THE PROBLEM OF KEEPING EMPLOYEES: INVOLVING EMPLOYEES, DECREASING DOUBT, AND FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EMPLOYEE STAYING AT A JOB

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Abstract:

Organizations are facing a power shift from employer to employee due to high employment rates and the negative impact of turnover not being managed effectively. Excessive turnover typically indicates underlying issues within the company. It is crucial to focus on retaining employees. Changes in the workplace have increased demands on employees, often leading to negative effects on their health and personal life. As companies demand more from their employees without offering much in return, employee distrust and scepticism may rise. Addressing employee turnover is a key strategic issue that must be prioritized for sustained success. It is essential for businesses to lay the foundation for long-term employee commitment in order to thrive.

Keywords*:* Employee skepticism; Emotions in the workplace, Work with purpose, Employee engagement, retaining talent, Ensuring employee longevity.

Introduction

The pursuit of significance is the main driving force in a person's life (Frank 1984). The modern workplace is constantly evolving rapidly, primarily in reaction to globalization and international competition. Over the past two decades, there has been a notable rise in mergers and acquisitions, as well as the streamlining and downsizing of many organizations. These types of restructuring often have detrimental effects on employees, including job losses, uncertainty, ambiguity, and increased anxiety, without necessarily resulting in any organizational advantages like improved productivity or financial gains. Conservative estimates indicate that less than half of all mergers and acquisitions achieve the expected benefits (Cartwright and Cooper, 1997), and less than a third of downsized companies see a rise in profits or stock prices within the following three years (Cascio, 1993 and Morris et al., 1999). As Western society has become more divided, there has been a breakdown in community support and a rise in a consumer-driven culture where commercial interests

increasingly take precedence. The ongoing corporate scandals are challenging the confidence and trust that shareholders, employees, and customers have in business leaders.

According to Herriot and Pemberton (1995), recent developments in the workplace have led to employees being required to work longer hours, shoulder more responsibilities, exhibit greater flexibility, and adapt to constant change and uncertainty. This shift has been associated with negative outcomes for individuals, such as heightened stress, deteriorating health (Barling et al., 2005), and conflicts between work and family life (Bellavia and Frone, 2005). In exchange for these demands, employees may anticipate higher salaries, rewards tied to performance, and simply having a job (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995). In contrast, the traditional employment arrangement, prevalent two decades ago, involved employees offering loyalty, trust, and dedication in return for job security, training, opportunities for advancement, and support from their employers. Previously, individuals relied on employers to provide training for skill development that would enable career progression within the same organization, but now they are encouraged to enhance their "employability" and pursue more entrepreneurial, self-managed, or boundaryless career paths (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

While some individuals may have embraced this new arrangement, many have reacted with frustration (Payne and Cooper, 2001) and a sense of loss stemming from the erosion of mutual commitment and trust between themselves and their employers. These changes in the workplace and society at large have led to growing discontent and disillusionment among individuals, who are increasingly seeking opportunities for self-expression and personal fulfilment (Bunting, 2004). Older workers may opt to exit the labour market, while others may reduce their work commitments, redirect their efforts elsewhere, or reassess their career prospects and job expectations. Evidence indicates that younger workers are starting to question the significance and purpose of work as they enter the workforce with higher levels of education compared to previous generations (Kompier, 2005). In a research study involving more than 10,000 young individuals, (Bibby 2001) aimed to identify the attributes that are deemed essential for a satisfactory job.

For many years, it has been acknowledged that work satisfies various personal needs beyond just financial compensation. Recent research (Chalofsky, 2003) has consistently shown that individuals prioritize purpose, fulfilment, autonomy, satisfaction, strong relationships, and opportunities for learning over money. As traditional community structures like neighbourhoods, churches, and extended families have declined in developed societies, the workplace is now viewed as a key source of community and connection. With the evolution of workplace demands over the past two decades, organizations must now consider how to meet the changing needs of their employees.

Human capital plays a crucial role in ensuring customer satisfaction, service quality, customer loyalty, organizational performance, and competitive advantage within tourism and hospitality establishments (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Given the rapidly changing business landscape, there is a growing need to attract and retain talented individuals (Hilltrop, 1999). Organizations are engaged in fierce competition to secure high-performing employees who will serve as the backbone of the organization in the future (Yamamoto, 2011). However, globally, the primary challenge faced by organizations in this dynamic and competitive environment is retaining competent employees (Pfeffer, 1994).

The increase in employee skepticism

The evolving landscape of employment and workplace structures, specifically concerning breaches and violations of the psychological contract, is thought to have led to an increase in employee skepticism and lack of trust (Pate et al., 2000). Employee skepticism is commonly defined as harbouring negative sentiments of dissatisfaction, disappointment, and disdain towards business entities, leaders, supervisors, and other entities within the work environment (Dean et al., 1998). Elucidated employee skepticism as a pessimistic outlook towards one's employer, consisting of three distinct facets (Dean et al. 1998):

i.   A perception that the organization is lacking in honesty and moral principles.
ii.   An adverse feeling towards the organization.
iii. Characteristics that include displaying negative and judgmental actions towards the company in line with these beliefs and emotions.

Employee cynicism has been proposed as a new model for understanding the dynamic between employees and employers due to factors such as longer working hours, increased workload, poor leadership and management, changes in the workplace, and frequent restructuring within organizations (Bunting, 2004).

Research on stress has shown that cynicism in employees is linked to the issue of burnout in the workplace (Maslach and Schaufeli, 1993). Burnout is defined as comprising three components: exhaustion, cynicism (or depersonalization), and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. Cynicism is seen as a way for individuals to protect themselves mentally from burnout by creating psychological distance.

Numerous scholars have explored the concept of employee cynicism within the context of the psychological contract. (Andersson 1996), breaches that lead to employee cynicism can be categorized into three main groups:

i. Attributes of the business environment such as discrepancies between policies and practices, unethical conduct, commitment to corporate social responsibility, and unfair compensation policies.
ii. Attributes of the organization including ineffective communication, managerial inadequacies in implementing change, and absence of employee engagement.
iii. The type of work involving conflicts in roles, uncertainty in job responsibilities, and excessive workload. It was determined that modern work environments offer numerous reasons for skepticism among their staff, particularly due to a focus on economic and external business incentives at the expense of employee welfare.

Confidence in the abilities and effectiveness of leaders and managers.

Several scholars propose that trust and integrity are closely connected to the meaning of work. Trust is defined as an individual's expectations, assumptions, or beliefs regarding the likelihood that another person's future actions will be beneficial or at least not harmful to their own interests. It has been argued that mistrust often leads to the failure of change initiatives because organizations fail to provide employees with a meaningful framework to comprehend and justify the proposed changes (Gioia and Chittipeddi,1991). Trust is acknowledged as an essential component of the psychological contract (Rousseau,1995). The psychological contract can be categorized into two types: transactional contracts, which involve fixed-term exchanges such as financial rewards, and relational contracts, which are characterized by open-ended relationships and emotional exchanges such as personal growth and development. To re-engage employees in this era of anxiety, where approximately 6% of the workforce is unemployed, 25% are underemployed, and one-third worry about losing their jobs in the future, it is necessary to revert to more relational contracts. These contracts are built over time through mutual commitment and rely on the fulfilment of promises and the earning of trust, rather than being induced (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995) (Chalofsky, 2003).

The cultivation of trust and significance within the work environment is a crucial duty of leadership as it holds the potential to enhance the sense of attachment that individuals have towards their work. Research has consistently shown that inadequate or ineffective leadership leads to stress and deterioration of mental well-being (Kelloway et al., 2005), underscoring the necessity for leaders and managers to serve as role models, demonstrate a tangible personal commitment, and prioritize actions over words (Konz and Ryan, 1999). This underscores the importance of management displaying through their actions a consistent pattern of fulfilling their promises. Furthermore, it is contended that leaders should exhibit greater openness in how they communicate information and treat employees with respect and maturity. It is inappropriate to draw parallels with the familial context in organizational settings where individuals, be it offspring or employees, are subjected to inequality and unfair treatment while being expected to suppress their grievances. Such dynamics mirror dysfunctional parent-child relationships, illustrating a lack of emotional awareness that can breed deep-seated animosity and detachment (Sawaf et al., 2001).

The growing interest in emotions within the workplace and the notion of emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 1999) highlights the necessity for leaders to engage more actively in listening to and addressing the concerns of their employees (Sawaf et al., 2001). Emotional intelligence has been closely linked to transformational leadership (Barling et al., 2000), which is deemed vital for effective change management. The rise in employee skepticism and distrust can be avoided if organizational leaders exhibit prudence and consideration

for the emotional repercussions of their decisions. While traditionally, employees were expected to suppress their emotions upon entering the workplace, a mindset rooted in denial and idealism (Sawaf et al., 2001), it is now recognized as incongruent with the framework of a mentally stable and emotionally attuned society. Investing in emotional intelligence training is seen as a promising strategy for enhancing leadership conduct and offering employees trustworthy role models (Cartwright and Cooper, 2005). Zohar and Marshall (2000) introduced the concept of Spiritual Intelligence (SQ), which pertains to the ability to address and resolve issues related to significance and ethics. SQ is closely associated with the philosophy of servant leadership advocated by Greenleaf (1997), where leaders prioritize meeting the fundamental needs of others to facilitate their personal growth.

Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that leadership in today's world necessitates a deliberate emphasis on rebuilding trust, instilling hope, and fostering a sense of optimism in the workplace. This approach not only encourages individuals to demonstrate resilience and quickly recover from setbacks but also supports them in their quest for purpose and meaningful connections. This leadership style, known as Authentic Leadership, underscores the significance of cultivating open, trustworthy, and authentic relationships. Quinn (2005) outlines the key qualities anticipated in successful contemporary leadership as follows:

i. Enhanced transparency regarding the desired impactful outcomes sought by leaders.
ii. Demonstration of behavior that align with their fundamental beliefs, thus fostering integrity, authenticity, and assurance.
iii. Prioritizing the collective interests of the organization over individual ones, leading to augmented trust and a strengthened communal spirit.
iv. Demonstrating greater flexibility and innovation in response to external factors, while displaying less reliance on camaraderie compared to other forms of organizational leadership.

Significance within the professional environment

Organizations must delve into and comprehend the underlying needs of their employees to retain them and maintain their motivation, as "talented individuals seek meaningful work...if denied, they will depart." Although there is no universally accepted definition of meaning in the workplace, Baumeister and Vohs (2002) assert that the core of meaning is "connection" and is associated with positive outcomes for both the individual and the organization, such as enhancements in organizational performance (Neck and Milliman, 1994), retention of key employees, effective management of change, and increased organizational commitment and employee engagement. Conversely, a lack of perceived meaning in the workplace has been linked to negative consequences, particularly employee cynicism. While life is marked by constant change and anxiety, meaning is seen as a means of establishing stability. S. Cartwright, N. Holmes / Human Resource Management Review 16 (2006) 199–208 201 suggests that the late 20th century ushered in a new era of anxiety, where the definition of success has become more elusive and individuals are striving to find a new equilibrium between work, family, and other responsibilities. He identifies five primary areas - love, work, religion, drugs, and place (e.g. home and community) - that individuals turn to in order to alleviate their anxiety. With people dedicating more time to work, they are increasingly looking to work as a central source of meaning, stability, and a sense of community and identity in their lives. The absence of meaning in the workplace has been linked to the emergence of the "Quarter Life Crisis" (Robbins and Wilner, 2001), where individuals between the ages of 25 and 35 are growing disillusioned with their current jobs and are consequently seeking more rewarding and fulfilling careers.

According to Baumeister (1991), searching for meaning is motivated by four fundamental needs that individuals have. These needs include:

i. The presence of a clear purpose
ii. A defined set of values that serve to imbue life with positivity and moral grounding, guiding actions
iii. A belief in one's ability to make a difference or achieve goals
iv. A strong sense of confidence and self-esteem.

While work can fulfil three of these needs, it frequently lacks a consistent and compelling system of beliefs. (Chalofsky,2003) has crafted a framework for meaningful work that centers on the harmonization of an individual's skills, beliefs, and objectives, closely tied to the idea of internal drive. This framework includes

three main elements focusing on self-awareness, the nature of the job, and a sense of equilibrium that work together to establish a sense of complete harmony.

Emotions play a pivotal role in the conception of self and are closely intertwined with motivation, actions, and mental well-being (Slaski and Cartwright, 2003). After more than seven decades of researching the workplace factors associated with job satisfaction, studies consistently reveal a weak connection between performance and satisfaction. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in exploring the impact of emotions and feelings in the workplace, emphasizing that how individuals perceive themselves, their tasks, and their colleagues can significantly influence their work performance. The concept of meaning encompasses the intricate relationship between an individual's inner world and the external environment of the workplace. In their quest for meaning, individuals are believed to structure their experiences around three key inquiries:

i. To which group do I fit?
ii. In what manner can I establish connections and form relationships with others?
iii. What worth do I provide to others through my contributions?

The notion of meaningful work, seen as a crucial component of self-identity and self-worth, aligns with the increasing interest in the realm of positive psychology, which promotes a focus on actively cultivating the positive aspects of life and work rather than solely addressing the negative aspects (Seligman, 2002). Seligman (2002) makes a distinction between living a pleasant life, a good life, and a meaningful life. The concept of a pleasant life, characterized by sensual pleasures such as material wealth, is considered the most basic form of happiness, followed by the good life, which involves finding joy in activities one excels at, with the meaningful life representing the highest level of fulfilment and lasting happiness. According to Seligman (2002), a meaningful life revolves around engaging in activities that hold significance and value. These principles can be traced back to Aristotle and the concept of eudemonia, a state of happiness achieved through virtuous living and the pursuit of goals with intrinsic worth.

Factors influencing employee retention
Opportunities for professional growth and advancement

Career development is a structured and planned system that aims to harmonize individual career aspirations with the workforce needs of the organization (Leiboiwitz et al., 1986). The increasing recognition of the pivotal role individuals play in giving a company a competitive edge in the market has become evident. HR professionals now face the task of identifying developmental strategies that will foster employee commitment to the firm's mission and values, ultimately driving motivation and supporting the organization in gaining and retaining a competitive advantage. Investing in employee development is crucial for companies looking to strengthen their relationship with their staff (Hall and Moss, 1998; Hsu et al., 2003).

This investment involves creating avenues for internal promotion and offering training and skill enhancement opportunities that enhance employees' marketability both internally and externally (Butler and Waldrop, 2001). High performers have often left companies due to a lack of growth opportunities caused by insufficient training and promotion prospects, leading to a reduction in growth opportunities offered by employers (Steel et al., 2002). Career development holds significance for both organizations and individuals, as it yields beneficial outcomes for both parties involved (Hall, 1996). Organizations rely on talented employees to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage, while individuals seek career advancement opportunities to enhance their skills and abilities (Prince, 2005).

Guidance and assistance from a supervisor

One of the key determinants affecting employee retention is the quality of the relationship between a worker and their supervisor. Supervisors serve as the human connection within an organization. Research conducted by Eisenberger and colleagues (1990) indicates that a worker's perception of the organization is significantly influenced by their interactions with their supervisor. Support from supervisors can decrease the likelihood of employees leaving an organization, while fostering engagement through positive relationships and effective

communication (Greenhaus, 1987). Supervisors play a crucial role in bridging the gap between organizational goals and day-to-day operations, offering guidance to address conflicting priorities and supporting employees both within and outside the work environment. In cases where this relationship falls short, employees may seek new job opportunities. The significance of supervisor support in retention is highlighted by the notion that employees often leave due to issues with their supervisors rather than the job itself (Ontario, 2004). In today's increasingly diverse workforce, the importance of strong relationships between supervisors and employees for retention cannot be overstated. Freyermuth (2007) discovered that employees value supervisors who demonstrate trust, understanding, and fairness in their interactions.

Abusive managers can create conflicts in employees' attitudes towards their job, personal life, and the organization. When employees feel valued, they are more likely to actively engage in the organization's objectives, demonstrate productive workplace behavior such as increased job commitment, reduced absenteeism, and lower turnover rates. This appreciation is often communicated through both formal and informal means of recognition. In any setting, whether personal or professional, employees in an organization respond positively to praise, encouragement, and support.

Supervisors play a crucial role in discussing and monitoring employee progress, beyond the formal evaluation process. Instead of simply focusing on upward mobility, supervisors should assist employees in finding the most suitable position within the organization. Freyermuth (2007) highlighted the fact that even well-skilled individuals in good positions may be tempted to seek employment elsewhere; however, fostering supportive and close working relationships is more effective in retaining talent. As stated by Freyermuth (2007), organizations should prioritize the development of supervisors who can cultivate a workplace that employees are inclined to remain in. By providing various levels of performance expectations and opportunities for growth, organizations can enhance their employees' capabilities and productivity.

Ambience of the workplace

Numerous studies have endeavored to elucidate the work environment across various dimensions, such as employee turnover (Martin 1979), job satisfaction (Iaffaldano and Muchinsky, 1985), job involvement, and organizational commitment (Sjoberg and Sverke 2000). According to Zeytinoglu and Denton (2005), the work environment plays a pivotal role in determining an employee's choice to stay with a company.

Traditionally, discussions on the work environment have been rooted in an industrial context, emphasizing physical factors like heavy lifting, noise, and exposure to hazardous substances. Interestingly, the characteristics of the work environment in the services sector differ from those in the production sector due to the need for client/customer interaction (Normann 1986). The frequency and intensity of interactions between employees and clients vary depending on the nature of the business and type of job. Consequently, the shift in focus from the physical to the socio-psychological aspects of the work environment is warranted. The socio-psychological work environment encompasses factors such as support, workload, demands, decision-making autonomy, stressors, and other elements. Recognizing the evolving needs of individuals is crucial in fostering their commitment and providing a conducive work environment. According to Ramlall (2003), individuals are inclined to thrive in organizations that cultivate a positive work environment where they feel valued, see the impact of their work, and where teamwork is prevalent.

A study by ASID (American Society of Interior Designers, 2004) highlighted the significance of the physical work environment in influencing employees' decision to stay or leave a job. Factors such as lighting, noise levels, and access to natural elements have been identified as key determinants of job performance and overall well-being of employees. Common complaints in office settings include lack of speech privacy, which can hinder concentration and productivity. Incorporating elements of nature in the work environment can help reduce stress and anxiety, promoting a healthier workplace. The design of workspaces has a significant impact on employees, who are likely to remain in a job longer if they are satisfied with their work environment. According to ASID, office equipment and furniture should be designed in a way that promotes privacy and minimizes distractions. It is important for workplace design to accommodate the needs of older workers, including those with poor eyesight, by providing tools that require less physical exertion and ensuring ergonomic positioning. Research by (Miller 2001) suggests that employees benefit from a work environment

that fosters a sense of belonging. Companies with inclusive personalization policies are more likely to retain and satisfy employees by offering appropriate levels of privacy and noise control in the workspace, which can increase motivation and commitment to the organization in the long term (Wells and Thelen, 2002). In a seminal study, Earle (2003) observed that different generations assess risk and value the work environment differently within the economic framework. Therefore, organizations should focus on providing high-quality jobs with optimal work environments to retain their employees (Lennart, 2002).

Benefits

The concept of 'reward' is a commonly discussed topic in the literature, referring to the incentives provided by organizations to employees in recognition of their contributions and performance, as well as something that employees themselves desire (Agarwal, 1998). Rewards can encompass both extrinsic and intrinsic forms, such as monetary bonuses or public recognition like being named employee of the month. Additionally, rewards may also refer to tangible incentives that serve as a means for organizations to motivate employees towards future positive behavior. Within a corporate setting, rewards can manifest in various ways, including cash bonuses, awards for recognition, complimentary merchandise, and sponsored trips. It is crucial for these rewards to leave a lasting impact on employees, reinforcing their perception of being valued within the organization.

Rewards play a crucial role in contributing to job satisfaction as they serve to satisfy basic needs and facilitate the achievement of higher goals. Compensation serves as a means for employees to gauge the value they bring to their job through the investment of time, effort, and skills (Bokemeier and Lacy, 1986).

Attractive remuneration packages are vital for retaining employees as they fulfil financial and material desires, while also conferring a sense of social status and power within the organization. Numerous studies have shown considerable variability among individuals in their perception of the importance of financial rewards for retaining employees (Pfeffer, 1998). The reward system implemented by an organization can significantly impact employee performance and their decision to continue their employment (Bamberger and Meshoulam, 2000).

Work-Life Policies

Prior research has suggested that employees place a high value on work-life initiatives (McCrory, 1999). Employees who are loyal and committed to their current job are particularly concerned with aspects such as flexible work schedules, family-friendly policies, leave options, and proximity to their home, in comparison to those actively seeking new job opportunities (Dubie, 2000). Several studies have examined the impact of work-life benefits, including flexible schedules, childcare support, parental leave, childcare resources, and parental leave, on organizational commitment. Findings have indicated that employees who have access to work-life policies are more likely to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment and express lower intentions to leave their current profession (Grover and Crooker, 1995).

Workplace flexibility has emerged as a significant concern in modern business. It is evident that monetary compensation alone is no longer sufficient; employees are increasingly willing to sacrifice a portion of their salary in exchange for reduced working hours. Researchers argue that offering reduced work hour options can create a mutually beneficial scenario for both individuals and organizations, with schedules tailored to meet the needs of employees while ensuring sufficient productivity. Excessive time spent on the job can result in fatigue and decreased performance, as well as compromising safety. Contrary to popular belief, increased time at work does not necessarily correlate with higher productivity; breaks from work can actually enhance the quality and efficiency of work. The decision of employees to choose reduced hours is not simply about scheduling, but rather involves a fundamental restructuring of work arrangements, which in turn impacts organizational culture and career paths. Effective reduced-hours options necessitate changes in areas such as compensation, job assignments, and opportunities for advancement. Therefore, it is more effective for management to adapt work arrangements to accommodate the needs of employees, rather than force employees to conform to the existing system (Barnet and Hall, 2001). By implementing strategies that prioritize work-life balance, organizations can improve their ability to meet customer demands for enhanced access to services, while also addressing the evolving needs of both employees and employers (Manfredi and Holliday, 2004).

Various studies have documented the influence of nonwork factors, such as job stress and burnout, on an employee's intention to leave an organization.   These studies also highlight the factors that contribute to job stress, work-family conflicts, and job characteristics that drive employees to seek opportunities elsewhere. The level of support provided to employees, their personal attributes, industry norms, and the overall management of these components in the workplace all play a crucial role in determining the level of work-family conflict experienced by employees.   This conflict can impact job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and ultimately result in employee turnover, as noted by Mulvaney et al.   (2006), Cleveland et al.   (2007), and Rowley and Purcell (2001).

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