

What's Pulling or Pushing Your People Away?

Most employees' value jobs that have great work-mates and interesting work. What seems to distinguish those who are more likely to be 'movers' during the coming year is that they are looking to join a business with a long term vision, and where there is opportunity to make decisions in their work. These may be aspects that are missing in their present work, but they are potential factors that could pull people out of your organisation.

It could be a sudden crisis – a change in reporting relationship, a partner getting a new job, or a call from the headhunter. Or it could be an accumulation of commuting hassles, the over-due review, and a friend talking about the fun she's having in her job. FX Consultants is running an on-line survey to check what people would value in a new job. In this update on the results we identify what could make a difference to retaining or losing staff. We paid particular attention to what would be attractive to those people who are more likely to leave in the year.

In a competitive talent market organizations are seeking not only to attract new talent but also to put a plug in voluntary employee turnover – but how? What people say is important to them could be part of the answer.

In our on-line survey we investigate 28 possible turnover factors (reasons/motivations) as a function of the strength of participant's intention to leave. Respondents are asked to distribute a total of 20 points between the 28 factors to indicate which of the factors are important to them in an overall employment proposition. This forced choice methodology simulates the trade-offs people may have to make, and to identify what is more important.

Nearly two-thirds of those completing the survey could be described as 'movers' – they considered themselves likely to change jobs in the next 12 months. This is higher than we typically find in in-house surveys. This gives us a sample that may provide greater insights into the factors those considering leaving their jobs are contemplating.

The percent of participants rating each factor as important in their employment proposition considerations were calculated for the overall sample as well as for each of five self-reported leaving intention groups. The top 5 and bottom 5 factors for each group are shown in Table 1; the questions relating to each of the items in the tables are given in Table 2.

Table 1: Top 5 and Bottom 5 factors considered important in an employment proposition overall, and by self-reported leaving intention.

TOP 5 Attractors						
Overall	Rank	Very likely to move	Likely to move	May move	Not sure	May stay
Co-workers	1	Co-workers	Co-workers	Co-workers	Challenge	Co-workers
Challenge	2	Challenge	High Pay	Challenge	Participative	Well-being
Well-being	3	Vision	Challenge	Supervisor	Reputation	Fair Pay
Supervisor	4	Decision	Well-being	Reputation	Co-workers	Decision
Reputation	5	Supervisor	Vision	Well-being	Well-being	Supervisor
BOTTOM 5						
Overall	Rank	Very likely to move	Likely to move	May move	Not sure	May stay
Conflict Sup	1	Conflict Sup	Conflict Sup	Conflict Sup	Social Resp	Promotion
Social Resp.	2	Career	Career	Team Rwrđ	Promotion	Social Resp
Team Rwrđ	3	Team Rwrđ	Social Resp	Flat Status	Conflict Sup	Conflict Sup
Career	4	Shares	Flat Status	Super	Flat status	Super
Promotion	5	Org Rwrđ	Information	Social Resp	Information	Team Rwrđ

Note: LI1 = very strong leaving intention; LI2 = strong leaving intention; LI3 = moderate leaving intention; LI4 = neither intending to leave or stay; LI5 = moderate intention not to leave.

Table 2: Questionnaire items for Top 5 and Bottom 5 factors considered important in an employment proposition overall, and by self-reported leaving intention.

Factor	Questionnaire Item
Co-workers	Co-workers are good people to work with
Challenge	The work is interesting and challenging
Well-being	The organisation takes the well being of its people very seriously
Supervisor	You have a good relationship with your supervisor
Reputation	The organisation has a good reputation for the quality of its goods or services
Vision	The organisation is committed to a long term vision rather than simply short term results
Decision Making	There is opportunity for you to make decisions in your areas of responsibility
High Pay	Wage rate or base salary significantly higher than alternative options
Participative	There is opportunity to participate in decisions affecting the way you do your job
Fair Pay	Your pay is fair relative to what others receive, considering both your and their skills and contribution
Conflict Support	Supported if there is conflict in the team
Social Responsibility	The organisation has a strong reputation for its commitment to corporate social responsibility
Team Reward	All in the team are rewarded financially for achieving or exceeding team targets
Career	There is the chance to change career or occupation within the organization

Promotion	There are good prospects for promotion
Shares	There is opportunity for good performers to buy shares and share in the financial success of the organisation
Organisation Reward	All in the organisation are rewarded financially when it achieves or exceeds its targets
Flat Status	There are not big status differences between managers (or Partners) and staff
Information	You have open access to important information about how the organisation is doing
Superannuation	The organisation offers superannuation or other opportunities for future financial security

Our overall results match well with other research. ‘Good co-workers’, weighted as the most important factor in the overall employment proposition in our research, is also the number one reason for ‘staying’ in other NZ research. Similarly, ‘challenging and interesting work’ weighted as the second most important factor in the overall employment proposition, was found by other researchers to be the number one reason given for ‘leaving’.

Challenging and interesting work is the second most important factor overall, and is ranked in the top three for those very likely to move, through to those that are non-committal in their intention to leave or stay. Challenging work does not make the top 5 for those who may stay. This could be an indication that those who are less likely to move find their current work challenging or interesting and therefore weight other factors as having more impact on their employment decisions (such as fair pay, which doesn’t make it into the top 5 for those in groups more likely to leave).

Notably, the organisation’s long-term ‘vision’ may also be a discriminator for those who are more likely to be thinking of leaving than for those with a moderate or lesser intention to leave.

Looking at what matters least in employment propositions a similar pattern emerges. ‘Conflict support’ is ranked as the least important consideration, overall and across all leaving intention groups.

The extent to which the organisation actively promotes ‘social responsibility’ ranks second least important overall, but varies according to how likely people are to leave their organisation (not appearing in the bottom-rated options for those most likely to be moving on). This suggests that although social responsibility is not seen as an important factor overall, as the intention to leaves become stronger and people start considering other companies they would actually like to work for it may become important in the employment proposition.

The ‘career’ factor also varies across the groups. The chance to change career or occupation within the organization is ranked fourth least important overall, coming in second least important for both those very likely to move, and those likely to move. However, it is not ranked in the bottom 5 for those

who are less likely to leave. Perhaps those with a strong intent to leave are not as concerned with opportunities for career progression. They possibly don't see their career as being within a particular organization, instead seeing it as something they control in a buoyant labour market. Career opportunities within the organization may however have impact on retaining those with less intent to leave, and be an area where organisations can move the tipping point back from strong leaving intention.

There are some lessons if you are intent on keeping talented people. Quality relationships with co-workers, challenging and interesting work and the drive for personal growth are very important. But in a context where labour turnover and job loyalty are multi-determined there are several interrelated factors which need monitoring. Employers have much to gain from regular measurement of employee attitudes towards work, organization, policies and practice. Improved systems for individual performance review, particularly when they encourage greater employee involvement in personal development planning and job design, are also likely to prove valuable.

Greater investments in these HRM dimensions should, in time, save money in staff replacement costs and thus show a significant return on investment for employers.

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