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# **EFFICACIOUS STRATEGIES FOR BOOSTING EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN SEARCH OF EFFECTIVE STAFF RETENTION IN ZIMBABWE'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES: RETURNEE LECTURERS' LENSES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study sought to unveil possible efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the returnee lecturers' lenses. Seven returnee lecturers were chosen by means of expert sampling. An in-depth interview method was used to generate data which analysed using NVivo. The study found that efficacious strategies for employee commitment in pursuit of effective staff retention ranged from job loyalty to accountability. It also established lack of support for research and inadequate leave opportunities to be among other challenges faced by the studied universities in implementing efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention. The study concluded that efficacious strategies for employee commitment to enhance effective staff retention in the selected universities are diverse, and at the same time play a complementary role in either promoting or inhibiting staff retention. The study recommends that every university manager to be held accountable for the lecturers they lead so that they will know how to stimulate employee commitment to produce results and promote staff retention without blaming a poor salary and salary delays of course. The study also recommends that macro-level studies need to be pursued using varied research methodologies to establish how well the current study's findings inform higher education policy decisions locally, regionally and internationally.

**Key Words:** Efficacious strategies, employee commitment, effective staff retention, public universities, private universities, returnee lecturers, returnee lecturers' lenses



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Boosting employee commitment is subject to many staff retention strategies other than money. World over, money has been found to be a motivator in public and private or organisations (Mapolisa, 2015), but there are a lot of occurrences where companies are constrained, yet we still need the commitment and performance of our employees at work (Sibanda, 2014). While money drives people to work, its influence is not conclusive particularly on stimulating employee commitment (Adi, 2012).

Van Dyk, Coetzee and Tebele (2013) explored the phenomenon of job embeddedness in the context of employee commitment in South African organisations. They found that workers who had a feeling of embeddedness are committed to their work. By the same token, Heymann (2010) observed that staff members with a strong feeling of job embeddedness and commitment may define their relationships with their employers in the longer term more than their colleagues with lower levels of job embeddedness and commitment to their organisations.

Muteswa and Ortlepp (2011) studied staff turnover as an indicator of lack of job commitment in selected South African organisations. The two scholars established that workers with critical skills were leaving South Africa because of many reasons. Chief among such reasons were: poor relationships between workers and employers; lack of career advancement plans; poor match between the worker and the job or organisation; rewards (bonuses and incentives) that are not linked to performance; the need to have stimulating and meaningful work; lack of appreciation, recognition and rewards; insufficient coaching and feedback; aspects related to the dynamics of the work team; and insufficient alignment between the employee's work and the achievement of organisational objectives.

Empirical studies in the field of job commitment (Pitts, Marvel and Fernandez, 2011; Van Dyk, 2012) revealed that workers who are committed to their organisations tend to have a lower intention job quit rate than those who are not committed to their jobs. Thus, Van Dyk et al. (2013) argue that their study's results indicate that the participants' feelings of organisational commitment significantly influenced their perceived job embeddedness and vice versa.

Previous research in the United States of America has also shown that managers and subordinates usually have many shared expectations that affect staff retention, let alone job commitment (Dreyer-Hardley, Marvel and Fiori, 2008). Underscoring how shared expectations impact on job commitment, Dreyer-Hardley et al. (2008) exemplify some of the mutual expectations as the desire for:

- recognition for work done;
- open communication about the firms' goals and values;
- job stability and security; and
- Competitive wages.

From an Australian perspective, Scott, McMillan and Royal (2012, p.2) indicate that, "...workers who are the strongest performers, have a high potential or are in critical- is even more important during economic recoveries when organisations compete aggressively for market share and talent..." In the same vein, Allen (2006, p.1) conducted a study on how to retain staff in the US and found that, "One of the most critical issues facing organisations to is how to retain workers they want to keep."



With respect to studies related to job commitment in Zimbabwe, Mupemhi and Mupemhi (2011) and Mhlanga, Matope, Mugwagwa, Phuthi and Moyo (2013) concur that lack of opportunities for staff development, contact and sabbatical leave, and insufficient study leave eroded university lecturers' levels of job commitment.

The foregoing investigations managed to explore in depth issues regarding staff retention, job embeddedness and implied job commitment. Most of the studies targeted non-university organisations and participants. The studies did not focus on efficacious strategies for boosting job commitment in search of effective staff retention in the context of Zimbabwe's public and private universities. Also, most of the preceding studies originate from developed countries with comparatively better economies than the Zimbabwean one. Furthermore, these studies were not comparative in their outlook. On the basis of such gaps in knowledge and practice, the present study seeks to explore efficacious strategies for boosting job commitment in search of effective staff retention in the context of Zimbabwe's public and private universities. Another point of departure of current study from the early explorations is that it compares efficacious strategies to boost job commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the returnee lecturers' lenses.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Employee commitment is assumed to obtain differently in organisations, yet in actual fact it is hardly observable (Sibanda, 2014). To worsen the situation, staff turnover rates that universities and other organisations around the globe experience are strong indicators of lack of employee commitment (Bushe 2012; Jongbloed, 2012; Pitts et al., 2011). Also, existing literature appears to have not done much in unmasking possible strategies to boost effective staff in public and private universities. Given the background of the preceding scenarios, the present study addresses the following research problem:

How far can efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment enhance effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities on the basis of returnee lecturers' lenses?

## 1.2 Sub-questions

The study uses the following sub-problems to provide answers to the main question.

1. How do efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention manifest themselves in the selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities?
2. What challenges do selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities face in implementing efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention?
3. How can efficacious strategies for employee commitment be boosted in search of effective staff retention in the selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities?

## 1.3 Rationale for the Study

The justification for the conduct of this study is four-fold. First, its findings may cumulatively add new knowledge with regards to efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention not only to university organisations alone, but to other public and private sector organisations as well. Second, the study's empirical findings might inform policy analysts and makers to enable them craft efficacious strategies that boost employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in organisations. Third, the industry and commerce would benefit from the 'quality' graduates who they will employ, once they have been trained by satisfied, motivated and above all, committed lecturers. Fourth, related to the third value of the study, once universities boost employee commitment levels,



their ability to retain best lecturers who will deliver quality university education increases. This will be much to the greatest benefit of the student, industry and the nation at large.

#### **1.4 Delimitation of the Study**

The study is delimited to purposely selected two public and two private universities in Zimbabwe. It is confined to expertly sampled four public university and three private university returnee lecturers. The study is a comparative case study that uses in-depth interviews to generate data regarding efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the selected universities from the returnee lecturers' lenses. The research data would be analysed using NVivo. The study is an excerpt from an unpublished thesis that was conducted between 2009 and 2014.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework: Staff Empowerment Theory**

The study is informed by the staff empowerment theory. Staff empowerment is one of the most topical and novel approaches keeping a content staff in the light of staff retention. According to Charles (2010) the concept of empowerment subsumes control of one's work, autonomy on the job variations of team work, and pay systems that match with performance. On the same note, Liden et al. (2000) highlight that researchers and practitioners have embraced empowerment as a way to encourage decision making at lower levels in organisations. Dimitriades (2005) describes empowerment as an act and culture of granting power to the persons being empowered. The same authors go on to consider empowerment as a process that leads to the experience of power and also the psychological state that manifests itself as the conditions sought rather than being measured. Menon (2001) in Dimitriades argue that empowerment is the major new industrial weapon against domestic and international threats that contributes to wise utilisation of human resources.

Val and Lloyd (2003) perceive empowerment as a managerial style where managers share with members of the organisation their influence in the decision making process. The same scholars go on to point out that empowerment and trust can have dynamic effects in organisations in terms of complexity, reduce transaction costs, strengthen relational systems within flatter organisational structures and diminish the need for supervisory oversight.

Within the context of educational institutes, university managers are the persons that act as leaders. They are responsible for providing direction to their subordinates. The development of a strength-based, positive organisational culture begins with strong positive leadership (Anderson, 2010). Empowerment together with trust, are elements that could facilitate a supportive environment. The theory of empowerment could be a guide for the researchers to establish the efficacious strategies for employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities from the returnee lecturers' lenses.

### **2.2 Employee Commitment Manifestations in Organisations**

With respect to the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of staff retention in South Africa, Brum (2007) studied what impact training had on employee commitment and employee turnover in South Africa. He concluded that training coincided with commitment, establishes employee commitment and assist organisations to build a more committed and productive workforce. In another study in South Africa, Botha et al. (2011:1) revealed that, "Key findings suggested that employer brand is influenced by the target group needs, a differentiated Employer Value Proposition (EVP), the people strategy, brand consistency, communication of the Human Resources (HR) employer



brand.” In another related study, Bushe (2012) conducted an empirical review of factors that determine academic staff retention and commitment in private tertiary institutions in Botswana and underscored the importance of the human resources viz academics in achieving organisational goals viz university goals. He found that there was a need for creating a motivating work environment that not only motivates but engages workers in productive work outcomes. The preceding three studies’ findings revealed that efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of staff retention manifest themselves in various forms, despite the fact that they lack the university context-specificity. It is against the background of such findings that the researchers seek to unveil how efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of staff retention manifest themselves in selected Zimbabwe’s public and private universities on the basis of the retained lecturers’ lecturers’ lenses.

### 2.3 Boosting Employee Commitment

Sohail et al. (2011:904) made two recommendations to mitigate staff retention challenges in the light of employee commitment in Pakistan:

- Organisations need to understand the value of their employee and reasons to retain them because greater turnover means that employees are using organisation as a stone to step further and the professional experience they are gaining from the organisation is important.
- To retain employees, the organisations must review their career plans and recognise those plans according to the market so that intelligent and talented employees could serve more and be beneficial in the long run.

Seehra (2013) examined the creation of a culture of serendipity with specific reference to recruitment and retention strategies at Cambridge in which she described:

- how Cambridge is addressing recruitment, retention and the management of its talent pipeline;
- continuous development for the academic faculty; and
- delivering career aspiration of researchers.

The foregone findings were established in organisations whose contexts specifically belong to the First World. They were however devoid of comparing findings in the context of public and private university settings. In the light of these gaps, the present study compares efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe’s public and private universities from the returnee lecturers’ lenses.

### 2.4 Challenges Faced by Organisations in Boosting Employee Commitment

In another Australian study, Coates et al. (2009:2) identified the following challenges faced by the Australian academic profession:

- There is a clear, present and growing demand for academic work, a demand being propelled by system growth, looming retirements and increased international mobility.
- The hitherto largely ‘caused’ response to this demand lacks coherence, strength and vision.
- The settings are not right for engaging and replenishing Australia’s academic workforce.



In the United Kingdom, Jongbloed (2012) found that in recent years there has been substantial improvement in academic salaries and benefits, but, however, due to recent cuts in public funding, the continued affordability of the (quite competitive), UK salaries and benefits have been called into question. The foregoing two studies' findings were from universities in Australia and the UK. They pinpointed challenges that bedevil employee commitment, but they were silent on whether their focus of studies was on private or public universities. On the basis of that silence, the current study explores challenges faced by selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities in implementing efficacious strategies for boosting effective staff retention from the lenses of the returnee lecturers.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

The study was grounded in a qualitative research paradigm. The qualitative research paradigm was adopted because of its anthropocentric approach (Newstom and Rudestam, 2007), which enabled the researchers to obtain data from the returnee lecturers' lenses regarding the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities.

#### **3.2 Research Method**

On the basis of the adoption of the qualitative research methodology, the researchers made use of the multiple-case study method to generate data. It enabled the researchers to dig deep into the returnee lecturers' perceptions on the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe's public and private universities. Thus, a multiple-case study method is a comparative method of study that explores phenomena in great depth in order to generate new knowledge (Berg, 2010).

#### **3.3 Selecting Participants**

Seven returnee lecturers were selected by means of expert sampling. Expert sampling enables researchers to select participants who possess a great deal of knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Kombo and Tromp, 2009). In this study, returnee lecturers were selected using expert sampling on the basis of the wealth of international experience and knowledge gained outside Zimbabwe in connection with the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention.

#### **3.4 The Research Instrument**

In order to generate data, an in-depth interview was employed using face-to-face encounters with the participants. It enabled the researchers to understand the language and meaning that the participants assigned (Berg, 2010) to the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe's public and private universities. In that regard, in-depth interviews also enabled the researchers to unearth hidden issues about the phenomenon (Silverman, 2006) of efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe's public and private universities. In order to generate data, the in-depth interview schedule had three open-ended questions based on the three research questions identified earlier on with some probing questions put aside in a note book.



### 3.5 Procedure

The researchers observed ethical and legal considerations before the conduct of the study. To begin with, permission to carry out the study in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities was sought from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development on 26 July 2013. Permission was granted on 26 August 2013. Also, the researchers sought permission to conduct the study at the research sites by 01 September 2013. This was in line with what Walliman (2006) refers to as institutional approval. Upon reaching the research sites, the researchers fully explained the purpose of the study, and the likely risks associated with the participants' consent regarding taking part in the study. This was done all in the name of seeking for the participants' informed consent (Gray, 2009). As a result, all participants signed the informed consent form which ensured them of the researchers' promise to keep the participants' responses anonymous, private and confidential. In that regard, no participant participated in the study through coercion and compulsion. They voluntarily and willingly became interviewees. The interviews were audio-taped with an average duration of one hour long. Audio-taped interviews enabled the researchers to come with thick descriptions of the phenomenon in the form of transcripts (Gray, 2009). Interviewees were approached at least twice between 26 September 2013 and 31 December 2013 for the purposes of enhancing trustworthiness of the interview data through member checking and making use prolonged stays at the research sites as advised by Creswell (2012) and Marshall and Rossman (2011).

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The interview data produced eighteen transcripts. These were edited and cleaned between 01 January 2014 and 28 February 2014. The research data were analysed using NVivo- a qualitative data analysis software. It enabled the researchers to reduce and manage thick descriptions of the phenomenon of the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention. Creswell (2012) contends that NVivo facilitates the analysis of the voluminous interview data because a template can be generated to speed up the analysis, and various types of files and folders can be created to data. On the basis of the NVivo data analysis output, open coding was employed to come up with themes and sub-themes which enabled the researchers to present the data using three tables whose three headings were: main theme(s), sub-theme(s) and substantiation(s). To enhance interpretation of data, public universities were coded Case 1 and Case 4, while private universities were coded Case 2 and Case 3. Public university returnee lecturers were coded Case 1RL1 to 3 and Case 4 RL1, while private university returnee lecturers were coded Case 2 RL1, Case 3 RL to 1. In this case, RL stands for returnee lecturers. These codes were crafted on the basis of Marshall and Rossman's (2011) advice that in qualitative research it is unethical to divulge the identity of the participants and their institutions. The researchers then used review of related literature and the interview data output together with direct quotes to fully analyse, present and interpret the findings. Direct quotes were useful in giving the rich account of the phenomenon (Marshall and Rossman, 2011) of efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Manifestations of Efficacious Strategies for Boosting Employee Commitment in Search of Effective Staff Retention in Selected Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities



**Table 4.1: How efficacious strategies for boosting employee retention manifest themselves in the studied universities in search of effective staff retention**

Main Theme(s)	Sub-theme(s)	Substantiation(s)
1. Manifestation of employee commitment	1. Job loyalty	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employee commitment is seen through job loyalty (Case 1RL1).</li> <li>2. Employee commitment is characterised by job loyalty...(Case 2 RL1)</li> </ol>
	2. Job enrichment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Job enrichment is another way of showing levels of employee commitment (Case 3 RL1)</li> <li>2. Job enrichment depicts how well workers are committed to their jobs (Case 2 RL2)</li> <li>3. Job enrichment enhances employee commitment. (Case 1RL3)</li> </ol>
	3. Job enlargement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The occurrence of employee commitment is shown through job enlargement as well (Case 2 RL1)</li> <li>2. Job enlargement is an indicator of employee commitment (Case 1 RL2)</li> </ol>
	4. Staff motivation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Staff members exhibit their levels of commitment to their jobs through motivation (Case 1 RL3)</li> <li>2. Staff motivation is a pathway to employee commitment (Case 4 RL1)</li> </ol>
	5. Staff retention	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High staff retention rates are a reflection of the degree of employee commitment...(Case 3 RL1)</li> <li>2. There is a positive correlation between staff retention and employee commitment (Case 1 RL1)</li> </ol>
	6. Harmonious relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Harmonious employee-manager relationships indicate the existence of employee commitment (Case 1 RL2, Case 2 RL2)</li> </ol>
	7. Accountability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Possession of the virtue of accountability is a portrayal of employee commitment (Case 2RL1)</li> <li>2. An exhibition of accountability is indicative of job commitment (Case 4RL1)</li> </ol>
	8. Employee engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employee engagement is a passport to employee commitment (Case 1RL3)</li> <li>2. Employee engagement enables workers to realise their value... (Case 3RL1).</li> </ol>
	9. Job satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Job satisfaction is a route to employee commitment (Case 2RL1)</li> </ol>



A cross section of the of public and private universities' returnee lecturers' perceptions unveils to the academic fraternity nine sub-themes derived from the main theme; manifestation of employee commitment. The emerging sub-themes are job loyalty, job enrichment, staff motivation, harmonious relationships, accountability, job engagement and job satisfaction. The preceding sub-themes are examined together with what the participants actually said about the researched phenomenon below. They are also going to be compared and contrasted with previous research as well.

#### **4.1.1 Job loyalty**

The study's findings attempted to demonstrate the link between efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities. In that regard, the ensuing two excerpts show the participants' perceptions on how job loyalty is a manifestation of employee commitment. The first perception came from a public university returnee lecturer's perspective.

1. *Employee commitment is seen through job loyalty. Job loyalty in itself reflects how workers identify with their university and are committed to its success, while at the same time they will be trying to stay at their jobs (Case 1RL1).*

Similarly, a private university returnee lecturer had this to say about efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention:

2. *Employee commitment is characterised by job loyalty. Employee commitment and job loyalty are two sides of the same coin. They support each other in keeping staff members at their jobs (Case 2 RL1).*

In the light of the above two excerpts, two issues emerge regarding efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities. First, the findings seem to indicate that lecturers who pay a great deal of allegiance to their jobs show some level of commitment. Second, lecturers who are loyal and committed to their jobs are attached to their universities for a long period of time. These findings resonate well with Van Dyk et al. (2013) who observed that employees who are embedded to their jobs have a higher level of employee commitment and less desire to leave their jobs. In that regard, the researchers are content that public and private university lecturers similarly perceive job loyalty to be among efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's universities.

#### **4.1.2 Job enrichment**

Another efficacious strategy for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe's public and private universities was job enrichment. The following three excerpts demonstrate the degree to which job enrichment is an efficacious strategy for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the studied universities. Two private university participants put their viewpoints in this way:

1. *Job enrichment is another way of showing levels of employee commitment at any university. In a bid to show employee commitment, lecturers go any extra mile in enriching their much to not only to their benefit, but to their university as well (Case 3 RL1).*
2. *Job enrichment depicts how well workers are committed to their jobs. As a result of job enrichment, lecturers exhibit advanced levels of commitment and loyalty to their jobs as they diligently, efficiently and effectively execute them (Case 2 RL2)*



The third excerpt is from the point of view of a public university returnee lecturer.

3. *Job enrichment enhances employee commitment. It advances their love for work and desire to stay at their jobs (Case 1RL3)*

What is apparent in the above excerpts is the fact that lecturers' job enrichment breeds employee commitment in search of staff retention at the research sites. Also, interestingly, the public and private university participants synonymously appeared to hold job enrichment in high regard as far as efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe's public and private universities are concerned. These findings bode well with Bushe (2012) who observed that job enrichment is the rock upon which successful employee commitment is built.

### 4.1.3 Job enlargement

Related to job enrichment is the aspect of job enlargement. To expand on this subject, two participants pointed out that:

1. *The occurrence of employee commitment is shown through job enlargement as well. What it does is to increase the scope of the current worker's job so that he/she becomes attached to the job and organisation, thereby; increasing levels of employee commitments (Case 2 RL1).*
2. *Job enlargement is an indicator of employee commitment. It is an avenue for employee commitment (Case 1 RL2).*

An inference of the preceding lines of thought indicates that job enlargement in collusion with job enrichment makes workers feel inspired, motivated, satisfied and commitment to the extent that their organisation will have the comfort of retaining them. The present findings are consistent with early research by Muteswa and Ortlepp (2011) who revealed that stimulating and meaningful work increases employee commitment levels. It therefore follows that as new contribution to the existing body of knowledge, workers with increased commitment levels are more likely to be retained by their organisations than those who do not.

### 4.1.4 Staff motivation

Allied to job loyalty, enrichment and enlargement is staff motivation. In substantiating this subject, two public university participants had the following to say:

1. *Staff members exhibit their levels of commitment to their jobs through motivation. The occurrence of employee commitment is also shown through staff motivation, which is in itself a sound revelation of staff retention (Case 1 RL3).*
2. *Staff motivation is a pathway to employee commitment. It is common knowledge that demotivated staff members do not show employee commitment, and that negatively impacts on their desire to stay on their current jobs (Case 4 RL1).*

The aforementioned findings, albeit public-university based tend to suggest that staff motivation is a pre-condition to employee commitment in search of effective staff retention. The current observations attest to previous research findings by Scott et al. (2012) who established that motivated workers are the strongest performers, have high potential, or are in critical jobs. Motivated workers hold work to the best of their ability to accomplish their set high goals they mutually set with their employers. The findings also dispute Pitts et al. (2011) who found that staff motivation ensures the existence staff commitment. In this regard, the current study



has unearthed that staff motivation is situationally responsible for efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment, let alone staff retention in organisations from the returnee lecturers' lenses.

#### **4.1.5 Staff retention**

Staff retention also emerged among other efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in selected Zimbabwe's public and private universities. Two perceptions underscore this finding.

1. *High staff retention rates are a reflection of the degree of employee commitment among other staff retention variables such as lecturers' age, sex, geographical mobility and staff development opportunities (Case 3 RL1).*
2. *There is a positive correlation between staff retention and employee commitment. The two concepts are mutually supportive of each both in theory and in practice (Case 1 RL1).*

It can be deduced from the above utterances that while effective staff retention in the universities can be promoted by employee commitment, there are other determinants of staff retention other than employee commitment, although employee commitment has a big say in determining staff retention. In essence, on the basis of the returnee lecturers' lenses, the present study is declaring that efficacious strategies for employee commitment and effective staff retention reciprocally promote each other.

#### **4.1.6 Harmonious relationships**

Harmonious relationships were found to be reflective of employee commitment in some of the studied universities. This claim is concurred by one public university participant and one private university participants who asserted that:

*Harmonious employee-manager relationships indicate the existence of employee commitment (Case 1 RL2, Case 2 RL2).*

The aforesaid shared sentiment is consistent with large body of empirical evidence; Dreyer-Hardley et al. (2008), Allen (2006), Heynmann (2010), Muteswa and Ortlepp (2011) and Van Dyk et al. (2013) which established that existence of sound mutual super ordinate-subordinate relationships is the firm foundation for building everlasting employee commitment. A new addition to the current knowledge from the returnee lecturers' lenses is that sound employee-manager relationships conceive efficacious strategies for employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the studied universities.

#### **4.1.7 Accountability**

One other manifestation strategy of employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the studied universities happened to be accountability. The ensuing two remarks aptly qualify accountability as a finding for this study.

1. *Possession of the virtue of accountability is a portrayal of employee commitment. Accountability shows how well the staff members can be trusted with responsibility (Case 2RL1).*
2. *An exhibition of accountability is indicative of job commitment. Accountability accounts for the degree attached to dependability and honest attached to the workers (Case 4RL1).*



In the interests of this study, the findings corroborate with Muteswa and Ortlepp's (2011) observations which noted that responsible workers are held responsible for the work they are committed to do. A new insight into the existing knowledge from the returnee lecturers' lenses is that committed workers are dependable, reliable and responsible for whatever task they willingly undertake. They can be counted on at all times and are ready to stay at their jobs so that they can see through the realisation of the goals and objectives.

#### **4.1.8 Employee engagement**

Employee engagement emerged as another efficacious strategy for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in this study. The way how employee engagement is perceived in that regard is depicted by the following two observations.

1. *Employee engagement is a passport to employee commitment. It is boosted by providing workers with challenging work which motivates and inspires them to work even harder (Case1RL3).*
2. *Employee engagement enables workers to realise their value, worth and recognition for their capacity to work (Case 3RL1).*

Employee engagement is an avenue for employee commitment that searches for effective staff retention in the studied universities. Thus, the findings dovetail with observations made by Dreyer-Hardley et al. (2008) who indicated that shared expectations increase employee commitment and impact on employee commitment. A novel revelation from these findings is that participatory decision making actively engages the workers in their jobs to the extent of increasing their levels of commitment and desire to be retained.

#### **4.1.9 Job satisfaction**

The last efficacious strategy for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in this study is job satisfaction. An illustration is finding is made by one private university participant who indicated that:

*Job satisfaction is a route to employee commitment. The roots of employee commitment in search of effective staff retention can be traced from job satisfaction (Case 2RL1).*

In the context of this study, it is emerging that satisfied workers are largely committed to their work depending on their workplace's circumstances. These findings are in contradiction with Pitts et al. (2011) who found that satisfied workers do not necessarily mean committed workers.

## **4.2 Challenges Faced by Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities in Implementing Efficacious Strategies for Boosting Employee Commitment in Search of Effective Staff Retention in Selected Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities**



**Table 4.2: Challenges that the research sites face in implementing efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention**

Main Theme(s)	Sub-theme(s)	Substantiation(s)
1. Lack of government support to private universities	1. Non-awards of government grants	1. Private universities do not receive grants from the government to pay lecturers (Case 1 RL1) 2. Lecturers are comparatively paid less than those of state universities because the state does not give private universities grants (Case 3RL1)
	3. Inadequate support for research	1. Non-provision of research support resources 1.The university no longer offers lecturers research block fund (Case 1 RL1) 2. There is not much that the university is doing to provide research funds for conference attendances (Case 2RL2) 3. The university is not providing mentorship for upcoming researchers (Case 3RL1)
3.Peripherilisation of academics	1. Non-recognition of academics	1. It is unfortunate to learn that there is lack of academic space in the universities (Case 2RL2) 2.Managerialism is beginning to take its toll in the universities, yet universities are academic institutions (Case 1RL3)
4.Ever falling students' enrolments	1. Dwindling programme enrolments	1. Student enrolments are falling down such that some programmes become economically unviable to offer (Case 1RL1) 2.Low student enrolments are a discouragement to employee commitment (Case 4RL1)
5.Inadequate leave opportunities	1. Inadequate study leave, contact leave, sabbatical leave, post-doctoral research leave and research fellowship leave opportunities	1.Academics are disheartened by lack of study leave opportunities here (Case 2RL1) 2. Most lecturers have not gone for sabbatical leave (Case 1 RL1) 3. Contact leave opportunities are a rare commodity at this institution (Case 4RL1) 4. New PhD holders and graduates are not being assisted to pursue post-doctoral research opportunities (Case 3RL1) 5. I have hardly come across a colleague who has ever had a research fellowship opportunity(Case 1RL3).

Findings in Table 4.2 related to challenges that the research sites face in implementing efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the studied universities. The table presents five main themes, their sub-themes and substantiations. The main themes are lack of government support to private universities, inadequate support for research, peripherilisation of academics; ever falling students' enrolments and inadequate leave opportunities. The discussion of each these themes are done below.



#### 4.2.1 Lack of government support to private universities

The discussion for this theme is best done under the subheading non-award of government grants.

##### Non-award of government grants

The study established two findings in connection with the non-award of government grants in private universities. First, it found that:

1. *Private universities do not receive grants from the government to pay lecturers. This puts the university at a disadvantage when compared with public universities in terms of conditions of service. (Case 1 RL1).*

Similarly, the study established that:

2. *Lecturers are comparatively paid less than those of state universities because the state does not give private universities grants. This situation waters down levels of commitment and at the same time making the lecturers contemplate quitting their jobs (Case 3RL1.)*

The preceding findings demonstrate how non-award of government grants tends to be a disincentive to employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the private universities. The findings tend to refute Bushe's (2012) observation that private institutions tend to enjoy better conditions of service in Botswana. A new development as a result of the conduct of this study is the fact that government grants are not mandatory because they can be withdrawn anytime depending on the performance of a country's economy. Therefore, on the basis of the returnee lecturers' lenses, both sets of universities need to establish a funding source diversity to promote strategies for efficacious to boost employee commitment in search of effective staff retention.

#### 4.2.2 Inadequate support for research

The subheading non-provision of research support resources specifies the discussion for the theme inadequate support for research.

##### Non-provision of research support resources

With regards to non-provision of research support resources, the study came up with three findings from both sets of universities. From the public university perspective, one participant lamented lack of research support in this way:

*The university no longer offers lecturers research block fund. The implication for this lack of research support is that lecturers hardly carry out research, yet universities are established for the purposes of teaching and conducting research and community service (Case 1 RL1).*

A two-fold perception regarding the same finding is given below by private university participants:

1. *There is not much that the university is doing to provide research funds for conference paper presentations and attendances. Under such circumstances, lecturers are deprived of opportunities for capacity development in research (Case 2RL2).*



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2. *The university is not providing mentorship for upcoming researchers. While the university highly rates research as a key result area for lecturers, it is unfortunate that budding researchers and writers do not have mentors to look up to for guidance (Case 3RL1).*

Of particular interest in the above three findings is the fact that universities do not fully support lecturers' research activities. The findings reiterate Gberevbie's (2009) observation that research support is central to lecturers' career and professional growth. Perhaps, lack of research support by both kinds of universities could be a result of poor performance of the local economy at the present moment. The state cannot provide research funds, even though it is doing so at the expense of national development in regard to issues of promoting efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment and effective staff retention in the country.

### 4.2.3 Peripherilisation of academics

Non-recognition of academics is a subheading that places the theme peripherilisation of academics into its proper perspective.

#### Non-recognition of academics

The study revealed a sad development obtaining in the universities. Two scenarios demonstrate how academic staff members' rights are being violated in the selected universities. A private university returnee lecturer was at pains in attempting to illustrate the challenge of non-recognition of academics in the universities by retorting:

*It is unfortunate to learn that there is lack of academic space in the universities. Lecturers have been bullied to the extents that they thrive on quietness when it comes to the issues that concern the core business of the universities. They have been turned into tools and implements for use by non-academic staff members (Case 2RL2).*

In the same vein, a public university participant whined:

*Managerialism is beginning to take its toll in the universities, yet universities are academic institutions. Lecturers' decisions are kept on the periphery, while those of directors, managers and administrators precede lecturers' decisions (Case 1RL3).*

The two findings show that lecturers' status is diminishing by day in the universities. The findings are a rebuttal to what Pitts et al. (2011) referred to when the scholars regarded that the greatest resource in higher education institutions is a lecturer. Under such a scenario, the present researchers contend that unrecognised and unvalued lecturers lack self-esteem, motivation and satisfaction to such an extent that they are not committed enough to be retained by their universities. The researchers also support research evidence by Coates et al. (2009) who found that in Australian universities there is a clear, present and growing demand for academic work, a demand being propelled by system growth, looming retirements and increased international mobility.

### 4.2.4 Ever falling students' enrolments

Dwindling students' programme enrolments is a subheading that contextualises the discussion of the theme ever falling students' enrolments well.

#### Dwindling programme student enrolments

Another finding that depicts a challenge that the studied universities face in implementing strategies for boosting



employee commitment in search of effective staff retention is dwindling programme student' enrolments. Two public university-based findings illustrated the preceding finding. The first one said:

*Student enrolments are falling down such that some programmes become economically unviable to offer. Programmes with low student enrolments can be terminated at any time (Case 1RL1).*

Echoing the first participant's line of thinking, the second participant, although from a different public university remarked:

*Low student enrolments are a discouragement to employee commitment. Lecturers stay on the job while they are not sure about what the future holds about their jobs (Case 4RL1).*

In the light of the above findings, the current researchers comment that falling students' enrolments are an indication that lecturers' job security is at risk. They can lose their jobs as a result of over staffing because they will be deemed excess baggage if they offer programmes whose enrolments are not commensurate with lecturer staff establishment.

#### **4.2.5 Inadequate leave opportunities**

The theme inadequate leave opportunities is put in its proper context by the subtheme; inadequate study leave, contact leave, sabbatical leave, post-doctoral research leave and research fellowship leave opportunities

#### **Inadequate study leave, contact leave, sabbatical leave, post-doctoral research leave and research fellowship leave opportunities**

A five-fold perception has been unleashed in expounding the challenge of inadequate leave opportunities that undermine the implementation of efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search effective staff retention in the studied universities. They are chronicled below.

1. *Academics are disheartened by lack of study leave opportunities here. Their desire to advance themselves academically is stifled (Case 2RL1).*
2. *Most lecturers have not gone for sabbatical leave. These lecturers lose a lot of professional benefits by not going for sabbatical leave (Case 1 RL1).*
3. *Contact leave opportunities are a rare commodity at this institution. Just like in the deprivation of sabbatical leave, lecturers' growth is stunted (Case 4RL1).*
4. *New PhD holders and graduates are not being assisted to pursue post-doctoral research opportunities. Their capacity development research wise is regressed (Case 3RL1).*
5. *I have never come across a colleague who has ever had a research fellowship opportunity (Case 1RL3).*

In view of the above findings, it can be seen that the studied universities appear to be shortchanging the academic staff members. The contractual obligations that the universities are supposed to fulfill for the benefit of lecturers seem to be violated. The implication for such a negation of duty by university managers is lecturer disgruntlement. Disgruntled lecturers are usually devoid of commitment, motivation and satisfaction. Lecturers whose contractual obligations are violated tend to have a lukewarm commitment to their jobs (Boyne et al., 2011). Where lecturers are not committed to their jobs it becomes difficult for universities enforce effective staff



retention. It follows that efficacious staff retention strategies in pursuit of effective staff retention in the universities from the returnee lecturers' lenses become elusive in the absence of employee commitment.

### 4.3 Enhancing Employee Commitment in Search of Effective Staff Retention in Zimbabwe's Public and Private Universities

**Table 4.3: Ways of enhancing employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe's public and private universities**

Main Theme(s)	Sub-theme(s)	Substantiation(s)
1. Adequate funding sources	1. Diversity in funding sources	1. Government to fund private university operations (Case 3RL1) 2. Universities need not rely on government funding alone (Case 4RL1) 3. The business community and the private sector can be roped in to partner universities through research and internship, thereby, providing funding to the universities (Case 2RL1) 4. International organisations and world renowned bodies can also assist in funding universities (Case 1RL1)
2. Academic space	1. Provision of academic space	1. Academics need academic space (Case 3RL1) 2. Academics need to exercise their academic freedom all the time (Case 1RL2)
3. Programme rebranding	1. Programme rebranding and introduction of new programme	1. Programme rebranding increases employee commitment as it attracts more students (Case 1RL3) 2. Programme rebranding increases market value of programmes (Case 1RL2) 3. Apart from rebranding the programmes, introduction of new programmes raises student enrolments (Case 2 RL2)
4. Granting leaves	1. Granting various leave opportunities to academic staff members	1. Provision of study leave raises the academic stock of lecturers (Case 4RL1) 2. Sabbatical leave opportunities promote career growth of lecturers (Case 3L1) 3. Contact leave opportunities facilitate exchange of experiences among lecturers (Case 1RL1) 4. Research fellowship and post-doctoral research opportunities enhance professional growth (Case 1RL2)



5. Research mentorship	1. Research mentorship experiences	1. Universities need to provide a conducive environment for research mentorship (Case 2RL2) 2. Proper mentorship nurtures researchers intending to show employee commitment as a result of research (Case 1RL3)
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Table 4.3 presents findings with respect to ways of enhancing employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in Zimbabwe’s public and private universities. It presents them using a five-fold theme namely, adequate funding sources, academic space, programme rebranding, granting leaves, and research mentorship. Their expansion is undertaken below under sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.5.

**4.3.1 Adequate funding sources**

An illumination of adequate funding resources is enhanced by means interpreting the subtheme diversity in funding sources.

**Diversity in funding sources**

Regarding how funding diversity sources obtain as a strategy for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the universities, a four-pronged view was put forward by both public and private university returnee lecturers. The opinions are as follows:

1. *Government to fund private university operations. State funds increase employee commitment in a bid to enhance effective staff retention in the universities (Case 3RL1).*
2. *Universities need not rely on government funding alone. There are other reliable sources of funding universities if they are approached properly (Case 4RL1).*
3. *The business community and the private sector can be roped in to partner universities through research and internship, thereby, providing funding to the universities (Case 2RL1).*
4. *International organisations and world renowned bodies can also assist in funding universities (Case 1RL1).*

An inspection of the preceding findings reveals that private universities’ wish to be state funded is not only undesirable, but unsustainable because as of now the state is struggling to sustain the salaries of workers in its ten state universities. However, all things being equal, the state can fund both public and private universities circumstantially so as exert some control on higher education. Universities can take leaf from Gbervbie (2009) who observed that it is healthy to bank on a variety of sources of funds to finance higher education institutions; otherwise, states can go bankrupt. The researchers appreciate the fact that while it is good idea that universities obtain funds from diverse sources, caution needs to be taken regarding some of the agendas of the financial bodies. If caution is thrown to the wind; some donors may advance an agenda to undermine the government through student unrest and lecturer industrial action and capital flight.

**4.3.2 Academic space**

An elucidation of the theme academic space is enabled by examining the subtheme provision of academic space



### **Provision of academic space**

In connection with the finding of providing lecturers with academic space, a twin perspective was advanced in the following manner:

1. *Academics need academic space. They need to autonomously work as professionals without anyone breathing over their necks all the time (Case 3RL1).*
2. *Academics need to exercise their academic freedom all the time. The lecturers are fully professional in the manner they conduct their duties (Case 1RL2).*

A critical observation from the preceding findings is the degree to which lecturers appear to be fast losing their worth at their institutions. Judging by the foregone sentiments, it seems they no longer enjoy academic freedom. Decisions about their work, the core business of the universities, are done by others on their behalf. These findings go against what Ng'ethe, Iravo and Namusonge (2012) found out when they indicate that academics in public and private Kenyan universities enjoy academic freedom. The researchers assert that academic freedom is an efficacious strategy for boosting employee commitment meant to enhance effective staff retention in the studied universities.

### **4.3.3 Programme rebranding**

An enunciation of the theme programme rebranding is made possible by analysing the subtheme programme rebranding and introduction of new programmes.

#### **Programme rebranding and introduction of new programmes**

Regarding the finding of programme rebranding and introduction of new programmes, three participants expressed how this finding can be an efficacious strategy for enhancing employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the universities. The three views are:

1. *Programme rebranding increases employee commitment as it attracts more students (Case 1RL3).*
2. *Programme rebranding increases market value of programmes. Rebranded programmes become attractive to the market (Case 1RL2).*
3. *Apart from rebranding the programmes, introduction of new programmes raises student enrolments. Lecturers can be kept actively engaged in teaching once new programmes are introduced (Case 2RL2).*

What is emerging from the aforementioned three-fold finding is that the demands of the universities' markets and clientele are constantly changing in the light of competition induced by globalisation. Universities can no longer afford to rely on offering the same programmes over and over again if ever they want to remain relevant in an extremely competitive university environment. Thus, Higgins (2012) observed that universities that are worth their salt constantly offer new programmes and rebrand the existing ones in response to the ever rising demands of their societies. In that regard, it becomes indisputable that programme rebranding and introduction of new programmes, according to returnee lecturers' lenses, are among efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of staff retention at the studied research sites.



#### **4.3.4 Granting leave opportunities**

An expagoration of the theme granting leave opportunities is facilitated by assessing the subtheme granting various leave opportunities to academic staff members.

#### **Granting various leave opportunities to academic staff members**

A quadruple perspective with respect to the extent to which granting various leave opportunities to academic staff members can be an efficacious strategy for enhancing employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the universities is given below.

1. *Provision of study leave raises the academic stock of lecturers. Lecturers improve their academic qualifications by obtaining higher qualifications (Case 4RL1).*
2. *Sabbatical leave opportunities promote career growth of lecturers. They learn and share standard and best practices of how to conduct their academic business (Case 3L1).*
3. *Contact leave opportunities facilitate exchange of experiences among lecturers. Lecturers are likely to learn from what other lecturers do in their universities (Case 1RL1).*
4. *Research fellowship and post-doctoral research opportunities enhance professional growth. These two opportunities increase lecturers' chances of promotability (Case 1RL2).*

An emerging observation from the four-pronged perception is necessity of the provision of the different kinds of leave to academics as an efficacious strategy meant for effective staff retention in the studied universities. The findings corroborate with previous research by Sohail et al. (2011) who indicated that academics are committed to their work if they are provided with fair sabbatical and contact leave opportunities, as well study leave opportunities. Sohail et al. also go on to indicate that in order retain committed employees, the organisations must review their career plans and recognise those plans according to the market so that intelligent and talented employees could serve more and be beneficial in the long run. Similarly, Mapolisa (2014) found that opportunities for research fellowship and post-doctoral studies were among the highly rated strategies for boosting employee commitment which can effectively enhance staff retention of lecturers in the studied universities.

#### **4.3.5 Research mentorship**

An exposition of research mentorship as an efficacious strategy for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the universities is enhanced by critiquing the subtheme research mentorship experiences.

#### **Research mentorship experiences**

The way how research mentorship experiences can be an efficacious strategy for enhancing employee commitment in search of effective staff retention in the universities is demonstrated by the ensuing two perspectives.

1. *Universities need to provide a conducive environment for research mentorship. Mentorship cultivates a spirit of commitment in the lecturers (Case 2RL2).*



2. *Proper mentorship nurtures researchers intending to show how employee commitment is an efficacious strategy for effective staff retention as a result of research. Surely, mentored lecturers exhibit high levels of employee commitment (Case IRL3).*

From the above findings, it can be deduced that lecturers' capacity to research does not come as a surprise. It is something that is learnt over a period of time. It is learnt from others who have already gone through the mill. These findings dovetail with Curran's (2012) observation that provision of mentorship in research satisfies lecturers to the extent of raising their levels of employee commitment. Mentorship is also likened to training which Brum (2007) studied what impact training had on employee commitment and employee turnover in South Africa. He concluded that training coincided with commitment, establishes employee commitment and assist organisations to build a more committed and productive workforce. On the basis of the above findings and literature, the present researchers are content with the fact that the way how research mentorship is provided at a university determines the quality of efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

With the aid of the foregoing findings the researchers made five conclusions. First, efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment to enhance effective staff retention in the selected universities are diverse, and at the same time play a complementary role in either promoting or inhibiting staff retention. Second, the collusive challenges faced by the studied universities in implementing the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention are as result of lack of financial resources in the universities. As remuneration issues remain a key Human Resources challenge facing many organisations in Zimbabwe, a common dilemma that confronts business leaders is how to stimulate employee commitment even when conditions are not permitting (Sibanda, 2014). Third, efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention should not about money alone. Fourth, varied measures to mitigate challenges faced by the studied universities in implementing the efficacious strategies for boosting employee commitment in search of effective staff retention may be particular to universities. Fifth, lecturers will perform better, be better committed and retained to their job if they understand what they are expected to achieve, but more significantly if university managers show interest in lecturers' work by making conversations with them (returnee lecturers).

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequent upon the present study's findings and conclusions, the researchers make recommendations. There is need for:

1. Public and private universities to ensure that the efficacious strategies for employee commitment in search of effective staff retention they offer to their lecturers are commensurate with the needs of their lecturers. This would increase lecturers' desire to stay at their jobs, while at the same time exhibiting their increased levels of employee commitment.
2. Every university manager to be held accountable for the lecturers they lead so that they will know how to stimulate employee commitment to produce results and promote staff retention without blaming a poor salary and salary delays of course.
3. University authorities to value the need to offer lecturers staff development leave, study leave, contact and sabbatical leave, and research fellowship and post-doctoral studies' leave opportunities. This would call for the need to create commitments and convents with employers focused on their willingness to work for their universities, for example, university managers can ask questions such as; if we do this are you going to continue



working for us? Are you going to be happy? Are you going to be committed? What else can we do for you? This could be one of the on-spot stimulants to employee commitment, performance and retention.

4. University managers need to keep an eye on the amount of time lecturers spend on personal development activities, bearing in mind that if lecturers develop themselves in anger, they have the potential to leave the university by the time they finish studying if universities do not help them.
5. Macro-level studies need to be pursued using varied research methodologies to establish how well the current study's findings inform higher education policy decisions locally, regionally and internationally.

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