

Examining Staff Members' Views on Staff Retention Practices in a Public Higher Education Institution

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KEYWORDS College Staff. Job Satisfaction. Employee. Motivation. Work Environment

ABSTRACT Worker productivity is enhanced by good working conditions provided to workers. Good working conditions include perks and benefits. Underpinned by the Four Drive Model of Employee Motivation, the study sought to examine workers' views on staff retention measures at the workplace. The study adopted a mixed methods approach. A concurrent triangulation mixed methods design was employed. The study found that availability of medical allowances and pension schemes was disregarded at the workplace and that career advancement was not taken seriously as staff members who wanted to advance themselves were not supported. The study concludes that there were seriously negative issues regarding staff members' job satisfaction in the institution under study. The study recommends that institutions should have clear recruitment policies and that basic and attractive conditions of service should be put in place to attract staff and enhance job satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

It is very important to retain critical employees because these are the most important asset of any organization and have a great role to play in profit and loss and overall organization effectiveness (UK Essays 2016). Job satisfaction is a significant factor in retention (Aiken et al. 2002). Workers can only be retained at the workplace if they feel satisfied with the way they work and the overall conditions at the workplace. Half (2016) points out that retaining employees should be a main concern of every company and that it is vital for every company to create employee retention strategies. Research work by Döckel (2003) identified a set of specific factors that may influence staff retention. The factors included compensation (monetary and non-monetary rewards), job characteristics (skill variety and job autonomy), training and development opportunities (formal development activities provided by the organization), supervisor support (recognition by and feedback from supervisors to employees), career opportunities (internal and external career options an employee may have), work-life balance (employee's ability to meet both work and family commitments),

and organizational commitment (employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization).

Sinha and Shukla (2013) state that "employee retention refers to policies and practices companies use to prevent valuable employees from leaving their jobs." Every organization strives to attract and retain experienced, knowledgeable and competent staff. Varied working conditions attract staff members to their workplaces. Singh (2013) points out that having policies and practices that address the workers' diverse needs is one way of attracting staff to an organization. In places such as a teacher training, college staff members are enticed by mainly the environments existing in the institute. Providing environments that promote teaching and learning will not only attract staff to the workplace but also "assist in retaining them" (Maphosa et al. 2014: 349).

McLean (2003) observes that staff is attracted to workplaces by factors such as the socialization of the individual, skills and aptitudes the individual possess, media depiction of the specific work environments, role models and personal experiences in workplaces. Sandhya and Kumar (2011) point out that employee motivation is one important condition that attracts employees to their workplaces and these include open communication channels, employee reward package, career development strategies, performance-based tokens, recreation facilities and even gifts at some occasions.

Staff benefits are significant at workplaces. Singh (2013) believes that when an organization

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has employed good people, skilled them, built them to the expectations of the organization, it does not want to lose them. Benefits at work are vital in that they assist in attaining and maintaining a working environment that attracts and supports staff in remaining with the organization. Most employee benefits are meant to enhance the job satisfaction of the staff and retain them and this reduces recruitment and training costs. Sandhya and Kumar (2011) observe that staff benefits are not only meant for retention and reducing staff turnover costs but also for retaining talented and knowledgeable employees from moving to other organizations. An employee leaves the organization, with valuable information about the organization, the customers, and the current and past projects, and thus, staff benefits assist in retaining the organization's confidences and customer services.

Employees should feel a sense of belonging to the workplace if their needs are met. This is possible through employee engagement. The Corporate Leadership Council (2004: 5) defines employee engagement as:

"...The extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment."

It is apparent that actively and positively engaged workers are hard workers and exhibit organizational commitment. Such workers are bound to produce positive results for the organizations. Conversely, workers who are not engaged lack commitment and passion for their work and this has negative results for an organization (Lockwood 2007). It was the purpose of this present study to establish incentives in place that would save to retain workers in the institution.

Branham (2005) argues that employees' motivational commitment to the job and to an organization is a key indicator that they will be likely to serve the organization for a long time and this is only possible if an employee feels that the organization provides developmental, financial or professional rewards in the employee's best interests. This is where the issue of incentives such as remuneration and perks play a pivotal role. Properly remunerated employees have high levels of job satisfaction and will devote their time and energy to work for the good of the organization. This is consistent with the view shared by Kaye and Jordan-Evans (2003) that in order to retain talented workers, companies

should try to capture their minds and hearts at each stage of their work lives. Similarly, Glen (2006) observes that the use of reward and recognition measures is important in ensuring staff retention in an organization. Hence, the present study sought to establish how workers in the institution under study found the conditions under which they operated.

The issue of job satisfaction is also important as a determinant of staff retention. Parvin and Kabir (2011: 113) note numerous factors contributing to job satisfaction and observe that:

Some of these factors include the level of pay and benefits, the perceived fairness of the promotion system within a company, the quality of the working conditions, leadership and social relationships, and the job itself (the variety of tasks involved, the interest and challenge the job generates, and the clarity of the job description/requirements).

As raised in the view above, the existence of a fair promotion system is very important in ensuring job satisfaction. Workers should be aware of the requirements for promotion, appropriate and periodic calls for application for promotion should be made and the whole promotion process should be conducted in a clear and transparent manner. The present study, among other issues, sought to establish if the workplace had a clear promotion policy and the promotion procedures were implemented in a fair and transparent manner.

Previous Studies on Staff Conditions in Institution

Very few studies have been conducted in relation to college staff conditions in institutions. Studies similar to the study on staff conditions in institutions that have been conducted mainly reflected staff retention strategies. Kumar (2013) explored the link between employee benefits as a retention strategy in restaurant chains in India. The study concluded that it is important to have employee retention strategies in organizations and advises that in drafting new strategies, organizations should analyze the impact it brings to the organization. In a study by Kumar (2013) it was also concluded that consideration of employee development along with the organization's growth helps employees align their goals with that of the organization. The study also concluded that recruitment and se-

lection, employee engagement, organizational culture and benefits, training and induction if planned in advance, would save the organizational costs incurred with high employee turnover and lack of retention plans.

Ananthan and Sudheendra (2011) conducted a study to investigate the dynamics of employee retention practices and strategies and systems. Results revealed that orientation strategies were employed maximum followed by training and development strategies, management and organizational strategies as well as reward and recognition strategies least. Kumar and Dhamodharan (2013) conducted a study, which aimed at developing insight on how employee retention is relevant in the present business context. The major dimensions taken to measure the influence in employee retention were organizational fit, remuneration and recognition, career development, challenging opportunities, leadership, team relationship, organizational policies, communication, working environment, organizational commitment. The study found that factors such as challenging assignments, remuneration and recognition, and opportunities to learn new things, infrastructure, potential talent and the prospective roles influence employee retention.

Research Objectives of the Study

The research objectives of this study were to:

- ♦ Establish staff retention packages put into practice in a public higher education institution
- ♦ Suggest ways to improve staff retention practices in higher education organizations

Research Questions of the Study

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- ♦ What staff retention packages are available in public higher education institutions?
- ♦ How could staff retention practices in higher education organizations be improved?

Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by the Four Drive Model of Employee Motivation by Lawrence and Nohria (2002). The Four Drive the-

ory is based on research that shows four underlying drives to ensure employee engagement and motivation. The drives are to 'acquire and achieve', to 'bond and belong', to be 'challenged and comprehend' and to 'define and defend'. The model is a comprehensive way of looking at employee motivation rather than looking at the issue from the "pay" model, which is common in most workplaces. The theory is hinged on the realization that human beings have four fundamental, biological drives, that is, acquiring, bonding, learning and defending.

The 'acquire and achieve' drive merely focuses on remuneration and incentive issues as important in motivating workers whereas the other three drives play an important role in a holistic way of motivating workers. Therefore, in order to motivate workers and ensure staff retention, organizations should look at issues beyond pay and remuneration. The present study sought to establish measures in place in the institution under study meant to ensure staff retention as informed by the four drives model.

The issue of team building in an organization is important as it directly relates to the 'bond and belong' drive and should be taken seriously by organizations as they seek to create a united workforce that performs well. Similarly, the drive to be 'challenged and comprehend' shows that workers perform better when they are not bored or "not challenged" and learning on the job. This implies that any workplace with the intention to retain staff should have promotion procedures as well as career development programs. Workers are given the opportunity to learn new skills and to engage in more challenging responsibilities for their own career growth and for the good of the organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed method approach located in the post positivist paradigm. This is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). Gay and Airasian (2003) observe that quantitative research is characterized by a deductive approach and qualitative research is characterized by an inductive approach. A deductive approach is aimed at testing theory and an inductive approach is concerned with the generation of new theory emerging from the data. Inductive approaches are generally associated

with qualitative research, whilst deductive approaches are more commonly associated with quantitative research (Gabriel 2013). The mixed methods were considered more suitable in this study as collecting both quantitative and qualitative data provided a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied. The study employed a concurrent triangulation design in which both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time.

Population and Sampling

A sample is a group of subjects or participants from whom the data is collected (McMillan and Schumacher 2010: 129). According to Punch (2009: 251), representativeness is a key concept in sampling. A population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which researchers intend to generalize the results of the research. It is important for researchers to carefully and completely define both the target population and the sampling frame. This study sought to establish views on staff retention from staff members in a tertiary college understudy. A convenient sample of thirty-two (32) members of staff from a tertiary college in Zimbabwe participated in the study.

Instrumentation

Questionnaires and questerviews were used to collect data in this study. Questerviews carry open-ended questions that demand responses with explanations and they provoke explanations that encompass stories, narratives and detailed experiences from the study participants (Adamson et al. 2004). A questionnaire is relatively economical, as the same questions for all respondents are used and can ensure anonymity (McMillan and Schumacher 2010: 195). Questionnaires are often viewed as more suited to a large-scale quantitative research, but they can actually work effectively within a case study (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier 2013).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed statistically with the aid of SPSS version 22. Data was presented in frequencies and percentages as well as means and standard deviations.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were attended to, as informed consent was sought from participants as they were asked to fill in consent forms after the purpose of the study was explained to them. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point.

RESULTS

The type of working conditions that workers are subjected to influences retention and productivity employees. This section reports on the perceptions of employees in a public higher education institute, on staff retention measures at their workplace.

The biographic details show that the participants' age ranges from 30 to above 45 years and the age range with more participants was 38 to 45 years (Table 1). The majority of the respondents, that is, eighty-four percent (n=27) were over 38 years of age suggesting maturity in assessing issues regarding staff retention in the institution. The majority of the respondents, that is, sixty-eight percent (n=21) had more than five years of working experience further suggesting their being well-positioned to give informed judgment on the issue under investigation. There was a fair gender balance in the study sample, though there were slightly more male respondents. It was further noted from biographic details of the participants that the majority of them (63%) held higher ranks from senior lecture and above (n=20).

Table 1: Biographic details of participants (n=32)

<i>Biographic details</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	
<i>Age</i>	22-29	0	0
	30-37	5	16
	38-45	15	47
	Above 45	12	37
<i>Gender</i>	Male	19	59
	Female	13	41
<i>Teaching Experience</i>	1 – 5 years	11	34
	6 – 10 years	14	44
	Above 10 years	7	22
<i>Rank</i>	Lecturer	12	37
	Senior Lecturer	6	19
	Principal Lecturer	10	32
	Lecturer in Charge	2	6
	Head of Department	2	6
	Any other	0	0

On the issue of available incentives for staff retention, it was disturbing to note that none of the respondents indicated the availability of medical allowances and pension schemes, whilst very few respondents indicated the availability of attractive conditions of service, clear requirements for promotion, periodic call for staff promotion, financial incentives to supplement income as well as assistance in acquiring residential stands and personal vehicles (Table 2). It was however noted that a fairly sizeable number of the respondents confirmed the existence of a clear recruitment policy, availability of allowances for positions of special responsibility as well as availability of institutional accommodation and assistance with fees for spouses and children, though these were still in the minority.

In commenting on the available incentives for staff retention some of the negative comments were captured as follows:

Conditions of service are extremely bad, staff members walk on foot to report for duty.

The college has limited accommodation, which is dilapidated and even difficult to get.

In some cases the college offers shared accommodation only to few lecturers and the majority have to rent accommodation in the townships.

Staff members are expected to work hard but no one seems to care about the welfare of the workers.

Allowances for lecturers in charge have been stopped and it is very demoralizing.

One can stay in a grade for many years. Policies are not clear on promotion and salary regarding because of experience.

It is clear from the data that staff members were not generally satisfied with conditions existing in the institution, which negatively impacted job satisfaction. The table below shows responses on the extent to which respondents agreed with a given issue on staff retention.

On rating the level of agreement with an identified aspect of staff retention, it could be gleaned from the data that the majority of the respondents (78%) did not confirm the existence of a fair promotion policy (n=25) and that the conditions of service were attractive, (75%) (n=24). A great majority of the respondents (75%) (n=24) also could not confirm that staff members were satisfied with working in the college and none of the respondents confirmed this. Similarly, the majority of the respondents (56%) (n=18) did not confirm that staff members who wanted to advance themselves were supported and fifty-three percent (n=17) did not confirm that fair treatment of workers existed (Table 3).

In terms of ranking aspects of staff retention by mean responses the issue of general satisfaction with working in the college was the lowest followed by the existence of a fair promotion system. Issues of the existence of disciplinary procedures that were fair and fair recruitment system were ranked first and second, respectively (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The study found that key issues regarding workers' welfare such as availability of medical allowances and pension schemes were disregarded at the workplace. In line with Lawrence and

Table 2: Available incentives for staff retention (n=32)

Incentive availability	Yes	%	No	%
Staff recruitment policy	13	41	19	59
Staff promotion policy	4	12	28	88
Periodic calls for application for staff promotion	2	6	30	94
Clear requirements for staff promotion	2	6	30	94
Good conditions of service necessary for staff retention	1	3	31	97
Financial incentives for staff members	2	6	30	94
Allowances to supplement salaries	4	12	28	88
Allowances for special responsibility posts	10	31	22	69
Institutional accommodation for staff	15	47	17	53
Assistance in acquiring residential stands	3	9	29	91
Assistance in purchasing personal vehicles	2	6	30	94
Availability of staff transport to and from work	7	22	25	78
Assistance with fees for spouse and children	14	44	18	56
Availability of medical allowance	0	0	32	100
Funeral support for staff members	4	12	28	88
Availability of pension schemes	0	0	32	100

Table 3: The extent to which respondents agreed with the given issue on staff retention (n=32)

<i>Aspect of staff retention</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Unsure</i>		<i>Dis-agree</i>		<i>Strongly disagree</i>	
	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
The college has a fair recruitment system	7	22	3	9	10	31	5	16	7	22
The college has a fair promotion system	1	3	1	3	5	16	8	25	17	53
Conditions of service are attractive	1	3	1	3	6	19	8	25	16	50
Leave system is attractive	0	0	4	12	8	25	13	41	7	22
Management system promotes staff growth	0	0	4	13	15	46	4	13	9	28
Staff members who want to advance themselves are supported	4	13	4	13	6	18	7	22	11	34
There is fair treatment of staff members in the college	0	0	7	22	8	25	6	19	11	34
Disciplinary procedures are fair	3	9	8	25	11	34	5	16	5	16
There is low staff turnover in the college	2	6	4	12	14	44	5	16	7	22
Staff members are generally satisfied with working in the college	0	0	0	0	8	25	7	22	17	53

Table 4: Ranking of aspects of staff retention

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Aspect of staff retention</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
1	Disciplinary procedures are fair	2.97	1.204
2	The college has a fair recruitment system	2.94	1.435
3	There is low staff turnover in the college	2.66	1.153
4	Staff members who want to advance themselves are supported	2.47	1.414
5	Management system promotes staff growth	2.44	1.045
6	There is fair treatment of staff members in the college	2.34	1.181
7	Leave system is attractive	2.28	1.043
8	Conditions of service are attractive	1.84	1.051
9	The college has a fair promotion system	1.78	1.039
10	Staff members are generally satisfied with working in the college	1.72	0.851

Nohria's (2002) Four Drive Model of Employee Motivation to acquire and achieve drive is made through incentives such as pay. Therefore, for a worker to operate without attention given to welfare issues such as medical allowances and pension schemes serves to operate as demotivators. Workers, who are demotivated, invariably fail to develop a sense of belonging in a workplace and their effort and commitment to the organization is severely compromised. This is why Half (2016) states that it is vital for every company to create employee retention strategies.

It also emerged from the study that staff members were not happy with the general conditions of service in the institution as offered by the employer, that is, the government. The finding is consistent with the view by Dockel (2003) and UK Essays (2016) that compensation factors, which included monetary and non-monetary rewards were very instrumental in ensuring staff retention in the organization, as retaining critical workers in an institution brings profit to

the organization. Once workers fail to be properly remunerated, they are compelled to leave an organization for other ones in search of the proverbial 'greener pastures'.

It further emerged from the study that issues regarding promotion were a cause for concern. Staff members had problems regarding lack of clear requirements for promotion and periodic call for applications for staff promotion. Kumar and Dhamodharan (2013) note that worker recognition and career development are critical issues that organizations should attend to in an attempt to retain staff. This also ties very well with Lawrence and Nohria's (2002) 'challenged and comprehend' drive in the Four Drive Model of Employee Motivation where workers require to be challenged and cannot remain in the same positions for long periods of time, and hence the need for periodic and timely promotion as recognition for hard workers.

The study further established that career advancement was not taken seriously as staff

members who wanted to advance themselves were not supported. This finding corroborates findings by Sandhya and Kumar (2011) that the existence of clear career development strategies is essential in motivating workers and thereby retaining them in organization. An organization that does not have deliberate plans to nurture and support professional and career development of workers only succeeds in frustrating them and will lose workers.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there were serious negative issues regarding staff members' job satisfaction in the institution under study. The negative concerns revealed by this study had a potential of adversely affecting staff retention in the studied higher education institution. Instances were basic issues regarding conditions of service were not attended meant staff members operated in a frustrating and non-rewarding environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Against the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The institution should have a clear recruitment policy and all staff recruitment processes and procedures should be transparent and in line with the said policy.
2. Basic and attractive conditions of service should be put in place to attract staff and enhance job satisfaction.
3. Clear promotion procedures should be put in place and periodic calls for promotion for eligible members should be made.
4. Career advancement policy should be in place and staff members should be fully supported in their career advancement endeavors.

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Paper received for publication for August 2015
Paper accepted for publication for March 2016