MITIGATING STAFF TURNOVER IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS: LESSONS FROM ZIMBABWE'S STATE UNIVERSITIES

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Supplier information sharing, Supplier collaboration, Supplier ICT Integration, Supplier value creation and Performance of FMCG	This study analyzes the antecedents, consequences, and managerial retention strategies of employee turnover in Zimbabwean state universities. The study purposively sampled 30 employees from five universities in the country, and data was collected through focus group interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to generate recurring themes from the interviews. The findings reveal that the main causes of employee exits are poor career progression, lack of promotion, poor leadership strategies, location, and poor working conditions. Additionally, staff exit results in work overload and high costs of recruitment, selection, and training of new employees. As a managerial strategy, it was suggested that top management should consider local people first if they qualify for the position to mitigate high employee turnover. Overall, this study contributes to academic researchers, HR practitioners, and management by identifying strategies to mitigate high employee turnover in higher learning institutions, particularly in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

This research investigates the causes, consequences and mitigation strategies of labor turnover in universities. The effect of labor turnover has received attention from top management, human resources practitioners and industrial psychologists. It has emerged to be one of the costly and seemingly human resource challenges encountered by both public and private entities across the globe (Dwesini, 2019). Nyaga (2015) notes that employers are using approximately US$15, 000 per employee, which comprises other costs like overtime, employing temporary employees or consultancy, and replacement costs that encompass advertisement, interview time, and training. In addition, Muiruri (2012) postulates that high employee turnover necessitates other organizational expenses like decreased sales that may cost around $3, 000 to $10,000 per hour for every employee who has departed the organization.

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The academic literature reveals that employees who are satisfied with their jobs and committed to their institutions are more likely to be glued or attached than those who are discontented (Thomas 2013; Dwesini 2019). It was observed that labor turnover is a serious problem in different entities and universities are not spared (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). High labor turnover is believed to result in poor organizational growth and performance, disgruntled employees and a lack of appeal to talented employees (OwenCE et al., 2014). High labor turnover also coerces talented employees to leave the organization and automatically reduces productivity and quality of service (Mawodza, 2014). Therefore, the above assertion means that labor turnover is a salient matter in human resource management and executive managers.

The literature review shows that several studies were done on labor turnover in the hospitality industry (Dwesini, 2019), and other industries like retailing (Hammerberg, 2002), and mining (Mawodza, 2014), hence there is an imbalance in institutions of higher learning, especially in developing countries. Some studies disclose that black universities are experiencing high labor turnover, and 66% of employees in black universities are leaving their institutions per year, which is a serious crisis for the organization (Owence et al., 2014). Zimbabwean universities are also facing a high exodus of employees in different departments. The statistics which were revealed by the human resource departments of the universities indicate that 18% of employees left the university between 2020 and 2021, which is a serious concern to the universities. The high exodus of employees causes those who remain to have stress, triggered by work overload, hence causing poor performance.

Labor turnover necessitates some serious devastation to the business in the form of both direct costs (recruitment and selection, advertisement, orientation, training) and indirect costs (loss of production, self-confidence, and dwindling of social capital) (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Dwesini (2019) asserts two classifications of labor turnover which are voluntary and involuntary. In Zimbabwean universities, most employees voluntarily leave their jobs. Salaries are indeed very low in the state universities due to the economy which is in turmoil. However, what is shocking is that some of these employees who are leaving are joining other state universities where the salaries are the same. Further to that, they are given the same positions and responsibilities as previous ones. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the antecedents, consequences and managerial retention strategies of labor turnover in State universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW Employee Turnover

Labor turnover is the situation whereby employees leave the organization voluntarily or involuntarily (Malek et al., 2018). It has also been defined as the ratio of employees who have left or detached themselves from the organization during the period being considered divided by the average number of employees in that organization (temporary, contract workers and permanent employees) during the period (Iqbal, 2010). Some scholars viewed employee turnover as the continuous exodus of employees from organizations at a specified period (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Due to its dismal effect, employee turnover has been a considerable topic for scholars, academics and top management. Therefore, it is imperative to discuss types of employee turnover, causes, effects and reduction strategies of labor turnover.

Types of Labor Turnover

There are several types of turnover which were discussed by other scholars which are voluntary and involuntary turnover, functional and dysfunctional turnover, and avoidable and unavoidable turnover (Dwesini, 2019). Voluntary turnover refers to when an employee decides to leave an organization by choice. It can be caused by the need for a higher salary, better worklife balance, and more opportunities to progress in their careers (Mawodza, 2014). Involuntary turnover includes layoffs or reductions in force and termination of poorly performing employees (Mawodza, 2014). Functional turnover is when employees' exit becomes a benefit on the side of the

owners of production (Kadiri & Isiaka, 2017). Dysfunctional turnover is critical to the employer because the organization is still interested in the services of the leaving employee. Mostly, employers would like to retain an employee because of what he/she offers (Dwivedi & Chaturvedi, 2019).

Dysfunctional turnover is considered costly to an organization because it is difficult to replace a talented employee who had left the organization. The skills of talented employees are rare to find and difficult to imitate and hence it is a loss on the side of employers (Dwesini, 2019). Hard-working employees are eager to face and learn new challenges, hence they easily leave the organization if they perceive that something is wrong within the present organization (Asimah, 2018). Unavoidable turnover is necessitated by life decisions that are detached from the organization or work itself. These are decisions that are out of an employee's control, for example transferring to another location, region or country to join a spouse and leaving the organization due to ill health (Dwesini, 2019). On the other hand, avoidable turnover might be prevented by the management by instigating effective human resource practices that attract employees to stay with the organization. Examples of avoidable turnover are when an employee is leaving the entity because of mismanagement, low job satisfaction and poor remuneration. These administrative issues might be improved by the organization (Lee & Mitchell, 2003).

Internal turnover is when employees move from one position to the other in the same entity. Normally, internal turnover takes place when an employee is getting a promotion either in the same department or in another department but in that same organization (Kadiri & Isiaka, 2017). It is related to internal recruitment, where the organization decides to fill the vacant position with their employee in the organization. Inconsistently, external turnover is when an employee moves from one organization to another. Mostly, external turnover takes place when an employee is taking a higher position in another organization (Porter et al., 2016).

Positions which do not need any qualification or profession often face high labor turnover. However, unskilled turnover does not affect the organization because it does not incur any losses of performance. These positions can be replaced easily because anyone can do the job and the labor market has available prospective employees anytime they are needed (Mawodza, 2014). On the other hand, professional employees generate a serious predicament for the organization because sometimes it is difficult to replace them. Therefore, turnover for skilled professionals incurs some serious replacement costs such as training the new employees and motivating the employee to quickly adapt to the organizational culture and environment (Dwivedi et al., 2019).

Causes of Employee Turnover

Job dissatisfaction

Job dissatisfaction is one of the factors that trigger employee turnover. When employees are discontented with their job, they detach themselves from the organization (Iqbal, 2010). It was revealed that, the association between job satisfaction and employee turnover augments when the unemployment rate is low and decreases when the unemployment rate increases (Owence et al., 2014). Dissatisfied employees are dangerous to the organization because they can influence other employees to underperform or to listen to their superiors. Further, dissatisfied employees might cause a serious vendetta between management and other employees that may trigger increased migration of employees from the organization (Vakira et al., 2022).

Better pay elsewhere

Pay is articulated as the wages, salary or remuneration given to an employee in exchange for rendering their services to the organization. It is interesting to note that employees view themselves as more productive and their salaries are not congruent with their effort (Nyaga, 2015). Mostly, several employees leave their jobs because of the availability of better-paying jobs elsewhere. In addition to that, the situation is now volatile in this era due to globalization (Owence et al., 2014). Fredrick Taylor, father of scientific management, noted that humans are

economic animals, they are always motivated by tangible resources such as salary and other benefits. Therefore, it can be argued that pay is the most important outcome of the organizational membership of employees. If employees perceive that there is no fairness in terms of salary distribution, there will be a serious friction between employees and owners of production, in the end, employees always find their way out of the organization (Iqbal, 2010).

The person

Mostly, employee mobility is indeed necessitated by salaries and wages and working conditions (Harunavamwe, 2018); however, there are individual factors that initiate employee turnover. These factors encompass personality traits (Owence et al., 2014). These personality traits include the desire to acquire a new skill, change of profession and family situation. Most employees are compelled to change their organizations because of their family situations. If the entire family is based in a certain region or another country, one would be compelled to sacrifice the present job and join the family. In addition, personal issues embrace relocation, health issues, chemical abuse and marriage situations (Hammerberg, 2002). An employee might terminate the contract because the spouse got a paying job in another location, hence there is a need to migrate to a new location and environment. Further, personal issues like relationships within the organization might propel an employee to leave the organization. Experiencing a bad relationship with the boss or the superior might be the driver of employee migration from the organization.

Managerial factors

High labor turnover sometimes is generated by the instability of management in an organization. Most employees are eager to work in a stable working environment, and failure to provide such an environment, employees leave the organization (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Furthermore, employees are not pigeons, they think for themselves and do not want to be manipulated (Hammerberg, 2002). Employees need to be involved in decision-making so that they can take it as their initiation. Management is always influential in the employment relationship. If the relationship between the two parties is indecorous, employees will not take the time to detach themselves and join another employer given an opportunity (Dwesini, 2019). In that same vein, Hetrick et al. (2022) highlighted that a leader's nefarious act is one of the prevailing reasons that propel employees to exit the organization. Displaying evil behavior by the leader may cause employees to think otherwise, hence exodus of employees will take place. In addition to the above assertion, one of the reasons why employees are leaving organizations is lack of coordination. Coordination is the process of communicating job activities that can necessitate organizational performance. Gabelica et al. (2016) highlighted that poor coordination leads to reduced performance and correctly coordinated teams perform better. Therefore, a conflict between superiors and subordinates is caused by poor coordination and that triggers turnover intention behavior that can turn into actual turnover (Akinyomi, 2016). Furthermore, leaders or management sometimes do not fulfill perceived promises to their employees, thus psychological contract breaches. Low perceived organizational support may activate the intention to quit behavior, which negatively affects organizational support (Cruz et al., 2022). In that same vein, Lin and Chi (2022) assert that leaders sometimes put unfair pressure on employees to engage in uncompensated extra role work activities beyond their formal job responsibilities. Working for extra role activities may coerce employees to leave the organization, in a quest to find organizations that do not compel employees into compulsory organizational citizenship behavior. Social exchange theory argues that employees give their all if the organization is ready to consistently pay back their effort.

Working environment

The working environment is one of the factors that force employees not to be identified with the organization. A conducive work environment motivates employees to come to work and that may sustain them to serve the organization for a long time. Basic facilities like heat, failure to provide drinking water, employee houses, free wifi, outdated furniture, work overload, and old equipment are some of the issues that amplify employee thoughts of leaving the organization (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Further to the above, a bad leader also plays a role in creating a hostile working environment that leads to employee exodus. The length of time that employees spend with the organization has largely contributed to the relationship between them and their managers. Dwesini (2019) posited that leaders should control and influence the operations of the organization and hence controlling staff turnover is the only way to improve its operations. Owners of production and managers should continually enhance the working environment for both their internal and external customers. Continuous improvement of the working environment is linked to favorable organizational results, profit maximization, customer satisfaction, loyalty and reduced labor turnover (Arokiasamy, 2013).

Career development

When employees perceive that there are no plans for career development or advancement in their current job or future, they have no reason to stay with the same employer. If career growth is desired, employees eventually depart the current employer and join another where there are employee career development plans in place (Hammerberg, 2002). The immediate supervisors of different departments need to provide support through the career advancement of their subordinates. The onus of career development lies with the employees, so if they are satisfied with the career development policy of the organization, they have no reason to leave the entity (Asimah, 2018).

Career promotion

Most organizations use pay, promotion, benefits and different kinds of bonuses to enhance high levels of employee performance and satisfaction. However, the lack of employee promotion immensely contributes to employee intention to leave the organization (Thomas, 2014). Employees are economic animals; consequently, it is difficult to keep hold of employees when paying significantly less than other organizations and this problem is not found in all sectors of business (Hammerberg, 2002). The reason behind employee promotion is to motivate them to continuously serve the organization. To a certain extent, employees leave the organization because of ineffective performance assessment and job unfairness. If employees realize that there is nepotism which leads to job unfairness, their intention to leave will be amplified (Mamun & Hasan, 2017).

Mitigating Strategies for Employee Turnover

Good working environment

Literature advocates that the retention of employees has become a strategic issue for several organizations globally and human resource management scholars and practitioners are concentrating more on it (Dwesini, 2019). A good working environment is one of the strategies which reduces the number of employees who are enthusiastic to depart the organization. Nyaga (2015) posited that providing a healthy work environment, which nurtures happy, empowered and motivated employees, reduces high labor turnover and absentee rates. Further, a work environment that encourages personal and professional growth promotes peace and harmony in the organization. Supportive leaders create time for interaction and availability of resources, and clean and safe work conditions are more vital than higher salaries (Muiruri, 2012). Kniffin et al. (2015) suggested that one of the environmental elements of workplaces that should be included as a positive source that improves team performance is cooperative activities, for example eating together in the canteen can enhance organizational

performance and reduce employee turnover. Cooperation again can help employees to recover from work overload that builds up from work, caused by employee attrition. Work overload can negatively affect the psychological health of employees, hence it is important for the organization to give employees ample time to rest so that they can recover (van Hooff et al., 2018).

Good and effective leadership

One of the issues which necessitate high employee turnover is the lack of support from the top management. The lack of good leadership qualities arouses the anxiety of employees to exit the organization. So, the entity must impart knowledge to its leaders in every department about the importance of exhibiting improved leadership skills. Employees are not supposed to be friends with their leaders, but they need to have a healthy relationship with their respective captains (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). In addition, leaders are viewed as people who hold respected positions that are influential to society and the organization. Leaders should attempt to support and make sure that employees get their needs first so that they can have an organizational attachment. They should empower their members to be prosocial agents that can deposit good things that make others better (Mostafa, 2022). Leaders are role models, so they can positively impact the attitudes and behaviors of their followers, hence reducing the idea of leaving the organization (Sawhney et al., 2022).

In addition, leaders should create an environment where employees relate well among themselves. Creating an environment where there is a reciprocal relationship is ideal for employee retention. Employees might find it difficult to leave the organization if they perceive their relationship with management and co-workers as strong. The above sentiments are in line with the social exchange theory that asserts that organizations should always support their employees in the form of human capital development or competitive rewards. If the employers do not breach their promises to the employees, they might be obliged to give back to the organization by serving the organization for a long time and improving performance (Cruz et al., 2022).

Recruiting appropriate employees for the job

Recruiting is the process of placing the right employees for the job. If the organization hires suitable employees for the job, it minimizes high labor turnover (Thomas, 2013). Sometimes it is critical to employ employees from within the community because those who are hired from other places might be compelled to look for jobs close to where they come from (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Owners of production need to be proactive when hiring new employees and identify prospective employees whose backgrounds show a negative behavior pattern. Therefore, it is imperative for the organization, particularly the recruitment team to do background checks for aspiring employees. Background checks help the organization to identify leapfrog employees and those who might be involved in negative behavior such as theft, violence, drug usage, and frequent job dismissal for different explanations (Hammerberg, 2002).

Compensation

Competitive compensation is one of the most effective strategies for retaining employees. Good reward programs facilitate employee engagement and lead to career growth and personal development (Dwesini, 2019). Offering competitive rewards necessitates employees to stick with the organization for an extended period in their career, and the bottom line of the organization can be realized easily. Nyaga (2015) postulated that employees always flock to organizations that bargain for better salaries and benefits. Therefore, universities need to consider offering their employees better salaries and benefits as a way of retaining them.

Career promotion

Career promotion is one of the reasons why employees leave organizations. When the organization is busy promoting external recruitment at the expense of qualified employees who have been working for the entity for

some time, it demoralizes their organizational identification, and they will be duty-bound to exit the organization (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). The best way of motivating employees is through bundling of pay, promotion, bonus and other ways of rewards that can be applied by the organization to retain its talented and loyal employees. Lack of career promotion significantly contributed to employees' intention to leave the organization (Thomas, 2013). The top management must generate policies that consider promoting employees internally, particularly those with relevant qualifications and experience for the job in question so that they can stick with the organization.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the most important ingredient for reducing employees exiting the organization. When employees are content with their jobs, it may bring engagement with their current organization (Dwesini, 2019). It is believed that employee happiness is strongly linked to retention. When employees are content with their job roles and responsibilities, they are not easily convinced by friends and workmates to leave the organization; rather, they will act as ambassadors of the organization when they mix and mingle with other people on different occasions (Dwesini, 2019). Some of the ways to improve job satisfaction are employee involvement in decision making, positive organizational climate and culture, represented by honesty and teamwork (Akinyomi, 2016). The organization needs to involve employees in critical issues which affect employees and also create a positive organizational climate and culture.

Provision of training and development opportunities

Training and development is another strategy that can be used to retain or control high labor turnover in the organization. Training provides employees with specific skills they need to perform better in their job roles. Development is a process of enhancing the current skill that employees already possess (Akinyomi, 2016). Developing employee skills is of paramount importance as the organization significantly benefits in future. Training and development are some of the reasons why employees decide not to leave the organization, especially young and energetic employees (Nyaga, 2015). Training and development are among the top reasons why employees stay with the organization. However, some entities perceive training and development as costly as compared to salary increments (Thomas, 2013). Employees are no longer glued to the organization because of the best compensation strategies offered by the entity, but they consider organizations that take training and development seriously. Further to that, it is imperative to have both specific human capital and general human capital. Human capital is defined by Brown and Harris (2022) as employee skills, knowledge, and other abilities that propel the individual to perform better in the workplace. Universities in developing countries employ people with general skills that are easily transferable to the next organization, hence labor turnover is high. It is critical to develop specific skills that are only relevant to the organization so that employees can be staunch to the organization. In that regard, it is critical to train and develop employees because it is one of the tools for retaining employees of this generation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY Population of the Study

The population for the current study includes the existing workforce at State Universities and those who left the organization. The population of the study comprises current employees at 13 state universities in Zimbabwe and former employees. The study targeted both academic and non-academic employees who left the universities between 2020 and 2021.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The main objective of qualitative research is to accomplish a point of saturation (Shereni, 2019). Saturation emerges when the addition of more participants does not yield any new ideas or perspectives. The sample size of the study was determined by the saturation obtained from the participants, both those who are working for the

organization and those who had departed. The study used focus group interviews, and each focus group had six respondents. The composition of the respondents in each focus group was three current employees and three former employees. Five focus groups were interviewed from five different state universities in Zimbabwe. The point of saturation was reached on the fifth focus group as there was no new information coming out from the interviews. The sample size of the study was 30 respondents. Further, a purposive non-probability sample also known as judgmental sampling was adopted in the study. Purposive sampling is selecting a sample based on an individual's familiarity with the nature and context of the study.

Data Collection Instrument

The researchers used focus group interviews to collect the needed data from participants using structured questions. Further, researchers made use of information gathered from the human resource departments of five state universities to ensure that they have access to those who exited the organization. The participants were told that their responses would be kept confidential.

Data Analysis

The study used the thematic analysis method to analyze the data that were collected from respondents using a purposive sampling technique. The method helped the researchers to identify, organize and offer insights on what is common from the data so that themes are formed (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The themes for data presentation and analysis were designed following the research objectives. Researchers further analyzed the data by comparing the research findings with existing literature on labor turnover.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION the underlying factors that lead to employee exit at universities

Respondents were asked to indicate the main reason that leads to employees leaving their respective organizations. The thematic analysis process revealed six themes. The themes are the need for growth, work environment, lack of promotion, organizational politics, leadership and remuneration.

The need for growth

Numerous factors were identified as the underlying factors that facilitated employee exit. The factor that got much momentum amongst the study respondents was the quest for growth**.** Focus group participants concurred in highlighting that there were little to no opportunities for growth, regardless of the qualifications that they held. The idea was buttressed by participant 1, 45 year old female employee from focus group 1, who cited that:

"The major reason that made me leave the university was the quest for growth, I had been stagnant from the very time I joined the institution and still holding the very same position up to the time I left, although I had developed myself and was due for promotion."

Moreover, in that essence, participant 3, 38 year old female employee from focus group 2 also highlighted that:

"*The university lacks non-academic staff development opportunities and that contributed much towards the reason why I left the institution."*

Data from the field noted the university lacked plans for career development and advancement for the workforce, thus they had no reason to stay with the same employer but seek better or greener pastures. The study findings were in that note in line with Hammerberg (2002) who posited that if career growth is desired, employees will eventually leave the current employer and join another where there is employee career development. Dwesini (2019) confirmed the study findings and concurred with Hammerberg (2002) stating that the onus of career development lies with the employees, and if they are satisfied with the career development policy of the organization, then they have no reason to leave the entity. The results are also linked with the assertion of social exchange theory that highlights that employees seek for fair transition with what they receive and what they give to the organization.

Lack of promotion

In addition, the lack of opportunities for promotions fuels the rate of staff exit at different universities. Individuals engage in career upgrades, as noted by the fact that some joined the institution as shop floor employees and managed to upgrade their educational qualifications, so much that most of them now have degrees and some hold masters' and are due for promotion but owing to the lack of promotion opportunities, they still hold same posts. Participant 6, 36 year old female employee from focus group 3 highlighted that:

"I entered the university as the secretary with just a diploma, and I developed myself up to masters level and I had only been promoted to a senior secretary and nothing more, that forced me to look for greener pastures where I would be allowed to utilize my skills." Respondent 2, a 36 year old male employee from focus group 4 had this to say:

"I joined the university without any professional qualification; I developed myself, and now I am a degree holder. However, I am looking forward to being recognised by the institution if the university fails to promote me, I might end up leaving the organization."

Results from the field noted that what led to the proliferation of staff turnover at the institution understudied was the lack of promotion opportunities. Numerous organizations in today's operating terrain use pay, promotion, benefits and different kinds of bonuses to enhance high levels of employee performance and satisfaction. The study findings confirmed what Thomas (2014) postulated that lack of employee promotion immensely contributes to employee intention to leave the organization. While Hammerberg (2002) also corresponded with study findings highlighting that employees are economic animals, and to retain them when paying less attention to key factors like pay, promotion, and benefits is cumbersome. The reason behind employee promotion is to motivate them to continuously serve the organization.

Organizational Politics

On this aspect, all the participants mentioned informal, unofficial and behind-the-scenes efforts to influence an organization, increase power and some instances achieve targeted objectives selfishly. The idea is reinforced by participant 5, 48 years old male employee from focus group 5 who stated that:

"The institution had become more toxic to the extent that it lacked fairness and it was more difficult for one to move from one position to the other, promotions are more based on whom you know".

Respondent 3, 42 years of age, a male employee from focus group 1 had this to say:

"I joined this institution in 2012 but I have not been promoted nor had my grade augmented, those who joined the institution after me are now above me in terms of position even though my professional qualifications are better than them."

The results above are in line with the literature which states that high labor turnover is necessitated by mismanagement (Mamun & Hasan, 2017); thus, employees need to be treated fairly and sometimes should be involved in decision-making.

Job satisfaction

Besides organizational politics, the study participants stated that what drove them to exit the University had a lot to do with the staff welfare and a lack of job satisfaction, which encompass working conditions and remuneration. Working conditions that the university workforce have been exposed to have become more unfavorable inducing the need to exit the academic institution. Participant 2, 35 year old female employee from focus group 1 buttressed the idea remarking that:

"Others may have mentioned other factors but I feel like, at this university, general staff welfare is taken for granted, that has issues to do with remuneration and working conditions, there is a need to strike the balance between these academic institutions, some institutions are offering benefits not offered by this institution."

Respondents 4, a 37 year old male from focus group 1 echoed the same sentiments as participant 2, and had this to say:

"I loved this institution so much but then the working conditions had become more unfavorable. Considering where this institution is located, the university management should at least do something different as compared with other sister universities."

While Participant 3, 42 years male employee in focus group 1 stated that:

"Working conditions had become so bad, that I had to walk from home to the university and back, because of the housing and transport challenges."

The study findings coincided with Iqbal (2010) who concluded that when the workforce of an institution is dissatisfied with their job, they easily leave their current employer. On that note, Owence et al. (2014) buttressed the idea stating that there is a positive association between job satisfaction and diminished labor turnover.

Wage salary disputes

One of the themes that got much momentum in the focus group discussion was the employee and employer relationship that had been negatively affected by the economic depression, so much that there has been an interplay of wage and salary-related disputes in the workplace that in turn have resulted in a proliferation of staff exit from the university, with several employees leaving the institution for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other greener pastures. Participant 2, a 49 year old male from focus group 3 had this to say:

"There have been quarrels between the employer and the employees in as far as salaries and allowances are concerned, as it academics are getting allowances as the directly involved and that on its shows that the university does not care much about non-academics."

In addition, participants stated that the institution lacked a lot, thus facilitating the high staff exit. Respondent 4, 30 year old female from focus group 3 had this to communicate:

"The university has no benefits that are being offered to the workforce besides the obvious deflated government salaries."

The study findings were confirmed by Nyaga (2015) who highlighted that most employees feel that their energy and expertise are not congruent with their salaries. In that instance, numerous employees leave their jobs because of the availability of better-paying jobs elsewhere. If employees perceive that there is no fairness in terms of salary distribution, that triggers serious friction between employees and owners of production, and in the end, employees always find their way out of the organization (Iqbal, 2010).

Working environment

Regarding the working environment, respondents stated that what made their exit and the university, was the relocation initiative that brought about more challenges. In line with working conditions, the relocation initiative cultivated unfavorable conditions of work among the workforce, leading to turnover intentions. Respondent 5, 37 year old male from focus group 1 echoed the following:

"The relocation initiative without adequate resources facilitated my decision to leave the institution, as the initiative had no flexibility or work-life balance considering that my family was now leaving in another city while I spend most of my time in a different location, with no staff accommodation and transport from where I resided, that was more stressful."

Still, on that note, participant 4, 37 year old male from focus group 1 had this to say:

"Owing to the relocation, life had changed so much that I needed to buy groceries for me that side and my family back home, and it presented challenges to me, with the little that we were earning, thus when I got the opportunity I found it worth it to leave the institution because of the need to get closer to home."

The current working environment in the academic institution understudied was identified as the major driver of staff turnover intentions. A conducive work environment plays a pivotal role in motivating the workforce to work and even go an extra mile for the organization, and that on its own is essential in staff retention. On that note, the findings of the study confirmed what Mamun and Hasan's (2017) study concluded: basic facilities like heat, failure to provide drinking water, employee houses, outdated furniture and old equipment are some of the issues that amplify employee thoughts of leaving the organization.

Poor leadership skills

From field data, the researchers noted that nepotism was identified as one of the major themes that got much momentum in the focus group discussion; participants noted that the university leadership had too much nepotism. Nepotism was identified as one of the factors that lead to staff exit in different universities. The idea was cemented by participant 5, 44 year old female from focus group 2 who had this to say:

"Employees are recruited and promoted based on who they know, and that affects work output, incompetent people are hired and promoted and in turn, they have less contribution to the organization, competent people are then overloaded with work leading to employee burnout which triggers the idea of an intention to quit"

These results are congruent with the findings of Mamun and Hasan (2017) who argued that most employees are eager to work in a stable working environment, and failure to provide such an environment amounts to turnover intentions. Dwesini (2019) posited that leaders should control and influence the operations of the organization and hence controlling staff turnover is the only way to improve its operations. Leaders should create a conducive environment for employees so that they can serve the organization for a long time (Cruz et al., 2022).

Effects of staff exit on university operations

Three themes were generated on the effects of labor turnover in state universities in Zimbabwe. The themes are increase in recruitment costs, loss of institutional memory and teamwork.

Increase in recruitment costs

Regarding the effects of staff exit on university operations, one of the themes that were generated was increase in recruitment costs. The majority of the participants highlighted that the costs that the university incurs upon losing an employee are way too much. Respondents in five different focus groups highlighted that employee exit is costly to the university in terms of hiring costs such as advertising, selection and training the new employee. This was cemented by participant 2 from focus group 3 who revealed the following sentiments:

"The effects of staff exit is that the university incurs costs that have a lot to do with recruitment and selection, as the institution has to continuously lose employees and continuously do recruitment and selection."

Respondent 4, 32 year old female from focus group 4 had this to say:

"The university incurs the cost of losing the valuable employee and engaging a whole new employee and that on its own drastically affects organizational performance." On that note, participant 1, 29 year old male from group 4 highlighted that:

"If the institution keeps on losing valuable workforce, it will keep on having vacant posts, keep on advertising and keep on undergoing the whole recruitment and selection process, that will mean the institution always have new employees and that on its own is costly in as far as the image of the institution is concerned."

The results above are consistent with the findings of Owence et al. (2014) who highlighted that one of the effects of staff exit on organizational operations is the recruitment costs of the new employees. It was revealed that the

costs of hiring and training a new employee to fit the organizational culture are high to the extent that the operations of the institution might be dismally ruined.

Loss of institutional memory

Regarding the effects of staff exit on university operations, one of the themes that were developed by the researchers was institutional memory. This theme was reinforced by several participants from different focus groups, who highlighted that staff exit interrupts the services of the institution that causes loss of institutional memory. Participant 3, 46 year old female from focus group 4 had this to say:

"When an institution is characterized by staff exit, it means there will be a loss of institutional memory and that affects the progress of the whole institution as the employees are always new and trying to grasp the concepts and the culture of the organization."

Respondent 1, 32 year old male employee from group 3 had this to say:

"The effects are numerous, but what cannot be denied is that there will be no continuity within that department that loses employees or within the institution at large because of loss of institutional memory."

There is limited information in the literature that states that staff exit affects organizational continuity because the remaining employees might not have the institutional memory.

Teamwork

Concerning the effect of staff exit on university operations, one of the themes that were highlighted was teamwork. The majority of the participants highlighted that one of the factors that harm university operations as a result of staff exit is the disruption in teamwork activities. Respondents 4, 50 year old male from group 2 had this to say:

"Staff exit has negative repercussions on teamwork, as the team always loses team members and it goes further to kill team spirit and that harms the performance of the institution."

The results above show that employee turnover destroys team spirit because the group is always building, hence affecting the consistency of the group. However, there is a limited information in the literature on how staff exit affects the teams in the organizations.

Strategies to mitigate against labor turnover in state universities

The focus group interviews also asked respondents to suggest strategies that could help their organizations to reduce labor turnover. Four themes were generated from the thematic analysis. The themes are job satisfaction, recruiting appropriate employees for the job, career promotional opportunities and good effective leadership.

Job satisfaction

One of the themes identified and that got much momentum from study participants was job satisfaction. This was buttressed by participant 5, 48 year old male from focus group 5 who stated that:

"Currently within the university, the staff welfare of the workforce is taken for granted, and it would be amazing and have a retention effect if the university would revise the staff welfare of employees that have to do with bettering working conditions and increasing the remuneration packages offered to employees."

Respondent 4, 30 year old male from group 3 stated that:

"All institutions of higher learning should put in place staff retention packages and motivational perks like adjustment of salary scales and other benefits such as housing allowances, particularly universities based in remote areas."

Participant 3, 38 year old female from focus group 2 highlighted that:

"Job satisfaction can differ from one institution to the other, universities who are outside cities should treat their employees differently because those universities in big cities or towns are embedded with several factors that cannot be found in remote areas."

Field data identified that job satisfaction was the key ingredient in curbing employee exit at any institution. The findings of the study corresponded with Dwesini (2019) who argued that when the workforce is contented with their jobs, that positively influences employee engagement, and on that note employee happiness and contentment are strongly related to talent retention. Akinyomi (2016) stated that an improvement in job satisfaction through employee involvement in decision making, positive organizational climate and culture, represented by honesty and teamwork would curb employee turnover.

Recruiting appropriate employees for the job

Field data identified that one of the key ways to curb the proliferation of employee turnover phenomenon in the workplace is to recruit the right candidates for the right jobs. Participant 4, 37 year old male from focus group 1 commented that:

"Employees are recruited and promoted based on who they know, however, employing the right candidate for the job might mitigate the behavior of intention to leave, thus recruiting appropriate employees may minimize the explosion of staff turnover"

In line with the above sentiments, participant 2, 49 year old male from focus group 3 had this to say:

"Employing local people, especially those institutions that are operating from remote areas may mitigate high labor turnover."

The study findings confirmed what Thomas (2013) posited: if the organization hires a suitable workforce, they would attain a person-job fit and that in turn minimizes high labor turnover. While Mamun and Hasan (2017) concluded that recruitment and selection are of paramount importance to the organization and that the recruitment process should be done locally because those who come from other regions might be compelled to look for jobs that are close to their geographical locations.

Career promotional opportunities

Field data identified that the provision of career promotional opportunities to the workforce may play a pivotal role in mitigating high labor turnover at any institution. Participant 2, 35 year old female from focus group 1 highlighted that:

"The institution should come up with a clear policy of internal promotions, particularly for those who are progressing well with their careers, if the promotion policy procedures are followed fairly, employees will not detach themselves from the organization."

Thomas (2013) concurred with the study results stating that lack of career promotion significantly contributed to employees' intention to leave the organization. On that note, university management needs to promote employees internally, with special attention to those that possess relevant qualifications and experience for the job in question so that they can stick with the organization.

Good effective leadership

From field data, the researchers noted that good effective leadership plays a pivotal role in mitigating labor turnover at universities as highlighted by several respondents. Nepotism in different universities was identified as one of the factors that lead to staff exit of many university employees and in that essence, it was noted that good and effective leadership would play an essential role in mitigating the phenomenon. Participant 3, 33 year old female from focus group 3 had this to say:

"Recruitment and promotion opportunities are based on nepotism than merit and that has had negative effects on work output and facilitated staff exit, thus there is a need for good and effective leadership to curb the phenomenon."

Deducing from study results poor leadership and supervision triggers employee turnover, on that note, Mamun and Hasan (2017) concluded that entities which need to mitigate staff turnover need to coach and train leaders in every department so that they can enhance their leadership skills and have the ability to cultivate healthy relationships with their subordinates.

CONCLUSION

Labor turnover is one of the major problems experienced by universities around the globe. Employee separation with the current organizations is exacerbated by job dissatisfaction, lack of career progression, fluctuation of salaries, aggravated by the economy which is in turmoil, and the issue of unfairness grounds of promotions among universities. Employees are thinking animals; they view the work environment and conclude what they have assumed is correct. Further, the study revealed that staff exit affects the operations of the institution. Employing new people without institutional memory affects the smooth flow of university operations. Failure to consistently follow the procedures of the university also negatively spills over to the performance of the students in the university. It is of paramount importance to strive to get hold of current employees because they have institutional memory. In addition to the above sentiments, the study revealed that leaders should exercise fairness when they are promoting the internal staff to better positions. Establishing promotion policies that are followed is pertinent in a quest to mitigate high labor turnover. It was also exposed that when hiring employees, it is righteous to consider the community labor market, where the university is operating from.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study established that one of the reasons why employees separate themselves from the institution is because of nepotism among university employees. The management must exercise fairness when they are elevating some of the employees who are experienced and qualified for the job. Generating an internal promotion policy that is followed is viewed as the panacea to the high labor turnover disease that has radically strained the institutions of higher learning in developing countries. The internal promotion policy should protect internal employees when there is a vacancy. Management should consider existing employees when they are competing with external prospective employees. Still, further, the management of universities should also employ recruitment and selection policies that stipulate fair selection and hiring of the right candidate for the position.

Further, the recruitment policy procedure should be followed systematically and consistently, meaning that it should not be used selectively. The above sentiments were echoed by Owence et al. (2014) who highlighted that changing the existing recruitment and promotion policies might help organizations to minimize high labor turnover. Winterton (2004) also highlighted that one of the strategies for reducing high labor turnover in organizations is the promotion of internal employees in line with their professions. If the above strategies are considered and implemented, employees are going to work extra years with the same university or organization and that is a plus to the organizational performance.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our results suggest that having healthy relationships between employees and their employers is potent because it impedes employees who are likely to leave the organization. We argue that creating more relationships, that is with both co-workers and management may strengthen the attachment employees have with the organization. This argument is different from the results of Cruz et al. (2022) who suggested that employees who perceive positive relationships with their organization tend to behave negatively with their co-employees. Although we support the notion that having good relations with the organization reduces employee turnover and augments organizational performance. We still believe that having a good relationship with employers does not explicitly affect the relationship between employees. This notion is in line with social exchange theory that suggests

employees respect what they receive from the organization and they strive to give back the good deeds and it does not affect their relationships with one another. When employees perceive that the organization is not supporting them in terms of career development, career promotion and improved salaries, they are going to exhibit less engagement and organizational citizenship behavior (Cruz et al., 2022). We suggest that creating more relationships within the organization might be a panacea to employee turnover as depicted by job embeddedness theory which suggests that having more networks in the organization might act as a mesh to the organization (Hussain & Deery, 2018; Harunavamwe, 2018).

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Several limitations should be highlighted in our study. First, the study concentrated on state universities that are operating in Zimbabwe only. There is a need to carry out the same study in other countries where the economy is stable, to find out if the study depicts the same results. Second, there is also a need to include private universities operating in the same environment, to find out if the same results are realized. Third, the study used focus group interviews and structured questionnaires to gather data from the respondents, hence there is a need to interview employees separately so that they can be free to voice their concerns in confidence and secrecy. It is also important for future studies to use unstructured questions so that respondents will be free to articulate what they think about the issue of employee turnover. Fourth, the data were collected from universities that are operating in the same region, hence future researchers might consider including state universities operating in all regions. Fifth, the current study employed an interpretivism research paradigm; therefore, we recommend that future researchers use the positivism research paradigm in carrying out the research, where employee turnover will be used as one of the variables.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [E Vakira], upon reasonable request.

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