

Exploring the Dynamic Relationship Empowerment between Flexible Working and Employee Retention in Small Scale Gold Mining Firms in Mberengwa District

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamic relationship between empowerment and flexible working and its impact of employee retention in the small-scale gold mining sector. This study employed positivism research philosophy. The quantitative research design was employed as the research approach. The research design was explanatory. The convenient sampling was used in this study to select one hundred and fifty participants. The research data were gathered from questionnaires. The results revealed that higher job satisfaction, productivity, top performance emanate from employee empowerment. In addition, empowered employees are more creativity, innovation, and ooze with problem-solving skills. The study also revealed that flexible working conditions engender greater trust in leadership and loyalty to the organization and, above all, leads to improved business results and customer satisfaction. This study recommends that employees should be empowered to make decisions pertaining to their work. Furthermore, managers ought to maintain clear communication of expectations, offer training and development opportunities, encourage employee feedback and participation. The study also recommends the management to establish a supportive workplace culture. An atmosphere of learning should be created at the company. The managers are also recommended to employee compressed schedules so as to enable them to work your standard work hours per week in fewer workdays. This raises employee standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

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Keywords: Empowerment, Flexible Working, Satisfaction, Employee Retention

Introduction

This study sought to explore the dynamic relationship between empowerment and flexible working and its impact of employee retention in the small-scale gold mining sector. Long-term health and success of any organization depends upon the retention of key employees (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021). To a great extent customer satisfaction, organizational performance in terms of increased sales, satisfied colleagues and reporting staff, effective succession planning is dependent upon the ability to retain the best employees in any organization. Encouraging employees to remain in the organization for a long period of time can be termed as employee retention (Pasaribu et al., 2021). Thus, employee retention is a process in which the employees are strategically encouraged to remain with the organisation they are working for a long period of time or at least until the project is completed. It can be argued that all companies prosper when their key resource which is the human being is well

motivated and energised to accomplish set organisational goals. Notwithstanding the challenges and inevitable limitations of retaining key personnel exacerbated by the persistent and adverse Zimbabwean macro-economic environment among other distortions, it remains one of the best alternatives of propelling an organisation to dizzy heights of prosperity (Chikove, 2023). Although, as is the case with an army scoring small victories in a major war, it would be myopic for management to engage in modest bouts of self-praise and congratulations for having met targets when employee morale is low. Organizations and employees share a symbiotic relation, where both are dependent on each other to satisfy their needs and goal.

According to Bagus and Ilomata (2021) empowerment connotes giving employees discretion over certain task-related activities. This implies that employee empowerment is the transfer of power from the employer to the employees. Employee empowerment focuses on developing trust, motivation, and participating in decision-making (Armstrong, 2021). Scholars suggest that employee empowerment strategies include management leadership and commitment, communication, employee inclusion, reward system, clearly defined goals, managerial strategies, training and delegation of authority (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021). Arguably, effective management leadership and commitment is needed to maintain employee empowerment. Employees in the small-scale gold mining sector will demonstrate a high level of commitment if they perceive that top management show commitment by providing adequate resources.

Chikove and Shiri (2021) submit that organisations need to involve employees in critical thinking, basic leadership and methodology details to enhance performance. Thus, inclusion allows employees to secure new information and understand what is expected of them. Arguably, a robust reward system is important to empower employees and motivate them to put in their best (Collins, 2021). It can, therefore, be noted that employees are empowered and motivated when their organisation sets clear and challenging goals. Thus, the management should create an environment that supports employees to do everything they want desirously and intentionally. Managerial strategies such as delegation, participating in decision making and leadership style (Chikove, 2023), can promote employee empowerment in the small-scale gold mining sector.

Training will motivate employees to participate more actively by improving their confidence level (Gahlawat & Kundu, 2021). Arguably, employee training should focus on total quality, decision making, employee relations and customer care. Employee training has been associated with a couple of benefits such as lower costs, reduced turnover and absenteeism, increased revenues, employee satisfaction and flexibility empowerment (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021). Thus, delegation of authority can enable an organisation to nurture hidden talents and competencies to meet the business need. It can therefore be noted that when empowerment is at its most effective the result would be workers in the small and medium scale gold mining sector acting on their own, with a clear direction and within clear parameters set by leaders.

According to Baek and Kim (2021) adduce that empowered employees are happy with the training they received, self-development programmes, their participation various activities and consideration of their ideas and opinion. Extant literature suggests that employee empowerment has a direct influence on employee performance, job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Bagus & Ilomata, 2021). Therefore, employee empowerment significantly influences customer satisfaction, quality improvement and organisational effectiveness at Zimplats Holdings Limited. The managers of firms in the gold mining

company should be conscious of how they empower employees because it may weaken the organisation culture

Workplace flexibility is a strategy for responding to changes that may occur in the workplace and when meeting expectations (Lim & Weissmann, 2021). Thus, in the workplace, employees, employers and work schedules may all be flexible. Workplace flexibility and its benefits, enables the personnel to find ways to improve their work, reach their professional and personal goals, and excel in a particular job. A flexible work arrangement (FWA) empowers an employee to choose what time they begin to work, where to work, and when they will stop work (Ababneh, 2023). The idea is to help manage work-life balance and benefits of FWA can include reduced employee stress and increased overall job satisfaction. On the contrary, some employees refrain from using their FWA as they fear the lack of visibility can negatively affect their career (Alanizan, 2023). Overall, a flexible work arrangement has a positive effect on incompatible work/family responsibilities, which can be seen as work affecting family responsibilities or family affecting work responsibilities. In other words, there is a positive relationship between work life balance and flexible working arrangements. It is noteworthy that FWA is also helpful to those who have a medical condition or an intensive care-giving responsibility, where without FWA, part-time work would be the only option (Alathari, 2021). Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA) are both important and significant to workplaces in this twenty-first century. Mining firms are burdened with how to balance their employees work-life balance to enable them to reduce all the attendant problems associated with them while ensuring efficient and effective performance. Hence, a lot of organizations offer flexible working arrangements to employees due to the benefits associated with flexibility both for the employees and employers. Thus, FWA enhances employee well-being.

Flexible, non-standard or alternative work arrangements, as the case may be, are basically options that allow an employee to work outside the traditional confines of a standard organization of work with respect to such different modalities as amount, distribution of working time and place of work (Alshamrani et al., 2023). This is in direct contrast with traditional work arrangements that require employees to work at a standard time and place daily. Flexibility in scheduling of hours includes teleworking, flexitime, job share, phased retirement, contract work, part time jobs and term time working. Flexitime is notably more applicable to professional and higher-level employees than lower-level employees and even workers in service and manufacturing jobs seem to have less access to it than jobs in other industries.

Flexibility in location relates to the place of work and involves employees working from a location outside of their physical organizational setting. It includes telecommuting, satellite offices, neighbourhood work centres and mobile workers (Andreas, 2022). It is noteworthy that telework or flexi-place is a flexible work schedule that permits employees to work in varied locations, typically using information and communication technologies. It avails employees the opportunities to engage in regular tele- interactions with work colleagues, while reducing both the commuting time and the need to acquire urban office space. Flexibility in length of the work normally involves the relocation of work time into fewer and more manageable tasks.

Alshamrani et al. (2023) define retention as “the effort by an employer to keep desirable workers in order to meet business objectives.” Thus, retention is when the organisation is able to hold onto those employees they want to keep, for longer than the rival firms or

competitors. The retention should be analysed at more than just a single level the influence of employee retention can arise at multiple levels. Employee retention has emerged as a critical yet complex aspect for businesses to navigate. Chikove (2023) opine that the shifting dynamics of the workplace, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic, have brought this issue into sharp focus. Retention is considered as multifaceted component of an organization's human resource policies. It begins with the hiring of right people and persists with working agendas to keep them involved and devoted to the organization.

Globally, retaining qualified employees remains the most important role human capital departments perform in every organisation. This is because businesses require competent employees to exist and stay in business (Chikove, 2023). As a result, one of many modern organisations' major issues is retaining talented employees to achieve organisational performance. Organisations with a deficiency in top talent talented will have difficulty reaching their desired goals and objectives since inadequate employee retention strategies typically result in employee turnover. According to Ababneh (2023), organisations have experienced high labour turnover, and this has led to higher recruitment costs, work disruptions and training cost. The negative consequences of a high turnover or attrition rate in an organisation cannot be overstated. There is always a considerable knowledge vacuum when one individual quits an organisation (Gahlawat & Kundu, 2021), creating work for the remaining team members. High labour turnover has serious repercussions for the organisations in terms of recruitment and new employee training. This implies that the people managers should realise that set organisational goals can be achieved when employees stay long at the firm. Such workers are conversant with the organization's culture, and they generally become efficient and effective in executing their duties. Employee retention can also be examined in the context staff turnover, which means the aggregate number of workers that may decide to part ways with the organisation.

Therefore, a conducive environment that promotes effective motivation to stimulate employee morale and job satisfaction is required. In addition, high employee involvement boosts employee morale and ultimately leads to high productivity. Collins (2021) affirms that the organisation's ability to satisfy their customers as well as strong organizational performance in terms of increased sales, are dependent upon the ability to attract and retain the best employees in any organization. Therefore, the leaders of firms in the Zimbabwean gold mining industry are obliged to encourage their employees so that they remain within the firm for a long time to derive maximum benefits form their expertise. Therefore, gold mining firms should strive to remain afloat by effectively motivating their employees.

Chikove and Shiri (2021) submits employees can only commit themselves that it is only those workers who are effectively motivated and satisfied with their work who tend to be more committed to their jobs. Thus, job satisfaction positively correlates to high performance and engenders employee retention. Employee retention enables the organisational identification, commitment, as well as organisational citizenship behaviour. This implies that employees are key to an organisation's success and that the managers should be supportive. Baek & Kim (2021) opines that human capital managers should realise the difficulty associated with finding highly skilled personnel hence quite a number of organizations today take great care of their staff in an endeavour to retain them. Therefore, one of the main reasons why the human resources department exists at an organisation is to make sure that the firm does not lose its personnel unnecessarily. It is imperative to note that organisational success and achieving competitive advantage are both rooted in proper management retention of talented

workers. Therefore, one of the most certain ways to retain talented employees is ensuring that they remain motivated.

Armstrong (2021) affirms that firms should strive to keep their employees happy so as to tap the best out of them. The management of mining organisations should view employee motivation as a strategy to increase employee productivity and retention. Managers of mining firms should come up with employee retention strategies so as to guard against the loss of key personnel. An effectively motivated employee would want to remain at an organisation and strive to propel the organisation towards achieving its set objectives. Fundamentally, the keeping of employees at an organisation for long periods is much more important than merely hiring them. Thus, retention is the process of using a multiplicity of rewards to encourage skilled employees to remain at the same organisation for a maximal period of time.

Methodology

This research uses the positivism paradigm. This research philosophy forbids the researcher in engaging in a mudslinging contest or debates concerning ‘concepts as truth and reality.’ Therefore, this is bound to give a picture (idea) as to why knowledge that is contingent is deemed not only binding but also crucial to the researchers. The quantitative research design was employed, and the research approach and the research design was explanatory. The convenient sampling technique was employed. The target population was derived from the population in the small-scale gold mining sector in Mberengwa District. The target population was 1500. The sample size was 150.

Fundamentally, identifying a sufficient sample size in this study was determined by Etikan and Bala (2017), who opine that a 10% or more of the target population is regarded as a sample since the population is homogeneous. Hence from a target population of 1500 participants a sample size of 150 participants was selected to participate in the study. Thus, the researcher in this study used 150 respondents.

The response rate is acceptable as 100% of the population was accessed. The majority of the sample comprised males (90%) compared with females (10%) while. Thus, the mining sector is a male domain. In the study, the age categories of the participants 20-29 years old 10.5%, the 30-39 years group (30.6%), 40-49 years (45.16%), and 50+ (13.74%). Therefore, it can be safely concluded that the majority of the sample used in this study were the 40 to 49 years age group, with a cumulative percentage of 45.16% of participants being less than 50 years.

The standardised questionnaire was developed by the researcher was used. The questionnaire was constructed as thus: section1: biographic data, section 2: Self-assessment questions on collective bargaining. The biographical data sheet gathered information on the participants’ position held, age, marital status, work experience, highest academic qualification and highest professional qualification.

The researcher sought permission to conduct the study from the management of various small scale gold mining firms in Mberengwa District. This was followed by a pilot study, conducted to assess the effectiveness of the instruments in relation to aspects such as length, wording and validity. The study used questionnaires to collect data. The participants gave their informed consent before participating in the study. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher directly to participants after obtaining a sampling frame from the management which allowed the researcher to group the miners into different groups, such

as functional categories. Other ethical considerations applied throughout the research process include confidentiality and withdrawal from the research process even after informed consent had been given, was allowed.

Results and discussion

Employee empowerment

Table 1 shows the results of the factor analysis for supply chain management roles-related factors. The KMO of the identified factor was 0.756. The associated Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant as $p \leq 0.00$ and Cronbach's alpha was 0.847. A mean of 4.2713 and a low standard deviation of 0.31057 was confirmed for the factor employee empowerment. This means indicates a tendency to lean more toward the higher end of the Likert scale, above 3 in Table 1 implies that employee empowerment plays a pivotal role in the retention of top talent.

Table 1: Employee empowerment

Questionnaire statements	Employee empowerment Related Factor
Increases the Productivity and Morale.	.823
Solving Problems Quicker	.792
Bigger Involvement Leading to Bigger Commitment.	.778
Greater trust in leadership and loyalty to the organization	.755
Improved business results and customer satisfaction	.707
Leads to creativity and innovations	.692
Cronbach Alpha	.847
Mean & Standard deviation	4.2713 \pm .31057
KMO value	0.756
Bartlett's Test value	65.895%

The results reveal that having empowered employees is the dream of every leader. It is undeniable that all managers want employees who show initiative by taking on and completing tasks with little guidance. Of course, the expectation is that these people will perform only in ways consistent with company objectives and values. The results corroborate with the views of Andreas (2022) who asserts that the leadership should often guard against micro-management by empowering employees to make autonomous decisions. Therefore, the managers of mining firms ought to desist from having selfish intentions but strive to create an environment of empowerment. Below are eight tips to help make your company a place where people feel good about stepping up and taking it on. Employee empowerment increases productivity and morale. Many companies are built on top-down communication from management. Employees in this environment feel there is no purpose in taking a stand, since they have no direct channel and don't feel they'll have an impact. Give employees structured ways to make their thoughts, feelings and observations known enables the firm to solve problems quickly, easily and regularly. Managers should help employees understand that their input is valued even if they decide to go a different way. In addition, they should acknowledge them for sharing and reward valuable input that helps the company. It is imperative to note that empowerment leads to greater trust in leadership and loyalty to the organization. Furthermore, improved business results and customer satisfaction emanate from empowered employees.

The results are also consistent with Chukwuma (2023) who assert that bigger involvement leading to bigger commitment and above all empowerment leads to creativity and innovations.

Managers should give their employees the green light to be innovative. A leader who is constantly looking over the shoulder of employees is little more than a babysitter. Give your employees reasons and opportunity to stretch out on their own and even lead others. They may stumble, but they will learn a lot and build the respect of their colleagues while preparing to be great empowering leaders themselves someday.

The results are in tandem with the views of Bagus and Ilomata (2021) empowerment connotes giving employees discretion over certain task-related activities. This implies that employee empowerment is the transfer of power from the employer to the employees. Employee empowerment focuses on developing trust, motivation, and participating in decision-making (Armstrong, 2021). Scholars suggest that employee empowerment strategies include management leadership and commitment, communication, employee inclusion, reward system, clearly defined goals, managerial strategies, training and delegation of authority (Alsafadi & Altahat, 2021). Arguably, effective management leadership and commitment is needed to maintain employee empowerment. Employees in the small-scale gold mining sector will demonstrate a high level of commitment if they perceive that top management show commitment by providing adequate resources. Small and medium scale gold mining organisations can enhance the productivity if employees are empowered. Thus, the management needs to involve employees in critical thinking, basic leadership and methodology details to enhance performance. Thus, inclusion allows employees to secure new information and understand what is expected of them. Arguably, a robust reward system is important to empower employees and motivate them to put in their best (Collins, 2021). It can, therefore, be noted that employees at in the small and medium scale gold mining sector are empowered and motivated when their organisations set clear and challenging goals. Thus, the management should create an environment that supports employees to do everything they want desirously and intentionally. Managerial strategies such as delegation, participating in decision making and an appropriate leadership style can promote employee empowerment in the gold mining sector.

Flexible working conditions.

Table 2 shows the results of the factor analysis for the Effects of global supply challenges on firms' Related Factors. The KMO of the identified factor was 0.872. The associated Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant as $p \leq 0.00$ and Cronbach's alpha was 0.885. A mean of 4.4383 and a low standard deviation of 0.36954 was confirmed for the factor flexible working conditions. This means indicates a tendency to lean more towards the higher end of the Likert scale, above three. The findings imply that there are a plethora of benefits of flexible working for organisations such as recruiting and retaining a broader pool of talent, reduced recruitment costs (due to lower attrition) and retaining employees' skills, leading to financial gains and a potential competitive advantage for the organisation. In addition, employee engagement and loyalty are strongly rooted in a flexible working arrangement. Thus, employees are more likely to be flexible for the organisation (for example, changing their working hours when the need arises), and show more loyalty. Enhanced work performance Increased productivity and better quality of work, more efficient ways of working, with employees managing and organising their workloads better.

Table 2: Effects of global supply challenges on firms' related factors

Questionnaire Statements	Flexible working conditions related factor.
Attract and retains top talent	.820
Increases productivity and performance.	.800
Leads to job satisfaction	.781
Promotes work life balance	.762
Leads to professional development	.749
Cronbach Alpha	.885
Mean & Standard deviation	4.4383 ± .36954
KMO value	0.872
Bartlett's Test value	58.825%

The results are consistent with Dargahi et al. (2022) who assert that FWA engenders a work life balance hence avoiding negative employee outcomes and work-related stress, reduced sickness absence and other negative employee outcomes. Employees going 'above and beyond' Employees going beyond the call of duty, more motivated to work hard for the organisation, and giving back to the organisation (by, for example, by training other staff). FWA creates a positive working culture, in which employees feel valued. It is noteworthy that having a flexible working campaign and being known as an employer that supports flexible working can make an organisation an employer of choice. It also enables the workforce to work in line with their needs that is being able to balance the workforce in line with the organisation's needs and avoid being over-staffed.

Results also confirm findings by Blustein et al. (2023) who advocate that the flexibility of work arrangement in studies is analysed in the context of improving the balance between professional and private life (work life balance) and also the increase of work efficiency. Work-life balance is indicated as one of the most important benefits of implementing flexible work arrangements for employees, although it should also be noted that macroeconomic context - the country's social welfare system, legal support regulating flexible work arrangement practices, and microeconomic context - organizational culture of a company, managerial support (Alshamrani et al., 2023) have an impact on the results. The balance between work and private life is a strong mediator between flexible work arrangements and job satisfaction, and providing appropriate, flexible solutions in the organization is important in order to increase employee satisfaction, commitment, improvement of their performance, and thus increase of productivity.

Conclusion and recommendations

It can however be concluded that having empowered employees is the dream of every manager who seeks to excel and above all attain organisational objectives. Employee empowerment increases productivity and morale. The managers should give employees structured ways to make their thoughts, feelings and observations known enables the firm to solve problems quickly, easily and regularly. Managers should help employees understand that their input is valued even if they decide to go a different way. In addition, they should acknowledge them for sharing and reward valuable input that helps the company. It is imperative to note that empowerment leads to greater trust in leadership and loyalty to the organization. Furthermore, improved business results and customer satisfaction emanate from empowered employees.

High worker involvement leads to bigger commitment and above all empowerment leads to creativity and innovations. Managers of small and medium scale gold mining firms should give their employees the green light to be innovative. A leader should give his / her employees reasons and opportunity to stretch out on their own and even lead others. Empowerment connotes giving employees discretion over certain task-related activities. This implies that employee empowerment is the transfer of power from the employer to the employees. Employee empowerment focuses on developing trust, motivation, and participating in decision-making (Armstrong, 2021). Arguably, effective management leadership and commitment is needed to maintain employee empowerment. Employees in the small-scale gold mining sector will demonstrate a high level of commitment if they perceive that top management show commitment by providing adequate resources. In addition, employee engagement and loyalty are strongly rooted in a flexible working arrangement. Thus, employees are more likely to be flexible for the organisation (for example, changing their working hours when the need arises), and show more loyalty.

Flexible work arrangement leads to enhanced work performance, increased productivity and better quality of work, more efficient ways of working, with employees managing and organising their workloads better. FWA engenders a work life balance hence avoiding negative employee outcomes and work-related stress, reduced sickness absence and other negative employee outcomes. Employees going ‘above and beyond’ Employees going beyond the call of duty, more motivated to work hard for the organisation as well as giving back to the organisation. FWA creates a positive working culture, in which employees feel valued. It is noteworthy that having a flexible working campaign and being known as an employer that supports flexible working can make an organisation an employer of choice. It also enables the workforce to work in line with their needs that is being able to balance the workforce in line with the organisation’s needs and avoid being over-staffed.

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