

Determinants of employee's retention in Tanzania local government authorities: the study of Ikungi District Council in Singida Region

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Abstract

This paper investigates the managerial and personal factors influencing employees' retention in local government authorities in Tanzania. Over the years, studies of employee's retention have been focusing on managerial or organizational factors with family factors in local government authorities receiving little attention. This paper therefore, aimed at exploring managerial and personal factors influencing employees' retention particularly in local government authorities in Tanzania. Accordingly, a qualitative approach was adopted and Ikungi District Council was selected as a case study particularly because it is one of the rural local government authorities in Singida Region in Tanzania with high labour turnover. Data were collected through documentary review and focus group discussion comprising a sample of 150 respondents among the staff members selected from different departments of Ikungi District Council. The data were analysed using thematic approach. The study findings indicate that although the managerial factors influence employees' retention, they do not reveal the complete picture explaining the reasons of turnover particularly in Ikungi District Council in Tanzania. Some personal factors such as searching for a better offer, or changing working environment, equally influence employees' retention. To understand employees' retention, both personal and managerial factors should be taken into consideration.

Key words: Employee retention, managerial and personal factors, Local Government Authorities

Introduction

The growing trend of employee turnover around the world has forced many organizations to devise strategies of ensuring that the best and the most talented people are retained within the organization. This is because retaining employees enable the organizations to be more productive and achieve organization goals and objectives (Sushma, 2014). This implies that, the success of an organization depends not only on good business strategy but also on the ability of an organization to appreciate and motivate their employee, which can in turn maximize organisational performance for the benefit of the organization (Steinmetz et al. 2014; Mahadi *et al.*, 2020).

New developments theoretical and empirical literature on employees' retention provides accounts for the factors influencing employee's retention. For example, motivators and de-motivators factors propounded by Herzberg through two factor theory provided strong motivation for this study.

Furthermore, some empirical literature (i.e., Bycio *et al.*, 1995; McNeese-Smith, 1995) extended these factors to include leadership and personal factors. Literature by Andrews and Wan (2009) shows that leadership style influence employees' intention to leave an organization as well as the degree of employee's commitment, which is related to the intention to leave. In addition, Andrews scholar (i.e., Wan, 2009; Mahadi *et al.*, 2020) emphasized on the importance of leadership style as a retention factor through which leaders create a vision of guiding employees through transformation and inspiration. This in turn influences employee's commitment of staying with the organization. This suggests that having a good relationship with the supervisor can influence the intention of the employee of staying in the organization (Mahadi *et al.* 2020).

Besides leadership factors, personal factors such as age, gender, marriage, education level and years of working experience were also found to influence employees' retention (Liu and Wang, 2006). Studies (i.e., Babajide, 2010; Mamun & Hasan, 2017) have proven that employees who are inexperienced, young, and have a high level of education have lower levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of commitment to the organization. These negative attitudes have an impact on employee's turnover.

Despite this new development, the trend of employees leaving the organization has increased especially in local government authorities (Mahadi *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, studies on factors influencing employees' turnover particularly in local government authorities are scarce. For example, it is not clear as to how leadership style used by leaders in local government authorities in Tanzania or personal factors such as new job offer, marriage or age influence the employee's intention to leave the organisation. Accordingly, the question what are the managerial, leadership and personal factors influencing employee retention in local government authorities is worth investigating. To respond to this question the study was carried in Ikungi District Council, which is one of the rural local government authorities with high employee turnover in Singida region in Tanzania. The remaining part of this paper is organized in the following sections: the concept of employee retention, the analytical frame, methodology and the findings.

Employee retention conceptualized

The term employee retention has been described and defined by different management scholars in different ways. Scholars (i.e., James & Mathew, 2012; Das & Baruah, 2013; Lam *et al.*, 2015) perceive employee retention as a process in which employees are encouraged to remain in the organization for the maximum period. On the other hand, Mahadi *et al.* (2020) define employee retention as a systematic effort by employers of creating and fostering an environment that encourages current employees to remain with the organization. In another study, Kossivi *et al.* (2020) defines employee retention as a practice companies adopt to maintain effective workforce and simultaneously meeting operational requirements. This study adopted the last two definitions because they are consistent with the goal of this study, which is to analyse managerial and personal factors influencing employee retention in local government authorities in Tanzania.

The concept of employee retention has been subsumed into a number of factors, which include mental and physical dimensions. The mental dimension factors consist of work characteristics. Employees always prefer flexible work tasks where they can use their knowledge and see the results of their efforts, which in return, help in retaining the valuable resources.

The physical dimension factors consist of working conditions (working environment) and pay (fair payment) Das and Baruah (2013). The section below will unpack the theoretical framework of this study. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory

The prominent theory explaining employees' retention is the Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (also known as the Herzberg two – factor theory). This theory was coined by Fredrick Herzberg in 1959. Herzberg divided the employees' retention factors into (Intrinsic factors/content) for example employee rewards, recognition, autonomy, training and development, personal growth and hygiene factors (Extrinsic factors/context). Extrinsic factors are those factors which prevent employees from any job dissatisfaction; examples include salaries, rules and policies and working conditions (Wan *et al.* 2013; Busalic and Mujabasic 2018). Despite their presence, employee's dissatisfaction will not be affected, but its absence will cause employee dissatisfaction and feel uncomfortable to work in the organization (Wan *et al.*, 2013. They only affect or prevent employees from the feeling of dissatisfaction and attract them to stay with the organization for a long period. According to this theory, extrinsic factors are less likely to contribute to employee's motivational needs. Intrinsic factors are factors that when they are supplied can influence employees' satisfaction, or affect employee's attitude or behaviour on work performance (Wan *et al.* 2013; Busalic and Mujabasic 2018), This means that, intrinsic factors tend to motivate employees so as to increase work performance and love the job they do and their organization. One of the flaws of Herzberg theory is that it focuses on managerial factors and pays less attentive on personal factors. However overall, the theory indicates, how motivation plays an important role in influencing employees' retention. This means motivation and retention are directly related. A motivated employee is expected to perform higher and better than unmotivated employees (Busalic & Mujabasic 2018).

On the other hand, another category of theories explaining employee retention are managerial/leadership theories. Leadership style in the organization can influence employees to decide on whether to stay or leave an organization. Andrews and Wan (2009) emphasized on leadership as a strategy to increase an organization retention capacity. Mahadi *et al.* (2020) categories leadership styles into two categories; transformational and transactional leadership. Transformational leadership is characterized by a leader who creates vision to guide subordinate. This leadership style is sometimes called quiet leaders and one of the most inspiring leadership styles. While transactional leadership style is characterized by a leader who expects the subordinate to carry out their duties based on leader instruction. They will be given reward if are able to carry out the duties well and given punishment if they fail to do so.

The study conducted by Bycio *et al.* (1995 as cited in Mahadi et al., 2020), found that the higher the degree of transformational leadership the lower the intention to leave the organization. Similar observation is reported in a study by McNeese-Smith (1995 cited in Mahadi *et al.*, 2020) which found that, leadership has a strong constructive relationship with employees' commitment towards organization and employees' job satisfaction. The employee's intention to stay in the organization might depend on human factor especially leadership rather than on organization itself. Employees are human beings, as human beings any emotion related aspect can greatly influence their decision of quitting or remaining in an organization. Poor leadership is practiced over time it may cause stress and emotional exhaustion to employees

Furthermore, according to Mahadi *et al.* (2020), the relationship between leaders and their subordinate is an important variable and can affect the turnover intention of employees.

For example, according to this research, the relationship between employees and their immediate supervisors or managers was ranked the third most important factor for employees' retention. A good relationship with the supervisor bears a positive impact on employee's intention to remain in an organization. A considerate leader will make employees stay longer in the organization. Any employee working in any organization has a free will of working with trustworthy and respected supervisor, who understand and treat employee with respect. A good relationship with the supervisor contributes indirectly to other positive values such as receiving good supervisor's support that motivates employees to perform better. This in turn creates stress-free work environment, improves job satisfaction, increases employees' commitment and reduces voluntary employee turnover (Mahadi *et al.*, 2020). In addition, literature shows that personal factors such as age, gender, marriage, education level and years of working experience also influence employee's retention (Liu & Wang, 2006). Scholars (i.e., Babajide, 2010; Mamun & Hasan, 2017) have proven that employees who are inexperienced, young, and with high level of education have lower levels of job satisfaction and a lower level of commitment to the organization. Nevertheless, overall the theory and empirical literature cite management and leadership factors as influencing employees retention; however, there is little or scarce empirical literature on the role played by personal factors on employee's retention particularly in local government authorities in Tanzania. This study proposes an analytical framework that takes into account the impact of managerial/ leadership factors and personal factors on employee's retention particularly in local government authorities. In this respect the current study sought to respond to the following question: what are the managerial or leadership and personal factors influencing employee retention in local government authorities in Tanzania?

Methodology

To respond to the research question stated in the preceding section, this study used qualitative approach with Ikungi District Council as a case study. Ikungi District Council was selected on ground that the District Council is young Rural Local Government Authority (LGA) established from Singida District Council in 2013. However, unlike other LGA's, over the years most of the staff have moved to urban areas in search for greener pastures. In order to get an in-depth data for the current study a sample of 150 respondents was picked purposely from the population of 300 staff from different departments of Ikungi District Council constituting top managers/head of departments/division, line managers and extension officers. among these, there were 80 lower cadre staff. The data analysis began with content analysis of relevant documents such as Ikungi District Council profile, pay and incentive policy, employees' exist survey reports and quarterly reports of the Council. The review of documents provided information of the formal rules governing employee's retentions such as incentives and pay policy of the council. The review was followed by an in-depth interview and focus group discussions. About 70 policy officers were involved in the in-depth interviews and 80 lower carder staffs were involved in 14 focus group discussions. The data from interviews and focus group discussion were analysed using thematic approach in which themes and categories were identified to match the interviews patterns. For the purpose of ensuring reliability, the interactive questioning of the same respondents and probing was used. In addition, the researcher reviewed important documents including employees exit surveys.

Ikungi District Council – An overview

The Ikungi District Council was established in March 2013 as a new district council in Singida Region in Tanzania. The council was established through the Government gazette no 87 of the Local Government (District Authorities) Act No.7 of 1982. Based on data of the population and housing census of 2012, the total population of the district is 272,959 (URT 2014). Administratively, the district is led by the District Executive Director who is the head of executives, and politically the district is under the council chair assisted by four standing committees responsible for decision making. These committees include Finance, Administration and planning committee; Education, health and water committee; Agriculture, economics, environment and works committee and HIV/AIDS committee. The Council Management Team which constituted by the heads of departments and units is responsible for the day-to-day activities. The departments include Planning, Agricultural, Irrigation and Cooperatives, Livestock and Fisheries, Land and Natural Resources, Environmental and Sanitation and Community Development and Human Resource. The units include Legal Unit, Procurement, Internal Audit, Information and Communication Technology (URT 2014)

Staff education profile

The level of education of the respondents in Ikungi District Council varies from primary school to Master's Degree level. Overall, the qualification of staff involved in the research varies from the primary school until the Master's Degree level certificate to bachelor degree levels. About 2(1.5%) of the respondents had primary education and these mainly constituted security guards, Ward and village Executive officers and primary school teachers. About 7(5.3%) had secondary education, 13(9.8%) had certificate level of education, 45(33.8%) had diplomas, 39.8% had bachelor degrees and 6(4.5%) had master's degree.

Working environment of employees at Ikungi District Council

To understand the trend of employees' retention in Ikungi District Council, the study began with the review of documents including the council profile and the exit survey. The findings from documents review indicate that the council has three hundred staff currently working in the council and 75 employees which equals to 25 percent had left the organization in the past five years. One of the reasons reported is low salary and unsuitable working environment (URT 2014).

When the respondents were asked about the factors which influence their decision to leave or remain with the organization, the findings show that, working environment was one of the main factors. For example, most of respondents especially those working in low cadres reported that they were working in very poor conditions, because they did not have an office and had to perform their duties under a tree. This makes them believe that Ikungi is not a good place to work as one of the interviewee says,

“I and my fellows do not have an office, we are working under a tree, and there is no even money to rent a single room.”

The findings show further that, although Ikungi District Council is aware of the importance of ensuring good working environment to their employees, low cadre staff also experience a lack of job security problem and increased exposure to occupational risks as witnessed in the following extract:

“ we're collecting revenue during night with no security or police support, we are risking our life and the management doesn't seem to care, they just want to see revenue arise”.

Furthermore, long distance to work is another challenge. The respondents said that they experience a problem of walking long distances to work due to lack of staff housing facilities in the council. The situation becomes worse during rainy season because some local roads are in bad conditions. Consequently, the impassable poor roads together with lack of staff housing facilities restrict them from attending their work as is was reported in the following extract

“there is no houses for staff or for rent to stay; we have decided to stay far from our working station because we don't have other options for a place to stay near our working station”.

Salary and fringe benefits were other factors which influence employees' high turnover at Ikungi District Council. For example, one of the respondents reported the following during focus group discussion.

“I will leave soon as if I get the better offer especially to any government institution”.

Work life balance of employees at Ikungi District Council

Moreover, work life balance is another factor influencing high labour turnover. The respondents reported to have been working more than 12 hours a day without any motivation and sometimes in most cases they find themselves working during weekends. Long working hours limit their private time. Consequently, this makes them busy with official activities most of the time and hence limiting the balance between official work and their private time.

The findings indicate further that low cadres are among the category of staff affected by lack of work life balance. This category of employees work even during weekends, and during late hours in the night. The findings indicate that the most affected staff are those working at the Headquarters. For example, one of the respondents had the following to say during interview,

“we are lacking time to perform our private life activities, most of our time we do perform official works especially during the revenue season” “sometimes we even sleep three to four hours a day, most of time we use to be busy on collecting revenue”.

Leadership style and employees retention at Ikungi District Council

With respect to leadership style, the respondents reported that leadership style is another factor influencing employee retention at Ikungi District Council. For example, through interviews and focus group discussions, many respondents reported to work under poor leadership style. Leaders do not care much about their employees. They just care about themselves. For example, one of the respondents during the interview had this to say,

“most of them do not have qualities of leadership to handle cases, they forget about us they just care about themselves by been afraid of losing their position”.

During the interview, another respondent said “there is a gap between managers and lower cadre employees; we lack good communication with our bosses”.

Career development and employee retention at Ikungi District Council

Career development was reported by many respondents as another challenge, indicating that they do not get opportunities for growth and time for training. For example, through interview, one of the staff of Ikungi District Council from Human Resource and Administrative Department had this to say,

“Training is provided to everyone who wants to, and they policy is quite clear what they supposed to do is to follow the procedures when they have the requirements”.

On the contrary, through interviews and focus group discussion with lower cadre staff, the respondents said, "Training for career development provided to some levels and it has poor system (bureaucratic system). They provide opportunities to the people who are closely to them and perhaps they have same interest".

In addition, the motivation policy emerged as another factor that contributes to high labour turnover. For example, one of the factors reported during the interviews was poor motivation policy. Most of the respondents said, motivation policy at Ikungi District Council, is very poor because motivation was provided once per year on May Day (Mei Mos Day), and normally for only one or two people per departments, and on issues of extra duty. There are some cadres who do not get any pay for extra working hours despite that the nature of their work make them qualify for extra duty payment.

Personal factors for employee retention at Ikungi District Council

The researcher asked this question in order to identify personal factors that may causal factors for employees' exit from the organisation. According to the respondents, family matters such as age and better work packages are the main causes for employees' leaving Ikungi District Council. For example during the interview, one of the respondents said,

"I am here because I have not secured a good job in town. If I get another job which pays more like central government I will leave Ikungi District Council because I have good education and am still young "

Another respondent said,

"Ikungi is my home, is my place of domicile and I love working here but I would like to stay close to my family which is now in Singida town. I must leave Ikungi District Council because I want to join my spouse and children".

Discussion of the findings and cross referencing

One of the factors for high turnover which featured the most is poor working environment. The study respondents reported that, most of them were working in poor environment that minimising their level of satisfaction and leading to poor work performance. For examples, some cadres reported working under trees because due to lack of office space, furthermore most of Ikungi staff were working in remote areas with no or limited access to the internet and other networks, and with poor health system and other social amenities. These findings are inconsistent with the findings from other studies (i.e., Adriana & Giovanni, 2008; Sandhya & Kumar (2011); Shao, (2013); Calist, 2015) who showed that, controllable factors such as short contract, poor working conditions, poor recruitment procedures, lack of motivation and poor or inadequate incentives and rewards are the reasons that influence voluntary turnover.

Furthermore, changing working environment came out regularly because the respondents claim to have been working at Ikungi District Council for a long time, thus they would like to work somewhere else to acquire new experience. These findings are consistent with the findings in a study by Babajide (2020) who observed that all the personal factors (work family life, job satisfaction, commitment to organization and general health) taken together predict workers' turnover intention. Elsewhere, scholars (Shen & Hall, 2009; Andresen, 2015; Nor, (2018); Chepkosgey *et al.*, 2019) argue that, employees may leave companies in search for better payment packages, better career development and opportunities and job satisfaction among other factors.

Furthermore, the lack of work life balance was reported as another important factor for employee's decision to exit at Ikungi District Council. The findings indicate that, some cadres (lower cadres) sometimes work seven days a week and even during midnight and thereby most of their life is spent on official duties. They do not have enough time to deal with their personal life.

This is unhealthy because work demands interfering with personal life results to stress and emotional exhaustion among employees. These findings are inconsistent with the findings from other studies showing that work life balance is comparatively a recent trend which is being used by various organizations to retain its employees by promoting a healthy balance between one's personal and professional life (Nasir & Mahmood, 2018).

Poor career development and training were cited as other factors influencing employees' retention. The findings show that, the most affected employees are those in lower cadres working in the extension or field areas such as wards, village, primary schools, and dispensaries. This category of staff does not get adequate opportunities for career development at Ikungi District Council. This is consistent with the findings from other studies (i.e., Ahmad & Azumah, 2017) revealing that provision of promotion and career development opportunities to individuals can make them stick to an organization.

In addition, leadership style is another factor reported to have had an impact on employee retention. The interview with the respondents indicates, that there were poor working relations between managers and their subordinates at Ikungi District Council. The findings show that the leaders and subordinates at Ikungi District Council are divided into classes: the class of leaders who are the superiors who care little about their subordinates and the class of subordinates (lower class) who fail to get assistance from their bosses. This is also proven by the absence of a room for communication between leaders and their subordinates. The leaders sometimes put their staff in the police custody for minor offences without giving them opportunities of expressing themselves. Similar findings are reported in a study by Callist (2015) who found that leadership style can influence organizational commitment and job satisfaction that can in turn have an impact on organizational commitment and work performance.

Finally, family matters were found to be the main personal factors influencing employee's retention. Most of staff said that they wanted to leave Ikungi District Council, because they wanted to stay close to their families including spouses and children. Similarly, looking for better job with better pay was a push factor. Through interview, the respondents reported that comparatively other institutions especially the central government institution pay more than do local government institution. However, it is the local government staff who perform a lot of work, serving citizens and working many hours. These findings are consistent with the findings in a study by Babajide (2010) and (Mamun & Hasan 2017) showing that employees who are inexperienced, young, and have a high level of education have a lower level of job satisfaction and a lower level of commitment to the organization. These negative attitudes have positive coloration with employees switch or labour turnover.

Conclusion

To understand the factors influencing employees' retention particularly in local government authorities, both managerial or leadership factors together with personal factors should be taken into consideration.

Managerial factors such as the working environment, work life balance, career development are instrumental in creating a conducive and comfortable work environment for local government staff while leadership factors contribute to moderating the relationship between leaders and subordinates. This study indicated how leadership style of district local government authorities affected leaders and subordinate relationship. Oppressive District leaders against the local government staff at Ikungi District Council, family matters especially the need to be close to family members and better pay are among the most important personal factors that influence employee's turnover intention at Ikungi District Council.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusion in this study, this paper recommends the following; first, the management of the local authorities should establish a reward system, which is fair and reasonable especially to lower level cadre's staff. Furthermore, the local government authorities should revise their motivation policy. Motivation of staff should not wait for the May Day, which occurs once per year. There should be a system of recognizing good work regularly and rewarding it accordingly.

Moreover, the local government authorities should devise a strategy of improving working conditions of staff by providing housing facilities to staff, and improving local roads to enable the staff reach the working place without difficulties.

Besides, the District Council leaders should be trained on the importance of leadership and on the strategy of building good relationship between leaders and subordinates through communication.

In addition, the management of the council should devise a new strategy of improving carrier development of staff and the staffs who qualifies for training, according to the training needs analysis of the council should be given the opportunity for further training.

Finally, the council should devise a strategy of balancing work and life and allow employees to enjoy their private time instead of regularly interfering with employee's private time and forcing them to work beyond their capacity.

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