2006

Motivation Techniques and Incentive Programs into the Office of Personnel Management's Retention Plan

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EMPA 396

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<center>Abstract</center>

Retention programs allow an employer the ability to develop and maintain a plan which can enhance the working environment for their employees. A productive program can also provide a structure which provides the tools to motivate and drive employees to succeed. Employees who display a positive attitude about their working environment will perform at a higher level, while lessening their desire to look elsewhere for employment. An employer who neglects a retention program to combat their potential loss of employees can lead to increasing turnover and additional costs to hire and train new replacements. In the economy of today, it is critical to make every effort to retain the employees which make up the foundation of the organization, for they are a major contributor to providing the best product to the customer.

The incorporation of motivational techniques and incentive programs is being implemented at the Federal level in the Office of Personnel Management's new retention plan as a way to increase a greater retention rate in the 2006 fiscal year. This has been in reaction to OPM's continual turnover of their employees and staff. High turnover is inherently dangerous in an industry charged with security and safety, and when employees don't remain at the company long enough to become

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proficient at the job, overall performance suffers (McNally and Branham, 2004).

There is an overwhelming concern to address the problem of retaining employees and

to provide an enhanced process to accomplish this task. The project proposes to

evaluate two methods of retention to include incentive programs and motivation

techniques. After examining all the data, the project will attempt to promote an

efficient method of retention. This study will look at whether these motivational

techniques and incentive programs are effective and reliable methods to retain

employees at Federal level of OPM.

Introduction

A survey from the Society of Human Resources Management and

CareerJournal.com, 2004 U.S. Job Recovery and Retention, found that 35% of current

employees are actively seeking a new job and another 40% are passively looking for

one (Anonymous, 2005). The reasons as to why employees are looking for other job

opportunities are better compensation packages, career opportunities elsewhere, and

dissatisfaction with potential for growth at their current organization. The problem is

out of control, and many organizations have been caught off guard by the issue. Some

organizations have implemented some type of special retention process in response to

the specter of losing personnel at a rapid rate (Anonymous, 2005).

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The problem at hand is that the current retention program did not effectively provide the means to keep employees at their current positions with the Office Personnel Management at the Federal level. The current course of action did not target specific areas of concern and it does not clearly lay out a plan for new methods of retention. Many employers accept retention as a given, something they have no power to change, which nothing could be further from the truth (Ferraro, 2005). An employee which has not been introduced to incentive programs and motivational techniques within their given position will find employment elsewhere which will provide them better benefits and options of opportunity. According to Ferraro (2005), every time you lose an employee, all the money you have invested in that employee walks out the door with them.

The continual exit of employees facing the Federal level of OPM will require a continual source of updated methods and techniques of retention. The issue to be examined is if the current programs and methods actually help to retain employees while promoting growth in the organization. This research proposes to examine if the incorporation of motivation techniques and incentive programs into the Office of Personnel Management's new retention plan at the Federal level will result in a greater retention rate in the 2006 fiscal year.

The necessity for a retention plan became an important topic when the Director of the Western Business Unit had a district meeting stating that the company had a 40% turnover rate in the year of 2004. The company then hired an outside

management consulting company which conducted a thorough evaluation of the organization targeting the issue of retention. The results which OPM kept in confidence provided helpful insight into the overall retention problem and exposed the many factors employees felt contributed to the high turnover rate. This was a research topic which needed to be explored in order to have the employees who are directly affected by the retention have their voices heard and their concerns brought out into the open.

The hypothesis for this proposal states that the incorporation of motivation techniques and incentive programs into the Office of Personnel Management's new retention plan at the Federal level will result in a greater retention rate. The independent variable of the research is the incorporation of motivation techniques and incentive programs into the Office of Personnel Management's new retention plan. The dependent variable of the research will result in improved employee morale at their place of employment and increased retention rates.

The following are sub-questions:

1. How much influence will the implementation of motivational techniques and incentive programs at OPM have on employee's morale in their current positions?

2. Which factors will effectively enhance the retention of employees at OPM?

3. If OPM was to incorporate a new retention program into the overall working environment, would employees embrace the changes, resulting in the retention of employees?

4. How important is it that OPM develop and continually maintain a retention program?

For the purposes of this study, the term motivational technique will signify the different steps management will take in order to promote new methods to their employees. These steps would include weekly face to face meetings, using positive reinforcement language, outlining the different positive methods which will enhance the work place, and developing opportunities of social interaction between employees. Management will encourage their employees to provide feedback and make their voice heard in order to make positive changes for the future.

For the purposes of this study, the term incentive program includes the different methods management will utilize in order to reward their employees for performing in a productive manner. These methods would include a pay performance plan, team-based compensation rewards, and programs allowing employees to have flexible work schedules. Management will use incentive programs to help motivate their employees to succeed.

This is an interesting topic, because retention has become a common problem throughout many organizations. The problem has forced organizations to react by seeking new methods and techniques to help combat the problem. The matter of retention is important, because many qualified individuals are leaving organizations for better opportunities. This in turn leaves large holes that need to be filled by their previous employer. Co-workers must then take on extra work load, which causes an overall negative effect on the environment of the work place. When an individual leaves, management will have to use extra funds to train and hire new employees. This topic will introduce new outlook on how organizations will need to target specific methods to incorporate into their work place in order to have continual success with their employees. A recognition program alone is unlikely to work with a disgruntled or unmotivated work force. For it to be effective, a recognition program must be part of a whole culture of valuing employees (Darling, 1997). It is critical that organizations structure programs that will support their employees while improving their morale in the working environment. This study is of interest to both the public and private sectors, because it adds a new level of understanding to this issue. Retention will become an even bigger issue in the years to come because of all the organizations moving overseas and foreign countries hiring away very skilled American workers. It is important to jump on the issue early in order to be prepared for what the future might provide.

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Literature

A search conducted on research literature found several articles which
addressed the incorporation of incentive programs and motivational techniques to
help organizations in the retention process of their employees. Two articles did
express the importance of the employee and the means that should be utilized to
retain the employee and their services. The article entitled *Incentive Program From
Team Research Helps Companies Motivate Employees and Increase Profits.* (Jordan
and Kelley, 1999) and *Retention Strategies that Hit the Mark.* (Sujanksy, 2004)
stressed that the most important resource of any organization is the people who
perform their jobs in a manner that creates a successful working environment. Each
employee will find meaningful and satisfying work while the organization will get
the human talent they need to be successful. A prime example is that individuals
need the opportunity to work, the ability to receive a monetary payment, and the
security of having a life long profession.

Across this nation, organizations have searched among the many practical and
productive ways to promote uplifting employee attitudes. An important concept to
remember is that a good fit between employees and their organization will benefit
both in the end. One method that many companies consider a successful way to
motivate employees is the monetary incentive program (Jordan and Kelley, 1999). An

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incentive program is usually created by an organization to help keep records on the

attendance and behavior of their employees. An incentive method can be very

efficient if it's used in an appropriate manner. The program must be used with the

motivational ideas that supply employees with intrinsic rewards, while they address

the higher level of the needs of the employee.

An intrinsic reward is the satisfaction an individual receives in the course of

conducting a specific action. Jordon and Kelley (1999) outlined the importance of

rewarding employees for their productive job performance and to allow suggestions

on how to enhance the overall working environment. Employees would like to be

able to express their opinions and provide valuable feedback towards the company.

According to Sujanksy (2004), employees want to know that their company is

strategically strong and is moving in the right direction.

When an incentive program is implemented, the end result will have

employees being given bonuses and gifts for a job well done. According to Jordan and

Kelley (1999), an organization that rewards their employees and makes them part of

the team will bring significantly improved profits. The first step an organization will

have to take in order to maximize an incentive program is to develop a plan. For both

the company and the employee, it is important that a clear focus is established.

Employees will naturally wonder if they are the next to join the unemployment line,

particularly if an employer has already gone through one or two waves of cutbacks

(Sujanksy, 2004).

To combat this, management will need to address the history of the organization, where the organization stands, and future endeavors of the organization. The next step is setting realistic goals for each individual of the company, while keeping a steady eye on the goals accomplished in order to measure performance. Management can set guidelines to provide a clear picture of what areas will be examined, and they would include the employee's reliability, attendance, and their behavioral aspects. This will enable organizations to monitor the production and achievement of goals from their employees throughout all areas of the company. The program will have a beneficial side of providing managers the opportunity to share information gathered on the overall performance of the employees while sharing it with each employee individually.

According to McNally and Branham (2004), a review of various studies and reports concludes that the top reason for early termination versus long-term employment is unsatisfactory compensation. There are other related factors which contribute to turnover to include a lack of appreciation, unsatisfactory management, and few opportunities to grow with an organization. There are several ways to combat the problem. The first method would provide employees competitive wages and benefits. This would be accomplished by reviewing the compensation of each employee and evaluating it against the competitiveness of the whole market. Conduct annual market analyses of similar companies with similar or identical

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security positions and, when you can, make necessary adjustments in pay and benefits (McNally and Branham, 2004).

Through the increase of reported turnover across many organizations, it is essential that management have a thorough understanding of the factors that cause turnover. An organization must first gather historical turnover numbers and rates. The next step would include collecting current surveys along with proven retention strategies which would lead to enhanced organizational profitability. Documenting past retention performances will launch a standard to gauge the future performance of employees. Management can then set goals to evaluate the effects of any attempted retention methods. It is important that turnover rates are continually monitored to ensure that retention remains a high goal of the organization. An organization that has had their turnover rates identified should allow their managers to conduct random surveys to gather feedback on issues that matter most too each employee. Since the variables that contribute to turnover have direct and negative organizational consequences, the exact identification, extent, analysis and understanding of any issues can result in an initial well-founded starting place to develop retention strategies, as well as to measure the effectiveness of solutions (McNally and Branham, 2004).

In summary, the literature review has provided insight into the many aspects of the retention process to include the incorporation of motivational techniques and incentive programs. There is still a lot of work to be done to explore the many

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avenues of the retention process and the overall effect it has on organizations. This literature helps to outline a starting point to address some of the immediate concerns of retention and the steps needed to combat the problem.

Methodology

The methodology was created for this project through conducting an extensive analysis of educational and professional research. An extensive search was carried out for concepts relating to motivational techniques and incentive programs in the workplace. The search utilized statistical data, documentation from a variety of organizations, and the OPM website in order to determine an agenda for a retention program at OPM. The agenda was structured through the qualitative process which was shaped by the opinions of OPM employees on retention methods. The results from the survey were formulated on what factors the employees believed might best gauge how OPM and its employees will function with a new retention program.

A written questionnaire was developed and mailed to one hundred current employees across the Western Business Unit of OPM. The target audience of the research were the investigators which make-up Investigation Division. The sampling population consisted of over one quarter of the employees from the business unit. It was important to utilize a large number of research participants in order to establish a diverse opinion on the topic of retention. The list of investigators was obtained

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through a company wide directory which provides all current investigators employed through OPM. The directory can be located on the company's intranet which is provided for all employees to be utilized as a communication device among all employees. The directories are updated on a continual basis through each district manager within the overall business unit.

Primary data for the retention methods of motivational techniques and incentive programs was collected for a two month period in the year of 2006. The method utilized will be the non-probability sampling design with a focus in purposive sampling for this research. There was a need to target a specific group of research participants, because these individuals are the ones who are directly affected by the problem of retention at this current time. Purposive sampling was very useful for this research project, because there was a critical need to reach a targeted sample group in a quick manner where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern. It is critical to use this sample, because it can lead to future research being conducted on a hypothesis that is continually attracting attention. The components of this specific sample are selected on the notion of the known characteristics that represents the population.

Through the review of literature addressing methods of retention, primary data will be used in order to analyze the true effectiveness of motivational techniques and incentive programs at the Federal level. The best course of action is primary data due to the large area being studied and the lack of research. The use of secondary

data would not provide the required data to address the overall focus of the research. The secondary data would provide guidance and research to help target specific areas of evaluation.

Data Collection

The opening of the questionnaire stated that the survey was being utilized to find out the beneficial effects of the company's new retention program. The employees who were sent the survey also had the opportunity to express their opinions on the importance of the motivational techniques and incentive programs which have been implemented in their working environment. The survey also outlined that the research gathered would provide a solid base to promote retention programs while encouraging continual input to enhance the overall program's effectiveness expansion. The employees were all given a window of one month to receive the survey and return the completed questionnaire. It was critical to allow each employee the option to remain anonymous in order to ensure honest answers without the threat of retaliation for providing responses which might not seem popular with upper management. The retention program questionnaire was formatted to have four questions which covered the area of targeted research. The first set of three questions incorporated a list of questions which allowed the employee to provide their opinions on their overall quality of their working

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environment, OPM's current retention program, and what new ideas should be incorporated to enhance the retention program.

The first question posed to the employees of the Investigative Division was as dollowed: if OPM was to incorporate a new retention program into the overall working environment, would employee embrace the changes, resulting in the retention of employees? This question was to examine if the current retention plan in place is providing an effective method of contesting a high turnover rate. Through their response to this question, employees were able to express their desire for a new retention program in their working environment. The employees are also expressing the potential positive effect a new plan could have in retaining employees. The rating chart had a scale of very likely, likely, somewhat likely, and not likely at all. This was an important question to start off the survey, because it informed the participant about what the research revolved around and allowed them to express their support either way on the one specific topic.

The second question posed to the employees was: how much influence do they believe the implementation of motivational techniques and incentive programs at OPM will have on employee's morale in their current positions? The chart allowed the employee to respond by stating that there was a high level of impact, an impact, and a low impact. This question was presented in order to see the overall impact these two techniques would potentially have in these employees' working environment. In every economy, the workplace environment and employee morale

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are vital factors to the success of an organization. All too often, an organization focuses exclusively on making the quick dollar, overlooking the very people that bring those dollars in through customer support. There has been previous research which has shown that increased workforce motivation contributes to increased productivity, improved problem solving skills, and reduced turnover. With this information at hand, an organization cannot afford to overlook the simple steps that need to be placed in motion to build employee morale.

The third question had the employees respond to which factors will effectively enhance the retention of employees at OPM. The survey presented four methods which fell under the realm of incentive programs and motivational techniques. The employees who took the survey were given the option to respond "yes" or "no"to each factor they believed should be incorporated into the overall plan if OPM were to develop a new retention program that focused on increasing the morale, productivity, and the quality of the workplace in order to retain employees. The four factors of the retention program would include the different steps management would take in order to help retain to their employees. These factors include encouraging employees to provide feedback, using positive reinforcement language, initiating a pay performance plan, and providing team-based compensation rewards. These are different positive methods which will enhance the work place while developing opportunities of interaction between employees and their managers. This question gave the employees the opportunity to support or oppose the methods they felt would help a

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retention plan succeed. The methods ranged from monetary increases to team focused awards, as well as looked at using a positive dialogue throughout a workplace.

The last question the employees were asked was how important was it to them that OPM develop and continually maintain a retention program. The chart allowed the employee to respond with the answer of very important, somewhat important, important, and not important. This question was direct in order to find out the level of support the employees would have in OPM putting together a retention plan and keeping it up to date. It was critical that the employees were able to show their degree of trust in OPM when it involved a retention program. The past has shown little improvement in area of retention and that is what led to a high turnover rate company wide.

Findings

The methodology was created for this project through conducting an extensive analysis of educational and professional research. An extensive search was conducted for ideas on motivational techniques and incentive programs. The search utilized statistical data, documentation from a variety of organizations, and the OPM website in order to determine an agenda for a retention program at OPM. The agenda was developed through the qualitative process which was conducted by opinions on retention efforts from OPM employees. The results from the survey were formulated

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on what factors the employees believed might best gauge the how OPM and its employees will function with a new retention program.

This research petitioned for the opinions of employees to identify influential factors for measuring an effective retention program at OPM. The written questionnaire was developed to search out what factors may best predict how effective motivational techniques and incentive programs will be at combating high turnover at OPM. Questionnaires were mailed to one hundred employees who are investigators in the Investigations Division of OPM. A total of 71 surveys were completed and returned, with an overall response rate of 71 percent. This was a very good response rate considering the average of mailed questionnaires is 50 percent or less.

The first question dealt with whether or not the incorporation of a new retention program into the working environment at OPM would be embraced by the employees. The results came out to be relatively even across the four categories of responses, with 38% very likely to embrace the changes. The other three options fell in a range from the high of 26% likely to a low of 16% not likely. There was only a little more than 60% of respondents who felt that a new program would have the full support of the employees. An efficient company and effective employee have one thing in common - a vision which they both recognize and promote in a way that initiates a workable plan to make that vision a reality.

The surprisingly above average number of overall support shows that not all the employees would welcome a new retention program from OPM. This could be in response to the past years of neglect by OPM to address the problem of high turnover rates while also implementing motivational methods and developing incentive programs for their management staff to put in action. Through some employee responses provided in the comment section, it was expressed that enough had not been done by OPM to provide the necessary resources to address the problems of employees leaving for other opportunities. In their responses, the employees let it be known that there is not full support for a plan, and OPM will have to show a lot more in the future in order to get everyone on the same plan.

If OPM was to incorporate a new retention program into the overall working environment, would employees embrace the changes, resulting in the retention of employees?
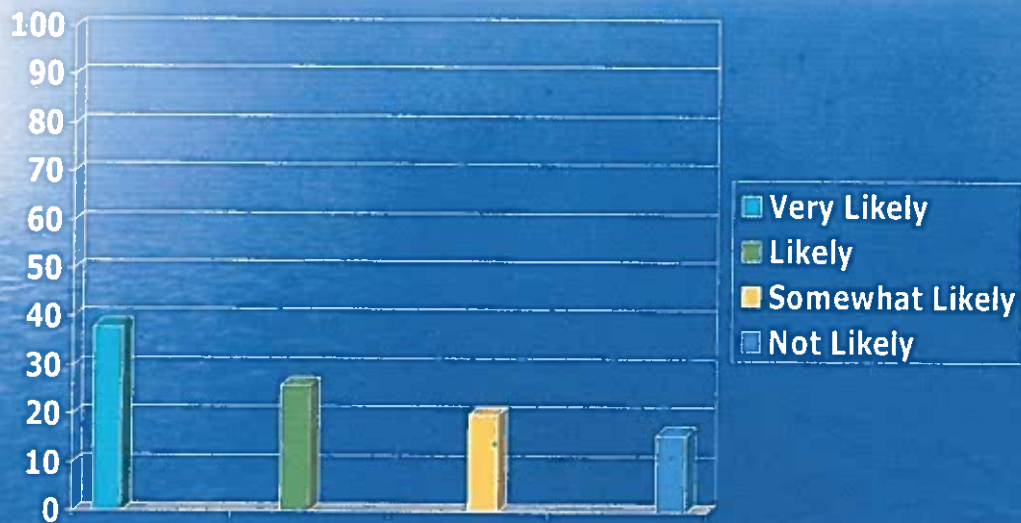
The second question focused on how much influence the role of the

implementation of motivational techniques and incentive programs would have on

employees' morale in their current positions. The results were pretty staggering from

a high impact of 78% to a low impact at about 7%. The results were not surprising

due to how many organizations have had to re-shape the methods and techniques

they have utilized in the past to increase the overall morale of their employees. A large response by the employees is a clear statement that these methods would play an important role in improving the working environment and create an uplifting attitude among employees. It is known that higher morale and self-esteem among employees can have a positive impact on workplace performance. An employee with this self-confidence is more likely to understand the goals of OPM, feel they have a stake in their jobs, and take responsibility of their work. Employees will also have the drive to try new things and actively seek additional training that will prepare them to move up in their organization.

How much influence will the implementation of motivational techniques and incentive programs at OPM have on employee's morale in their current positions?

The next question had the employees respond to which factors they felt will effectively enhance the retention of employees. This had a surprising result when it came to team based awards, which had the lowest support with a 64%. Could this suggest that the employees of OPM are more focused on themselves than they are on team unity? The employees are suggesting through their response that they are taking care of their own needs before venturing out to their co-workers. The job of

an investigator is based around working solely as an independent employee with limited contact with other investigators. This could play a role in as to why employees felt that team based awards would have an overall low impact on the issue of retention. Another surprise was seeing that pay performance plans only took in an 87% favorable rating. It would make many people scratch their heads that pay should be one of, if not the most important factor when involving retention. When an employee's motivation for coming to work is based solely on collecting a paycheck, that company is bound for turnover problems, because the company needs to give the employee a sole purpose if they want to boost retention rates. (Curry, 2005). The employees spread out their responses in order to cover all areas that deemed important to creating a sound retention plan.

The employees felt strongly about being able to provide feedback which had a 92% favorable rating, as well as management using positive language, which had the highest rating at 96%. It is well documented that positive reinforcement is much more effective than punishment for shaping behavior, yet few supervisors effectively use this very powerful technique to manage their employees. In its place, employers more commonly use criticism, scolding, berating, belittling or ignorance of employees (Katcher, 2006). This is a calling from the employees that these are two important factors which would help in the overall process when an employee is thinking of leaving for another job. Through their responses, their focus is clearly not all about pay, but more directed towards working in a positive environment where there are

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open lines of communication. There is no question that involving employees in

important decisions helps them to feel more a part of the organization, but it's

important to understand that it's the culture of involvement, of two-way dialogue and

of genuine response to employee ideas about important issues that have the impact

and not simply a matter of hanging a suggestion box on the wall (Curry, 2005).
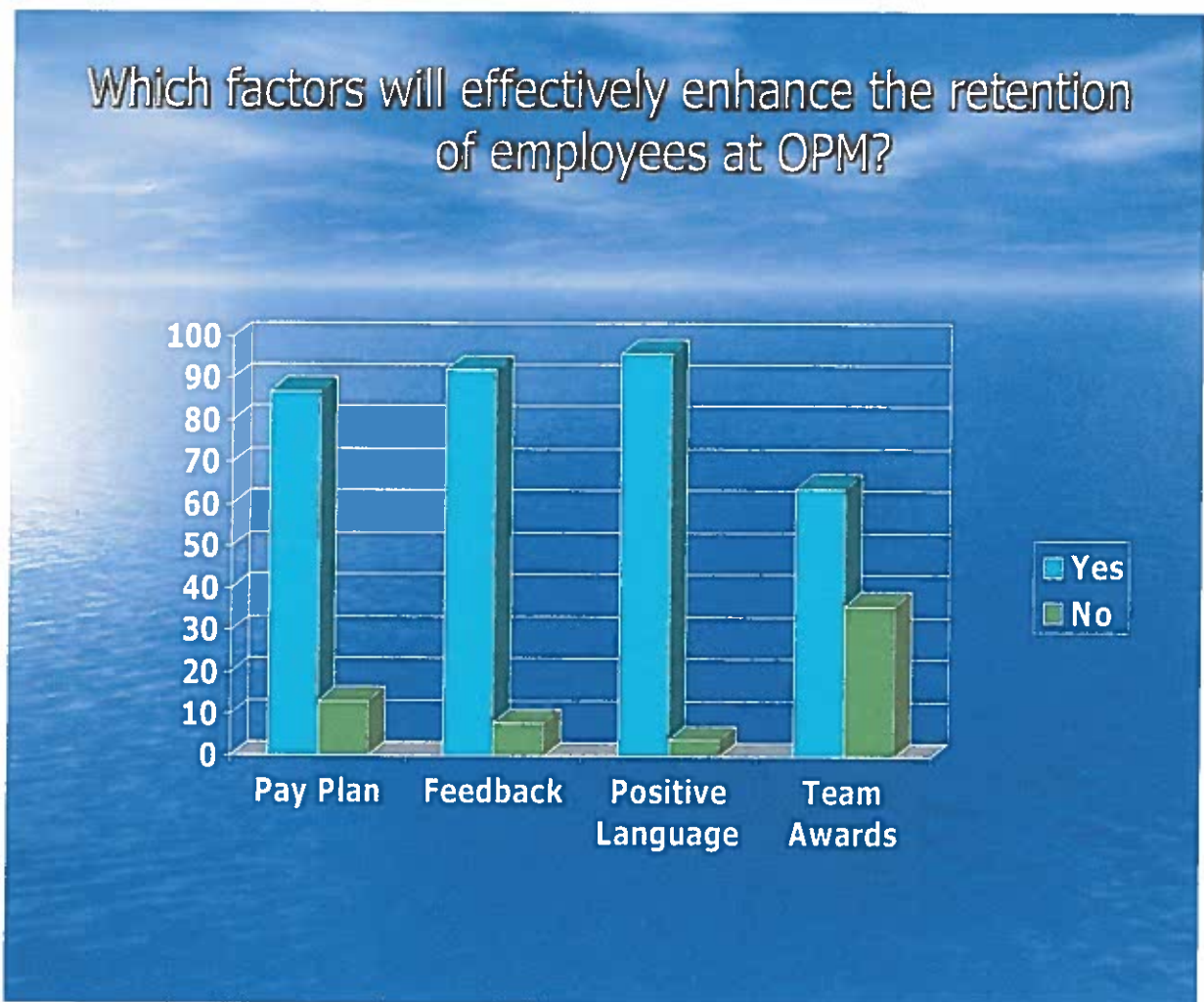
Which factors will effectively enhance the retention of employees at OPM?

The last question the employees were asked was how important was it to them that OPM develop and maintain a retention program. The high number of 58% for very important was unexpected, because it shows the lack of confidence the employees have in OPM. The other responses were 22% for important, 14% somewhat important, and 5% for not important. The response of "very important" from the employees was also intriguing,because there are probably other areas of concern which was not addressed in the survey which the employees believe have a higher priority to tackle than retention. The issue of retention does not touch home to many employees who are in a secured job or work in a positive environment. It just takes one unprofessional manager or a lack of a holiday bonus to attract the attention of an employee seeking an improved retention plan. The ability for OPM to develop and maintain a retention plan is a tall order and would take a full commitment by everyone involved at the organization. The issues of funding and resources will create problems, but if the organization is serious and understands the problem at hand it will do everything necessary to get the plan in motion.

How important is it that OPM develop and continually maintain a retention program?
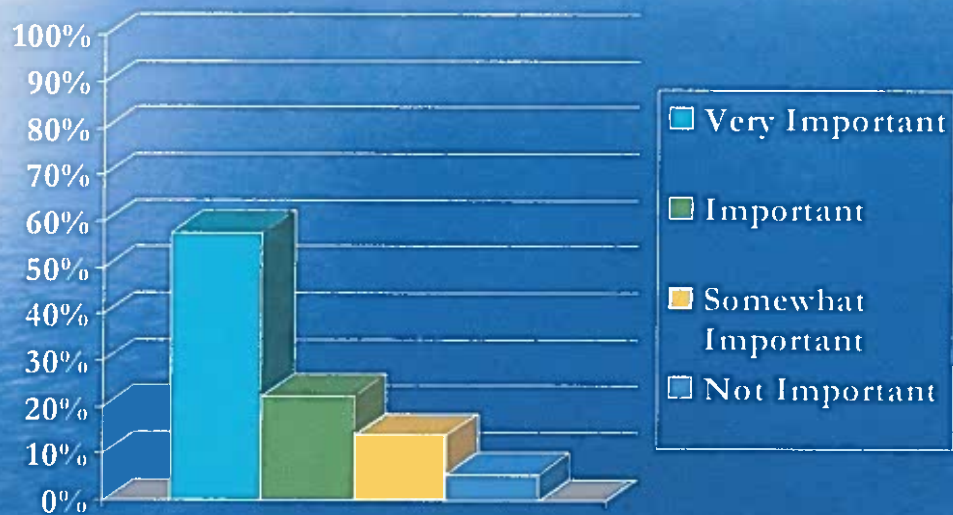
To summarize, the employees in the Investigative Division appear favorably

supportive of motivational techniques and incentive programs being factored into

OPM's retention plan, based on their responses to the questionnaire. They seem to

favor a program with pay performance plans, the ability of open communication lines,

and management using positive feedback over team-based incentives, such as rewards or sanctions. As an organization, the smartest thing they could do is to create a retention culture that engages high-performing employees in doing meaningful work for as long as the relationship is mutually rewarding, while recognizing that both money and environment have an impact on where people choose to work (Williams and Sunderland, 1999). They also recognize the importance of morale, encouragement, and positive attitudes in creating and sustaining a good working environment. Their willingness to embrace such a program does not rank high, but it does not take away from the potential influence a program could provide.

This research project proposed to evaluate the effectiveness of retention methods. The research to an extent does reinforce the hypothesis, because the responses from the employees highly support motivational techniques and incentive programs into a retention plan at OPM. There is over half of the employees who would embrace the development and implementation of a new retention with a continual promise of maintaining the plan. The intention of the research was to determine if incentive programs and motivational techniques are efficient methods of retention at the Federal level of OPM. This information obtained will hopefully provide the upper management of OPM the tools to construct strategies to best serve their employees.

Perhaps the biggest reason to change how your organization approaches retention is that current methods aren't working and only one in five company

representatives believes the retention programs are effective, according to research by Talentkeepers (Anonymous, 2004). Many organizations cannot decide on the best approach to take in order to deal with the ever increasing retention problem. The search of literature has given some insight to show the awareness that organizations have in regard to compensation as a major problem for the retention of employees. It appears that organizations do not want to act, because they believe the problem is under control and they have the excuse of a poor economy to blame. The research project will help outline the seriousness of the problem while providing some viable solutions.

Areas of Further Research

The areas of further research in regards to retention would include continuing to develop and revamp methods to combat the issue of high turnover in organizations. This can begin by developing new management techniques and expand to explore a variety of monetary methods. New pay strategies are on the increase, and companies are using this powerful retention tool to communicate company values, expectations and to ultimately reward employees for individual contributions and desired performance, but for pay programs to succeed, they must be well thought out and strategic in nature, have strong links to critical business priorities, and be clearly communicated and fully understood by employees (Williams and Sunderland, 1999).

An important area is involving employees in the overall retention process. This revolves around an organization allowing their employees to express ideas which are focused on enhancing the work environment, also providing them a survey to find out what current retention problems need to be address, and having an open forum which allows everyone in the organization to come together in order to debate the issue of how to combat retention. Front-line employees often know first who is considering leaving the company and educating employees about the value of a high-retention organization, helping them to coach their peers through difficulties that might cause them to leave, and identifying problems before they lead to turnover can help bolster the management-level retention program (Anonymous, 2004).

An area of further exploration would involve expanding the research on retention to other areas of OPM and Federal agencies. For example, there are several other areas of OPM which have the same retention problem and the problem has not been addressed at this time due to many factors which are swept under the carpet. There is also a current retention problem within the F.B.I. due to the top counterterrorism agents are leaving for more money within the private sector. This is an important issue due to the ongoing war in Iraq and the continual threat of terrorism in this country. An area which needs further research is the techniques and strategies utilized by private organizations. The reason this is an important to

examine this because the private sector has handled retention in some instances

differently than the government because of the access to better resources or funding.

There are many avenues which retention can be studied and improved upon in

today's job market. It is important to continual to finds ways to improve the working

environment and increase the morale of the employees which make the organization

function. Building a strong, effective work force in the midst of a tough labor market

is the biggest challenge organizations face today and by putting an effective work

force strategy into play - and taking into consideration business goals, culture and

benefits - finding the right people for the right jobs are like matches made in heaven

(Healey, 2001).

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