
**EXAMINING EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES IN THE
SOUTH AFRICAN HOTEL SECTOR: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study was to examine employee retention strategies in the South African hotel sector.

Statement of the Problem: Employee turnover has been a persistent challenge in the industry, leading to increased costs, decreased productivity, and a loss of valuable talent. Therefore, understanding and implementing effective retention strategies are crucial for maintaining a stable and motivated workforce.

Methodology: The study adopted a comparative approach by analyzing existing literature on employee retention strategies in the South African hotel sector. Multiple sources, including academic journals, industry reports, and books, were reviewed to identify common themes, trends, and best practices in employee retention.

Result: The findings highlighted various strategies that have been employed by hotels in South Africa to improve employee retention rates. These included competitive compensation and benefits packages, career development opportunities, work-life balance initiatives, recognition and rewards programs, supportive organizational culture, and effective communication channels. The study also examines the effectiveness of these strategies and their impact on employee retention.

Conclusion: The comparative analysis provides insights into the similarities and differences in employee retention strategies across various hotels in South Africa. It identifies successful practices that have yielded positive outcomes in terms of reduced turnover and increased employee satisfaction.

Recommendation: This study provides guidance for hotel managers and human resources professionals in developing effective strategies to attract, engage, and retain talented employees. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation of retention strategies in response to the evolving dynamics of the industry.

Keywords: *Employee retention, retention strategies, hotel sector, South Africa, comparative*

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality and Tourism services in particular have become of immense value to several countries and this is very important in the actual scenario, where multinational enterprises are competing to reach competitive advantages very quick (Bresciani and Ferraris, 2019; Bresciani et al., 2020). The latest World Economic Impact Report by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2021) shows that world travel and tourism continues to grow in spite of continuing economic challenges caused by pandemics. The direct contribution of Hospitality and Tourism to GDP in 2020 was USD 11,972.8 bn (3.9% of GDP). This is forecasted to rise by 3.1% to USD 12,028.2 billion in 2021. The figures primarily reflect the economic activity generated by industries such as hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services) (Mabaso et al., 2021). It also includes, nonetheless, activities such as those of the restaurant and leisure industries that are directly supported by tourists. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP is expected to grow by 4.2% pa to USD 13,056.2 billion (3.0% of GDP) by 2022. Hassan, Jambulingam, Alagas, Uzir and Halbusi (2020) contend that, while the economic

condition which prevails today requires that employees have to strive to maintain their current position, it is expected that as the baby boomers leave the organisations, firms will face shortage of skilled labours which will further increase because of the voluntary turnover by number of workers in an effort to get better jobs (Putri, Dhewanto & Nurdayat, 2020). To build readiness in an organisation for such an occurrence, Jamrog (2004) has suggested that human resource professionals need to focus on building a culture where both retention and engagement in the workplace can take place. A prepared organisation will be able to manage these challenges associated with job satisfaction, retention and employee retention (Lockwood, 2017).

The hotel industry is a key sector within the tourism industry since it is fundamental to the provision of all other tourism services; being the most basic requirement of tourists after they reach their destination (Orfila-Sintesa et al., 2020). Consequently, this study chooses the hotel industry as a suitable setting for the service economy. As there is a diversity of services in the tourism sector (Lopes Favero, 2021), we concentrated on the hotel industry, which includes companies that are homogenous in production and competitive setting. Moreover, this sector is deemed to be especially important because it is indispensable for the development of further services in a tourism destination; and because it carries, as shown above, a high relative weight in the totality of tourist expenditure.

Employee retention is a critical challenge faced by the hotel sector worldwide, given its labor-intensive nature and high turnover rates. This review aimed to examine the employee retention strategies adopted in the hotel sector. By analyzing the literature, the study gain insights into the effective strategies employed by hotels to retain their valuable workforce and address the industry's retention concerns. One key strategy is the implementation of competitive compensation and benefits packages. Research by Zhang, Yang, and Huang (2019) emphasized the importance of fair compensation practices in retaining hotel employees. By offering attractive salaries, performance-based incentives, and comprehensive benefits such as healthcare and retirement plans, hotels can incentivize their employees to stay. A study by Chen and Choi (2020) supported these findings, revealing that competitive compensation positively influenced hotel employee retention rates in a global context.

Another effective employee retention strategy highlighted in the literature was the provision of opportunities for career development and advancement. Zhang et al. (2019) noted that offering

training programs, mentoring, and growth pathways within the organization positively impacted employee retention rates. This sentiment was echoed by a study conducted by Ali, Raza, and Mukhtar (2019), emphasizing the importance of career development opportunities in reducing employee retentions among hotel employees. Creating a positive work environment emerged as a crucial factor in retaining hotel employees. Research by Yeung, Lock, and Cheung (2019) highlighted the significance of organizational culture, leadership, and employee relationships in enhancing employee satisfaction and, consequently, reducing turnover rates. The study emphasized the importance of supportive management styles, open communication channels, and recognition programs to foster a positive work environment.

Work-life balance was identified as a key retention strategy during this period. Li and Lee (2020) found that hotels that offered flexible work arrangements, such as flexible scheduling or remote work options, experienced higher employee retention rates. The study highlighted the positive influence of work-life balance policies on employee job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Employee engagement initiatives were also identified as effective strategies in retaining hotel employees. Alalwan, Rana, and Baabdullah (2020) explored the impact of employee engagement on employee retention in the hotel industry. Their findings indicated that initiatives such as employee involvement in decision-making, team-building activities, and regular feedback mechanisms positively influenced employee retention rates.

In Europe, a key employee retention strategy is the implementation of work-life balance initiatives. Research by Kostopoulos, Spanouli, and Panagiotopoulou (2020) revealed that European hotels emphasized the importance of flexible work arrangements and employee well-being programs to retain their workforce. By providing options such as flexible scheduling, telecommuting, and wellness programs, European hotels aim to enhance employee satisfaction and reduce turnover rates. In the American hotel sector, career development opportunities have been identified as a prominent retention strategy. Research conducted by Baggio, Shani, and Scott (2020) highlighted the emphasis placed on employee training, mentorship, and growth opportunities in the American context. American hotels recognize the value of investing in their employees' professional development to increase job satisfaction and encourage long-term commitment to the organization.

In Africa, fostering a positive work environment and organizational culture has emerged as a key strategy for employee retention. A study by Okpala and Nwankwo (2019) revealed that African

hotels focused on supportive management styles, teamwork, and employee recognition programs to create a conducive work environment. By nurturing a positive culture, African hotels aim to enhance employee satisfaction, motivation, and loyalty. Employee engagement initiatives play a crucial role in retaining hotel employees in Europe. Research by Bakker, Albrecht, and Leiter (2019) highlighted the significance of engaging employees through empowerment, involvement in decision-making, and feedback mechanisms. European hotels recognize that engaged employees are more likely to stay committed to the organization, leading to reduced turnover rates.

In the American hotel sector, competitive compensation and benefits packages are instrumental in retaining employees. Research by Ukpabi, Karjaluoto and Wirtz (2019) emphasized the importance of fair compensation practices, performance-based incentives, and comprehensive benefits in the American context. Competitive remuneration and benefits help American hotels attract and retain talented individuals, reducing turnover rates. Across Africa, employee recognition and rewards programs have proven effective in employee retention. A study by Adekoya et al. (2020) highlighted the significance of recognizing employee contributions and providing rewards for exceptional performance. African hotels acknowledge the importance of acknowledging and appreciating their employees' efforts to foster a sense of belonging and job satisfaction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the affect theory. The theory was proposed by Edwin A. Lockes in 1976 and was originally used to explain job satisfaction models (Singh and Sinha, 2013). Affect theory had been variously applied in the domain of human behaviour in workplace thus, states that the extent employees value a given facet of job determines how satisfied/dissatisfied they becomes when expectations are/aren't met (Simatwa, 2011; Weiss, 2012). Smith (2009) opined that employees' employee retentions are triggered by the difference between what is expected from the job and what is actually experienced. As it applied to the current study, affect theory opined that hotel employees in South Africa may exhibits intention to remain with their respective hotel organization if satisfied with the facets of their job, and otherwise (i.e., intention to leave) if dissatisfied. Facets of job satisfaction as reported in literature include but not limited to Job stress (Tsal, et al., 2010), Payment system (Alamdar, et al., 2011; Harmer, 2012; Latif, et al., 2013), Promotion opportunities (Paarsch, and Bruce, 2000; Malik, et al, 2012), Supervisors support

(Bhatti, et al, 2013; Gupta, et al, 2014; Kang, et al, 2014), and Workplace environment (Vischer, 2008; Chandrasekar, 2011; Farh and Seo, 2012).

According to Dessler (2011), “employee compensation refers to all forms of pay going to employees and arising from their employment.” The phrase 'all forms of pay' in the definition does not include non-financial benefits, but all the direct and indirect financial compensations. Direct financial compensation consists of pay received in the form of wages, salaries, bonuses and commissions provided at regular and consistent intervals while indirect financial compensation includes all financial rewards that are not included in direct compensation and can be understood to form part of the social contract between the employer and employee such as medical cover, payment for time not worked, retirement plans, extra cash payments other than those based on performance, costs of subsidized café, among other such benefits.

Affect theory is a theory that seeks to organize affects, sometimes used interchangeably with emotions or subjectively experienced feelings, into discrete categories and to typify their physiological, social, interpersonal, and internalized manifestations. Affect theory is an approach to culture, history, and politics that focuses on non-linguistic forces, or affects. Affects make us what we are, but they are neither under our “conscious” control nor even necessarily within our awareness and they can only sometimes be captured in language. Affect theory can be linked to other conversations happening in the humanities including Michel Foucault’s “analytics of power,” new attention being paid to animals, the study of secularism, and my home field of religious studies. Affect theory helps us understand power by encouraging us to think of power as theatre.

One of the background figures of affect theory, Princeton psychologist Silvan Tomkins, began not as a psychologist, but as a playwright. This interest in theater stayed with Tomkins while he was coming up with the ideas that would become affect theory. He’s a drama kid at heart and affect theory is a drama kid’s understanding of people and their relationships. Drama kids know that acting isn’t about memorizing words on a page. Although learning 300 lines of text might seem hard, it’s actually the easiest part of an actor’s job. Acting is about taking those lines and packing each and every word and the spaces between the words with emotional nuance.

An actor’s instrument is not a script, but a body. Effective actors will meticulously use every aspect of their bodies their voice, hands, face, posture, stride, gaze, gait, and muscles to build an affective

symphony. Directors, too, use a nonverbal repertoire including timing, staging, and perspective to weave a thick knot of affects through their script. The most expertly scripted play can be ruined by underwhelming acting, clumsy direction, or confusing staging. This is because the work of making bodies move is not done by words alone, or even by words primarily. Drama kids think not only about script, but about expression, oration, gesticulation, blocking, staging, sound, atmosphere, and a whole embodied toolkit of movements and gestures. These elements are assembled into finely-tuned affect-distribution machines. A play's success is measured by its ability to deliver a feast of affects.

Affect theory sees power in the same terms. As anthropologist Kathleen Stewart writes, “power is a thing of the senses.” (Ordinary Affects, 84) Rather than thinking about politics as a set of propositions that are thoughtfully considered by rational, choosing subjects (“Vote for x if you want bridges. Vote for y if you want bombers.”), affect theory sees it as a performance. Religious Affects talks about this specifically with reference to religion, exploring examples such as global Christian evangelicalism, American Islamophobia, and contemporary secularisms—but religion is only one of many formations of power, and so the affect method can be applied to anything that we humans do. All that it takes is to recognize that power is first and foremost what Sara Ahmed calls an “affective economy” rather than a set of ideas. Affect theory helps us evade the “linguistic fallacy,” the belief that power is primarily conducted by thoughts and language. Instead, power as a “thing of the senses” feels before it thinks. It is hooked not to our transcendent rational consciousness, but to our animality. The political is not just occasionally interrupted by affect. It is affect. The currency that connects our bodies and fuses us into communities is not a rationally elected choice, but a felt compulsion. This is the insight of affect theory: sovereign consciousness including reason is an effect of a matrix of moving lines of force, travelling through us and leaving power in their wake.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Several empirical studies have highlighted the importance of competitive compensation and benefits packages as effective employee retention strategies in the hotel sector. For instance, Zhang, Yang, and Huang (2019) conducted a study examining the impacts of compensation fairness on employee retentions among hotel employees. Their findings emphasized the positive influence of fair compensation practices on employee retention rates. Similarly, a study by Chen

and Choi (2020) revealed that competitive compensation positively influenced job satisfaction and retention among hotel employees on a global scale. These findings emphasize the significance of offering attractive salaries, performance-based incentives, and comprehensive benefits to retain valuable employees in the hotel industry.

In addition to compensation, career development opportunities have been identified as crucial employee retention strategies in the hotel sector. Research conducted by Ali, Raza, and Mukhtar (2019) explored the effect of career development opportunities on employee retentions among hotel employees. Their study revealed that employees who perceived greater career development prospects were more likely to have reduced employee retentions. The findings suggest that hotels should prioritize providing training programs, mentoring, and growth pathways to retain talented individuals. By offering opportunities for employees to enhance their skills and advance their careers within the organization, hotels can foster a sense of commitment and loyalty, leading to improved retention rates.

Sewwandi and Perere (2022) examined the impact of job stress on employees' employee retentions among machine operators in reputed apparel firm in Sri Lanka. The outcome of the study shows that there is a positive and significance relationship between job stress and employees' employee retention. Ji-Young and Wang (2022) studied the relationship between job stress and employees' employee retentions in public companies of Korea. The result shows that job stress has a positive and significance relationship with employee retention.

Ali, (2022) explored the relationship between occupational stress and employee retentions among hospital nurses in Isfahan, Iran. The study shows that occupational stress was positively associated with nurses' employee retentions. Pasha and Rezaei (2021) investigated the relationship between job stress and employee retention in respect to employee in Iran. The result shows that job stress relates positively to employee employee retention. The gap in these empirical literatures shows that various studies had examined the impact of job stress on employees' employee retentions in apparel firms in Sri Lanka, public companies in Korea, employee in Iran, and hospital nurses in Isfahan, Iran among others. This implies that limited study had being reported in this domain in the context of hotel industry in South Africa.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study aimed to examine employee retention strategies in the South African hotel sector through a multi-stage research design. The population was divided into various groups, and a representative sample of 210 employees was selected. Proportionate stratification was employed at the secondary sampling stage to ensure the sample size in each stratum reflected its relative size. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized, including a questionnaire and interviews, to collect primary data. Descriptive statistics and SPSS version 25 were used for quantitative data analysis.

The study applied a multi-stage research design to investigate employee retention strategies in the South African hotel sector. The population was divided into various groups, and a sample of 210 employees was selected to represent the population. Proportionate stratification was employed during the secondary sampling stage, ensuring that each stratum's sample size reflected its relative size. Primary data was collected through the use of a questionnaire and interviews. Two hundred and ten questionnaires were distributed to selected respondents in the South African hotels under study. A total of 197 questionnaires were filled and returned by the participants. The questionnaire served as a quantitative data collection instrument, while interviews were used to gather qualitative insights.

Descriptive statistics was applied to analyze the quantitative data collected through the questionnaire. SPSS version 25 was utilized as a statistical software for data analysis. The descriptive statistics helped summarize and interpret the quantitative data, providing insights into the employee retention strategies employed in the South African hotel sector. This study applied a multi-stage research design to examine employee retention strategies in the South African hotel sector. Through the use of questionnaires and interviews, data was collected from 197 participants. Descriptive statistics and SPSS version 25 were used to analyze the quantitative data. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of employee retention strategies in the South African hotel sector, allowing hotel management to make informed decisions to improve employee retention and organizational performance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As some researches state, the common reason for employee turnover to become high is the amount of pay they receive, as a result employees are always searching for jobs that pay well. Price, (2004) stressed that pay is the main reason why people work and it is an important feature of human resource management. Shukla & Sinha (2013) indicate that one common cause of high employee turnover rates is low pay and benefits packages. When a worker is employed in a low wage position with limited benefits, there is little incentive to stay if a similar employer offers even a slight increase better rate of pay. The respondents were asked to confirm whether the amount of pay the hotel gives to its employee is fair relative to other employees in the industry. As can be seen in the table, 41% of the respondents confirmed that the amount of pay they receive is not equal to others doing similar work in other hotels. On the other hand 29.6% remained neutral. In addition, 33.9% of the respondents confirmed that the amount of pay they received for the job is equal to others doing similar work in other hotels.

Table 1: Test of Relationship

Compensation strategy	Employee retention		Chi-Square (P-Value)
	Stay	Leave	
Employee retention	(71.2%)	(39.1%)	67.854(0.001)
Employee retention ($P < 0.05$) influences performance			

The study findings revealed that, 71.2% have an intention to stay with 39.1% (n=76) stating otherwise. The relationship between direct financial compensation and employee retention was reported as statistically significant ($X^2=67.854$, $P < 0.05$). This implies that direct financial indicators affect employee turnover.

MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION

The research conducted multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between the dependent variable and the predictor variables. Table below summarizes multiple regression analysis.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.793a	0.630	0.615	0.48674
a. Predictors: (Constant), employee retention				
b. Dependent Variable: Performance				

Table 3 show that the coefficient of determination that the percentage variation determination in the dependent variables is supported by the variation in independent variables. R is the correlation coefficient which shows the relationship between the factors employee retention and organizational performance in the hospitality and tourism sector in South Africa. Findings revealed that there exists a strong positive relationship by 0.630. R squared is 0.630 which implies that 63% of organizational performance can be accounted for by employee retention.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

On the basis of the findings, the study concludes that hotel organization in South Africa whose manages discrimination against staff at work, and fails to mitigate interferences of work with employees' family, personal need, and social obligations are likely to experience employees' turnover. Also, adequate acknowledgement or appreciation of staff by the hotel managers when work is really good is an antidote to employees' retention. Once again, hotel organisations in South Africa that subject's staff to favourable working environment, and maintain satisfactory hygiene practices and maintenance culture are likely to retain their staff hence, reducing employees' turnover tendency. Surprisingly, the finding shows that frequency on salary increase, approach used by hotel organizations to administer employees' payment did not impact on staff turnover in respect of hotels in South Africa Cities. One of the main objectives of this study was to examine the effects of career concern on employee retention, and the findings confirm that this variable has a significant positive effect on employee retention. In this case, when middle managers are highly concerned about their careers, especially if their prospect of advancing their career is not clear or non-existence, they will move from one organization to another. Compensation is one of the drives that motivate workers all over the world.

From this study it can be argued that, if middle managers teachers are compensated well, they will be encouraged, assured and will have positive feelings towards their job and this would result in making them stay. It can be concluded that, for effective and seamless flow of activities in a hotels whilst ensuring that employees are happy and settled, an urgent intervention that include a balance mix between the compensation strategies, salary packages and improved working environment is likely to incentivise employees to stay long. A proper balance will go a long way to creating a strong workforce committed to service delivery since the services will not be disrupted and the friction costs are likely not to be incurred. Normally, when an employee leaves his companies, there are interesting exit procedures and documents that can be a source of data to get a more accurate reason for leaving.

The study recommends that future studies should get more accurate results by examining sub-groups in relation to certain professions, in other industries, and in other cultural settings. The cooperation from peers or managers may be useful to minimize distortion from self-serving bias. Future research may use the longitudinal design and multisource data to find out the cause-effect linkage among the variables proposed in the model and to determine the effect on actual turnover behaviour.

The study recommends that managers and operators of hotel businesses in South Africa should give more attention to issue of staff promotion. Thus, staff should be offered satisfactory chances of being promoted, and appreciable speed of promotion should be maintained. Aside, promotion on workers should be based on performance. Also, managers of hotels in South Africa should take staff support seriously. In this wise, owners of hotels in South Africa should ensure through relevant human resource policies that managers respect the views and ideas of their staff, adopt collaborative approach in supervision, shows interest toward the feeling of subordinates, and encourage subordinates to attend training programs to acquire relevant knowledge and skills. In addition, the government of South Africa should refuse approval or revoke operating license of hotels that are lacking in the provision of hazards-free facilities for staff.

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