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Reframing “staying power” as an organizational construct: implications for teacher retention and sustainable quality in education

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Introduction: The world wide crisis of teachers and principal retention highlights the need for new perspectives to understand what contributes to “staying power” in schools for sustainability of education. The purpose of this paper is to reframe the concept of staying power as an organizational construct using quality management as a theoretical lens, which relocates the dialogue on recruitment and retention from human resource development to leadership and organizational development.

Method: A thematic synthesis was conducted using findings from a systematic literature review to explore “staying power” as an organizational construct. Quality management was used as a theoretical lens to identify the interplay between individual and organizational attributes as part of the construct of staying power.

Results and discussion: Staying power is a multi-faceted phenomenon that reflects the organization’s ability to create a positive, sustainable, and attractive working environment. It is about nurturing a culture that values, supports and retains its workforce, leading to enhanced productivity, innovation, and long term success. Retaining educators is more than creating incentives for teachers and principals based on a model of fit. Staying power is based on the interplay between people, processes, and outcomes. Organizations can adopt a proactive, long-term approach to “staying power” as opposed to “retention” by prioritizing and combining employee engagement, development, and wellbeing.

KEYWORDS

education, educational leadership, organizational sustainability, quality management, staying power

1 Introduction

The recruitment and retention of qualified and committed educators have become a critical global issue for education systems (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022; Liu and Li, 2025; Stark and Daulat, 2025). Anticipated teacher shortages in Australia, Ghana, and Sweden, combined with rising teacher attrition, turnover, and reduced teacher graduation rates has implications for both educational quality and sustainability (Arnold and Rahimi, 2025; Bryant et al., 2023; Casely-Hayford et al., 2022; Chiong et al., 2017; Gorni et al., 2024; Heilala et al., 2022; Liu and Li, 2025). This global crisis underscores the need to understand educators’ staying power, including the push, pull, and mooring factors influencing retention (Australian Government, 2023; Berryhill, 2021). Retaining

well-trained, intrinsically motivated employees is a key leadership challenge in both business and education (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Saks et al., 2022; Sanchez-Cardona et al., 2021). As employees are central to organizational quality and sustainability (Sarpong et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021), understanding why educators remain in the profession is critical to the long-term sustainability of education (Arnold and Rahimi, 2025; Stark and Daulat, 2025; Sarpong et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020; Tricarico et al., 2015).

Currently, there are a limited number of studies that focus on understanding why employees stay in organizations; and within education this is almost non-existent (Saks et al., 2022). Rather than focusing on pull and attraction of staying from an organizational perspective, recruitment and retention approaches have been dominated by a human resource orientation to leaving, defined by turnover and attrition, and associated with job-security factors such as salary and benefits (Fletcher et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2020; Stark and Daulat, 2025; Yang et al., 2021). This framing promotes a deficit view of retention, positioning attrition as an individual act rather than an organizational phenomenon. In their meta-analysis of teacher turnover, Nguyen et al. (2020) demonstrate its complexity, identifying both personal and organizational influences. Yet these factors are often studied in isolation, underscoring the need for research on their interplay in shaping staying power.

Job Embeddedness Theory (Crossley et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001) and Work Engagement Theory (Rafiq et al., 2019; Sanchez-Cardona et al., 2021) have advanced understanding of staying by emphasizing fit across work and non-work domains (Crossley et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001) and the role of job demands and resources in fostering vigor, dedication, and absorption (Rafiq et al., 2019). However, both are largely psychologically oriented and give limited attention to how organizational practices, culture, and attractiveness interact to shape staying power (Ramesh and Gelfand, 2010). Nor do they fully address the links between fit and engagement (Holtom and O'Neill, 2004), organizational culture and performance (Kontoghiorghes, 2015), or organizational attractiveness as a motivator to stay (Bakanauskiene et al., 2017).

In education, the concept of “fit,” central to job embeddedness theory, may be insufficient to explain why teachers remain in schools. Teaching is widely understood as a vocation oriented toward societal contribution, with identity and status tied more to the profession, rather than to a specific workplace. This weakens the explanatory power of organizational, community, and person-organization fit as primary drivers of staying power, suggesting the need for a broader lens. As Nguyen et al. (2020) note, such dynamics emerge from the interaction between individual experience and organizational practice.

Research on sustainable quality in education highlights organizational factors that influence staying power. For example, Johnson (2025) found that strength-based, systems-oriented leadership fosters cultures of engagement and appreciation that educators and stakeholders find attractive. In other studies, infrastructures for dialogue, reflection, and teaming (Mårtensson and Snyder, 2023; Senge et al., 2000; Sparks, 2025); opportunities for empowerment and professional development (Snyder et al., 2025); and shared vision and accountability (Fitzgerald, 2023; Sullivan, 2023) were identified as central to cultures that engage and retain educators. This research offers perspective that extends the concept of staying power beyond job embeddedness by

foregrounding work culture as essential to creating attractive workplaces and strengthening positive conditions for engagement, organizational agility, and long-term retention.

Examining the relationship between organizational attributes and employees' intentions to stay aligns with quality management theory, which emphasizes the interdependence of organizational culture, work practices, and employee engagement and performance (Bergman et al., 2022; Dahlgard et al., 2011). From a systems-based perspective, this article frames staying power as an organizational phenomenon that is shaped by school leadership rather than an isolated human resource function. Turnover is thus a reflection of the degree to which educational leaders have cultivated a quality culture strong enough to retain employees. This organizational perspective reframes teacher retention through a quality management lens, highlight the interplay of individual decisions with relational and structural school conditions (Nguyen et al., 2020; Yan, 2020).

The purpose of this paper is to reframe the concept of staying power as an organizational construct using quality management as a theoretical lens. This approach adds to the literature on “staying power,” reinforcing the need to shift focus from why people leave to why people stay in organizations. In doing so, the dialogue on recruitment and retention is relocated from human resource development to leadership and organizational development.

1.1 Analytic framework

From a quality management perspective, “staying power” is an organizational phenomenon shaped by the interaction of multiple factors that create quality work cultures based on a sense of value, shared purpose, and belonging for workers (Bergman et al., 2022). Quality management is a systems-based approach that integrates people, processes, and productivity (Dahlgard et al., 2011). It emphasizes value co-creation and organizational culture as foundations for creating conditions that support wellbeing, success, and continuous improvement (Fundin et al., 2020; Ishikawa, 1985; Schein, 2004). This theoretical perspective is derived from a systems view of organizations in which people are valued as the number one resource that is central to achieving quality. Rather than asking individuals to “fit” within the organization, leaders engage workers to participate in shaping value and identifying the necessary processes to support quality products and services.

Creating organizational quality that attracts and retains employees is a complex process (Bergman et al., 2022; Tripathi et al., 2020) requiring a structured framework to guide culture, structure, and leadership practices that strengthen employer-employee relationships (Dejanovic and Nikolic, 2023; Zenger and Folkman, 2022). This paper draws on the Cornerstone Model of Quality Management (Bergman et al., 2022), a Scandinavian adaptation of the Malcolm Baldrige Award and the EFQM, selected based on the authors' prior work with the framework. The model is grounded in collectively shared values and a holistic systems approach to continuous improvement that are reflected in six dimensions that comprise the quality system. At its core is (1) a focus on the customer, including employees, supported by (2) process focus, (3) continuous improvement, (4) evidence-based

decisions, (5) participation by all, and (6) committed leadership (Bergman et al., 2022, p. 60).

In this model, customer focus is defined by the value an organization creates to meet or exceed expectations for both internal customers (employees) and external customers (service or product recipients). Value for internal customers is fostered through empowerment, participation, and engagement. Organizational activities are supported by interrelated processes aligned with mission, values, and goals. Quality is driven by continuous improvement informed by evidence-based practices, including dialogue, pulse meetings, and systematic follow-up. Leadership enables these conditions by cultivating processes and a culture that support value co-creation and continuous improvement. Within this framework, retention is conceptualized as an outcome of organizational conditions that promote employee health, engagement, and shared purpose.

Research in quality management consistently demonstrates that quality cultures grounded in trust, valuing, belonging, involvement, and empowerment positively influence employees' propensity to remain (Boselie and van der Wiele, 2002; Fundin et al., 2025; Guimaraes, 1997; Ingelsson et al., 2018; Ooi et al., 2006). These elements align with what Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2021) describe as *mattering*, feeling valued while contributing value, which is associated with employee sustainability (Reece et al., 2019) and strengthens wellbeing, motivation, and commitment (Zach, 2025). Empirical evidence further supports this relationship, as Ooi et al. (2006) identified strong links between customer focus, organizational trust, communication, employee involvement, empowerment, and employees' intention to stay.

Reframing teacher retention as an organizational phenomenon through a quality management lens emphasizes culture, expressed in shared values and behaviors that support organizational goals (Snyder and Snyder, 2023). From a social constructivist view, culture comprises shared assumptions, values, rituals, and communication practices shaping work (Dejanovic and Nikolic, 2023). In complex systems like education, quality emerges through collective ownership and self-organization around shared needs and values (Senge et al., 2000; Van Kemenade, 2023). Teaming and networking foster vitality, growth, and sustainability, shifting focus from expert-driven models to collaborative communities of learners that enhance engagement and empowerment (Senge et al., 2000; Snyder and Snyder, 2023). Self-managing teams and collective leadership increasingly replace hierarchy as effective pathways to quality (Laloux, 2014).

Accordingly, staying power is framed as an organizational construct that extends beyond job embeddedness theory, which emphasizes individual organization fit, and instead foregrounds the active interactions among individuals within a shared culture. Rather than relying on individual resilience or vocational calling, the model offers a systemic framework through which staying power can be embedded as a collective and enduring cultural norm.

2 Methodology

A thematic synthesis was conducted using findings from a systematic literature review to explore “Staying Power” as an

organizational construct (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Thematic synthesis is a proven method of synthesis that preserves the original findings and themes of the research (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Thematic synthesis aims to identify recurring themes across multiple studies and generate new theories or understandings that go beyond the original research through interpretation and integration (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Quality management was used as a theoretical lens to identify the interplay between individual and organizational attributes as part of the construct of staying power. The initial systematic literature review (Smith Rouse, 2021) was conducted to examine what factors are identified by prior research to contribute to staying power in organizations.

2.1 Systematic literature review

The systematic literature review examined and assessed the latest evidence of connections between organizational sustainability and culture, and retention of employees and customers published between January 2016 and April 2021. Article selection was completed in six stages as visualized in Figures 1, 2. Stage one formulated the aim and research question. Stage two developed the protocol, which included the use of scholarly/peer reviewed full articles, English language only publications, within a date range of 5 years (2016-2021). Stage three involved identifying the search terms and combining search blocks, the search string used for this systematic literature review was “employee AND retention AND organizations AND intention to stay.” Stage four included identifying the databases to be used in the search and included four databases, SCOPUS, ERIC, Business Source Complete and Academic Search Premier. Stage five included documenting the search strategy and the process undertaken. This stage produced a total of 127 articles for review. During stage six the 127 articles were assessed for quality, duplicates were removed, and other articles were discarded due to lack of access to the full text. In total, 32 articles were included in the review.

Table 1 presents key findings from the systematic literature review. Included were the author, year, journal, country of origin, method and key findings. This table served as the basis for a deeper thematic analysis that is presented below.

2.2 Thematic analysis

A thematic synthesis was conducted from the data provided in Table 1 using Thomas and Harden (2008) and included five steps. *Step one:* the review articles were entered into an Excel document, which detailed the author/s, date of publication, journal article title, country of study, sample size, method of study, and the key findings. *Step two:* Each article was read individually, by a single reviewer, with detailed analytic notes recorded to support subsequent analysis. *Step three:* An abstract was developed for each article to identify thematic insights (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) related to the concept of staying power. These abstracts were synthesized into preliminary themes, which were refined through repeated review of the original articles to ensure rigor. The

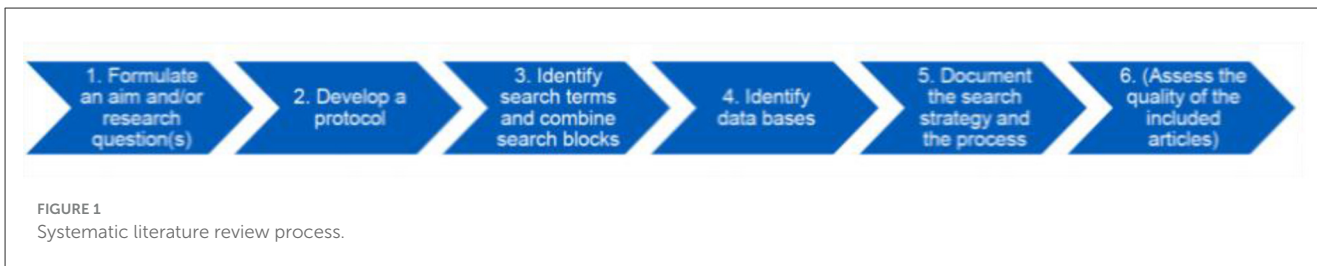


FIGURE 1 Systematic literature review process.

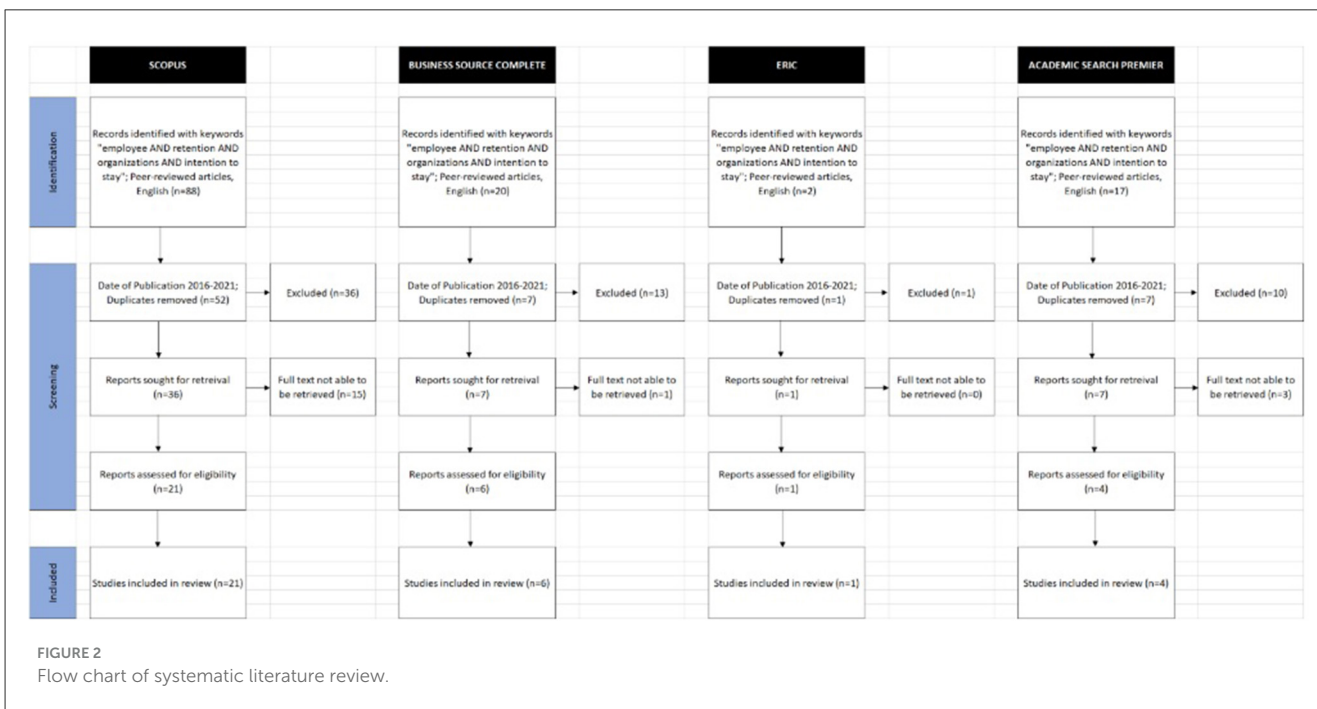


FIGURE 2 Flow chart of systematic literature review.

finalized themes were presented narratively in Smith Rouse (2021). In *Step four*, descriptive themes were generated by the first author and refined through an iterative process in collaboration with the remaining authors. Consistent with Creswell and Creswell’s (2018) criteria for qualitative rigor, credibility was strengthened through dialogic engagement among the authors, during which themes were critically reviewed, questioned, and refined. Dependability and confirmability were supported through reflexive memoing, transparent documentation of analytic decisions, and consensus-based validation of themes rather than reliance on statistical inter-coder reliability. *Step five* involved a dialogic, iterative process between all researchers to derive interpretative themes using quality management as a theoretical lens. This collaborative sense-making enhanced theoretical coherence and trustworthiness by grounding interpretations in both the synthesized literature and the analytic framework, leading to expanded themes that illuminate staying power as an organizational construct.

The reviewed literature spans multiple sectors and international contexts, limiting transferability to school systems due to differences in governance, labor conditions, culture, and professional norms. Consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2018), the findings are intended to provide analytic insight rather than universal generalization.

3 Results

The thematic analysis revealed eight key themes that influence or contribute to organizational staying power: (1) sense of belonging, (2) empowerment, (3) intrinsic motivation, (4) job satisfaction as defined by happiness at work and intention to stay, (5) personal fit, (6) wellbeing, inclusion, and psychological safety, (7) organizational embeddedness & quality of work life, and 8) internal branding. These themes may present differently across varied educational settings, including experience level of the educators, location, and type of educational environment. The themes are visualized in Figure 3, which presents each factor alongside the underlying arguments drawn from the literature.

3.1 Sense of belonging

Colleagues and customers are essential elements within organizations. Supervisors, managers, and line managers often have a high-level role as to how an employee feels about their job and the organization (Gordon et al., 2019; Steiner et al., 2020). Managers who create favorable brand orientation experiences foster a sense of belonging and psychological attachment from

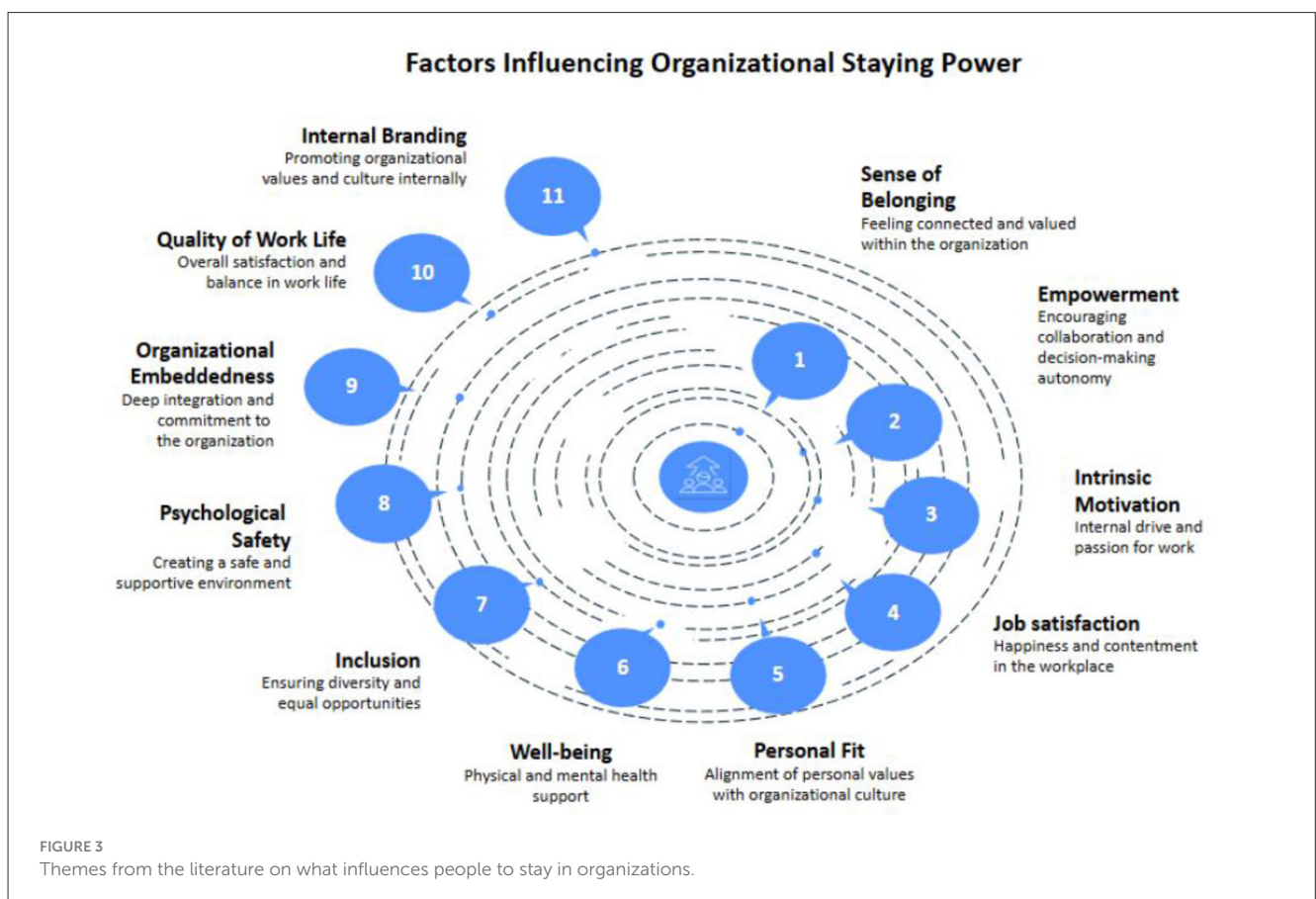
TABLE 1 Articles included from the systematic literature review sorted by descending date.

Author(s) year	Title (shortened)	Journal	Sector country	Sample (n) method	Key findings
Yang et al. (2021)	On-the-job shocks and intention to stay	Chinese management studies	Multi China	304 (n) Survey	On-the-job shocks reduce intention to stay; HR practices can mitigate effects.
Bentley et al. (2021)	Psychosocial distress and turnover	Safety science	Multi New Zealand	867 (n) Survey	Workplace bullying increases turnover; inclusion and psychosocial safety climate reduce negative effects.
Ikram et al. (2021)	Internal branding and retention	Journal of open innovation	Higher education Pakistan	377 (n) Survey	Internal branding strengthens organizational culture and supports intention to stay and innovation.
Sanchez-Cardona et al. (2021)	Job resources, meaningful work and intention	Journal of management & organization	Multi Puerto Rico	217 (n) Survey	Meaningful work enhances engagement; job resources indirectly influence intention to stay.
Rai and Nandy (2021)	Employer brand and retention	International journal of energy sector management	Power India	224 (n) Survey	Employer branding strengthens identification and retention.
Aman-Ullah et al. (2021)	Workplace safety, job satisfaction and retention	Journal of Asian finance, economics and business	Healthcare Pakistan	394 (n) Survey	Job satisfaction is critical for retention; safety initiatives encourage employees to remain.
Iyer et al. (2020)	Person–organization fit and intention	International journal of selection and assessment	HR Netherlands	637 (n) Survey	Better fit between employee and organization increases job satisfaction and intention to stay.
Younas and Bari (2020)	Talent management and Generation Y retention	Economic research	IT Pakistan	372 (n) Survey	Mentoring, leadership, and social media support retention; knowledge sharing had no significant effect.
Steiner et al. (2020)	Predictors of retention in global energy firm	Journal of occupational and environmental medicine	Energy multi-national	30,094 (n) Annual survey	Retention linked to organizational engagement and supervisor relationship; support and communication influence engagement.
Jolly and Self (2020)	Diversity climate and turnover	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	Hospitality USA	1,028 (n) Online survey	Positive diversity climate strengthens embeddedness and reduces turnover intentions.
Steil et al. (2020)	Learning opportunities and retention	Journal of workplace learning	Technology Brazil	440 (n) Survey (secondary)	Continuous learning opportunities encourage retention.
Dechawatanapaisal (2020)	Millennials' intention to stay and referrals	Evidence-based HRM	Multi Thailand	2,649 (n) Survey	Person–organization fit and shared values promote retention.
Kim and Beehr (2020)	Empowering leadership and commitment	International Journal of HRM	Multi USA	294 (n) Online survey	Empowering leadership fosters organizational commitment.
Rodrigues et al. (2020)	Employability paradox and retention	International Journal of HRM	Multi UK	429 (n) Survey	Training investments raise performance but risk employee turnover before organizational return.
Tripathi et al. (2020)	Employer branding in IT retention	IUP Journal of Brand Management	IT India	100 (n) Survey	Employer branding and belongingness positively influence retention.
Sharma and Stol (2020)	Onboarding success and turnover (IT)	Journal of Systems and Software	IT Ireland	102 (n) Survey	Effective onboarding improves retention of software professionals.
Steigenberger and Mirc (2020)	Retention post-acquisition	Human Relations	Medical Germany	41 (n) Mixed-method	Organizational and occupational identity combined with disappointment increases turnover.
Gordon et al. (2019)	Supervisor support and hotel turnover	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Hospitality USA	234 (n) Survey	Supervisor support improves wellbeing and reduces turnover.
Rafiq et al. (2019)	Engagement and turnover	Work	Media Pakistan	418 (n) Survey	Engagement, trust, and embeddedness reduce turnover intentions.
Vincent and Marmo (2018)	Social justice commitment and retention	Human Service Organizations	Nonprofit USA	107 (n) Online survey	Organizational commitment links social justice to job satisfaction and retention.
Aluwihare-Samaranayake et al. (2018)	Work-life experiences and nurse retention	Journal of Advanced Nursing	Nursing Sri Lanka	Case-based Experience	Work-life experiences shape motivation to stay.
Fletcher et al. (2018)	Training, attitudes and retention	International Journal of HRM	Multi UK	1,809 (n) Survey	Training influences positive work attitudes, which support retention.

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Author(s) year	Title (shortened)	Journal	Sector country	Sample (n) method	Key findings
Langbein and Stazyk (2018)	Retention in U.S. federal government	International Public Management Journal	Government USA	37,000 (n) Survey	Retention linked to intrinsic motivation; employee exits can influence peers.
Dechawatanapaisal (2018)	Internal branding and sales retention	Personnel Review	Construction Thailand	702 (n) Survey	Internal branding improves brand attitudes, commitment, and retention.
Ghaffar and Muhammed Khan (2017)	Job embeddedness in faculty	Journal of Arts and Social Sciences	Higher Ed Pakistan	459 (n) Survey	Demographics influence embeddedness, which affects retention.
Moen et al. (2017)	Flexibility/support and turnover	Social problems	IT USA	977 (n) Field study	Flexibility and supervisor support initiatives reduce turnover intentions.
Dechawatanapaisal (2017)	Work-life quality and retention	International journal of manpower	Healthcare Thailand	422 (n) Survey	Growth opportunities and supportive work environments encourage retention.
Thakur and Bhatnagar (2017)	Work-life balance and job embeddedness	Employee relations	Multi India	209 (n) Survey	Job embeddedness mediates work-life balance and intention to stay.
Ladge et al. (2017)	Retaining new mothers	Human resource management	Multi USA	40 (n) Mixed-method	Maternal confidence and workplace support increase intention to stay.
Harris et al. (2016)	Leadership and retention in higher ed	Journal for leadership and instruction	Higher Ed USA	59 (n) Survey	Servant leadership improves job satisfaction and retention.
Spencer and Gevrek (2016)	Non-salary benefits and retention	Personnel review	Higher Ed USA	462 (n) Online survey	Non-salary benefits, such as tuition discounts, support retention and productivity.



an employee to the organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Tripathi et al., 2020). Improvement in support from supervisors to employees can increase engagement and retention (Gordon et al., 2019; Steiner et al., 2020). Improvement of employee

wellbeing and support can then reduce turnover and may increase employee satisfaction, guest or customer satisfaction and lead to greater profits (Gordon et al., 2019; Tripathi et al., 2020).

Long-term planning by the organization to improve and create inclusion models will help develop affective retention strategies (Steiner et al., 2020). Steiner et al. (2020) also draws attention to the bidirectional transactions that occur between an organization and an employee, where one favorable treatment or action by one participant leads to a favorable response, treatment or action by the other participant. This ongoing “conversation” can lead to mutually beneficial arrangements and support for an employee’s intention to stay.

3.2 Empowerment

Leaders who have successfully empowered subordinates have been associated with positive work outcomes (Kim and Beehr, 2020). Empowering leaders enable employees to have autonomy and developmental support (Kim and Beehr, 2020). It also appears that empowering leaders encourage participation of the employee with the organization (Kim and Beehr, 2020). Through empowering employees Kim and Beehr (2020) found that employees were more likely to be dedicated to the organization and are more likely to stay with the organization. Among the strategies used were developing the role of leaders in self-managing work teams.

Empowering leadership was also found to relate to positive work outcomes that benefited both employees and organizations (Kim and Beehr, 2020). The confidence that is passed to the employee promotes more positive experiences and emotions surrounding their working within a particular organization (Kim and Beehr, 2020). Strategic leadership can influence an employee to stay within an organization by recognizing individual abilities, career development, and alignment of the employees to the strategies of the organization (Younas and Bari, 2020). Generation Y prefers to work in a team environment; mentoring and knowledge sharing as defined “by the social relationship between employees” (Younas and Bari, 2020, p. 1340).

Trust is a concept that is reciprocal in the supervisor and subordinate role. Kim and Beehr (2020) suggest that further research could focus on trust as both the cause of leader empowerment and a result of it. Rafiq et al. (2019) states that trust along with employee work engagement, and job embeddedness is a way of improving employee retention. Leadership development opportunities support the personal and professional growth of an employee (Vincent and Marmo, 2018). Employers need to be mindful and strategic in offering development opportunities (Vincent and Marmo, 2018).

3.3 Intrinsic motivation

Dechawatanapaisal (2017) found that intrinsic factors, such as opportunities, values and time, were better motivators for employees to remain within an organization as opposed to extrinsic factors such as money. A sense of identity within the organization through specialized or individualized assignments also meant employees felt a sense of obligation to the organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017). In contrast, Steigenberger and Mirc (2020) found that organizational and occupational identification do

not entice an employee to leave or stay with an organization. Rather when organizational and occupational identification is combined with employee disappointment, this may trigger an employee to leave (Steigenberger and Mirc, 2020).

Publicly funded organizations often lack high powered incentives to attract and retain employees over that of private organizations (Langbein and Stazyk, 2018). Employees of public organizations are often led to remain with their organization by intrinsic factors, which can include having a voice within the organization (Langbein and Stazyk, 2018). The threat of loss of intrinsic motivators can become a deterrent on the turnover of an employee (Jolly and Self, 2020). The intrinsic resources can become a powerful tool to both employees and organizations, especially if they are unique to that organization (Jolly and Self, 2020). Intrinsic motivators listed by Jolly and Self (2020) included job security, autonomy, high quality leader-member exchange relationship, transformative leadership, psychological safety climate, a fair organization, organizational, team and job characteristics. The true loss of any of these areas is often not felt until after the employee has left the original organization and started at a new job/organization (Jolly and Self, 2020).

3.4 Job satisfaction: happiness at work, and intention to stay

Many non-profit organizations believe that job satisfaction is of critical importance to the overall success of the organization (Vincent and Marmo, 2018). Job satisfaction is a relative and subjective feeling that Vincent and Marmo (2018), describe as being a complex interaction of personal characteristics, including beliefs, desires, aspirations, work culture, work environment, the community in which the work is located, the social and even political environment. Vincent and Marmo (2018) used an online cross-sectional survey to examine middle managers orientation to social justice and if that was associated with job satisfaction, the intention to stay with the agency or organization, and if their commitment was impacted. They found that organizational commitment has a critical role in the relationship between job satisfaction, social justice, and intention to stay. Harris et al. (2016) found that intention to stay acted as a moderator role in that of job satisfaction. They were able to demonstrate a positive correlation between intention to stay and job satisfaction, with intention to stay predicting a 33% variance of job satisfaction (Harris et al., 2016, p. 27).

3.4.1 Happiness at work

Harris et al. (2016) defined job satisfaction as happiness at work. They conducted a quantitative study predicting happiness at work and intention to stay with an organization. When employees are energized by their work, they are more likely to stay with an organization (Harris et al., 2016). Fletcher et al. (2018) found that employees are more likely to stay with an organization when they are engaged, have job satisfaction, and have additional tools of access to training and development. Organizational investment into career development helps to create sustainable employment through a stronger attachment to the organization when the

employee is proactive in engaging in career self-management (Rodrigues et al., 2020). When a lack of attention is given to an employee's perception and reactions, this may affect the level of organizational obligation that the employee feels and may increase their tendency to leave the organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018).

Providing employees with the ability to have a voice in how an organization functions is an important factor in retention (Yang et al., 2021; Langbein and Stazyk, 2018). The question then from the research is how much voice is too much before it affects the organization negatively and becomes ill-suited or unnecessary (Langbein and Stazyk, 2018). The positive effect of job satisfaction can be seen to have an impact on the employee's retention and intention to stay within an organization.

3.4.2 Intention to stay and meaningfulness

Sanchez-Cardona et al. (2021) studied the connections between meaningful work and work engagement in the relation between job resources and the intention to stay at work. They described job resources as including task variety, skill variety, and task significance, and found these factors to be positively related to meaningful work. From there Sanchez-Cardona et al. (2021) connected meaningful work to work engagements, all of which supported an intention to stay with an organization. Gaining personal satisfaction through their work engagement and job resources creates motivation and a positive psychological connection to the organization and the employee's intention to stay (Aman-Ullah et al., 2021; Rafiq et al., 2019; Dechawatanapaisal, 2020; Sanchez-Cardona et al., 2021). A positive, diverse organizational environment can decrease an employee's intentions to leave an organization (Jolly and Self, 2020).

Training and development have been linked with an employee's positive intention to stay within an organization (Fletcher et al., 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2020). Designing jobs when combined with development strategies for employees may stimulate meaning, motivation, and wellbeing and may contribute to an employee's retention (Sanchez-Cardona et al., 2021). Long term career road maps or succession planning help an employee to recognize and realize growth and potential within an organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017). This includes lateral movements with greater levels of specialization and skill development (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017). The development of younger employees is necessary for an organization to ensure acquisition of skills, aptitude, and learning for an organization to remain competitive in the current business world (Younas and Bari, 2020).

Diversity and inclusion within an organization can have a positive effect on the employee's intention to stay (Jolly and Self, 2020). This is an increasing area of psychological interest that is both valuable to an organization's performance and becoming an ethical obligation to society (Jolly and Self, 2020). For many employees, the importance of work engagement and organizational commitment support the feeling of personal fit with the organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017; Steiner et al., 2020). There is a high connection between positive and wellbeing employee mindsets as a predictor of the employee's intention to stay at an organization (Sanchez-Cardona et al., 2021). Continuous

internal employee feedback is essential for understanding in the employee organization fit (Rai and Nandy, 2021).

3.5 Personal fit

Person-organization fit refers to the compatibility between people, including employees and other parties, and the organization (Iyer et al., 2020). Employees whose personal mission matches that of the organization are more likely to stay with that organization (Vincent and Marmo, 2018). An employee's commitment to an organization is critical to the employee's job satisfaction and intention to stay within the organization (Vincent and Marmo, 2018). Vincent and Marmo (2018) found that as middle-managers organizational commitment increased, so did their job satisfaction and the intention to stay. Work-life experiences influence nurses' motivation to remain, or leave, an organization (Aluwihare-Samaranayake et al., 2018). A nurse's intent to stay is influenced by organizational commitment, job satisfaction, work-group cohesion, collaboration, and age (Aluwihare-Samaranayake et al., 2018).

Iyer et al. (2020) created a personality measure that will measure the Big Five personality traits from Goldberg (1990, cited in Iyer et al., 2020) of emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Person-organization fit is posed as a career variable; it impacts workplace and career outcomes as well as career choice for an individual (Iyer et al., 2020). Iyer et al. (2020) and Sharma and Stol (2020) both found that person-organization fit is especially important in the process of recruitment and initial onboarding. This period may be essential to the successful establishment of the new employee in the organization (Sharma and Stol, 2020). Iyer et al. (2020) also suggests that consideration is given to personality when forming teams or reworking teams, specifically finding complementary fit rather than a supplementary fit. The complementary fit would work especially well when a team needs specific traits or abilities. Iyer et al. (2020) also highlighted that future research could be formed around the role of tenure, or staying power, within an organization based on personality perceptions and organizational outcomes.

3.6 Wellbeing, inclusion, and psychological safety

Steiner et al. (2020) found that financial rewards were not a key driver for organizational commitment or retention, rather recognition was linked with engagement and satisfaction. Steiner et al. (2020) also highlighted the role of perception of caring from an organization regarding an employee's health and wellbeing as this has been shown to enhance employee engagement within an organization. This leads to the understanding that quality colleagues and customers are important to the development of longevity in employee connections to an organization.

Psychosocial safety climate (PSC) is used by Bentley et al. (2021) to discuss the psychological wellbeing of employees at an organizational level, specifically regarding workplace bullying

and the turnover intention of the employee. They found that inclusion and positive diversity climate were linked to employee retention and turnover intentions. From an organizational level, the positive psychological safety, culture, and inclusion of an organization can powerfully change the experiences and intentions of an employee's desire to stay or leave an organization. A sense or understanding of safety may encourage employees to stay with an organization (Aman-Ullah et al., 2021). Bentley et al. (2021) suggest that future research could use longitudinal data collection to examine the impact of psychosocial safety and inclusive climates in the workplace, as well as both the individual and organizational outcomes over time.

Employees with positive responses to wellbeing, flexibility, and job satisfaction are more likely to stay connected to the organization (Moen et al., 2017). Flexible work policies and support for employees personal and family lives may reduce turnover intentions especially when clearly stated and with broad access for all (Moen et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2021). Empowering all employees to work in a flexible manner with co-workers increases the effectiveness of employees both on and off the job (Dechawatanapaisal, 2020). Ladge et al. (2017) found that work-family conflict is an important cross-domain mechanism that combines confidence in a non-work role to a woman's intention to stay with an organization. A sense of safety strengthens the connections between employees as they feel taken care of by the organization, which in turn encourages employees to stay with the organization longer (Aman-Ullah et al., 2021; Ladge et al., 2017).

3.7 Organizational embeddedness and quality of work life

Job embeddedness focuses on the retention of an employee rather than the turnover and recruitment (Ghaffar and Muhammed Khan, 2017). Organizational embeddedness is often more complicated than simply listing resources. This calls for a more wholistic view to combine the resources into a powerful tool for the organization (Jolly and Self, 2020). There is often a web of resources that is created over time (Thakur and Bhatnagar, 2017). This includes embedding the mission, culture, and philosophy of the educational institution to improve job satisfaction and employee retention (Yang et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2016). Employees who identify with the organization's values and behaviors are more likely to stay connected to that organization (Steiner et al., 2020).

Organizations can increase the level of employee embeddedness by designing programs that instill and strengthen company values and culture (Steiner et al., 2020). A positive attitude held by the employee toward the organization and its values adds to engagement (Fletcher et al., 2018). Highly engaged employees are more likely to stay with an organization due to the strong personal connections that in many cases become a mutually beneficial relationship for both the employee and organization (Fletcher et al., 2018; Rafiq et al., 2019; Thakur and Bhatnagar, 2017). The work-life balance of an employee is essential to embedding the employee

by building deeper contextual and perceptual forces (Thakur and Bhatnagar, 2017).

Quality of work life is multi-faceted including motivation, expectation, wellbeing, and satisfaction, which was found to have a positive effect on organizations (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017). This is a human resource management strategy that can be applied to many organizations. Dechawatanapaisal (2017) studied the opposite question to this study "why do people leave?". Finding that organizational embeddedness in the case of healthcare professionals impacts the employee's intention to stay and turnover. The quality of work life becomes very significant in impacting organizational embeddedness. Factors affecting the quality of work life include career opportunities, the perception of quality of work life, work life balance, and job characteristics (Dechawatanapaisal, 2017). The quantity of time that people work is superseded by the quality of work produced, with greater engagement being a much-needed priority (Rafiq et al., 2019). Employee embeddedness when combined with work-life balance practices encourages employees to stay in order to receive resources and accumulate more (Thakur and Bhatnagar, 2017). Internal communication increases employee embeddedness, especially when done in a humorous and relaxed style (Yang et al., 2021) or through encouraging stories (Dechawatanapaisal, 2020).

3.8 Internal branding

Internal branding has an impact on an employee's intention to stay (Ikram et al., 2021; Tripathi et al., 2020). The internal branding helps to create the internal culture of an organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2020; Rai and Nandy, 2021; Tripathi et al., 2020) and this then leads to enhancing the dynamics of open innovation (Ikram et al., 2021). Dechawatanapaisal, 2018 believes that part of the answer to "what makes people stay?" is internal branding. The right mindset, brand identification and commitment, and right attitudes all support the internal brand and therefore the employees will feel proud, supported and are more likely to be loyal to the organization (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018).

Tripathi et al. (2020) found that factors such as growth opportunities, work culture, creativity and learning, socio-ethical responsibility, compensation, and recognition do not motivate an employee to stay with an organization. Rather, the above factors were only important when they were notably absent from the organization and the employee was dissatisfied with their work. Further, they found that fully satisfied employees are more likely to remain at an organization and recommend it to others. Employees who share the dedication of the employer may strengthen the mission, stability, and focus of the organization (Vincent and Marmo, 2018). Building a strong internal brand that is believed in by the employee then creates positive attitudes that support the organizational brand and in turn then supports retention strategies (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). The constant building and renewal of the organizational brand both internal and external should be the responsibility of all employees at all levels (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018).

4 Analysis

So, what exactly is staying power? Tricarico et al. (2015) describes staying power in education as “the ability to endure or last within challenging contexts by possessing strength enough to persevere” (p. 237). They further clarify this as educators who stay beyond the 5 years of an initial teaching apprenticeship. This definition implies strength, time and emotional stability are all required to have “staying power.” This definition is limited at best, as it frames staying power as evidence of endurance or perseverance of individuals, rather than a reflection of the important features of an organization and acknowledging the interplay that occurs between the employee and the organization.

In other contexts, staying power is defined as job embeddedness (Crossley et al., 2007; Ramesh and Gelfand, 2010) or the extent to which leaving is less desirable than staying (Mitchell et al., 2001). As Setthakorn et al. (2024) point out, the explanatory focus of job embeddedness is characterized by “webs of entanglement” that leave people feeling locked in, potentially contributing to the phenomenon of apple polishers to which Ishikawa (1985) warned. Younis et al. (2023) states that it is important to recognize not every employee should or will be considered valuable, so identifying and retaining those that are considered valuable is key. Ishikawa (1985) continues to caution that the right sort of employee should be encouraged and supported to stay. The viewpoint from Ishikawa (1985) is that employees should have courage, conviction, and independent thinking to continue pushing an organization forward.

In education, expertise and commitment provide organizational stability (Hungo et al., 2024). The challenge then is for school leaders to ensure that the work culture is healthy and continuously evolving to keep the focus on webs of engagement rather than webs of entanglement. While long-serving teachers are not always more effective (Chiong et al., 2017), their departure causes significant losses of knowledge and skills, impacting schools and society (Chiong et al., 2017; Heilala et al., 2022). This underscores the importance of developing school cultures that foster healthy staying power.

Fletcher et al. (2018) conclude that developing intent to stay within organizations should consider a broader range of interdependent attitudes and affects, rather than approaching the concept as individual. This was echoed Sanchez-Cardona et al. (2021) who stress the importance between job resources, job demands and meaningful work to understand the motivational process of staying with an organization. A key difference in studies on retention and turnover in organizations is the focus on the pull or push of the relationship (Fletcher et al., 2018). Staying power shift focus to the positive aspects of pull factors that attract and retain employees within an organization (Fletcher et al., 2018). Quality management emphasizes developing pull factors through value co-creation and engaged leadership.

Defining “staying power” as an organizational phenomenon is reflected in an organizational culture characterized by engagement, sense of belonging, focus on wellbeing, psychological safety, personal fit and organizational embeddedness. Premature turnover, from this perspective, reflects system failure rather than individual weakness, signaling misalignment in structures, leadership, and

culture. Ishikawa (1985, p. 25) states that “If people are treated like machines, work becomes uninteresting and unsatisfying.” This continues with the idea that employees need to feel empowered and valued in their workplace, which is often nurtured through trust and transparency (Ain, 2019). This perspective on staying power emphasizes the importance of building organizational cultures that value the human dimension and emphasize strategies to develop employee engagement and sense of belonging (Bergman et al., 2022; Ooi et al., 2006) to shift from webs of entanglement to webs of engagement. Creating the conditions for staying power in organizations is a leadership task (Bergman et al., 2022; Ishikawa, 1985), underscoring the need to intentionally design and continuously refine work process that engage employees in co-creating shared purpose, value, and meaning (Senge et al., 2000; Snyder et al., 2024).

4.1 Staying power as an organizational phenomenon

The themes in this article frame “staying power” as an organizational phenomenon, that are derived from an interdependent interplay between individual and organizational attributes. Individual attributes are reflected by how employees perceive and respond to the organization, while organizational level attributes reflect how the organization supports, values and is committed to employees and creates conditions for success through internal practices. In Table 2, individual-level attributes (associated with psychological factors) include a sense

TABLE 2 Individual and organizational-level attributes of staying power.

Staying power themes	Individual-level (how employees experience the organization)	Organizational-level (what the organization does to develop a quality culture and value for workers)
1. Sense of belonging	Yes	Yes
2. Empowerment and shared commitment	Yes	Yes
3. Intrinsic motivation	Yes	Some (structures to allow, fairness)
4. Job satisfaction: “happiness at work and intention to stay”	Yes	Some (policies, recognition leadership style)
5. Personal fit	Yes	Some (recruitment)
6. Wellbeing, inclusion and psychological safety	Some (care, flexibility)	Yes
7. Internal branding		Yes
8. Organizational embeddedness and quality of work life		Yes

of belonging, empowerment, intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction (happiness at work, intent to stay, meaningfulness) personal fit, wellbeing and psychological safety. These can be further grouped into *motivators* (intrinsic motivation), social work culture (belonging, inclusion) *agency* (empowerment) and *outcomes* (happiness at work, meaningfulness and intention to stay). While often linked to psychological theory, these attributes also reflect a quality management perspective emphasizing inclusion, valuing, empowerment, and engagement as essential for sustaining organizational quality (Bergman et al., 2022; Snyder et al., 2024).

Among the organizational-level specific attributes are organizational embeddedness, quality of work life, and internal branding. However, these work together as a system, reflecting the interplay between individual experience and organizational practice. For example, strong internal branding clarifies purpose, which fosters a sense of meaningfulness and intrinsic motivation and strengthens job-embeddedness. In education these attributes are strengthened through organizational practices such as teaming and dialogue (Snyder et al., 2025; Sparks, 2025; Sullivan, 2023). As an individual attribute, a *sense of belonging* is a relational phenomenon defined by how employees feel socially and emotionally connected to others in the workplace. Organizationally, a *sense of belonging* is found in the social structures, practices, and leadership behaviors that are used to foster inclusion and support a sense of community. The second attribute, *empowerment*, is also described as both individual and organizational. Individual *empowerment* and autonomy reflect how employees experience a sense of agency, confidence in their role, sense of trust, and feeling valued about their contributions. Organizationally, leadership can develop cultures of empowerment and commitment through *teaming structures*, strategic alignment, and shared leadership practices.

Using the Cornerstone Model as a lens, many individual-level attributes align with multiple model dimensions, highlighting the systems nature of staying power. Rather than acting as isolated variables, individual and organizational attributes interact to build conditions for staying power, grounded in trust, communication, and employee involvement and empowerment (Ooi et al., 2006). These attributes function as enablers, mechanisms, and outcomes within the model rather than independent predictors. Leadership and culture shape internal customer value, sense of belonging, internal branding, wellbeing, and psychological safety. Participatory processes foster inclusion, empowerment, intrinsic motivation, and shared ownership. Continuous improvement embeds these dynamics into sustained quality through organizational embeddedness and work-life quality, supporting ongoing learning and capacity development. Together, these dimensions form a system underpinning staying power as an outcome of organizational quality culture.

5 Discussion

Why are we interested in understanding the phenomenon of “staying power”? As stated earlier, there is a global downtrend of both recruiting and retaining quality teachers (Casely-Hayford

et al., 2022; Liu and Li, 2025; Stark and Daulat, 2025). This is further supported by the knowledge that teachers statistically have a high drop off rate in the first few years’ post-qualification (Chiong et al., 2017). So why do those that stay, stay? Intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in generating job satisfaction and ultimately leads to employee retention. Teachers look toward school leaders to provide a clear vision and dedication to drive positive change and development (Sullivan, 2023). However, for staying power in education to be sustainable, other factors need to be included.

Zenger and Folkman (2022) found that organizations that build stronger connections are often more inclusive, positive, and safer for all, which connects to the themes of wellbeing, sense of belonging, and psychological safety presented in this article. This is also true for education. As school leaders adopt a systems approach, cultures become integrated through teaming, empowerment, and shared commitment and accountability (Mårtensson and Snyder, 2023; Snyder et al., 2008; Sullivan, 2023). Respect, trust, and strong relationships are reinforced through teaming structures and work systems that support continuous growth and professional learning (Johnson, 2025; Snyder and Snyder, 2021). These cultures extend internal branding beyond teaching’s professional calling, creating attractive work environments that enhance a sense of mattering, belonging, and organizational embeddedness (Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky, 2021).

Educators committed to the school’s mission and student wellbeing strengthen organizational stability, focus, and social impact, reinforcing internal brand identity and supporting staying power through a dedicated, aligned workforce. Through quality cultures that are supported by engaged leadership, participatory processes, evidence-based decision making, and a strong customer value focus, traditional stress factors that Yan (2020) identified as associated with leaving are replaced by incentives to remain. When employees feel valued and invested in the organization, they contribute to the overall culture of the organization and help to drive continuous improvement and sustainability (Fundin et al., 2025; Ingelsson et al., 2018).

This article makes a theoretical contribution to understand staying power as an organizational phenomenon. Building on prior research that identified personal and organizational factors associated with teacher turnover (Nguyen et al., 2020), this article advances understanding of the dynamic interplay between individual and organizational attribute through that shape staying power. From a quality-management perspective, the individual is viewed as an interdependent part of the organizational system, implying that retention involves more than just personal psychological traits. Staying power is cultivated when organizational leaders demonstrate their commitment to employees and establish conditions that enable success through healthy work cultures (Bergman et al., 2022; Ingelsson et al., 2018). This includes promoting participation, empowerment, efficient work processes, and shared decision-making, supported by a workplace culture, job design, leadership practices, and organizational structures that actively engage employees (Shah et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021).

Ishikawa (1985, p. 25) states that “If people are treated like machines, work becomes uninteresting and unsatisfying.”



FIGURE 4 Staying Power as understood through Quality Management (AI generated figure based on input data from the authors own analysis).

Employees need to feel empowered and valued in their workplace, which is nurtured through strong connections, inclusion, trust, and transparency (Ain, 2019; Zenger and Folkman, 2022). Understanding elements of the organization’s culture and work process and the interplay with the individual experience is thus relevant to further understanding the complexities and multifaceted nature of staying power as more than a psychological construct.

Figure 4 demonstrates the application of Quality Management to that of staying power. Applying a quality management lens underscores the role of leadership in creating organizational conditions that support sustained engagement through a systems perspective, characterized by the interdependence of leadership, customer focus, participatory practices, and continuous improvement. The themes of staying power are not associated solely with one specific quality cornerstone; rather they are found in multiple dimensions suggesting that staying power is a systems-based outcome of organizational practices. This interrelationship is central to explaining how individual and organizational factors jointly contribute to long-term staying power and is illustrated in Figure 5.

5.1 Actionable implications for developing staying power in education

Viewing staying power as an organizational construct helps educational leaders better create work environments that attract, support, and retain educators over time. By integrating the eight staying-power themes with the Cornerstone Model of Quality Management, this paper offers an actionable framework for strengthening educator retention through effective work processes,

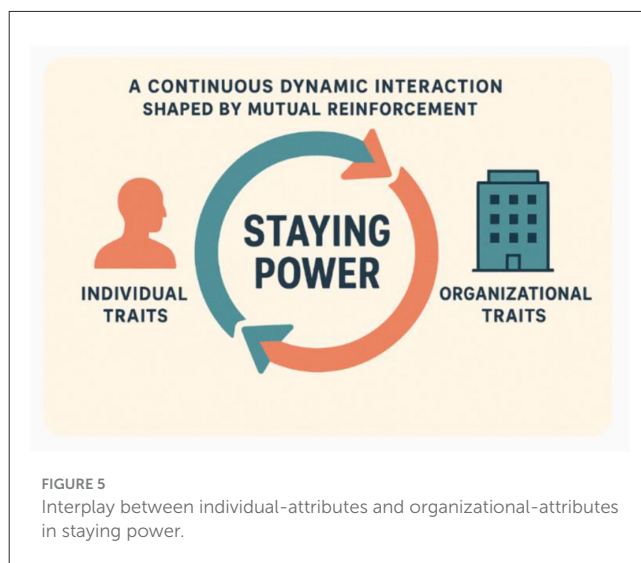


FIGURE 5 Interplay between individual-attributes and organizational-attributes in staying power.

continuous improvement, active engagement, and committed leadership. Recommended strategies include:

- Shift from retention metrics to that of staying power diagnostics. The use of a tool that assesses staying power indicators such as engagement, team dynamics, belonging, and intention to stay.
- Invest in leadership practices that encourage connection and belonging. School leaders should intentionally cultivate relational leadership practices.
- Adopt strength-based organizational frameworks. Rather than focusing on problem-solving approaches, a strength-based

framework focuses on recognizing teachers' capacities and supports professional growth.

- Design systems for shared decision making and recognize professional agency. The creation of authentic influence on curriculum, pedagogy, and school initiatives reinforces the identity of an educator as a professional and ownership over a long career.
- Develop an organizational understanding of why educators stay. Organizations can gather qualitative and quantitative data from employees who stay through interviews, reflective surveys, and narratives to inform culture-building efforts as well as next initiatives.
- Integrate staying power into strategic planning and quality management guidelines. Placing staying power as a central element creates a long-term sustainability goal that is explicitly linked with both organizational stability and student success outcomes.

6 Conclusions

To address the current challenges of recruitment and retention in education, this paper offers an alternative view by shifting focus from the individual to the organization. Framed within a quality management perspective, staying power is defined as a multi-faceted phenomenon that reflects the organization's ability to create a positive, sustainable, and attractive working environment. It is about nurturing a culture that values, supports and retains its workforce, leading to enhanced productivity, innovation, and long-term success. Organizations that prioritize staying power can reap the benefits of a committed and dedicated workforce. Helping organizations develop a capacity to identify and develop staying power requires a paradigm shift in thinking about traditional recruitment and retention.

Developing "staying power" in education is more complex than teacher incentives and professional "fit." Staying power emerges from the interaction of people, processes, and outcomes that support sustainability and long-term workforce commitment. Rather than focusing narrowly on retention, schools can take a proactive, long-term approach by prioritizing employee engagement, growth, and wellbeing. Shifting the focus to why educators stay enables organizations to strengthen workplace culture, job design, leadership, and support structures that encourage long-term commitment to the profession.

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Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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