Psychological ownership as a requisite for talent retention: The voice of highly skilled employees

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify and clarify the elements and possible role of psychological ownership in highly skilled employees' retention. The methodology encompasses a qualitative research design inclusive of an extant literature review, open-ended questions and interviews to sought deeper understanding and clarification of the data. Data were analysed through thematic analysis and compared with the theoretical elements of psychological ownership. The findings indicated that highly skilled employees identify with the elements of psychological ownership. The contextual factors especially the more structural aspects, being: clear communication; relationship building; clear direction and goal alignment; ethical

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conduct; recognition and acknowledgement and leadership, surfaced more explicitly as requisite for talent retention.

Keywords: Psychological ownership; skilled employees; organisational effectiveness; talent management; retention

Biographical notes:

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1. Introduction

In the current global economic landscape organisational success depends on competitiveness (El Toukhy, 1998). The human capital of the organisation is its only true sustainable competitive advantage (Bassi and McMurrer, 2007). This deduces that competitiveness relies profoundly on the skill set, capability and mind-set available and the ability of the organisation to attract, develop and retain psychologically connected employees from all demographic groups (Torrington, Hall, Taylor and Atkinson, 2009).

Employment and employability in the current contemporary world of work context, both locally and internationally, are dependent on skills and therefore skilled employees. As the "war for skilled talent" is prevalent, according to De Villiers, (2006), it becomes increasingly important to explore the psychological factors that influence people's commitment and loyalty to an organisation.

According to Pannell (2014), talent management is a context-specific issue. South Africa, as a developing country, experience exceptional levels of growth with less job opportunities comparing to developed countries. The current South African environment poses multiple socio-economic challenges: (a) Unemployment levels are extremely high, especially among the youth; (b) the education system is poor specifically for sections of the population whose training is either outdated or inadequate; (c) although South Africa experience extraordinary levels of growth, it is about 2% comparing to the 6% growth rate of other sub-Saharan economies with the result that it cannot move South Africa into reversing unemployment trends; (d) South Africa has a scarcity of employees to occupy semi-skilled, skilled, managerial as well as professional jobs despite the large unemployment rate. Education and skills development could address this problem but as mentioned earlier, the national educational system failed to deliver the required results; (e) although South Africa is capable of delivering high levels of quality, the productivity levels are extremely low and (f) the labour market in South Africa is very rigid, with little alignment between government, business and labour supported by a very comprehensive legislative framework. All of these challenges have contributed to the need for exploring citizenship as commitment to the country (Enslin, 2003), which in this study refers to the psychological ownership phenomenon as enabler of talent retention in the South African workplace. A key challenge for most South African organisations is the retention of highly skilled employees (Kerr-Phillips and Thomas, 2009).

Fiorito, Bozeman, Young and Meurs (2007) concluded that psychological ownership might be one of the variables that can predict organisational commitment as based on their

study of Human Resource practices and other organisational characteristics that affect organisational commitment. This informs the research questions that are going to be dealt with in this paper:

"*What are the descriptive elements of 'psychological ownership?'"*

Is "psychological ownership" perceived as requisite in the retention of highly skilled talent in the South African context?

Earlier research suggests that the psychology of possession can play a huge role in the relationship between individual employees and their organisations. In their development of a model of employee ownership, Pierce, Rubenfeld and Morgan (1991) hypothesized that employee ownership leads to social-psychological and behavioural outcomes. However, several studies (Klein, 1987; Pendleton, Wilson and Wright, 1998; Dunn, Richardson and Dewe, 1991) found no significant relationship between ownership and employees' level of job satisfaction or commitment.

Pierce et al., (1991) identified an intervening variable, "psychological ownership", which could play a role in the interface between the presence of share ownership and employee commitment. Psychological ownership is narrowly defined as a state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of it is "theirs" (i.e. "It is *mine*!"). In this case it means that part of the organisation or job is perceived by the employee to belong to them.

According to Kubzansky and Druskat (as cited in Pierce, Kostova and Dirks, 2001), a psychological sense of ownership may be an integral part of an individual employee's relationship with an organisation. The presence of psychological ownership among employees can have a positive effect on organisational effectiveness and subsequently uphold staff retention (Brown, 1989).

This paper will be guided by the following objectives:

Objective 1: To describe the contributing elements of psychological ownership and its' possible role in the retention of highly skilled employees.

Objective 2: To discover and explain the perceptions and experience of psychological ownership as requisite of highly skilled employees' retention within the South African context.

An in-depth literature review clarifying the elements and possible role of psychological ownership in skilled employees' retention will pursue in order to address objective 1 as stated above. A discussion of the findings and the results pertaining to objective 2 will follow, concluding with possible limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Talent retention

As mentioned in the introduction, for any organisation to gain a competitive advantage the quality of skills is the most important in talent. There are a number of reasons why the attraction, growth and retention of talent is important to organisations. Employees leaving the organisation often take with them valuable knowledge and expertise gained through experience. Another turnover impact for the organisation is the fact that long-tenured employees have established close relationships with clients. These relationships are the foundation for a reinforcing cycle of positive interactions between employees and clients. Staff retention thus has a positive effect on good client relations and eventually profitability (Meyer, 2005).

In addition to these indirect costs, organisations also face many costs related directly to turnover, including exit interview time and administrative requirements, payment of unused vacation leave, the cost of temporary workers or overtime for co-workers asked to fill in, and training costs.

Replacement costs include advertising, head-hunter and selection fees. Training costs, both formal and informal, add to the overall burden (Mitchell, Holtom & Lee, 2001). Losing good employees is also costly in terms of the impact it has on the organisation's morale. Organisations also have to deal with the risk that new employees will not perform as expected or will not fit the organisation culture (Meyer, 2005).

Kotzé and Roodt (2005), suggest that employers are left with two options in order to succeed in the war for talent: The first option is to become and remain an "employer of choice", which will attract and retain people with the required profile (Cappelli, 2000); and the second option is to develop, retain and efficiently utilise the employer's existing talent pool. Rossi (2000) also suggests that the best method of filling important vacancies in organisations is to ensure that current qualified employees remain a part of the organisation. Current employees are, after all, a known factor. They are familiar with the internal workings of the organisation. These employees have established the formal and informal networks that are necessary to help them remain productive within the organisation's context and they have been trained in the use of many of the methods and systems used by the organisation.

Fiorito et al. (2007) suggested that psychological ownership may be one of those variables that might predict organisational commitment and maybe the missing element that

can enhance commitment and play a major role in the retention of talent. It is thus important to have a closer look at psychological ownership as a construct.

2.2 Psychological ownership

2.2.1 Definition of psychological ownership

The widely-accepted definition of Pierce *et al.* (2003, p. 86) defines psychological ownership as a "state where an individual feels as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is "theirs". Psychological ownership can be directed at a variety of objects (targets), including an organisation, a job, or a work project, and is considered to be a sense of possession of an object whereby the object becomes an extension of the self and is closely linked to the individual's identity and consist of affective and cognitive elements (Pierce et al., 2001).

A theoretical framework illustrating the elements of psychological ownership and showing the role that psychological ownership could play in the retention of highly skilled employees is displayed in Figure 1.
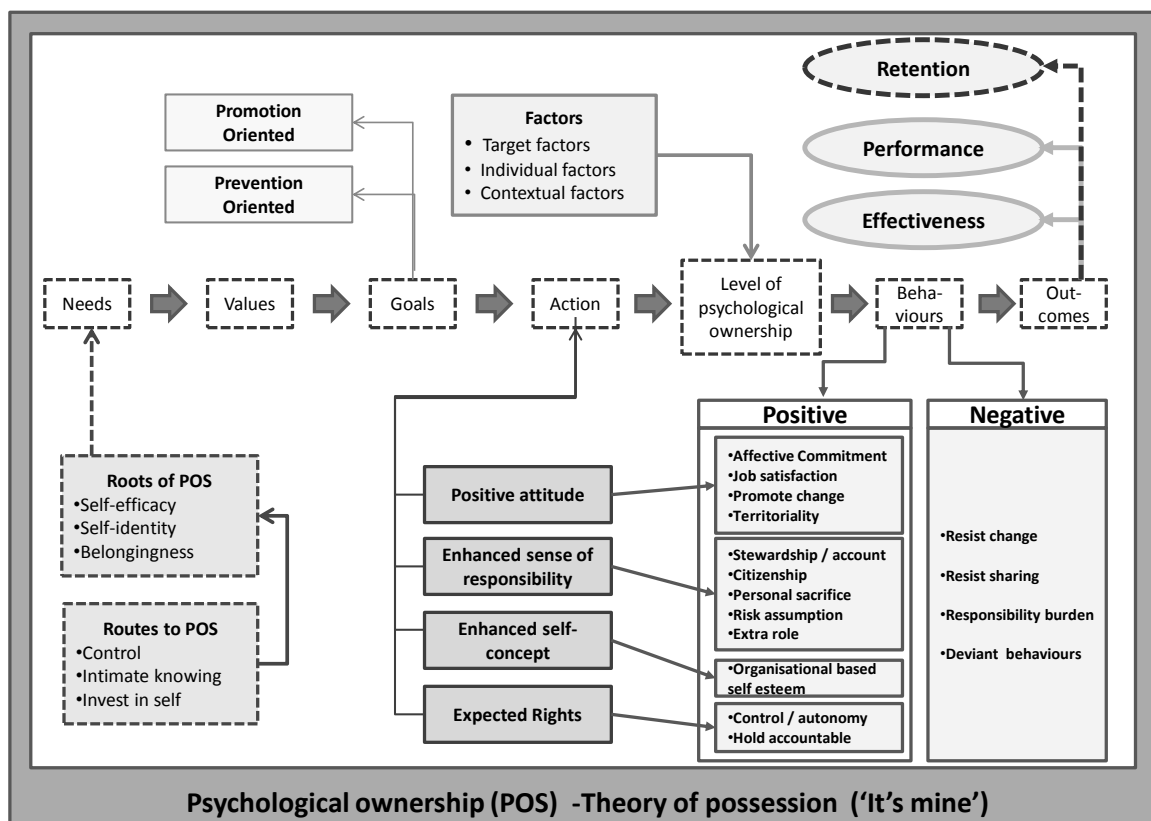

Figure 1: Theoretical framework of psychological ownership

According to the framework presented in Figure 2, employees' actions are triggered by prominent needs, followed by relevant values and goals. The satisfaction of needs will lead to a particular level of psychological ownership that can result in either positive or negative behaviours. These behaviours then lead to particular outcomes for the organisation such as talent retention in the case of this study.

2.3 Needs

Needs are influenced by the motives for psychological ownership and the routes through which psychological ownership emerges.

2.3.1 Motives for or roots of psychological ownership

According to Pierce et al. (2001), psychological ownership exists because it satisfies three basic human needs:

Self-Efficacy and effectance: this refers to employees' judgments about their capability to perform tasks (Bandura, 1995) and also means that it is important for an individual to be in control (Furby, 1978). The possibility of being in control, being able to do something with regard to the environment and being able to affect a desirable outcome of actions are important in creating psychological ownership.

Self-identity: people's sense of identity are "established, maintained, reproduced and transformed" (Dittmar, 1992, p. 86) through their interaction with tangible possessions and intangibles such as an organisation, mission or purpose (Rousseau, 1998).

Belongingness: Belongingness in terms of psychological ownership in organisations may be best understood as a feeling that a person belongs *in* the organisation. Belongingness results from common goals shared with other employees and the feeling that their function fulfils their personal needs (Lee, as cited in Edwards, 2005).

2.3.2 Routes to psychological ownership

Pierce et al. (2001) suggest that psychological ownership emerges through three routes or mechanisms: through *control of an object,* through *knowledge of the object*, and through creating or *investing themselves in the target* of ownership.

Controlling the ownership target: According to McClelland (1951) control exercised over objects enhances feelings of ownership for that object with the result that the object form part of the person's extended self. The greater the amount of control exercised over certain objects, the more the object is experienced as part of the self (Furby, 1978).

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Researchers such as O'Driscoll and Beehr (2000), and Parker (1998) found that the extent to which employees believe they have control is a key determinant of their effective responses, such as job satisfaction, work involvement and organisational commitment.

Intimately coming to know the target: Sartre (1969) posits that the more information and the better the knowledge an individual has about an object, the deeper the relationship will be between the object and the self, therefore the stronger the feeling of ownership toward it.

Investing the self in the target: People often feel that they own that which they create, shape, or produce. Therefore, according to Durkheim (1957), individuals own the objects they have created in much the same way that they own themselves. The investment of a person's energy, effort, time and attention in objects causes the individual to experience that the target of ownership emerges from the self (Rochberg-Halton, 1984).

2.4 Values

According to Pelham (1995) personal values make some objects more or less esteemed. Pierce et al. (2003) claim that different attributes are important to different people and that people seek different types of objects. People may attempt to increase their feelings of self-worth by striving to possess, psychologically or legally, the objects that hold the greatest importance for them in order to enhance their self-concept. Individuals are probably prone to feel ownership of those objects they consider most important according to their personal values because ownership is one means of boosting an individual's self-esteem.

2.5 Goals

Higgens (1997) states that individual's goals are influenced by two self-regulatory systems: *promotion* and *prevention*. People that use a promotion-focused approach pursue goals that reflect their hopes and aspirations. Those that use prevention goals focus on rules and obligations to avoid punishment. Psychological ownership thus takes two forms: promotion-oriented and prevention-oriented psychological ownership.

2.6 Action (behaviours)

According to Furby (1978) the three fundamental outcomes associated with feelings of possession are: positive attitudes about the target, an enhanced self-concept, and a sense of responsibility. Ownership is also frequently defined and experienced in terms of a "bundle of rights". Ownership is associated with the right to information about the target of ownership and the right to have a voice in decisions that affect the target. However, every right associated with ownership should be balanced by a responsibility or obligation.

2.7 Level of psychological ownership

Three groups of moderating factors could influence the emergence of psychological ownership, namely individual characteristics, the potential ownership target, and the situation or context (Pierce et al., 2001). Therefore, the level of psychological ownership, while probably latent within each individual, does not necessarily always occur and is not equally strong across individuals, targets and situations. Psychological ownership is determined by a complex interaction of a number of intra-individual, object-related, and contextual factors.

2.7.1 Target factors

Ownership seems to attach itself to a variety of targets: work, material objects, ideas, relationships, territory and creations (Dittmar, 1989; Rudmin and Berry, 1987). In order to capture the person's interest and attention, Pierce et al. (2001) suggest that the target must be visible and attractive to a person and must be experienced by the individual.

2.7.2 Individual factors

According to Pierce et al. (2003), there are differences regarding the strength of the motives, both across individuals and within individuals over time, and personality also has an impact.

2.7.3 Process factors

The process by which psychological ownership emerges is thus associated with a complex interaction between the 'roots', the 'routes', target factors and individual factors. The three roots of psychological ownership (efficacy and effectance, identity, and having a home) are not wholly independent of one another. Ownership may emerge as the result of any one or any subset of these needs (Pierce et al., 2003). Similarly, the three routes to psychological

ownership (control, intimate knowing and investment of self) are also complementary, additive and distinct. Any single route may result in feelings of ownership independently of the others.

2.7.4 Contextual factors

Although a wide variety of contextual elements affect the emergence of psychological ownership, the focus in this paper was on two aspects, namely, structural and cultural aspects as they are prevalent in the South African context.

Structural aspects

It was found that *structural aspects* of the context such as a structured work environment, complex job designs and leadership styles may promote or prevent individuals from developing feelings of ownership.

Structured work environment **-** The study conducted by O'Driscoll, Pierce, and Coghlan, (2006) found that a less rigid and structured work environment would generally provide individuals with greater autonomy and control over their job and work environment, thus promoting greater feelings of ownership of the job and the organisation. They suggest that organisations wishing to enhance the feeling of ownership experienced by their employees, along with increasing citizenship activities, might modify the work environment to increase levels of participation, control, and autonomy and reduce the extent of system control over employees' job performance.

Complex job designs - According to Pierce et al. (2009) increasing job complexity provides job incumbents with the opportunity to customise their work, personalise it, and to find a place within it to dwell, and as a result job complexity contributes to the satisfaction of the motives of efficacy and effectance, self-identity and having a place. Work that is designed in such a manner that it creates feelings of ownership satisfies the motives that underpin psychological ownership and is pleasure per se. Work that is pleasure producing contributes to work attendance and high quality of work performance, has strong and positive motivational consequences, reduces turnover, and produces frequent acts of good organisational citizenship behaviour (Pierce et al., 2009). Complex job design will give employees psychological empowerment, which in turn will increase their intrinsic motivation, work satisfaction, organisational commitment, and voluntary and constructive work-related behaviours.

Leadership styles **-** Shamir, House and Arthur (1993) state that employee's feelings of

involvement, cohesiveness, commitment, potency and performance are enhanced by the transformational leadership style. Yukl (1989) defined transformational leadership as leadership behaviour that transforms the norms and values of the employees, motivating them to perform beyond their own expectations.

Cultural aspects

According to Pierce et al. (2003) psychological ownership is also influenced by the cultural aspects of a social context. Hofstede (1980, p. 25) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes members of one human group from another". Pierce et al. (2003) theorise that there are two theoretical reasons why they believe culture will have an effect on psychological ownership.

Concept of the self - Firstly, according to Erez and Early (1993), there is a strong connection between psychological ownership and the concept of self. The concept of self is in part socially imposed and influenced by culture.

Socialisation practices - Secondly, psychological ownership is partially "learnt" through socialisation practices, which again are culturally determined. Culture is thus an important aspect that needs to be examined to better understand the phenomenon of psychological ownership. Culture, which is reflected in customs, norms, traditions and beliefs in society, shapes the individual's self-concept and values with regard to control, self-expression, self-identity, property, and ownership.

Pierce et al. (2003) propose that culture will have an influence on all the elements of their framework of psychological ownership: on the construct itself, the motives, the "routes", targets, individuals, and the process. Although possessive feelings are universal, it is possible that individuals from different cultural groups assign different meaning to possessions in terms of viewing them as part of their extended selves. Possessions may play a more significant role in the self-definition in some cultures than in others. Therefore, Pierce et al. (2003) suggest that feelings of ownership may be present in different cultures to a different extent.

According to Pierce et al. (2003), both the kind of target and the expression of feelings of ownership towards that target will vary greatly according to the culture and country in which the individual operates, and the locus of the self-concept in that society.

2.8 Behavioural consequences of psychological ownership

Psychological ownership results in either positive or negative behaviours, which can impact on the intention not to quit or to quit their jobs in the organisation. Psychological ownership has been associated with: greater commitment to the organisation (VandeWalle, Van Dyne and Kostova, 1995); greater accountability (VandeWalle et al., 1995); greater job satisfaction (Avey et al., 2009; Buchko, 1993; Mayhew et al., 2007; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004); better organisational performance (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004; Wagner, Parker & Christianson, 2003); better organisation-based self-esteem (Avey et al., 2009; VandeWalle et al., 1995; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004); organisational citizenship behaviours (Avey et al., 2009; VandeWalle et al., 1995; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004); an increase in extra-role behaviour (VandeWalle et al., 1995); and the intention to stay in the organisation (Avey et al., 2009; Buchko, 1993). Other outcomes of psychological ownership are stewardship, promotion of organisation change, personal risk-taking and self-sacrifice and caring and protective behaviours directed toward the target of ownership (Dirks, Cummings and Pierce, 1996; Pierce et al., 2001

2.9 Outcomes

According to Bernstein (cited in Mayhew et al., 2007, p. 483) "ownership instils a sense of pride in employees and acts as a motivator of greater performance". Psychological ownership will encourage employees to think and act like owners, which will in turn enhance organisational performance and effectiveness and will promote talent retention.

3. **Research methodology**

In discovering and explaining the perceptions and experience of psychological ownership as requisite of highly skilled employees' retention within the South African contexta qualitative research approach with an intepretivist paradigm was followed and the applicability within the South African context was elucidated.

3.1 Sampling

According to Giddens (1990) qualitative research usually contains a smaller sample than quantitative research, because a deeper understanding of social behaviour and phenomena is sought. A purposive sample group comprised 19 highly skilled workers employed in private

and public sectors, representing the South African population, were selected. The sample demographics are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information of the sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Gender	Male	4	21	21
	Female	15	79	100
	Total	**19**		
Ethnic Group	African	15	79	79
	Asian	3	16	95
	Caucasian	1	5	100
	Total	**19**		
Age	Younger than 29	3	16	16
	30-39	8	42	58
	40-49	7	37	95
	50+	1	5	100
	Total	**19**		
	Bachelor's degree	4	21	21
	Postgraduate degree	15	79	100
	Total	**19**		

Of the respondents, 79% (n = 15) females and 21 % (n = 4) males. Of the sample, 79% (n = 15) were African, 16% (n = 3) were Asian and 5% (n = 1) were Caucasian/White. The sample comprised 16% (n = 3) were younger than 29 years of age, 42% (n = 8) were between 30 and 39 years of age, 37% (n = 7) were between 40 and 49 years of age and only 5% (n = 1) were above 50. The majority of the sample had obtained a postgraduate degree, representing 79% (n = 15), indicating a highly skilled group. Respondents who had obtained a Bachelor's degree represent 21% (n = 4).

The research process and qualitative methods used, displayed in Figure 2, will be described.
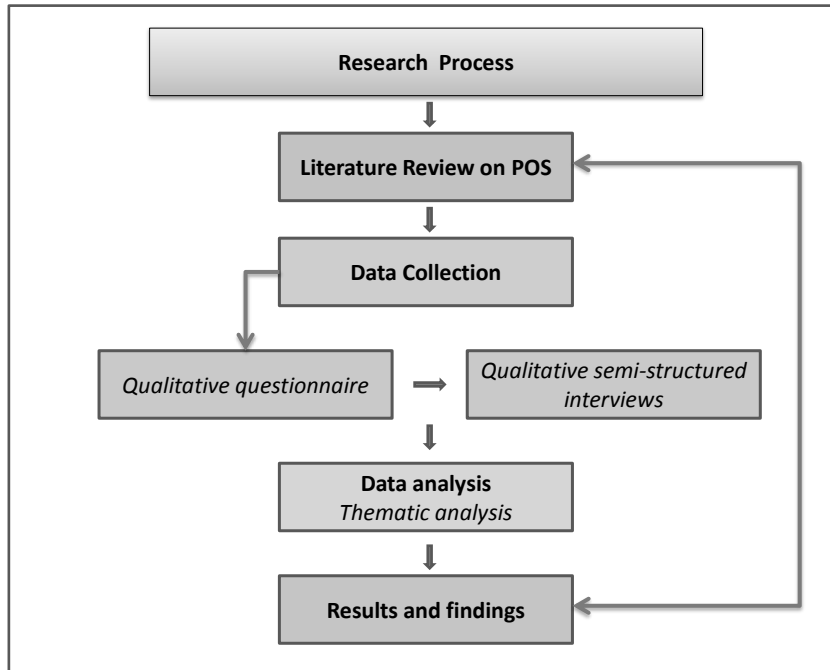
Figure 2: Research process

3.2 Data collection

An extant literature review and analysis was performed to discover and explain the elements and the role of psychological ownership as possible requisite of talent retention. The perceptions and experiences of psychological ownership were sought by administering an open-ended questionnaire. This questionnaire, developed form the literature, was distributed in hard copy to 19 voluntary respondents. The following questions were asked: *"What makes you feel attached to your organisation? (It's mine)", "What should the organisation do to enhance your feeling of belongingness?"* and *"What should take place in your organisation that will keep you as an engaged employee?"* All participants completed the questionnaire within less than 30 minutes.

Individual semi-structured interviews of 10 minutes each were conducted with each respondent after they had completed the open-questionnaire. This was to clarify their responses and ensure transparency and trustworthiness of the data in representing their perceptions and experiences of psychological ownership. The researchers also had to check there own possible biases in interpreting the data ensuring ethical conduct.

3.3 Data analysis

The qualitative data analysis relied on the basic premises of content and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Weber, 1985), interview analysis (Kvale, 1996) and employing data reduction methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data analysis is a subjective process that originates itself between the researcher, the data and the interviewee. With this in mind the researcher made an effort to manage possible biases, through the connection of analysis and interpretation of data to theory and experiences of psychological ownership. Common themes emerging from the data, as indicated in Table 2, were categorised to achieve

Table 2: Common themes emerging from the data with some evidence quotations

Common theme identified	Psychological ownership element	Respondent	Responses on Questions *What makes you feel attached to your organisation? (It's mine)* – **Evidence Quotation**
Clear communication and relationships	Accountability Routes: **Intimate knowing**	(I.17.)	"My voice is heard, opinions listened to"
		(I.8.)	"Before decisions that will concern me are taken must be discussed"
		(I.19.)	"I love the people I work with, I see them as part of a larger family"
		(I.17.)	"My work relationships are supportive, transparent and professional"
Clear direction and goal	Routes: **Intimate knowing**	(I.1.)	"I will feel that I belong if my colleagues and I work together to achieve one common goal"
		(I.19.)	"When I go to work each day, I would like to feel that there is some sense of direction"
		(I.16.)	"I can say my organisation, because of the shared vision I have with that organisation"
		(I.6.)	"Align my responsibilities with those of the organisation"
Decision making	Autonomy	(I.2.)	"I have some decision making power"
		(I.15.)	"When I am part of planning, decision making in my organisation"
		(I.11.)	"If I am involved in the top level decision making and I'm allowed to make an input"
		(I.3.)	"It is my organisation if I participate in decision making"
Ethics, respect	Values – link to self-identity	(I.1.)	"If there is mutual respect, trust and loyalty amongst us"
		(I.18.)	"Implementation of working ethics"
		(I.15.)	"There is respect amongst people in an organisation "
		(I.13.)	"My input gets the respect it deserves" "They can trust me to execute certain jobs in the organisation"
		(I.7.)	"If I feel respected by my line manager and fellow colleagues"
		(I.2.)	"Respect for me and my beliefs"
Recognition	Creates sense of belonging	(I.1.)	"If my ideas, innovations and contributions are acknowledged and appreciated"
		(I.19.)	"I want to feel appreciated and acknowledged

			because I know that I have performed at the best of my ability"
		(I.17.)	"I am valued for my contributions"
		(I.14.)	"My contribution is being recognised, I have been rewarded for that"
		(I.13.)	"My efforts are recognised"
		(I.7.)	"When I feel that my contribution to the growth of the organisation is being acknowledged'
Leadership	Contextual factor – structural that creates a sense of belonging	(I.6.)	"Management does not control everything"
		(I.19.)	"I feel that I am not stifled by management"
		(I.18.)	"Management does not feel threatened in any ideas that we come up with"
		(I.17.)	"Management is committed to engagement"
		(I.12.)	"That management listens to the needs of each section and assists in the realisation of needs"
		(I.7.)	"Positive attitude and thinking from line managers"
		(I.3.)	"If management does not shut us down". "Consulting us."
Responsibility	**Responsibility**	(I.17.)	"I have responsibility to take ownership of my roles within an organisation" "I feel a responsibility towards being an ambassador for the organisation" "We have responsibilities not just rights"
		(I.12.)	"Because I have the responsibility and roles to play to build relationships and get good results"
Self-efficacy	**Self-efficacy**	(I.1.)	"If I am placed in a managerial position and capable enough to lead and delegate", "If I am given this huge responsibility the organisation will feel like my own"
		(I.19.)	"I feel I have a wealth of experience and my true capabilities are not acknowledged"
		(I.13.)	"Knowing how to do my work very well" "When people show that they have confidence in me" "I would be happy if my organisation could give me a chance to prove to them that I can do it"
		(I.9.)	"Trust that I have the capabilities of doing the job"
Authority	**Autonomy** linked	(I.9.)	"Because sometimes leadership make you feel that you have no authority of being in control"
Autonomy	**Autonomy**	(I.11.)	"I think part of it belongs to me as I'm given full ownership of my job"
		(I.2.)	"I feel the department I run is mine. I have the freedom to run it as best I can"
		(I.18.)	"Allow me to flow and do my responsibilities"
		(I.5.)	"Given space to do my work" "Do not have to ask for approval for everything"
		(I.3.)	"If I am at liberty to implement what will benefit the organisation"

the research objectives. The respondents were coded as I.1 to I.19, where 'I' represents the respondent followed by the number of respondent 1-19. Compiling evidence tables facilitated the writing of a descriptive review of each theme and to synthesise the key findings from the data reviewed.

4. Findings, results and discussion

Research findings and discussions are presented according to the research objective 2 and evidence quotations are provided of the research findings within the South African context. Discussion of the findings will be presented in relation to Figure 2 as in the literature review.

4.1 Needs

4.1.1 Motives for or roots of psychological ownership

Self-Efficacy and effectance:

The quotations from respondents provided in Table 3 confirm that their efficacy expectation is the conviction that they can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce outcomes and that they perceive control as a critical determinant of self-efficacy. The respondent's quotations also confirm Adrisani's (1976) belief that a high level of perceived control relates positively to personal confidence, initiative, and innate ability.

Table 3: Evidence quotations: Self-efficacy

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.1. Asian, female, 40, master's degree)	"If I am placed in a managerial position and capable enough to lead and delegate"
(I.19. Asian, female, 27, master's degree)	"I feel I have a wealth of experience and my true capabilities are not acknowledged"
(I.13. African, female, 36, bachelor's degree)	"Knowing how to do my work very well" "When people show that they have confidence in me" "I would be happy of my organisation could give me a chance to prove to them that I can do it"

Self-identity:

It is evident from the quotations presented in Table 4 that in order to retain employees in the organisation, employees need well-defined goals and want to know exactly what is expected of them. This evidence is confirmed by Edwards (2005) who stated that

organisational goals that are aligned with individual goals will result in an employee that will be motivated to engage more in order to achieve these goals.

Table 4: Evidence quotations: Self-identity

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.19. Asian, female, 27, master's degree)	"When I go to work each day, I would like to feel that there is some sense of direction"
(I.18. African, female, 33, bachelor's degree)	"Clear direction"
(I.14. African, male, 42, honours degree)	"Direction is clear"
(I.4. African, female, 45, honours degree)	"Knowing my clear roles and responsibilities"
(I.4. African, female, 45, honours degree)	"When I am involved and informed about the mission and vision of the organisation"

Belongingness:

Table 5 presents the responses of the participants when asked the following questions: "*What makes you feel attached to your organisation? (It's mine)*", and "*What should the organisation do to enhance your feeling of belongingness*?

Table 5: Evidence quotations: Belongingness

Respondent	Responses to question: *"What should the organisation do to enhance your feeling of belongingness?"* **Evidence Quotation**
(I.19. Asian, female, 27, master's degree)	"I love the people I work with, I see them as part of a larger family"
(I.18. African, female, 33, bachelor's degree)	"Relationship with management and staff"
(I.17. White, female, 54, honours degree)	"My work relationships are supportive, transparent and professional"
(I.15. African, female, 37, honours degree)	"There is respect amongst people in an organisation and the relationship is good"
(I.10. African, female, 42, honours degree)	"There are relationships in my organisation"

It is evident from Table 5 that strong relationships enhanced employees' sense of belongingness in the organisation. This evidence is confirmed by Heidegger (1967) who stated that a sense of belonging is thus, in part, achieved as a result of an individual's interaction with his or her environment and the personalisation of this environment, which enhances familiarity, a sense of being one with, and the discovery of oneself within.

4.1.2 Routes to psychological ownership

Controlling the ownership target

According to the respondents feelings of ownership toward their organisation will most probably emerge if they are involved in decision making that will allow them higher levels of control. Evidence provided by the quotation of one respondent in Table 6 clearly indicates that the development of psychological ownership might be impeded if there is a decrease in the possibility to exert control. In such a situation, employees perceived that nothing is "theirs", because power is placed in the structure and they have limited control over the organisation or any part of it (Pierce et al., 2001).

Table 6: Evidence quotations: Controlling the ownership target

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.2. Asian, female, 34, honours degree)	"I have some decision making power"
(I.13. African, female, 36, degree)	"If I am consulted or made part whenever change or decision is made"
(I.11. African, female, 38, degree)	"If I am involved in the top level decision making and I'm allowed to make an input"
(I.8. African, female, 45, honours degree)	"Taking me in consideration – decision making"
(I.6. African, female, 31, honours degree)	"If I am involved in decision making"
(I.4. African, female, 45, honours degree)	"When I am involved in the decision of the organisation"
(I.3. African, female, 42, honours degree)	"It is my organisation if I participate in decision making"
(I.7. African, female, 35, honours degree)	"I have little control over my work environment. I feel like a pawn"

Intimately coming to know the target:

It is evident from the quotations provided in Table 7 that when members of an organisation are given information about potential organisational targets of ownership (for example, the mission of the organisation, its goals and performance), they tend to feel that they know the organisation better and may consequently develop a sense of psychological ownership toward the organisation.

Table 7: Evidence quotations: Coming to know the target intimately

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.1. Asian, female, 40, master' s degree)	"I will feel that I belong if my colleagues and I work together to achieve one common goal"
(I.19. Asian, female, 27, master's degree)	"When I go to work each day, I would like to feel that there is some sense of direction"
(I.18. African, female, 33, bachelor's degree)	"Clear direction"
(I.17. White, female, 54,) honours degree	"I see my responsibilities are aligned to those of my library and institution"
(I.16. African, female, 29, honours degree)	"I can say my organisation, because of the shared vision I have with that organisation"
(I.6. African, female, 31, honours degree)	"When people start working towards the same goal and stop competing" "Align my responsibilities with those of the organisation"

Investing the self in the target:

From the evidence provided in Table 8 it is clear that respondents will invest their energy and time in different aspects of the organisation, but that it is important for them to get recognition for those efforts. Having the opportunity to invest themselves in different aspects of the organisation and being recognised for would lead to feelings of ownership toward those targets.

Table 8: Evidence quotations: Investing the self in the target

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.1. Asian, female, 40, master's degree)	"If my ideas, innovations and contributions are acknowledged and appreciated"
(I.19. Asian, female, 27, master's degree)	"I want to feel appreciated and acknowledged because I know that I have performed at the best of my ability"
(I.17. White, female, 54, post grad)	"I am valued for my contributions"
(I.14. African, male, 42, honours degree)	"My contribution is being recognised, I have been rewarded for that"
(I.13.African, female, 36, degree)	"My efforts are recognised" "My clients who always write back thank you letters for helping them"
(I.12. African, male, 41. honours degree)	"If recognition and rewards are bestowed for good work done"
(I.7. African, female, 35, honours degree)	"When I feel that my contribution to the growth of the organisation is being acknowledged'
(I.6. African, female, 31, honours degree)	"When my individual contribution counted"
(I.2. Asian, female, 34, post grad)	"Recognition of work well done"

4.2 Values

Personal values such as respect, trust, loyalty and working ethics as indicated in Table 9, will enhance respondents' feelings of ownership. This is particularly of importance in the South African environment where segregation was promulgated and mistrust between different groupings is the order of the day. It seems that a sense of ownership was not felt by the majority of the population and thus the importance of creating psychological ownership is vital.

Table 9: Evidence quotations: Values

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.1. Asian, female, 40, masters)	"If there is mutual respect, trust and loyalty amongst us"
(I.19. Asian, female, 27, masters)	"There is desperate need for respect"
(I.18. African, female, 33, degree)	"Implementation of working ethics"
(I.15. African, female, 37, honours degree)	"There is respect amongst people in an organisation "
(I.14. African, male, 42, honours degree)	"Ethical conduct" "Respect" "Respect my views"
(I.13. African, female, 36, degree)	"My input gets the respect it deserves" "They can trust me to execute certain jobs in the organisation"
(I.9. African, male, 41, degree)	"Good organisational practice – ethics"
(I.7. African, female, 35, honours degree)	"If I feel respected by my line manager and fellow colleagues"
(I.4. African, female, 45, honours degree)	"Respect from the management and …" "Treating staff as people and not money making machines"
(I.2. Asian, female, 34, post grad)	"Respect for me and my beliefs"

4.3 Goals

Employees' feelings of ownership will be enhanced if they perceive and experience that management listen and attend to their needs. However, if employees perceive and experience the opposite and are not allowed to come up with ideas due to the fact that management feel in some way threaten by their involvement, it might prevent them from engaging, as is evident from Table 10.

Table 10: Evidence quotations: Goals

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation	Form of POS
(I.18. African, female, 33, degree)	"Management they feel threatening in any ideas that we come with".	**Preventative oriented**
(I.3. African, female, 42, honours degree)	"Management has a way of shutting us down. They decide and finish everything without consulting us and pretend to consult while they actually impose with fear".	**Preventative oriented**
(I.12. African, male, 41, honours degree)	"That management listen to the needs of each section and assist in the realisation of needs"	**Promotive oriented**
(I.17. White, female, 54, post grad)	"Management is committed to engagement".	**Promotive oriented**

4.4 Action (behaviours)

It is evident from Table 11 that having the opportunity to raise their opinions and being involved in decision-making may enhance people's self-concept, which in return will increase feelings of ownership. The respondents realised that for every right, there is a responsibility as illustrated by the last quotation in Table 11.

Table 11: Evidence quotations: Actions

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.17. White, female, 54, post grad)	"My voice is heard, opinions listened to"
(I.8. African, female, 45, honours degree)	"Innovative – listen to new ideas – processes that work" "Before decisions that will concern me are taken must be discussed"
(I.5. African, male, 38, honours degree)	"When I can contribute my views and understanding of issues without fear"
(I.18. African, female, 33, degree)	"When I will be involved and informed in any changes"
(I.15. African, female, 37, honours degree)	"When I am part of planning, decision making in my organisation"
(I.11. African, female, 38, degree)	"If I am involved in the top level decision making and I'm allowed to make an input"
(I.17. White, female, 54, post grad)	"I have responsibility to take ownership of my roles within an organisation" "I feel a responsibility towards being an ambassador for the organisation" "And the fact that we have responsibilities not just rights"

4.5 Level of psychological ownership

When goals are established and monitored, employees see visible achievements and feel acknowledged and recognised. Evidence is provided in Tables 4 and 8.

It is evident from Table 12 that employees expect their organisation to provide them with opportunities to control facets of their employment by allowing them the freedom and flexibility to plan and perform their workloads.

Table 12: Evidence quotations: Structured work environment

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation
(I.2. Asian, female, 34, post grad)	"I feel the department I run is mine. I have the freedom to run it as best I can"
(I.18. African, female, 33, degree)	"Allow me to flow and do my responsibilities"
(I.5. African, male, 38, honours degree)	"Given space to do my work" "Do not have to ask for approval for everything"
(I.3. African, female, 42, honours degree)	"If I am at liberty to implement what will benefit the organisation"

It is evident from Table 13 that a climate of self-determination can be influenced by either a promotive oriented or preventive oriented form of psychological ownership. A climate where employees receive support, recognition for hard work and participative management practices is associated with beliefs and behaviours reflecting a sense of possession of the organisation that is more promotive oriented. It is also clear that an autocratic leadership style might impede feelings of psychological ownership and is therefore more preventive oriented.

Table 13: Evidence quotations: Leadership style

Respondent	Response – Evidence Quotation	Form of POS
(I.9. African, male, 41, degree)	"Because sometimes leadership make you feel that you have no authority of being in control"	**Preventative oriented**
(I.6. African, female, 31, honours degree)	"Management controls everything"	**Preventative oriented**
(I.19. Asian, female, 27, master's degree)	"I feel that I am stifled by management"	**Preventative oriented**
(I.17. White, female, 54, post grad)	"Management is committed to engagement"	**Promotive oriented**
(I.12. African, male, 41. honours degree)	"That management listen to the needs of each section and assist in the realisation of needs"	**Promotive oriented**
(I.10. African, female, 42, honours degree)	"Support from above (top management)	**Promotive oriented**
(I.7. African, female, 35, honours degree)	"Change of attitude and thinking from line managers is necessary" (more positive attitude)	**Promotive oriented**
(I.3. African, female, 42, honours degree)	"Management has a way of shutting us down. They decide and finish everything without consulting us and pretend to consult while the actually impose with fear"	**Preventative oriented**

5. Conclusions and implications

Psychological ownership and the descriptive elements derived from the literature have been proven as valid as most came forward from the responses. It is evident from the specific responses and the findings, as reflected in the quotations, that certain elements are more profound and seems to be more important in reflecting psychological ownership as retention enabler of highly skilled employees within the South African context. The specific element that came out strongly can be described as contextual factors, being: clear communication; relationship building; clear direction and goal alignment; ethical conduct; recognition and acknowledgement and leadership.

The theoretical framework on psychological ownership has expanded the existing theory on organisational engagement and work-related attitudes necessary for talent retention

that distinguishes the level of psychological ownership from its antecedent and consequent conditions. This paper illustrates how organisations can benefit from psychological ownership of especially highly skilled employees, because it leads employees to feel responsible toward the target (for example, the organisation or job) and consequently to demonstrate citizenship, which can play a role in talent retention and employees' intention to stay in the organisation. The contextual factors especially the more structural aspects, being: clear communication; relationship building; clear direction and goal alignment; ethical conduct; recognition and acknowledgement and leadership, surfaced more explicitly as requisite for talent retention.

Limitations to this study are that the relatively small sample size prohibits generalisations and that broader contextual factors could also influence the outcome of the study. More research on larger sample groups is necessary and notice of the contextual factors is important.

In conclusion, it is evident from the literature that it is a challenge for organisations to retain their most talented staff in a highly competitive 21st century world of work. Therefore, if the organisation can create a work environment that engages and retains highly skilled employees by addressing the factors indicated in the framework on psychological ownership, they could become better workplaces with outcomes that sustain performance. A large percentage of the highly skilled workforce in South Africa is still attracted out of the country and skill shortages are a critical challenge for socio-economic sustainability. This is especially vital in developing economies such as South Africa, where the psychological ownership – "it is mine", was and still is also influenced by seemingly contextual factors, such as abusive leadership style, relationship problems, socio-economic - and cultural divides.

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