

Effect of Social Support on Employee Retention in Nigerian Tertiary Health Sector

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Abstract

This research investigated the effect of social support on employee retention in tertiary health institutions in Nigeria. It was a cross-sectional survey of the employees of the Federal Medical Centres. The study sought to establish the effect of social support - supervisor support, mentoring, and co-worker support on the retention of employees in the Federal Medical Centres. The instrument of data collection was the questionnaire. The sample comprised of 412 medical staff of all the 22 Federal Medical Centres in Nigeria. SPSS version 20 was employed for data analysis and test of research hypotheses, in which multivariate analysis was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that there is a strong relationship between social support and retention of employees in the sector (at 97.9%). In particular, supervisor support and mentoring were found to be significantly related to retention of employees in the sector, while there was no significant influence between co-worker support and retention of employees in the sector. It was therefore, recommended that training of supervisors to relate cordially and support employees under their supervision and adequate mentoring of employees that will help alleviate job frustrations and help in the identification of skills that should be developed further be provided by the government and management of the Federal Medical Centres in order to enhance employee engagement and subsequent retention of employees in the sector.

Keywords - Social Support, Mentoring, Supervisor support, Co-worker support, Employee Retention.

I. INTRODUCTION

In modern organizations supervisors and mentors are considered authorities who possess most of the control over experiences at workplace and outcomes like employee retention [1]. Employee retention is of importance to organizations because every organization needs to hire qualified candidates for smooth running of its activities and after hiring of qualified candidates their retention is also important for organizations, as organizations spend huge amount on the orientation and training of the potential employees. As such, organizations use different strategies such as high wages, career development programmes, provide healthy work environments and organizational support. Due to organizational support

from mentors, supervisors or co-workers, employees have fewer tendencies for quitting and help in building their relations and positive intentions to stay [2]. In the relationship with supervisor, supervisors generally act as a representative of the organization who evaluates employees and communicate the goals and values of organization to them. Hence, supervisor support is crucial to employee retention and it can be rightly said that many workers prefer leaving their bosses but not the jobs.

Employee retention is affected by a number of factors; but one of considerable importance is the relationship with the supervisor and co-worker [3]. Mentors, co-workers and supervisors have the potential to influence employee retention, by giving them social support colleagues and supervisors can lessen the feeling of exhaustion of the individual [4]. Mentoring and co-worker support also play vital roles in individual's decision to continue to work in the same organization because they contribute to the satisfaction of the individual's social and emotional requirements [5].

Thus, it is imperative to have supportive superiors and co-workers in the health sector if retention of health personnel in the sector is to be achieved. This is particularly important considering the shortage of health workers in the country. According [6], "the national average for doctor per 100,000 populations is estimated at 12, some zones notably North West and North East have as low as 4. Whereas the national nurse/midwife per 100,000 populations stands at 21, the South West, North West and North East zones have 16, 11, and 18 respectively". This is against the WHO-prescribed ratio of 1:1000 populations for doctors and 3:1000 populations for nurses

In addition, because a large number of nurses and doctors migrating abroad benefited from government funds for education, it poses a challenge to the rate of return of federal funding of health care education [7]. Therefore, there is need to carry out a research that will address the retention of workers in the sector. Hence, the research explores the extent to which social support influences employee retention in the sector.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the research was to assess the effect of social support on employee retention in the Nigerian tertiary health sector. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) To determine the extent to which mentoring (MEN) influences employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions
- (2) To ascertain the extent to which supervisor support (SUS) influences employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions
- (3) To ascertain the extent to which co-worker support (CWS) affects employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions

III. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

To achieve the objectives of the study, the null hypotheses stated below were formulated:

Ho₁: There is no significant influence between mentoring and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions

Ho₂: There is no significant influence between supervisor support and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions

Ho₃: There is no significant effect between co-worker support and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Reference [8]" suggests that coaching employees and helping them with planning their work, highlighting potential difficulties, and offering advice and emotional support helps to foster engagement. "Reference [9]" suggests that in order to promote the development of a "can do" mindset, the coaching process should help to promote employees' self-efficacy. "Reference [10]" note that resilience is promoted through training, the development of specialized knowledge, having the opportunity to observe role models, and having the ability to commit and recover from mistakes. Ongoing coaching that helps employees develop professional skills should help to foster engagement, and commitment which in turn will ultimately lead to employee retention. Therefore, mentoring of employees and offering emotional advice by senior, more experienced staff should help to improve their commitment and intention to stay with the organisation. Although mentoring is considered to be a mode of knowledge transfer [11] and has been shown to be

beneficial for protégés [12] the assumption that mentoring is a process whereby knowledge is transferred from the mentor to the protégé has limited empirical support in the mentoring literature [13]. Also, mentoring creates additional demands on the mentor, time demands and scheduling problems limit the potential of mentoring. Further, choosing a poor performing mentee can reflect negatively on the mentor's judgement [14]. Additionally, mentors have reported feelings of personal inadequacy derived from an unsatisfactory mentoring relationship [15]. Further, conflicts sometimes arise between the mentor and mentee. These conflicts could be as a result of lack of confidence in the mentor by the mentee or an outright mismatch between a mentor and mentee. The mismatch may result from conflicting personalities, differing career goals, differences in work ethic(s), or any other reason [13]. Hence, the need to determine the extent to which mentoring influences employee retention in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

"Reference [16]" defines supervisory support as "the degree to which employees perceive that supervisors offer employees support, encouragement and concern." As employees perceive more supervisory support, they feel more secure and sense that the firm takes care of their welfare [17]. Having a supervisor to fall back on under adverse circumstances and who is willing to listen can be a significant motivational boost for employees [17]. Further, supervisory support can alleviate some of the stress and strain imposed by the high demands associated with the job [16]. Consequently, when employees feel that they are furnished with adequate resources such as supervisory support, high job demands feel less daunting and employees remain engaged in their work [18]. Conversely, when supervisory support is lacking, employees question their value and contribution to the organization and feel detached, frustrated, and helpless.

In addition, trust in the supervisor is seen as an essential factor in the acceptance of duties and support from the supervisor. Generally, whether an action was performed on an employee's own volition, or it was requested by a supervisor, an employee is expected to know better than to act in ways that are unfavourable to the organisation and will be held accountable for any resulting consequences. If an employee feels that his/her supervisor may give incorrect information or support, the employee may take extra precautions and/or be reluctant to perform when working [19]. This behaviour could result in slower task completion [19]. In this scenario, the lack of trust acts as an impediment to employee productivity and consequently results in losses for the organisation in the form of wasted employee time. When trust in the supervisor is low, subordinates disregard directives and support from their supervisor out of fear that the information given to them is

unreliable [20]. Therefore, the need to examine the extent to which supervisor support influences employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions.

Social support from co-workers is also important for engagement. "Reference [21]" identified work interactions as important for psychological meaningfulness. In particular, individuals experienced meaningfulness when they had rewarding interpersonal interactions with co-workers and clients. He also argued that interpersonal relationships foster psychological safety when they are supportive and trusting. Employees may also acquire task-relevant knowledge and expertise from supportive co-workers, which may make new ways of doing things possible [22]. In this context, working with helpful, supportive colleagues promotes an environment where new ideas can be discussed more openly and freely and this positively impacts employee retention.

On the other hand, a study by [23] to address the question of whether social support (supervisor support and co-worker support) could contribute to the variance in work engagement using 402 staff nurses working in three general hospitals in peninsular Malaysia. Findings indicated that supervisor support was positively related to work engagement but co-worker support was found to have no effect on work engagement. Also, co-worker support could in fact have negative interpretations. Co-workers behaviours may be viewed as political or self-enhancing and therefore it may not always be associated with constructive work attitudes. In addition, accepting support from a co-worker may suggest incompetence on behalf of the person accepting the support, especially because peers are usually regarded as equal, support from a co-worker may suggest a lack of ability or independence [24]. Hence, the need to determine the extent to which co-worker support influences employee retention in the Nigerian tertiary health sector.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study employed cross-sectional survey to achieve the research objectives. The sample of the study included 412 medical staff of the 22 Federal Medical Centres in Nigeria. The research study assessed dimensions/aspects of social support by using a survey instrument. Survey respondents provided their ratings on a Likert rating scale, based on self-observation. The primary purpose of the survey instrument was to measure employee perceptions of the aspects of social support covered in the study. The respondents provided their input along a continuum of strongly disagree to strongly agree for questions pertaining to both social support and employee retention. The rating scale on these multiple-choice questions is akin to a 5-point Likert scale. The

responses were categorised into three-agree which is $3.0 \leq X \leq 5.0$, indifferent which is $2.0 \leq X < 3.0$ and disagree which is $1.0 \leq X < 2.0$, where X is the mean score of responses.

For the purpose of the study, reliability tests pertaining to mentoring yielded a Cronbach's α of .84; supervisor support had .83, and co-worker support had .93. Also, reliability tests in respect of employee retention produced a Cronbach's α of .88. "Reference [25]" recommended a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.8 or higher for research studies. Since all values are over 0.80, the scale associated with the survey instrument was considered acceptable.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

This section analyses the data collected for the study.

Table I: Model Summary between Employee Engagement Strategies and Employee Retention

Model Summary ^b										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	Df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.948 ^a	.899	.898	.39121	.899	1206.749	3	408	.000	.111

a. Predictors: (Constant), CWS, MEN, SUS

b. Dependent Variable: ER

Table I, shows the model summary of social support and employee retention. It can be seen that social support has a strong relationship (97.2%) with employee retention. This means if employees are socially supportive of each other, it will lead to high rate of employee retention. The table also shows that social support account for 94.1% of the variations in employee retention while 5.9% is accounted for by factors outside this study. Also, 0.1% (94.1 – 94.0) is the variation in result that uses the entire population and this one involving sampling and so the study is reliable and valid.

Table II: Regression Coefficients between Employee Engagement Strategies and Employee Retention

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	-.765	.082		9.381	.000	
1 MEN	.741	.040	.667	18.727	.000	.196
SUS	.432	.092	.348	4.675	.000	.045
CWS	-.056	.094	-.044	-.598	.550	.045

Table II shows the effect of social support on employee retention. It shows that an increase in social support (CWS) will insignificantly reduce retention of employees by 2.9%. On the other hand, SUS and MEN will all significantly increase employee retention by 47.5% and 22% respectively.

VII. TEST OF HYPOTHESES

This section tests the research hypotheses stated earlier. Further details of the test of hypotheses are shown below.

A. Hypothesis One

There is no significant influence between mentoring and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions.

From Tables I and II, mentoring is significantly related with employee retention (p-value of 0.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted that there is a significant influence between mentoring and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions.

B. Hypothesis Two

There is no significant influence between supervisor support and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions.

Similarly, Tables I and II, indicate that supervisor support is significantly related with employee retention (p-value of 0.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted that there is a significant influence between supervisor support and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions.

C. Hypothesis Three

There is no significant effect between co-worker support and employee retention in Nigerian tertiary health institutions.

Also, Tables I and II, show that co-worker support is insignificantly related with employee retention (p-value is 0.550 which is >0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted that co-worker support does not significantly affect employee retention in Nigerian Tertiary Health institutions.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From Tables I and II, mentoring is significantly related with employee retention. This finding is congruent with the findings of other studies. "Reference [26]" posited that engagement mediated the relationship between work environment (including mentoring) and engagement. In addition, findings by [27] show that mentoring fosters organisational retention because the emotional bond established between a mentor and a protégé may contribute to higher levels of organisational commitment. The implication is that for employee retention initiatives to succeed, management should put in place, mentoring programmes. This is because, mentoring shows management support, interest and concern for an employee's potential with the organisation and also demonstrates to employees that management is willing to invest time and resources necessary to help them succeed in their careers. In return, employees are more likely to become productive and loyal to the organisation.

Similarly, Tables I and II, indicate that supervisor support is significantly related with employee retention. This result is in line with other studies. A study by [28], examined the influence that employees' trust in their supervisor has on engagement. Their findings were that a climate of trust is likely to have a significant bearing on employee engagement, which in turn is likely to promote learning, innovation, and retention. Further, [29] found a significant relationship between supervisor support and service quality and employee retention. This signifies that supervisors who appropriately support and "time in" to individual subordinates, elicit direct commitment and therefore, higher employee retention in return.

Tables I and II, show that co-worker support is not significantly related with employee retention. The finding is surprising because many studies support the relationship between co-worker support, employee engagement and employee retention. "Reference [30]" found that co-worker social support

is positively related to the engagement dimensions of vigour and dedication in a cross-sectional study. Also, [31] reported that interaction among nurses was related to job engagement. However, the finding of insignificant relationship between co-worker support and employee retention is not without precedence. "Reference [32]" did not find support that co-worker support differentially increase work engagement (including intention to stay) when job demands were low. Also, [33] did not find social support predictive of engagement. However, this result may be related to the fact that in tertiary health institutions in Nigeria, nurses and other similar cadre of health workers (who are the predominant cadre of health workers) are not allowed to carry out certain procedures. Therefore most medical procedures carried out by nurses and similar cadre of health workers are routine and do not require much support from co-workers, as such, their intention to stay may not be greatly influenced by the support they receive from other peers .

IX. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, there is a positive relationship between social support and employee retention in Nigerian health institutions. Specifically, mentoring and supervisor support are clearly significantly related with employee retention in the Nigerian tertiary health sector while co-worker support was found to be insignificantly related to employee retention in the sector. It is therefore, imperative to ensure that employees are highly engaged. Hence the organisations need to prioritize and give more attention to the aspects of social support that are highly contributing to employee retention in the sector.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the research, the recommendations below are made:

(1) Management of the Nigerian tertiary health sector should pay close attention to the selection or appointment and development of supervisors to ensure that they maximize their potential to be engaging leaders. This entails informing the supervisors about their role in enhancing engagement of employees and they must be trained to relate cordially and support employees under their supervision.

(2) Mentoring initiatives should also be put in place by management in the sector. This will aid in the identification of skills that should be developed or improved upon. Additionally, the mentors can help alleviate job frustrations the employees have through one-on-one coaching that will ultimately result to a more engaged workforce that will contribute immensely to employee retention in the sector.

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