



## Administrative employees' workplace motivation at a South African University

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### Abstract

*The purpose of the study was to determine the factors that contribute to the administrative employees' workplace motivation at a South African university. In this study, 123 administrative employees were identified and only 112 administrative employees took part in the study. A quantitative research approach in the form of a closed-ended questionnaire was adopted in order to collect data and conduct a descriptive analysis. The findings of the study indicate a positive correlation between the identified factors that motivate administrative employees in their workplace. Job security, rewards and remuneration and job advancement opportunities were ranked as top three of the most important motivating factors for the administrative employees. Since there are different factors of motivation, it is thus important for management to possess sufficient knowledge and understanding these employee motivating factors in order to effectively improve and maintain efficient organisational performance. The findings of this study can be adopted as a guideline for the formulation of employee motivation strategies in academic institutions.*

*Keywords— administrative employees; motivation; job performance; tertiary institution*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Human resource management is regarded as a crucial factor for any organisation to remain competitive and the recruitment and maintenance of the right employees serves as an important challenge for the organisation. That is, the employees of an organisation are its most valued assets, and the management of employees remains a challenging task. Employee motivation plays an important role in the success of an organisation and it is important that the needs and expectations of both management and employees be determined in order to recognise driving forces towards motivating them and productivity improvement (Hanaysha & Hussain, 2018). Higher education institutions face various challenges within the contemporary competitive market environment due to new competition, business dynamics, emerging technologies, poor fit within current positions, varying productivity and increased turnover of employees (Chahar, Jain & Hatwal, 2021). The higher education environment context is atypical when compared to the conventional service sector organisation as academic institutions comprise of top management, academic and support staff (administrative employees) providing services to students (Balwant, Mohammed & Singh). Administrative employees in higher education institutions have a vital role in representing the institution's competence and client service, and research on the motivation of higher education institution administrative employees remains limited (Barkhuizen, Schutte & Smit, 2015). Thus, this study will focus on determining the factors that administrative employees in the targeted tertiary institution perceive as important towards their motivation. Motivation remains an essential push factor in employees' performance and poor motivation can have a domino effect on employees' performance. The assumption that motivation and productivity can potentially influence both employee performance and organisational performance, and also establish a capacity to sustain a competitive advantage over other organisations has contributed greatly to the momentous interest in the topic by scholars globally. Employees who are motivated are prone to rendering a quality service (Kreye 2016), while Jungert (2018) asserts that motivated employees assist organisation to

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maintain a competitive edge and as a result, employee motivation is important for organisations as it can lead to obtaining crucial information regarding the employees' job performance.

Since employee motivation and job satisfaction coincide with each other, it is important that academic institutions understand which factors can contribute to the motivation of its administrative employees. Though motivation can be used to enhance employee performance and direct objectives towards attaining organisational objectives, at the targeted academic institution, administrative employees play an integral role and contribute towards the success of the institution. For the academic institution to maintain high productivity and to keep its employees loyal, different strategies are implemented. However, the problems are that challenges relating to job performance, employee motivation and job satisfaction continue to surface from time to time.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Administrative employees have been deemed as the backbone of any successful organisation (Indeed, 2021). Administrative employees ensure that business operations run smoothly by supporting the organisation's daily operational needs, and administrative roles have also become broader in scope, requiring more skills and responsibility than ever before (Karlsson & Rytberg 2016). In order to improve on quality output, management needs to encourage participation of administrative employees for the development of the organisation (Clara & Jayadi, 2022).

### Motivation

Motivation is an important construct and central pillar of the workplace. A good working environment, high quality leadership and opportunities for personal development form part of the prerequisites for motivating employees and different employees are motivated by different things, thus, motivating employees is a challenge. Motivation is described as a desire that causes a person to act in accordance with a goal that the person would like to reach (Hajiali, Kessi, Budiandriani, Prihatin & Sufri 2022). It is aimed at strengthening and directing behaviour and the factors that influence employees to behave in a certain way. It is perceived that motivation can be used to enhance the performance of employees as motivation can direct behaviour towards the attainment of organisational objectives (Ibrahim & Daniel 2019). Factors such as leadership, compensation, training and development, recognition, advancement, work environment, performance appraisal, job security, feedback and work-life all have an impact on employee motivation (Labrague, Nwafor & Tsaras 2020).

### Theories of motivation

Despite the impact of the technological era we are within, people remain as the most pivotal factor in production within the working environment (Mandhanya, 2015). Their importance as the human factor provides life to technology in production and this has resulted in the importance of the key role that is played by employees in the existence of an organisation (Abdi, Ibrahim & Hussein 2017). Theories of motivation allow for guidelines, analysis and explanation of the behaviour of employees within the organisation (Ahmed, Islam & Al Asheq 2021). These theories are intended to assist in providing insight and understanding of the needs and aims of employees as well as to assist managers to establish courses of action or deter unwanted employee behaviours that prove to be problematic (Abdi et al. 2017). The motivation theories promote understanding of the otherwise complicated processes of motivation as there are no straightforward answers in motivating people in general (Ahmed et al. 2021). Earlier perceptions of motivation have created an important foundation for individual growth. There are various motivation theories, though in this study, focus is on two of the theories, namely, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory.

### Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow developed the best-known motivation theory globally, the theory is known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Aruma & Hanacor 2017). This theory is continuously applied when addressing and satisfying the needs of employees (Stefan, Popa & Albu 2020), the theory is also regarded as a good starting point when examining the various theories of motivation. The theory was founded on the behaviours which people exert when searching for needs as their needs are based on what they already have (Osabiya 2015). The theory suggests that upon satisfying lower needs in the hierarchy, an individual's motivation needs to not simply disappear, but rather the individual will attempt to find fulfilment in the next needs level (Stefan et al. 2020). Basically, the Maslow's theory suggests that if an employee's needs are attained, the employee will not be dissatisfied within their job. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is classified into five different levels which are arranged by importance in a hierarchy (Osemeke & Adegboyega 2017), the needs are as follows:

- **Physiological needs:** The needs are regarded as basic biological needs and must be attained for survival, examples of these physiological needs include breathing, water and food. The needs are basic in the sense that a lack of these needs may overpower all other humanly needs. In the workplace, these needs can be

regarded as a basic salary to guarantee survival, air and adequate heat. The physiological needs are the most important needs to employees because if an employee were to be lacking of all other needs, the physiological needs would come first in the employee's search for satisfaction. Maslow further stated that when these needs are culturally focused on the organisation, employee performance will improve drastically.

- **Safety needs:** When an employee's physiological needs have been met, then the needs on the next level of the hierarchy arise. Security and safety needs within the organisation refer to needs such as jobs, job security and fringe benefits. When employees believe that their organisation recognises their efforts and need for status development, the employees are likely to offer their best skills when rendering services on behalf of the organisation.
- **Social needs:** In a work context, these needs include the need to interact with other employees and belongingness. Since employees require social needs, it is the responsibility of the organisational culture to facilitate the development of values and norms that human practice will pay attention to when planning for the efficient operating of the organisation. In an organisational setting, these needs influence the desire for good working relationships with co-workers, management and participation in work group.
- **Self-esteem needs:** Satisfying these needs leads to increased self-confidence and suppression of the needs may lead to feelings of weakness, helplessness and a lack of worth. Social needs are referred to as "The ego", as they are attributed with the desire for a positive self-image, receiving attention, recognition and appreciation from others. In Maslow's theory, these needs are divided into a lower part which includes the need for the respect from others, recognition, status, dignity and appreciation, while the higher part includes the need for self-respect, feeling of competence, mastery, freedom and independence.
- **Self-actualisation needs:** At the peak of the hierarchy is the need for self-actualisation. These types of needs are reflective of the need for self-fulfilment, which is the development of an individual's full potential. In order to meet these needs in the workplace, organisation need to provide employees opportunities for growth, creativity and training for advancement, though when it comes to self-actualisation needs, it is not always apparent what the employee wants.

### Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation

Herzberg's motivation theory is one of the most globally recognised theories of motivation. The theory is founded on the proposition that the concept of motivation is divided into two aspects, namely, hygiene and motivators (Yousaf 2020). To better understand and explain employee attitudes and motivation, Herzberg's study focused on determining factors in an employee's work environment which could cause satisfaction and which factors could cause dissatisfaction. The theory suggest that there are two sets of factors; being hygiene factors and motivating factors. The hygiene factors produce job dissatisfaction while motivating factors produce job satisfaction as discussed below (Band et al. 2016).

- **Hygiene factors:** The factors are associated with extrinsic factors as they surround the job rather than the actual job itself. Hygiene factors are related to job context and can cause job dissatisfaction. They include features of the work environment such as supervision, working conditions, interpersonal relationships, company policies, salary and benefits. In their absence, hygiene factors can cause job dissatisfaction for employees, although their presence creates a neutral state for employees as hygiene factors are not strong motivators by themselves. In summary, hygiene factors are preventative in nature and may only be used to mitigate or suppress employees' dissatisfaction.
- **Motivating factors:** These factors are used to motivate employees towards increased performance. Motivating factors are related to job content and job tasks as they form a significant part of the job and can lead to employee job satisfaction. Motivating factors are considered to be satisfiers and are internal to the job itself. They are allied with job content and include factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, nature of work and personal growth. The presence of these factors on the job can motivate employees and eventually lead employees to job satisfaction. Individuals find motivating factors to be intrinsically rewarding and serve strongly as motivation factors within an organisation. In an organisation, it is the onus of management to utilize motivating factors for the purpose of increasing employee performance.

Herzberg's two-factor theory is concerned with the question "What do people want from their jobs?" The theory describes motivating factors as intrinsic to the job and hygiene factors as extrinsic to the job. Therefore, motivating factors are a means for improving and increasing job satisfaction while hygiene factors attempt to decrease job dissatisfaction among employees (Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl & Maude 2017).

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed study adopted a quantitative research approach utilising a questionnaire as the research instrument in an attempt to maximise objectivity, generalisation of findings, replicability and possible predictions. The study sought to obtain information on into how administrative employees perceived factors which may influence their motivation. The questionnaire was based on available literature, and it was also adapted from the different studies by van Wyk (2011), Wanjihia (2016) and Salman, Ahmad & Matin (2014). The questionnaire was adopted from the different studies in order to develop a new perspective on employee motivation that was previously not considered by the authors in their studies. The scale for 4 motivation factors, namely, rewards, leadership, responsibility and performance appraisal were retained. The scale on job security based on 2 items was dropped as the items were not retained. This study used a 4-Point Likert scale with a scale range of 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Agree; 4 = Strongly agree.

#### **Research strategy**

The primary strategy for the study was to conduct a quantitative online questionnaire. In this study, an online survey method was used for the collection of data, the online survey was adopted by taking into consideration the ease of access, rapidity and compilation of data in order to develop an understanding of administrative employees' perception of workplace motivation. Individual administrative employees were the unit of analysis. The academic institution has in its employment 180 administrative employees who are spread out in terms of administrative positions and departments.

#### **Research setting**

The study was conducted at a higher education academic institution that is in the Limpopo province, in South Africa. The academic institution main function is to provide higher education training services to the public.

#### **Sampling and research participants**

A pilot study was performed with 10 administrative employees within the university to ensure data validity and reliability, also to make sure that the data accurately represents the study sample from where the full study will be conducted. Some few adjustments were made to the study questionnaire to address the study's objectives. The study had a target population of 180 administrative employees working within the university and the questionnaire was disseminated using an online platform accessible by email. Convenience sampling is the sampling method which was adopted for its convenience and it also allows the researcher the freedom to select participants willing to take part in the study (Scholtz 2021). The study's target population size was 180 administrative employees, though the target population as calculated in accordance with the Raosoft® calculator with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence interval ( $p \geq 0.5$ ) was 123. The actual number of participants for the study was 112(N) administrative employees. A reliability and valid analysis were performed. The study adopted the rule proposed by Ekolu & Quainoo (2019) which states that a Cronbach Alpha score that is greater than 0.50 is acceptable. The proposed and existing scales in accordance with Cronbach Alpha score were reported as reliable. The data collected from the study was coded and analysed using Statistical Package of Social Science Program (SPSS) in order to compile descriptive statistics.

### IV. RESULT/FINDING

Result section presents the results of the study. Research results can be supplemented with tables, graphs (pictures), and / or charts.

### V. DISCUSSION

The data collected from the study was analysed through the use of SPSS version 28.0.1.1 program and corroborated using a statistician. Few of the items were deleted in order to maintain reliability and average variances extracted to be within the proposed Cronbach Alpha score guidelines, in that, the reliability of the scores between 0.60 and 0.90 are appropriate and the factor loadings exceeding 0.50 are retained (Ab-Hamid, Sami & Mohamad-Sidek 2017). Table 1 presents the results from the pattern matrix with factor loadings and Cronbach Alpha.

**TABLE 1:** Cronbach Alpha reliability scores

Pattern Matrix		Component					Cronbach Alpha
		1	2	3	4	5	
Rewards	Q1- I am motivated by my salary to perform occupational tasks efficiently.	0.843					<b>0.806</b>
	Q2- The current incentives scheme motivates me to perform better.	0.824					
	Q3- The university is aware of the types of rewards employees values as important.	0.819					
	Q4- I receive adequate feedback from the manager(s) of my division.		0.882				
	Q5- I receive constant support from the manager(s) of my division.		0.793				
Leadership	Q6- The type of relationship between me and my manager(s) has an impact on my motivation.		0.706				<b>0.715</b>
	Q7- I receive recognition for achievements from my manager(s).		0.443				
	Q8- I have an opportunity to contribute to decision making on how to perform my tasks.			0.884			
Responsibility	Q9- I am provided with the necessary resources to perform occupational tasks.			0.749			<b>0.701</b>
	Q10- My manager(s) allows me to take responsibility of my daily tasks.			0.526			
	Q11- The performance appraisal systems measures my true performance.				-0.915		
Performance appraisal	Q12- The current performance appraisal system motivates me to achieve my goals.				-0.915		<b>0.73</b>

Job security	Q13- Employee achievements are publicised throughout the organisation.	-0.407
	Q14- Employees are rotated in the organisation in order to enlarge their occupational expertise.	
	Q15- I feel secure about my future within the organisation.	0.662
	Q16- I have no fear about the financial stability of the organisation.	0.618 /
	Q17- The style of leadership in the organisation has an influence on my degree of motivation at work.	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. Rotation converged in 21 iterations.

Source: Researcher

From Table 1, it can be deduced that the motivation factors are reliable according to the Cronbach Alpha scores. From the results obtained from the Cronbach, all the values were higher than 0.70 which is in line with the prescribed guidelines by (Ekolu & Quainoo 2019).

The Kaiser criterion (Eigenvalues larger than 1) suggested that 5 factors could be extracted, explaining 62.87% of the variance in the data. When performing the factor analysis, the factors of Rewards and Job security were replicated, while 3 of the 5 Leadership items formed a factor together with one item from Recognition. The third factor comprised one item from Leadership and one from recognition, which clearly pertained to providing of responsibility and resources to the individual. Lastly, the 2 items related to performance appraisal formed a factor with one of the recognition items. These items referred to the handling of performance management in the organisation. Therefore, although the original items did not group exactly as intended, the formed factors made theoretical sense. Two items did not show a meaningful loading ( $>0.40$ ) on any of the factors. The pattern matrix with factor loadings and Cronbach's Alpha for the factors is reported in Table 1. The reliability of all factors is acceptable except for job security. Even though the 2 items related to performance appraisal and recognition formed a separate factor, the Alpha coefficient was only 0.271, and the correlation between the items was a mere 0.168. It is possible that respondents did not think carefully about what they were responding to when an item was negatively formulated (Q16). This is a common occurrence. For this reason, job security was not included in subsequent analyses.

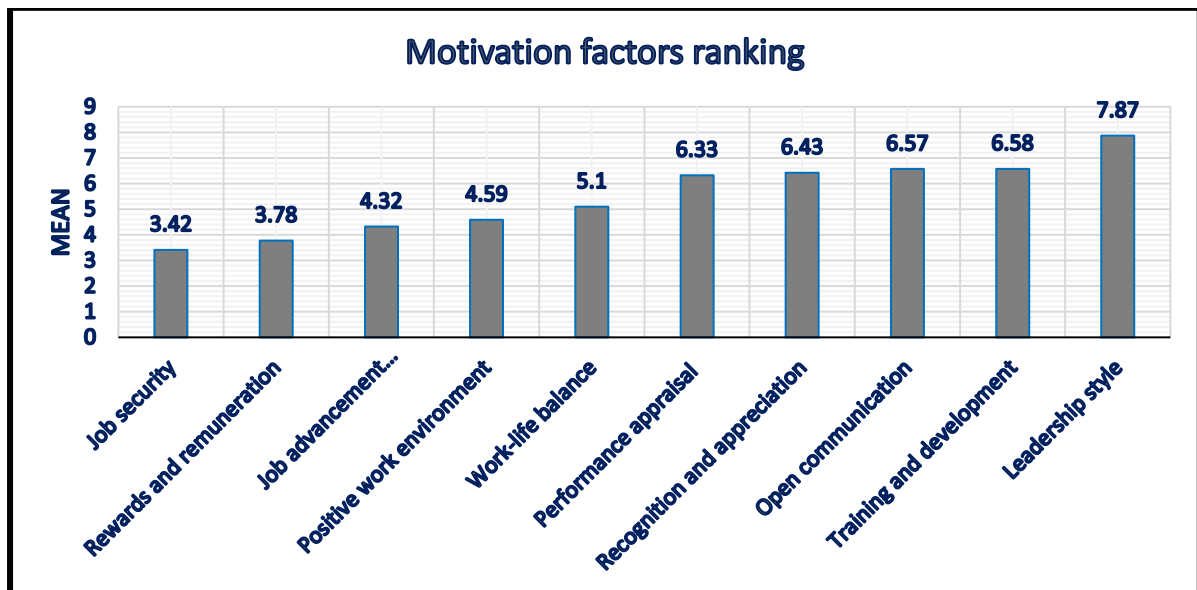
**TABLE 2:** Descriptive statistics of motivation factors

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Rewards	112	1.00	4.00	2.2411	.81060
Leadership	112	1.00	4.00	2.7522	.63094
Responsibility	112	1.33	4.00	2.9911	.51301
Performance appraisal	112	1.00	3.00	1.6845	.60832
Valid N (listwise)	<b>112</b>				

Source: Researcher

The study made use of descriptive statistics to assess the mean scores for the factors. From the results obtained, all the mean values were below  $<3$  as presented in Table 2. The scores ranged between 1.68 and 2.99. The factors

of Rewards, Leadership and Responsibility scored a mean of  $<3$ . Indicating that the variables were related on the negative side of the scale. The factors of Performance appraisal scored a mean of  $<2$  which indicates that this aspect was rated particularly negatively.



Source: Researcher

**FIGURE 1:** Motivation factors ranking

The administrative employees were provided with 10 motivation factors from which they had to rank from most important to least important according to their opinion. The factor ranked 1 would be considered as their most important motivating factor and number 10 being the least important factor to motivate them in their work.

The results were gathered by calculating the average rank of individual items and considering frequency scores. A higher rating within the questionnaire indicated a lower rating of importance and a lower rating indicates a higher importance rating. The ratings of the factors were also analysed by considering the mean scores. In order to create a better understanding of the results, the data collected from the study were compared to Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation and Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

According to Herzberg's two-factor theory, job security (ranked 1), rewards and remuneration (ranked 2), a positive work environment (ranked 4) and performance appraisal (ranked 6) are classified as hygiene factors. Three of these hygiene factors were rated fairly high (occupying three of the top five highest ranked factors) by the administrative employees at the tertiary institution; these three hygiene factors are job security (ranked 1), rewards and remuneration (ranked 2) and a positive work environment (ranked 4). According to Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation (1966), hygiene factors cannot increase or decrease satisfaction. However, they may affect the degree of employee dissatisfaction since hygiene factors must be present to allow motivation factors to emerge and prevent dissatisfaction (Alrawahi et al. 2020).

Maslow (1943) classifies job security (ranked 1), rewards and remuneration (ranked 2) and a positive work environment (ranked 4) as lower-level needs when categorised in the order of motivational importance to the administrative employees. All three of these lower needs were regarded as most important by the administrative employees at the university, being ranking as 1, 2 and 4 of the most important motivation factors. Maslow proposed in the hierarchy of needs that the lower-order needs must be met before the higher-order needs can be considered by employees.

Based on the above findings of the study, it is important that the tertiary institution not only pay attention to the hygiene factors to deter or minimise administrative employees' dissatisfaction, but they should also attend to the intrinsic factors of the work for the administrative employees to be motivated. Herzberg stated that attention to hygiene and motivational factors is important to motivate employees.

The factors such as job advancement opportunities (ranked 3), work-life balance (ranked 5), recognition and appreciation (ranked 7) and open communication (ranked 8) are classified as motivation factors. It can be surmised from the findings that the administrative employees at the tertiary institution only ranked job advancement

opportunities (ranked 3) and work-life balance (ranked 5) fairly high as the two factors they consider motivating them the most. In a study by Thant & Chang (2021), it was found that administrative employees valued non-work related factors such as opportunities to spend time with family, children and relatives as important in motivating them. In contrast, advancement opportunities did not influence their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. However, Herzberg, Mausner and Snyder (1959) believe that only motivational factors directly motivate employees to perform better. Furthermore, in the study conducted by Maake (2016), feedback was ranked as the fifth most important factor to motivate administrative employees; in contrast, the administrative employees at this tertiary institution only ranked open communication as the eighth most likely factor to motivate them.

In a study by Erasmus (2020), it was argued that monetary rewards should be discarded as a motivator and replaced with recognition since employees were already being paid for their services. However, in this study, the administrative employees have ranked rewards and remuneration as the second most important factor that will motivate them and only ranked recognition and appreciation as the seventh most likely factor to motivate them.

The factors, namely performance appraisals (ranked 6), training and development (ranked 9) and leadership style (ranked 10), are all classified as hygiene factors according to Herzberg. When the organisation adequately meets the hygiene factors, the employees will no longer be dissatisfied or satisfied. Without the hygiene factors, the employees will not necessarily be demotivated, but they would also not be motivated to perform better.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation still possess wide applicability in today's organisations; according to Yeboah & Abdulai (2016), it is important that organisations first give attention to hygiene factors before they introduce the motivating factors into the employees' work if they want to motivate their employees, as remedying the causes of dissatisfaction cannot necessarily result in satisfaction.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### **Theoretical implication**

The study's results may be used to examine relationships between workplace motivation and the factors affecting employee motivation. The study concludes that the university can increase employee motivation if the organisation focuses on practices that assist its employees in achieving higher motivation and job satisfaction. From the above discussions, employees at the university can be motivated simultaneously intrinsically and extrinsically by applying various methods (hygiene factors and motivators) to encourage motivation among employees and promote job satisfaction with the work environment.

### **Limitations of the study**

There exist few limitations associated with the study. This study was conducted with a focus on a single tertiary institution in South Africa, and the findings can only be generalised to that specific tertiary institution. It should also be noted that the results of this study do not represent any other university but the one that was focused on. It would be interesting for the researcher to explore how the findings would have been if the population had been expanded to other universities in South Africa. Another limitation is that the study only used a quantitative research approach in the form of an online survey to gather data; as a result, a more in-depth understanding of the study could not be developed. Like any other studies which could require people to respond to questions pertaining to themselves and their work environment, the respondents may have been cautious when choosing the information they were willing to divulge.

### **Conclusion and suggestions for future research**

In a conclusive note, it can be said that this study will provide management within tertiary institutions a better comprehension and understanding of the types of workplace motivation factors that administrative employees perceive as important in order for them to perform at optimum levels and attain job satisfaction. Managements' focus on job security, rewards and remuneration, and job advancement opportunities as the most important motivation factors will assist tertiary institution to maintain increased employee performance and possibly deter absenteeism and employee turnover. As the study was limited to one specific university, the research could be expended to other academic institutions and comparisons between different academic institutions could be compiled to determine whether the results from this study could be generalised across other universities within South Africa.

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