

HUMAN RESOURCE ATTRITION IN THE CIVIL SERVICES: A STUDY OF MALAWI

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Abstract

The existence of capable and competent employees in an organization is the basic need for its success. Lack of employees leads to lack of attainment of organizational goals. As any other organization, the Malawian Civil Service has been facing issues of high employees' attrition which has been affecting the delivery of public services. It is with the above background that the author conducted this research with an objective to establish the factors leading to employees' attrition in the Malawian Civil Services as well as to find out the consequences and best strategies which can help in addressing this challenge. The study was conducted using primary data collected through a questionnaire with respondents from various ministries, departments and agencies in the Malawian Civil Services. The study established the existence of high employees attrition in the Malawian civil services caused by various factors at different levels of management, age and experience. The findings also established that lack of proper incentives as one of the major causes of employees' attrition in the service among many others. A number of strategies have been suggested by the study which will help in dealing with the challenge of employees' attrition among various government institutions in Malawi.

Key Words: Malawian Civil Service, Employees' Attrition, Organization, Factors, Measures

Introduction

Human Resource is a very important asset for every organization. The success of each organization depends on the availability of dedicated and competent employees. Lack of employees in an organization results in a lack of productivity and non-achievement of the organizational goals. Therefore, organizations must implement mechanisms to ensure that employees are retained to avoid human resource attrition. Human resource attrition is a process whereby employees leave an organization for different reasons among many others such as retirement, resignation, death, dismissal/termination, secondment, interdiction and abscondment. Human resource attrition is often associated with negative effects on the ability of an organization to realize its strategic goals and objectives. Organizations need to have an understanding of the various causes resulting in the loss of human resources in order to develop better human resource management strategies that would ultimately minimize the extent to which human resources are being lost, as well as put in

place measures for replacing lost skills in order to rationalize the fatalistic impact of human resource attrition.

Statement of the Problem

Organizational performance is undoubtedly affected by the organization's employee turnover rate. Like any other organization, the Malawian public service has also been unable to produce effective and efficient results due to the rate at which employees leave the service. Therefore, this paper will discuss this issue and find out the root cause of employee attrition in the Malawi Civil Services and its impact on public service delivery.

Nature and Scope of the Problem

The Malawian Civil Service has been losing employees for the past few years which has contributed to high vacancy rate in most public institutions in the country. This has affected delivery of public services and achievement of sustainable development goals such as the Vision 2020, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy and others. The study will identify the factors responsible for high employee attrition rate in the Malawi public sector and will come out with the solution for the same. The scope of the research problem will be the Malawi Civil Service.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the main factors responsible for high employee attrition in the Malawian Civil Services.
2. To analyze the impact of high employee turnover in the civil services of Malawi.
3. To suggest the best strategies and measures to address the issue of high employee attrition in the Malawian public service.

Literature Review

A study conducted by Haldorai et al. 2019, identified that the need for the workers to work throughout the day was the main cause of high attrition at a 5 star hotel. The writers used a sample size of 308 employees working on a full-time basis for at least one year. Various factors including hours of work, career progression, inadequate pay and many others which were determined in previous studies were considered in this research. Several models were used to assess the various factors that cause attrition and the Average Variance Extracted was used to check the validity. The results suggested that attrition is caused by short and medium-term factors. Short-term factors include work overload, interpersonal tensions and labour emotions while medium-term factors include issues to do with the balance of work and life (Haldorai et al. 2019).

Furthermore, the authors used the pull-push-mooring framework to identify the factors that attracts an individual to join an organization or those that motivates them to leave an organization. In addition, mooring factors those interpersonal factors that shapes how a person perceives the work.

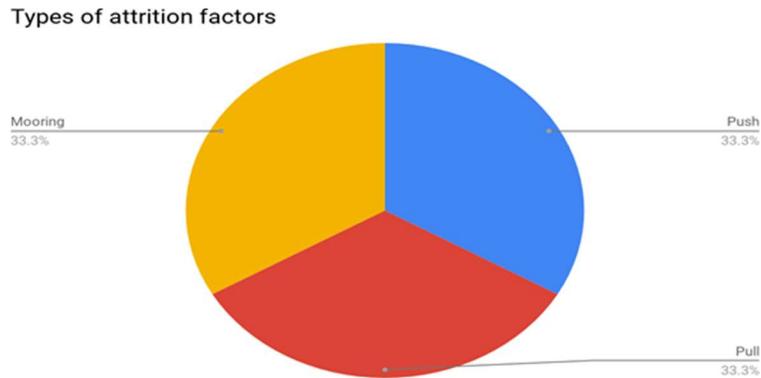


Figure 1. Types of factors that explain employee attrition

The focus of the intentions for the employees to leave has been regarded as the strength of the study. On the other hand, the use of subjective questions by the researchers is the limitation of the study because it did not give the participants a chance to provide their perspectives on the issues pertaining to attrition.

Joy and M. J. Chiramelin, 2016, conducted a study to analyze the significance of organizational support in controlling rise in attrition rates due to withdrawal behaviour of the employees. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from twenty-five (25) IT companies with a sample of 350 workers. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the withdrawal behaviour of the employees using a scale of 18 items. The results of the research reviewed fundamental negative effects of the organizational support on employee attrition rates.

Organizational support in terms of career development strategies and promotion opportunities reduces attrition rates as evidenced by the statistical evidence was the most compelling point of the study (Joy & Chiramelin 2016). The authors suggested improving employees' commitment through promotion of culture, improving work setting and recognition of the employees as ways of reducing withdrawal behaviors in the organization (Joy & Chiramelin 2016). Despite the limitations, the authenticity, validity and reliability of this research can not be understated. The study show the possibility of limitations pertaining to the misrepresentation of information by the participants due to the fact that the information reported in the questionnaires was self-reported.

N. El-rays, M. Smith and S.M. Taylor, 2019 also conducted a research on the same which has also been regarded in this paper. They conducted a conceptualized and prognostic research on employee attrition by using tree-based models. A sample of approximately 5000 resumes were anonymously submitted in Glass-door portal. In order to identify the factors causing attrition, four exploratory studies were conducted to analyse the statistics. Top management performance, compensation and company culture were identified as the major factors causing high attrition rate in the companies.

The idea of predicting the employee attrition rates by using the tree-based model is the most convincing portion of this research. The employees' ability to decide with regards to their future and current employment has been one of the ways which has helped in proving the effectiveness of the model. Furthermore, in order to analyze the effectiveness of the results of implementation of the suggested measures, the writers requested the companies to provide information concerning the implementation of the measures. This would also help in identifying common characteristics in the programmes aimed at preventing the high attrition rates in the organizations. In conclusion, the application of the tree-based model to predict the attrition in an organization has helped to make the research more valid, reliable and authentic. This also helps in improving the efficiency of the human resource management function.

The next research was conducted by V. Pereira et al. 2016 which analyzed employee turnover based on the relationship between the employee and employer. A sample of 66 participants of both the employees and human resource managers by using qualitative research methods such as case research and semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that the decision by employees to leave the organization depends on complex interaction factors such as place, people and the organization's management (Pereira, et al. 2016). It was suggested that short-term approaches to people management should be discouraged and longer-term intrinsic approaches should be put in place.

The study also reviewed that generational gap between the employees was a significant variable of the analysis. The high employee turnover rate was attributed to the differences in cognition and action between the generation Y employees which comprised of participating employees between the age of 22-24 and the generation Y which comprised of HR managers of ages of approximately 36 years. (Pereira, et al. 2016). The generation X concentrated on the extrinsic approach to the intrinsic approach of motivating the employees. This led to the HR managers not being able to address the attrition problem.

In conclusion, the adoption of semi-structured interview schedule and diversity of respondents represents the validity and reliability of the research. Lack of employee's liability towards their former employer has been cited as the objectivity of the research. The potential bias of the employees towards their former employer has been the major limitation of the study which influenced the effectiveness of the participants.

In addition to the above studies, a rapid review of studies published since 2005 on attrition rates of health workers from different regions and settings by Castro Lopes et al. Human Resources for Health 2017 has also been included in this study. A total of 51 studies were included in the study out of the 1782 studies identified. Furthermore, a 2014 survey conducted by the State of the World's Midwifery (SoWMy) was also analyzed together with regional survey for the Arab states

on the annual voluntary attrition rate for midwives, doctors and nurses in the 79 participating countries.

The results indicated that there are different types of definitions of attrition and previous studies have not differentiated between voluntary and total attrition. In accordance with the results on voluntary and total attrition rate, the voluntary attrition rate ranged from 0.3 to 28% while the total attrition rates ranged from 3 to 44%. The results of analysis from 49 countries conducted by SoWMy indicated the average voluntary attrition rate of 6.8% in all cadres.

The study found out that most attrition studies do not take into consideration the voluntary attrition rate. In addition, internationally there are no standardized definitions and methods for measuring the main factors related to employees attrition. This has affected countries in identifying measures to deal with this attrition challenge.

The final study considered in this paper is by Bagchi, 2020 who conducted oral interviews to identify causes of attrition rates in the retail industry in India. He specifically chose oral interviews because he noted that previous studies on the topic gave unspecialized findings. The workers indicated that some of the reasons which caused the employees to leave the organization were competitive pay, lack of work- life balance, stress due to long working hours and the like (Bagchi, 2020). The study reported that the retail industry has a high attrition rate as the average service time for most employees was 12 months.

Despite the employees reports of being happy and valued at their position, the author found out that most of the employees who were interviewed felt uncertain with regards to policies of their organizations. These include career development opportunities, lack of understanding of the processes of seeking different types of leave and others. Furthermore, majority of the employees complained of not having family time due to long hours of work.

The strength of this research lies on the use of interviews since it gave the author the ability to fully understand the human resource functions and attrition in general. In addition, the interviews helped the author to understand issues surrounding the structure of the retail business especially the front line workers. In view of the above, this research paper is valid as it has highlighted the various issues pertaining to the rise in attrition rates in the retail industry despite the the use of limited sample.

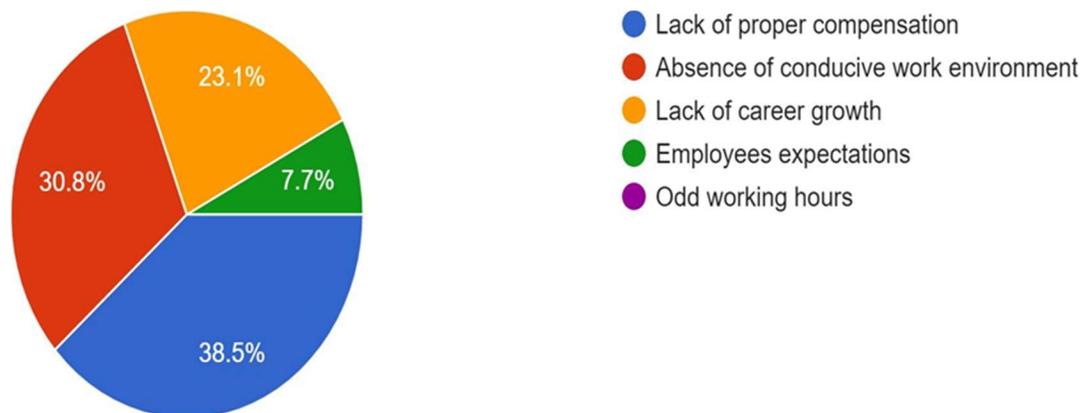
Research Methodology

This paper will use primary data collected by using a questionnaire with respondents from different Ministries Departments and Agencies of the Malawian Civil Service. The study will also use secondary data from various previous studies, journals, books as well as articles.

Findings and Data Analysis

The causes of attrition in the Malawian civil service are different for each employee. On a policy perspective, the factors causing attrition in the Malawian civil services may be classified into four categories. Firstly, attrition caused by retirement as a result of reaching mandatory retirement age. Secondly, attrition is prompted by personal as well as family factors such as ill health, marriage or child care responsibilities. Thirdly, attrition may be caused by those pull factors that motivate employees to search for greener pastures in other organizations. Lastly, attrition may also be due to push factors which arise due to arising from discontentment with job conditions associated with the work.

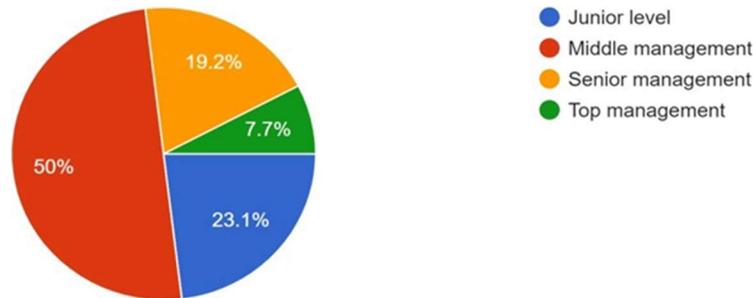
Figure 2 below shows the factors contributing to the rise in attrition rate in the Malawian civil service.



The above figure indicates that lack of proper compensation as the major reason for the rise in employee attrition in the Malawian civil service which stands at 38.5%. Absence of conducive work environment is the second factor at 30.8% followed by lack of career growth and employees' expectations at 23.1% and 7.7% respectively. The figure also indicates 0% on the odd working hours as a factor which entails that the the working hours in the Malawian civil service are okay and that this factor does not contribute to the high attrition rate.

The data collected has also shown the rise in attrition rate at the middle management level as compared to the other levels. This is because the middle management level is full of employees who are at a youthful stage and are hungry for success in comparison with those at higher levels who feel like they have already done their part and are just waiting for retirement. So once the middle managers feel like their effort is not matching with their expectations, they get frustrated and start looking for other greener pastures.

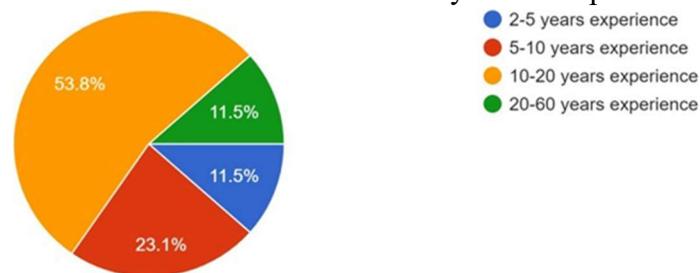
Figure 3 below provides the details of attrition in relation to management level in the Malawian civil service.



The figure above shows a 50% attrition rate at middle management level followed by 23% at junior level. The senior level is the third at 19.9% and lastly the top management level with 7.7% attrition rate. The reduction in attrition rate at the higher management levels could also be attributed to the various incentives provided such as different training opportunities, higher salaries and various forms of allowances as compared to the lower levels of management. This means that the higher management levels are highly motivated as opposed to the lower levels.

In addition to the above observations, it has also been established that different years of experience have also different rates of attrition. The data has indicated high attrition by those employees with 10 to 20 years experience followed by those with 5 to 10 years experience with 53.8% and 23.1% respectively. Those with 2 to 5 years experience are sharing the same percentage of 11.5% with those with 20 to 50 years experience. This could be connected to the same issue of motivation between those at higher and lower level management as the middle and lower level is mostly associated with employees of 5 to 20 years experience.

Figure 4 below indicates the rate of attrition at different years of experience.



Those with 2 to 5 years experience have a lower attrition rate due to the fact that they are the employees who have just completed their probationary period and are awaiting

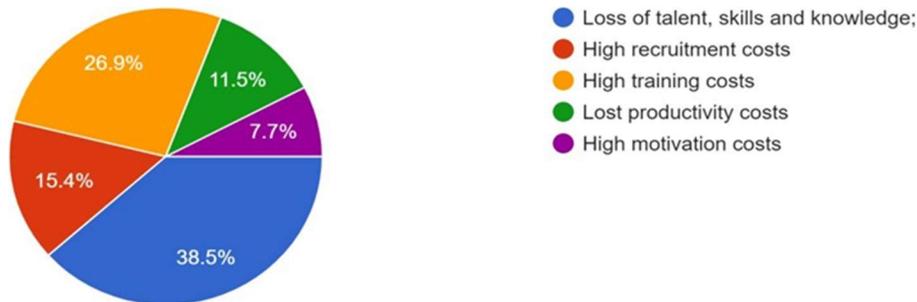
for their confirmation. Therefore, they tend to be more reluctant to leave the civil service because they still have higher expectations from their job.

Consequences of Attrition in the Malawian Public Service

Attrition not only affects the delivery timely delivery of public services but also leads to the loss in productivity due to loss of human resources in the public service. According to the data collected, the major effect of employees' attrition is the loss of talent, skills and knowledge of the

employees. Despite having the same qualifications, people are naturally different and they express themselves in a unique way different from the others. Figure below illustrates the different consequences of attrition with regards to the Malawian civil service.

Figure 5 below indicates the consequences of high employees' turnover in the Malawian civil service



As indicated in the above figure, loss of talent has been the major impact of employees' attrition in the Malawian civil service with the rate of 38.5% because as employees leave, they leave with their knowledge, skills and their inborn talents as already explained above. The second impact is the rise in training costs with 26.9%. This is due to the fact that, when employees leave the service, the Government is required to invest in training new employees who will come in to replace those that have left the service. Also those already existing in the service will have to be trained as part of motivation and preparing them for bigger roles.

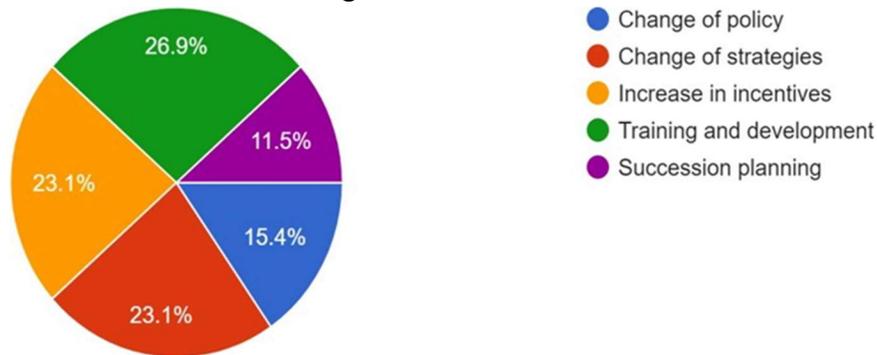
The third consequence according to the above figure is the high recruitment costs. Recruitment is one of the most expensive human resource function in any organization. Similarly, the Government also invest a lot of resources in recruiting employees into the civil services. As such, attrition results in high recruitment costs as the Government is required to bring in new employees as a replacement to those who have left the civil service.

In addition to the above costs, lost of productivity costs which is at 11.5% and high motivation costs at 7.7% are also among the other consequences of high employee's attrition in the Malawian civil service. As employees leave, there is loss in productivity as such employees are required to be motivated in order to work harder and to prevent them from following the same path that their former colleagues have taken.

Strategies to Counter Employees' Attrition in the Malawian Civil Service

It is a naked fact that high employees' attrition affects the performance of the any organization including the Malawian civil service. As such, there is need for the Government to put in place different strategies to ensure employees' retention in the civil services. The following are some of the suggested strategies to counter employees' attrition in the Malawian civil service.

Figure 6 below shows the different strategies to counter attrition in the Malawian civil service.



As per the above table, 26.9% of respondents indicated training and development as one of the best strategies to retain the employees in the Malawian civil service. Training and development helps the employees to grow personally and also learn new knowledge, skills and abilities. It also helps to prepare them for future roles and as such they feel motivated and develop a sense of belongingness in the organization.

Increase in incentives and change of strategies are the next strategies provided by the respondents as a way of dealing with high employee' attrition in the civil services with both standing at 23.1%. This implies that the incentives and strategies are available but they are not addressing the problem to the fullest. Therefore, there is need for the Government to explore other ways of increasing the incentives and developing new strategies to address the challenge of attrition in the civil service.

Change of policy has also been sighted as one of the ways of addressing the high attrition rate in the Malawian civil service. It has been observed that most of the Human resource policies in the Malawian Civil service are outdated such that they are failing to address the current challenges that the human resources is facing. The Government should therefore prioritize on coming up with new policies or updating the already existing policies to match with the current human resource trends.

The last strategy is succession planning. Succession planning refers to the process of identifying and developing new, potential leaders who can move into leadership roles when they become vacant. It helps the subordinates to develop a feeling that one day they will assume the leadership positions and therefore, they are motivated to stay in the organization for a longer time period. Therefore, the Government should put in place measures to ensure that succession planning is being practiced by different MDAs.

Recommendations

1. Better implementation strategies on succession planning in order to ascertain the availability of knowledgeable and skilled employees at the time an employee leaves the service.
2. Providing better working conditions of service in order to continue strengthening staff retention and attraction of new employees.

3. Training and development of current employees in order to fill the knowledge and skills gaps left by those retiring from the service due to mandatory retirement.
4. Development of strategies to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases which leads to loss of public servants due to death which is the second top reason as regard to attrition in the public service.
5. Enhance access of women, youths, disabled and other vulnerable groups to the public service in order to ensure gender balance and inclusion in the public service.

6. Improving the recruitment process and procedures in order to fill the vacant posts created due to attrition.
7. Provision of short-term employment (contract/temporary employees) in order to curb the employment gaps created due to secondment or interdiction.

Conclusion

Employees' attrition has a huge negative impact on the delivery services in the Malawian civil services. It is therefore important to understand the issues related to the rise in attrition rates in the organization in order to come up with best strategies to address the challenge. Most employees leave the organization due to pull or push factors. The pull factors are those external factors which convince the organization to leave the organization in search for greener pastures from other organizations. The push factors are those internal factors in the organization which makes the employees leave the organization due to dissatisfaction with various factors such as policies, interpersonal relationships and overall organizational environment in the organization. This leads to loss of talent, skills and knowledge as the major impact of followed by high training costs, high recruitment costs, lost productivity costs as well as high motivation costs respectively. Despite the limitation which has been attributed to limited sample, the study is valid and has been strengthened through the use of a questionnaire with respondents from various Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the Malawian civil service.

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