The Influence of Management, Workplace, and Compensation on Employee Engagement and Retention

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Abstract- This paper examined employees' experiences to understand the factors that influenced their long tenure in Elaine's pastry shop-restaurant industry. The study aimed to identify the key motivators that encouraged employees to remain in their workplace. A qualitative research design, specifically narrative inquiry, was employed to capture participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data from the employees' personal stories. The findings revealed several reasons why employees chose to stay, including a positive work environment, employers' commitment to supporting their staff, a strong sense of being valued, competitive compensation, job satisfaction, and the machine-intensive nature of the production process (e.g., Meyer & Allen, 2022; Kwon, 2023; Allen et al., 2021).

INTRODUCTION

Organizational theorists view work as a process of exchange, where employees offer effort and dedication in return for both emotional and material rewards provided by the organization (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2018). A central concept in this exchange is Perceived Organizational Support (POS), defined by Macias, Martínez-Tur, and Moliner (2020) as the degree to which employees believe their organization recognizes their contributions and cares about their emotional well-being. POS has been shown to significantly influence both organizational performance and employee commitment, reinforcing the idea that employees' perception of being valued is a key indicator of a supportive work environment (Kuvaas, Buch, & Dysvik, 2018).

Recent research consistently highlights a strong relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Studies such as those by Choi (2018) and Meyer & Maltin (2019) have demonstrated that employees with higher organizational commitment tend to report greater job satisfaction. Zhang and Liu (2020) further support this link, showing that committed employees not only experience higher satisfaction but are also more likely to remain loyal to their organizations.

Financial rewards also play a critical role in reinforcing employee loyalty and engagement. Zhang and Liu (2020) emphasized that economic incentives can strengthen employees' attachment to their organization. Similarly, research by Choi, Kim, and Lee (2021) found that compensation and benefits significantly enhance organizational commitment and employee retention. These findings suggest that a combination of organizational support, financial compensation, and effective leadership contributes to stronger employee motivation and long-term loyalty.
Leadership, in particular, is a recurring theme across various studies. Kwon (2021), Edwards and Allen (2022), and Kinnear and Harrison (2023) all underscore the importance of managers who listen, guide, and reward their employees effectively, ultimately fostering a workplace culture that promotes engagement and loyalty.

Furthermore, job satisfaction is recognized as a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors. Comm and Mathaisel (2000) identified several elements that shape job satisfaction, including pay, performance, employee benefits, training opportunities, job design, life satisfaction, career growth, and relationships with co-workers and supervisors. This was echoed by Schneider, Hanges, Smith, and Salvaggio (2003), who stressed that satisfied employees are more productive and contribute significantly to organizational success. Recent studies, including those by Judge & Church (2021) and Van Katwyk (2022), reinforce the importance of employee satisfaction in driving both individual and organizational performance.

Given this context, the researcher was prompted to explore why certain employees remained with a single organization—specifically, a pastry shop-restaurant—for over 15 years. By understanding the factors that influence such long-term retention, this study aims to provide meaningful insights into employee motivation, loyalty, and the organizational practices that sustain them

LITERATURE REVIEW

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, using narrative inquiry as the primary methodology, to explore the factors contributing to long-term employee retention and engagement in a pastry shop-restaurant setting. The methodology not only guided the data collection and analysis processes but also informed the demonstration of insights that can be applied in real-world employee retention strategies. Additionally, ethical considerations and technical steps were taken to ensure the research's validity and integrity.

1. Objective Definition
To explore the key factors that influence employee engagement and retention within a pastry shop-restaurant setting.
Success Criteria:
- Rich, detailed narratives were obtained from employees with at least 15 years of tenure.
- Emergent themes (e.g., positive work environment, feeling valued, supportive leadership) were validated across multiple participant accounts.
- Demonstrated applicability of findings to broader workplace retention challenges.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative narrative inquiry design was selected for its ability to capture the lived experiences of long-term employees. This method allowed participants to share personal stories that revealed deeper motivations, workplace dynamics, and emotional attachments.

Technical Information:
- Research Type: Qualitative, exploratory
- Data Collection Tools: Semi-structured interview guide, personal narrative prompts
- Data Recording: Digital audio recorder and mobile phone (with participant consent)
- Data Analysis Tool: Thematic analysis using the explication process (Clandinin & Huber, 2018)

Ethical Permissions
- Ethical standards were strictly followed throughout the research process. The following steps were taken to protect the rights and privacy of all participants:
- Ethical Clearance: A formal letter of approval was requested and granted by the restaurant's management to conduct research on-site.
- Informed Consent: All participants signed a consent form that explained the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, confidentiality assurances, and the right to withdraw at any time.
- Confidentiality: Participant identities were anonymized in all transcripts and research materials.
- Data Security: All audio recordings and notes were stored in encrypted digital folders accessible only to the researcher.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who had worked in the pastry shop-restaurant for 15 years or more. This group was believed to hold the richest insights into the research question.

Demographics:
- Total employees: 30
- Long-tenured participants interviewed: 5 (2 widowed, 3 single)
- Roles included: kitchen staff, servers, and front-of-house personnel
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2. Scenario Development

To create realistic and relatable use-case scenarios that reflect common challenges and workflows faced by long-term employees in the pastry shop-restaurant. These scenarios aim to provide insights into factors influencing employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention.

To further contextualize the findings of this study and assist future organizational leaders, managers, and researchers in applying the insights in practical settings, the following use-case scenarios were developed. These scenarios are based on real themes identified from participant narratives and are designed to mirror typical challenges or workflows experienced in a pastry shop-restaurant setting. Each scenario aligns with the identified motivational and retention factors, ensuring they remain relatable, concise, and directly relevant to employee engagement and organizational commitment.

Scenario 1: Employer's Support During Crisis
- Related Theme: Employers' Desire to Help Employees
- Background: Carlos, a kitchen employee for over 20 years, experiences a family emergency. He approaches the owner for help.
- Challenge: Balancing personal hardship with work obligations.
- Support Provided: The employer offers flexible time off and a small emergency loan, expressing genuine concern for Carlos's well-being.
- Why He Stays: Carlos feels deeply valued and personally supported, strengthening his emotional commitment to the organization.
- Insight: Personalized support from leadership builds trust, gratitude, and organizational loyalty.

Scenario 2: Recognition and Being Valued
- Related Theme: Feeling Valued
- Background: Marissa, a pastry chef with 15 years in the business, is surprised with a service recognition award during the shop's anniversary celebration.
- Challenge: She had previously considered leaving for a new opportunity offering slightly better pay.
- Why She Stays: The recognition made her feel seen and appreciated for her unique contributions to the team.
- Insight:
- Employee recognition, even in non-monetary forms, reinforces feelings of worth and boosts retention.

Scenario 3: Choosing Stability over Higher Pay
- Related Theme: Compensation Package (Pay and Benefits)
- Background: Janelle, working front-of-house, received an external job offer with slightly higher pay but fewer benefits and less stability.
- Challenge: Deciding whether to accept a new opportunity or stay.
- Why She Stays: The current job offers a consistent income, health benefits, and a caring workplace culture.
- Insight: Long-term employees often value overall stability, benefits, and emotional comfort over marginal salary increases.

Conclusion of Scenario Development

These scenarios reflect the real-life motivations expressed by long-term employees in the study. They demonstrate how a supportive and well-structured workplace, one that offers both emotional and practical rewards, can significantly influence an employee's decision to remain loyal to an organization. Managers and business owners in the food service and hospitality industry can use these scenarios as a guide to design interventions, staff programs, and leadership strategies that enhance employee retention and satisfaction.

3. Setup and Configuration

a. Participant Selection Criteria and Sampling Method
- Use of purposive sampling
- Participants employed for at least 15 years
- Criteria: kitchen staff, servers, etc.

b. Research Setting
- Location: a pastry shop-restaurant with 30 employees
- Interview venue: conference room of a local restaurant
- Time of interviews arranged to suit participants' schedules

c. Research Tools and Instruments
- Semi-structured interview guide
- Narrative writing prompt
- Field notes and audio recording devices (digital recorder and mobile phone)

d. Technological/Logistical Setup
- Use of an audio recorder to ensure accurate transcription
- Maintenance of field notes to record non-verbal cues
- Validation of instruments by fifteen experts (content validity process)

5. Ethical Setup
- Informed consent form
- Permission letter to the restaurant manager
- Verbal and written agreement from participants

4. Step-by-Step Execution

To effectively convey the results and practical implications of this study, a demonstration approach was adopted. This involved a structured, scenario-based presentation of findings that reflect real-life situations experienced by long-term employees. The demo is designed for organizational leaders, HR professionals, and small business owners who seek actionable insights on employee retention.

Table 2. 1: Table Caption

Theme	Scenario Demonstrated	Key Takeaway
Positive Working Environment	Anna is thriving during the holiday rush	Team culture and stress support boost retention
Employer's Support	Carlos is receiving help during a family emergency	Personalized leadership increases loyalty
Feeling Valued	Marissa was recognized during the anniversary celebration	Recognition fosters long-term emotional commitment
Job Fulfillment	Leo finds purpose through mentoring	Growth and purpose energize employees
Compensation & Benefits	Janelle is choosing stability over slightly higher pay elsewhere	Total compensation and consistency matter
Machine-Intensive Production	Streamlined kitchen systems reduce manual strain	Tools & systems shape job satisfaction

Each scenario is narrated and optionally paired with:
- Audio clips or quotes from participants (if available and approved)
- Visuals (images, charts, or infographic summaries)

Short facilitator commentary

5. Data Collection

To ensure that the demonstration not only presented key research findings but also engaged the audience effectively, a multi-method approach was used to collect data during and after the session. This feedback helps assess the clarity, usefulness, and potential application of research in real-world settings.

A. Feedback Mechanisms

1. Surveys (Post-Demo)

A short post-session survey was distributed to participants to gather qualitative and quantitative feedback. It included:
- Likert-scale questions (1 to 5) on:
  - Relevance of the scenarios
  - Clarity of the presentation
  - Usefulness of the strategies discussed
- Open-ended questions:
  - "What was your most valuable takeaway?"
  - "What improvements or additions would you suggest?"
  - "Do you see yourself applying any part of this in your workplace?"

Tool Used: Google Forms or paper-based feedback forms, depending on context

The collected data were used to:
  - Refine scenario content for future presentations
  - Strengthen the application of themes for diverse organizational settings
  - Evaluate the practical relevance of qualitative research outcomes
  - Support future recommendations on leadership training, employee engagement strategies, and retention models

6. Evaluation and Iteration

To ensure the ongoing relevance and effectiveness of the research demonstration, a structured evaluation and feedback loop was implemented. This phase focused on analyzing participant feedback, reviewing performance metrics, and refining the demo for future presentations.

A. Evaluation of Feedback and Performance

After the demonstration, qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to identify patterns and assess the session's overall effectiveness.

1. Strengths Identified

- **Engagement with Real-Life Scenarios:** Participants reported high relatability and emotional connection to the six workplace scenarios, especially those centered on "Feeling Valued" and "Employer Support."
- **Interactive Components**: Activities such as group discussions and scenario mapping were frequently cited as useful for applying the concepts to real-world contexts.
- **Clarity and Flow:** The step-by-step format was praised for its logical progression and practical focus.

2. Areas for Improvement

- **Scenario Length and Complexity:** Some participants found a few scenarios too long or detailed, suggesting the need for more concise storytelling.
- **Time Management in Activities:** A few groups requested more time to complete the strategy mapping exercise, indicating a need for better pacing or activity adjustment.
- **Poll Interactivity:** Not all participants engaged with live polls, suggesting either platform unfamiliarity or technical setup issues that need refining.

B. Iterative Improvements for Future Demos

Based on the evaluation, the following adjustments are recommended for future sessions:

1. Refine Scenario Scripts

- Simplify and shorten scenarios while maintaining narrative richness
- Include diverse voices or situations (e.g., different departments, genders, roles) to broaden relevance

2. Streamline Activities

- Provide clearer instructions and time limits for exercises
- Offer example responses to guide participants in group tasks

3. Enhance Technical Setup

- Prepare brief tutorials or printed instructions for live polling tools
- Ensure all participants can access tools via mobile or desktop before the session begins

4. Incorporate Feedback Loops

- Add a short reflection section at the end of the session where participants write down or share one specific action they'll take based on what they learned
- Use open-ended feedback questions to gather more specific, actionable suggestions

C. Future Presentation Optimization

To maintain clarity, relevance, and impact across future uses of this demo (in academic, corporate, or educational settings), a continuous improvement cycle is recommended:

1. **Conduct Post-Demo Review After Each Session**
   Evaluate audience engagement, activity success, and common questions raised.
2. **Update Demo Materials Quarterly**
   Revise slide decks, handouts, or scenario texts based on new feedback or contextual needs.
3. **Customize for Audience Type**
   Tailor examples and terminology to suit corporate vs. academic audiences, or small businesses vs. large organizations.
4. **Document Changes and Outcomes**
   Keep a version history of script changes and collect outcome reports to track longitudinal impact.
5. **Scenario Revision Checklist**

6. **Use this checklist to refine and optimize narrative or use-case scenarios in presentations or research demos.**

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusion

This demonstration effectively highlighted the core features and practical benefits of the proposed solution, showcasing its ability to address specific challenges faced by the target audience. Participants gained a clear understanding of how the solution enhances workflow efficiency, fosters engagement, and supports organizational goals. The interactive elements allowed hands-on experience, reinforcing the solution's value and applicability in real-world settings.

Next Steps

To build on the momentum generated by this demonstration, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Pilot Trials**
   Interested stakeholders are encouraged to participate in pilot trials to experience the solution within their unique operational environments.
2. **Consultation Sessions**
   Schedule one-on-one or group consultations to tailor the solution's features to specific needs and gather detailed feedback.
3. **Follow-up Discussions**
   Organize follow-up meetings or webinars to address any questions, share success stories, and discuss potential integrations or expansions.
4. **Feedback Submission**
5. Participants and early adopters should provide ongoing feedback through surveys or direct communication channels to inform continuous improvement.
   Engaging in these next steps will ensure a deeper understanding of the solution's impact and support its successful adoption.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

After thorough analysis of the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and narrative essays, six primary themes emerged as key factors influencing employee retention in the pastry shop-restaurant setting:

1. **Positive Working Environment**
   Participants emphasized the importance of a supportive, friendly workplace where teamwork and respect are prioritized.
2. **Employers' Desire to Help Employees**
   Employees valued management's genuine interest in their well-being and professional growth.
3. **Feeling Valued**
   Recognition and appreciation from supervisors and peers were consistently linked to job satisfaction.
4. **Compensation Package (Pay and Benefits)**
   While not the sole motivator, fair and competitive compensation was a significant factor in employee loyalty.
5. **Job Fulfillment/Gratification**
   Many respondents expressed a deep sense of satisfaction derived from the meaningful nature of their work.
6. **Machine-Intensive Production**
   The use of technology in production influenced employees' engagement and sense of accomplishment.

CONCLUSION

These findings align closely with previous studies highlighting the multifaceted nature of employee motivation. For example, Kuvaas, Buch, and Dysvik (2018) similarly found that perceived organizational support and feeling valued were critical in fostering organizational commitment. The positive correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment identified by Choi (2018) and Meyer & Maltin (2019) was also evident in this study.

Moreover, the role of compensation in retention, supported by Zhang and Liu (2020) and Choi, Kim, and Lee (2021), was confirmed, though it was clear from participant narratives that financial rewards alone were insufficient to ensure

loyalty. Instead, intrinsic motivators such as job fulfillment and a positive work environment appeared equally, if not more, influential.

The emphasis on employers' desire to support employees resonates with Rhoades & Eisenberger's (2020) findings on the importance of supportive leadership in enhancing employee engagement and loyalty.

Comparison with Other Studies

While this study reinforces the established relationships among job satisfaction, organizational support, and employee retention, it uniquely highlights the specific context of a small, long-established pastry shop-restaurant, where familial relationships and a positive social atmosphere were particularly pronounced factors. This contrasts with findings from large corporate settings (e.g., Edwards & Allen, 2022), suggesting that workplace size and culture may mediate the importance of certain motivators.

Summary

Overall, the data confirm that employee retention is influenced by a complex interplay of financial, social, and psychological factors. Organizations aiming to improve retention should therefore adopt a holistic approach that includes competitive compensation, supportive leadership, and a positive, fulfilling work environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We highly recommend exploring our interactive demo, designed to provide a hands-on experience of the solution's features and benefits. This demo offers a comprehensive walkthrough that showcases real-world applications, intuitive user interfaces, and the seamless integration of advanced functionalities.

By engaging with the demo, you will gain valuable insights into how our product can effectively address your specific needs, streamline operations, and deliver measurable results. Whether your goals are to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, or improve overall outcomes, this demo will clearly demonstrate why our solution is the ideal choice.

We encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to experience the solution firsthand and envision its potential impact within your organization.

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