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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE RETENTION AT A SELECTED CITY COUNCIL IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The inability to attract, attain and retain talented employees that perform effectively which in turn intensifies service delivery challenges across City Councils in Zimbabwe has remained a main challenge facing Masvingo City Council. This study examined the management practices that can be employed by the City Council to improve on employee retention. The study adopted a quantitative research approach using questionnaires administered to a total of 67 professionals at the City Council. Responses were captured and analysed using SPSS. Statistical tests were used to test 5 hypotheses which were formulated for the various sections of the study. Findings indicated that management practices have an impact on employee retention at the Council level. It was further revealed that there is a strong relationship between the implementation of talent management and retention strategies at Masvingo City Council. The study recommended that the City Council should provide employees with opportunities to empower them, promotion and growth opportunities, sufficient training, and development, revised and improved personnel policies, and incentives for outstanding performance.

Keywords: Management practices, talent, performance, management, employee, retention

Introduction

It has been over a decade since Cappelli (2008) argued that “retention of key productive employees is a major challenge for all local and international organisations because the upheaval created by replacing employees who voluntarily leave the organisation, costs

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the business both directly and indirectly". The world over, the domain of management practices has emerged as an area of interest for academics, business writers and leadership of organisations in recent times. For Namiq (2018:404), management practices refer to the leadership strategies utilised by the authority or supervision to effectively work with and via others so as to successfully attain organisational goals by efficiently putting available resources to use. Management practices include, among other things, performance, and people management, e.g., monitoring, target setting, feedback mechanisms, selection, and incentive-based policies. They also include operational and organisational processes, such as long-run planning, just-in-time processes, and quality circles (Ali and Ali 2020:2). Scholars from different academic disciplines have addressed how important management practices are to organisations (Valero, 2021:305). Ali and Ali (2020:1) affirm that for organisational growth, performance and survival, management practices are regarded as key drivers. A study by Valero (2021:302) found a connection between several management constructs and employee retention. Their study suggests that for organisations to retain talented employees, having effective management practices in place is vital in light of increased competition for such human capital.

It is a general perception that the more experienced and competent employees in an organisation, the better the organisation performs. Hence, it is vital for organisations to put forth good management practices to retain resourceful talented individuals and minimise employee turnover. Chikwature and Makamache (2020:35) identifies a concern in Zimbabwe that given a choice, at least 42% of workers would like to leave their organisation. This suggests a challenge for employee retention which he attributes to poor management practices. The Zimbabwean situation calls for the need to ensure employee retention especially when one considers the many benefits of retaining employees. Al-Emadi, Schwabenland and Wei (2015:8) also agree that employee retention is a voluntary process by any organisation to create an environment which encourages and motivates people to remain with the entity for the maximum period. Since Dries (2013:274) has noted that finding a suitable replacement is not only expensive but also difficult and time consuming, it becomes important for organisations to develop creative ways of retaining their employees.

In this study, we focus on the Masvingo City Council based in Zimbabwe which is responsible for providing basic services to the community such as water, waste management, maintenance of council infrastructure and so forth. Based on the researcher's observation, this specific council is laden with gaps in their management practices, and this is the motivation in which the study is predicated upon. The thrust of this paper is to therefore investigate the Masvingo City Council's employees in respect to management practices and how effectively managing retention can impact on their ability to provide efficient service delivery to residents especially if valued employees are retained. Mulcahy (2013:4) also intimate that because City Councils are vital to economic growth, it is important to ensure their smooth running so that long-term growth and development can be established with fewer obstacles. The long-term growth referred to by Mulcahy (2013) can indeed be achieved if employees are well managed to perform at a significantly high level. This paper discusses the magnitude of the challenges of retaining employees in the public sector industry. It further outlines the important role played by management in ensuring that employees remain in the organisation.

Literature Review

Against the problem statement outlined in the introduction, it is evident that public sector organisations such as City Councils, are expected to operate in a technologically advanced global environment and offer service delivery to the relevant communities by not only attracting suitably qualified and experienced employees but also retaining them. Across the globe, the state of service delivery in municipal areas has a direct impact on the lives of residences. Zimbabwe is no exception and there has been an outcry over the service delivery provided by municipalities since the turn of the millennium. Several stakeholders such as municipal residents' associations and the non-governmental organisation (NGO) community have also testified to the fact that there has been a general decline in municipal service delivery (Musingafi 2019:96). Musingafi postulates that management plays a vital role in the morale of the employees and in turn the service delivery to the public.

Several factors encourage employees to stay within an organisation. Among these, practices followed by management are one of the essential factors that cannot be ignored in employee retention. A recent extensive study by Thompsons in a public sector organisation

in South Africa (2020:2) in employment issues specified that nearly 75% of individuals leave the job because of the management they have to report to. Individuals in management positions motivate employees to achieve organisational objectives. Thus, management and their practices are essential in employee retention. In light of this, it is of paramount importance to ensure that management practices and policies are aligned in a way that includes employees. It is argued that when management procedures are seen as fair, employees will not search and imagine situations that are better than their current situations (Acar and Yener 2019). Further, Petkovic and Dordevic (2013) also state that for organisations to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, they must engage valuable resources, and if valuable resources are considered in terms of strategic value, then employees' contribution in their area of expertise is exceedingly important.

Poisat, Mey and Sharp (2018) highlight that due to the growing demand for talented individuals and concurrently the shortage in supply, organisations need to create a workforce that is passionate at every level. Measures also need to be put in place to ensure that these employees are retained in the organisation so as to remain competitive and ultimately be able to provide effective services to the public. Research by Lyria (2013) investigated the impact of talent management on retention in Kenya. The findings revealed that effective management practices influence retention. On the other hand, Onwuka, Ugwu and Kekeocha (2015:1586) also studied the relationship between talent management and employee retention in selected Nigerian public sector firms. The results show that in the public sector, there is a need to provide human resources management personnel with the skills to implement talent management practices effectively as the capabilities that are needed to implement such practices are ailing. Ashraf and Caldwell (2017:2) state that the quality of an organisation is measured by the quality of the workforce it possesses. In this regard, Thunnissen and Buttiens (2017:401) highlight that management programs give deep insights to the management about their employees, their development needs, strengths and weaknesses, areas of interest and their abilities, therefore, it is easier to determine what to emphasise on, which leads to improved employee performance and in turn value-added service delivery.

Methodology

A quantitative approach was employed for this research. Zikmund et al. (2013:135) attest that this research method employs the use of questionnaires and is a systematic measurement and collection of numeric data to determine the relationship between research and theory. The research instrument used in the collection of data was structured questionnaires. Du Plooy-Cilliers and Cronje (2014:152) define a questionnaire as a data collection instrument comprising a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from a group of respondents. The questionnaire comprised of a consent form authorising the researcher to conduct the research and a covering letter assuring respondents of their anonymity. The questions presented were in line with the research questions and objectives of this study. The researchers employed a 5-point Likert scale as it allows respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009). For this study, the target population were the employees at Masvingo City Council in Zimbabwe. The lead researcher as a Zimbabwean, having lived in the Masvingo City Council for several years, is aware of the gaps in service delivery in the city and by extension, Zimbabwe.

In the researcher's informal quest to understand these gaps, management practices stemmed as one of the key factors thus, prompting an academic investigation in the Council's management practices. This involves all employees who were on a professional career path in the different disciplines within Masvingo City Council. Masvingo City Council employs a total of 72 professionals. 67 professionals were involved in the study. Since the target population was relatively small, the census method was used, and each element formed part of the target population. Thus, there was no need for the selection of a sample, in other words, the entire population formed part of the study. After collecting the questionnaires from the respondents, the researcher reviewed the questionnaires with the purpose of establishing if the respondents had completed and answered all the questions. The researcher captured the data obtained from the questionnaire to form a data set. Thereafter, since the questionnaires were pre-coded, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 for Windows, which is the latest version, was used to analyse the responses. Fisher's exact test and the Pearson's chi-square test were used to test the hypotheses. The

researcher employed the services of a statistician for the analysis of the statistical information.

Hypothesis Testing

The main aim of this study was to investigate the impact of management practices on employee retention at the Masvingo City Council in Zimbabwe. For this study, the hypotheses were tested using the Fisher's Exact test and the Pearson Chi-Square test values.

Hypothesis 1

H01: There is a significant relationship between management practices and employee engagement at Masvingo City Council in Zimbabwe.

Table 1: Relationship between management practices and employee engagement (n=67).

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.886a	12	0.004
Likelihood Ratio	22.670	12	0.031
Fisher's Exact Test	23.034		0.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.752b	1	0.001
N of Valid Cases	67		

*Pearson Chi-squared = 28.886a, df = 12, Significance $p < 0.05$.

*Fisher's Exact Test = 23.670, Significance $p < 0.05$.

As shown in Table 1, the Pearson Chi-square test value ($p < 0.05$) is significant. There is a significant relationship between the implementation of management practices and employee engagement. In addition, the Fisher's Exact Test value ($p < 0.05$) supports a significant relationship between the implementation of management practices and employee engagement. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. According to Aljunaibai (2014:1), organisations that are interested in increasing employee engagement should establish proper management practices systems that focus on employee development and support from management. Thus, management support initiatives will make employees more committed and engaged with their job. Good management practices

enable employees to feel engaged, appreciated and valued and aligned to the organisation's goals and objectives (Davies and Davies, 2020:87). This in turn encourages employees to stay in the organisation.

Hypothesis 2

H02 There is a significant relationship between implementing people management strategies and measures to retain staff at Masvingo City Council.

Table 2: Relationship between implementing people management strategies and measures to retain employees (n = 67).

Pearson Chi-Square	85.451a	16	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	27.215	16	0.039
Fisher's Exact Test	29.718		0.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.565b	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	67		

*Pearson Chi-squared = 85.451a, df = 16, Significance $p < 0.05$.

*Fisher's Exact Test = 29.718, Significance $p < 0.05$.

As illustrated in Table 2 above, the Pearson Chi-square test value ($p < 0.05$) and Fisher's Exact Test value ($p < 0.05$) revealed that there is a strong relationship between implementing people management strategies and measures to retain employees at Masvingo City Council. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. Ogbetta, Nzewi and Chiekezie (2015:68) state that the successful implementation of effective management practices can increase employee commitment and helps in retention of key employees in an organisation. In relation to the above, measures of retaining valuable employees are the key objectives and primary motivators of having personnel management strategies and programs in an organisation (Oladapo, 2014:28). In addition, Isfahani and Boustani (2014:118) postulate that the benefits of successfully implemented management strategies include improved employee retention and recruitment. Kibul, Gachunga and Namusonge (2014:422) concur that to gain competitive advantage, the demand for human resource drives personnel management to integrate new employees, while developing and retaining existing employees.

Hypothesis 3

H03 There is a significant relationship between employees feeling empowered to take responsibility of their personal development and their motivation at Masvingo City Council in Zimbabwe.

Table 3: Relationship between employee feeling empowered to take responsibility of their personal development and motivation (n = 67).

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.673a	12	0.001
Likelihood Ratio	23.592	12	0.023
Fisher's Exact Test	23.373		0.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.398b	1	0.011
N of Valid Cases	67		

*Pearson Chi-squared = 33.673a, df = 12, Significance $p < 0.05$.

*Fisher's Exact Test = 23.373, Significance $p < 0.05$.

As shown in Table 3, the Pearson Chi-square test value ($p < 0.05$) and the Fisher's Exact Test value ($p < 0.05$) produced a significant result. As depicted in Table 4.11, the test statistics show that the hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is a relationship between employees feeling empowered to take responsibility of their personal development and their motivation. Dobre (2013:58) states that employee motivation is influenced by numerous factors such as salaries, working conditions, management styles and empowerment as well as personal development. In support, the study conducted by Gollin and Kaji (2015:641) on the impact of empowerment for personal development on motivation in the Turkish pharmaceutical sector found out that there is a strong relationship between empowerment for personal development and employee motivation.

Hypothesis 4

H04 There is a significant relationship between measures to retain staff and employees' intentions to leave Masvingo City Council in Zimbabwe.

Table 4: Analysis of data for measures to retain employees and employees' intentions to leave the Masvingo City Council (n = 67).

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.394a	16	0.496
Likelihood Ratio	17.943	16	0.327
Fisher's Exact Test	14.483		0.496
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.036b	1	0.045
N of Valid Cases	67		

*Pearson Chi-squared = 15.394a, df = 16, Significance $p > 0.05$.

*Fisher's Exact Test = 14.483, Significance $p > 0.05$.

In relation to Table 4 above, both the Pearson Chi-square test value ($p > 0.05$) and the Fisher's Exact Test value ($p > 0.05$) produced a non-significant result. The results revealed that there is no significant relationship between measures to retain staff and employees' intentions to leave the organisation at Masvingo City Council. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected. According to Kossivi, Xu and Kalgora (2016:261), organisations need not only to attract the best talent but to retain the valuable talent in the organisation for a long tenure. The results of this hypothesis are inconsistent with the findings of Holton, Mitchel, Lee, Elberly (2008:270). Their findings outlined that when retention measures are implemented to retain employees, intentions to leave decreases. In addition, Gupta-sunderji (2007:37) concurs that employees who are not satisfied with current employment display intentions to leave, unless the organisation take necessary measures that drives employees to stay or leave the organisation.

Hypothesis 5

H05 There is a significant relationship between the organisation's retention strategies and the personnel policies at Masvingo City Council.

Table 5: Relationship between the organisation's retention strategies and the personnel policies (n = 67).

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	30.416a	16	0.016
Likelihood Ratio	23.871	16	0.092
Fisher's Exact Test	23.394		0.000

Linear-by-Linear Association	17.780b	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	67		

*Pearson Chi-squared = 30.416a, df = 16, Significance p<0.05.

*Fisher's Exact Test = 23.394, Significance p <0.05.

In relation to Table 5, both the Pearson's Chi-square test ($p < 0.05$) and the Fisher's Exact Test ($p < 0.05$) produced a significant result. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between organisation's retention strategies and personnel policies at Masvingo City Council. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. Organisations need to implement personnel policies and retention strategies to make employees feel valued and engaged in order to keep them (Yazinski, 2009:1). Haider, Akhtar, Rasli and Tariq (2015:1) conducted a study on the impact of human resources practices and policies on employee retention. The findings of their study revealed that human resources practices and policies had an impact on employee retention.

Results and Discussion: Descriptive Analysis

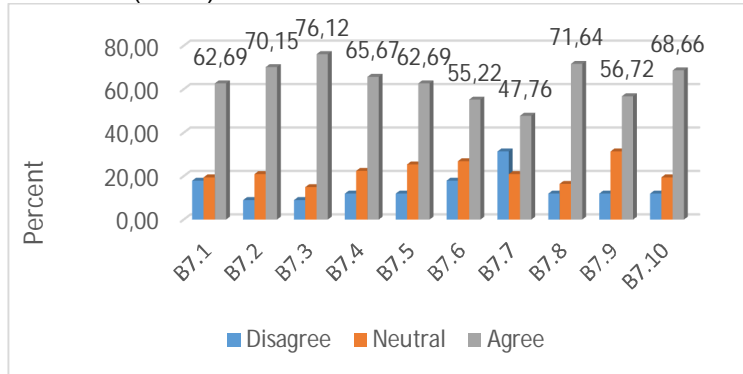
According to Gray (2014: 566), descriptive analysis involves the creation of a summary of a survey in terms of the key variables being researched. The section that follows analyses the scoring patterns of the respondents on management practices and, employee retention. Where applicable, levels of disagreement were collapsed to show a single category of "Disagree". A similar procedure was followed for the levels of agreement. The results are first presented using numbered Tables and Figures of summarised percentages for the variables that constitute each section.

This section presents the descriptive analysis relating to retention strategies. Figure 1 and Table 6 provide a summary of the response from the respondents regarding retention strategies.

Table 6: The summary of the scoring patterns relating to employee retention (n=67)

STATEMENT		RESPONSE OPTIONS			
		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Total
B7.1	I rarely think about leaving this organisation to work somewhere else.	12	13	42	67
		17.9%	19.4%	62.7%	100%
B7.2	The organisation's culture helps to retain employees.	6	14	47	67
		9.0%	20.9%	70.1%	100%
B7.3	Given the opportunity, I tell others great things about working here.	6	10	51	67
		9.0%	14.9%	76.1%	100%
B7.4	There are measures to retain employees in this organisation.	8	15	44	67
		11.9%	22.4%	65.7%	100%
B7.5	At this point, remaining with my organisation is a matter of necessity as much as desire.	8	17	42	67
		11.9%	25.4%	62.7%	100%
B7.6	One of the major consequences of leaving my organisation is the scarcity of available alternatives.	12	18	37	67
		17.9%	26.9%	55.2%	100%
B7.7	If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organisation.	21	14	32	67
		31.3%	20.9%	47.8%	100%
B7.8	One of the major reasons that I continue working for this organisation is that I believe that loyalty is important and thus I feel a sense of moral obligation to remain here.	8	11	48	67
		11.9%	16.4%	71.6%	100%
B7.9	The retention strategies in this organisation are satisfactory.	8	21	38	67
		11.9%	31.3%	56.7%	100%
B7.10	I see myself within the organisation in the next 5 years.	8	13	46	67
		11.9%	19.4%	68.7%	100%

Figure 1. The summary of the scoring patterns relating to employee retention (n=67)



As illustrated in Figure 4.5 (Statement B7.2) in relation to organisational culture, 70.15% of the respondents indicated that organisation's culture at Masvingo City Council helps to retain employees. A mere 9.0% of the respondents revealed that organisational culture at Masvingo City Council did not help to retain employees. According to Zeitlin, Augsberger and McGowan (2015:36), the organisation's culture which comprise of both the employee relationships and values, is related to employee retention. In support, Putthiwanit (2015:483) states that the organisation's culture is preciously unique, and it can facilitate employee retention as well as the overall competitiveness of the organisation.

Statement B7.4 in relation to employee retention indicates that 65.67% of the respondents revealed that there are measures to retain employees at Masvingo City Council and 11.9% of the respondents indicated that there were no measures to retain employees at Masvingo City Council. Mabika (2016:17) highlights that organisations in Zimbabwe has adopted more retention measures which are not limited to proper orientation of new employees, effective human resource strategies, effective communication, employee training and development as well as attractive compensation packages. In addition, Figure 4.5 (Statement B7.5) illustrates that 62.69% of the respondents at Masvingo City Council indicated that they remained employed with their current organisation as a matter of necessity as much as desire. However, 11.9% of the respondents revealed that they remained employed with Masvingo Municipality not as a matter of necessity or desire. Kumari and Afroz (2013:14) state that when employees remained

with the organisation because of desire and necessity, it represents an affective attachment to, identification with and involvement as well as loyalty in an organisation.

As shown by statement B7.6 in Figure 4.5, 55.22% indicated that the major consequences of leaving Masvingo City Council was the scarcity of available alternatives. According to Saygan (2011:221), when employees remain within the organisation because of high cost of leaving and the benefits of staying, it resembles continuance commitment. Given the high unemployment rate and job scarcity, Umoh, Mamah and Wokocha (2014:72) state that the scarcity of employment alternatives means that there is a likelihood that employees will not leave their jobs. As shown in Figure 4.5, statement B7.7 reveals that 47.76% of the respondents indicated that if they get an employment offer for a better job elsewhere, they will not feel it was right to leave Masvingo City Council. However, 33.30% of the respondents revealed that they felt it was right leaving their organisation if they got better employment offer elsewhere. In addition, 71.64% of respondents indicated that the major reason that they continued working for Masvingo City Council was that they believed that loyalty is important and thus they felt a sense of moral obligation to remain with their organisation (statement B7.8). According to Mohamed, Kader and Anisa (2012:2), when the retention strategies are effectively implemented the workforce develops a culture that makes them more likely to stay and less likely to leave the organisation.

For this study, it is recommended that management at Masvingo City Council ensures that outstanding performance is awarded in the organisation. The findings indicated that a substantive response from the respondents revealed that outstanding performance was not being awarded at Masvingo City Councils. Therefore, programs should be developed and implemented at Masvingo City Council to recognise outstanding performance to deter employees from leaving the organisation. Also, top management at Masvingo City Council should provide regular feedback to employees regarding their performance. In addition, the feedback should be accurate and have both the employees' strengths and weaknesses. The results indicated that there is a significant relationship between employees receiving regular feedback on their performance and the performance review process providing employees with accurate information about their strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, management at Masvingo City Council should involve employees in the decision-making process. A considerable number of respondents indicated that they were not involved in making decisions that affect their performance. Therefore, top management should allow employees to participate through joint consultation in decision making, goal setting, teamwork and other measures through which an organisation attempts to achieve organisational performance. In the same vein, the Masvingo City Council should value the input and ideas from employees. A significant number of respondents revealed that their ideas and inputs were not valued at Masvingo City Council. Valuing the ideas and inputs of employees will entwine them to the organisation which will result in a higher retention rate. In addition, employees are motivated to perform effectively when their inputs and ideas are valued thus, employee performance will also improve.

Our study also revealed that a significant number of the respondents did not agree that they performed well because they were satisfied with what they learned. Therefore, top management at Masvingo City Council should ensure that the training methodologies employed are the ones preferred by employees. Moreover, training manuals should be simple and understandable, and the delivery method should be convenient to the employees. In addition, training and evaluation should be conducted at the end of each training program to determine the effectiveness of the program delivered as well as making improvements.

Finally, it was found that most of the respondents revealed that if they got another offer for a better job elsewhere, they felt it was right to leave Masvingo City Council. Therefore, top management at Masvingo City Council should ensure that the retention strategies adopt the commitment-based approach. The essence of the commitment-based approach is to draw out employee commitment, which in turn will produce both better organisational performance and greater human development.

Concluding Remarks

This study was carried out to investigate the impact of management practices on employee retention and it was an in-house investigation at Masvingo City Council in Zimbabwe. The need to determine whether management practices have an impact on employee retention is what prompted this study. Findings indicate that the pressure on public sector departments to retain talent in today's

dynamic and competitive environment is increasing. Regardless of how vast a public sector organisation may be or how exceptional the services are, it is impossible to survive in the long run without a high-performance workforce. To ensure that a high-performance workforce is retained, effective management practices must be put in place. The management practices an organisation has in place will have enormous impact on employees' intention to stay or leave the organisation. The study further concludes that, talent management plays a vital role in ensuring that high potential and high-performance employees are retained in the organisation. Thus, public sector organisations must adopt a talent mindset to remain fully and effectively operational in the long run. Retention of core skills in the organisation and ultimately transferring these skills to other employees leads to an improvement in service delivery for public sector organisations, hence, the need for retention strategies. The study proposed recommendations and guidelines that can be applied to enhance employee performance and retention strategies by effectively optimising talent management.

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