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“Examining the Impact of Employee Engagement Strategies on Staff Retention at McDonald’s Corporation”

Introduction

Employee engagement and staff retention present significant challenges for global organisations, especially in the quick-service restaurant industry where employee turnover is high. McDonald’s Corporation employs millions of crew and restaurant staff worldwide, and it recognises employee recruitment, retention and development as key priorities.

(McDonald’s Corporation, 2023) The company acknowledges that retention remains a core focus and that improving the employee experience is fundamental to business success (McDonald’s Corporation, 2023). Engagement — defined as the emotional and professional commitment an individual has to their organisation — is widely recognised as a major driver of retention and long-term service (McDonald’s Corporation, n.d.). McDonald’s has implemented initiatives such as inclusive culture programmes, advanced training via its “Hamburger University” and flexible scheduling to support employee experience and retention (McDonald’s Corporation, n.d.). However, despite these efforts, the company still faces retention challenges globally — one UK FAQ page notes that turnover figures cannot be compared across the sector and that further improvements are ongoing (McDonald’s UK, 2018). This study aims to examine how McDonald’s employee engagement strategies influence staff retention and organisational performance. By investigating the factors that either support or hinder engagement, the research intends to provide actionable insights that will help McDonald’s and comparable organisations to strengthen their human-resource management practices and thereby reduce turnover while boosting long-term performance.

Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to investigate how employee engagement strategies can influence staff retention within McDonald’s Corporation, with a view to improving organizational performance and sustainable human-resource practices. The fast-food industry continues to struggle with high turnover rates, imposing considerable costs on hiring, training and productivity (Cross, 2017; Umezurike, 2021). At McDonald’s, despite various initiatives to improve the employee experience, retention remains a persistent challenge (McDonald’s Corporation, 2023). By analysing the link between engagement initiatives (such as recognition programmes, training, and career pathways) and retention

outcomes, this study aims to reveal which practices are most effective in a high-turnover context like McDonald's (Prado, 2024). Moreover, the research will assess employee perceptions of engagement strategies in McDonald's to understand how these shape commitment and intentions to stay. Through these insights, the study will propose actionable recommendations for McDonald's management and for other firms in the QSR (quick-service restaurant) sector seeking to enhance staff loyalty and reduce attrition. Ultimately, the research contributes to the theoretical debate on engagement-retention linkages while offering managerial value in a globally significant employer.

Research Questions:

1. What are the main reasons that employees leave jobs at fast-food companies like McDonald's? (Mohsin & Lengler, 2014)
2. Which engagement or motivation strategies does McDonald's currently use to keep staff for longer?
3. How do employees at McDonald's feel about the engagement or support they receive?
4. Is there a link between how engaged employees are and how likely they are to stay working at McDonald's? (Dangaiso, 2024)
5. What could McDonald's change or improve in its engagement practices to reduce turnover?

Understanding employee engagement and retention in fast-food companies like McDonald's is important because this industry has some of the highest turnover rates in the world. Industry reports show that many restaurant workers leave their jobs within a short time, which increases training and hiring costs for companies (Toast, 2025). This makes fast-food businesses focus more on keeping staff happy and motivated.

McDonald's explains in its public documents that it offers training, growth opportunities and benefits to support workers and improve the employee experience (McDonald's Corporation, 2024). These programmes are used to help employees feel valued and stay longer. However, turnover is still a challenge across the fast-food sector, and more needs to be learned about which strategies really work (McDonald's Corporation, n.d.).

Academic studies also show that employees are more likely to stay when they feel supported, respected and engaged in their work (Mohsin, 2014). Research further suggests that training and good management practices can reduce turnover and improve job satisfaction (Adhvaryu et al., 2024).

Together, these sources show that studying McDonald's engagement strategies is important because it can help identify real solutions to keep staff motivated and reduce turnover in the fast-food industry.

Literature Gaps and Contribution of the Study

Although many studies discuss employee turnover in the fast-food industry, there are still important gaps. Much research focuses on general turnover causes such as stress, low pay and long working hours (Mohsin, 2014). However, fewer studies look closely at **how engagement programmes at specific global companies like McDonald's actually affect staff behaviour and retention**. Also, many industry reports describe strategies such as training and career pathways, but they often come from company statements rather than employee feedback (McDonald's Corporation, 2024). This means there is limited independent research showing whether these strategies truly work in real restaurants.

Another gap is that a lot of academic research examines fast-food labour in the United States or Asia, and less attention has been given to McDonald's employees' views in other markets (Adhvaryu et al., 2024). Industry reports show turnover is still high despite training investments (Toast, 2025), meaning more insight is needed into what employees value and what motivates them to stay.

This study helps fill these gaps by exploring **employees' own experiences** and assessing **which engagement practices make the biggest difference**. The findings will help McDonald's and other fast-food companies design more effective engagement and retention strategies based on real employee needs.

Research Methodology & Design

Research Approach

This study will use a **mixed-methods research approach**, combining both qualitative and quantitative data. Mixed methods are useful when a topic needs to be understood from different angles, especially when exploring people's opinions and also measuring patterns (Creswell, 2014). In this research, surveys will be used to collect **quantitative data** from McDonald's employees about their engagement and intention to stay. Surveys help collect information from many people quickly and allow trends to be analysed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019).

In addition, **qualitative interviews** will be carried out with a smaller group of McDonald's employees to explore their personal experiences and feelings about engagement programmes. Interviews allow deeper understanding and provide detailed reasons behind employees' decisions and attitudes (Bryman, 2017). Using both methods together will give a clearer picture of how engagement strategies affect retention, because numbers alone cannot show emotions, and interviews alone cannot represent the whole workforce (Creswell, 2014).

This approach will therefore help identify common trends in employee engagement and also explain **why** employees stay or leave McDonald's, making the findings more reliable and meaningful for real business decisions in the fast-food sector.

Data Collection, Sampling, and Ethical Considerations

This research will use both **surveys and interviews** to collect data from McDonald's employees. Surveys will gather **quantitative data** on employee engagement and retention intentions. Surveys are useful for collecting information from a large number of participants and identifying patterns (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Short interviews will be conducted with selected employees to collect **qualitative insights** into their experiences and views. Interviews help researchers understand feelings, motivations, and personal experiences in more depth (Bryman, 2017).

A **purposive sampling** approach will be used, meaning participants will be chosen because they currently work at McDonald's and can provide relevant information (Taherdoost, 2016). This method ensures the study includes employees with direct experience of engagement strategies. At least 30 survey responses and 5–10 interviews will be targeted to obtain meaningful perspectives.

Ethical guidelines will be followed throughout the study. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the research, and they will give **voluntary consent** before taking part. No personal details will be shared, and responses will remain anonymous to protect privacy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Participants will also have the right to withdraw at any time. These steps help ensure fairness, confidentiality, and respect for participants.

Business Relevance & Practical Implications

Potential Impact of Findings on Business Practices

The findings of this research could help McDonald's and other fast-food companies improve how they manage and support employees. If the study shows that strong engagement programmes increase retention, managers may invest more in training, fair scheduling, career development, and recognition systems. Reports already show that when employees feel valued and supported, they perform better and are more likely to stay (Gallup, 2023). This research could therefore encourage McDonald's to strengthen staff development and communication practices to build a more motivated workforce.

Higher retention can also reduce recruitment and training costs, which are known to be high in fast-food businesses (Toast, 2025). By understanding which engagement strategies employees value most, McDonald's could improve workplace satisfaction and service quality. Academic work also shows that happy employees deliver better customer experiences (Adhvaryu et al., 2024), meaning the business may benefit through improved customer satisfaction and higher sales.

Finally, this research could contribute to industry knowledge by providing employee-based evidence rather than company statements. This can help policymakers and HR teams design more effective strategies to reduce turnover and improve work conditions across fast-food organisations.

How This Research Could Inform Decision-Making and Industry Practice

This research can help managers at McDonald’s make better decisions about employee engagement and retention. If the results show which engagement activities — such as training, rewards, or flexible shifts — are most valued by employees, managers can focus resources on those strategies. Research shows that businesses with strong engagement programmes make smarter staffing decisions and see better performance outcomes (Gallup, 2023). By understanding what keeps employees motivated, McDonald’s managers could improve scheduling, communication, and career development planning.

The study could also support HR planning by helping leaders understand why employees leave and how to improve workplace conditions, which would minimise turnover costs (Toast, 2025). Encouraging investment in employee support can also help improve customer service, since engaged employees tend to deliver better customer experiences (Adhvaryu et al., 2024).

On a wider scale, the findings could inform the fast-food sector by offering real employee perspectives, rather than relying only on corporate reports. This can support industry changes such as better employee training, fairer working practices, and improved management approaches. Overall, the research can guide business leaders and policymakers in creating more effective and motivating work environments.

Plan of Work

Time Schedule (8-Week Plan)

Week	Task
Week 1	Finalise research topic and objectives
Week 2	Literature review and source collection
Week 3	Design survey and interview questions
Week 4	Collect survey responses from employees
Week 5	Conduct interviews with selected staff
Week 6	Analyse survey and interview data
Week 7	Write findings, discussion, and conclusion
Week 8	Final proof-reading and submission

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