ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of an empirical investigation undertaken at the Auckland District Health Board (ADHB). It focused on needs, discontent, labour turnover and inter-cultural communication issues which may increase or decrease turnover of international staff. A questionnaire covering 200 staff resulted in a response of 53.5 %. Interviews were also conducted with employers and employees.

The findings revealed that international employees have “needs” relating to Job Satisfaction, Training, Work/Life Benefits, and Organisational Commitment. “Discontent” related to: A lack of promotion opportunities, including insufficient understanding of “inter cultural communication” and “cultural integration”. Resolving these issues may decrease employee turnover, provided innovative and entrepreneurial strategies are devised and implemented.

INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that broadly speaking healthcare is a problematic sector and is perhaps also short on staff in many countries around in the world. Less developed countries are also losing qualified healthcare staff at an alarming rate to more developed countries in the world. For example, in 2007 a total of 57 of the 100 nurses who qualified in Swaziland immediately left the country after graduation to go and work in more developed countries (Scribante and Bhagwanjee 2007). The competition for qualified health staff is exacerbated in countries like Australia and New Zealand which have to compete with Western Europe, the USA and Canada to attract sufficient numbers of health workers. The dependence on internationally qualified health workers is also common knowledge in New Zealand. The ability to attract and retain international workers is therefore important to the New Zealand health sector and in particular the various health boards in New Zealand, in order to maintain public health at an acceptable standard.

Currently many challenges are facing the healthcare sector, for example, the ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation) has steadily lost more and more money over the last few years in New Zealand and has currently virtually run out of money. The ACC needs in excess of $NZ 2 billion to continue with its activities during latter part of 2009 and 2010. The National Party Government, which has been in office less than a year, had to make urgent contingency plans for ACC funding during October 2009 to keep it going. The financial and related problems in the health sector has, however, been known to the health authorities for years and is not a new problem. However, in recent times it has reached the point where innovative approaches and entrepreneurial thinking is critical in order to continue to provide effective health services in New Zealand in future.

Furthermore the New Zealand healthcare sector must also find new ways to deal with diversity and cultural sensitivity because the profile of the country and its healthcare industry has changed dramatically during the last decade.
Aligning human resource management (HRM) in entrepreneurial ways to improve business performance is a major commitment of the Auckland District Health Board (ADHB) in New Zealand. In an attempt to attain its objectives in this regard the focus of the ADHB was to reduce costs by retaining desired and committed employees, including a special focus on international employees (Rodriques 2008). One of the two major goals, which is part of the key priorities for the next five years, is to develop a strong health infrastructure which includes workforce, information technology and performance assessment. The second goal is to introduce sound employment relations strategies towards retention of desired employees. To attain these goals the focus of the ADHB was to reduce costs especially by retaining desired and committed employees especially international employees.

In support of the ADHB’s objectives the rationale of an empirical investigation was to focus on international employees. It was executed to gain an understanding of what was important to international employees to retain them by evaluating their needs and discontent regarding the employment relationship. This was deemed necessary to attempt to stem the flow of voluntary resignations from international employees at the ADHB in New Zealand by applying innovative ways to stop the loss of these staff. Such an exercise is important should any organisation seek to retain desired and committed staff to improve effectiveness and increase productivity by improving its management and being innovative (Abbasi & Hollman 2000, Atkins 2009).

The research reported in this paper addresses the issue of international health workers working in New Zealand and their intention to quit or being discontent with their job regarding, amongst others, issues like diversity and intercultural communication. The research focused on the Auckland District Health Board (ADHB) and its approach to and dealing with the mentioned issues regarding its employment relationship with international health workers. The findings of the empirical survey may perhaps assist planning at the ADHB in order to reduce employee turnover, retain the right skill mix of staff and to suggest recommendations for effective retention strategies of international staff in particular within the four major hospitals (Auckland City Hospital, Starship Hospital, National Women’s Hospital and Greenlane Clinical Centre) under the aegis of the ADHB. Being entrepreneurial in its approach would also enable the DHB to retain staff more effectively.

On the basis of the rationale and practical implications, the investigation sought to answer the following core research question: What are the factors that would encourage international employees to stay in their employment at the ADHB? This objective is addressed through five supporting sub-questions:

Q1. How do employees assess their employment needs with the ADHB?
Q2. What are the factors influencing discontent in their employment?
Q3. Are there any unique variables that may affect international employees’ turnover?
Q4. What are the differences, if any, in between the need and discontent of different job positions?
Q5. What retention strategy can ADHB adopt to pre-empt international employees’ voluntary resignation?

For the purpose of this paper the results of questions 1 and 2 are briefly discussed, but the main focus is on questions 3 and 5. Question 4 is not discussed at all due to paper length limitations.

The results of the questionnaire based survey, which was followed up with interviews, would most probably make a significant contribution to current knowledge.

**LITERATURE SURVEY**

It is a fact that employee turnover is a widely studied phenomenon in human resources (HR) research (Curtis & Wright 2001; Lema & Duréndez 2007; March & Simon 1958; Steel & Ovalle 1984; Torlak & Koc 2007; Wheeler, Richter and Sahadevan 2004). To date, literally thousands of articles on employee turnover have been written in journals spanning a wide range of variables (Bernardin 1977; Cohen, Granot-Shilovsky and Yishai 2007; Vakola, Tsousis and Nikolau 2004). The popularity of employee turnover research has stemmed, in part, from research that has examined both the positive consequences (Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000; Savolainen, 2000) and negative consequences (Dalton & Todor 1993; Townsend 2007; Wagar & Rondeau 2000) of employee turnover.
A number of key issues need to be considered when defining employee turnover; such as involuntary employee turnover, voluntary employee turnover, organisational withdrawal behaviours, social phenomena of turnover, intent to leave and limitation of employee turnover study.

Traditionally, employee turnover has, however, been classified to be either voluntary (control of the employee) or involuntary (beyond the control of the employee) (McBey & Karakowsky 2000; Morrell, Loan-Clarke and Wilkinson 2001; Price 1977).

Involuntary turnover generally occurs for reasons which are independent of the concerned employee such as when organisations incur losses or unavoidable expenses, and perceive the need to cut costs, re-structure or downsize. It was identified someday ago by Mowday, Porter, and Stone (1978) who stated that involuntary turnover may include circumstances, such as poor performance of the organisation, difficult economic periods, and/or dismissal or individual circumstances, such as temporary/permanent disability or even death.

In contrast, voluntary turnover refers to an employee’s chosen exit from the organisation. The key difference being the distinction between an employer and employee initiated course of action. In comparison to voluntary turnover which is employee driven, it was highlighted sometime ago that employees who are involuntarily dismissed from their employment have no say in the decision taken to terminate their employment (McEvoy & Cascio 1987). However, inclusion of these circumstances in a study of ‘organisational cessation’ will mean the relationship between voluntary and involuntary turnover may be significantly diluted, given the circumstances of involuntary turnover where the employee has been forced to leave is likely to be ‘beyond the control of the employee’.

Theoretically and in real business, a large percentage of organisations correlate voluntary employee turnover to being an “avoidable” cost to the business. In support, Morrell, Loan-Clarke, and Wilkinson (2004) indicates that “voluntary turnover incurs significant cost” that could be reduced by better human resource management (HRM), providing opportunities, professional training and/or rewards. Due to the critical nature of turnover, it is important to consider the extent to which an instance of voluntary turnover may be classified as ‘avoidable’ (Abelson 1987; Campion 1991). A question such as: Can voluntary turnover per se, be avoided? Is therefore of critical importance when investigating the phenomenon of labour turnover. This could provide an organisation with a method of planned intervention.

The employee turnover term comprises the concept commonly known as organisation withdrawal behaviours. Hemingway and Smith (1999) study reports that under certain circumstances, the immediate reaction of employees is to distance themselves physically and mentally from unpleasant and unsafe work environments. Hughes and Bozionelos (2007) study provides further evidence indicating that absenteeism, excessive sick leave, disruption in work-life balance, lateness, frequent annual leave are variable indicators that relate to the family of withdrawal responses. Given that all these variables could indicate ‘voluntary’ employee turnover, a more precise definition stating the uniqueness of employee turnover is sought.

Mobley (1982:10) led the way to define turnover clearly from organisational withdrawal behaviours as “the cessation of membership in an organisation by an individual who received monetary compensation from the organisation”. An interesting issue, often discussed in respect of operationalisation of the employee turnover construct is the extent that turnover premeditates leaving and is thus a social phenomenon indicating the ‘state of mind’ where the individuals have chosen to terminate a significant relationship.

An interesting issue, often discussed in respect of operationalisation of the employee turnover relates to use of intent to leave as an alternate measure of actual turnover. Research has consistently proved that employees’ behavioural patterns of intention to leave their employers are the strongest predictors of actual turnover (Firth, Mellor, Moore and Loguet 2004). It is...
conclusively demonstrated that intent to turnover is the single best indicator for actual turnover and is often used by researchers when access to employees, who have actually exited the organisation, is not feasible. An interesting issue, often discussed in respect of operationalisation of the employee turnover construct is the extent that turnover premeditates leaving and is thus a social phenomenon indicating the ‘state of mind’ where the individuals have chosen to terminate a significant relationship. In contrast, involuntary turnover is controlled by intervention from the organisation, whereby a relational aspect to turnover namely ‘cessation of membership’ is lost. It is, therefore, likely that social science research of involuntary turnover would focus on extrinsic aspects, rather than intimate intrinsic involvement (Dess & Shaw, 2001).

An in-depth understanding of the process of labour turnover can increase the degree to which organisations and employees within organisations can adapt to, or contain the turnover process (Booth & Hamer 2007; Hom & Kinicki 2001; Jackson & Schuler 1995). A relatively recent meta-analysis of 800 turnover studies conducted by Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner (2000) confirmed some well established findings on the factors influencing employee turnover. The thirteen factors influencing Employee Turnover are as follows: Actual/Perceived Alternate Opportunities; Intentions to Leave; Job Satisfaction; Organisational Commitment; Employee Characteristics; Work Conditions; Training and Career Progression; Career Commitment and Progression; Organisational Size; Unionisation; Influence of Co-workers; Work/Life Balance and lastly Performance Appraisal (PA).

On an organisational level a positive consequence that may be accrued as a result of employee turnover is the decreased repetitions of other occupational withdrawal behaviours such as absenteeism, non-genuine sick leave, lateness, frequent annual leave and dissatisfaction due to imbalance of work-life ratio (Hughes & Bozionelos 2007). This is supported by a recent meta-analysis conducted by Zacharatos, Hershcovich, Turner, and Barling (2007) who found a positive relationship between absence and employee turnover.

All businesses need a source of labour to function (Erasmus and Nel 2009). This argument applies equally irrespective of the fact that whether an organisation wants to improve effectiveness and/or increase productivity by relying solely on a basic economical model, with labour as the main factor of production (Sauian, 2002). Or to rely on a Marxist account, emphasising “labour power” (Wheen, 2006) which place importance on the “human capital” or “intangible” competitive advantage of the organisation (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002). However a study conducted by Firth et al. (2004), suggests that managers can influence behavioural patterns in employees and influence the employees’ intention to quit. The study by Ming, Siong, Mellor, Moore, and Firth (2006) further supported the hypothesis that lack of management support plays a significant role in reducing job satisfaction and increasing stress leading to increased intention to quit. This indicates that the literature has established a strong link between intentions to quit and perceived alternatives.

In concluding the literature survey it must be noted that traditionally employee turnover research has been divided into two schools (Nel, Werner, Haasbroek, Poisat, Sono and Schultz 2008). Although classification is bound to be arbitrary, given the vast amount of research to date, it is essential to provide a meaningful segregation between two central traditions of turnover research. For the purpose of the review, these two schools of research are been called the economic market school and the psychological school (Du Plessis & Venter 2007). This division provides a way of organising the literature on employee turnover and related models.

**METHODOLOGY**

To date, research in New Zealand on the retention of employees in the health sector has generally centered around Nurses exclusively and as such may not translate to other categories of employees in the health sector. The empirical investigation executed by the researchers during mid 2007 included employees in diverse occupational categories within the ADHB. The sole criteria being that the employees participating in this study had to be international employees possessing a legal work permit granting permission to work in New Zealand and work for the ADHB.

The main hypothesis of the empirical investigation was to find factors predictive of voluntary employee turnover. The survey instrument was based on Mobley (1982) Intermediate Linkage Model, Mobley et al. (1979) Expanded Model, Maslach & Jackson (1986) Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Hom & Griffeth (1991) Structural Equations Modelling Test (SEMT) as well
as additional variables such as employee trust, employee culture and communication which are considered important to this study.

The survey approach was used by applying a questionnaire which is a popular method in business researches that enables comparisons between practice and function according to Alleyne, Doherty, and Greenidge (2006). The questionnaire was compiled from the above information and adapted by the researchers for use in the ADHB survey. After a pilot study was executed and refinement took place it was administered. The questionnaire was followed up by a number of interviews to gather further data for analysis purposes.

This study therefore utilised a combination of the two approaches which is known as the ‘mixed’ approach. The mixed approach primarily combines the quantitative and the qualitative approach. Eldabi, Irani, Paul and Love (2002) explain that the basic objective of a mixed methodology is to gain understanding (qualitative) and measurement (quantitative) from the relevant data gathered.

At the first stage the study uses the quantitative (questionnaire) instrument to extract specific outputs. The qualitative (interview) technique was used at the second stage to strengthen the quantitative outputs, and is briefly discussed for the purposes of this paper.

The questionnaire composed of questions based on the following groupings:

(a) Job Satisfaction (b) Personal growth and Professional growth (c) Trust in management (d) Promotion opportunities (e) Career progression (f) Performance appraisal (g) Work-life balance opportunities (h) Wages (i) Intentions to quit (j) Comparison of alternatives (k) Search intentions (l) Safety at work (m) Conflict resolution processes (n) Cultural differences (o) Value of international qualifications.

The survey utilised the Likert scale using ‘1’ to ‘5’, where ‘1’ meant ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ meant ‘strongly agree’.

The survey was available for completion for a period of eight weeks commencing mid April to mid June 2007 and 200 international staff members were eligible to participate. The survey instrument was posted via the internal delivery mail and a return envelope was enclosed to enable the respondents to remain anonymous. A total of 107 staff responded returning a 53.5% response. The analysis and writing up of the results were completed by mid 2008.

The Quantitative data was analysed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software using descriptive statistics and cross tabulation (Kerr, Hall and Kozub 2002). The major variables assessed for impact on the dependent variables were (a) Age (b) Gender (c) Work experience (d), Employment contract, and lastly (e.) Position employed. These were presented in patterns of participation contained in table1 along with interpretations.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The profile of the respondents to the survey are presented below

Employees by Place of Origin

The respondents in the survey came from several different countries across the globe such as Canada, USA, China, England, India, South Africa, Philippines, France, Germany, Fiji, Scotland, Denmark, Cyprus, Colombia, Zimbabwe, Australia, Singapore, Northern Ireland, Tuvalu, Hong Kong and Cyprus. The wide range of countries is an indication of internationalisation of staff recruitment.

The international employee respondents to the survey represented 22 countries across the globe. Eighty-six respondents (80.4 %) specified their technical or professional skills were acquired in place other than New Zealand. 33 % of respondents had acquired maximum work experience from England, 6.5% from India and 40 % respondents had acquired their skills mainly from their individual place of birth and had migrated to New Zealand. The remaining 20% acquired their skills in New Zealand. Majority of the international employees’ were skilled and indicated that their accumulation of work experience came from outside New Zealand.
Age
The trend of international employees in terms of age indicates that majority of the respondents are in the younger age group with 36.4 % and 37.4 % of the respondents aged in between 18 to 30 and 31 to 40 years respectively. In contrast 18.7 % and 6.5% accounted for the respondents aged in between 41 to 50 and 51 to 60 years respectively. Overall, 73.8 % of the international employees were below 40 years of age, reflecting a younger international employee population.

Gender
The gender ratio was heavily geared in favour of the females. The female respondents outnumbered the males by 2.5 times. A total of 78 females responded to the survey questionnaire in comparison to only 29 males representing 72.9 % for females and 27.1 % for males. In totality it was identified that the ADHB had a greater female to male proportion of international employee population.

Tenure of Service
The analysis of the questionnaire provided a remarkable insight to this study, with regards to ‘tenure of service’ of international employees within the ADHB. The survey results indicate that 47 respondents (43.9 %) of the population had been in employment at the ADHB for a period less then 12 months. While 26 respondents (24.3 %) indicated that they were in service for a little longer period ranging in between 12 and 24 months. In contrast, only 18, 4 and 11 respondents, representing 16.8%, 3.7 % and 10.3 % were employed with the ADHB for periods extending between 24 to 36 months, 36 to 48 months and 48 to 60 months respectively. This indicated that 68.2 % resigned from the service of the ADHB in 24 months or less with only 14 % continuing employment longer then 36 months or more.

Type of Employment Contract
Recruitment at ADHB has been fairly consistent. The survey results indicate that 92 respondent (85 %) of the international employees have been offered permanent employment contract. In contrast, a small percentage of employees have been hired on casual basis, fixed term contract and temporary employment contract. Only three (2.8%), seven (6.5%) and five (4.7 %) respondents indicated that their type of employment contract as casual, fixed term and temporary employment contracts respectively. This may indicate the ADHB would prefer to offer a stable work environment to the international employees.

Position Employed at the ADHB
This study included various working positions in the ADHB. Twenty non-clinical employees (18.7 %) formed the highest group of respondent to the survey instrument. The Allied Health Professionals (AHP) was the next group with 18 respondents (16.8 %). This group was closely followed by 16 Nurses who responded and formed the third group indicating a response of 15 %. The last major group constituted 15 Technical Professionals who responded to the survey and determined 14 % of the population. The rest of the population included three Consultants (2.8%), three Registrars (2.8%), five Midwives’ (4.7%) and one Senior Medical Officer (0.9%). In addition, 25 respondents indicated their position in the ADHB as ‘others’. This group included the health care assistants, kitchen staff and technicians.

RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION
The results of the research are summarised by briefly reviewing sub questions 1 (needs) and 2 (discontent) which are presented first. Thereafter sub-question 3(unique variables) is presented and finally sub-question 5 (strategies to be innovative) is discussed.

Needs and discontent of international employees
The interviews with employees’ reveal that the expectations and needs of international employees are not fulfilled leading to dissatisfaction and perhaps employee turnover. On the other hand, the interviews with employers indicate that they have provided the required tools to employees to complete their jobs satisfactorily. The findings demonstrate that employee and employer views differ widely

Identified needs of international employees are important in order to decrease the intent to quit: The findings of the survey instruments and interviews have highlighted the needs of the international employees that are considered important in order to decrease the intent to quit thereby reducing
employee turnover. They are Job Satisfaction, Training, Work/Life Benefits, Collective Bargaining Forum, Organisational Commitment, Career Development Plan and Internal Alternative Job Opportunities.

Identified discontent of international employees: The findings have further indicated the discontent of the international employees to the work relationship in the ADHB. They are a lack of promotion opportunities and application of performance appraisal processes. Lack of efforts towards understanding ‘intercultural communication’ and ‘cultural integration’ has led international employees to indicate these variables as potentially leading factors in increasing employee turnover.

Unique variables

The third sub-question in this study was to find unique variables, if any, that affect international employee turnover.

The findings of the survey instrument and interview highlighted two such variables. The variables, intercultural communication and cultural integration were found as having a significant impact on international employee turnover. Previous research considers communication as an important link to employee turnover (More & McGrath, 1997). With advances in globalisation and movement of employees across international borders, a number of communication gaps became evident and hence resolving these communication gaps with cultural overtones came to be known as intercultural communications.

The variable intercultural communication was not considered at the survey stage nor did the ADHB exit interview questionnaire have questions regarding intercultural communications. The issue was highlighted when conducting interviews with the Management Staff (MS) wherein it was observed that MS faced difficulty in correlating to international employees due to a number of barriers. Firstly, the difficulty to explain job requirements was considered very significant. The MS could never understand if the international employees comprehended the hospital needs on sensitive and ethical issues. For example, international employees would say “Yes” for everything and eventually do the work incorrectly. When questioned, the reply would be that fear of reprisal at the lack of understanding, forced them to confirm affirmatively rather than negatively. Another example is that international employees ‘nod’ their heads in agreement when explained a task. MS could never fathom whether the ‘nod’ meant that the employee understood the task or not. Communication specialists explain this phenomenon as cultural difference in manners, customs and rituals.

Secondly, MS would encourage employees to mingle around with different communities at break time. However, it was observed that employees of similar culture tend to group amongst themselves. This habit was regarded as anti-social to other cultures co-existing in the same work environment. Specialists regard this grouping as values, beliefs or attitudes which are invisible culture preferences. As employees of similar culture mix around themselves for the purpose of emotional bonding.

MS also faced the situation where international employees opted to speak in their local language. This posed an ethical issue to the MS, when staff of cultures complained. Therefore the greatest challenge faced by MS in intercultural interactions was in deciding who adapts to whom and when.

In the interviews, the MS recognised that in order to retain skilled international employees, intercultural communication skills were critical to serve the growing diverse population of immigrant labour. A communication specialist was employed to create intercultural awareness with different cultural issues. Special training sessions were initiated with focus on ‘Communicating for Results’, ‘Communication for Crisis Management’ and ‘Communicating in Conflict Resolution’. MS is now tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that communication between customers and colleagues is clear, coherent and free from intercultural ambiguities. In order to achieve this goal, MS needs to possess flexibility, patience and be astute in managing intercultural difference positively.

In retrospect, when international employees were interviewed, a majority of the employees said they had no communication problem; however most of them responded that interaction with their one up supervisor was problematic. When asked to explain, they stated that their supervisor did not
understand their perspective and hence the reason for mistrust. Perhaps the employees are confused with working in an intercultural environment where differences in opinion are bound to be present.

This issue has the possibility of being a continuous stressor between MS and international employees. The stress would lead to continued misunderstanding and job dissatisfaction and indirectly result in employee turnover. On a positive note, it would be beneficial for the organisation to cascade the inter-cultural communication training to international employees. In order to give them the right perspectives of other cultures and encourage them to continue working for the ADHB.

The second variable, cultural integration was investigated both at the survey and interview level. 17% of international employees participating in the survey indicated that culture difference hindered their integration within ADHB and the integration process was not smooth. For an organisation promoting cultural diversity, it was observed that a high percentage of employees were dissatisfied with the process of integrating international employees successfully into the cultural fabric.

At the interview level, both employees and employers were asked questions such as – Is a multi cultural workforce a boon or hindrance? Has a multi cultural work force heralded a better work environment? Employees gave mixed responses. They were happy with social interaction and enjoyed the exchange of culinary delights. However, at work, remarks such as “the preciousness with which certain ethnic groups are treated is insane” and “language barriers which is particularly unhelpful in an emergency situation” “poor health and safety standards by other staff when handling patients” highlighted serious issues of favoritism and unsafe patient care. In the health sector these issues can become a serious threat and need to be carefully assessed.

In comparison, employers were quick to acknowledge the contribution from employees of different cultures and remarked that patient/employee relationships and patient care was of high standard. As noted earlier communication gaps did exist but concerted efforts by MS had alleviated the problems reasonably well.

Literature on cultural integration focuses basically on the culture of the organisation and the ability of its employees to engage positively with the organisational culture. There is definitely a deficit of literature researching individual cultural integration. Questions such as the following were asked, ‘How successfully can an international employee integrate with local culture?’ ‘What are the barriers these employees face?’ ‘How can organisations help their entry into local organisation?’ - Individual cultural integration is an area where management neglect can hinder a successful transition. Cultural differences often lead to decreased productivity and lessened effectiveness. Individual culture is usually deeply ingrained. Both employer and employee need to act as one in order to avoid problems such as low morale, job dissatisfaction and employee turnover.

In concluding this section of the results, employers’ and employees’ beliefs differ on several cultural issues. A sound strategy of intercultural communication and cultural integration goes hand in hand. To reduce stress, dissatisfaction and intent to quit based on improved trust, team work and understanding. This could perhaps prevent avoidable employee turnover by applying a more innovative approach to deal with international employees as well.

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

In the light of the above discussion of the results, the final sub-question of this study is addressed by the identification of the following strategies which are proposed by Rodrigues (2008:131) for consideration in order to retain international employees. It is clear that entrepreneurial avenues have been pursued in order to stem the flow of resignations and to improve the retention rate. These are discussed below

**Declaration of objective on retention strategies to be used by the ADHB**

These include strategies for goal setting and tactics in order to retain international employees. The purpose is to aid management in mapping each task in the broader strategy, and provide requisite resources for individual supervisors and team leaders to state their plan of assessment. The
strategies could be tailored for an individual employee or group of employees working in the area in terms of employees’ aims and objectives.

The process of goal setting is an important aspect of motivation which helps to increase effectiveness. Goals should be quantifiable and precise in order to measure the rate of success in efforts. Provisions for the involvement of the team in the goal setting process could also be incorporated.

A timely schedule for self evaluation and performance appraisal feedback by the employer which is related to setting goals and strategies and focused on efforts made by the employees should be established. This schedule should be workable and not just on paper. Also recommended are provisions for employees to set goals and receive feedback on an annual basis.

Employer regulated goals ought to include supporting new recruits during the critical first few weeks in the job, providing clear career pathways for advancement, support of staff development, considering work-life balance issues, providing updated training modules to up skill employees, creating a pleasant and interesting working environment, offer internal alternate job opportunities, promising organisational commitment and job satisfaction, encouraging affiliations to recognised Unions, communicating and consulting collaboratively with employees (Head & Lucas, 2004).

Some of the tactics utilised by employers in retaining international employees would be to offer an attractive employee benefits package, keep wages on par with appropriate market rates, recognition programs that reward retention related behaviours, permit extra flexi-time options, (Haar, 2007), balance social and work related events, sought greater input from employees on policies and procedures, opportunities to work from home and compensatory time off facilities.

**Culturally appropriate strategies**

Management should encourage strategies that help to achieve the goals of the proposed strategic planning document of the ADHB (http://adhbintranet/proposed_strategic_plan.htm). It seeks to retain desired and committed staff through programmes which enable all international employees to realise their full potential as individuals, and to integrate culturally, socially and occupationally within the ADHB as employees.

It is recommended that managers act strategically and proactively rather then just reactively. The first stage would be to conduct a needs assessment. Data about international employees are gathered and processed to create relevant information needed during the ensuing stages. The primary information could be utilised as selection criteria (recruitment stage). Upon selection one would impart entry level training such as preparing the employees for entry into foreign environment and advanced level training such as overcoming language barriers and intercultural communication proficiency.

Rodriques (2008:133) points out that it is clear that the ADHB promotes cultural diversity. However, in order to increase interaction between groups of employees and improve commitment, Management should form cross-functional teams with employee involvement being crucial. This is supported by the study of Khatri and Budhwar (2002) who recommends that initiatives such as information sharing, engaging communication channels, lifelong learning programmes, formal dispute resolution procedures, training and retraining instead of redundancies. As discussed earlier, the primary management issues that need to be addressed during the entry period are language acquisition training popularly called ‘intercultural communication’ and cultural adjustment known as ‘intercultural integration’.

By being innovative and entrepreneurial in its approach, the ADHB could perhaps succeed in promoting the mastery of experiences for employees’ to adjust sufficiently to the host culture to function effectively before assuming full work responsibilities. These strategies will obviously be challenging to both employer and employee, but implementing them will emphasize issues which will need to be worked through in a spirit of multi-cultural diverse employment relationship by finding novel and innovative ways to address the problem.
Professionally trained managers that optimise organisational effectiveness

The ADHB could perhaps revisit the value of highly trained professional managers with specialised operational and people skills, meaningful understanding of their role, in depth business mastery and purposeful attitudes towards employees’ and employers’ needs. By utilising these professionals in innovative ways to address the problems around the retention of internationals to address their needs and discontent, is regarded as part of the way forward.

This recommendation by Rodrigues (2008) is supported by the research of Gentry, Kuhnert, Mondore & Page (2007) which reveals that managers and supervisors with a professional approach can influence a supervisory support climate that has significant impact on employee retention. Emphasis should be placed on providing professional development programmes which help managers uncover attitudes towards racial bias, ethnic gathering, language polarity and cultural groups, acquire knowledge about diverse cultures, and acquire knowledge and skills to develop an equity scheme which provides a climate of equal opportunity for international employees to attain professional and personal success.

Managers must take responsibility for employee retention. Ensuring that employees in their team are engaged continuously in the learning process, helping employees by their supportive and nurturing attitudes, providing the opportunity to learn about shared values and group differences and encouraging activities with a collaborative yet strong leadership mentoring (Gummesson, 2006). Employee retention involves being sensitive to employees’ needs by demonstrating strategies that are essential with employees learning from each other and the expertise of the manager (Hjalager, 2003).

Empowering Employees

The greatest challenge is to empower employees to make decisions about their jobs which are creative. Empowering employees makes them accountable for their own work and take responsibility for their results.

This is where managers of the ADHB could perhaps be very innovative and entrepreneurial by applying the following: Firstly implementing effective policies and procedures. The rule book of policies and procedures empowers employers and employees with a consistent approach to accomplishing their daily routines that convey the pulse of the organisation. Empowerment ensures a shared vision and shared communication between both employer and employee. Secondly, management policy and vision; if the employee is certain about the vision of the ADHB, employees’ then feel confident in the decision making that takes place. Thirdly, improve communications; this aspect helps in efficiently running operations and bridging the gaps between related departments. Lastly, improve productivity and the decision making process; by providing employees with an authoritative source for answering questions (Boyd, Nel and Hansen 2006, Nel and Boyd 2008).

The above recommendations are relatively innovative in the context of the healthcare sector to retain the services of international employees. It may contribute significantly to improve international employees’ trust in the ADHB whereby their needs are satisfied and their discontent reduced, all of which may perhaps reduce the intention to quit and therefore reduce actual labour turnover with all the accompanying negatives which impact on the quality of healthcare provided by the ADHB. It is justified to say that the regional frontiers of entrepreneurial activities in healthcare in New Zealand are extended by means of the results of this research and the steps which are being taken are currently already finding its way into the strategic planning document of the ADHB. It is concluded that the relevance of the ADHB organisational strategies need to be communicated to the international employees. The employees need to develop an understanding of their role and be aware of the resources in the organisation which will facilitate their jobs. Employees and Employers need to be equipped with cultural centered strategies that assist optimal achievement and have relevance both in the organisation and beyond. Procedures, policies and practices should connect both employers and employees with both taking equal responsibility in achieving organisational (ADHB) goals.
OVERALL CONCLUSION

The major aim of the research reported in this paper was to determine the factors that encourage international employees to stay in their employment at the ADHB. In order to identify the factors, it was necessary to understand the constructs of employee turnover and identify new ways to deal with these issues.

Employees are in a constant mode of transition. Understanding the intricacies of employment relationship processes and outcomes, is central to the development of strategies aimed at retaining desired staff in order to improve effectiveness, increase productivity and minimise the shortage of skilled staff.

In order to achieve organisational success an employer-employee relationship is important. Employers are beginning to move from the control relationship to the commitment approach in employment relationship, which is a changed approach and represents entrepreneurial thinking to manage participation of international employees in the health industry in New Zealand. To attain the goals of ADHB, the proposed plan (http://adhbintranet/proposed_strategic_plan.htm) has a clearly stated strategic plan on human resources management. It would be valuable if a supplementary plan for both, employer and employee, which clearly states the retention strategies to achieve the goals in the daily departmental context is devised. To empower employees it entails entrusting to them the accountability and ownership of individual and team achievements, which is a step in the right direction.

It is clear that ongoing proactive support to strengthen retention efforts will need to focus on culture research to integrate staff at ADHB. Clearly defined career plans enabling employees to develop on job skills, will perhaps help the employees to discern organisational commitment. Theoretical innovation lead by further research should provide the foundations in building a clever recruitment policy so that competent international employees are recruited for the right job and that the intention to quit would be significantly reduced. Individual efficiency and team spirit are relevant in the bicultural-multicultural context of New Zealand in order that international employees benefit from job satisfaction as well.

It is concluded that this research may perhaps help to extract some of the major reasons underlying the underachievement of the ADHB recruitment and retention strategy, but also contribute to address it. The findings emphasise the need for new thinking which would reflect innovative and entrepreneurial HR strategies which are embedded at the grass root level of the organisation.

The results are clearly a major effort to extent the regional frontiers of HRM at the ADHB in the context of being innovative and entrepreneurial research, to retain international staff in the New Zealand health sector in particular.

REFERENCES


