

Factors influencing labour turnover in departmental stores: *A case study of barbours departmental store in harare*

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Abstract

This research study sought to determine the factors influencing labour turnover in a Departmental Store. In this study, eighteen (18) employees and five managers were used as the research subjects. Structured interview were used as research instruments. The documentary review method was also used to provide information on the reason why employees are leaving the departmental store. Low salary was found to be the most effective factor influencing high labour turnover. Job satisfaction, working conditions, management, job matching were also cited as contributors to staff turnover with training and career development contributing the least. This study recommends that competitive and fair compensation be put in place in order to retain workers. It is also necessary for the store to implement training and career development practices as well as creating a conducive working environment which is typified with employee participation and communication. Finally, it is also recommended that further research be undertaken in order to broaden the generalizability of the findings of this particular study.

Keywords: Labour-turnover, Departmental Store, Influence

1. Introduction

High levels of labour turnover can be a serious problem for large and small organisations. All organisations can expect some degree of labour turnover. Indeed a certain degree of labour turnover may be desirable since it creates opportunities to introduced wider experience and new ideas to the organisation, as well as providing career development opportunities for existing workers. Persistently high levels of labour turnover, however is costly both to the individual, organisations and the economy as a whole and can adversely affect inefficiency, profitability and morale. Labour turnover can be a serious problem for large and small organisations. There is a vast literature on the causes of voluntary employee turnover dating back to the 1950's. By developing multivariate models that combine a number of factors contributing to turnover and empirically testing the models researchers have sought to predict why, individuals leave organisations. This research paper examined factors influencing labour turnover, at a departmental store in Harare, Zimbabwe.

1.1 Background of the study

Thomas Meikles Stores, a division within Meikles Africa was established in Zimbabwe over a hundred years ago. The store Division encompasses the Departmental stores, of which Barbours is one of them. In its Mission Statement, Barbours wants to be seen by the customers as the most efficient and reputable trading organisation in Zimbabwe by providing a working environment for all its staff in which they can find personal satisfaction, which will allow for a sense of achievement, commitment and participation in the company's success and an awareness of performing a worthwhile function in an organisation rendering a genuine service to the Zimbabwean public. In spite of this mission statement, there is high labour turnover at Barbours and this study wants to determine the factors, which are influencing this labour turnover.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Labour turnover has become an issue of major concern at Barbours. A high labour turnover figure is wasteful (Bernstei 1998)^[4]. It indicates poor selection techniques, poor placement or working conditions. High labour turnover is costly. It involves extra costs of recruitment, engagement, training and possibly more accidents and failure to meet orders in time.

2. Objectives of the study

The research was guided by the following questions:

- To identify the factors influencing labour turnover.
- To formulate and advance retention strategies in order to reduce labour turn over.

3. Methodology

Structured interview method was largely used for soliciting responses as well as questioners. The interviews were used for soliciting information from both management and staff. The researcher chooses the interview in order to minimize the risk of misinterpretations by the respondents that is to avoid misunderstanding of the questions by the staff members and the management. Two interview schedules were used, one for the management and the other for members of staff and a questioner for the members of the staff. In addition to the interviews, documents were consulted for certain types of data. These documents include registers, log in books, and staff statistics files. Attendance registers were examined in order to examine the rate of turnover.

4. Literature review

Employee turnover, as defined by Hom and Griffeth (1994), is 'voluntary terminations of members from organizations'. Loquercio *et al.* (2006) observed that staff turnover is the proportion of staff leaving in a given time period but prior to the anticipated end of their contract. According to Singh *et al.* (1994), staff turnover is the rate of change in the working staffs

of a concern during a defined period. Ivancevich and Glueck (1989) opine that staff turnover is the net result of the exit of some employees and entrance of others to the organization. Kossen (1991)^[20] defined turnover as the amount of movement in and out (of employees) in an organization. High levels of labour turnover can be a serious problem for large and small organisations. All organisations can expect some degree of labour turnover. Indeed a certain degree of labour turnover may be desirable since it creates opportunities to introduced wider experience and new ideas to the organisation, as well as providing career development opportunities for existing workers. Persistently high levels of labour turnover, however is costly both to the individual, organisations and the economy as a whole and adversely affect inefficiency, profitability and morale. Employee turnover is a much-studied phenomenon (Maertz, 1998).

High labour turnover may be due to a particular cause but they can also be an indication of more fundamental organizational problem. Establishing the cause and working out a solution may, therefore, call for a thorough examination of the organisation's policies and activities. It may be difficult for those within the organisation to do this with the degree of rigour and objectivity required, and it may be advisable to involve someone from outside the undertaking to assist with the task.

Mistrust is positively related to high role ambiguity, which leads to inadequate interpersonal communications between individuals and psychological strain in the form of low job satisfaction, decreased well-being and feelings of being threatened by one's superior and colleagues (French & Caplan, 1973)^[11]. Research findings support the idea that sources of stress in a particular job together with certain individuals/personality characteristics may be predictive of stress manifestation in the form of job dissatisfaction, mental ill health, heart disease alcohol abuse and social family problems (Cooper, 1985)^[9].

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Empirical studies (e.g. Harris, 2000; Kinnear & Sutherland, 2000; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Meudell & Rodham, 1998)^[17, 24, 26] have explained that factors such as competitive salary, friendly working environment, healthy interpersonal relationships and job security were frequently cited by employees as key motivational variables that influenced their retention in the organizations.

Two factor theory propounded by Herzberg *et al.* (1959)^[15] is an important theory that explains what satisfies or dissatisfies employees and hence, serves as an important framework for employee retention. Herzberg *et al.* (1959)^[15] proposed a two-factor theory or the motivator-hygiene theory. According to this theory, there are some job factors that result in satisfaction while there are other job factors that prevent dissatisfaction. The opposite of "Satisfaction" is "No satisfaction" and the opposite of "Dissatisfaction" is "No Dissatisfaction".

4.2 Patterns of Labour Turnover

Workers resign for many reasons including poor wages and not favourable working environment, will eventually affect them psychologically, Workers may leave-after their first morning or day at work, or resign within a few weeks or month of employment, this might be because of the conditions they might have experienced within that period. This stage is often

referred to as induction crisis. A separate problem is when a recruit accepts the job but never turns up for the job. Of these two stages, it is the contribution to high labour turnover caused by the induction crisis, which is seen by organisations as the main area of concern. Where workers can compare their earning unfavourably with those of others in the same industry or the same locality, then pay levels do affect labour turnover. Even so people remain in jobs they like although higher paid work is available. Once a high level of labour turnover has been reached, however, low rates of pay make it much more difficult to reverse the trend.

The longer workers are employed the more likely they are to stay. This can be due in part to the fact that workers move less often as they get older, but are mainly because they become used to the work and the organisation, and have an established relationship with those around them. A good relationship with their immediate superior is undoubtedly an important factor inducing workers to stay with the organisation. Also if they leave their place of work, they have family responsibilities and if other family members also work in the same organisation, they will be less likely to leave (Kirschenbaum & Weisberg, 2002)^[19].

There is a tendency for turnover to be higher in larger, highly centralized organisation, and lower in small companies. There is also a slight tendency for turnover to be higher in urban areas and lower in rural areas, even with the same industry because new starters are more likely to leave, turnover may also be high in organisation which is contracting as workers move to employ offering greater job security. Pay is perhaps most frequently assumed to be the reason for leaving for this will affect the psychologically and causing them to be frustrated and stressed and ending up leaving the job (Kirschenbaum & Mano, 1999)^[19]. The highest labour turnover tends to be among those who have recently joined on business. Longer serving employees are more likely to stay, mainly because they become used to the work and the business and have an established relationship with those around them.

4.3 Causes of Labour Turnover

Employee turnover is a much studied phenomenon. Many studies are based on only a small number of variables, which often only explain a small amount of variability in turnover. Another criticism of turnover studies is that they do not adequately capture the complex psychological processes involved in individual turnover decisions. A recent study of turnover by Boxall *et al* (2003)^[6] in New Zealand confirmed the view that motivation for job change is multidimensional and that no one factor will explain.

However, overtime there have been a number of factors that appear to be consistently linked to turnover. An early review article of studies on turnover by Mobly *et at.*, (1979)^[28] revealed that age might increase the need to leave the job, overall satisfaction, that includes the working environment, salary and motivation. There are cases where the salaries are good but the conditions are bad such that it will end up causing psychological problems such as anxiety, stress and depression ending up in them leaving their jobs. In 1995, a meta-analysis of some eight hundred (800) turnover studies was conducted by Hom and Griffeth, which was recently updated (Griffeth *et al*, 2000)^[13]. Their analysis confirmed some well-established findings on the causes of turnover. These include: job satisfaction, organizational commitment, comparison of

alternatives and intention to quit.

4.4 Job Satisfaction

The relationship between satisfaction and turnover has been consistently found in many turnover studies (Lum *et al*, 1998) [22]. Mobley *et al* 1979 [28] indicated that overall job satisfaction is negatively linked but explained little of the variability in turnover. Griffeth *et al* (2000) [13] found that overall job satisfaction modestly predicted turnover. In a recent New Zealand study, Boxal *et al* (2003) [6] found the main reason by far for people leaving their employer was for more interesting work elsewhere because of poor working conditions. It is generally accepted that the effect of job satisfaction on turnover is less than that of organizational commitment.

4.5 Intention to Quit

Much of the empirical research in turnover is based on actual turnover, although some studies are based on intentions to quit and actual turnover. Mobley *et al* (1979) [28] noted that the relationship between intentions and turnover is consistent and generally stronger than the satisfaction turnover relationship, although it still accounted for less than a quarter of the variability in turnover. Much of the research on perceived opportunities has been found to be associated with intents to leave but not actual turnover (Kishenbaum & Mano-Negrin, 1999) [18]. One of the possible reasons is that intention does not account for impulsive behaviours and also that labour turnover intentions are not necessarily followed through to lead to actual turnover.

4.6 Characteristics of employees

Despite a wealth of research, there appear to be a few characteristics that meaningfully predict turnover, the exception being age and tenure. Age is found to be negatively related to turnover because of the belief that there is need to rest or that they have achieved what they wanted to achieve. However, age alone explains little of the variability in turnover and age is linked to many other factors, alone it contributes little to the understanding of turnover behaviour.

Tenure is also negatively related to turnover (the longer a person is with an organisation, the more likely they are to stay). Mangione in Mobley *et al* concluded that length of service is one of the best single predictions of turnover. There is little evidence of a person's sex being linked to turn over. Griffeth *et al*'s year 2000 [13] meta-analysis re-examined various personal characteristics that may be linked to turnover. They also cited evidence that gender moderates age-turnover relationship that is, women are more likely to remain in their jobs the older they get, than men do. They also found no link between intelligence and turnover, and none between race and turnover.

4.7 Wages and Conditions

The research conducted on the link between dissatisfaction with pay and voluntary turnover appears to be inconclusive. Mobley (1979) [28] concluded that studied on the role of pay in turnover were mixed but that often there was no relationship between pay and turnover. On the other hand Campion (1999) cited in Tang (1998) suggest that most important reason for voluntary turnover is poor working conditions and low salaries which at the end will cause depression and stress. Martin (2003) [25] investigates determinants of labour turnover using

established-level survey data for the United Kingdom. Martin indicated that there is an inverse relationship between relative wages and turnover, that is, establishments with higher relative pay has lower turnover.

4.8 Pay and Performance

Griffeth *et al* (2000) [13] noted pay pay-related variables have a modest effect on turnover. Their analysis also indicated studies that examined the relationship between pay, a person's performance and turnover. They concluded that when high performers are insufficiently rewarded, they leave. They cited findings from Milkovich & Newman (1999) [27] that where collective reward programs replace individual incentives, their introduction may lead to higher turnover among high performers.

4.9 Costs of Labour Turnover

High labour turnover can be expensive, although the actual costs are different to estimate. To get some indication, organisations can start by adding up the most obvious expenses, that is, those of advertising, recruitment and training together the cost of associated management and supervisory time. The annual total could well convince the organisation that time and effort spend reducing labour turnover is cost effective. Increased expenditure on recruitment and training represents only a small proportion of the total cost of labour turnover. Much greater costs may be incurred through unnecessarily high staffing levels and overtime payments-lost or delayed production-interruptions to the flow of work, increased production costs, scrap levels and risk of accidents to inexperienced workers, long term workers becoming unsettled and leaving, low morale and resulting low productivity, and damage to the organisation's local reputation.

Increasing labour turnover often becomes a vicious cycle. Low morale causes more workers to leave, increasing the dissatisfaction of those who remain and so on. Managers sometimes aggravate the situation by an inappropriate response to the worsening conditions. For example, as available labour disciplinary measures against unauthorized absence tends to be relaxed and pressure to recruit results in replacements which do not match organisational requirements. These new recruits are more likely to leave, especially as supervisors and trainers have less time to give them adequate induction and training. It is not surprising then, that there is a tendency for good situations to improve, and for bad situations to worsen. This may not affect only morale, but also pay if bonus schemes are in operation and targets are not met. Workers and their representatives will understandably feel resentment unless they can see that remedial action is being undertaken. As summarised by Dalton *et al* cited in Abelson (1987) [1], high rates of labour turnover are expensive in terms of:

- Additional recruitment costs,
- Low production costs,
- Increased costs of training replacement employees,
- Loss of know-how and customer good will,
- Potential loss of sale (e.g if this is high turnover amongst the sales), and
- Damage that may be done to morale and productivity.

4.10 Benefits of Labour Turnover

Labour turnover does not just create costs. Some levels of labour turnover is important to bring new ideas, skills and

enthusiasm to the labour force. A natural level of labour turnover can be a way in which a business can slowly reduce its workforce without having to resort to redundancies.

4.11 Reducing Labour turn Over for New Starters

Organisations that want to reduce the labour turnover of new starters should pay particular attention to the following key areas: recruitment and selection, induction and job training.

(a) Recruitment and selection

Most employees develop some kind of recruitment and selection process often including a selection test, to determine whether applicants are suitable for the job. Where the job involves practical skills, it can make sense to test them at the time of interview. Advertisements and details given to the local job centre or employment agency should give an accurate picture of the jobs, including terms and conditions. They should also include an indication of starting pay and future prospects. Organisations sometimes feel forced to high less than ideal replacements when labour turnover is high. This can simply worsen the problem and every effort should be made to maintain the standard for new recruits. According to Burke (2003) ^[7], the result of not doing so is often higher costs of training and supervision and a reduction in the quality of output. Organisations should also beware of the disadvantages of setting unnecessary high standards – overqualified candidates may quickly become bored with jobs that turn out to be more mundane than they had imagined. The responsibility for seeing that the new recruit becomes a fully trained effective worker falls to the supervisor, and it is useful to involve the supervisor of the section in the selection process. This involvement is important in securing the supervisor's commitment to seeing the properly trained and settled into the job.

(b) Induction

When new workers star, there is a good deal of information, which they need, quite apart from training for the specific job, before they can properly settle down and feel a part of the organisation. This induction training is often shared between the personnel or administration department, which covers such matters as pay and conditions, hours of work and the supervisor, who covers the place of work, introductions to colleague, fire and safety regulations. If there is a written induction programme items are less likely to be forgotten. It is important to realize that this process is more than a simple administrative chore and should not be skimped, even if time is short. It is especially important where there are particular difficulties such as language problems.

(c) Job Training

Training a new entrant for a job naturally varies in length and complexity according to the organisation and the job itself. Training may be on or off the job and even quite small organisations may make use of the job facilities, particularly where the job is complex or cannot be taught satisfactorily on the job. A training scheme should ensure that the new starter is gradually introduced to each of the stage of the job and can do each task satisfactorily before moving on the next, Wilkinson J (2004) ^[35]. Where the job calls for a detailed training programme or something more informal, the supervisor should keep a constant check on the trainee's progress be available to

answer questions, correct faults before they become bad habits, and give encouragement.

The supervisor in charge of the on the job training will need to ensure that he or she devotes sufficient time to this task and that it is given no lower priority than his or her other duties. Otherwise there is real danger that the trainee will be neglected. It is in the interest of both the organisation and the trainee themselves that they become fully effective workers as quickly as possible. Where an incentive bonus scheme is in operation, it is important that new recruits are told what point to expect to reach an effective standard and earn bonus. They should be given every assistance in training to reach the standard on schedule.

4.12 Reducing Turnover of Long-term Workers

Where an analysis shows that the significant number of trained and experienced workers are leaving the company, it is more different to point to specific areas for remedial action. The cause of this type of labour turnover are often more fundamental and may require attention to wider issues such as organizational structure or management. As a first step however, it is necessary to examine rates of pay an earnings levels to ensure that they have not become out of line with those paid for comparable jobs in the industry or area. It is also useful to make sure that, wherever possible opportunities for career progression and steady improvement in earnings and skills are maintained. Where there is a declared policy of promotion from within the organisation, workers naturally see less need to seek career development or pay improvements elsewhere, provided the policy is seen operate in an open and fair way (Wilkinson, 2000).

Finally, dealing effectively with labour turnover calls for a continuous and coordinated efforts by personnel managers, line managers, including first line supervisors and worker representatives. High labour turnover can often be a symptom of worker dissatisfaction with their jobs. Sound, fair and consistent policies and procedures can provide a framework within which labour turnover problems can be addressed.

5. Findings

5.1 Discussion and Recommendations

The first objective of the study was to find the psychological factors influencing high labour turnover at Barbours. The findings show that all subjects (100%) cited salary as the most effective factor influencing labour turnover. The result is consistent with earlier findings by Campion (1991) ^[8] who found out that, the most important reasons for voluntary turnover is low salaries. This is also in consistent with the British clothing company. The factor emerged as the most important reasons for voluntary turnover is lower salaries. This is also in concurrence with the findings of Taphin *et al* (2003) who conducted a large scale turnover study in a British clothing company. The factor emerged as the most significant reason for employees to leave the organization. When ranked, the results showed that lack of training or career development (26, 09%) was viewed as the least effective factor. However, this concurs with Green *et al* (2008) who concluded that in aggregate, training has at average no much impact on mobility.

5.2 Job Satisfaction

According to Lum *et al* (1998) ^[22], the relationship between satisfaction in job and turnover has been consistently found in

many turnover studies. This is also confirmed by this study in which job satisfaction (73, 91%) was indicated as a factor influencing labour turnover. The responses received indicated that there are a number of factors which influence job satisfaction at Barbours. Among the cited is job status, remuneration, working conditions and knowledge of results. This indirect influence was also shown in Lum *et al* (1998)^[22]'s study of pediatric nurses.

Fifty six point fifty two percent (56, 52%) interviewed indicated that economic hardship were affecting them. However, there are no earlier findings in which significant association between economic hardship and turnover was reported. Possible explanations for this disagreement with this study could be that participants at Barbours were earning below the poverty datum line, and relating their wages to the high cost of living during the economic hardships, they are struggling to earn a living.

5.3 Managers

About 82, 61% of the respondents noted a strain with their managers. They expressed significantly more unfavourable attitudes on almost all the interview items regarding their managers. This regards the amount of help the manager gives his subordinates to improve performance on the job, the degree to which the manager is receptive to new ideas and suggestions and the ability to plan. Thus has contribution to low morale and stress. A strained relationship between managers and subordinates can result in aggressiveness, absenteeism, negligence and resignation. The respondents noted that strenuous relationship can cause resignations. This concurs with a study by Gallup Organisation (1999) which concluded that, "if organisations are losing staff, look at their immediate bosses. Managers is the reason people stay and thrive in an organisation, and he is the reason why people leave"

5.4 Pay and Pay System

One of the findings on salaries was that workers have quite separate feelings about pay and the pay system which produces their earnings. Participants indicated that the pay system does not provide earnings flexibility and as a result does not act as a grievance handling mechanism in relation to effort-reward bargaining. The pay system is not serving its function as a regulator between effort and reward. In support to this outcome, Griffith *et al* (2000)^[13] also indicated that pay and pay related variables have a modest effect on turnover. Possible explanations for this agreement could be that when higher performers are insufficiently rewarded, they leave.

5.5 Training and career development

The respondents (26, 09%) indicated that there is no facility to enhance the skills of existing workers.

"The only training you get is the AB&C of Selling, provided you are a sales assistant...they do not pay fees for our education if one decides to further his or her education...but they really know that what they are giving us is not enough for us to pay on our own....", one of the respondents indicated.

Martin (2003)^[25] detected a complex relationship between turnover and training. He suggested that establishments that enhance the skills of existing workers have lower turnover rates. This was indicated by one of the participants when he

said,

"...when one is here, he expects to move up the ladder, but it is not happening...when someone from outside is offered a job, the reason you get is of having better credentials....you get frustrated and disillusioned, and the next thing is to look for opportunities somewhere else...."

However, management participants were of a different view on training. They indicated that although it is a noble thing to develop their staff, to them it was not working in favour of the company, because once one is equipped with a new skill, particularly where they are issued with certificates, the next thing is to look for new outside offers using the same certificates. This indication from management however, agrees with Martin (2003)^[25], who found out that turnover is higher when workers are trained to be multi-skilled, which may imply that this type of training enhances the prospects of workers to find employment somewhere else.

5.6 Working Conditions

The researcher reduced the responses given in an interview to a two-scale ranking, that is, good and poor. Most of the respondents (91, 30%) cited conditions of work as poor. Generally, those who were complaining about the conditions regarded them as stressful. Lack of resources, poor remuneration and role conflict were cited as some of the contributors to poor working environment.

"...we do not even have somewhere to sitbreakfast and lunch times are the only resting periods....besides, we are on our feet from 8am to 5pm....", remarked one of the participants.

Only 8, 70% of the participants noted a conducive working environment, and these were all managers.

6. Recommendations

In light of the above findings, it is recommended that the company should implement professional training and career development programmes in order to enhance morale and employee retention. Training constitutes an investment that the company makes in the worker, providing him or her with new skills, competence and confidence. Employees who receive employer-aided education are less likely to leave their employment. Further suggestions are as follows,

- Fair and competitive compensation system must be implemented,
- Employee participation and communication (feedback) must be guaranteed,
- Employees must be recognized and rewarded for their performance, and

A further research be conducted using a different design to test the findings of this study and therefore, to raise the generalizability of the findings of this particular study.

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