ABSTRACT

High attrition rate in the workplaces related to Higher Education has contributed immensely to the unwanted expenses. In this review, we will concentrate on the major reasons behind such high attrition in the higher education institutes and which aspects in higher education are mostly affected due to this condition. The research findings show that attrition has several negative impacts on an institution. It is a problem spread everywhere irrespective of institution types, field of study or discipline, genders, races, and ethnicities. Attrition impacts both types of employees – those who are leaving and those who stay with the institute. Its impact on the existing employees is found to be very demoralizing. An overall loss of productivity is noticed sometimes. The current review will try to bring a clear picture on the whole matter to understand what are the key issues behind this burgeoning problem, what issues are going against the organizational structure in the higher education institutions leading to poor administrative or faculty retention. The review will also try to provide some significant solutions that can strengthen the organizational activities in the higher education institutions.

Keywords: Attrition, staff retention, job satisfaction, workplace productivity

INTRODUCTION

THE COSTS OF HIGH ATTRITION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

It seems that the high attrition has become a part of the organizational culture in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The high rate of attrition prevailing both in the administrative and academic departments. It is found that the higher authority has been blaming the state of the economy for the high and frequent attrition. They say that they have to maintain the expenditure within the assigned budget which sometimes becomes impossible. Higher attrition sometimes creates the adverse working environment. Many institutional operations are compromised or higher authority needs to get satisfied with low productivity or quality. In order to combat the situation of disorganization, they need to get control over the environment [1].

In this research paper, my aim will be to find the impacts of attrition in HEIs on the faculty members, administrative staff, and overall operations in these institutions. My intention is to show to these HEIs how the proven theories and models can provide effective solutions to all this practice. Higher Education Institutions are rearing future workforce. They are imparting education and skill to the students necessary in different professions. So, the HEIs are the breeding ground of the future professionals. Universities and colleges are showing these breeding professionals the best practices in different business or working environments. However, these theories or models, which are taught to
the students are not practiced or applied in the HEIs as far as their own environments are concerned. There are hundreds of examples where the management of the HEIs is far away from applying the principals of effective management practice. Through this research, my aim is to raise these issues and show the ways to improve organizational or management practices.

In a research, Jo (2008) has shown that a typical employee changes their jobs at least seven times in their whole career [2]. In HEIs, the rates of attrition may be different in different types of institutions but as a whole, it has been troublesome and expensive. According to Jo (2008), almost $68 million is spent annually in the USA alone just due to attrition in the workplaces around the country. A major part of this amount is related to lower and poor productivity, degraded work ethics and culture among the existing employees, and loss of skills. Expenses are also made in new recruitments and training. That is why Jo (2008) has termed attrition as a “silent thief” in a workplace that robs the organization unknowingly. There are multiple factors influencing attrition in HEIs. Here are some qualitative research questions need answers in order to open up the problem and understand the real issues [3]:

1. What are the prime factors behind high attrition in HEIs?
2. What factors influence high workplace productivity?
3. What are the impacts of attrition on any institutional environment?
4. What theoretical models could be used in the HEIs for a relevant solution?

Attrition in the workplaces and its impacts are prevailing across all types of institutions, races, disciplines, and genders [4]. The aim of my study is to enhance our common understanding of the impacts of attrition on the operational process in an HEI and on its Human Resource (HR). There are physical, psychological, and emotional impacts of attrition which cannot be denied [5].

This research work also tries to contribute to the industry by opening up the issues that have an immense effect on the different operational aspects in HEIs which ultimately leading to poor retention and poor job satisfaction among the employees. Discussion with the help of different theories seems appropriate for the problem will be made. In this research work, these theories will be presented keeping in view their relevance in the current context and with an intention that the HEIs will implement them for strengthening their operational aspects and increasing employee retention.

**ADMINISTRATIVE ATTRITION**

Sturges and Guest (2001) performed a research to find the prime factors behind the decision of the new graduates or professionals to stay with the first employer or leave them [6]. The researchers applied a conceptual framework to assess the organizational commitment. The research outcomes show the ways how the employee relation could be strengthened, how the employees could be made more productive, and how leadership is related to the organizational retention. Their research results show that on an average, the retention rate of the new graduate students is almost 50% (keeping a 5 years’ retention parameter). There was as high as 86% retention rate in one organization and as low as 4% retention rate on the same parameter in another organization. This important study on the retention of graduate students in the first organizations they join provides a deep perspective on what makes the new graduates stay with their first employers.

The research of Sturges and Guest (2001) is motivated from the research work of Arnold et al (1999) that gives us a longitudinal view of the first 10 years of the career of the new graduates [7]. Their research findings give an in-depth idea of the consequences of organizational commitment that the graduates show in different situations. The modern-day managers need to know the results of these research works. The results will be immensely beneficial for proper recruitment and overall HR development. Several pioneering research in this field has proved that employee commitment is an utterly important matter. Highly committed employees never think to leave their employers [8]. It is found that the attrition rates are highest when the employees are at the beginning of their career.
During this period an employee, who is a new entrant in the industry, never feels committed to their employer.

The research works of the above authors focus on this aspect too to assess what is the effective commitment level that can make an employer really committed and reduce the attrition rate in a higher education institution. It seems that their findings are influenced by Porter’s research on “Relative Strength” that determines how an individual identifies themselves with the organization where they work [9].

In this research study, the cross-sectional qualitative approach was followed. The objective of the research was to find the commitment of the graduates to their respective organizations and their future intentions, i.e. whether they wanted to stay or leave the current employers. Five types of organizations were considered in this study: Public Sector, Technical, Food processing, and Finance. All these organizations recruit fresh graduates and members of the Association of Graduate Recruiters. 50 graduates within the age group of 23-35 years were selected among them 38 were men and 12 women. The respondents were given unique codes for keeping confidentiality [6]. The organizations were asked to select 12 graduate employees who are presently working for the company. Postgraduate degree holders were excluded from this research work. A semi-structured survey was considered as the best research tool for this research. The researchers considered this tool as the best one in this research. The questionnaire was arranged in such a way to get data on the organizational commitment levels of the respondents and what factors influence the commitment of the respondents [6].

The core questions in the research were the following:

1. What is your expectation from the present job?
2. What factors influence you to stay with the organization?
3. What made you committed to the present employer?
4. Do you think that the commitment you are showing will help you in career development?

The opinions and answers of the respondents were recorded, analyzed, and coded for more intensive analysis and coming to a conclusion.

The qualitative process used in this research faced some difficulties while the interview was going on. In an organization collection of data was a major problem as the respondents selected was working in multiple locations and shifts. The researchers marked the major antecedents of organizational commitment and recognized the following influences:

1. Prior experience in the same type of organizational environment
2. Biological features like age and sex
3. Organizational structural features like size of the organization and type of hierarchy maintained, etc.
4. The expectation of the employer regarding the role and responsibility of the employee
5. Scope of self-development

The outcome of the survey shows that if a graduate can relate their experience in the current organization with their career development, their organizational commitment remains very high [7]. Another outcome of the research is that the new graduate recruits are more interested in career success and development rather than showing gratification to their employers [6]. Thus, an employer who understands this attitude of the new graduate recruits can use this characteristic in their favor by providing more challenging jobs and high targets. Perception of career opportunities in the current organization is another prime influencer.
In their research, Struges and Guest (2001) used the term ‘expectation gap’. This is what a new recruit expects from their current job position and what they perceive the organization can provide or offer [6]. If the gap is wide, it can create a psychological difference between the employer and employee.

The current research identifies three significant areas relevant to organizational commitment: Pre-joining expectation, Career Management, and Future decisions. These three aspects need some elaborations:

Pre-joining expectation: It is the expectation that a graduate possesses prior to their employment after a selection. This expectation is created after getting information about the organization from different sources including the recruiter and other graduates.

Career Management: It is the responsibility of the administrative or HR team to give proper guidance and direction to the graduates so that they can feel that they are in the right organization.

Future decisions: The management of an organization should create an environment where the graduates could see their future. For the graduates, their new organizations should provide work-life balance, the reward for good performance, due recognition, and career progression [10].

Jo (2008) conducted a research on volunteer attrition among female employees in HEIs [2]. Her research findings show that females change job more frequently than males. Her study shows that the female employees face the following difficulties in HEIs:

1. No getting value or due recognition
2. Not getting a flexible work schedule
3. Disrespect
4. Not trusted with tough jobs
5. No opportunity for growth

Her study also reveals that younger women having small kids at home show a different commitment than the other women and expects different kinds of flexibility at the workplaces. For example, they may expect flexible schedule so that they can spend more time at home with the children. However, the data presented by Jo (2008) shows that percentage of attrition among females is more than males [2]. This happens mainly due to the work-life imbalance they face.

There are some effective theories on workplace attrition. According to labor market theory, the state of the economy is the prime factor regulating the job market. It is natural that if the demand in the job market is less and supply is good, it is difficult to find a new job. In that situation, an employee tries to adjust with the present employer even if the relationship is not good or the employee is dissatisfied with the job [2]. In any condition, the compensation or salary is the first attraction for an employee. On the other hand, the first reason for resigning is tension in the relationship with the supervisor. According to the Rational Economic Choice theory, jobs are available but an employee takes the decision of leaving the job on the basis of several factors:

1. Job satisfaction level
2. Recognition from the higher authority
3. Relationship with the manager or higher authority
4. Career advancement
5. The state of the economy of the region or country

The research of Jo (2008) further spotted the areas that are impacting the attrition in HEIs. There are both monetary and non-monetary reasons behind attrition. Jo suggests that financial incentives in HEIs should be attractive enough to retain an eligible employee. If an employee is looking for any non-
monetary reward, they should be given opportunities to work in the challenging goals. Institutions need to recognize and reward able employees publicly [2].

ANTECEDENTS OF ATTRITION

Takawira et al (2014) focused on the effects of attrition intention on the organizations and the whole dynamics of this aspect [5]. They selected a South African HEI for his study. They study the relationship among work engagement, job embeddedness, and attrition intention. The author suggests that attrition in an HEI can negatively affect the HR of the HEI. It also disrupts the productivity of an institute. Employee embeddedness is a combination of several factors or forces that make an employee committed to the present employer. According to Lee and Mitchell (2001), employee embeddedness is an important factor in employee attrition, if it is strong in an organization, the retention rate remains fairly high [11]. Employee embeddedness has two dimensions, viz. Organization and Community. Among these two dimensions, organizational factors are more important in this matter.

Mitchell et al (2001) have talked about ‘job fit’ while discussing job embeddedness. This refers to an employee’s perceived compatibility with the organization where they work [11]. The study reveals that ‘job fit’ is positively related to the rate of retention in an organization [5]. Another important aspect related to job embeddedness is ‘perceived cost’ of leaving the current employer. According to Takawita (2014), this can be termed as ‘sacrifice’. If an employee finds that the perceived cost is high, they decide to stay with the organization.

In the study, a cross-sectional quantitative survey method was followed to accumulate relevant information from the respondents. The survey was self-administered, i.e. the respondents were given full freedom to express their opinions [12]. As said before, the researcher selected a South African HEI for the research; the questionnaire was distributed to the participants linked to that institution. The sample size was 153 with 61% females. The demography of the sample was as follows: 85 Asian, 52% African American, 37% white, and 3% mixed race. There were almost 54% of the participants were married and the age range of the sample was 26 to 45 with the median age being 37. It was ensured that the participants had at least 5 years of working experience.

The research findings reveal that high embeddedness can reduce attrition. It further finds that embeddedness creates a connection between an employee and the institution that is again related to high retention rates. The researchers also suggest arguing that as embeddedness concentrates on the factors of retention, this can simultaneously find out the probability of attrition in the institution [5].

This research has also identified the connection between embeddedness and job engagement. Job engagement is a cognitive state of an employee that is characterized by dedication and vigor. The researchers defined vigor as the level of energy and determination that an employee puts in their job. Dedication is the level of passion an employee possesses towards their job. According to Saks (2006), the job engagement is closely associated with an employee’s intention, attitude, and behavior [10]. This research shows that job engagement and attrition are negatively related to each other [13]. Thus, if an employee has no mental connection with the job or the organization, there remains a keen chance of attrition.

The study also discusses the research findings of Harter et al (2002). In this research, 7939 business units of 36 organizations are surveyed [13]. The research shows a close connection between job engagement and certain business aspects like attrition, brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction [14].

FACULTY ATTRITION

Sabharwal and Corley (2009) performed a research to get an idea whether job satisfaction in the HEIs is a matter of gender and discipline [4]. They followed quantitative research approach to gather information. In another research, it was found that women in the field of engineering are more satisfied than the women in the fields of social sciences. This was just opposite in males in the fields of engineering and social sciences.
The research was restricted within HEIs. It examines attrition and its effects on productivity and quality of life of the employees. Employees spend a major part of their day in the workplace. Hence, certain factors in the work environment definitely affect their other aspects of life [4]. The research of Sabharwal and Corley also covers gender differences across different disciplines in the HEIs. Their research findings show that males are more satisfied if the salary, benefits, and promotion opportunities are good.

In this research, 900 different academic institutions were considered. A secondary source was used for related data; it was the National Science Foundation’s survey on the doctorate recipients. For the primary data, a survey questionnaire was prepared. The researchers apprehended the basic demographic variables and faculty perspectives with the help of job satisfaction scale [15]. The respondents in the study are all degree holders before 2002 in different disciplines. There were 40,000 respondents in the survey. The weighted size was 685,296 and the actual unweighted sample size was 29,915. They all were doctorate candidates. The survey was conducted in a controlled environment. The primary aim was to get information from the academic scientists working full time and who have worked in colleges or universities at least 4 years. This criterion reduced the sample size to 238,674. Thereafter, the postdoctoral candidates were also filtered which reduced the sample size to 223,424 [16]. As the participants were from different disciplines, for the convenience of the study, the researchers grouped them into 4 categories: Engineering, Social Science, Natural science, and Health Care.

The key finding of the research reveals that women and minority faculties in the universities faced multiple hindrances throughout their academic career. According to ward (2000) disparity in the salaries of male and female academicians is also very common [17]. Vardaman et al (2008) have revealed that minority faculty members in healthcare often experience discrimination which degrades their morale and job satisfaction [18]. The research work of Sabharwal and Corley also appeared in a study conducted by UCLA. Antonio et al (1997) have revealed in their research work that discrimination on the basis of color is very much present in the academic arena [19]. Carr et al (1998) have argued that married faculty members are more satisfied with their jobs than the unmarried ones in the same academic environment [16]. However, women with children face more hurdles than others in academic environments.

As the researchers need to work as part-time teachers, it develops a conflicting aspect in their career. Olsen et al (1995) reveal that faculties with any research projects in hand feel disturbed when they are bound to act as teachers [20]. This conflict intensifies when the research works carry some higher rewards. To these faculties, job satisfaction is closely linked to more involvement in the research works. Thus, the study shows that job satisfaction is high when the academicians are given scope to concentrate on their research projects.

**URBAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

What about the attrition rates among faculties in the Urban Public Universities? Short et al (2009) have conducted a research study in this matter and focused on certain important factors [21]. The researchers have applied the Casual model of Smart (1990) which is again based on the expectancy theory [22]. The expectancy theory states that employees bring with them certain expectations. An organization who met most of those expectations is capable to retain the employees for a longer period [14]. Addressing issues related to working environment are important in meeting the expectations of the faculty members. The expectation theory is analyzed with the help of three variables: Structural, Environmental, and Psychological. Some structural expectations are work autonomy, participation in decision-making, collegial communication, etc. [23]. If structural expectations are met job satisfaction among the faculty members become higher. Psychological expectation includes a faculty member’s perception regarding work-related responsibilities and working environment. Some other factors, like the financial condition of the faculty and the condition of the job market, also determine the faculty’s commitment level. The expectancy theory indicates five variables related to work structure: Workload,
Autonomy, Role conflict, Openness in the communication process, and Distributive justice. On the other hand, the psychological variables are two: Organizational commitment and Job satisfaction. These all areas as identified by the Expectancy theory are important for lowering attrition or increasing retention rate in an organization.

Normally, a public university is popular for three features: the affordable education system, community outreach, and research facilities. Public universities are always populated with students. As Dee and Daly argue, in many situations frustration among the faculties grow just due to the poor communication system in an institution. Managing multicultural class or a large number of students may be a challenge for the faculties in the public universities which may also be frustrating [24]. The study also shows how the frustration grows in the faculties due to heavy workload, poor communication, and time constraints. These factors lower the commitment levels among the faculties. This problem may be present in the other universities or HEIs but more obvious in the public universities.

In this research, a Likert 5-point scale questionnaire was prepared and used for data collection. 15 Urban Public Universities in the USA were considered for the survey. 1500 full-time faculty members and research staff were considered for the survey. Permission from the university CEOs was duly received before initiating the survey. 100 random faculties were selected from each university. There were 61% male respondents of which 75% were white. There were 48% of the sample were working as full-time professors while nearly 30% as associate professors.

The focus of the research was to reveal the key factors that determine high retention rates in the Urban Public Universities. The researchers used the Expectancy theory for the in-depth analysis of the survey data to get the key aspects that built the intention of the faculty members that make them highly committed faculties. The researchers identified four variables: Autonomy in work environment, easiness in the communication process, role conflict, and equality in facilities and benefits or distributive justice. These four variables have an immense effect on the commitment levels of the faculty members. The study findings also make it clear that the faculty members expect higher academic independence, good leadership, and collective governance [25]. Faculty member’s expert the highest possible autonomy in the work environments that give them a sense of comfort in the workplace. The researchers have indicated that autonomy is directly linked to commitment. The faculty members also expect an environment where the communication along the hierarchy could be easy and comfortable. As such, communication openness is tightly connected with active participation, a sense of ownership, higher responsibility, and collegiality. Presence of all these features makes a faculty highly committed, work-oriented, and product in every sense [26]. It is the sole responsibility of the leadership to keep a constant vigilance on the work environment to ensure that every faculty member or research staff get interested in staying with the university. Through the effective communication, the leadership needs to ensure that no groups or faculty member left out unintentionally.

Role conflict is a negative factor that can increase the attrition rate in an HEI. It can weaken a faculty’s commitment to their workplace and job satisfaction. But, role conflict can be resolved easily. In this matter too, the leadership needs to come forward and communicate with the conflicting parties openly [27]. Clear responsibilities and organizational expectations can diminish the problem of role conflict to a great extent.

Distributive justice is another prime variable factor in organizational commitment. In this matter, the institutions should make it clear to every faculty member or research staff or any other supporting staff regarding the reward systems, compensation, career opportunities, promotions, fringe benefits, etc.

There is another variable called the environmental variable that is directly connected to the job opportunities. The commitment and job satisfaction are high; a faculty may leave the institution if they get a better opportunity somewhere. Thus, if the job market is strong, attrition may be high [28].
Lastly, the psychological factors also need a close look. Job satisfaction is a psychological factor that can reduce attrition. Similarly, the commitment levels of the faculty members may enhance retention rate in an institution.

CONCLUSION

Higher Education Institutions are bearing a huge responsibility for a nation or society being the resource for developing skilled and resourceful human resource. My research has identified some issues before the institutions or more precisely before the management of the institutions that can lower the productivity levels of the faculty members or administration staff. These issues, in turn, create opportunities for the leadership to develop effective strategic changes to the HEI. I have tried to address the major challenges before the leadership that need immediate solutions, otherwise, these issues can weaken the productivity of an HEI as a whole. It should be kept in mind that both the administration and faculty need equal attention in this matter.

Now, the obvious question is what is happening in HEIs that is negatively affecting both these groups? My research and other studies reveal that high attrition in the administrative department of an HEI is a key challenge to that HEI. The key factors pushing this problem forward are a poor commitment, inefficiency shown in the training and development, poor future prospect, poor level of engagement from the staff, and low compensation. Research shows a different outcome in this respect among faculty members. Here the major challenges are income disparity between males and females, workload, time constraints, and poor communication. Women and minority faculties face some other challenges too. These challenges need more attention and efficient solutions in order to enhance institutional retention rates and improve productivity. My intention is to bring forth some implementable steps that could prevent organizational ineffectiveness due to these impediments.

REFERENCES


