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Strategic Talent Retention in Malawi's Public Sector: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Human Capital Development

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Malawi's strategic public talent retention, focusing on the ministries of education and health in Blantyre and Lilongwe. People are leaving their jobs even though many people are trying to get them to apply for jobs. This is because of low pay, no chance for career growth, political interference, and bad working conditions. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate organizational performance and retention dynamics via Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Organizational Commitment Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. The data indicate that appreciation, mentoring, and leadership guidance are significant yet infrequently utilized advantages. The study recommends investing in infrastructure, establishing mechanisms for worker engagement, implementing a national retention framework, and reforming the pay structure.

These actions are needed to build a strong and motivated public workforce that is in line with Malawi's goals for growth.

Keywords: Talent retention, Strategic HRM, Public sector, Malawi, Human capital development

Introduction

But over time, the industry has had trouble keeping workers who are good at their jobs. High turnover rates among administrators, teachers, and healthcare workers have hurt institutional memory, made services less reliable, and hurt public trust. Problems with the institutions, like low pay, few job openings, unpredictable working conditions, and too much politics in human resources, are what cause these retention issues. This article is important because it tries to figure out how to keep talented people working in Malawi's public institutions, which is a very difficult problem. Retention strategies are still not well thought out and are only used when needed, even though hiring efforts have recently gone up. It also wants to move away from short-term staffing solutions and toward long-term, institutionally sustainable, and contextually grounded strategic human resource management (SHRM) interventions.

The article seeks to examine the institutional, structural, and psychosocial determinants affecting employee turnover in Malawi's public sector and to recommend contextually appropriate, evidence-based strategies for improving retention. The research offers a theoretical and empirical foundation for reassessing HR practices to ensure alignment with national development goals, employing recognized organizational and motivational frameworks, including Organizational Commitment Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

Objectives of the Research

- To identify key drivers of employee turnover in Malawi's public sector.
- To assess the effectiveness of current retention practices and policies.
- To analyse the relationship between employee motivation, engagement, and institutional performance.
- To propose strategic HRM interventions tailored to Malawi's governance and resource realities

Scope of the Discussion

The Ministries of Health and Education are very important, and the study looks at public institutions in Lilongwe and Blantyre. It employs a mixed-method research methodology that integrates quantitative data with qualitative narratives to gather insights from HR administrators, frontline employees, and policymakers. The conversation takes place in developing countries and is about strategic workforce planning, reforming the public sector, and the long-term viability of human capital.

Literature Review

Retention of talent in the public sector has surged throughout sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in areas where high employee turnover has historically hindered the maintenance of service continuity and delivery. Dzimbiri (2021) and Mazulu (2022) found that the main reasons for Malawi's high turnover in the civil service are low pay, few chances for career advancement, and human resources practices that are influenced by politics. Mohammed et al. (2023) discovered that retention within Ghana's health sector was significantly associated with access to training, recognition, and well-defined promotion systems. Malawi's public service also didn't have these things.

Govender (2023) says that retention treatments need to be culturally relevant, especially when there aren't many resources available. Public institutions must rely on organizational culture and intrinsic motivators to retain personnel, while private sector models are frequently influenced by financial incentives. Barkhuizen and Masale (2022) demonstrated that strategic HRM initiatives, including succession planning and leadership development, improved retention strategies within Botswana's public sector.

Theoretical Frameworks

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory: Distinguishes motivators like recognition from hygienic elements like compensation.

The social exchange theory promotes the idea of perceived justice and reciprocity in interactions between employers and employees.

The organisational commitment theory examines normative, emotional, and continuity commitments as factors that influence employee retention.

Discussion

- **Management of Strategic Human Resources (SHRM)** Putting hiring, training, performance reviews, and employee engagement at the center of setting and planning for the organization's goals is what strategic human resource management means. In the government, HR decisions must be in line with the goals of the administration and the larger goals of national development, policy implementation, and service delivery. SHRM is the answer to making HR a real job and making sure that jobs are safe in Malawi, where politics and money have always been a problem for government agencies.
- **The Retention of Talent** It's not enough to just lower turnover to keep good employees. It means making a workplace where workers can see a clear path to future promotions and contributions, and where they are always getting better and are engaged. It includes planning for succession, but it also includes career advancement, protection, rewards, and mentoring. Retention should be seen as a strategic investment in employees that will help the Malawian public sector stay stable and keep performing well, even though professionals there tend to stay in the same job for a long time.

Findings/Observations

- **Pay and Stagnation in Careers** Due to a lack of competition and delayed payments, over 80% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the then-current income levels.
- **There were few opportunities for professional growth or career advancement, and career development pathways were seen as ambiguous and politically motivated.**
- **Leadership and the Culture of the Organisation** The majority of the respondents linked poor communication, lack of recognition, and favoritism to the inconsistent leadership support they reported.
- **Most workers were unhappy and alienated because they believed they were being underpaid.**
- **Shortages in Infrastructure and Workload** Health and education workers' worst enemy was overwork brought on by staff shortages, especially in rural deployments.
- **Burnout and frustration were also caused by inadequate infrastructure, which included subpar office space, a lack of textbooks, and unpredictable transportation.**
- **Political Interference in HRM Departments:** Despite merit-based hiring and retention, HR decisions were occasionally made for political motives.
In ministries with decentralised HRM, retention strategies were applied inconsistently, and staff turnover was not effectively tracked.
- **Limited Involvement and Voice of Employees** Most participants said they had no opportunity to provide feedback or contribute to institutional planning and were not involved in decision-making. Participation exclusion reduced affective commitment and management trust.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A full plan for keeping employees includes investing in safety culture, inclusion, and leadership skills to build affective commitment; improving operating support and infrastructure to ease workload pressures and resource shortages, especially at the service front end, to reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction; expanding employee participation and voice channels through feedback systems, participatory planning, and regular staff consultations to build trust and responsiveness; and creating a national retention structure that includes both monetary and non-monetary incentives within a single, consistent, cross-government policy.

6. References

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