnout, whereas employment consultants did not. Similarly, organisational change had a negative impact on job engagement in managers but did not for non-managers. Finally, personally confronting situations were only relevant for burnout in employment consultants.

Job Demands	Burnout	Job engagement
Admin and red tape		
Bullying and discrimination		
Change	+	
Health and safety risks	+	-
High workload	+	
Insufficient hours	+	-
Job expectations		
Personally confronting situations	+	
Role ambiguity	+	-
Role conflict		-
Rostering		



## What was the impact of specific job resources?

Most job resources measured in this study did not impact either burnout or job engagement. Five job resources had positive impacts on reducing employee burnout. In order of importance, they were work-life balance, organisational support, supporting diversity and inclusion, customer support, and onboarding. Similarly, the four job resources that were found to positively impact job engagement were job commitment, organizational support, value alignment, and customer support.

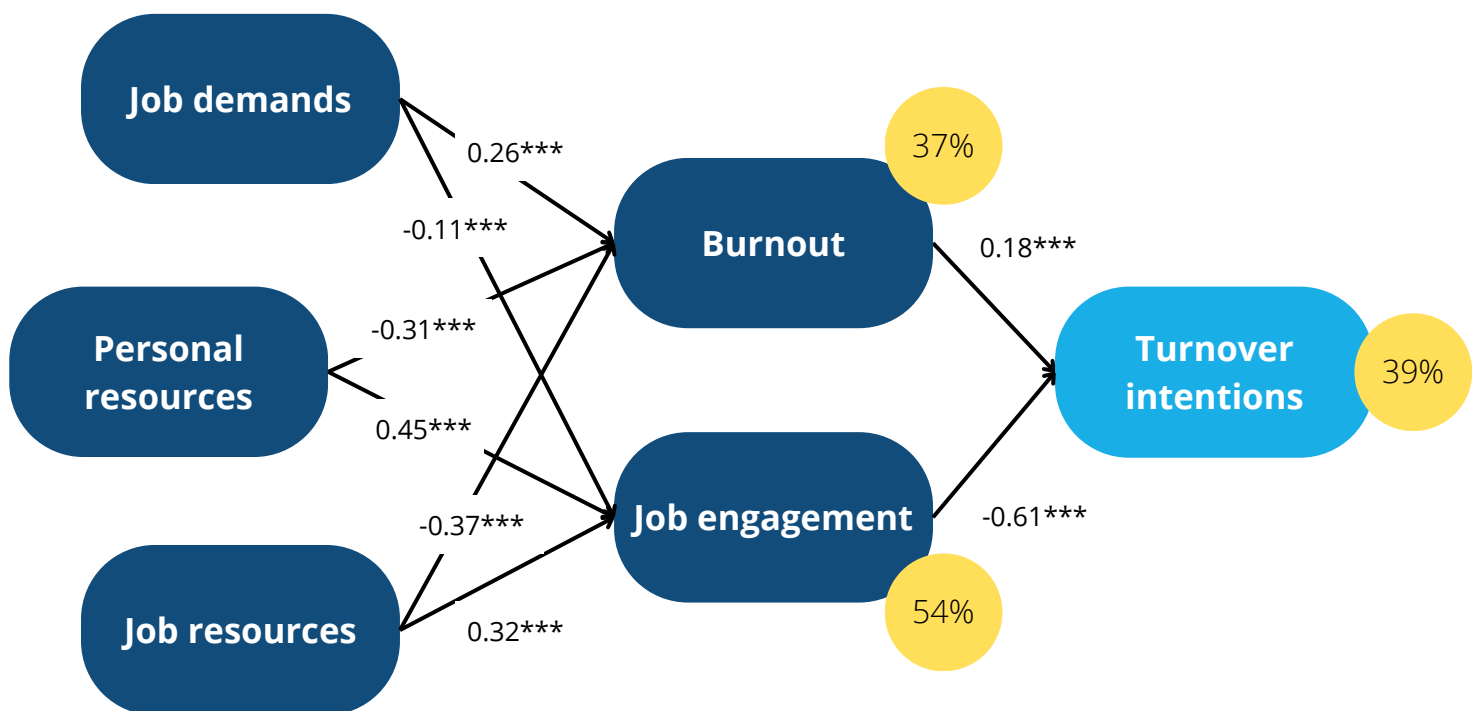
There were a few notable differences between for-profit and not-for-profit organisations. In not-for-profit organisations, the impact of value alignment on job engagement is not significant. Similarly, in not-for-profit organisations, training opportunities have a significant impact on job engagement. Finally, customer support only impacts burnout in for-profit organisations. Organisational support has a much greater impact on job engagement for management than it does for employment consultants. Work-life balance was much more important for offsetting burnout in metropolitan compared with rural and regional provider sites.

Job Resources	Burnout	Job engagement	Job Resources	Burnout	Job engagement
Customer support	-	+	Recognition		
Diversity and inclusion	-		Relationship with colleagues		
Job commitment		+	Relationship with supervisor		
Job control			Remuneration		
Job security			Training opportunities		
Onboarding	-		Training satisfaction		
Organisation's ethical standards			Value alignment		+
Organisational support	-	+	Work-life balance	-	
Progression and growth opportunities					

## What is the influence of personal resources?

Recent JD-R research has highlighted that in addition to job resources, personal resources can also play a role relation to reducing turnover intentions. From our analysis of the data from Study 1, we found that:

- **Reduction in Burnout:** Personal resources significantly reduce burnout by 31%, highlighting the protective role personal resources play against job-related stress.
- **Increase in Job Engagement:** Personal resources increase motivation by 45%, indicating that individuals with higher personal resources are more motivated in their jobs.
- **Influence on Turnover Intention:** The adjusted R-squared value for turnover intention remains relatively stable, indicating that personal resources do not significantly add to the variance explained in turnover intention beyond what is already explained by other factors.



*Personal resources have a significant impact on reducing burnout and increasing motivation, but only have a negligible effect on turnover intentions.*

## Personal resources also impact employees job engagement and burnout

Employees with a high degree of customer orientation, self-efficacy and person-organisation fit were more likely to have low degrees of burnout and high job engagement. Similarly, employees higher in trait conscientiousness were less likely to experience burnout. Conversely, agreeableness and neuroticism were positively correlated with burnout. There was no difference between for-profit and not-for-profit organisations in terms of these effects.

Managers had a much stronger correlation between neuroticism and burnout compared with non-management. Furthermore, resilience was found to be important for reducing managers' burnout but did not impact non-managers.

Personal resources	Burnout	Job engagement
Self-efficacy	-	+
Resilience		
Customer orientation	-	+
Extraversion		
Agreeableness	+	
Conscientiousness	-	
Neuroticism	+	
Openness		
Qualifications		
Experience		
Performance		
Person-organisation fit	-	+

STUDY 1C:

# ***Moving from intentions to action***

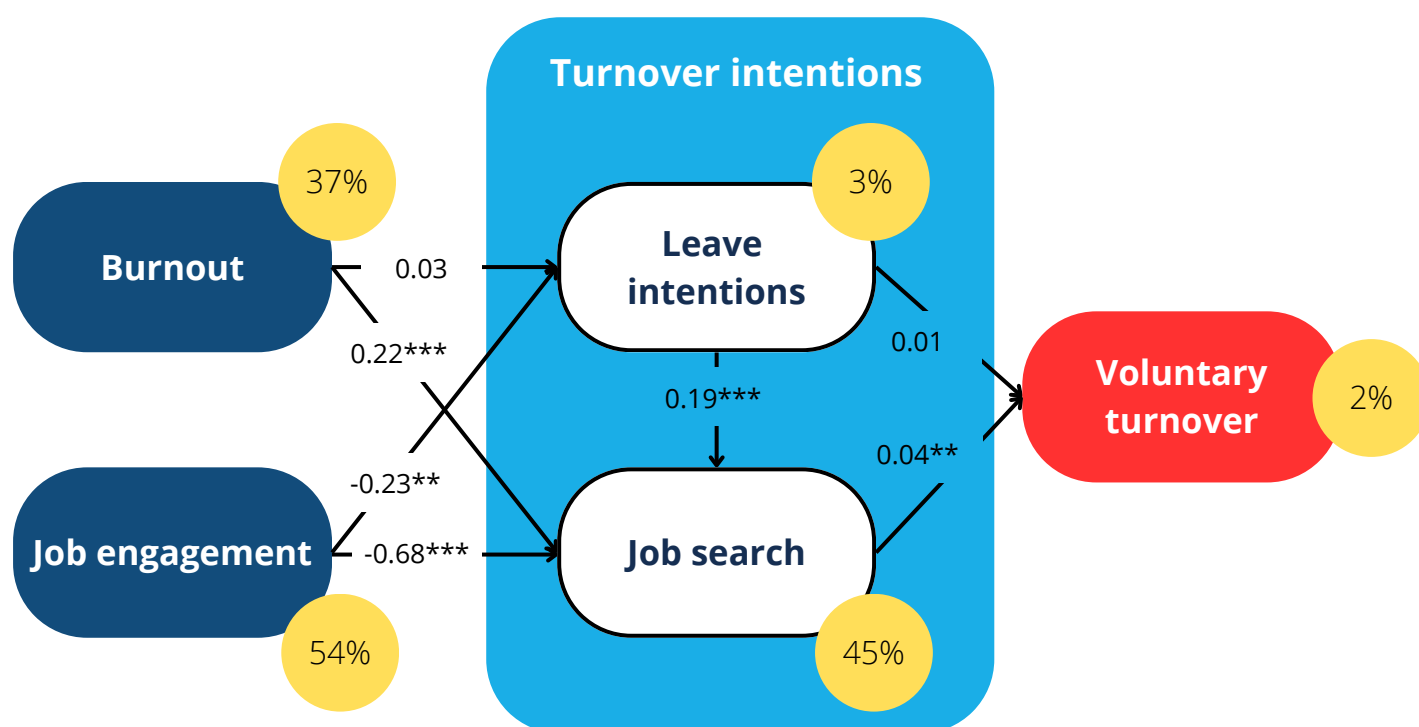


## What drives actual turnover?

In addition to the survey data, we also obtained organisational data relating to the employment status of respondents three months after they completed to our survey to investigate whether turnover intentions translated into actual turnover. To facilitate a more nuanced investigation of the impact of turnover intentions, we split the measure into its two constituent components - leave intentions and job search behaviours. The results of our analysis are provided below:

- **Impact of Burnout:** Employees experiencing higher levels of burnout are 22% more likely to engage in job search activities.
- **Impact of Job Engagement:** Motivated employees are 23% less likely to consider leaving and 68% less likely to actively search for new jobs.
- **Impact on Voluntary Turnover:** Engaging in job search activities is a stronger predictor of actual turnover compared to simply having the intention to leave.

The findings suggest that more variance in motivation and job search can be explained when these constructs are considered separately. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between different aspects of turnover intentions to better understand and predict voluntary turnover.



*Voluntary turnout was impacted only modestly by increased turnover intentions as reflected in job search.*

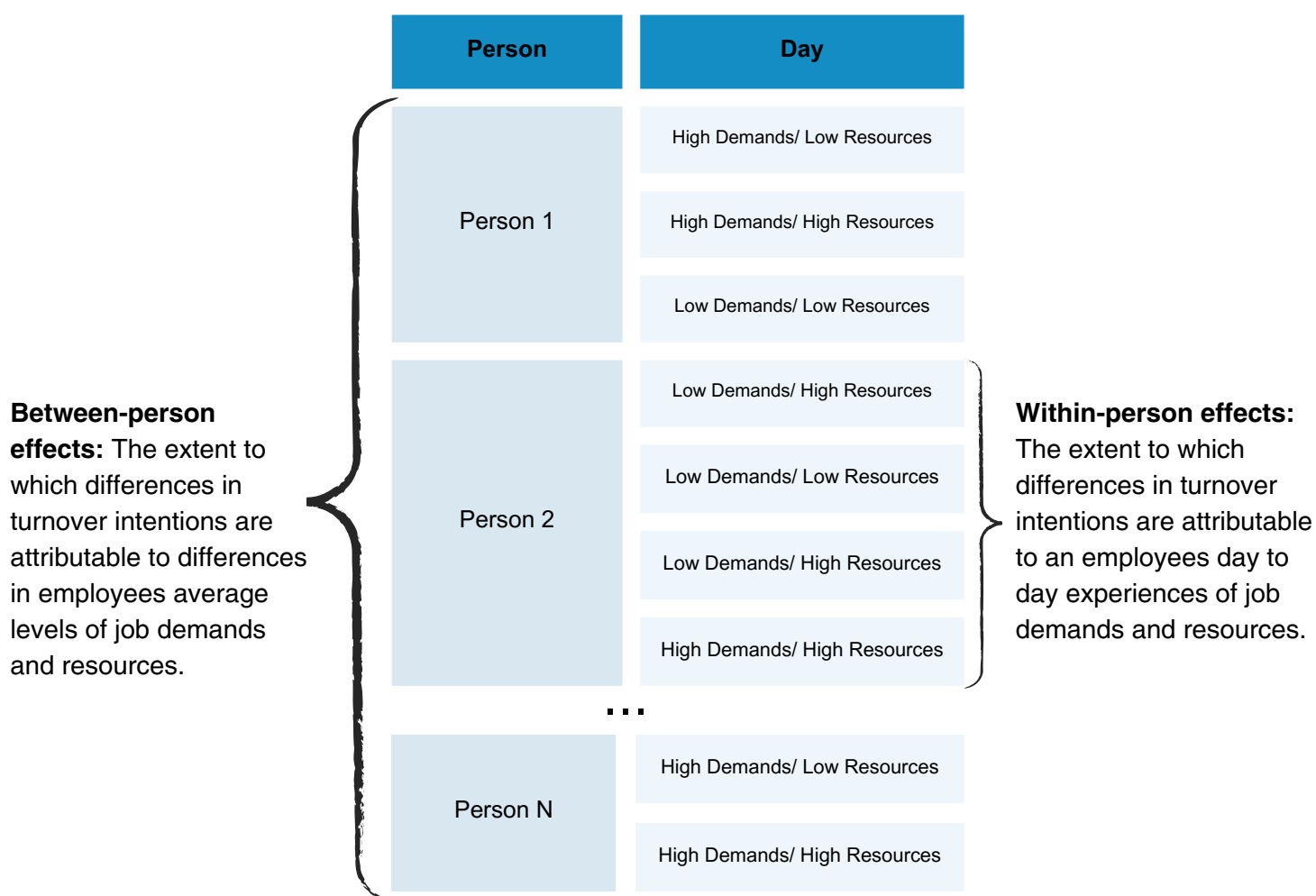
STUDY 2:

***Impact of daily changes  
in work conditions***

## Effects of fluctuations in job demands and resources on turnover intentions

While the previous findings provide information on how turnover intentions and voluntary turnover vary between persons, cross-sectional research methods such as surveys take a single snapshot of a population at a particular point in time. It is possible that this snapshot may not accurately reflect the experience of an individual over time (see figure below). To investigate the within-person differences over time, we undertook a daily diary study to assess how daily changes in job demands and resources influenced turnover intentions.

Our findings showed that the effects of daily changes in job demands and resources on turnover intentions were not as significant as the effects observed between different individuals. When an employee's job demands were 20% higher than their average on a given day, they had a 3.4% higher likelihood of reporting turnover intentions for that day. On the other hand, when an employee's job resources were one unit higher than their average, they were 2.3% less likely to report turnover intentions. Thus, while fluctuations in job demands and resources can result in daily changes in turnover intentions, their impact is smaller than the progressive accumulation of job demands and resources over time.

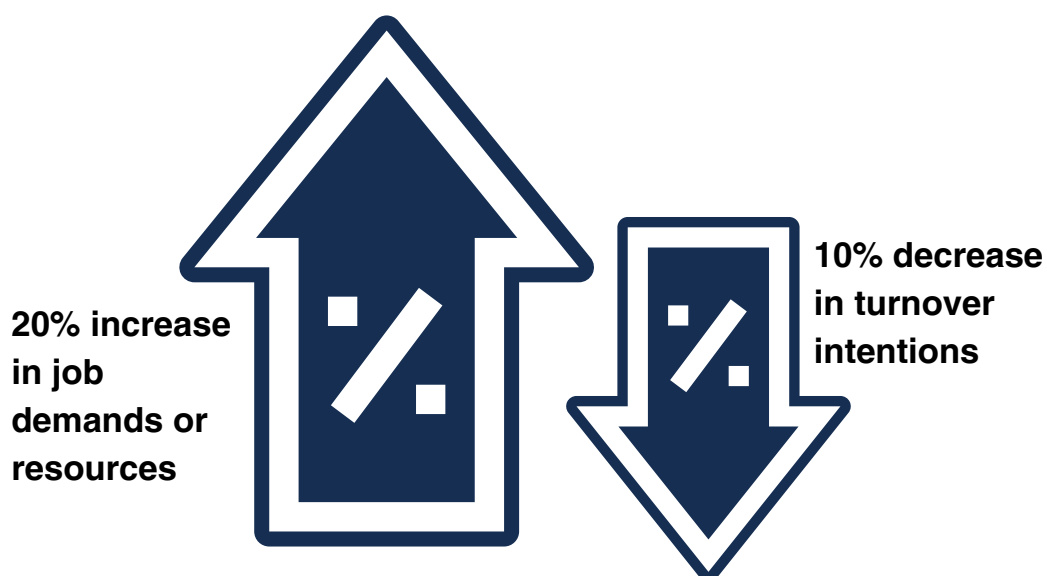


***There is a 50% return on investment in reductions in turnover intentions from changing job demands and resources.***

## **How much do you have to change job demands and resources to impact turnover intentions?**

In order to determine the efficacy of investing in job demands and resources, we investigated how much change in one would lead to change in the other. We found that a 20% increase in job demands meant that employees were 10% more likely to have turnover intentions. Similarly, every 10% increase in an employee's average job resources meant that they were 10% less likely to report turnover intentions. In essence, efforts to reduce job demands and increase job resources should have a 50% return on investment in reductions in turnover.

In other words, an employee who perceives their job resources as 20% higher than another employee is 10% less likely to quit. Compared with accepted norms, this has a strong effect, suggesting organisations can meaningfully change their employees' turnover intentions by manipulating job demands and resources.

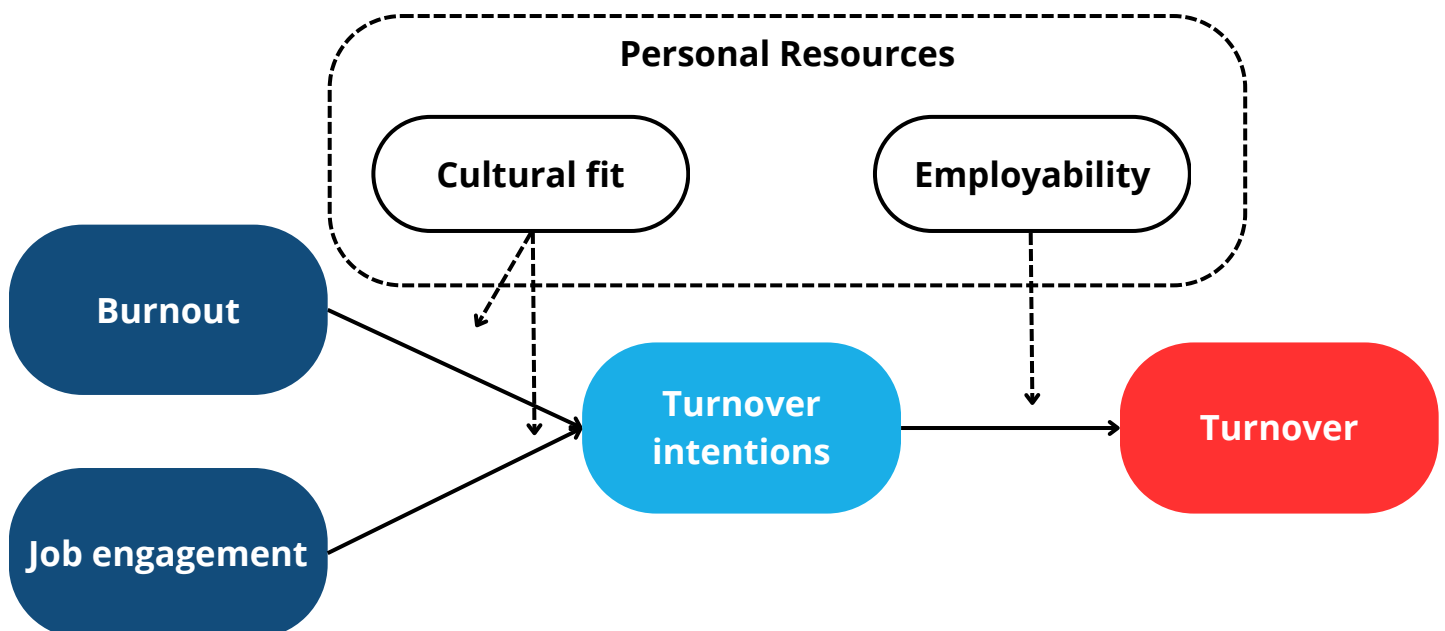




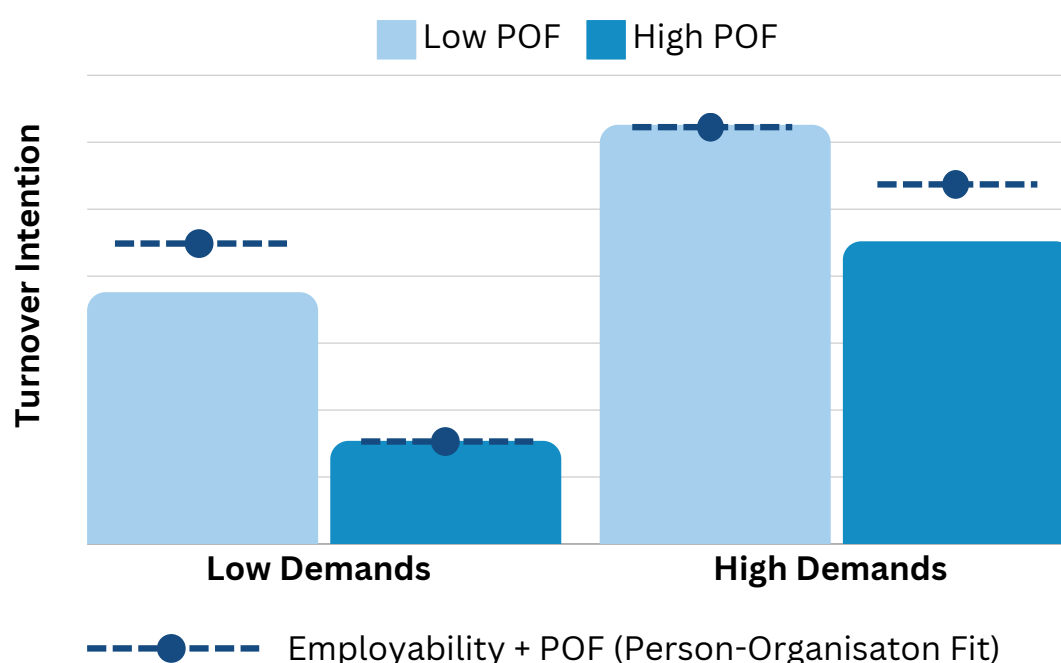
## What role does cultural fit and employability play?

In Study 1, we investigated the influence of personal resources as a driver of turnover intentions via increased burnout and reduced job engagement. It may also be possible that personal resources could moderate the influence of job demands and job resources on turnover intentions and voluntary turnover (see Figure below). Specifically, we examined the influence of cultural fit as a moderator of turnover intentions and employability as a moderator of voluntary turnover. In doing so, we adapt the original JD-R model to reflect another key theory in the study of turnover - the Unfolding Model of Voluntary Turnover (UMVT). This second model argues that turnover intentions arise when employees realise a misalignment between their values and those of their employer, and that the decision to leave requires a belief that the employee has options (usually confirmed following job search activities).

Our research has shown that employees who have a good fit with their organisation are 55% less likely to have intentions of quitting compared to employees who do not have a good fit. We also found that the negative impact of employability can be reduced by having a good person-organisation fit. For instance, employees with high employability and job demands are 17.5% less likely to have intentions of quitting when they have a good person-organisation fit. However, if the person-organisation fit is low, employees are likely to have a high turnover intention regardless of their job demands.



Source: Adapted from Bakker & Demerouti (2007) and Lee et al. (1999)



Unfortunately, there is little that organisations can do to control the impact of the external labour market and mitigate its impact on turnover. Organisations can, however, make themselves more appealing by managing their organisational culture. As already discussed in this report, person-organisation fit is important to reducing the impact of job demands on burnout and turnover intention. In addition, this study found that person-organisation fit mitigated the negative impacts of employability on employees' perception of their job demands.

In the present investigation, we found that employees with higher-than-average job demands were 11.9% more likely to intend to quit when they perceived their employability to be high. Similarly, employability accentuated the impact of a bad day where job demands were particularly high whereby employees with high employability were 12.6% more likely to have intentions to quit on that day. We found no evidence that employability had any impact on employees' perception of their job resources.

# ***Key findings and recommendations***

## How can organisations best leverage the findings of this research?

To effectively reduce employee turnover in the DES sector, practitioners should focus on enhancing job resources, addressing job demands, and fostering a supportive and positive organisational culture. Implementing targeted interventions, providing career development opportunities, and promoting work-life balance will help retain employees and reduce the incidence of turnover.



**High Turnover Intentions Among Junior Employees.** Turnover intentions are higher among newer employees and more junior employees.

- **Recommended Action:** Implement targeted onboarding and mentorship programmes to support junior employees and integrate them into the organisational culture. Providing clear career progression pathways can help retain junior staff.



**Dissatisfaction with Pay and Benefits.** The main reason for turnover in the DES sector is dissatisfaction with pay and benefits.

- **Recommended Action:** Conduct regular market comparisons to ensure competitive salaries and benefits. Consider implementing performance-based incentives to reward and retain high-performing employees.



**Impact of Negative Workplace Culture.** Negative workplace culture and management issues are significant drivers of turnover.

- **Recommended Action:** Promote a positive workplace culture through leadership training, team-building activities, and open communication channels. Establish regular feedback mechanisms to address and resolve workplace issues promptly.



**Lack of Learning and Career Progression Opportunities.** Lack of learning and career progression opportunities contributes to turnover.

- **Recommended Action:** Develop and communicate clear career development plans and provide continuous learning opportunities, such as workshops, training programmes, and support for further education.



**Health and Safety Concerns.** Health and safety risks are significant predictors of burnout and turnover intentions.

- **Recommended Action:** Enhance health and safety protocols and provide regular training on workplace safety. Establish a support system for employees dealing with personally confronting situations.



**Work-Life Balance.** Work-life balance significantly reduces burnout and supports employee retention.

- **Recommended Action:** Implement flexible working arrangements, such as remote work options and flexible hours, to help employees balance their professional and personal lives.



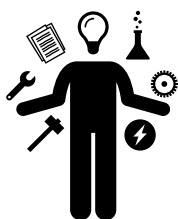
**Role Ambiguity and Conflict.** Role ambiguity and role conflict are major job demands that impact burnout and job engagement.

- **Recommended Action:** Clearly define job roles and responsibilities. Ensure regular and effective communication from management to reduce ambiguity and conflict.



**Customer Support and Organisational Support.** Strong customer support and organisational support positively impact job engagement and reduce burnout.

- **Recommended Action:** Foster a supportive work environment by recognising and rewarding employee contributions. Provide resources and support to help employees succeed in their roles.



**Influence of Personal Resources.** Personal resources, such as resilience and self-efficacy, significantly reduce burnout and increase job engagement.

- **Recommended Action:** Offer training programmes focused on building personal resources like resilience and stress management. Encourage a culture of self-improvement and personal growth.



**Person-Organisation Fit.** A good person-organisation fit reduces turnover intentions significantly.

- **Recommended Action:** During the hiring process, assess candidates for cultural fit with the organisation. Promote and maintain a strong organisational culture that aligns with employee values.



## Notes



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