Factors of Faculty Retention and their Implications in Private Institutions of Higher Learning in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: To retain quality faculty has become a critical issue and a matter of great concern in higher education. This study was undertaken to identify factors which influence the retention of faculty in a private university in Solan, Himachal Pradesh. This university nurtures a very strong vision to become one of the top global universities in next five years. The question, what factors contribute in retaining quality faculty in university, served as forerunner in this study. This study adopted a qualitative research design. The information was obtained through in-depth interviews from a purposively selected sample of 12 very senior members to provide understanding of factors, they perceived to be most relevant in to retain faculty. The content analysis of the interview data indicated clusters of factors that attest to the research objective of the study. The factors: leadership and institutional culture, growth opportunities, institutional mission and vision, meaningful role, cooperation and healthy interaction emerged important in influencing the retention of the university faculty. These observations suggest that university should adopt and formalize these factors as its’ strategies for retention of faculty. Such strategies need to be coupled with intrinsic needs of faculty, continuous support and enforcement within institutional culture and framework. From pragmatic point of view, a few implications are mentioned which may serve as guiding indicators.

Keywords: Growth opportunities, cooperation, healthy interaction, retention, private universities, organizational culture

I. Introduction

Importance of institutions of higher learning in socio-economic and technological advancement is well recognized. Ideally these institutions are repositories of knowledge, which is generated and disseminated by intellectuals/faculty. Universities are instrumental in fulfilling manpower needs of a nation and evolving a humane society. To realise this goal, faculty and staff is of paramount importance. It is their quality, size and their effective capability which impacts university education. Armstrong (2009) pointed out that there is a paradigm shift from human resource to human capital which consists of the knowledge, skills and abilities of the people employed in organization which is indicative of their value. Primarily, universities depend upon commitment of faculty and staff. Hence, this makes essentially important to retain faculty and staff. This issue also acquires added importance because over the last two decades, there has been mushroom growth of private institutions of higher learning in India to achieve the goal of higher education during the last two decades.

Interestingly, one cannot deny that on the one hand, higher education in India is facing problem of faculty voluntary turnover, and on the other hand, private universities witnessing acute shortage of talented faculty. This is believed to be adversely impacting the quality of education. The University Grants Commission has developed norms to maintain standard of education which are mandatory for all educational institutions. The issues of faculty retention are very intricate and complex. But, there is growing concern at the national level, to address these issues for benefit of universities and students. Vasishtha (2009) observed that replacing talented employees and training new ones to function as productively as their predecessors is a growing challenge for higher educational institutions. In an environment of greater emphasis of the state on private education, issue of ‘retention of quality faculty’ has a wider scope. As academic leaders, are facing biggest challenge to find and retain talented and competitive faculty, therefore, from sociological and human resource point of view, private institutions of higher learning, provide an interesting context for understanding of faculty retention. Exploring this, in a scientific way, is of great value. It may help academic leaders to understand such crucial factors which might serve to retain and create a pool of staff with high degree of talent, academic acumen and administrative mind-set.
II. Theoretical background

There are number of theories which address employee needs and have been advocated by a number of scholars as basis of retention strategies in organizations. However, most notable are: Equity theory, Expectancy theory; Hertzberg two factor theory. All are relevant to understand human resource and factors affecting them in the world of work.

**Equity Theory** developed by behavioural psychologist John S. Adams Equity theory (1965) is concerned with the perceptions the people have about how they are treated as compared with others. The theory describes that employees seek to maintain equity between the input they bring into a job (education, time, experience, commitment and effort) and the outcome they receive from it (promotion, recognition and increased pay) against the perceived inputs and outcomes of other employees. Failure to find equity leads to various actions one of which may be to leave the organization. The major strength of this theory is that, it recognizes that individual inputs such as education, experience, effort should be recognized in such a way that equity is experienced. It also shows that individual employees are part of the larger system. This theory therefore guides in understanding what may influence academic staff to leave. They keep on comparing what their counterparts earn in other universities and other comparable organizations in order to realize a balanced state between the inputs-outcome ratio. In turn, this contributes to labour mobility within and outside the academia. The major weakness in this theory is subjectivity of the comparison process. There is a tendency in human nature to distort their inputs especially in regard to effort and hence becomes subjective when comparing (Beardwell et al, 2007).

**Expectancy theory** of Vroom (1964) is widely used in turnover intentions. Basic to the idea of expectancy theory is the notion that people join organisations with expectations and if these expectations are met they will remain members of the organisation. According to turnover and retentions frameworks developed from this theory decisions to stay or leave an organization can be explained by examining relationships between structural, psychological, and environmental variables. Empirical studies (Daly et.al., 2006) employ the model of employee intent to stay that is grounded on expectancy theory which includes structural, psychological and environmental variables. Structural variables include, work environment, autonomy, communication, distributive justice and workload. Psychological variables include job satisfaction and organizational commitment and the environmental variables include availability of job opportunities.

**Herzberg** (1959) two factor theory argues that employees are motivated by internal values rather than values that are external to the work. In other words, motivation to work is internally generated and is propelled by variables that are intrinsic to the work which include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. Conversely certain factors induce dissatisfying experiences to employees and these factors largely result from non-job related variables also called extrinsic variables. This theory is relevant to this study in that it recognizes that employees have two categories of needs that operate in them and that both should be addressed.

III. Factors of Staff Retention

According to Trevisan et. al., (2014) research findings of majority of studies conducted in the past, a few for instance, by Chatman & Cha (2003), Grojean et al. (2004), Allen (2008) , Doh et al. (2011) Ng’ethe et.al,(2012), Gupta & Tayal (2013), Paul and Berry (2013) converge into organisational culture and values, self-actualisation, leadership, communication, work–life balance, and reward and recognition factors that influence the retention of quality academic staff.

Recently, a few studies highlighted interesting findings. Bansal and Monga (2014) in a study of managers in pharmaceutical industries in Himachal Pradesh observed retention of staff indirectly rest on employers’ ability to hire well qualified and trained staff. Bansal and Monga (2014) in another study highlighted that job satisfaction and retention of managers in pharmaceutical industry to a great extent is determined by congenial work culture and pay fairness, Prabjot Kaur (2014) in her study of retention of faculty in business school concluded that career planning and development, FDPs and training programs, job enrichment, cooperation from the work teams, and job security like other factors are found to be the most possible variables influencing faculty members towards retention. Raj and Kumar (2016) found that mobility and career progression, clear policies and regulations supporting promotions were of highest priority in retention of academic staff in schools and colleges in Tamil Nadu. Monga and Monga (2016) pointed out that to assure organizational development, quality of education and healthy nurture of faculty members, transformational leadership alone seems to best suit for an institute of higher learning for fulfillment of the cherished vision to find place in global arena.

IV. Objectives

In the backdrop of foregoing description of issues pertaining to retention of faculty, one pertinent question emerge, what factors influence retention of faculty in private universities? To explore answer to this question, one basic objective was to identify factors which influence retention of quality faculty in private universities; and, two to draw implications on the bases of identified factors.
V. Methodology

This research study primarily is qualitative in nature and followed a case study design in order to make in-depth analysis of factors which influence the retention of faculty in private universities. Out of 12 private universities in Himachal Pradesh, one university (name deliberately concealed) located in Solan, was purposively selected for this study. The main reason to select this was that this university boasts of being in top global universities in near future. It has ‘state-of-Arts’ campus and provides education in Management, Science, Engineering and Humanities. Out of 180 faculty members, a sample of 12 senior faculty members, with 15 years of teaching experience including, at least, five years in this university, was purposively drawn. It was in our mind that as respondents are renowned scholars in their field with considerable teaching, research and administrative experience with adequate resilience are most suitable to provide in-depth and better insight on issues under study. They served as key informants in this study. Qualitative information was collected through interviews using an interview guide. Whenever felt appropriate during or after the interview, informal discussion was also held with the informant to authenticate and supplement information. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to uphold ethics and standards of research. To realise considerable reliability uniform track and method of posing questions to the respondents was followed. The data recorded were subjected to content analysis to understand, in a logical way, various factors of faculty retention in an institution of higher learning i.e. a private university.

VI. Findings

Main focus of this study was to identify factors which influence the retention of faculty in private institution of higher learning in Himachal Pradesh. From the content analysis and interpretations of data, following themes emerged:

Leadership and organizational culture: Out of twelve participants, seven faculty members emphatically appreciated supportive leadership in this university. They expressed that the VC is a missionary, spiritual and highly supportive in all tasks pertaining to development of the university. Almost all members of management are easily accessible, supportive and value opinion of others. Training, growth opportunities and exposure to new domains of knowledge for all, most particularly, for younger faculty members are adequate.

Institutional vision and mission: Majority of participants had a clear understanding of the university’s mission and vision. They are enthusiastic and excited on its vision of being a top-notch university in global arena by the end of 2022 and efforts to create value by empowering faculty and students. To achieve this university constantly is engaged in improving its education delivery and evaluation system.

Meaningful work: Seven respondents perceived that their work added value to themselves and the university. They have understood relevance of their contribution in growth and success of the university. They also found their work challenging and intellectually stimulating, which they stressed as being important for them.

Environment: The physical and academic environment created by the university is paramount importance for almost all the informants. Eight of them used words like ‘dynamic’, ‘friendly’, ‘social’, ‘clean’ and ‘colourful’ for the university’s environment. They described the work culture as reflective of values and mission of the university. It fostered collaboration and innovation among faculty members. The working environment is unique and facilitates services to all visitors, parents, students, faculty and management. Visiting the campus, departments and administration makes one feel the comfort zones created by the university. Respect for other colleagues was valued by all of them. Positive relations among colleagues motivate them and almost all other faculty in university and they enjoy working here. Irrespective of their academic positions, they felt surrounded by their colleagues. Majority (9) of them expressed that there are harmonious relationship between management, faculty, students and staff, which makes this university distinct. However, exceptions are always there.

VII. Discussion

The transformational style of leadership emerged as the leading factor in faculty retention in private university. Trevisan et. al. (2014) observed that academic leaders/the Vice- chancellors, who are approachable and inclusive, inspire and motivate staff within institutions, which makes them feel to stay in institution. Hence, transformational leadership is a significant factor in faculty retention in private university and vice-versa, that is, in the absence of transformational leadership, some faculty members may like to leave their institution. The leaders, who allow, autonomy in functioning and provide motivation and are easily approachable are seen as the most favoured. Chatman and Cha (2003) held that such leadership allow faculty to take ownership of their actions and committed and loyal to university/institution. Organizational culture, which values faculty’s contributions, assures economic and psychological security; cherishes high values and ethics encourages faculty to align with university’s vision. Physical environment i.e. congenial working conditions were seen as assisting in innovation. This implies that good faculty prefer working in environments that are productive, all inclusive, sociable, respect employees and value diversity (Ramlall, 2004). Transformational leadership and good organizational culture is very crucial in job satisfaction of faculty and staff (Bansal and Monga 2014; Prabhjot Kaur 2014; and Monga and Monga. 2016). Growth opportunities and Career progression everyone felt
important in one’s work life and all praised opportunities and strategies tuned for staff development. This attest to the views that providing staff with training and development opportunities generally increases their retention (Allen 2008; Ryan 2010; Prabjot Kaur 2014; and Monga and Monga 2016). Respondents conveyed most of the faculty cherishes vision to improve academic standards and develop to become important in global arena. This is in conformity with the observation of Messmner (2004) and Monga and Monga, 2016) that if staff identify with the institution’s vision and recognise their role in fulfilling it, they are likely to remain with the institution.

Acceptance by all as valued ones in teaching, research and administration, and also in strategic decisions, helps and encourages them to fulfil their dreams and as well as goals of the university. This meaningfulness is very vital in inculcating commitment and loyalty towards vision and mission of the university (Prabjot Kaur 2014; and, Monga and Monga, 2016). All respondents said that they Respect for each other, cooperation in work related task , company of passionate and hardworking colleagues, harmonious relationship and mentoring and mutual help were perceived as source of longer association with university. Employees enjoy working with like-minded people who share the same behavioural norms (Kinicki and Fugate 2012; and, Monga et.al.,2015).

Hence, healthy relationship amongst faculty and management appeared to be one of the important factor that retains quality faculty in university.

VIII. Conclusions

Faculty retention has emerged an issue of great concern due to competition, mushroom growth of private universities and penetration of foreign universities/institutions in India, and demands of the global economy. Faculty retention is increasingly seen as benefit driving human resource in today’s world. Prioritizing faculty need which is in tune with providing quality education as per current needs and demands of society has acquired paramount importance in education arena. Findings of this micro-level study, indicates some vital factors for retaining quality faculty in private universities/institutes of higher learning. These are: transformational leadership and organisational culture; growth opportunities; meaningful work and collegiality or positive relations among colleagues. As the research in this field is scarce in India, therefore, these findings may serve as indications to retain quality faculty in private universities. From research point of view, one should not feel complacent on positive factors, as per actual experiences and observation of the researcher, these seem more of idealistic in nature and devoid of actual subjective and objective reality. Hence, there is urgent need to explore phenomenon of attrition in private universities and then draw inferences. This may help in exploring the extent to which positive and negative factors interplay in to comprehend retention of faculty in private university.

IX. Implications

Findings of this study may have implications for retaining quality faculty in private university education in Himachal Pradesh. Firstly, the university studied need to formulate clear-cut human resource strategies to recruit and retain quality faculty; secondly, this need to be supported by reinforcement of organizational culture and congenial environment , tailored to the needs of faculty and students; thirdly, motivation has to be backed by strategies to maintain highest standards of education;

And finally, academic leaders at all levels in university need to develop culture of academic freedom rather than culture of fear and psychosis, in order to keep the academic fraternity aligned to university’s mission.

X. Limitations

This study entails following limitations:

- Very small sample size;
- Specific group i.e. academic staff of one private university was included; and
- Findings are based on subjective outcome of the respondents;

References


