

**What can we learn
about improving
workforce retention
from five words?**

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April 2017**

‘People leave managers, not companies.’

‘If you have a turnover problem, look first to your managers.’

(Buckingham & Coffman, 1999, p.27)

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory suggests that the quality of the employee-manager relationship impacts on several employee outcomes including job satisfaction, commitment and turnover.

(Xerri, 2013)



About the research

- **Aim:** to determine whether similarities and differences in the perceptions of managers and health professionals about working in rural and remote regions could provide opportunities to improve retention
- **24 semi-structured interviews**
- **December 2013 – July 2014**
- **Health Managers, HR Managers & Health Professionals**
- Worked or managed health professionals working in a remote (rural) or very remote area (RA4/RA5)

The Questions



Q1: What are the 5 words that best describe working in a remote region?

Alternative perspectives:

Q2a: What are the 5 words that you think that your manager (not in a remote region) would use to best describe working in a remote region?

Q2b: What are the 5 words that you think that health professionals would use to best describe working in a remote region?

Most frequently used words to describe working in remote regions (Managers)

Managers' words	Health Professionals' perceived words that managers would use
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Challenging (40%)2. Rewarding (33%)3. Resources /Resourceful(27%)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Difficult (44%)2. Challenging (33%) Frustrating (33%) Opportunity (33%)

Most frequently used words to describe working in remote regions (Health Professionals)

Health Professionals' words	Managers' perceived words that health professionals would use
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Collegial (55%)2. Challenging (44%) Autonomy (44%)3. Rewarding (33%) Learning (33%)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Challenging (47%)2. Isolating (40%)3. Frustrating (27%) Rewarding (27%)

Emergent themes

- **connection with others**
isolation, lonely, collegial and autonomy;
- **resources and benefits** (resources/resourceful, rewarding, well-paid, learning, resilience (i.e. inner resources), opportunities); and
- **nature of the work**
difficult, frustrating, fascinating, challenging.

So what can we learn from the five words?

- While the rural and remote context calls for tailored solutions, the benefits of the employee-manager relationship are ingrained in management theory.
- To improve retention, managers should develop exchange relationships with employees that promote the benefits of reciprocity.
 - supportive professional relationships
 - build supportive collegial networks
 - share learning opportunities

Let's all take a moment ...



What are the 5 words that YOU would use to best describe working in a rural or remote region?

If you are manager – are they the same?

Why or why not?

How does this influence retention and turnover where you work?

Benefits for managers, health service providers and the community

Where social exchange improves retention through manager-employee relationships, everyone benefits:

- Managers and Health Services - improved retention
- Health professionals - shared understanding of the challenges and rewards
- Remote populations benefit from improved access to health services

Thank you

References

Buckingham, M., & Coffman, C. (1999). *First, break all the rules. What the Worlds Greatest Managers do Differently*. London, UK: Simon & Schuster.

Xerri M. Workplace relationships and the innovative behaviour of nursing employees: a social exchange perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 2013;51:103-123.