

2023

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Recommended Citation

Hunter, Barbara C. (2023) "Faculty Retention: A Case Study Examining the Factors that Influence Faculty Retention at the Northern Marianas College," *Journal of Fundamental & Applied Business Research*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/jbr/vol1/iss1/4>

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Doctoral of Business in Human Resources

Fundamental Research

Faculty Retention: A Case Study Examining the Factors that Influence Faculty Retention
at the Northern Marianas College

Abstract

The issue of the need to recruit and retain faculty has become increasingly discussed in educational literature. Retention programs for faculty play a strategic role in developing the institution, especially when it involves building capacity and maintaining a competitive advantage. The goal for this fundamental research is to illustrate how the qualitative methods applied will identify the factors that influence retention among faculty at the Northern Marianas College (NMC, 2020). To ensure that the case study was conducted thoroughly, a deeper and theoretically sound approach was explored to understand the perceptual views of current faculty and administration on retention. The qualitative approach included interviews, surveys, and the use of NVivo 12 Software to interpret data and identify recurring themes. The findings identified that administration had a large influence on the factors that affect faculty retention through the establishment of various concepts, all of which centered on effective communication. This research highlights the role of the researcher, participants, and the data collection process. In addition, the discussion on the dissemination of the findings will link to methods that can enhance retention among the faculty at the Northern Marianas College.

Keywords: administration, faculty, NMC, retention

Introduction

As community colleges seek to expand their student enrollment, transformational forces are requiring institutions to implement changes that can improve retention among faculty. Retention of faculty is important to not only sustain enrollment, but also to maintain continuity with operations. Many factors that lead to faculty conformity or departure may be attributed to, but not limited to, the geographic location of the institution, compensation, employee engagement, and support from management. This article analyzes the phenomenon that institutions like the Northern Marianas College face with regards to retention of faculty, and to further understand the logic and the connection between faculty and their motivation to leave or stay. Research required a thorough analysis of empirical data by utilizing the qualitative case study approach and incorporating the explanatory method. Scholarly articles presented provide the relevant information that align data with this research.

Background of the Problem

The background of this study was to investigate one of Northern Marianas College's greatest concerns, which has been faculty retention. The mission of NMC is to "provide the most meaningful post-secondary education that is accessible to the students in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands" (CNMI; NMC, 2020). In order to fulfill this mission, the human resource (HR) office must work diligently with the academic departments to help find ways to retain its faculty. However, much of the discussion for retention, especially among faculty, was linked to budget cuts, glass ceilings on raises, increased research productivity, and managing diversity in the workplace (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016).

There is no current strategy, method, or procedure for retaining faculty at the college (P. Masga, personal communication, June 2, 2020). Only a few measures were implemented to

address faculty retention, such as on-island professional development and a few off-island training opportunities. Zielinski and Veilleux (2018) noted that retaining good employees has been a challenge for many institutions. Although compensation may be one of the best methods to keep employees, organizations should not limit themselves to pay and benefits only; rather, they should look at different aspects that will make good employees stay. In addition, the Society of Human Resources illustrated that 47% of HR professionals noted that retention was the top workforce management challenge (Piazza, 2018).

Retention of faculty is fundamental to any community college, especially because of the value faculty bring to the institution and the learning outcomes that are derived from instruction (Maurer, 2017). Retention of faculty also plays a strategic role in developing the organization with ensuring efficient capacity and enhancing its competitive advantage amongst other small colleges in the region (Noe et al., 2017). The precise connection between the factors that influence retention was not made specific to faculty at NMC, because there has been no research to support such a case. However, a deeper and theoretically sound assessment was explored to understand the issues that contribute to high turnover rates (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016).

Problem Statement

The general problem addressed was the inability of community colleges in U.S. Island Territories to retain qualified faculty. One of NMC's biggest recruitment concerns is finding a qualified faculty member and then keeping them onboard far beyond their contract period of 2 years. The current employment situation at NMC is not as stable as it was 10 years ago. This is due to how, each year, about 10 employees resign; many have tenured for less than 5 years. The average rate of faculty turnover in community colleges is 7%; moreover, the turnover rate for the top three categories has increased by 17% since 2013 (Mahan, 2020). The current faculty

turnover rate is at 5% for NMC; however, the institution has a goal to achieve a 3% or less attrition rate (K. Reyes, personal communication, June 2, 2020). Although the average rate may appear to be below the national average, NMC believes that the current trend in teaching will affect retention in the future. Additional research has shown that the top categories of reasons employees leave community colleges were career development, work-life balance, and organizational support (Yuret, 2018). The specific problem addressed is the challenge of NMC's main campus on the island of Saipan to retain qualified faculty. A problem which has caused a gap in organizational performance to meet program objectives and student learning outcomes.

Methodology

The qualitative method chosen was the case study, which was appropriate for this research, because the design not only explored the faculty's experiences through a personal lens from a programmatic and developmental perspective, but also added validation and credibility to the study (Talusán, 2016). In addition, the case study method also required a review of literature, case study reports, exit interviews, statistical data from an integrated postsecondary information system, and documented semi-structured interviews. This research required the case study method because it allowed for utilizing multiple data collection sources, which helped to enhance the significance, validity, and convincing credibility of understanding the recruitment and retention processes (Houghton et al., 2013). Since the research was on the factors that contribute to retention of faculty at NMC, the case study proved to be the most appropriate method. The explanatory method was also incorporated because this phenomenon has not been thoroughly studied (George, 2021). Creswell and Poth (2018) also noted how qualitative methods such as these two were not only beneficial but also provided for more meaningful research.

Methods of Triangulation

Triangulation was also necessary to implement within this case study because of the particular challenges in demonstrating how the survey and interview results were valid and reliable, because of the perceived biases that appeared (Heesen et al., 2016). For this case study, the best approach for triangulation was to gather data via interviews. Through interviews, data such as observations and review of documents were checked against what the researcher observed on site and read about in documents (Natow, 2019). According to Mishra and Rasundram (2017), data triangulation utilized a variety of data sources in a study, which included time, space, and participants. The results were then validated and any weaknesses in the data would be compensated for by the strengths of other data, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the results (Spiers et al., 2018). When analyzing factors that contributed to retention of faculty, it was important that the case study be presented with data that were supported by those being interviewed (Modell, 2005).

To mitigate any biases, and at the same time, validate the study, member checking was conducted (Fusch et al., 2018). Each member interviewed was provided a copy of their interview transcript for review and verification of information. Any areas of improvement were corrected prior to finalizing the transcript (Birt et al., 2016). This approach had already been validated by other institutions that noted how member checking strengthened conclusions about findings and reduced the risk of false interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Triangulation was an added benefit to this case study regarding retention at NMC in two-folds. First, the researcher already possessed the length of service at NMC, which helped develop a positive relationship with the participants in the study. The researcher's experience and established working relationships with governing bodies helped in collecting data with

confidence. The interviews provided information that was not necessarily public knowledge, because it came from a reliable and powerful source (Renz et al., 2018). Second, the information collected was not only validated through interviews, but also highlights the factors that contributed to faculty departure or affected retention in the workplace (Farquhar & Michels, 2016). The case study analysis was valuable because of how it called attention to the impacts that affected retention, and the perceptions of faculty, as well as the views from management (Tetnowski, 2015).

Data Analysis

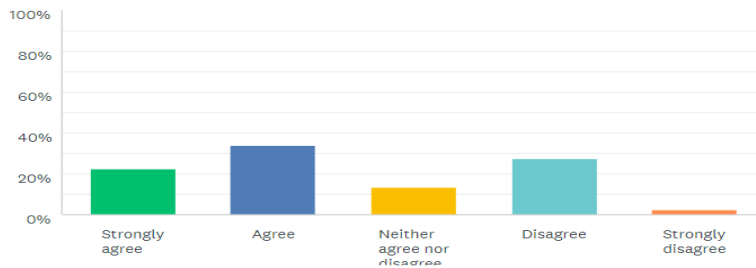
The findings gathered from surveys, interviews, and written documentation provided evidence on how communication, engagement, and empathy were the top themes affecting retention. Figure 1 illustrates an example of how the interviewees responded to a question regarding the ease of communicating with all members on campus.

Figure 1

Sample Survey Question Result

Do you feel that you can easily communicate with all members of this organization?

Answered: 44 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	22.73% 10
Agree	34.09% 15
Neither agree nor disagree	13.64% 6
Disagree	27.27% 12
Strongly disagree	2.27% 1
TOTAL	44

Figure 2 illustrates findings from the interviews that highlighted the number of times the themes were referenced. The criteria used to identify the theme included the number of times it was referenced in the NVivo Software.

Figure 2

Sample Result from Interviews Coded in NVivo

Name	Description	Files	References
Leadership Role	All interviewees agree that leadership role is important for faculty. Recognition, Open lines of communication, and mentoring were highly noted.	11	24
Factors that affect retention	Leadership was highly noted in this section followed by recognition	9	17
Communication	Open lines of communication, transparency among leadership was highly noted.	5	7

From leadership being instrumental in developing engagement and conveying empathy to ensuring active involvement from the employees (Ducci, 2018), these themes can be used to design an effective approach and applied to professional practice, which will enhance shared and participatory governance (McCormack & McCance, 2016). To further maximize this pattern of communication, leadership must ensure there is a balance in terms of empathic communication and a more focused discussion (Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015). Interviewees mentioned how effective communication was vital to ensure that correct messages were delivered in an appropriate way of importance.

Findings

Research has shown how novel supervisors tend to be less communicative and more impulsive. They tend to communicate in a way that welcomes confusion, conflicts, insensitivity, and isolation (Schreiber & Meloncon, 2018), all of which impacts productivity and longevity of

the organization. The results can be attributed to the constant churning of leadership at the college, where oftentimes there is neglect amongst the employees, as focus is placed more on the transition than on strategic decisions that lead the institution forward (Giudici & Filimonau, 2019). Adopting communicative strategies will help safeguard the flow of information and encourage the engagement of employees (Robbins & Davidhizar, 2020).

The findings from this study endorse the application of developing a policy and procedure, or a guide, that promotes faculty retention at NMC. Collaboration will be necessary between leadership and employees in order to apply the concepts discussed, so there is participatory governance to make high-quality decisions in the contexts gathered from research (Gayle et al., 2021). Recommendations for further research highlight two parts. On a macro scale, obtaining data from other institutions in the region to assess their approach in retention of faculty will help add a comparative view on their outcomes. On a micro scale, finding an appropriate time frame to obtain data from all the participants would help overcome any barriers for incomplete responses (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016). On a positive note, the current President was aware of this case study and was very supportive of the results. The NMC President had established a committee to review the organizational chart and included the author to participate as an active member to seek and provide recommendations. The knowledge from experience and current research collected gave the author the confidence needed to be a contributing member of this committee.

Christian Perspective on the Business Problem and Findings

Businesses exist to serve the common good. Leadership is always called upon to make decisions which include internally focused decisions (e.g., organization). Van Duzer (2010) noted that when businesses craft their purpose statement, it applies to the intrinsic purpose of

activities that make money to feed employees' families or support missions, which are both noble and Godly purposes.

Leadership should ensure that orientation for new employees are clear and consistent (Alvesson, 2020). Since NMC's mission is to serve its community, they should seek to provide the goods and services that will best enable the community to flourish and to structure their workplaces so as to afford all employees with opportunities to engage in meaningful and creative work (Thompson, 2002).

Scripture also serves as a great testimonial as it provides several principles that can be used to seek truth and learn from experience (LeTourneau, 2016). Corinthians 4:2 states, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." God's perspective is written so those in leadership positions understand their roles and continue to serve him by ensuring they are able to communicate their strategic plan into operational terms that reflect values and establish a means for assessment and improvement (Wiarda, 2019).

Research has shown that seeing through Christ's vision is one characteristic that is highly effective for retention (Jones, 2021). The key to ensuring that employees see through Christ's vision is for management to create an environment based on core values such as transparency, competency, consistency, and compassion (Frederick et al., 2018). Research has also illustrated how seeing through Christ's eyes can help organizations deal with external neighbors, and how selecting the best-fit employees can contribute to the success of executing its strategies (Thill & Bovee, 2017).

An organizational driver like retention is an example of a management factor that must be maintained in order to sustain the firm's operations (Lu et al., 2016). Leadership must demonstrate their commitment for employees to balance their work-life by making it a high

priority (Mahan, 2020). This is because employees can interpret their organization's values on how it is effectively managed by the actions of their leaders. For example, Bohlin (2009) described two aspects of how leadership can keep God's vision in the firm's mission and objectives. First, leadership must communicate how the workplace allows employees to exercise the gifts and talents that God has given them, and second, how leadership will help them meet their needs to accomplish their duties and responsibilities. In addition, leadership must also communicate the importance of hard work, and not take advantage of others (Dahlvig & Longman, 2016). Just as Thessalonians 3:10 stated, "for even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." Secondly, leadership must demonstrate their support for those employees whose contribution to the workplace is not only to ensure success, but also to help meet their family's needs (Mayhew et al., 2016). This is also found in Timothy 5:8, where it is illustrated that not providing for family and relatives is more like demonstrating their lack in believing in God and denying their faith.

On the other hand, employees must also remember that they too have a fiduciary duty to perform their tasks in the best interest of their organization (Harrison & Thompson, 2015). In Thessalonians 3:12-13, Paul specifically reminds Christians that it is their duty to work honestly for their pay, and to never become tired of doing what is right. The balance of workplace and life by seeing through Christ's eyes is possible when both management and employees are given the opportunity to use scripture as a reference guide in the workplace (Heliot et al., 2019). As disciples, leadership and employees can seek resolution through time tested actions (i.e., found in scripture) and learn from experiences on how to work in a dynamic environment, which are fundamental aspects in the workplace (Meng, 2016). The gospel is the best place to also find solutions for every social, spiritual, cultural, and personal problem an employee may encounter

(Hanes, 2018). Psalm 33:8 states, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.” When employees seek motivation, leadership can guide them to the Bible. Just as Hebrews 6:19 illustrates how faith will allow us to see “God as the anchor that keeps us sure and firm,” the Bible not helps encourage employees at all levels to find their relationship with God, but also inspires them to work effectively in a cohesive environment.

Conclusion

Today’s business environment is dynamic. As the world becomes increasingly demanding, the search for spiritual significance has grown to encompass both the personal and the professional field (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2015). The recommended strategies are important for institutions like NMC. To gain the competitive advantage, the strategies must be able to work through its human resources, most especially with faculty because they are a critical component of the college (Denisi & Griffin, 2018). Retention of faculty is an issue of concern that requires additional research because of the growing diverse population that comes with various experiences. Therefore, more analysis needs to be conducted in the content area so the findings can identify specific domains where data can be evaluated for effectiveness.

By providing the support through incorporating practices that will enhance strategies for effective communication, employees and most especially faculty can establish a positive relationship where they can improve on areas of opportunity, share their talents, and at the same time achieve a meaningful purpose and significance from their contribution (Ewest, 2015).

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