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Strategic management of retention in small and medium-sized industries: integration between development, recognition, and people analytics.

Strategic retention management in small and medium-sized industries: integration between development, recognition and people analytics

Strategic management of retention in small and medium-sized industries: integration between development, recognition and analysis of people

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SUMMARY

Retaining skilled workers is a significant challenge for small and medium-sized industries, where the loss of tacit knowledge, the concentration of skills, and the limited formalization of human resources increase the organizational cost of employee turnover. This article presents a narrative review aimed at integrating evidence on turnover, job demands and resources, psychological safety, recognition, development, and people analytics. It proposes an Integrated Model for Sustainable Retention, composed of diagnosis, job design, development, recognition, listening, and managerial learning. The model is not a validated protocol, but a didactic framework to support decisions proportionate to the size and risk of the organization. It concludes that retention should not be confused with workforce immobility. The managerial goal is to reduce avoidable departures, preserve critical skills, and create conditions for internal mobility, performance, and well-being.

Keywords: talent retention; turnover; small and medium-sized enterprises; industry; engagement; development.

ABSTRACT

Employee retention is a relevant challenge for small and medium-sized manufacturing firms, where the loss of tacit knowledge, concentration of critical skills, and limited formalization of human resource management increase the organizational cost of exits. This narrative review integrates evidence on turnover, job demands and resources, psychological safety, recognition, development and people analytics. It proposes an Integrated Sustainable Retention Model composed of diagnosis, job design, development, recognition, employee voice and managerial learning. The model is not a validated protocol, but a teaching framework for decisions proportionate to organizational size and risk. Retention should not be equated with workforce immobility. Its managerial purpose is to reduce avoidable exits, preserve critical competencies and create conditions for internal mobility, performance and well-being.

Keywords: employee retention; turnover; small and medium-sized enterprises; manufacturing; engagement; development.

1 INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises face particular constraints in attracting, developing, and retaining talent.

skilled workers. The OECD (2023) associates this difficulty with less formalization of management.

of people, to the limitation of career paths, to working conditions and to less access

structured around qualification networks. In industry, the issue is exacerbated by dependence on

tacit knowledge, safety routines, equipment proficiency, and coordination between functions.

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administrative and productive.

Turnover is a multi-causal phenomenon. The century-old review by Hom et al. (2017) demonstrates that Attitudes, external alternatives, connections, conflicts, and decision-making processes interact over time. Therefore, an aggregate turnover rate does not, in isolation, explain why people leave or... which departures could have been avoided. Responsible management distinguishes between voluntary and voluntary resignations. involuntary, critical and non-critical functions, length of service, professional destination and context of decision.

This article aims to organize a retention architecture applicable to small and medium-sized businesses. industries. The contribution consists of relating organizational theory, development practices and indicators, while preserving two precautions. The first is that retention does not authorize restriction. Mobility or silencing dissatisfaction. The second is the correlation between HR practices and retention. It does not prove causality in every company.

2 METHOD

A narrative review of a conceptual and applied nature was conducted. The selection prioritized articles Seminal documents, comprehensive reviews, and institutional documents on small and medium-sized enterprises. companies and skills development. The writing was guided by the principles of the scale. SANRA, especially the explicit relevance, bibliographic search, referencing, and scientific foundation (BAETHGE; GOLDBECK-WOOD; MERTENS, 2019).1

The review did not use a systematic protocol, meta-analysis, or primary data. Consequently, the The model presented should be understood as a didactic synthesis and organizing hypothesis, not as... psychometric instrument, proprietary technology or method whose effectiveness is clinically or Operationally validated. Applicability depends on local diagnosis and participation of... workers and periodic evaluation.

3. Retention as a Result of a Work System

The demands and resources theory of work proposes that physical, cognitive, and emotional demands... They consume energy, while autonomy, support, feedback, and learning opportunities... They promote motivation and coping (BAKKER; DEMEROUTI, 2007). Bakker's synthesis,

1The SANRA scale was used as a quality guideline for writing the narrative review. It was not applied as a formal scoring instrument for the manuscript, nor does it transform the study into a systematic review.

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Demerouti and Sanz-Vergel (2014) associate persistent demands with the depletion of adequate resources.
to engagement. In industrial environments, balance requires simultaneous attention to workload, shifts,
Predictability, security, tools, communication, and decision-making capacity.
Retention also depends on the quality of the relationship between the individual and the organization. The theory of
Social exchange describes reciprocity as a mechanism by which fair treatment, support, and
Reliability influences attitudinal and behavioral responses (CROPANZANO; MITCHELL,
(2005). Recognition, therefore, is not limited to awards. It includes understandable criteria,
Daily respect, equitable access to opportunities, and consistency between words and actions.
Self-determination theory adds that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are necessities.
Relevant psychological factors for quality motivation (DECI; RYAN, 2000). In small industry,
This can be translated into clarity of expectations, participation in improvements, and learning.
Progressive and trusting relationships. Autonomy must be compatible with safety requirements and
Standardization, avoiding both micromanagement and delegation without support.

4. DEVELOPMENT, RECOGNITION, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Effective development plans begin with mapping critical competencies, not by...
a generic catalog of courses. The competency-oriented approach identifies what...
The organization needs to execute, what capabilities are concentrated, and where there is a risk of...
Discontinuity. The OECD (2025) notes that skills-first practices can broaden access to talent.
and improve the fit between person and role, but they also require transparency, validation, and protection.
against new biases.

Training should be linked to the actual work. For operational roles, the combination of instruction,
Supervised practice, learning verification, and retraining tend to produce more evidence.
More useful than simply being present at activities. For leaders, development needs to include
Feedback, conducting difficult conversations, harassment prevention, workload analysis, and decision-making.
based on data.

Psychological safety describes the perception that the environment allows one to take interpersonal risks.
such as admitting doubt, reporting an error, or proposing improvement (EDMONDSON, 1999). It does not mean absence.
billing. In mature systems, the demand for performance coexists with the possibility of
demonstration without retaliation. This mechanism is especially relevant in operations where the
Silence can conceal quality or safety flaws.

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5. People Analytics and Indicator Governance

The turnover rate should be disaggregated. It is recommended to observe avoidable voluntary departures, loss of occupants of critical positions, tenure in the first few months, internal mobility and reasons
Coded exit interviews. Exit interviews help, but suffer from memory bias.
Desirability and apprehension. Combining this with tenure interviews, brief surveys, absenteeism, overtime, and development data improves interpretation.2
Indicators should support decisions, not monitor individuals. Governance requires an explicit purpose.
Limited access, data minimization, known criteria, and review of potential effects.
discriminatory. Small businesses can start with a few consistent indicators, avoiding
Sophisticated systems lacking analytical capabilities. A measurement is only useful when it has a definition.
Stability, responsibility, periodicity, and associated action.

Quadro 1. Síntese do modelo proposto

Dimensão	Pergunta gerencial	Indicadores possíveis
Diagnóstico	Onde estão as saídas evitáveis?	Turnover voluntário, função crítica, tempo de casa
Trabalho	As demandas são sustentáveis?	Horas extras, carga, previsibilidade, incidentes
Desenvolvimento	Há progressão de competências?	Matriz de habilidades, mobilidade, aprendizagem verificada
Reconhecimento	Os critérios são justos e claros?	Percepção de justiça, acesso a oportunidades
Escuta	Problemas podem ser relatados?	Ações concluídas, tempo de resposta, recorrência

Fonte: elaboração própria com base nas referências discutidas no artigo.

6. Integrated Model for Sustainable Retention

The proposed model organizes retention into a cycle. The diagnosis identifies segments,
Critical competencies and output standards. The job design examines demands, resources, and
Clarity. Development creates verifiable paths and mobility. Recognition establishes
Evaluation criteria. Listening transforms expressions into actions. Managerial learning reviews
It delivers results and corrects unwanted effects.
Implementation can occur in quarterly cycles, starting with one area or family of functions.
The first product should not be a retention campaign, but a baseline with...
definitions and risks. Then, the organization selects small interventions, such as a review of
Integration, leadership training, or standardization of recognition criteria. The comparison.

2. People indicators should be analyzed in aggregate and with access controls. Interviews, surveys, and administrative records have their own biases and do not allow for isolated causal inferences about the termination decision.

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The comparison between "before" and "after" should be interpreted with caution, because seasonality and the labor market also play a role.
They affect the results.

Governance should include management, HR, operational leadership, and worker representation.
This approach reduces the risk of treating process problems as individual failures. Also
It allows you to integrate retention with quality, safety, productivity, and succession planning.
Ultimate responsibility remains with leadership, but the quality of decisions depends on...
participation and evidence.

CONCLUSION

The analysis developed demonstrates that sustainable retention in small and medium-sized industries does not
This can be attributed to an isolated practice, a benefits policy, or the exclusive actions of the area.
human resources. Retention results from the interaction between working conditions, relationships,
trust, development prospects, recognition, leadership quality and perception of
justice. When these elements are managed separately, the organization tends to react to
Disconnections without understanding the mechanisms that precede them.
This understanding requires distinguishing between retention and professional inactivity. A legitimate policy does not
It seeks to prevent career moves and does not classify every departure as a failure. Its objective
It consists of reducing avoidable voluntary resignations, preserving critical knowledge, and offering...
conditions that allow workers who wish to remain to find real possibilities of
Learning, contribution, and progression. The worker's freedom of choice remains as
Ethical limit of any retention strategy.
The Integrated Sustainable Retention Model synthesizes this perspective by articulating diagnosis,
Job design, development, recognition, listening, and managerial learning. The value of
The model focuses less on the quantity of proposed actions and more on the coherence between them. Programs of
Training loses its effectiveness when workload prevents its application; initiatives of
Recognition becomes fragile when criteria are opaque; channels of communication are lost.
Legitimacy is lost when the reported problems do not produce an institutional response.
In small and medium-sized industries, proportionality is a requirement for viability. It is not
It is necessary to start with sophisticated platforms or extensive dashboards. Consistent definitions of
turnover, identification of critical roles, retention interviews, integration analysis and
Monitoring a few stable measures can produce a more useful decision-making basis than
Large volumes of data without interpretation. Maturity stems from the ability to transform
evidence in action and reviewing the action in light of its effects.

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Leadership occupies a central position in this process because it translates organizational policies into action.
Everyday experience. Clarity of expectations, balanced distribution of demands, feedback.
Respect and openness to reporting problems influence both learning and the intention to...
permanence. This centrality, however, does not authorize the individualization of structural problems.
Leaders need training, resources, and institutional guidelines so that accountability can be exercised.
so that retention is shared by the organization's governance.
Human resource analytics can improve the quality of decisions, provided it is aligned with the intended purpose.
Explicit, data minimization, and contextual interpretation. Indicators should not function
as surveillance mechanisms or as automatic proof of causality. Turnover variations
They can reflect the labor market, seasonality, technological changes, occupational profile, and...
Strategic decisions. Therefore, quantitative data needs to be combined with skilled listening.
and analysis of the processes in which the outputs are concentrated.
The main limitation of this study stems from its narrative and conceptual design. There was no search...
exhaustive systematic review, meta-analysis, primary data collection, or model validation in organizations.
industrial. The proposed structure should be understood as a teaching tool for organizing questions.
and decisions, and not as a proven effective protocol. Its adoption requires adaptation to the context,
Worker participation and evaluation of intended and unintended effects.
Future research could examine longitudinally how different combinations of demands,
Resources, development practices, and leadership quality are related to voluntary departures.
avoidable. Comparative studies between sizes, industrial segments and labor markets are also
They can clarify under what conditions certain practices produce different results. The advance
The acquisition of knowledge depends on transparent measures, control of external factors, and simultaneous attention.
to retention, learning, safety, well-being and organizational performance.

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