

Understanding Management Practices for Engaging and Retaining Professional Workers in War and Conflict Environments: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This research aims to identify management practices for engaging and retaining professional workers in war and conflict environments and discuss their research and practical implications. International NGOs and Multinational Enterprises (MNES) find engaging and retaining workers in conflict environments challenging for a number of reasons. The work environments is often difficult and in many cases pose a threat to personal safety, although the remuneration and job security is not as bad as found in other sectors. Unlike in other sectors, the turnover of staff presents costs to these organizations. In other sectors, management has sought to address attrition through a range of employee engagement and retention practices. These practices included those identified by the literature such as satisfying working conditions, higher salary and better benefits. It is not clear what practices are adopted by International NGOs and Multinational Enterprises (MNES) operating in war and conflict environments and how successful they are. This research explores these questions by considering management practices for retaining and engaging professional workers in war and politically unstable environments. While little formal research has been conducted in this field, evidences found in the conflict-affected countries highlighted that there is a problem of staff retention for professional workers in war and conflict environments. In addition, personal experience and anecdotal evidence has suggested that staff turnover is present and presents significant challenges for organizations operating in such contexts. Data was collected using sources such as review of relevant literature and government reports, newspaper reports and departmental and organizational reports. Findings revealed that while it is extremely difficult to operate in war and conflict environments, organizations working there still manage to engage and retain staff through employee empowerment, training and development, performance appraisal, and rewards as the variables for influencing employee engagement and retention in such contexts.

Keywords: management practices, staff engagement, staff retention in war and conflict settings

Introduction

International NGOs and MNEs have established themselves as significance agents in the social development and economic intervention occurring worldwide (Carr 2011; Lewis 2009). This establishment is evidenced by a significant change in the development of funding passed through them (Edwards & Hulme 1992; Fowler 2002). According to MacLean et al (2015)'s longitudinal analysis of INGOs from 2000-2015, there are an estimated 10 million non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide of which over 100,000 registered organizations are in Sub-Saharan Africa. On average, an NGO or MNE in Sub-Saharan Africa has worked there for sixteen years (Ruiz-Postigo et al. 2012). The MacLean et al's finding shows that INGOs and MNEs

account for \$2.2 billion of the African continental GDP. The humanitarian and development organizations' and MNEs' sectors are the second major employers after the governments in Sub-Saharan Africa and accounted for more than 16 million or 38.8% of total employed persons in 2005-2011 (Bunny 2017). In 2011, the collective amount spent by INGOs and MNEs in Sub-Saharan Africa exceeded US\$ 577 billion (Dagne 2011; Koppelman 2012).

The above important roles that international organizations, MNEs and their staff play in the developmental effort of developing economies make their workforces' effectiveness critical (McKenzie 2011). However, engaging and retaining workers is an issue to international NGOs and MNEs in general and to developing countries in particular (Irungu 2002; Shannon 2003). Prior studies show that engagement and retention of workers is a challenge that organizations in Africa often face (Smock 2009; Webb 2004). Professional workers often work under the most difficult conditions, far from their families, often sleeping in tents, on rough terrain, and in inhospitable environments (Kevany et al. 2012; Cernea 1988). A study conducted by Loquercio et al. (2006: 9) in the Horn of Africa found that some of the factors that cause professional workers to look for another job include dissatisfaction with working conditions ("push" factors), while factors that draw them towards other organizations include, higher salary and better benefits ("pull" factors).

Problems of worker engagement and retention are a major hindrance to organizational effectiveness among international NGOs and Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) operating in Sub-Saharan Africa (Thomas-Slayter 1992). Trivedy (1999, p. 625) also observed that "in Africa, a particular difficulty of aid organizations and MNCs is not being able to recruit competent and talented workers, but bad working conditions and lack of work flexibility". To demonstrate the magnitude of the challenge, Ipinge et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal research on 40 workers from different organizations operating in the Eastern Africa and they discovered that only 5 out of the 40 professional workers were remained with their original organizations after two years. According to Drucker (2004, p. 100), "the first sign of decline of an industry is its loss of appeal to qualified, able and ambitious workers". Losing large number of workers can be costly and disruptive (Lucero & Allen 1994, p. 141). Losing qualified workers can cause an organization not to achieve its mission and vision (Davidson et al. 2007; Malunga 2009). Rapid turnover of workers also limits the ability of organizations to start building a foundation of knowledge and experience from which to draw future learning and on which to continue building an increasingly competent and rigorous body of practice (Blaikie 2006). Development and sustainability, being long-term processes, require organizations to maintain continuity of qualified workers as one of the preconditions for success (Malunga 2009).

According to Sayers (2007, p. 474) organizations are finding it difficult to engage and retain skilled workers. A research conducted by Sarjoo and Barry (2011) found that the ability to engage and retain talent is one of the most critical issues of people management. Hughes and Rog (2008, p. 747) argued that in order for organizations to engage and retain suitable talent in their workforce, they must consider factors that may affect workers in both internal and external environments. According to Von Glinow (2005) lack of housing, working conditions, safety, and pay are some of the reasons why workers do not work for aid organizations in developing countries. These issues were also identified in India and Ecuador organizations (Jantzi et al. 2008). The importance of general living conditions, including accommodation, good drinking water, electricity, road and transport, were also identified by Mensah (2002) and Townsend et al.

(2004) as factors affecting engagement and retention of workers in the development organizations in Ghana.

The current social, economic, and political issues that developing countries are grappling with justifies the need for strong and vibrant INGO sectors and MNEs to complement and supplement government efforts. Unfortunately, however, the international NGOs sectors and MNEs industries in developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular are currently weak and one of the major causes of this is the difficulty in engaging and retaining professional workers. Being a continent with tough working conditions for professional workers, Sub-Saharan Africa particularly faces problems of both engaging and retaining professional workers. The few studies available on South Sub-Saharan Africa's international NGOs focus on identifying the challenges humanitarian and development organizations are facing and as such none specifically dealt with investigating and understanding factors affecting staff engagement and retention; although it is recognized as a major problem in almost all of the international NGOs and MNEs operating there (Beamon & Kotleba 2006). Therefore, the rationale for undertaking this study is to explore management practices for engaging and retaining professional workers in war and conflict environments, especially for international NGOs and MNEs operating in war and conflict environments.

The Overall objectives of this study are:

- To identify the management policies and practices for retaining and engaging professional workers in wars and conflict environments.
- To make recommendations that are relevant for practice i.e. for International NGOs and Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) operating in war and conflict environments' management and policy makers.

Method

Document in the fields of human resource management, employee engagement and retention, management and development were reviewed. Furthermore, relevant sources such as review of relevant literature and government reports, newspaper reports and departmental and organization reports were also consulted. International organizations such as humanitarian and development organizations and MNEs such as oil companies which are often cited and have been working in war and conflict environments, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, for over ten years were the only agencies that their documents were selected and reviewed.

Literature Review

Engagement and Retention of Professional Workers

The definition of what constitutes a nonprofit organization that will be adopted in this research project is the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO) system developed by Salamon and Anheier (1996). The defining attributes include: organized, private, self-governing, non-profit-distributing. Employee Engagement, also known as *Workforce Engagement*, is a profession that has grown in strategic importance over the past two decades. As the profession has grown, so too has the requirement on all organizational leaders to strengthen their knowledge and skills in this area. Just as every administrator needs a basic understanding of financial management, every HR manager needs a basic understanding of employee engagement. Despite a large number of studies, the effect of employee engagement on keeping employees

informed, recognizing their talents and keeping them focused, instilling a sense of pride and a level of energy that ultimately grow organizations inside and out are still not well understood (Mendelof 2007; Kearns 2008; Ferketish 2009; Welch 2008; Prison 2010). Despite evidence of how destructive employee exhaustion or disengagement can be, studies from the business management field on the opposite condition, engagement, are limited (Kahn 1990; Pirakatheeswari 2010). Surprisingly little academic and empirical research has been conducted overall, and a large portion of it comes from the social work community (Saks 2006; Wilson 2008).

The terms “engagement” and “retention” are rooted in role theory, in particular the work of Erving Goffman (1961) and William Kahn (1990). Goffman (1961, p. 94) defined engagement as the “spontaneous involvement in the role” and a “visible investment of attention and muscular effort”. Kahn (1990, p. 694) defined engagement as the “harnessing of organizational members’ selves to their work roles”. Robinson et al. (2004, p. 9) and Welbourne (2007, p. 45) stated that engagement is one of the “hottest topics in management” and Frank et al. (2004, p. 15) suggested that engaging and retaining workers is “one of the challenges facing organizations in this decade and beyond”. According to the most frequently cited engagement models (Schaufeli et al. 2002; Schaufeli & Salanova 2007; Macey & Schneider 2008), engagement is a combination of vigor, dedication, and absorption. According to Harter and Schmidt (2008) employee engagement is the extent to which employee commitment, emotional and intellectual, exists relative to accomplishing the work, mission, and vision of the organization. Also, engagement can be seen as a heightened level of ownership where each employee wants to do whatever they can for the benefit of their internal and external stakeholders, and for the success of the organization as a whole (MacLeod & Clarke 2011).

Scarlett (2010, p. 17) further stated that “engagement is a measurable degree of a worker’s positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organization which profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work”. Schaufeli et al. (2006, p. 14) argued that “engaged workers are active agents who believe in themselves, who generate their own positive feedback, have values that match with the organization, who sometimes feel tired, but satisfied, and are also engaged outside their work”. In general, the debates around engagement, as it is in variety of researches, focus on aspects related to “positive” worker behavior, and psychological concepts, such as organizational citizenship, commitment, and emotional stability (Robertson & Cooper 2010; Meyer et al. 2011). Newman and Harrison (2008, pp 31-32) argued that the defining features of employee engagement are the simultaneous presence of three behaviors in employees, namely their performance in the job, citizenship, behavior and involvement.

The concept of retention refers to organizational policies and practices aimed at maintaining the continued employment of valued workers (Bowen and Schneider 1987). Retention involves taking measures to encourage employees to remain in the organization for the maximum period of time. This depends on the compatibility between individual interests and personality and organizational goals. Darchen and Tremblay (2011) argued that retention is a process of organizational socialization. According to Salanova et al. (2005) socialization and attachment relationship should be durable and constant and link the employee to the organization by common values and by the way in which the organization responds to the needs of the employees. The main purpose of retention is to prevent the loss of competent employees from

the organization, which could have an adverse effect on productivity and service delivery (Brown & Yoshioka 2003; Coldwell et al. 2008).

Factors Influencing Professional Workers' Engagement and Retention

There are internal and external factors that affect management practices for engaging and retaining workers in development organizations (Ozutku & Ozturkler 2008). The internal environment of organizations strongly affects their management practices as well as organizational culture and leadership. Leadership is a combination of organizational policies, strategy, principles, and structure (Moynihan & Pandey 2005), while culture is a combination of management practices, shared mindset and ethos of an organization (Esty and Gewirtz 2008). A major point is the conviction that the best way to increase management practices is to focus on creating a culture of engagement and retention in an organization. According to McBain (2007), one of the factors that influence engagement and retention of workers is organizational culture. Lockwood (2007) also stated that work environment culture is one factor influencing employee engagement and retention in modern organizations. A supporting culture in friendly work environment creates engagement and retention of workers (Suharti & Suliyanto 2012). Hughes and Rog (2008, p. 747) argued that in order for organizations to engage and retain suitable talent in their workforce, they must consider internal factors that may work in favor of workers. According to Von Glinow (2005) lack of effective organizational strategy, structure and policies are some of the reasons why workers do not work for humanitarian and development organizations in developing countries. These issues were also raised and researched in India and Ecuador organizations (Jantzi et al. 2008). The importance of general management practices was also discussed in a research conducted by Mensah (2002) into factors influencing engagement and retention of professional workers in the humanitarian and development agencies in Ghana. Supporting this stance is Gelade and Ivery (2006) who observed that management practices help improve the organizations' employee engagement and retention strategies, as well as performance, including employee's productivity, quality and flexibility.

Absent in the management practices literature is analysis of the impact of the organizational environment on engagement and retention of workers in South Sudan, which this research aims to find out. Reports in the literature differ on the importance of pay and conditions on which a person makes decision to choose workplace. While salary was positively linked with decreasing intention to leave work of professional workers in Thailand (Spires 2012), Lehmann et al. (2008), in a study of reasons for staff mobility in South Africa, found that only 24% of respondents quoted better remunerations as a reason for leaving. Other challenges facing humanitarian and development organizations revolved around the relationship between locals and expatriates, especially the tensions around differences in the lifestyles and living standards between locals and expatriates (Mukasa 1999). Work environment and job satisfaction are other factors determining engagement and retention in developing countries (Olowu 2010; Debebe 2007). A study among workers in North Vietnam revealed that the most motivating factors in their job were identified as appreciation by managers, and colleagues, appreciation by the community, stable job, income and training (Martineaut 2003). Working conditions, including organizational arrangements, management support, high-risk work environment and availability of equipment, have been identified by literature as being a determining factor in deciding whether to leave or stay in an organization (McCoy et al. 2008; McCourt & Awases 2007).

Factors that influence engagement and retention of workers in the external environment include macro environment factors such as political-legal climate, economic conditions, socio-cultural climate, Actions of Union, technological factors, and globalization (Anheier et al. 1994; Cunningham 1994; De Cieri & Dowling 2006). In South Sudan, for instance, the political environment is important and the role of political parties in shaping the policies of humanitarian and development organizations is also significant. This may affect the way in which humanitarian and development organizations operate and the way they undertake their engagement and retention strategies. For example, the South Africa study by WHO emphasizes the importance of the perceived external environment and it found that social unrest and conflict ranked high as a reason for leaving the country (Lehmann et al. 2008). For example, professional workers, expatriates in particular, leave Zimbabwe because of political reasons, by far the most important push factor, followed by lack of facilities and despair about the future of the country (Chimbari et al. 2008).

The external environment, which is the context in which the organization operates, has an effect on how workers are engaged and retained in organizations (Kiraka 2003, p. 35). Hughes and Rog (2008, p. 747) indicate that the work environment should enable workers to do their best. In fact, this should not only be less intimidating to the new hires, but conditions of work should be appealing (Branham 2005; Brown & Yoshioka 2003). This is supported by Armstrong and Baron (2005, p. 149) who argued that healthy, safe and conducive working conditions should be provided to workers. Deery (2008, p. 804) further recommended that organizations should provide adequate resources for their staff so that they can do their job properly. International organizations and MNEs, according to Deery (2008), must ensure that working conditions are appealing, safe, healthy and well-equipped to attract the right people to their workforces.

Management Approaches for Improving Professional Workers' Engagement and Retention

Employee engagement and retention is taken to be a function of the management practices pertaining to empowerment, training and development, reward system, and performance appraisal (Suharti & Suliyanto 2012). Empowerment is delegating and encouraging people to gain the skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacle in work environment and ultimately, help them develop within themselves and in the society (Blanchard et al. 2001). Empowerment of employees in the workplace provides them with opportunities to make their own decisions with regards to their task. According to Potterfield (1999), many organizational theorists and practitioners regard employee empowerment as one of the most important and popular management concepts. Organizations ranging from small to large and from relief to development have been initiating empowerment programs in attempts to enhance employee engagement and retention, increase efficiency, and gain competitive advantages in the turbulent contemporary organization environment (Ahanotu 1998).

Studies have shown that low level of empowerment may lead to turnover (Ugboro & Obeng 2000; Quinn & Spreitzer 1997). Organizational managers must focus at gaining more self-governing to the employee to avoid turnover (Huselid 1995). Empowered workers tend to be more confident and try to give their best to organization because they are given more authority in decision making process (Hong et al. 2012, p. 64). According to Choong et al. (2011), employee empowerment can create a feeling of obligation among workers to stay in organization. Therefore, workers will tend to remain in the organization even when facing pressure from other factors, including external factors. The second management practice that influences employee engagement and retention is training and development. Traditionally, training provides the

knowledge and facilitates the teaching of the skills necessary to perform a job well (Delaney & Huselid 1996). Employee development, however, focuses on preparing of employees for future's jobs (Fitzgerald 1992).

Hunt and Michael (1983: 9) suggests that a practice of training and development needs to be adopted by organizational managers in order to ensure that their workers are acculturated to the concept of life-long learning so that their skills are continuously upgraded to meet current and emerging organizational requirements. It is the responsibility of organizations (as employers) to ensure that workers of all ages and at all levels have opportunities to pursue relevant training and development (Tannenbaum & Yukl 2002). Cetron and Davies (2005, p. 40-46) recommend that training and development is a necessity for anyone who works in the present-day organizations. Organizations that can provide diverse, cutting edge training will have a strong engagement and retention advantage over those that offer fewer opportunities to improve their workers skills and knowledge base (Noe & Peacock 2002).

Management practices such as providing training and development opportunities are important determinants of employee engagement and retention (Hong et al. 2012, p. 64). Fitzgerald (1992) and McLagan (1997) also stated that management practices such as training and development are positively related to engagement and retention because the practices motivate workers and "lock" them to their jobs, which are referred to as employee engagement and retention. Hong et al (2012, p. 66) asserts that training and development is a valuable activity for enhancing skills and improving staff performance, and that training and development contributes to employee engagement and retention. Improvements in organizational performance such as productivity and quality of services are outcomes of training and development efforts offered to workers (Cetron & Davies 2005). Fulfillment of the individual employee needs through the training and development programs permit organizations achieve their desired outcome by enhancing employee engagement and retention (Hong et al. 2012, p. 63).

Reward system is the third management factor that influences employees' engagement and retention. A reward is a stimulus given to individuals to alter their behaviors (Baker et al. 2012). Rewards typically serve as reinforcers (Poling et al. 2001). Reward is not only in the form of money, but also in non-cash such as intrinsic or extrinsic rewards (Sahoo et al. 2010). Benefits, such as pension, life and health insurance, and retirement plans, and allowances such as subsidized transportation and organizational cars, represent a significant reward element in many large organizations (Hong et al. 2012, p. 65). Reward systems are viewed as tools for engaging and retaining workers. Giving rewards to employees can enhance the motivation level among them to perform well (Wei & Rowley 2009). According to Hong et al. (2012), organizations are in danger of creating an unsatisfactory working environment if there is no reward system in place. Balkin and Gomez-Mejia (2006) found that if workers are satisfied with how the organization operates and communicates its reward policies, they remained committed to the organization. Baker et al. (2012) also indicated that organization's reward system can affect the performance of the employee and their desire to remain employed.

Performance appraisal, which is the fourth management factor that influences employee engagement and retention, is a systematic and periodic process that assesses an employee's job performance and productivity in relation to certain pre-establishment criteria and organizational objectives (Gupta & Kumar 2013; Ongori 2007). It also refers to an activity that, when done well, can drive higher levels of employee engagement and retention and align employees to the organization's goals (Kwenin et al. 2013; Ferreira 2008; MacMillan 2006). This implies that

effective performance appraisal can improve the human performance in the organization, which also means increased employee engagement and retention. Putting in place effective performance measurement and management system permits to empower competent employees and positively contributes to employee engagement and retention and organizational success (Farndale 2012; Parkes & Langford 2008). The employee retention and management literature identifies performance appraisal as an opportunity to develop workers by providing them with helpful feedback that can re-engage them in their roles and align them with the organization's goals and objectives (Mitchell et al. 2009; Hassin 2009; Padaki 2007).

Career development, which is the fifth management factor that influences employee engagement and retention, is not a mere management responsibility. It is a composite organizational process which involves people, addresses their ambitions, assigns them roles and responsibilities commensurate with their potential, evaluates their performance, and creates job positions to accommodate growth ambitions of employees" (Kwenin et al. 2013, p. 20). Careers are sequences of roles persons play during the course of his lifetime, and career development takes into consideration those aspirations of the individual that will likely go beyond his stay with an organization (Moncarz & Kay 2009). Career development is a complex and continuing process that involves several stages in the individual's life, each involving unique sets of issues, themes, and tasks (Greenhaus & Godshalk 2009) which in combination are meaningful only to the individual himself because they are his/her own unique set of aspirations.

Critical in the setting of career development goals is the alignment of family commitments, because a mismatch in the two has proven to negatively affect employees resulting in stress, lower morale and demotivation, reduced productivity, burnout and higher turnover (Edwards & Rothbard 2000; Galinsky & Stein 2000). For this reason, Kwenin et al. (2013) in their study of employee retention in Southern Africa region, recommend the Quality of Work-Life approach wherein career development planning is undertaken in consonance with family and home life as integral considerations. Moncarz and Kay (2009) underscored the long-term need for a firm to provide formal career development programs for it to retain those individuals which it has identified to be valuable to its operations. Employees are always in search of career opportunities in their organization because of the natural tendency among competitive and talented individuals to constantly seek meaningful self-improvement. Failing to find this in their current organization, that individual will tend to look for it in other venues, even though a transfer may entail a potential moderate reduction in pay or benefits (Kwenin & Nzulwa 2013; Moncarz & Kay 2009).

Career development opportunities help organizations avoid the dangers of an obsolescent, unacceptable workforce (Jiang et al 2018). Chew and Wong (2008) also asserted that career development provides a future orientation to human resources development activities. As the employees of an organization grow and change, the kinds of work they may want to do may also changes as well. If organizations can assist their employees in making decisions about future work, they can better prepare employees to be effective when they take on new positions. When organizations understand how their employees make decisions about future work, they can do a better job of planning for their human resource needs (Liu et al. 2013). Glen (2006) found that employee retention is significantly affected by the presence of meaningful work and opportunities for promotion. Other than opportunities for promotion, the evaluation criteria used in the promotion and reward system also had significant effects on employees' turnover intention (Bryant & Allen 2013). Jiang et al. (2012) observed that career development is characterized as a *motivation-enhancing HRM practice*, within the same category as competitive compensation,

incentives and rewards, extensive benefits, promotion, and job security. These practices differ from *skill-enhancing HRM practice*, which aims to ensure employees possess the appropriate skills for their jobs, and *opportunity-enhancing HRM practices* which empowers employees to use their skills and motivation to achieve organizational objectives. Of the three types of HRM practices, it is arguably the motivation-enhancing HRM practices, to which career development belongs, which most contributes to staff retention.

The fifth management factor that influences staff engagement and retention is organizational culture. Much as the workplace conditions provide the environment for workers' physical well-being, the organization culture and structure provide the environment for the workers' social well-being. Precisely what these features in the organization are conducive to employee retention are different for each study researched and for each group of workers researched on, but generally they pertain to organizational culture that supports an increase in the exercise of personal autonomy and discretion in the workplace, alignment of job requirements with individual skills, and harmonization of organizational goals with personal goals. In short, the favored organization has a culture and structure that enables an individual to realize personal fulfillment in a way that enhances engagement with the organization (Goffee & Jones 2013). According to McBain (2007), one of the factors that influence retention of workers is organizational culture. Lockwood (2007) also stated that work environment culture is one factor influencing retention and engagement of workers in modern organizations. A supporting culture and friendly work environment creates retention of workers (Suharti & Suliyanto 2012). In the view of Von Glinow (2005) lack of effective organizational culture, strategy, structure, and policies are some of the reasons why workers do not work for multinational organizations. These issues were also raised and researched in India and Ecuador organizations (Jantzi et al. 2008). The importance of effective HRM policies and practices was discussed by Mensah (2002) regarding factors influencing retention of skilled and experienced workers in organizations operating in Ghana.

Employee retention is also the argument by Tillott and Moxham (2013) in the case of qualified and experienced employee recruitment and retention. The study stresses that workplace culture that engenders trust within the organization enables employees to inspire among their organizations the same trust in their skills and professionalism. Certain cultural elements such as bullying, target-driven priorities, disengagement from management, low staff morale, isolation, lack of openness, acceptance of poor standards of conduct, and denial were identified in the study to be non-conducive to the provision of good care for employees and, ultimately, to employee engagement. Conversely, the presence of certain elements is specified by Manley (2008) to contribute to worker engagement and organizational effectiveness. These include shared governance, role clarification, transformational leadership, open communication, teamwork, safety, person-centeredness, support and challenge, lifelong learning, and involvement and participation by stakeholders.

Organizational structure also plays an important part in engendering engagement. Flatter, leaner and more networked organizations contribute to more effective communication between employer and employee, and therefore greater individual participation (Gelade & Ivery 2006). The traditional, purely directive hierarchy had tended to be too rigid and opaque, and is proving to be anachronistic in this time and age where organizations must be dynamic and transparent in order to compete (Groysberg & Slind 2012; Tannenbaum & Yukl 2002). Karim and Williams (2012) argue that the structural configuration of the units within an organization vary in their

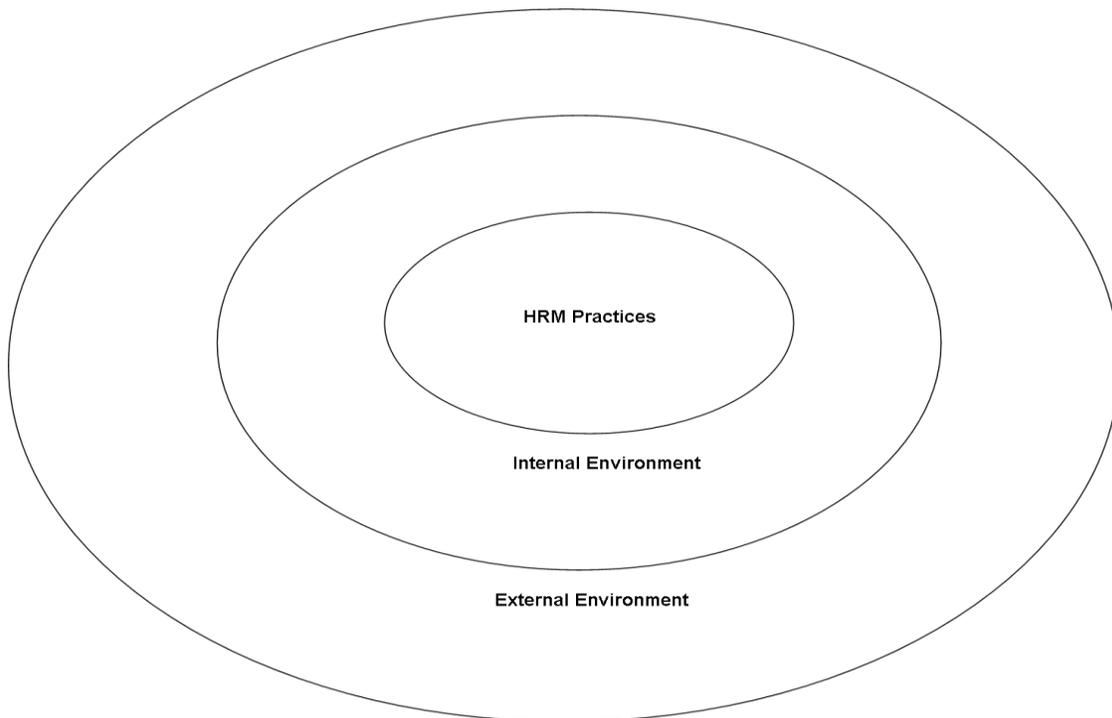
influence on the development of workers and managers within the organization. Consistent with the knowledge-based view of the organization and the theory of human capital, the knowledge gained by individuals working in the organization conform to the structural context in which the knowledge is applied (Lockwood 2007). It is therefore logical to expect that in the course of their careers, managers within an organization will tend to be moved to other units with similar structural characteristics as the ones in which they previously served. This observation has a bearing on the probabilities for reconfiguration and retention of both workers and managers or executives. Based on the unit configurations and how they function in relation to the whole organization, some workers and managers will tend to be more mobile and have a more fruitful career path, which tends to increase the chances for long-term retention.

Contextual Approach for understanding management Practices and Factors affecting it

Contextual approach links various concepts and serves as an impetus for the formulation of theory (Seibold 2002). The current research lends itself to an interpretive paradigm that is aligned with a qualitative approach. The interpretivist looks to understand meanings that constitute actions (Kelle 1997; Schwandt 1994), which acts as an overarching framework for this research. When using interpretivist theory the emphasis is on the importance of the processes which lie between social structure and behavior. The central character in these processes is the person who is active in the construction of social reality (Crotty 2008, p. 33). It is anticipated that by utilizing this theoretical perspective more relevant themes will emerge that both address the research questions and give light to alternative and improved management practices in the humanitarian and development organizations in South Sudan. There are many different theories and models from different disciplines which categorize and explain the factors impacting on management practices. Such include the Neoclassic Wage theory (Boyle et al. 2008; Todaro 2000); Behavioral theories (Armstrong & Baron 2005; Maslow & Herzberg 2004); and the Pull and Push Factors (Loquercio et al. 2006; Boyle et al. 2008; Lehmann et al. 2008). Drawing on the insight from the above perspectives, this study proposes to use the contextual approach in figure 1 below.

Variables identified from the literature were used to construct the above contextual approach. The main variables of interest were HR practices, internal environment, and external environment. Each variable in the model interacts with each other and influences every other. Relative to other variables, such as leadership and culture, management or HR practices play an important role in affecting engagement and retention of workers. This research follows two paths: first, the study of employee engagement and retention, considering the influence of management practices; second, the influence of internal and external environmental factors on management practices. All variables are expected to be influenced by internal and external factors such as organizational culture, staff empowerment, training and career development, performance appraisal and rewards, the macro environment and external stakeholders. An internal variable is something that an organization can take action on and control to some extent (Hendrie 2004; Gupta & Kumar 2013). Organizational culture, staff empowerment, training and career development, performance appraisal and rewards influence employees' attitudes towards their employer and the establishment of work values (Moynihan & Pandey 2005). Macro environment and external stakeholders in this study are considered external factors that influence management practices for engaging and retaining professional workers in war and conflict environments.

Figure 1: Contextual Approach of Understanding Management or HRM Practices and Factors affecting them



Adapted from Lehmann et al. (2008, p. 66) and Hong et al. (2012, p. 64)

Discussions and Conclusion

The aim of this research was to identify management practices for engaging and retaining professional workers in war and conflict environments and discuss their research and practical implications. This research intends to nurture workers who perform professional, managerial, or administrative work in the INGOs and multinational enterprises in politically and economically unstable environments. It is hoped that the insights from the study will be useful not only to organizations and MNEs operating in war and conflict contexts, but also to similar organizations in other developing countries and in Africa, while also contributing to management literature and debate. The research envisages highlighting areas for future research and proposing possible intervention strategies that management can adopt in order to overcome the engagement and retention challenges they are facing in war and conflict societies, Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. As such, the knowledge gained from these endeavors will help advance the cause of organizations, their employees, and those who study them. In many ways the role of the management or HR practitioners has evolved over the years from corporate gatekeeper to corporate change agent. However, that evolving role is being tested more and more as the organization's top executives look to HR for help in transforming their workforce. Responding to the new HR challenges of the 21st century will require new approaches, and new way of looking at corporate culture—that will be necessary to find fresh solutions to ongoing employee retention and engagement challenges, especially in war and conflict environments.

In a world that is changing both in terms of the global nature of work and the diversity of the workforce, having engaged and retained employees may be a key to competitive advantage (Erickson 2005). This will be especially true if we can show how the engagement construct produces effects at levels of analysis of concern to management. As with all good things, the challenge of establishing the conditions for effective management for effective employee engagement and employee retention will be great in the conflict environments. Once again, there seems to be no silver bullet. The betterment of this conclusion is that organizations that get these conditions right will have accomplished something that competitors will find very difficult to imitate. It is easy to change work focus and staff management strategies; it is another thing to create a state of effective human resource managers and engaged workforce. Results from this study will contribute to the limited empirical research on the topic of employee retention and engagement. Specifically, it will contribute the first empirical information about extent of engagement and retention among staff in INGOs and multinational enterprises in conflict societies. Because employee retention and engagement are now understood to be a critical component of successful organizational outcomes, they need to be closely examined in the management field, if for no other reason that organizations are held increasingly more accountable for outcomes (Erickson 2005), and funding is often tied to success strategies (Gupta & Kumar 2013). An engaged staff can contribute significantly to reaching positive outcomes (Lauer 2018; Hendrie 2004).

Therefore, the engagement and retention concepts should be at the forefront of business and human resources management research and policy implementation. The key to understanding the issue of employee engagement and retention is to realize that there is not necessarily a right or wrong way to approach engagement or retention, as long an attempt is being made to engage and retain workforce. We have seen that different types of organizations view engagement and retention theories in different ways. Large humanitarian and development organizations, for instance, deal with the existence of branch offices and a diverse and departmentalized workforce by holding group meetings as a tool to engage and retain employees. In addition, the research has shown that large companies and organizations actively recognize the need for employee engagement and retention and many have formal engagement and retention initiatives in place. These are not the only lessons we have learned, however. This research suggests that organizations need to address this issue, if not for moral and ethical reasons of protecting employee psychological health, then for the practical “bottom line” motivation of controlling turnover costs. Organizations could conceivably enhance the potential for more comprehensive employee engagement and retention by incorporating measures of openness to diversity (or openness to new experiences) in their selection procedures. Furthermore, as suggested by Hobman et al., “introducing norms promoting diversity and the involvement of all team members” (2003, p. 301), as, for instance in orientation or work/team design activities, can help avoid the negative outcomes and promote beneficial aspects of workplace heterogeneity.

In conflict environments and uncertain economic times, employee engagement and staff retention have become particularly important. Some of the ideas discussed thus far point toward a very proactive approach in employee engagement and employee retention as organizations move forward. Employee engagement is not reserved for line staff of commercial companies, either. As O’Connell (2009, p. 112) indicates, “only 13% of senior executives at the vice-presidential level or higher say they are ‘willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them’ — a decline from 29% two years ago.” This paints the picture that employees at all levels and all sectors are becoming increasingly disengaged because of the notion that “in the downturn

employees, especially senior leaders, are just grateful to have a job”. The challenge facing organizations and human resource managers especially in developing countries is engaging and attracting employees with growing senses of complacency or malaise about their current or pending situations. As has been discussed, many organizations are beginning to implement “tools” for engaging and retention employees. Among those are regular group meetings, career conversations, and coaching programs for new hires (Esty & Gerwitz 2008). In addition, some organizations have identified the need for an engaged workforce and taken a direct approach to measuring engagement. According to Veronesi (2019, 86), “leaders must first measure the level of engagement of employees through an engagement survey”. Another proactive approach to engage and retain employees has become commonplace in hospitals and other healthcare facilities. Lauer (2018) has discussed the practice of some of these organizations to employees as though they are customers. In particular, Lauer explains the concept of “giving employees the same sort of personal attention a customer should receive when doing business with any organization.” This, Lauer asserts, creates a culture in which employees are more appreciated and, therefore, more engaged and eventually retained (Lauer 2018). As knowledge of the significance of active engagement practices continues to become commonplace in organizations in developing countries, particularly politically unstable countries, the ways in which employee engagement is approached will continue to evolve. As a result, employee engagement will move further from being a problem facing organizations that struggle to retain workforce and closer to being a standard operating procedure in the modern organizations.

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