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EFFECTS OF EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES ON ORGANISATIONAL COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN MOMBASA COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

In today's business world, retention of valuable employees is one of the most critical issues confronting leaders. Employees have competencies that are critical for the survival of an organisation. The HR department has to play a key role in designing the policies, practices and strategies, which can enable an organization to retain the human resources contributing significantly to the business. This study examines the phenomenon of employee retention in the hotel industry in the Mombasa County in order to suggest appropriate strategies, which can help the organizations in this sector to retain their valuable talent as its major objective. This was a desk research study which relied heavily on secondary data. The study concludes that the employees seek for promotion and career growth, better compensation, rewards and work appreciation, and training and development. These strategies can be adopted by the hotel organizations to retain their employees. Without sound employee retention strategies the organizations suffer high employee turnover, high business operational costs. Recognising the size and strength of the hotel industry coupled with the demands faced in attraction and retention of employees, it could be concluded that employers in this sector need to focus developing distinctive and sound employee retention strategies which recognises some of the dynamic challenges the hotel industry in Kenya is facing.

JEL CODE

J23 Employment Determination; Job Creation; Demand for Labor; Self-Employment.

KEYWORDS

Career Development, Competitive Advantage, Employee Retention, Training.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Human resources are the life-blood of any organization. Organizations cannot ignore the importance of retaining skilled employees, during the present time when skills and knowledge of staff are the most desired requirements. Employee retention issues are emerging as the most critical workforce management challenges of the immediate future. Researches have shown that in the future, successful organizations will be those which adapt their organizational behaviour to the realities of the current work environment where longevity and success depend upon innovation, creativity and flexibility. Today employee retention is the top priority of organizations due to increasing competition. It is an efficient and productive advance towards the employee management who are considered to be 'greatest assets' to the company, Bagga (2013). Employee retention involves taking measures to encourage employees to remain in the organization for the maximum period of time. Hiring knowledgeable people for the job is essential for an employer. But retention is even more important than hiring. There are many organizations which are looking for such employees. If a person is not satisfied by the job he's doing, he may switch over to some other more suitable job. In today's environment it becomes very important for organizations to retain their employees. Retention is not only important just to reduce the turnover costs or the cost incurred by a company to recruit and train. But the need of retaining employees is more important to retain talented employees from getting poached.

The competencies and skills of the worker have become extremely vital competitive advantage in the present day business scenario. All the professionally managed organizations make an all-out attempt to acquire, retain and develop the talent pool that they encompass. Importance of human resources has increased manifold, firstly because of their scarce availability and secondly due to an increasing demand by the growing number of business units seeking quality talent. In this context the ability of an organization to keep hold of its vital and skilled manpower becomes extremely critical. HR department has to play a key role in designing the policies and practices which can enable an organization to retain the human resources contributing significantly to the business.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

To develop a thorough understanding of the conceptual constructs and empirical research for the present study, extensive review of literature was undertaken. This has not only helped in identification of the gaps in the existing body of knowledge but has also enabled to establish a relationship of the present study with what already exists.

2.1 MOMBASA COUNTY

Mombasa County, is the smallest county in the coast province of Kenya, covering an area of 229.7 Km² excluding 65 Km² of water mass. Administratively, the county is segregated into seven divisions, eighteen locations and thirty sub-location and hosts six constituencies namely Mvita, Changamwe, Jomvu Kuu, Likoni, Kisauni and Nyalii. Population distribution and settlement patterns in the county are influenced by proximity to roads, water and electricity facilities. The population is also concentrated in areas where there is availability and accessibility to employment opportunities, affordable housing, and security. The key sectors in Mombasa County include port, fishing, tourism and manufacturing.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES ISSUES IN HOTELS MOMBASA COUNTY

There are twenty two listed hotels in Mombasa County as at February 2015 (Ministry of Tourism). The hotel industry in Kenya has not been spared in the war for employee retention either. Hotel industry, being a labour intensive industry, needs staff with various skill levels, from the unskilled positions to those that require employees with high levels of skills. The industry however relies mainly on employees and high turnover rates and the costs that come with turnover and low retention level of skilled employees are some of the problems that are encountered by the hotel industry (Deloitte Consulting, 2011).

Even though most of the organizations including hotels in Mombasa County are mostly technology driven, human resources are required to run the technology. Human resources are the most vital and dynamic resources of any organization. With all round development in each and every area of the economy, there is stiff competition in the job market. With this development and competition, there are lots and lots of avenues and opportunities available in the hands of the human resources. The biggest challenge that hotels in Mombasa County are facing today is not only managing these resources but also retaining them. Securing and

retaining skilled employees plays an important role for any organization, because employees' knowledge and skills are central to companies' ability to be economically competitive. Besides, continuously satisfying the employees is another challenge that the employers are facing today.

The Human Resource Department in the hotels and other organizations plays an active role in retaining its employees. It make policies for employee betterment such that employee would be satisfied with the organization and stay with the firm for longer time. This shows that it is not just retention of employees but also retention of valued skills Gberevbie(2008).

3.0 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will help in establishing the effects of employee retention strategies on organizational competitive advantage in the hotel industry in Mombasa County and hence provide suggestions on sustainable applicable strategies on the topical issue. The hotel industry in Kenya plays a key role in the growth of the tourism sector which contributes a substantial amount to the growth of the economy of the country.

4.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Employee retention involves taking measures to encourage employees to remain in the organization for the maximum period of time. Hiring knowledgeable people for the job is essential for an employer. But retention is even more important than hiring. There are many organizations which are looking for such employees. If a person is not satisfied by the job he's doing, he may switch over to some other more suitable job. In today's environment it becomes very important for organizations to retain their employees. Retention is not only important just to reduce the turnover costs or the cost incurred by a company to recruit and train. But the need of retaining employees is more important to retain talented employees from getting poached. They may be the turnover cost which includes hundreds of thousands of money to the company's expenses. Employee retention involves a systematic effort by the organization to create an environment that addresses diverse employee needs so employees will stay with the company.

Employee Retention is an effort by a business to maintain a working environment which supports current staff in remaining with the company. Many employee retention policies are aimed at addressing the various needs of employees to enhance their job satisfaction and reduce the substantial costs involved in hiring and training new staff. In an industry like hospitality and hotel in Kenya, Outsourcing the work can often be monotonous and opportunities for career growth minimal. So when opportunities beckon, the high rate of attrition is not surprising. However, there are some common reasons that especially cause people to leave.

The hotel industry in Kenya has been experiencing turnover crises over the years. Studies have been conducted on employee turnover and retention but further investigation is needed on talent retention strategies.

5.0 OBJECTIVES

Managing retention of promising employees is considered as fundamental means of achieving competitive advantage among the organizations (Walker, 2001). Organizations need to create an efficient and loyal workforce and this has implications for the hospitality and tourism industries. Loyal, efficient and stable staffs are argued to be one of the key to competitive success (Porter, 1990). High employee turnover rates affect the quality of services and goods, incur large replacement and recruitment costs, and therefore, decrease in profitability. In particular human resource personnel in the hotel industry have to deal with the following factors: (i) compensation and reward (ii) work environment (iii) career development (iv) training and development. (Silbert, 2005). Therefore the research sought to find out the factors contributing to employee retention in the hotel industry in Kenya.

6.0 HYPOTHESES

The Kenyan coastal hotel sector is part of the wider tourism industry in Kenya. The tourism industry in Kenya has experienced turbulent times in the past three years due to insecurity related issues. However this sector is contributing close to 11 percent of Kenya's GDP and employing 18% of the Kenyan workforce. It is therefore crucial to investigate the employee retention strategies used by these hotels in order to enhance their competitive advantage.

7.0 METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a desktop research technique in seeking facts, general information on the topic, historical background and study results that have been published or exist in public documents. The information was obtained from libraries, newspaper archives and websites, journals and magazines. A comprehensive review of existing literature i.e., Journals, Books, Magazines, Internet and Newspapers was undertaken to know the contemporary employee retention scenario and the research undertaken in the field so far. It enabled identification of the prevalent gaps for the study.

8.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policies that are used to attract and retain people can be used to label the organization as an employer of choice. An organization that is an employer of choice is one of which people want to work and stay. Organizations with employer of choice status are able to compete effectively for talent because they are able to meet their needs and the organization needs simultaneously (Armstrong and Murlis, 2007).

Retention of talented employees who have the necessary competencies to assure organisational survival is one of the key issues organisations face in attempting to gain a competitive advantage through their human resources. The inability to retain employees leads to employee turnover, which, in turn, has a direct impact on organisational costs, productivity and business performance. According to Chew and Chan (2008:504), organisations attempt to eliminate these potential problems by striving to create positive organisational climates through the use of various human resource management initiatives in order to retain valuable employees. Issues that are deemed as important to employees include a satisfying working environment, training and career development opportunities, rewards and recognition, good working relationships and resources, challenging jobs and autonomy. Employees will be more committed to an organisation if the organisation provides something valuable to them, leading to the direct consequence of employees being more committed to an organisation and, as such, being less likely to leave (Maurer & Lippstreu, 2008:329). In order to create organisation commitment and develop retention strategies, the factors that operate as motivators for retention, together with the value that they attribute to employees, must be identified (De Vos & Meganck, 2009:47).

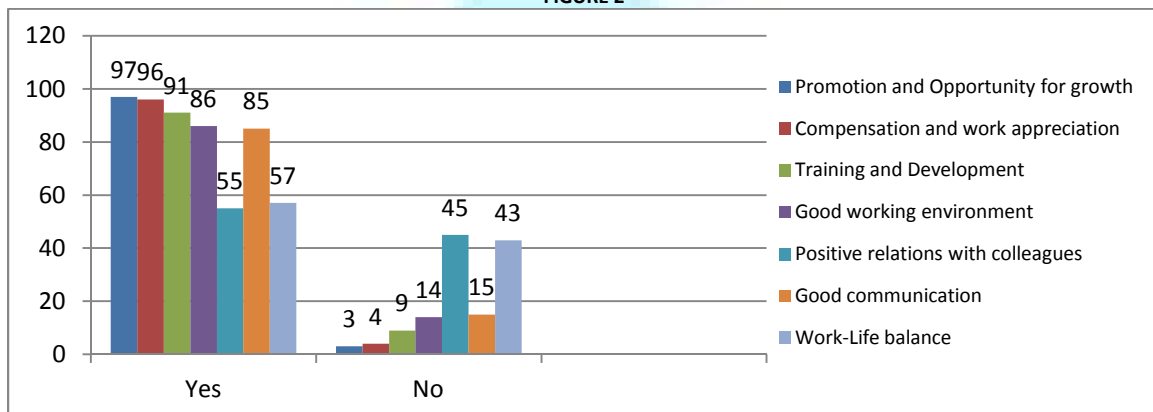
FIGURE 1: THE EMPLOYEE RETENTION & JOB SATISFACTION MODEL



9.0 FINDINGS

9.1 EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES

FIGURE 2



Source: HR Employee Satisfaction Survey Study; Field Survey, 2014

Figure 2 above shows that promotion and opportunity for growth score 97 per cent from the desk literature review. This is followed by compensation, rewards and work appreciation which had 96 per cent. Good working environment at the hotels is a retention strategy as indicated by 86 per cent and good communication on staff matters follows at 85 per cent. However, work-life balance and positive relations with colleagues had 57 percent and 55 percent respectively so they are strategies that least influence employee retention.

9.2 EFFECTS OF POOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES

FIGURE 3: EFFECTS OF POOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES

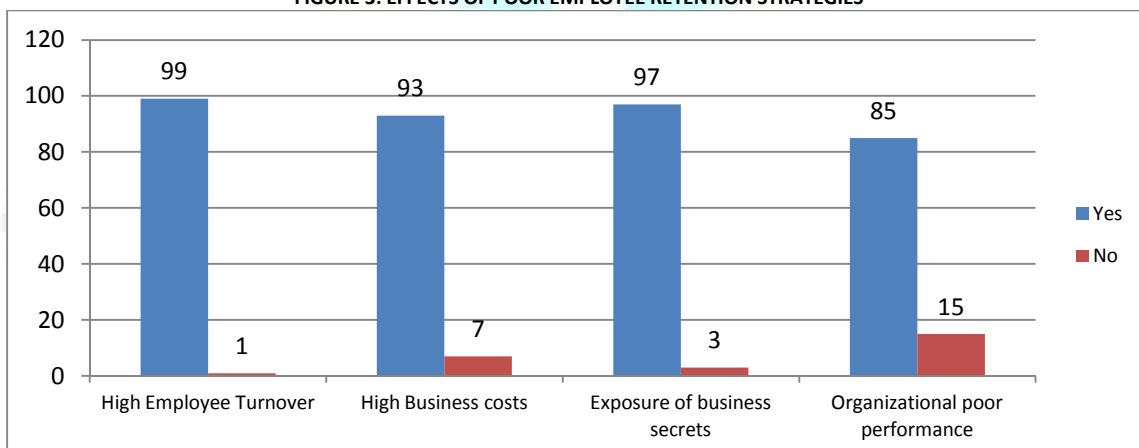


Figure 3 shows the effects of poor employee retention strategies in Hotels in Mombasa County. A 99 per cent of the literature journals reviewed show poor employee strategy results into high employee turnover, 97 percent show it leads to exposure of business secrets while 93 per cent show it leads to high business costs. Another earlier study on "Strategies used by Nairobi hotels in Talent retention", carried out by Jepngetich and Njue in 2013 gave a similar picture. The aspect of poor organizational performance had 85 per cent count.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The hotels should develop effective career planning programs for the employees after they attain significant work experience in order to ensure professional developmental opportunities within the organization itself so that the employees do not have to look for professional growth opportunities outside their organization.

As academic qualifications are reported to be significantly related with reduction in the retention of the employees at the hotels, it is recommended that the hotels in Mombasa County should not hire over qualified candidates for these positions as they are less likely to be a part of the organization for a longer time period.

Since fair and competitive salaries as well as performance related incentives have been reported as highly significant factors of employee retention, the organizations should constantly monitor the salary structures and performance oriented incentives offered by the competing organizations in the same industry so as to maintain parity with the competitors, thus reducing the chances of high employee turnover.

As no single factor can be considered detrimental for attaining high rate of employee retention, it is recommended that the organizations should look for variety of effective and suitable employee retention strategies and practices so that their combined effect can enable the organizations in the hotel industry to retain their employees.

It is suggested that the organizations should implement a well-defined talent management system suitable to their business needs so as to acquire, develop and retain the required level of talent for their overall long-term growth and success.

However, in as much as the retention strategies are in place, there is the challenge of job security and as a result, employee turnover will still be a recurring problem, therefore, it would be necessary that further studies be conducted to look into this and propose workable solutions for both the organization and the employee.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

Human resources are complex and not easy to understand. These are the assets which can make as well as break an organization. Retaining them will help in the long-term growth of an organization and will also add to their goodwill. But the most difficult task faced by an organization today is retaining as well as satisfying these resources.

This research is significant in providing the views of HR managers in the hotel industry on the key aspect of employee retention; this sector is globally and locally important yet relatively under-researched with regard to its contribution to the economy. Recognising the size and strength of the hotel industry coupled with the demands faced in attraction and retention of employees, it could be concluded that employers in this sector need to focus developing distinctive and sound employee retention strategies which recognises some of the dynamic challenges the hotel industry in Kenya is facing.

12.0 LIMITATIONS

There was limitation in getting the relevant information required from the various targeted hotels. This non-disclosure can be attributed to the suspicion on the part of the respondents as the data required touches on critical human resource issues. A second limitation is that the data used is for hotels in Mombasa County, which have small HR departments and HR managers without key strategic roles in HR strategic role formulation. Hence, the findings may not give a true representation of the wider tourism and hospitality industry in Kenya.

13.0 SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The study recommends further research to be done on employee retention strategies on the tourism attraction facilities in Kenya and in the East African Region. This will provide a more detailed comparative analysis of the challenges affecting the entire tourism industry in the region. Future research might also explore whether different categories of employees (e.g. knowledge workers, professionals, labourers) were attracted and retained by differing practices/benefits. Additionally, future research could directly seek the views of union representatives for their insights into challenges in attraction and retention and their own involvement in employment relations decision making in the sector.

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