

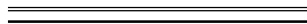
The Texas Probation Executive Development Program



Connecting the Dots: Factors in Employee Retention



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ABSTRACT

Criminal justice agencies are seeking alternative means to retain staff and decrease turnover as organizations face ongoing budgetary challenges. While monetary benefits continue to serve as an effective and traditional means to enhance retention, leadership teams must also take into account other non-monetary methods in order to increase employee job satisfaction through effective management and leadership practices in times when budgets do not allow for financial compensation as the sole means to retain or maintain quality staff. Retention remains a priority; however, antiquated management practices focus more on staffing levels rather than reasons an employee departed from the agency (Crews & Bonham, 2007). A review of strategies such as hiring and onboarding training practices to maintaining organization support for employees from all levels of leaderships are some key factors that facilitate increased retention rates among organizations. Agencies that cultivate a positive work environment of support, empathy and communication in lieu of solely using "assertive, directive and dominance-oriented" supervisory approaches promote trust and an increase in job satisfaction, which in turn results in commitment and higher levels of productivity from employees (Nowack, 2020). The use of effective performance evaluation tools that fit the needs of the employee and agency also plays a role employee retention. Adjustments to past practices are unavoidable as criminal justice agencies continue to compete with the private sector and other professions seeking to retain and maintain a high caliber of staff.

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INTRODUCTION

As criminal justice agencies continue to look towards building and maintaining quality staff while balancing budgetary constraints, employee retention remains an area of consideration among many management and leadership teams. As such, it is important to review some aspects of employee retention that at times may be unintentionally overlooked or stagnant by the use of traditional management and leadership practices. Although retaining staff is at the forefront, management practices in the past have focused on staffing levels rather than focusing on what attributed to the employee leaving one's agency (Crews & Bonham, 2007). An employee's trust or lack thereof in the executive and mid-level leadership can influence retention. A review of Leadership Models such as the "trickle-down and trickle-up models of leadership" describes the relationships between trust employees have in their direct and higher-level leaders as this can affect the employee's individual performance and the organization (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2017). Consideration of an employee's view of "perceived supervisor support (PSS)" and "performance oriented-culture (POC)" can also play a role in job satisfaction, thus a factor when reviewing retention implications (Jin, et al. 2016).

Management practices related to hiring and training of all staff including those that play a supervisory role as well as performance reviews and compensation can be influential in retention of tenured and qualified employees. Historically, finding the right employee and training were both influential in identifying those that had the "knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) of an organization's workforce" (Van Iddekinge, et al. 2009). It has also been suggested that increasing empathetic concern among leaders are also viewed as more likable by employees even when not as

competent with other day to day management skillsets (Nowack, 2020). Toussant (2005) identified "six key managing concepts" associated with performance reviews as Barnes et al. (2012) noted effective decisions regarding compensation often correlate with an employee's job performance.

While monetary compensation may play a factor in retention there are many other driving forces that deter turnover and increase retention. Higher instances of turnover in an agency can be costly to the agency from a budgetary standpoint, but also impact staff morale (Aarons, et al. 2009). A review of management practices past and present can assist those in leadership roles with enhancing policies and procedures related to hiring practices, training and performance evaluations.

POSITION

Staff retention has multiple layers other than salary as employees also relay job satisfaction with work environment as a contributing factor to stay with an agency or seek alternative employment (Crews & Bonham, 2007). A predictor related to retention is "propensity to leave" (Fried, et al. 2008). This concept is also known as "turnover intention" and is related to an employee's work behaviors of being absent or late to work as they are often giving consideration or actively seeking other employment (Aarons, et al. 2009). Employee satisfaction on the job linked to management and leadership's roles in cultivating PSS and POC within the organization can be favorable for the employee and organization (Jin, et al. 2012). An employee's trust in leadership influences not only individual work performance but also how well employees "internalize the goals and strategies of the organization" (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2017).

Aarons, et al. (2009), also discussed a need for agencies, as part of evaluating

retention strategies, to address high stress environments, lack of support and low pay as these factors attribute to an employee leaving the agency. Fried, et al. (2008) reviewed the impact of "role stress," "role ambiguity" and "role conflict" on work satisfaction and "propensity to leave." Fulmer & Ostroff (2017) found increased work performance built on trust in mid management correlates to satisfaction with an employee's job while trust in upper management affects the employee's "perceived organizational support and organizational commitment." Although "job autonomy" or one's view as to "the degree of perceived control that an employee has over how they perform tasks and the degree to which they operate independently" can encourage retention; however, the use of evidence based practices in "behavioral and social services interventions" coupled with support or coaching can decrease turnover (Aarons, et al. 2009).

Relationships within the organization is key. Typically, leaders are selected based on their skills of being "assertive, directive and dominance-oriented"; however, "empathetic qualities" are now being viewed as more desirable skillsets (Nowack, 2020). Higher levels of leadership may often establish a work environment that yields communication between staff and their direct supervisor or mid management in their day to day interactions; however, it is essential that staff also build trust through communication with upper management as well (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2017). Compassion within agencies is a contributing factor to increases in job satisfaction translating to commitment from the employee, and productivity (Nowack, 2020).

Agencies providing a high level of support and management, to include fostering employee development and leadership opportunities can serve as motivation for even

high performing employees (Jin, et al. 2016). The importance of "management development" processes that allow employees to gain "competencies" in order to "achieve managerial effectiveness" as part of the agency's investment in their employees can be a contributing factor in retention (Kraimer, et al. 2011). The idea of an employee wanting to feel valued by the agency they are a part of is "the group value model" and those same employees rely on fairness from management and leadership roles (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2017).

Van Iddekinge, et al. (2009) identified that employees newly hired often view an organization as "fair and just" when the agency uses "job-related selection procedures and this can increase retention. Kraimer, et al. (2011), discussed "perceived career opportunity (PCO)" as the employee's "belief that jobs or positions that match their career goals and interests exists within the organization." The onboarding process can often be the starting point in increasing retention in an organization. "Personal-identity socialization" calls for managers to "remember that an organization is made up of people, and that people have a desire to use their signature strengths," thus encouraging new hires to identify their own strengths and how these strengths can translate to their job duties while ensuring connections are made between colleagues and new staff (Cable, et al. 2013). Selection and training impacts the organization as training new employees can serve as a means to acquaint the employee with the "values and norms of the organization" which in turn can have a direct effect on work performance and retention (Van Iddekinge, et al. 2009).

Although many link an employee leaving their job directly with the amount of compensation, Crews & Bonham (2007) identified that the major factor is imbalances

related to the manner in which compensation is established and adjusted during their tenure. Employee performance reviews should mirror the behaviors that the agency is trying to obtain from their employees (Barnes, et al. 2012). Toussant (2005) noted six concepts key to evaluating performance: "having clear definitions, providing basic training, allowing self-evaluation, including multiple reviews, giving specific comments, and focusing on the future."

Employees dissatisfied with their work as a result of being unsure of their role in an organization or have a lack knowledge on how to perform duties assigned attribute to one's "propensity to leave" and/or create a reduction in the amount of work in day to day situations if the employee remains with the agency (Fried, et al. 2008). Smith-Jentsch, et al. (1996), noted that training as a necessary component for the employee as a means to establish and/or enhance "high job performance" and as a means to avoid negative consequences resulting in individual work performance. Training geared to obtaining tools to increase job knowledge and skills was a key factor in retention, as this tends to set the employee up for success and nurtures commitment and attachment to the organization thus increasing retention of the employee (Van Iddekinge, et al. 2009).

Fried, et al. (2008) termed "propensity to leave" as "one's desire or willingness to leave the employing organization." The term "turnover occurs when an employee actually leaves" and can be impactful to staff morale and productivity which in turn can have a negative impact on the agency as well as costs to the agency associated with hiring and retraining new staff and inconsistencies in delivery of practices (Aarons, et al. 2009). Kraimer, et al. (2011), identified organizational support for development (OSD) as an employee's perception of the support they receive from their organization to

development professionally which can be facilitated through "information exchange, rewards and resources that emphasize achievement, challenging job assignments, minimal work pressure, supervisor support, and organizational support for updating." Although managers may find performance appraisals challenging at times it is key that specifics related to "congratulations, criticism, and encouragement on specific projects" can foster trust between in the employee/manager relationship (Toussant, 2005). A review of contributing factors, other than salary, to include job satisfaction, hiring and training practices as well as trust and support within the organization can allow management and leadership teams to re-evaluate practices to enhance retention as proactive rather than from a reactive stance.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Monetary compensation remains a key, correlating factor to staff turnover among criminal justice agencies (Crews & Bonham, 2007). Many agencies correlate higher pay with an employee's work performance as this can serve as a means to provide "motivation, direction, and reinforcement for employees and should thus facilitate future performance (Barnes, et al. 2012). The practice of hiring "boomerang employees" or "rehiring former employees" seen previously in laborer type positions and now appears to be a more popular means to meet the staffing needs of agencies in other professions (Swider, et al. 2017). As agencies face budgetary limitations and lack of resources to maintain effective hiring and training practices, many leaders turn to use of antiquated means for operations and/or are turning to former employees, which may or may not prove beneficial for the agency in the long term.

An employee's trust in mid to high-level leaders within agencies is low (Fulmer &

Ostroff, 2017). Extensive research is lacking in regards to concepts such as "career commitment" and the correlation to an employee's choice of career. (Somers & Birnbaum, 1998). Crews & Bonham (2007) surveyed correctional employees and the results yielded dissatisfaction with their current pay and benefits as well as indicators that just under 20% would leave if offered a higher salary. Kraimer, et al. (2017) notes that promotion of OSD and PCO within an organization impact retention, as OSD will increase performance and reduce turnover; however, if employees see little room for growth or goals and career interests are dissimilar, the employee will pursue other career goals through another agency. A lack of career path coupled with no "step-pay raises, lengthy delays in receiving overtime/compensatory time and lack of annual raises" can affect morale within the organization (Crews & Bonham, 2007). Thus, the aforementioned factors translate into a lack of financial compensation and turnover despite other factors in place to that may prove effective in retaining staff.

RECOMMENDATION

Budgetary constraints continue to be a driving factor in organizational challenges. In the past, the correlation of a lack of monetary compensation and turnover were a major contributor to retention; however, agencies can learn from past lessons and recent research to implement new practices that can increase retention. The onboarding process can serve as instrumental and the initial opportunity to promote retention for an organization. Cable et al. (2013) described four principles for "personal-identity socialization" that promote increased work performance and a reduction in turnover. Crews & Bonham (2007) found that those in management and leadership roles can foster retention and job satisfaction among employees by offering new job

responsibilities that promote growth and a system of recognition of the value the employee brings to the organization.

Without a doubt turnover within an agency impacts performance and productivity (Aaron, et al. 2009) and in the field of community supervision, the mission of the department. An employee's trust in mid to high-level leaders within agencies is low and implications of not establishing practices aimed at increasing retention can translate to an adverse work environment (Crews & Bonham, 2007). Management practices play a significant role with employees thus facilitation of management and leadership styles that encourage organizational communication, problem solving and decision making strategies as well as flexibility were among some of the leadership qualities that were found to increase retention (Crews & Bonham, 2007). Employees experience less work stress and exhaustion when leaders within the organization demonstrate "higher levels of empathy, warmth, and caring" which in turn results in "higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement" from staff (Nowack, 2020).

Supervisors have a significant impact on an employee's satisfaction and commitment to their individual role and the role the employee has within the agency (Crews & Bonham, 2007). A "toxic boss" can be a contributing factor in lower rates of job satisfaction, employee absences and counterproductive work practices at the work place (Nowack, 2020). The ability to maintain and retain " a well-trained workforce provides benefit to both organizations and the clients that they serve" (Aarons, et al. 2009). Training conducive to "ongoing diversity and inclusiveness training, mentoring, coaching, peer support and experiences" can build supportive and trusting cultures within the agencies (Nowack, 2020).

In instances when an organization can provide financial compensation based on performance, it is important to ensure a performance tool that projects future performance as the employer may over estimate prematurely the work performance or conversely, may encourage an employee to underperform as to leave room for growth and continued compensation (Barnes, et al. 2012). Van Iddekinge, et al. (2009), found agencies able to retain employees can maintain high degrees of quality in hiring practices as they typically do not see a need to lower their standards, nor rush their hiring and onboarding processes in an effort to maintain the operations of the department. Agencies adapting to the needs of their current workforce may continue to look at the historical practices as valuable; however, adjustments are inevitable if agencies truly want to make an impact on increasing retention within their organization.

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