

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Motivational Factors of Employee Retention and Engagement in Organizations

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Abstract

Retention is the process of physically keeping employee members in an organization as it is one of the key fundamentals that are necessary for organizational success. In a globalized environment, retention and engagement of high prospective employees are a huge challenge to organizations especially in times of high turnover rates. In many cases, even engaged employees are sometimes dissatisfied with the outcomes of organizational performance which may lead them to look elsewhere. Due to these reasons, this theoretical paper investigates motivational factors that influence employee retention and examines their impacts on both organizations and employees. This paper argues the motivational factors that are crucial in influencing employee retention are financial rewards, job characteristics, career development, recognition, management and work-life balance. Thus, organizations should formulate appropriate retention strategies in a holistic manner to reduce turnover rates, and these require a commitment from employers, but it will be well worth the investment in the long term.

Keywords: *Employee Retention, Engagement, Motivational Factors.*

Introduction

Employee retention and engagement is critical for organization because employees are the driving force to achieve the development and accomplishment of the organization's goals and objectives. Retention and engagement start at the very early stages of the recruitment process. It is a never ending process as retention and engagement is affected by almost all aspects of the business [1] and directly affecting the employee/employer relationships around the world. Regardless of the region, recruitment process and retention seem to take the biggest hits [2].

Andrew Carnegie, the famous industrialist of 19th century commented, "Take away my factories, my plants; take away my railroads, my ships, my transportation, take away my money; strip me of all of these but leave me my key employees, and in two or three years, I will have them all again" [3]. Even in today's evolution of technology, these words are very true. Retaining key employee is a vital source of competitive advantage for any organization. It was supported by a recent study by Career Systems International in 2005, which surveyed over 7,500 employees about retention process and found out the attributes of retention: 48.4% exciting work/challenge, 42.6% career growth/learning, 41.8% relationships/working

with great employees, 31.8% fair pay, and 25.1% supportive management/great boss [4]. High percentage of retention process will definitely describe that employees will remain in the organization for the maximum period of time. Thus, employers should consider as many options as possible in retaining employees while securing their trust and loyalty, as the cornerstones of relationships within the organization [5] and to meet the goals of employees without losing sight of the organization's goal [6].

Both concepts of retention and engagement are critical to ensure a highly productive workforce. It is no use having good personnel if they are just as likely to leave, and there is little utility having employees retained in the organization if they do not engage with the organization and what it does. Due to these reasons, this theoretical paper investigates motivational factors that influence employee retention and examines their impacts on both organizations and employees. This paper will formulate appropriate retention strategies that can be implemented to reduce turnover rates and enhance retention and engagement of employees.

Literature Review

In today's new era, employees can choose organizations that provide inducements and

retention benefits, in return, they will continue to impart knowledge and dedication to their work [7]. But employee cannot sustain growth if they are not satisfied with their growth path [3] and discouraged with the outcomes, unpaid and unmotivated [8] that may cause a gap between employees' effort and their organizational effectiveness.

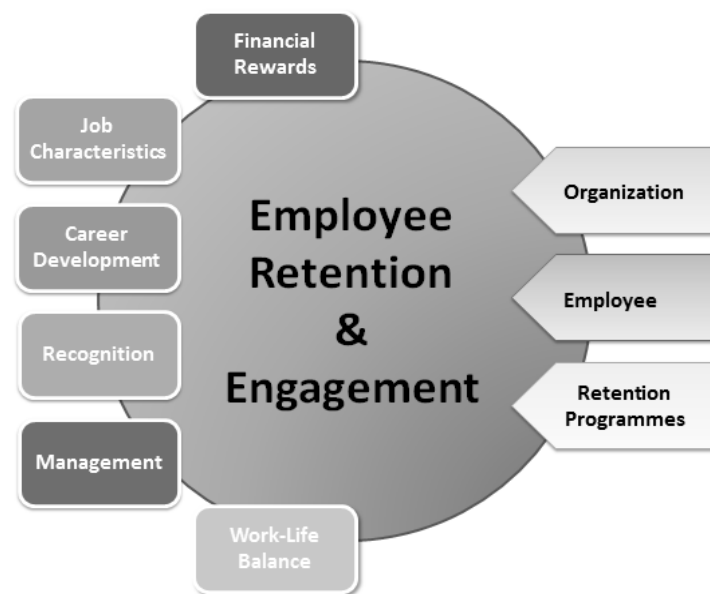
Most of the employees stay with the workplace if they receive motivating tools such as bonuses but yet remuneration is not the only thing that can motivate employees to stay [9]. Zwillling [10] believes that non-cash motivators may be more effective in the longer term than financial incentives. According to Padoa [11], BridgeGate LLC in 2000 conducted a study of 660 American workers on what would persuade them to stay with their current employer. They found pay raise (43.2 %) and (50.5%) non-monetary issues as motivators. The non-monetary motivators included: improved benefit programs (23.1%), flexible work schedules (14.1%), stock options (8.6%), and better training (4.7%). The biggest factor in attracting and most importantly retaining, key employee is culture. It is important for employees to feel like they are part of a team, need a connection to the vision and direction of the organization and their co-employees, need ways of working better together, which ultimately lead to more collaboration [12].

There are two interrelated strategies in understanding employee retention. First, there has been a significant focus on explaining why people leave organizations (voluntary turnover). Recently, research has focused on the multiple pathways that explain leaving [13]. Each pathway suggests different strategies for reducing voluntary turnover. Second, there is a growing emphasis on explaining why people stay [14], when they do stay, and why they choose to engage or not with their job and with the organization. A new survey by Right Management, the consulting arm of staffing group Manpower, finds that a whopping 84% of employees are planning on searching for a new job in [15]. But the problem is, when the employees move they not only take skills and knowledge but also trade secrets with the competitors' organization [16]. This paper helps identify the reasons for the high attrition rate.

Motivational Factors Influencing Employee Retention and Engagement

Employers can increase employee retention and engagement through a number of practical people-focused strategies. An effective retention program is one that embraces a variety of policies

and practices to create a work environment where employee wants to feel comfortable. Whatever the strategy adopted, an organization must ensure that the actions align with the mission, vision, culture, objectives, and values of the organization, as well as being realistic measures to meet employees' needs and expectations. Surveys, studies and articles, acknowledged for the past decades, were used to categorize the crucial factors in high employee retention and engagement. Broadly, many studies claim that there are several factors that determine an organization's ability to attract and retain employees (Fig. 1).



Source: Modified from the Recruitment Communications Company, *Understanding Employee Retention*, 2002

Fig. 1: Motivational factors for employee retention and engagement

Financial Rewards

In a competitive business world, more employers are looking at developments in excellence and increase productivity while decreasing costs. An employee reward program is one method of motivating employees to change work routines and key behaviours to benefit an organization. Reward programs are frequently used by organization to try to retain employees [17]. Most studies noted that financial reward is one of the basic types of extrinsic monetary rewards which cover the basic needs of income to survive (to pay bills), a feeling of stability and consistency (the job is secure), and recognition (my workplace values my skills). In today's economic times, financial reward such as money is still the primary incentive that causes employee to do better work. However, most experts agree that money is not the long-term answer for hiring, especially for keeping, high skilled employees [18]. For instance, a study conducted by the

“Institute for Employment Studies” in the United Kingdom stated that only 10% of employees who had left their employer gave dissatisfaction with pay as the main reason for leaving [19]. Many organizations used this tactic to commit their employees to remain by means of remuneration packages [20-22]. An example of this, in a study by Horwitz et al [23] found that the most popular retention strategy reported by HR managers of knowledge firms was still related to compensation.

Higginbotham [24] stated that high salaries are not important, but “good” and “fair” salaries showed a strong correlation with intention to remain, indicating that as long as the compensation is competitive, financial rewards are not the primary factor in retention [25] support this testimonial, which indicated that the actual level of pay is less important than feelings about pay raises and the process used to administer them. Employees want to understand how the pay system works, and want to know how they can earn pay increases. Once the pay level has been reached, other things become important, the intangibles, e.g. career, supervisory support, work and family balance etc. [26]. According to Farris [17], one time recognition awards are not effective in preventing turnover, rather small non-cash rewards and good old fashioned permanent salary increases were the most effective in decreasing the probability of turnover.

Job Characteristics

It is defined as “the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual to schedule work and determine the procedures used in carrying it out” [26]. It builds on the assumption that people do not just work for the money but also create purpose and satisfaction in their life [21,27]. According to Woodruffe [22], employees in addition to a strong need to deliver excellent results, also want to take on difficult challenges that are relevant to the organization. However, repetitive-based performance of tasks, the probability of de-motivation and turnover are relatively high. Research has shown that the design of high skilled employees’ work content influences the stability of the technical work force [28]. Furthermore, when employees view their tasks as challenging with opportunities for learning and information exchange, they are also less likely to leave. According to Amabile *et al.* [28] and Glynn [29], highly skilled employees, appeared to be more involved, more satisfied with their jobs, and more committed to the organization than non-high skilled employees did.

On the other hand, unengaged employees will leave the organization if their skills are under-utilized.

McEachern [30] reported that employees who had skills and training, but were not fully utilized would end up in a supportive role. Organizations are addressing the personal needs of their employees to enhance retention. Some organizations keep employees satisfied by giving them a chance to be creative, master different skills and pursue projects that interest them [31]. When a task requires an employee to stretch his/her skills and abilities, the task is almost invariably experienced as meaningful by the individual. When a job draws on several skills of an employee, he or she may find the job to have highly personal meaning even if it is, not of great significance or importance [32].

Career Development

The 21st century employment relationship has redefined development and career opportunity. Development is now considered as gaining new skills and taking advantage of many different methods of learning that benefit employees and the organization alike [33]. Employees benefit by experiencing greater satisfaction about their ability to achieve results on the job and by taking responsibility for their career; the organization benefits by having employees with more skills who are more productive. The availability of employees in terms of skill development opportunities and career movement is the ‘key attractors’ to organizations. If an organization does not recognize the individual’s need and desire to grow, then ‘development’ becomes a primary reason for resignation [34, 35].

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [36] states organizations need to realize that career development of their workforce is a way of attracting and retaining the best people. By recognizing and responding to the needs of employees they will get the best out of them. It was suggested that an organization that wants to strengthen its bond with its employees must invest in the development of these employees [37-39]. By offering career development opportunities, employers can help employees enhance their employability in the internal and external labor market [40] and develop their own personal competitive advantage. Many employees look out for employers who provide training and skill development activities that facilitate career improvement. When they receive such opportunities, employees are likely to commit to the organization. For instance, a study by Allen *et al.* [41] found that employee’ insights on growth

opportunities offered by employers reduced turnover intentions. Horwitz [23] reports that the problem of lack of skilled workers in Asia, particularly China and Japan, is seen to be the biggest threat and is frequently cited reason for high-performers to leave the organizations in the future.

Recognition

Jacobson [42] states that every employee has a need to be commended and recognized, and the more often they get it, the better. Being recognized for doing a good job makes individuals feel better about themselves and the organization they work for ensuring more loyalty. Employers are in the best position to recognize and retain today's employees. Heathfield [43] suggests that organizations should prioritize employee recognition to create a positive, productive and innovative organizational climate. He added that people who feel appreciated are more productive about themselves and their ability to contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. In 2011, Accenture in Ireland conducted a survey about the level of recognition that employees receive for doing a good job at work, and found 63% who have no plans of leaving are satisfied with their recognition, while 24% are not satisfied with the recognition of the organizations [44]. Given these numerous results, organizations should seek changes to improve their strategies like to eliminate favoritism, recognize more than just the elite, and value employees for more than their work.

Nelson [45] suggests that, in order for organizations to ensure that employee recognition activities are effective, genuine and meaningful, they should consider the following: recognition should be fair, transparent, inclusive, frequent, timely and varied; the form of recognition used should be appropriate to the contribution that was made; recognition should be meaningful and reflect the preferences of the recipients. Heathfield [46] adds the following guidelines for effective employee recognition: fairness, clarity and consistency; employee recognition approaches and content must be consistent; organizations must be specific in letting the individual know the reason for the recognition.

Management

Kreitner *et al.* [47], as cited in Bagraim *et al.* [48] define management as the process of working with and through others to achieve organizational objectives in an efficient and ethical manner. Manager plays a significant role in influencing the employee's commitment level and

retention. There are a number of manager's retention practices which increase the probability that an employee will remain committed to an organization over time. Management practices have a direct effect on employee turnover. These factors are the most influential: scheduling off-duty employees to work, limited training time, non-competitive pay rate and poor employee communication [49]. Ware & Fern [50] suggest these dimensions must be infused in place and aligned for an organization to achieve world class employee's commitment level and retention.

In a research conducted by Mastery Works Inc, Farren [51] reports that one of the factors affecting an employee's decision to leave an organization was whether the manager developed a trusting relationship with the employee. The survey found that managers who respected and valued employees' competency, paid attention to their aspirations, assured challenging work, valued the quality of work life and provided chances for learning, had loyal and engaged employees. In these days of corporate scandals, having a manager with integrity and respect has become more important than ever. A quality manager will inspire the employees to work harder and they will motivate employees to stay with the organization.

Work-Life Balance

In the modern lifestyle, 24 hours per day is not enough to tackle work and personal tasks. Work-life balance has become a pre-dominant issue in the workplace especially in the society filled with conflicting responsibilities and commitments [52]. Facilitating a good work-life balance is one of the retention factors frequently cited in the literature [53]. The conflict between work and career on the one hand and private life on the other is currently assuming large proportions in our society. Many organizations instituted hotlines, programs, or even software to ensure that these conflicts do not diminish the quality and productivity of employees' work [52]. There is an increasing demand for more flexible forms of work, which would positively affect the reduction of the work-family conflict and employee satisfaction in general [53,54].

Work-life balance policies help employees reduce the impact of work on family life, thereby often reducing stress levels, while increasing focus and motivation at work knowing that family and work commitments are being met. For employers, these policies often mean greater staff loyalty and commitment, resulting in lower turnover, and higher attraction levels. For instance, Greenslopes Private Hospital in Australia, an award winner in 2005, found that investing in

better work and family initiatives led to a 5.5% reduction in employee turnover and a 23% reduction in workers' compensation costs. Another sample, St. George Bank in Australia, a winner in 2007, reported reduced staff turnover from 18% in 2001 to 15% in 2006 and improved staff satisfaction from 48% of employees in 2002 to 73% in 2006 as some of the positive outcomes of introducing work-life balance initiatives [55]. Research suggests that policies aimed at improving the work-life balance are successful if they are implemented in a supportive context that truly allows employees to make meaningful and useful choices [53,54]. Lockwood [52] also suggests that forward-thinking human resource professionals seeking innovative ways to augment their organization's competitive advantage in the marketplace may find that work/life balance challenges offer a win-win solution. Many other factors exist that might apply to a particular organization and the importance of these factors will also vary within the organization.

Psychological Factor Affecting Employee Retention

In relation to the above mentioned organizational factors, various research and studies suggest that employers should consider these factors when implementing retention policies. However, most recent research on retention management has not tailored all types of retention factors which are impossible to measure their relativity in the retention practices. To understand the effectiveness of these retention factors, it is imperative to relate them to employees' views on their importance and actual delivery by their employer. This practice is known as psychological contract.

The concept of psychological contract was first used by Argyris [56] and has been developed further by the works of many researchers like Levinson *et al.* [57], Schein [58, 59], and most recently by Rousseau [60-62]. A psychological contract is an unwritten set of expectations that exists between an employee and the employer [63]. Rousseau [60] stated that these expectations are difficult to comprehend as a whole. They can be seen more like a multiple collective of diverse and differing expectations held by a set of actors [64]. Therefore, when these expectations are broken, employees' behavior in the workplace rests heavily, feeling disappointed and ultimately motivation on the job will suffer. Psychological contracts are based on specific promises made by both parties and on generally accepted promises that are based on the general

obligations of employers and employees. They emerge when individuals believe that their organization has promised to provide them with certain inducements in return for the contributions they make to the organization [65], and gives an employee a feeling of influence on work related outcomes [66]. If an employer has not made specific promises in that regard, every employee will appreciate clarity, fairness and good communication. Every employer will appreciate employees dealing properly with confidential information and doing good work. In addition, the psychological contract is further augmented with written agreements, such as employment contracts [67].

Formerly, research shows that employees are rather pessimistic about the extent to which their organization exists to its promises. For instance, one study discovered that as many as 50% of MBA graduates in the Midwestern U.S. Management School believed that their employers had broken their psychological contracts within the first two years of employment (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Another study reported that 25% of respondents among employees surveyed during a company restructuring, reported significant psychological contract violations [68]. An increasing number of today's employees believe they have suffered an injustice or have been treated unfairly by their employers.

Conclusion

A main concern of any organization is its capacity to attract, engage, and retain the right employee. Certain factors are crucial in influencing the employees' decision to either leave or remain in an organization. Nonetheless, the importance of other factors should not be miscalculated when formulating a retention policy. Organization should provide with a number of strategies to increase employee retention such as: design an interesting employee value proposition; develop a total reward system that contains more than compensation; give constructive point of view on employee performance on regular basis; implement flexibility programs in terms of work-life balance; build a culture of engagement, develop and refine management skills to be effective, as it engages employees while driving improved performance at the same time (Neelman, 2012). Also, employers should focus on issues and on the personal relationships they have with the employee to perform each function. This research sought to identify factors that affect employee retention and predict ways that the organization can improve on current practices.

The literature was helpful in pointing out that employees stay or leave an organization based on six key reasons, they were: financial rewards, job characteristics, career development, recognition, employee management and work-life balance. The factors represent a holistic systems approach to reducing turnover in organizations. Employers could take pieces of this process and implement, and for long-term impact, all components of the process must be addressed. It takes time and

commitment from employers, but it will be well worth the investment in the end.

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