Qualification: CIPD Diploma in Applied Human Resources

Module Name: Using a Research Approach in Human Resources

Report Title: **Exploring Employee Retention in the Health and Social Care Sector in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic.**

Word Count – 2113 (excluding Title page, Contents page and References)

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By signing below, I confirm that the work/evidence presented is my own, unaided work. I understand the regulations pertaining to candidate malpractice and the action that may be taken as a result.

Signed: Lucy Moriarty
Date: 05.06.2022

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1. Introduction

Walsingham Support is a national charity within the third sector that supports adults with learning disabilities, autism, brain injuries and complex needs. The organisation was established in 1986 and has over 1,000 staff across England and Wales. During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a significant rise in employee resignations, especially frontline staff. This report will identify ways of which Walsingham Support can retain its workforce to avoid the detrimental effect on the quality of care being provided to its clients. One focus is to improve current employee well-being and engagement practices to ensure the retention of the workforce. To do this I will critically analyse current research and will also undertake my own research collate primary data to still fit for purpose and collate the necessary information.

Aim

The aim of this research is to review primary and secondary data to identify strategies to retain employees within the health and social care sector.

Objectives

- To identify and analyse how employee engagement impacts employee retention within health and social care organisations.
- To identify how employee engagement and wellbeing affects employee retention.
- To identify leaver trends from organisational leaver reports within the last 4 months and make recommendations for retention strategies to be implemented.

2. Literature Review

Employee retention literature from a range of sources was evaluated, and a number of significant themes were discovered. However, not all of the examined literature was included in the report, but the (Skills for Care, 2021) study was included due to the broad diversity of research given and the trustworthiness of the sources.

Employee retention has become a primary goal for organisations, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, when several sectors, particularly the third sector, have suffered significant turnover rates. Research carried out by (Skills for Care, 2021) identified that turnover rates during the pandemic saw 28.5% of employees within the adult social care sector leave their jobs in 2020/21 this equates to 410,000 people. The advice provided by skills for care is that it is vital for organisations within the health and social care sector to attract and retain staff members with the right values and behaviours, it is also crucial that in order to retain the right employees they are supported to develop their learning and skills. According to further findings from Skills for Care, organisations who use values-based recruiting and retention techniques attract employees who perform better, have lower absenteeism, and achieve greater levels of success in acquiring the skills required for their roles.

This research shows that the pandemic emphasised the strains on the social care profession, as well as the need for long-term investment and support to recognise and reward those working in social care, as well as to invest in their training and provide viable career opportunities.

2.1 Employee Retention and the role of HR

HR professionals provide an important role in employee retention which begins with the onboarding process. According to research conducted by Glassdoor (2015) an organisation with a robust onboarding process can increase the retention of new employees by up to 82%. The onboarding process is the first impression that the employee has of the organisation, which can have an impact on their productivity and engagement going forward. The HR department provides an important role in employee retention by improving workplace policies and procedures, benchmarking salaries and benefits and providing support where needed. HR professionals are key in measuring retention rates which they use to identify, improve and strengthen weaknesses. The retention statistics can be used to enhance the employee journey and create a workforce of productive and committed employees who are more satisfied with their jobs, which will result in a positive organisational culture.

2.2 Employee Engagement and Retention

Many studies have shown a link between employee retention and engagement. Organisations where the engagement levels are higher are more likely to see higher retention levels, improved work/life balances of employees and better quality of output (CIPD, 2021) The right tools need to be implemented to provide leadership with continuous data in which to ensure that reward systems are consistent with engagement and retention goals (Gosling and Sloan, 2016). According to (Reimer, 2021) employee retention and engagement go hand in hand, poor employee engagement leads to poor retention of good employees and high turnover rates. Employee engagement strategies work in tandem with staff retention tactics to create and sustain an environment in which existing employees feel supported and a desire to stay with the organisation.

2.3 Employee Retention within the Health & Social Care Sector

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic high turnover rates were already an issue for the health and social care sector, with a turnover rate of 31% compared to the 15% across the remaining sectors, attracting and retaining staff has always been the biggest challenge. As stated by Fitz-Enz (1990) employee retention cannot be identified by one isolated issue but by a range of different elements. Previous research issued by the Health Foundation (2019) suggests that the range of issues that impact recruitment and retention within health and social care are usually the perceptions of the low status of the role, low pay and the lack of career progression. Due to this, Health and Social care are losing employees to different sectors that provide better prospects and pay. However, most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, research shows that the main reasons for resignation was due to anxiety around being exposed to the virus. At the end of 2021, the Department of Health and Social Care implemented regulations to amend the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014, to inform that organisations can only employ or otherwise engage a person in respect of a CQC regulated activity, if the person provides evidence that they have been vaccinated with a complete course, this had a major impact on the workforce and turnover rates due to employees in a direct support role without medical exemption would face dismissal. Although the regulation was revoked prior to the deadline, the organisation saw a number of employees leave. However, if the regulation had come into full effect, it would have caused higher vacancy levels and would have compromised the quality of care for the clients being supported.

3. Methodology

The report is based on primary data taken from exit interviews completed by leavers over a 4-month period from January 2022 – April 2022. There are several advantages to using this sort of research, since the data established from departing employees can be used to drive change and continuous improvement. Although there is no evidence that Exit Interviews reduce turnover, it is evidenced that engaged and valued employees are more likely to contribute and are less likely to leave. An Exit Interview, whether it's a face-to-face conversation, a questionnaire, a survey, or some combination of those methods, can help facilitate leaders' active listening, reveal what works and doesn't work within the organisation, highlight hidden challenges and opportunities, and generate critical competitive intelligence if done well (Spain and Groysberg, 2016).

When employees resign from the organisation, they are provided with a link to complete an exit interview. Employees are also given the option of conducting a face-to-face or telephone interview, but many prefer to complete the exit interview using Microsoft forms because it allows respondents to remain anonymous if they so wish, while also allowing for a less manual approach to data management and analysis. Exit interviews were previously posted or emailed to departing employees and responses were few and far between. The exit interview forms were added to an online survey on Microsoft forms in January 2022, and with the introduction of online surveys, the response rate has improved, resulting in significantly more cross-sectional data to analyse and reply to.

During January 2022 – April 2022, 94 employees from across the organisation resigned for various reasons. On departure all leavers were contacted to complete an exit interview either via a Microsoft forms link or a face-to-face interview. Unfortunately, none of the leavers chose to carry out a face-to-face interview and only 23 employees from 94 leavers (24%) completed the online survey. When the exit interview form was transferred from a word document to an online survey the questions were reviewed and condensed with the addition of multiple-choice questions to guarantee completion and the answers provided were of relevance.

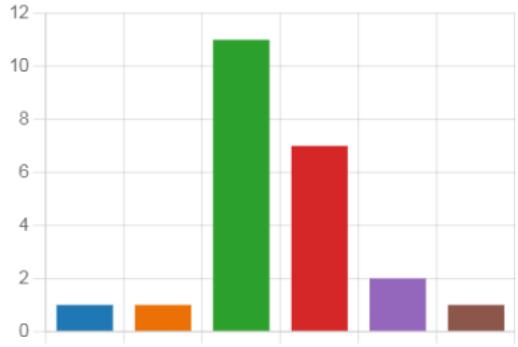
4. Findings

The responses from the online survey's completed over the last 4 months were collated and the findings were analysed as below:

2. What region do you work in?

More Details

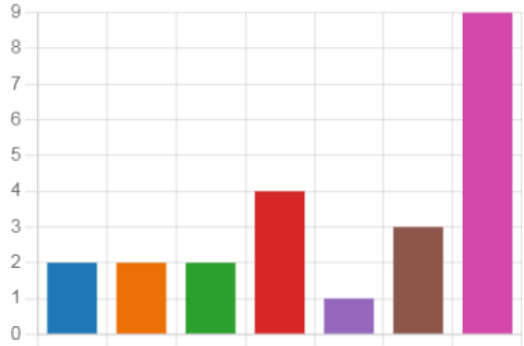
Head Office	1
WSCS	1
North	11
Wales	7
Central	2
South	1



5. How long have you been employed at Walsingham Support?

More Details

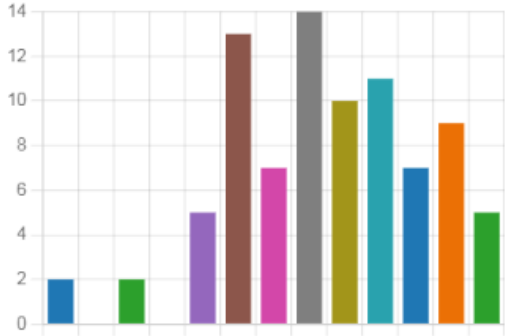
Less than 6 months	2
6 months - 1 year	2
1 - 2 years	2
2 - 3 years	4
3 - 4 years	1
4 - 5 years	3
5+ years	9



6. Why did you begin looking for a new job & What is your reason for leaving? (please select all that apply)

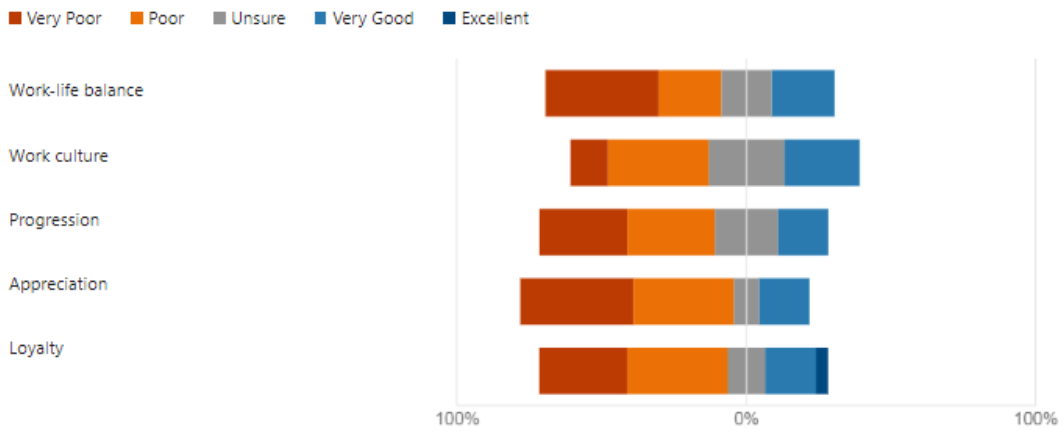
More Details

Restructuring of the team	2
Redundancy	0
Retirement	2
Fancied a change in sector	0
No development opportunities	5
Work-life balance	13
Relationship with management	7
Unhappy at work	14
Feeling burnt out	10
Lack of appreciation and recogn...	11
Culture of organisation/Hierarch...	7
Salary	9
Other	5



7. During your time at Walsingham how would you describe the following areas?

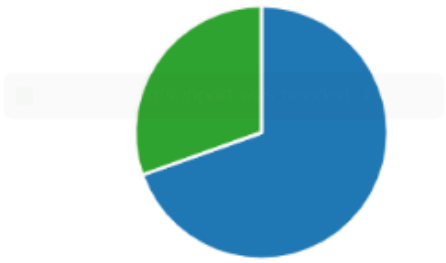
More Details



8. Did you feel that you were equipped to do your job well?

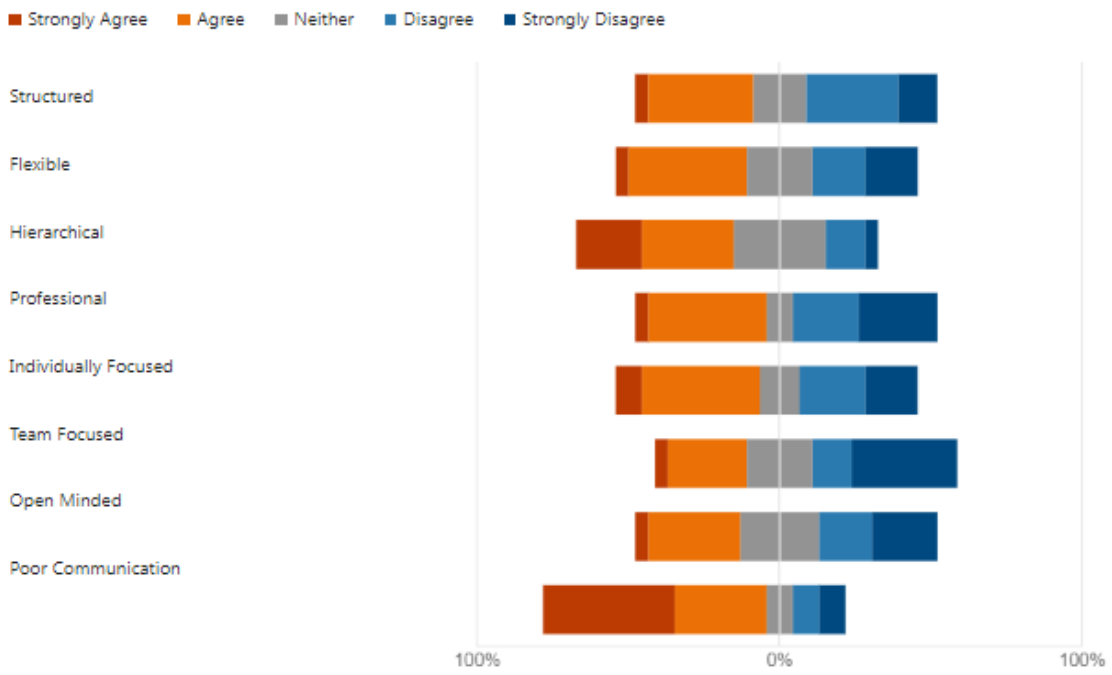
More Details

Yes	16
No	0
More training/support was nee...	7



9. With respect to company culture, would you agree or disagree with the below statements?

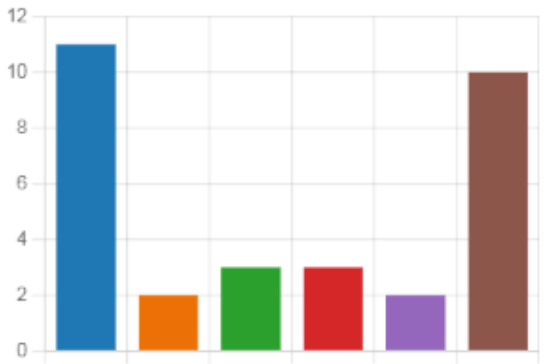
More Details



10. What did you like best about your job?

More Details

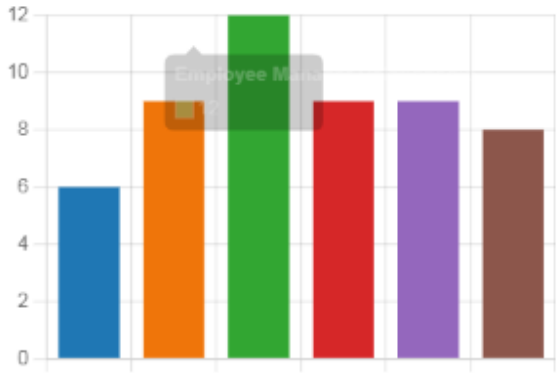
Team	11
Workload	2
Employee Manager Relationship	3
Support/training provided	3
Weekly Check-in/Catch ups	2
Other	10



11. What did you like least about your job?

More Details

Team	6
Workload	9
Employee Manager Relationship	12
Support/training provided	9
Weekly Check-in/Catch ups	9
Other	8



12. What could have been done for you to remain employed here?

More Details

More Training and Support	9
Change in Management	9
Change in Salary	10
Change in Duties	5
Other	11

From reviewing the data collated from the exit interviews, the majority of leavers that completed the exit interview survey were from the Northern region, this could be due to the Northern region being so vast that leavers felt that they could provide their honest opinion without repercussions. The results also show that out of the 23 participants between January 2022 – April 2022, 9 (39%) of them had over 5 years' service, from looking at the results more closely the reason that the 9 staff members with over 5 years' service left was due to poor work/life balance. Which has been a recurring issue throughout the pandemic.

The key themes that emerged from the exit interviews were concerning, highlighting areas that were inadequate and where employees felt that they hadn't been supported, it also highlighted that wellbeing had been severely impacted during the previous two years of the pandemic. There was a variety of reasons for employees leaving, however, the main reasons were due to employees feeling unhappy at work, lack of appreciation and recognition, feeling burnt out and poor relationships with management. The most common reason recorded was due to work-life balance which may have

been caused by high pressure working and employees re-evaluating their lives in the wake of the pandemic. Positively, employees felt that they were properly equipped to carry out their roles and also felt that their team was the best part of their jobs, which could be attributable to support staff working so closely during the pandemic and because of the camaraderie that they shared.

5. Conclusion

Employee retention refers to the use of strategic methods to keep employees engaged and motivated so that they will choose to stay with the organisation and contribute fully to its overall success. Retention is supported through training and development opportunities, as well as investing in employees' career advancement and futures within the company, which enables employees to feel appreciated and ensures a long and rewarding career. Understanding the causes of employee turnover allows organisations to develop measures to decrease turnover and boost employee retention. (CIPD, 2021). As established by the exit interviews, the main reason for turnover has been due to poor employee wellbeing practices and burnout, as a result of the pandemic. As there has been such a high turnover rate in recent months, this has led to high vacancy rates and staff shortages. Unfilled vacancies have increased the pressure on employees, which has led to high levels of stress and absenteeism, and high employee turnover.

It can be concluded that, particularly from information taken from the exit interviews, that generally to improve retention and make health and social care a better place to work, there is a need to develop collaborative, considerate, and inclusive leadership, as well as encouraging teamwork that appreciates their employees and meets their requirements for autonomy, contribution and to help support team conversations about health and wellbeing.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to Walsingham Support's stakeholders, mainly employees and senior management, to ensure that employee development and organisational success are strategically developed:

- An Introduction of an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to support the wellbeing of employees, especially after the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Recognition and rewards packages Employees are attracted, retained, and engaged through recognition and rewards in a fair and responsible manner, the most successful incentive packages address the demands of its employees, the company, and the organisation's mission, culture, and performance. (CIPD, 2021).

- Introduce career development programmes, that can be completed and reviewed in 1:1 supervision meetings. To ensure that employees career pathways are initiated and reviewed on a regular basis.

- Identify other methods, alongside exit interviews, of getting feedback or employee views on the organisation to gauge employee feelings before resignations are received, for example, interviews, focus groups, pulse surveys and case studies.

7. Limitations

The response rate to the exit interviews were lower than expected, as the questionnaires had been recently added to an online survey, the response rate was expected to be higher due to the ease of responding. Some employees are also apprehensive when it comes to completing exit interviews, as they feel that it may affect their future employment if they are too honest.

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Legislation

Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014