

Staff Turnover and Its Relationship with the Productivity of Commercial SMEs

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Citation: Suárez, K. J. F., Castillo, M. C. M., Herrera, T. G. Y., & Castillo, A. N. L. Staff Turnover and Its Relationship with the Productivity of Commercial SMEs. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 4503–4512. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i2.2300>

Published: November 24, 2025

ABSTRACT

Small and medium-sized commercial enterprises in Guayaquil often face limitations in human talent management, which has a direct impact on their organizational performance. In this context, the present research aims to analyze the relationship between staff turnover and productivity in this type of organization. To this end, a mixed approach is applied that combines quantitative data obtained through surveys and qualitative data collected through interviews with human resource managers. The results reveal that frequent turnover affects operational continuity, delays key processes, and causes excessive workloads for the remaining employees. At the same time, there is a lack of effective talent retention strategies, as well as weaknesses in induction and training processes. As a result, a significant relationship between turnover, productivity, and performance was found. Therefore, it is recommended to strengthen talent management practices through loyalty programs, improvements in the organizational climate, and actions aimed at retaining staff.

Keywords: Staff Turnover, Productivity, Performance, Management, Commercial SMEs

INTRODUCTION

Currently, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in a country's economic development. Because they are a significant source of employment, they also promote innovation and favor the growth of many productive sectors. Despite having limited resources and capabilities compared to large companies, they have the advantage of being flexible and able to adapt quickly to changes in the environment (Avendaño et al., 2021).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, SMEs represent approximately 99.5% of all companies, generate around 60% of employment, and contribute nearly 25% of gross domestic product (GDP). This scenario confirms their fundamental importance as providers of goods and services, as well as their key role in generating employment for a large part of the working population (UNDP, 2024).

According to data published by the Statistical Register of Companies (REEM) in 2025, there are around 1,173,985 active companies in Ecuador, of which 71,600 are small and medium-sized enterprises, representing 6.1% of the total. Although micro-enterprises are numerically superior, SMEs account for 23.6% of national sales and generate almost 30% of formal employment. The commercial sector is the most representative in the country, accounting for 35.5% of all companies. These organizations have a significant presence in terms of job creation (INEC, 2023).

Given their economic and social impact, it is important to understand the internal factors that can influence the performance of SMEs. In this type of company, success depends largely on the commitment and productivity of workers, which highlights the importance of proper human talent management (Canal et al., 2023).

It should be noted that emotional well-being is also an important factor for good organizational performance, as it directly affects productivity (Eng et al., 2025). In order to achieve stable organizational growth, it is necessary to update management systems, strengthen the skills of employees, and make the most of their capabilities (Arteaga et al., 2021).

Relationship between Turnover and Productivity

Although SMEs generally have a small number of employees and limited financial resources, which makes them quite vulnerable to situations that directly affect their staff (Adan et al., 2022). Staff turnover refers to the permanent departure of an employee from their position, either by their own decision or by the company's. This situation can lead to significant losses for the company because it generates a recruitment process that involves considerable expenses depending on the number of employees (Bravo et al., 2022).

Similarly, low employee retention in these types of companies causes several additional difficulties, such as increased hiring costs, loss of key staff skills, and disruptions to company activities (Xuecheng et al., 2022).

This situation also affects the work environment, as it generates work overload, demotivation, and stress among the remaining employees. Such conditions undermine productivity, reduce profitability, and can lead to the loss of key human talent within the company (Walid et al., 2021). Therefore, these companies must work to find strategies that create pleasant and healthy work environments, such as Happiness Management, a strategy that puts people first rather than employees (Cueva and Sánchez, 2024). This also contributes to improving the perception of happiness at work, which, although a personal decision, depends on how the organization manages the work environment (Cueva and Sánchez, 2025).

Although staff turnover is a well-known issue, there is still little information on how it directly affects the productivity of SMEs in the commercial sector in Guayaquil. This lack of studies limits the possibility of applying appropriate solutions to help improve performance in this type of company.

Given the lack of information, it is necessary to analyze how this phenomenon impacts local SMEs, especially in a competitive environment such as the commercial sector in Guayaquil. In these companies, where resources are limited and staff perform key functions, understanding the relationship between turnover and productivity can help make more effective decisions in human talent management.

In addition, some SMEs face difficulties in integrating new staff due to problems in the recruitment process, which limits proper adaptation and affects performance from the early stages (Almeida et al., 2021). Added to this are changes in job stability, typical of an unstable work environment, which influence workers' commitment to their organizations. These adjustments, such as turnover and talent shortages, represent financial and operational challenges for companies (Ames Guerrero, 2021).

In this context, productivity is one of the most relevant indicators for evaluating organizational performance. It allows not only for comparing results with other organizations, but also for detecting opportunities for internal improvement (Solano et al., 2023). Increasing productivity means achieving better results without increasing resources, which promotes efficiency and economic development (Ramírez et al., 2022).

The objective of this research is to determine the relationship between staff turnover and productivity in small and medium-sized enterprises in the commercial sector in the city of Guayaquil. It seeks to understand how the frequent departure of employees influences organizational performance, especially in areas where staff perform important functions in daily operations.

The research aims to identify the main causes of staff turnover, taking into account internal factors such as motivation, human talent management, the work environment, and the processes involved in recruiting new employees. In addition, the impact of this turnover on process efficiency, the quality of results, and the achievement of company objectives will be analyzed.

Based on this analysis, the aim is to propose practical guidelines to optimize personnel management and increase efficiency in commercial SMEs, creating tools that help make better decisions in the environments of this type of company with limited resources.

Theoretical Framework

Human capital theory posits that the skills, knowledge, and experience accumulated by employees are an essential part of the organization. Accordingly, investing in staff training and well-being helps improve productivity. In the case of commercial SMEs, where turnover is often more frequent, this leads to the loss of trained personnel, which in turn reduces staff, which threatens the company's performance. From this point of

view, it becomes important to retain employees in order to maintain efficiency in an environment with limited resources (Díaz and Toscano, 2022).

Similarly, the high-performance work system approach proposes that innovative practices in human talent management, such as employee participation, performance evaluation, adequate training, compensation, and recruitment policies, can increase a company's productivity and competitiveness by creating an environment that promotes creativity, innovation, and dedication at work. This system seeks to align the interests of the staff with the strategic objectives of the organization, thereby reducing turnover and enhancing employee performance (Aslam et al., 2023).

A complementary theoretical perspective is the theory of workplace well-being, which argues that the work environment has a direct impact on employee satisfaction, motivation, and commitment. When companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, foster appropriate working conditions such as positive leadership, recognition, work-life balance, and opportunities for growth, talent retention is promoted and productivity is improved. From this perspective, employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to stay with the organization and contribute more efficiently, reducing turnover and ensuring greater operational stability (Patiño and Sánchez, 2024).

Hypothesis

Variable: Staff turnover.

H1: "In commercial SMEs in Guayaquil, staff turnover is caused by internal factors such as lack of motivation and inadequate human talent management."

Variable: Impact of turnover on productivity.

H1: "High staff turnover has a negative impact on the productivity of commercial SMEs."

Variable: relationship between turnover and job performance

H1: "There is a significant negative relationship between employee turnover and job performance in commercial SMEs in Guayaquil."

METHODOLOGY

The academic article was developed from a descriptive and correlational approach, as it sought to determine the level of staff turnover and, on the other hand, to analyze the relationship that exists with productivity in commercial SMEs in Guayaquil. To this end, an attempt was made to obtain a complete understanding of this phenomenon. To this end, a mixed approach was used, combining quantitative techniques, through surveys, and qualitative techniques, through interviews. This allowed us to obtain direct information from SMEs, taking into account both the perceptions of their managers and the management strategies applied in internal processes. Data collection was carried out in July 2025, using Microsoft Forms online surveys.

The instrument underwent a content validation process by expert judgment, where the relevance of the items in relation to the research objectives and the technical quality of the questions, thus ensuring the validity of the questionnaire.

Data collection was carried out in 50 commercial SMEs officially established in the city of Guayaquil. For their selection, a non-probabilistic intentional sampling was used, selecting those companies that met the following characteristics: being legally constituted, belonging to the commercial sector, and having at least three years of continuous operation. This number of companies was chosen because it allowed for a manageable sample in terms of time and resources, but one that was sufficiently representative to reflect the reality of commercial SMEs in Guayaquil with regard to staff turnover and productivity.

The research method used was hypothetical-deductive and analytical, which allowed us to identify the key elements of the problem, such as its causes, consequences, and possible strategies, and then incorporate them into an overview. In addition, a deductive approach was used, based on general theories and concepts about human talent management, which were implemented in the specific context of commercial SMEs in Guayaquil.

RESULTS

This section presents the results obtained from surveys conducted with 50 small and medium-sized commercial enterprises in Guayaquil. The analysis was structured according to the proposed variables: staff turnover and productivity, considering sub-dimensions such as job retention, training of new human talent, impact on work quality, operational overload, and mitigation actions. The responses were organized into thematic blocks to facilitate their interpretation. The respondents were mainly owners and those responsible for

administrative and human talent management in the selected commercial SMEs, given that they have direct knowledge of staff turnover, hiring processes, and the effects on productivity.

Table 1. Staff turnover.

Question	Question topic	Most frequent response	Observation
Q1	Frequency of rotation in the last year.	Once	Turnover is a common occurrence in most SMEs.
P2	Impact of turnover on goal achievement.	Slight difficulty	Partially affects the achievement of organizational goals.

The data shows that staff turnover occurs frequently in the SMEs analyzed, especially at least once a year. Although this frequency does not seem alarming, it does have an impact on operational planning. The fact that several companies indicate that turnover interferes with goal achievement indicates that this situation, although manageable, causes imbalances in work continuity. This instability, if not managed preventively, can become a factor that limits the company's growth. (Table 1).

Table 2. Staff preparation and retention.

Question	Question topic	Most frequent response	Observation
P3	Level of preparation of new staff upon arrival.	Poorly prepared	Most require additional time to adapt.
P4	Disruptions due to loss of experience.	Rarely	Pauses or errors occur after unexpected departures.
P7	Average staff retention.	Few remain for more than one year.	High short-term turnover

The results show that most new employees are not fully prepared to take on their roles. This requires an additional investment of time and resources to train them internally, which is evident in the low retention rate, with most staff not staying for more than a year, affecting the stability of the teams. The combination of poor initial preparation and high turnover prevents the consolidation of efficient processes and limits the development of long-term skills within the company. These conditions explain some of the difficulties faced by SMEs in building strong and committed teams. (Table 2)

Table 3. Impact on productivity and performance.

Question	Question topic	Most frequent response	Observation
P5	Changes in the work environment due to rotation.	Has caused minor difficulties	Changes affecting teamwork.
P8	Effect on work quality.	Quality has decreased slightly	Less consistency in results.
P9	Loss of productivity or delays in operations.	Rarely	Although not constant, turnover has caused interruptions that reduce productivity.
P11	Comparison of new vs. previous staff performance.	Slightly lower	New staff tend to perform slightly worse at the beginning.

It can be seen that staff turnover has a direct impact on key aspects of productivity. Although most companies report only a slight decline in work quality, this is enough to show a gradual deterioration if no action is taken. It was also observed that the performance of new employees does not always match that of previous ones, implying a learning curve that temporarily reduces efficiency. In turn, the overload of tasks for the remaining staff generates additional pressure, which could affect the work environment and lead to further departures if the distribution of work is not properly balanced. (Table 3)

Table 4. Mitigation and retention measures.

Question	Question topic	Most frequent response	Observation
Q6	Level of training provided to new staff.	Acceptable	Initial training not very thorough.
P10	Existence of measures to reduce turnover	Exists, but not fully implemented	Lack of clear or sustained strategies.
P15	Priority given to retaining human talent	It is a secondary issue	It is recognized as important, but no concrete

This section shows that, although some SMEs have basic measures in place to address turnover, these are neither sufficient nor structured. Most provide partial training for new staff, but there is no clear strategy that prioritizes talent retention. This limited approach generates a reactive rather than a preventive response. The need for a solid policy in this area prevents companies from maximizing the potential of their teams and reduces their ability to generate stable long-term processes. (Table 4)

Table 5. Staff integration and monitoring.

Question	Question topic	Most frequent response	Observation
Q12	Difficulty finding qualified replacements	Somewhat difficult	Companies indicated that replacing staff is not complex, but new staff do not always have the same level of skill.
P13	Average time to adapt to the job	Between 1 and 2 weeks	New staff usually adapt quickly, although they do not always achieve the initial expected performance.
P14	Frequency of follow-up with new staff	Almost always	Frequent follow-ups are conducted to facilitate the integration of new staff.

Analysis of this last section shows that companies make efforts to effectively incorporate new staff. Frequent monitoring during the adaptation process is noteworthy, which is positive. However, although replacing staff is not seen as a major challenge, some companies acknowledge that they do not always manage to find profiles with the same level of experience. This leads to a loss of continuity in processes and can affect the quality of work while the new employee settles in. The average adaptation time, between one and two weeks, while not extensive, represents an interruption that, if repeated over time, can reduce overall productivity. (Table 5)

Correlation of Variables

To analyze the relationship between the variables, Spearman's correlation coefficient was used, since the survey items were measured using ordinal scales.

This type of scale does not require normal distribution and works even with moderate samples. Spearman is a non-parametric alternative to Pearson's coefficient, suitable for detecting monotonic relationships between ordinal variables (Mendivelso and Rodríguez, 2022).

The data obtained from the 50 surveys were processed in Microsoft Excel, where the correlation matrix between staff turnover, job performance, and productivity was constructed. As a result, coefficients of 0.83 between turnover and productivity, 0.76 between turnover and performance, and 0.71 between performance and productivity were identified, which shows a strong correlation between the variables analyzed.

These coefficients were calculated by converting the ordinal responses into numerical values, which allowed Spearman's correlation to be applied in Microsoft Excel. Through this procedure, the strength and direction of the relationship between the main variables was determined, obtaining the matrix that supports the results of the study. (Table 6)

Table 6. Correlation of staff turnover variables and their relationship with productivity.

Variables	Turnover	Productivity	Job performance
Turnover	1	0.833	0.762
Productivity	0.833	1	0.715
Work performance	0.762	0.715	1

Interviews

Table 7. Interviews conducted with human resources professionals.

Questions	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3
1. Based on your experience, how do you think staff turnover affects job performance within commercial SMEs?	It slows down operations due to the constant need to train new staff.	It decreases productivity due to processes and new training.	It affects operational stability and temporarily reduces productivity.
Analysis: The interviewees agree that staff turnover directly affects the productivity of commercial SMEs. This situation forces the reassignment of tasks and delays processes while new staff are trained, which disrupts the operational rhythm and reduces team efficiency.			

<p>2. What operational difficulties have you observed following the frequent departure of employees in your organization or similar ones?</p>	<p>The absence of retention and training programs increases turnover</p>	<p>The adaptation and selection of new staff often presents complications</p>	<p>Service quality is compromised and delays in processes are generated.</p>
<p>Analysis: The main difficulties mentioned include the lack of retention programs, complications in integrating new staff, and operational delays. These problems affect the quality of work and create an additional burden for teams that must constantly adapt to new employees.</p>			
<p>3. How does the loss of trained personnel influence the fulfillment of established objectives or goals in small and medium-sized enterprises?</p>	<p>The lack of clarity in job profiles prevents goals from being adequately met.</p>	<p>It affects timelines and efficiency, as replacements need to learn processes.</p>	<p>It disrupts continuity in sales and causes the loss of customer relationships.</p>
<p>Analysis: The loss of trained personnel represents a break in operational continuity. Respondents highlight that this situation weakens the achievement of goals and forces the restructuring of processes, which is exacerbated if job profiles are not well defined or are inadequately assigned.</p>			
<p>4. How prepared do you think new staff are to assume their responsibilities after a recent turnover? How long does it usually take them to adapt to the pace of work?</p>	<p>The lack of adequate induction and training processes means that new staff do not have the necessary tools, which delays their integration into the expected pace of work.</p>	<p>Although staff with general experience are selected, mastering the specific internal processes takes time; on average, initial adaptation takes one month.</p>	<p>Most new employees are willing to learn, but those with low technical knowledge take three to five weeks to adapt, depending on their profile and alignment with the position.</p>
<p>Analysis: In general, new staff arrive with a willingness to learn but without the required technical knowledge. The lack of adequate induction delays their adaptation, which can take three to five weeks depending on their profile and the support they receive in their first weeks on the job.</p>			
<p>5. What strategies or practices do you consider effective in minimizing the negative impact of turnover on team performance?</p>	<p>A consistent training plan and follow-up during induction.</p>	<p>Effective onboarding facilitates integration and reduces the impact.</p>	<p>Cross-training and incentive programs strengthen commitment.</p>
<p>Analysis: It was considered essential to implement training plans, structured induction processes (onboarding), and cross-training within the team. These strategies help reduce the impact of turnover, facilitate the integration of new staff, and strengthen organizational commitment.</p>			

<p>6. Has staff turnover affected the work environment or team motivation in your workplace? If so, how?</p>	<p>Frequent turnover exhausts the team that must support new staff and deteriorates the work environment when there is no inclusive environment or corporate values that foster camaraderie.</p>	<p>Even if you try to manage the transition properly, the constant departure of employees can affect the atmosphere if the process of terminating and integrating new employees is not managed well.</p>	<p>During times of high turnover, the team becomes overloaded and internal tension builds, affecting motivation. Therefore, operational meetings with an emotional focus are held to contain the impact and strengthen commitment.</p>
<p>Analysis: Constant turnover overloads the remaining employees in the company, affects motivation, and deteriorates the work environment. To counteract this, the importance of fostering a collaborative environment, promoting strong organizational values, and implementing active listening spaces with staff was highlighted.</p>			
<p>7. Do you think that retaining human talent in commercial SMEs is key to maintaining a good level of organizational performance? Why?</p>	<p>Retaining high-performing staff is essential, as it avoids additional costs, reduces turnover, and allows for the development of stable employees with growth potential within the company.</p>	<p>An employee who stays with the company knows the processes and functions of other areas and facilitates internal development, something that is difficult to achieve with someone from outside who has to adapt from scratch.</p>	<p>Retaining human talent ensures stability and operational continuity, encourages the development of internal leaders, and reinforces organizational culture, especially in multifunctional companies.</p>
<p>Analysis: All interviewees believe that retaining human talent is key to the stability and good performance of SMEs. Staff retention allows for the consolidation of experienced teams, reduces recruitment costs, and develops committed internal leaders.</p>			

DISCUSSION

The results of this research show that staff turnover in commercial SMEs in Guayaquil directly affects the achievement of goals and overall performance. This situation is exacerbated when the departure of key workers is not offset by adequate internal planning.

A similar finding was documented in companies in the meat sales sector in Ecuador, where it was found that turnover and absenteeism deteriorate the work environment and generate operational overload (Llanos and Castillo, 2022). It was also identified that most companies are unable to retain their workers for more than a year, which prevents stable team consolidation. Studies conducted in Latin American countries have shown that operational turnover has negative effects on productivity and the organizational environment (Romero and Toscano, 2024). This phenomenon, in the context of Guayaquil SMEs, reflects weaknesses in talent management.

It was observed that in some SMEs there are no formal measures to reduce the impact of turnover, which hinders a smooth transition after staff leave. According to Tenelema (2025), Ecuadorian SMEs continue to have deficiencies in key processes such as staff selection, training, and motivation, which highlights the need for more strategic human talent management. In a study of a Mexican maquiladora, it was noted that sustained turnover is related to low levels of motivation and increased costs, which has an impact on overall productivity (Langle et al., 2021). Complementarily, Santoso, (2024) found that factors such as staff empowerment, organizational support, and a favorable environment are directly related to greater commitment, better performance, and lower turnover intention in small businesses.

On the other hand, it was found that companies with unfavorable work climates tend to have higher turnover and lower performance. In Ecuador, research was conducted which proved that a positive work environment promotes motivation and improves productivity, while a negative one increases turnover (Ortiz et al., 2025).

It should be noted that poor training of new staff was found to affect job continuity. Blount (2022) highlights that a well-structured onboarding process allows new employees to quickly align themselves with the company's culture and expectations, which reduces early turnover and strengthens commitment. In this regard, Avendaño and Napán(2024) pointed out that low motivation and lack of training contribute to high turnover rates, compromising organizational efficiency.

Studies conducted in other regions also coincide with these results. In SMEs in China's Guangdong province, Wu Wei and Ayo (2024) concluded that sound practices such as defined leadership and continuous

training reduce turnover and strengthen retention. At the operational level, Traore (2024) documented that absenteeism related to turnover causes delays, higher costs, and loss of service quality.

The relationship between productivity and sustainability was also highlighted by Damnjanovic et al,(2023) who warned that sustained low productivity can lead to the failure of small businesses if human resources are not managed properly.

Finally, the present study showed a high positive correlation between performance and productivity. This coincides with the findings of Ohene Afriyie et al.,(2024), who stated that high levels of commitment increase institutional efficiency. Complementarily, Makhdoom and Jamali (2025) pointed out that, in manufacturing environments, turnover reduces work quality and negatively affects team performance.

CONCLUSION

This research showed that staff turnover in small and medium-sized commercial enterprises in the city of Guayaquil has a direct impact on organizational productivity. Through the analysis of surveys and interviews, it was identified that this problem, although common, is not always addressed in a structured manner, which generates operational, economic, and human consequences within companies.

One of the most relevant findings was the high frequency of turnover in these organizations, coupled with the short length of time that staff remain in their positions, which prevents the consolidation of stable and trained teams. This situation not only disrupts the normal flow of work, but also requires additional resources to be allocated to the selection, training, and integration of new staff. In addition, it was found that most new employees are not adequately prepared to assume their duties immediately. This increases the workload for existing employees and affects operational efficiency in the first days of employment. If adequate support measures are not implemented, these effects are prolonged, compromising service quality and overall results. There was evidence of a lack of clear strategies for retaining human talent. Although SMEs recognize the importance of this issue, few have developed sustained actions to strengthen staff motivation, well-being, or loyalty. This weakness limits the possibility of having long-term committed employees, which exacerbates the effects of staff turnover.

It should be added that statistical results show a significant relationship between turnover, performance, and productivity. Companies with higher turnover tend to report a decline in team performance, as well as a reduction in work quality and process efficiency. This pattern is reinforced by the testimonies collected in interviews, where it was noted that job instability leads to overload, demotivation, and deterioration of the organizational environment.

Finally, it is concluded that reducing staff turnover requires strategic human talent management, based on appropriate selection processes, training plans, continuous monitoring, and actions aimed at retaining valuable staff. Commercial SMEs in Guayaquil must strengthen their internal policies to ensure the retention of human talent, as this is the only way they will be able to achieve high and stable productivity that will allow them to compete in an increasingly demanding environment.

As future lines of research, it is suggested to expand the sample to other sectors and regions of the country, apply longitudinal studies that observe the evolution of turnover and productivity over time, and incorporate organizational indicators that complement the findings obtained.

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