Strategies Being Applied by Organizations to Retain Critical Staff: A case Study of Powertel Communications (Private) Limited.

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Abstract
The rising global demand for professional, specialized and skilled people has resulted in the exodus of employees from many organizations in search of higher rewards. Powertel, a wholly owned subsidiary of ZESA Holdings (Private) Limited has been experiencing high labour turnover in the last decade, so much that in 2009, retention of critical staff became a topical issue in strategic management meetings as Powertel sought ways to reverse the high number of critical employee exits. The overall purpose of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies employed by Powertel to retain its critical staff. The researchers conducted an extensive literature review regarding strategies that an organisation can utilize to retain its critical employees. The views of current Powertel employees on retention strategies were assessed and data was gathered through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with management. Secondary data in the form of exit interviews was also used to complement primary data. A case study approach was used so as to get a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study. From a population of forty (40) employees working under the Operations Department, a sample of fifteen (15) people was drawn comprising three (3) managerial engineers and twelve (12) non-managerial engineering employees. Research findings revealed that communication within Powertel was not accurate and timeous, engineers were dissatisfied with their jobs, performance appraisal system was not fair and consistent and the majority of respondents felt that although training and development was existent in the organisation, there was no career progression, no promotion available or acknowledgement of skills and abilities of the employees. These findings were presented using descriptive statistics. Recommendations from the research findings were that there must be provision of clear career paths for trained and skilled employees, speedy dissemination of information, creation of effective teams and scientific selection of employees for staff retention.

Key words: Retention, Strategy, Knowledge worker

Introduction
People and organisational capabilities have become even more critical to business success in today’s knowledge-based economies. The emphasis has shifted to how winning companies manage their human capital and build their organisational capabilities to how the same companies can gain and sustain their competitive advantage. Consequently, developing and retaining talent is a key challenge facing many organisations and their human resource professionals.

Powertel Communications is a wholly owned subsidiary of ZESA Holdings; a group of companies mainly into electricity and energy generation and distribution. However, Powertel business is a wholly telecommunications subsidiary with a thrust towards Information Communication Technology (ICT). Its main products include the provision of data / bandwidth and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). As such Powertel’s human resource base comprises mainly of knowledge employees with a wide range of specialised skills which competition in the industry is keen to prey on.

Like any other organization, Powertel faced an enormous challenge of dealing with high labour turnover, particularly in high technical fields where its critical staff was concentrated. A wave of labour turnover plagued the entire organisation in the recent past depriving the company of its critical intellectual capital. If this continued unabated, the organisation risked losing its competitive advantage as well as its well-earned goodwill. The turnover of staff significantly impacted on the efficient functioning of Powertel, as the loss of skill and the
accompanying competencies in the company's specialised environment could not be easily replaced. Powertel, a hub of talent, empowered its engineering employees (through training and development programmes) who subsequently found themselves in even greater demand by other organisations because of their skills level. The mass exodus of employees from Powertel simply meant that the organisation became a training ground for other companies in the same or similar industries.

Competition in the labour market has become so intense that concentrating on traditional strategies of motivation like compensation, career pathing, training efforts and investing heavily on employee development, is futile (Gwamanda, 2002) cited in Swanepoel (2004). These approaches cannot buy employee loyalty. The question is therefore: How can Powertel retain its critical employees?

In view of the above question, this research sought to establish the levels of satisfaction that employees at Powertel derived from being employees of the organisation. These levels determine in part whether an employee will stay with the organisation or not and thus pointing to the effectiveness of the whole package of employee retention strategy. The research provided pointers to the way forward in so far as staff retention is concerned. It was hoped that the research would be a tool with which motivation and retention strategies would be modeled along.

The objectives of the study were:
• To establish the retention strategies being used by Powertel to retain its critical staff.
• To establish the extent to which Powertel employees agree that these strategies can assist the organization in retaining them.
• To make recommendations on strategies that Powertel can use to retain critical staff.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Retention
Torrington et al. (2002) defines retention as ensuring that people choose not to leave the organization voluntarily. Employee retention is thus a process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organization for the maximum period of time or until the completion of the project.

Critical (core) Employee
A critical (core) employee is a permanent worker who has a full time position and enjoys benefits such as pensions, health insurance, and vacations that are usually not available to temporary workers (Segal and Sullivan, 1997). Critical employees carry out critical job functions with capabilities consisting of complex bundles of skills and collective learning, exercised through organisational processes that ensure superior coordination of functional activities (Allan and Sienko 1997; Gramm and Schnell 2001). Researchers like Lepak and Snell (1999) further describe critical employees of today’s organisations as high value, high uniqueness employees whose skills and knowledge are a source of competitive value to the organisation. Their value and uniqueness may be based on tacit knowledge that would be valuable to the competitor and these skills and knowledge are related to core processes developed internally and built up overtime (Entrekin and Court, 2001). Basically, a critical employee is someone whose knowledge and performance contributes significantly to the organisation’s competitive advantage.

A recent study by Chew (2003) examined the key characteristics of critical employees in Australian organisations and the results indicated that all the descriptions seem to have a focus on knowledge, skills and attributes (KSA) that are of strategic value to the organization. The description included five characteristics namely:
• Possession of knowledge, skills and attributes (KSA) aligned with business operation and direction,
• Are central to the productivity and well-being of the organisation,
• Provide a competitive edge to the organisation,
• Support the organisational culture and vision and
• Possess skills, knowledge and abilities that are relatively rare or irreplaceable to ensure the success of the organisation.
Knowledge Worker
According to Kinnear and Sutherland (2001) a knowledge worker is any employee who uses his/her specialist knowledge to contribute to the products or services from which a company profits. Armstrong (2006) argues that a knowledge worker creates knowledge and is the key player in sharing it. The skills level and experiences that these individuals have acquired are unique and are not easily sourced from outside.

Strategy
Armstrong (2009) defines a strategy as an approach selected to achieve defined goals in the future. Generally speaking, strategy is about achieving a fit between the organisation and its environment or developing a course of action for achieving an organisation’s purpose.

Push and Pull Factors and their Effects on Retention
An understanding of pull and push factors is indispensable as these factors trigger intentions for an employee to leave an organisation. According to Torrington (2002) push factors emanate from dissatisfaction with work or the organisation leading to unavoidable turnover. Insufficient development opportunities, boredom, ineffective supervision, poor levels of employee involvement and straightforward personality clashes are the most common precipitating factors. The opposite side of the coin is the attraction of rival employers.

Motivation and its Effects on Retention
Motivation represents those psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of voluntary actions that are goal directed. Managers need to understand these psychological processes if they are to successfully guide employees toward accomplishing organisational objectives. Motivation has a bearing on employee retention as a motivated worker is less likely to relinquish the job at hand.

Theories of motivation merely provide a framework from which to work in attempting to motivate staff effectively. These theories fall into two basic groups: Content theories and Process theories. Content theories of motivation focus on what motivates an individual, such as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Herzberg’s Two-factor Theory. Process Theories attempt to describe and analyse how people are motivated, such as Vroom’s Expectancy Theory.

Content Theories
Content theories deal with the first part of the motivation process- needs and need deficiencies (Griffin, 2002). Content theories of motivation focus on the needs, drives or triggers of human behaviour in the workplace. More specifically, content perspectives address the question, what factors in the workplace motivate people? Two leading theories were outlined under this category.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory
In 1943, Abraham Maslow published his theory of individual development and motivation -Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Mullins (1999) states that Maslow’s basic proposition was that people’s wants were insatiable. He suggests that human needs are arranged in a series of levels, a hierarchy of importance. The hierarchy is usually shown as ranging through five main levels with psychological needs at the lowest level, through to safety needs, love needs, and esteem needs and to the need for self-actualisation at the highest level.

According to this theory, company motivation, remuneration and retention strategies must thus be tailor made to meet the needs of the employee failure of which the employee may exit the company in search of an organisation that will meet his/her needs. It is critical for an organisation to note that individuals are different or have different needs and that a strategy that works to satisfy the lower level needs may not necessarily satisfy the higher order needs. Strategies thus need to address different needs of employees at different levels in the hierarchy.

Herzberg’s Two-factor Theory
Schultz et al. (2003) writes that Frederick Herzberg was interested in the factors that make employees feel good about their jobs. The factors that need to be in place if employees are to avoid dissatisfaction are called hygiene factors. The factors that lead to
job satisfaction and motivate employees are called motivators. Hygiene factors are external (extrinsic) to the employee, such as the quality of supervision, pay, company policies and working conditions. Motivators are internal to the employee (intrinsic) and include factors such as responsibility, achievement and opportunities for personal growth. It therefore implies that provision of hygiene factors alone, will not lead to motivation, but will remove dissatisfaction. Managers therefore have to make sure that they include intrinsic motivational factors if employees are to be motivated.

Process Theories
Cole (1996) argues that process theories focus mainly on the process of motivation rather than its content. Griffin (2002) concurs with Cole (1996) as he says the process perspectives are concerned with how motivation occurs. Rather than attempting to identify motivational stimuli, process perspectives focus on why people choose certain behavioural options to satisfy their needs and how they evaluate their satisfaction after they have attained these needs.

The Expectancy Theory
Victor Vroom’s Expectancy Theory of (1964) aimed specifically at work motivation. According to Vroom, expectancy represents an individual’s belief that a particular degree of effort (motivational force) would be followed by a particular level of performance (Krieten et al., 2002). Mullins (1999) states that Vroom’s model is based on three key variables: valence (attractiveness or preference about a particular outcome), instrumentality (the first level outcomes are performance related and the second level outcomes are needs related) and expectancy (development of a perception of the degree of probability of the outcome).

The Expectancy theory has some very important implications for managers:
• Increase the expectation that greater effort will lead to performance (expectancy).
• Rewards given by the organisation should be meaningful to employees (valency).
• Rewards and performance should be clearly linked (instrumentality).
• Managers must enhance the employee’s belief that performance will be rewarded.

Porter and Lawler
Porter and Lawler cited by Mullins (1999) further developed Vroom’s expectancy theory by going beyond motivational force and considering performance as a whole. Mullins (ibid) states that Porter and Lawler point out that effort expended (motivational force) does not lead directly to performance, but that it is mediated by individual abilities and traits, and by the person’s role perceptions. This model recognises that job satisfaction is more dependent upon performance than performance is upon job satisfaction. Porter and Lawler see motivation, satisfaction and performance as separate variables.

The Equity Theory
This theory was postulated by Adams (1965) who argues that people perceive what they get from a job situation (outcomes) in relation to what they put into it (inputs) and then compare their outcome-input ratio with the outcome-input ratio of relevant others. If individuals perceive their ratio to be equal to that of the relevant others with whom they compare themselves, a state of equity is said to exist. Individuals perceive their situation as fair—that justice prevails. When people see the ratio as unequal, they experience equity tension.

Based on this theory, when employees perceive an inequity they can be predicted to make one of six choices:
• Change their inputs (for example, do not exert as much effort).
• Change their outcomes (for example, individuals paid on a piece-rate basis can increase their pay by producing a higher quantity of units of lower quality).
• Distort perceptions of self (for example, I used to think I worked at a moderate pace but now I realise that I work a lot harder than everyone else).
• Distort perceptions of others (for example, Mike’s job is not as desirable as I previously thought it was).
• Choose a different referent (for example, I may
not make as much as my brother-in-law, but I am doing a lot better than dad did when he was my age).

- Leave the field (for example, quit the job).

The researchers think that people are complex creatures differing politically, socially, psychologically and culturally. Because of this, no single motivational theory adequately explains all human motivation. However, the above mentioned motivational theories are a good starting point in understanding and identifying people’s various needs that bring them to the workplace.

**Staff Retention Strategies**

**Money/ pay**

There is some debate in the retention literature about the extent to which raising pay levels reduces staff turnover. Gomez-Mejia and Balkin (1992) cited by Torrington et al. (2002) submit that there is evidence to show that, on average, employers who offer the most attractive reward packages have lower attrition rates than those who pay poorly, an assumption which leads many organisations to use pay rates as their prime weapon in retaining staff. Mullins (1999) submits that for the vast majority of people, money is clearly important and a motivator at work but to what extent and how important it is, depends upon their personal circumstances and the other satisfactions they derive from work.

An important realization is that pay is not the only thing people work for. Employees look for a number of other returns to justify their time, energy, mental and emotional effort that they devote to the organisation.

**Empowerment**

Kriettner et al., (2002) defines empowerment as sharing varying degrees of power with lower-level employees to better serve the customer. In modern organisations, people want to have greater say in the workplace. Schultz et al., (2003), says that empowerment is the sharing of influence and control with employees. Leaders should allow employees to share in developing goals and strategies and the satisfaction derived from reaching those goals. Factors that retain knowledge workers are creating an environment where employees are free to act independently and giving access to leading edge technologies and work challenges (Kinnear & Sutherland, 2009). Rashid and Zhao (2009) also noted that involvement has a significant direct effect on retention. Similarly, information flow was found to be directly related to retention. They concluded that it is far more important to actively involve employees in organisational activities and recommended that if companies want to focus on one thing, it should be finding ways to involve employees in their day-to-day work activities and listening to their ideas and suggestions.

**Job enrichment**

Job enrichment methods attempt to change the nature of the job by broadening responsibilities, giving more autonomy for decision making, creating client systems and direct feedback systems and generally enlarging the scope of jobs. According to Kriettner et al. (2002), job enrichment entails modifying a job such that an employee has the opportunity to experience achievement, recognition, stimulating work, responsibility and advancement.

**Performance appraisal**

Performance appraisal is the process of systematically evaluating each employee’s job related strengths, developmental needs, progress toward achieving goals, and then determining ways to improve the employee’s job performance (Hellriegel and Slocum, 2009). An important part of performance appraisal involves an assessment of each employee’s progress toward achieving his or her goals. For these goals to be effective, they must be clear and specific so that employees know what is to be achieved.

Mullins (1999) says that one way in which to review the performance and potential of staff is through a system of performance appraisal. It is important that members of the organization know exactly what is expected of them and the yardsticks by which their performance and results are measured.
Career Development
A career is progress through life and is made up of different jobs. A career means security, commitment, loyalty and performance, and is what many employees aspire to. Poor career planning may cause confusion and stress at any stage across the lifespan of an employee. The plateaued career, which is characterized by poor promotional prospects, is a specific workplace stressor (Schultz et al., 2003). Unfulfilled career expectations may cause motivational problems in employees who lack status and autonomy (ibid).

Managing expectations
For some years research evidence has strongly suggested that employers benefit from ensuring that potential employees gain a realistic job preview before they take up a job offer. The purpose is to make sure that new staff are well informed before they make the decision to enter an organisation only to find that the job fails to meet their expectations. A major cause of job dissatisfaction, and hence of high staff turnover, is the experience of having one’s high hopes of new employment dashed by the realisation that it is not going to be as enjoyable or stimulating as anticipated (Torrington et al., 2002).

Why Employees Leave an Organization?
The most common reason for high employee turnover is the salary scale because employees are usually in search of jobs that pay well. Those who are desperate for a job may take the first one that comes along to carry them through while searching for better paying employment. Also, employees tend to leave a company because of unsatisfactory performance appraisals. Low pay is good reason as to why an employee may be lacking in performance (Rampur, 2009). Unequal or substandard wage structures fall under this category as well. When two or more employees perform similar work and have similar responsibilities, differences in pay rate can drive lower paid employees to quit. In a like vein, if you pay less than other employers for similar work, employees are likely to jump ship for higher pay, if other factors are relatively equal (Handelsman, 2009).

Laser (1980) argues that most people feel that the major cause of employee turnover is the issue of salary. While there is some support for this view, its importance has been greatly exaggerated; it is widely held because individuals frequently cite salary as their excuse for leaving, making the organisation and its pay scale a convenient target for employee frustrations. This is largely due to the fact that few workers want to give more personal reasons for leaving and thereby risk the possibility of not receiving a good reference at a later date. Another major misconception is that today's turnover is the direct result of a decline in a nation's work ethic. While it is true that worker attitudes have changed dramatically in the last thirty years, the problem of turnover goes beyond this shift in values. Instead, the real causes of turnover seem to be linked to problems within the organisation and not really attributable to attitudes carried by the influx of new employees. The unwillingness on the part of employers to look inward has served both to perpetuate and accelerate the turnover problem (Laser, 1980).

Another reason that employees leave is because of lack of benefits available to them from the company in which they work. High employee turnover could also be due to no potential opportunity for advancements or promotions. Employees prefer other companies which may provide them with higher posts and increased compensation packages (Rampur, 2009). Lack of opportunity for advancement or growth can cause a high turnover rate for any organisation. If the job is basically a dead-end proposition, this should be explained before hiring so as not to mislead the employee. The job should be described precisely, without raising false hopes for growth and advancement in the position. Since employees generally want to do a good job, it follows that they also want to be appreciated and recognized for their efforts. Even the most seasoned employee needs to be told what he or she is doing right once in a while (Shamsuzzoha, 2007).

Some employees move from company to company because they prefer a working environment that is suitable for them. If working conditions are substandard or the workplace lacks important facilities, such as proper lighting, furniture, clean

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restrooms, and other health and safety provisions, employees would not be willing to put up with the inconvenience for long. If an employee finds an appropriate work environment which is suitable for them in a specific company, they may work in that same organisation for several years (Handelsman, 2009).

Another reason that employees may leave an organisation is due to lack of projects or assignments that do not require their full potential. Employees would certainly leave if they do not get experience and are just placed on the 'bench'. There are many more causes which contribute to employee turnover; such as lack of employee motivation, work pressure, job stress, partiality and favoritism, employee egos and attitudes and poor employee management (Rampur, 2009).

A bad match between the employee's skills and the job can also be a reason for an employee to leave an organisation. Employees who are placed in jobs that are too difficult for them or whose skills are underutilised, may become discouraged and quit. Inadequate information about skill requirements that are needed to fill a job may result in the hiring of either under skilled or overqualified workers (Handelsman, 2009).

Lack of employee engagement is also another reason why employees leave their organisations. Right Management Incorporation in (2008) did a research on employee engagement and found out that engaged employees had a high probability of staying when compared to those that were disengaged. Right Management Incorporation came out with the conclusion that engaged employees lead to increased productivity, retention, customer loyalty and profitability. They recommended that organisations must measure levels of employee engagement, determine the drivers of engagement and continuously track engagement levels, because they established in their research findings that if the above is done, the probability of retaining staff is high.

Similarly Chipunza and Samuel (2009) did a research in South Africa on the motivational variables of employee retention and turnover. They found out that certain variables are crucial in influencing employees’ decision to either leave or remain in an organisation. Such variables include training and development, recognition/reward for good performance, a competitive salary package and job security. They also concluded that the importance of other variables should not be underestimated when formulating a retention policy. It is only a comprehensive blend of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational variables that can enhance retention and reduce the high rate of employee turnover in various organisations.

How to Control Employee Turnover
According to Zografos (2006), Chief Executive Officer of the Z Donut Company, there are a host of issues focusing on employee turnover, good and bad. Actually, some turnover is good. New employees do bring in new ideas, attitudes and keep the organisation fresh and current. Also, money is not the only motivator. As long as employees are being paid comparably to what other franchisees are paying, then other factors come into play like work environment, respect, responsibility and camaraderie. In fact, if your employee turnover is low and your goals are met, you can focus on why employees stay with your company and continue to strengthen and improve them. Either way, the turnover statistic is a valuable piece of information. The franchisor or franchisee organisation that achieves the lowest turnover statistic and maintains those levels are usually the ones that make it a priority.

Employers would be able to retain and attract well-qualified and talented personnel if they would make it a point to offer salaries that would be competitive. This would possibly resolve the problem of employees leaving due to low salaries. Employers should also offer attractive benefit packages. There are many employees who are not aware of the benefits that are provided to them in their compensation package. The employers need to reduce their bureaucratic procedures in order for the employees to receive the best available benefits without any difficulty. They should make a note of what all benefits other organisations are providing, which may attract their current employees. Also,
companies need to evaluate and modify their promotion policies in a fair way which would enable promotions for candidates only on the basis of employee performance (Rampur, 2009).

Offering voluntary benefits can help further important objectives for both employers and employees. Voluntary benefits such as dental, long-term care and life insurance can improve employers’ employee retention and cost control objectives, while also addressing employees’ growing concerns about a variety of financial issues (Nugent, 2009).

According to Pires (2009), President of HR411.com, an award-winning online human resources support and information portal, there are nine steps an organisation can take to reduce employee turnover. These are:
- Hiring employees with the right fit ensures compatibility which is critical to retention.
- Consider hiring older candidates who are seeking stability.
- Make sure you describe the job as accurately as possible so candidates will know what is expected
- Develop competitive compensation and benefit packages.
- Challenge your employees.
- Provide excellent supervision.
- Recognise employee success.
- Provide an employee-friendly work environment.
- Provide career advancement opportunities.

Research Methodology

Research design
The research adopted a case study research design in which both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. The case study was chosen because case studies emphasise detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. In this case the study involved a rigorous examination of the retention strategies that are being employed by Powertel.

Population
In this study, the population of interest was defined as all permanent employees working for Powertel under the Operations Department. The department had a population of forty (40) employees consisting of the following employee categories:
- Network Operations Section 20,
- Infrastructure Development Section 10 and
- Research and Product Development Section 10

Sampling
Cooper and Schindler (2003) argue that the basic idea of sampling is that by selecting some of the elements in a population, a conclusion about the entire population may be drawn. A sample of fifteen (15) employees was drawn, using stratified random sampling. Three of the respondents happened to be managerial engineers, heading the three sections that were under review. These three were interviewed while the rest took part in the questionnaire survey. The sample was thirty-eight per cent (38%) of the population and was therefore a true representative of the population.

Sampling Technique

The researchers used stratified random sampling in drawing a sample for the questionnaire survey. Representatives from the three departments were chosen using the following formulae:

\[
\text{sample size} = \left(\frac{\text{Number of employees in each subsection}}{\text{Total population}}\right) \times \text{sample size}
\]

Therefore, six (6) employees where randomly selected from the Network Operations Section, three (3) from each of the Research and Product Development and Infrastructure Development sections. This was done by pulling names of subjects out of a hat. The three managerial engineers who were interviewed were purposively selected to give opinion from the managerial point of view.

Data collection instruments

Questionnaires were used as appropriate research tools to reveal sensitive issues which respondents would otherwise feel uncomfortable to talk about in an interview. A pre-test survey was conducted in order to evaluate the validity and reliability of the

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questionnaire. Questions that proved to be unclear to the respondents were modified, rephrased or discarded. Pretesting of instruments in the field can serve as a reality check indicating to the researcher how well conceptualization of the problem matches the actual experience of the practitioner. Key informant interviews were also used to obtain in-depth data from the managerial engineers. Secondary data in the form of exit interviews was also used to complement the other instruments.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Data gathered was presented and analysed. Linkages between findings of this research and previous research findings were established. Where findings contradicted previous research findings, explanations were given. Data from questionnaires, interviews and exit interview report was also discussed.

Data presentations from the questionnaires

Data presentation on respondent’s age

Figure 1. Respondent’s age

Source: Primary data.

Figure 1 illustrates a strong representation of respondents between the ages of 45 and 54. This group amounted to 66.3 %, showing that the workforce was heavily weighted in the older group of respondents. Although Powertel was reaping the benefits of this group’s superior knowledge and experience, it needed to inject younger employees into the workforce, bringing with them new ideas and fresh skills. The data also indicate that age ranges from 30-44 only carried a small percentage of 8.30%. This might mean that it is at these ranges where the experienced and qualified actually fall, as such the retention capacity for these ranges is so poor as the company might be facing stiff competition for such employees.

Data Presentation on Respondent’s Experience

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Table 1. Respondent’s experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years’ experience</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data.

A staggering 83.3% of the workforce had more than 21 years’ service. These individuals needed different factors of motivation such as challenging work and a sense of responsibility to motivate and retain them than the younger inexperienced employees. If no efforts were made to retain these individuals, a huge percentage of experience would be lost. Negative motivational aspects of these respondents would also contribute to inefficiency of service delivery for Powertel.

Data presentation on respondent’s qualifications

Table 2. Respondent’s qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade test</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data.

As can be seen in the table above, 25% of the respondents had obtained diplomas; with a further 25% earning Bachelor’s degrees and 50% had master’s degrees. These qualifications, as well as the employee’s work knowledge and experience, placed them in high demand by other firms in similar lines of operations. It also showed that with more experience, these employees could register with a professional institution and increase their marketability as highly skilled technical knowledge workers.

Analysis and Interpretation of Retention Strategies

The analysis and interpretation of retention strategies related directly to the second sub-problem, namely: “How do existing employees feel about current retention strategies at Powertel?”

The researchers used a three-point rating Likert scale.
Table 3. Summary of responses to questions on retention strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number and percentages of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Powertel provides me with continuous training and development.</td>
<td>Agree: 6/12 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>There are visible career progression paths within Powertel.</td>
<td>Agree: 0/12 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I know exactly what my job outputs are.</td>
<td>Agree: 3/12 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Management informs us timeously about changes that take place.</td>
<td>Agree: 0/12 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My job gives me satisfaction.</td>
<td>Agree: 2/12 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Performance appraisals are fair and consistent.</td>
<td>Agree: 2/12 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I feel that I earn a market related salary.</td>
<td>Agree: 1/12 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Money is the only important motivator to me.</td>
<td>Agree: 2/12 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I feel empowered to do my job through delegation of authority.</td>
<td>Agree: 6/12 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I feel proud working for Powertel.</td>
<td>Agree: 4/12 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I feel part of the organisation’s vision and mission.</td>
<td>Agree: 0/12 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Powertel has good employee benefits.</td>
<td>Agree: 1/12 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I feel rewarded for putting more effort in my work.</td>
<td>Agree: 0/12 (0%)</td>
</tr>
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Source: Primary Data

Statement 1 – There was an equal split with 50% agreeing and also 50% disagreeing with the statement that Powertel provides continuous training and development.

Statement 2 – An overwhelming majority (75%) of employees felt that there were no visible career paths within Powertel, with 25% uncertain. As reflected by the average age of this grade, there had been very little movement for the engineers with regard to promotion.

Statement 3 – Only 25% of the respondents agreed they knew what their job outputs were. This is an indication that at Powertel most employees do not know what their job outputs were.

Statement 4 – More than half of the respondents (60%) felt that management does not timeously
inform employees about changes that take place yet feedback is extremely important to employees for the attainment of organizational goals.

Statement 5 – The majority of the respondents (83%) felt that their jobs did not satisfy them. This appeared to be the chief antecedent of labour turnover.

Statement 6 – 58% of the respondents found the performance appraisal system to be unfair and inconsistent, with another 25% showing indifference. This showed that there was very little support for the performance appraisal system.

Statement 7 – The majority of respondents (75%) felt that they did not earn a market related salary. These are extrinsic hygiene factors as proposed by Herzberg. This implied that market surveys were not transparent or were not done at a regular basis so as to ensure employees are remunerated fairly. This was consistent with the Equity Theory of motivation which says in summary people make comparison of their job inputs (effort, experience, education and competence) and outcomes (salary, recognition and rewards) relative to those of others (referent others).

Statement 8 – Just over half of the respondents felt that extrinsic motivators did not motivate them as 83% felt that money was not the only motivator important to them. From the results of the study, with the average age factor being relatively high, a large majority was motivated by other aspects other than only money.

Statement 9 – The majority, 50% of respondents, felt empowered to perform their jobs through delegation of authority. This tended to point out that most respondents welcomed responsibility and control of their outputs in performing their jobs.

Statement 10 – A large amount of the respondents, (42%) did not feel proud to work for Powertel, with 25% uncertain and 33% feeling positive toward the statement. From the results of the study, it was concluded that because people’s esteem needs (Maslow) were not being met, employees felt negatively about the organisation. The 42% that responded negatively could be from the ‘learned’ group (employees possessing diplomas) that found themselves highly qualified for the job, whereas the 33% that responded positively could be from the non-diploma group.

Statement 11 – An overwhelming 75% of the respondents felt that they were not part of the organisation’s mission and vision. The respondent’s extrinsic hygiene factors were negatively affected. From the results of the research, it was assumed that this reflected that employees were not given the opportunity to participate in decision-making and that their contributions were not recognised. It also appeared apparent that managers did not exemplify the vision and mission.

Statement 12 – Half (50%) of the respondents disagreed that Powertel had good employee benefits. The organization’s benefits largely remained unchanged and had not kept pace with the changing environment. Medical benefits as well as leave benefits had decreased in value for the employees. These were once again extrinsic hygiene factors that were not being met to motivate employees.

Statement 13– The majority (91.7%) of the respondents felt that they were not rewarded for more effort or motivated to work harder at Powertel. Vroom’s Expectancy Theory which states in brief that the strength of the tendency to act in a particular way depends on the strength of an expectation that the effort will be followed by a given outcome and the attractiveness of that outcome to the individual was applicable to this statement. Employees expected that a particular effort will result in a particular performance. The amount of effort spent would be perceived as reward at the end. With little or no reward, employees would be unproductive as reflected by these statements.

Data Presentation on Interview Results

Three out of three (100%) of the planned interviews were carried out.
An array of findings were noted from the interviews. It was revealed that most of the employees were highly experienced and qualified putting them on a competitive position which competition is keen to prey on. This means that if no meaningful retention strategies are put in place, Powertel risks continuing to lose its critical staff. It was also found that although Powertel was reaping the benefits of superior knowledge and experience, it needed to inject younger employees into the workforce bringing with them new ideas and fresh skills.

All three responses disputed that Powertel rewards effort. They highlighted that the company was not paying competitive salaries. The managers were in unison, noting that competitive salaries were the hallmark of stability of employee tenure. This finding was surprisingly interesting as it placed more emphasis on money, which is contradictory to the views of other employees who acknowledged it as a motivator, but not the only important one.

The respondents had reservations for being Powertel employees, as they argued that they did not feel like being part of the organisation’s vision and mission. The managers highlighted that they were not effectively involved in strategic decisions, and as such they felt sidelined and unattached to the organization. They also harbored some feelings of discontentment with existing training and development programmes, as they outlined that bursaries and external courses were not granted to them for furthering studies, however they acknowledged that internal training was used by the organisation for developmental purposes.

Lack of feedback on performance was also cited as another thorny problem. Under normal circumstances, employees are familiar with their job outputs and their job requirements. Surprisingly, the interviews revealed that some engineering personnel did not know exactly what their job outputs were. With a high turnover rate, remaining employees were given more tasks to perform and added responsibilities that lured them away from their daily routine. With fewer people to attend to crises, employees were burdened with extra responsibilities that demanded different outputs.

Analysis of data from exit interview report

Analysis of Exit Interview Report, which contained information for four engineers who left the organisation for greener pastures during the period that spanned 2009 and 2011 also revealed significant pressure points for staff retention.

Among the trigger factors for their departures were lack of challenging work, straight forward personality clashes with supervisors, work under load, lack of promotion prospects, lack of career advancement opportunities, lack of employee-friendly work environment (an environment that failed to accommodate employees’ outside demands), incompetent supervisors who stifled professional growth, lack of competitive compensation and benefit packages, lack of job descriptions, lack of right person-organisation fit and lack of motivation.

DISCUSSION

With the majority of the respondents having earned diplomas and degrees, it was revealed that they desired greater challenges and responsibility. This refers to intrinsic motivators as proposed by Herzberg’s theory which argues that intrinsic motivators include achievement and opportunity for personal growth. Rampur (2009) argued that one of the reasons that employees may leave an organisation is due to assignments that do not require their full potential. As noted from the questionnaire responses, interviews and exit interview report, the employees seem not to be satisfied by their jobs as they feel not being challenged. In fact dissatisfaction is even worsened by overloading of work which in itself is a push factor as it leads to pressure and stress.

Results from the respondents suggest that person-organization fit positively influence employee retention. These findings were in consonance with that of Pires (2009) who stressed the need for hiring employees with the right fit to ensure compatibility which he cited as a critical determinant of retention. It could be inferred that the recruitment function had some inadequacies as it ushered in employees
without the right fit and hence rising discontentment from most employees.

The findings were also consistent with those of Samuel and Chipunza (2009) who found strong evidence of association between training and development and employee retention. The majority of respondents felt that although training and development was existent in the organization, there was no career progression, promotion available or acknowledgement of skills and abilities of the employees, which lead to continuous labour turnover being experienced. In support to this, literature revealed that poor career planning, not only causes confusion and stress, but is also the biggest contributor to job dissatisfaction.

Most of the subjects were not content with available benefits and salary scales that they felt were not market driven. It therefore appeared that employees made a comparative analysis of compensation and benefits. This was consistent with the Equity Theory which posits that employees compare their output-input ratios with those of referent others. The results would suggest that managers were ill advised about the obtaining competitive salaries due to their lack of research (salary surveys). This was not in line with a recommendation made by Rashid and Zhao (2009) that organisations’ focus must be towards adjusting reward structures to make sure employees feel they are being fairly compensated for their efforts.

Though the majority of the questionnaire responses cited that money was not the biggest motivator, the fact that they made constant comparisons of salary scales shows that they still valued it as a contributing factor to their retention. Interview responses also heavily emphasized money as a retention strategy. To support this finding, Mullins (1999) submits that for the vast majority of people, money is clearly important and a motivator. It should however be noted that pay is not the only thing people work for, as Chipunza and Samuel (2009) concluded that the importance of other variables should not be under-estimated when formulating a retention policy.

The general pattern of the responses contradicted Gwamanda (2000) who argues that concentrating on traditional strategies of motivation like compensation, career pathing, training efforts and investing heavily on employee development is futile as it cannot buy employee loyalty. Most of the key factors that triggered resignations revolved around these so called traditional methods. It therefore appeared apparent that Gwamanda’s argument was an oversimplification of reality.

**CONCLUSION**

Theoretical elements of retaining critical employees were obtained from a comprehensive literature study. Strategies identified include: empowerment, job enrichment, meaningful performance appraisal, career development, proper management of expectations and meaningful rewards that are market driven. Notable findings from the study revealed that Powertel employees were not satisfied with their jobs due to a myriad of factors including: lack of visible career paths, poor communication, lack of opportunities for continuous development, unfair and inconsistent performance appraisal, lack of fair remuneration policies and feelings of not being part of the organisation’s mission and vision. Engineering employees were therefore not proud to be working for Powertel. Interviews with managerial engineers revealed that Powertel’s retention strategies leaned heavily on extrinsic factors. Analysis of exit interview report revealed that straightforward personality clashes with supervisors were a chief contributor to employee turnover.

**Recommendations**

The following strategies were identified and recommended for retaining critical employees within Powertel:
1) Provision of clear career paths for trained and skilled employees
2) Speedy dissemination of information
3) Creation of effective teams
4) Enhancing job satisfaction
5) Recognising the engineering staff in its entirety
6) Enhancing job enrichment.
7) Scientific selection of employees
8) Meaningful performance appraisal

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