

**THE END OF THE AFFAIR: EXIT INTERVIEW EFFICACY IN TWO NEW  
ZEALAND HOTEL BRANDS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper presents findings from data analysis of formal exit interviews conducted in two hotel brands. One covers 2004 and 2005 and is a large New Zealand hotel chain with 15 sites. The quantitative data for this brand was collected nationally at multiple sites and is further illuminated by qualitative data focusing on a single site case study. The other brand represents a single site, with data gathered from 2001 to 2005. The theoretical foundations of employee turnover and exit interview efficacy are discussed in the literature review. Particular focus is placed on the antecedents of turnover in the organisational entry phase of the employment relationship, with questions being raised around the importance of socialisation. In an industry that has traditionally high

employee turnover, the efficacy of exit interviews in providing feedback on organisational entry is of crucial importance. Findings raise discussion questions regarding the effectiveness of information provided by both hotel chain's exit interview process, and furthermore lead the authors to ask how organisational improvement be directed if there is a process in place that fails to provide applicable employee feedback?

**KEYWORDS:** Exit Interviews, Turnover, Hospitality, Retention, Socialisation

## **INTRODUCTION**

Preliminary research indicates that New Zealand's hospitality industry experiences high levels of voluntary turnover. A recent governmental report has revealed that the industry is currently losing 8% of its workforce each year to other industries. This is partially due to the industry being characterised by historical practices, which are often based on stereotypes and myths such as 'you work in hospitality until you get a real job', and 'hospitality is a part-time industry'. Employee turnover within New Zealand's hospitality industry has been accepted as the norm, creating a 'turnover culture' (Deery, 2002, p. 55) in which organisational structures, management and employees show acceptance of turnover behaviour. This is of considerable concern given the New Zealand tourism industry requires an additional 100,000 new employees by 2010 (Brien, 2004, p.35).

Organisational turnover is the highest among new entrants and is especially problematic for hospitality organisations because of the significant investment in recruitment, selection and training required for service standards. It also recognises the importance of congruence between individuals and the organisation, to overcome this 'premature' turnover problem. Inadequate socialisation is identified as the principal driver of premature withdrawal.

Exit interviews are primarily designed to provide information regarding the motivation of employees leaving the organisation. The aim is to use this information to reduce voluntary turnover by addressing the issues raised in the exit interviews e.g. training, rewards and shift flexibility. This paper analyses the results from two hotel brands, with several years of regional and site specific exit interview feedback and seeks to question the usefulness of this data for ongoing organisational improvement for both hotel chains.

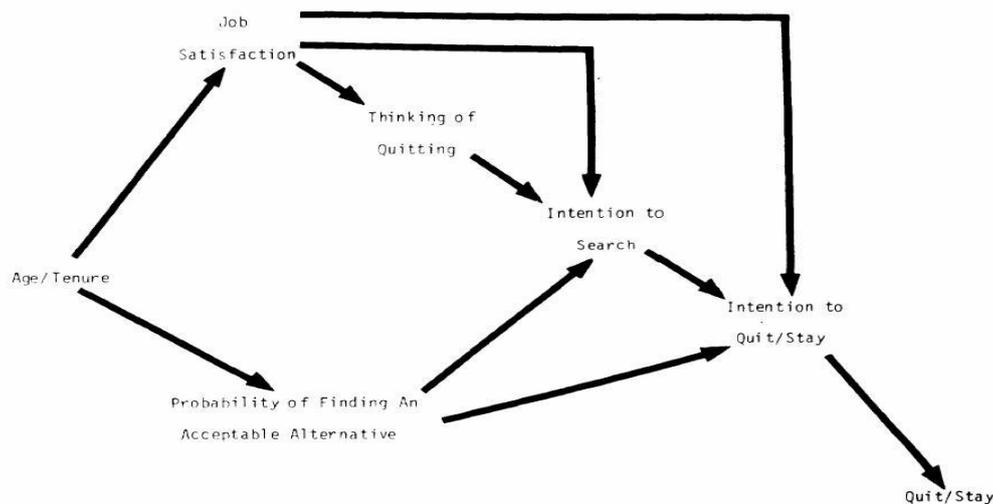
## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The turnover act is defined as the individual's physical separation from the organisation and has been subjected to intense conceptual and empirical interest over the last several years (Blau & Boal, 1989; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Dalessio, Silverman, & Schuck, 1986; Dougherty, Bluedorn, & Koen, 1985; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Hom, Griffeth, & Sellaro, 1984; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mobley, 1977; Porter & Steers, 1973; Steers & Mowday, 1981; Wanous, 1992). These theoretical models have focused primarily on the individual characteristics of commitment, satisfaction and intention as correlates of turnover (Peterson, 2004). However, a few researchers have suggested that organisational characteristics and relationships are also

significant to the turnover process (Lee, 1996; Jones, 1986; Schneider, 1987; Wanous, 1992) emphasising the significance of ‘individual-organisation fit’ (Wanous, 1992, p. 2).

There are several theoretical models proposing the antecedents and processes leading to voluntary turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mobley, 1977; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Price & Mueller, 1981; Wanous, 1992). These model’s general theoretical frameworks state that economic, organisational, personal and role related factors determine the individual’s intentions to leave, which in turn leads to voluntary turnover (Lance, 1991). Mobley’s (1977) model of turnover, shown in Figure 1, has been the most influential among traditional theoretical research. Mobley’s model of turnover consisted of eight variables: job satisfaction, age, tenure, thinking of quitting, the intention to search probability of finding an acceptable alternative, intention to quit, and actual voluntary turnover.

**Figure 1**  
**Mobley’s (1977) Model of Turnover**

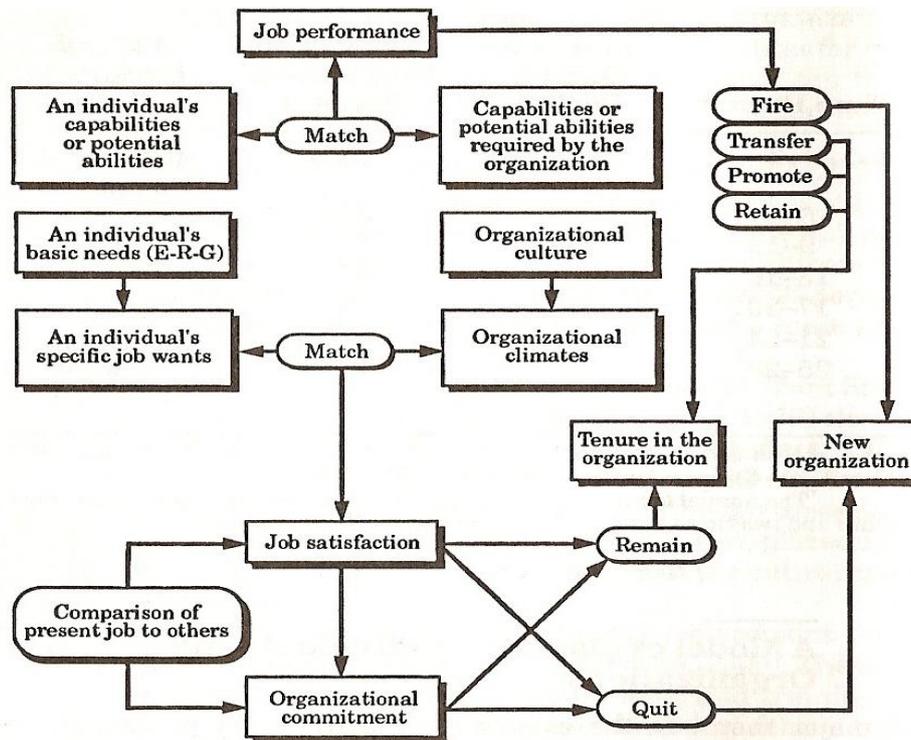


According to Wanous (1992), the congruence between individual and organisational goals and values was not considered within Mobley’s (1977) model. He refers to this congruence as ‘met expectations’ (Wanous, 1992, p. 4) and states that considerable attention should be placed on matching the individual and organisational needs, to avoid ‘premature’ (Guthrie, 2001, p.190) turnover. For some individuals the intent or decision to leave is based upon the lack of compatibility between the individuals and organisational beliefs and values. Donnelly & Quirin, (2006) state that the poor compatibility fit is the effect of unrealistic job expectations and cause of premature turnover.

At the heart of Wanous’s (1992) Matching Model (Figure 2) is the “dual matching process” (Wanous, 1992, p.249) between individual’s and organisation’s needs and capabilities. The upper portion of the model illustrates that the organisation’s job requirements are matched to the capabilities of an individual. This matching process is described as organisational selection (Wood, 2001). According to Wanous (1992) the major consequence of a mismatch in the upper portion would be on the newcomer’s job performance (eg. involuntary turnover). However, a

second type of the matching process is shown in the lower portion of this model, being the specifically wanted job outcomes of individuals and the capacity of organisational climates to reinforce those wants. Any mismatch that occurs has a direct influence on job satisfaction and an indirect influence on commitment to the organisation (eg. voluntary turnover) (Peterson, 2004).

**Figure 2**  
**Wanous (1992) Matching Model**



Wanous' (1992) model stresses the significance the culture and climate of an organisation plays in the turnover process. Therefore matching the individual's specifically wanted job outcomes and the capacity of various organisational climates to fulfill those wants is essential to the turnover process (Rudman, 2002). Guthrie (2001) illustrates that like 'anti-taylorism' cultures, high involvement organisational cultures are pivotal to the retention process and as a 'source of competitive advantage' (Griffeth & Hom, 2004, p. 23). In accordance with Pruijt (1997), New Zealand hospitality has adopted a 'taylorism' or control oriented approach to management, implying that employees are seen as 'commodity-like and more replaceable' (Guthrie, 2001, p. 181) and as a consequence, employee retention is significantly low. However, Guthrie (2001) also suggests that high involvement organisational cultures are associated with 'significant productivity losses in the face of mounting employee turnover' (Guthrie, 2001, p.183). This is because organisations became more reliant on the employees invisible assets and thus they become less replaceable.

Furthermore Steers, Mowday & Porter's (1981) model of voluntary turnover identifies key variables and suggests the relationships among those variables in the leaving process. Their model proposed the following sequence in the turnover process:

- (1) Job expectations and values have a direct influence on an individual's emotional responses to the job
- (2) This affects the intention and desire to stay or leave, depending on the non-work influences such as spouse's job and family
- (3) Eventually the intention to leave the organisation leads to actual voluntary turnover (Lee & Mowday, 1987)

This model of turnover specifically illustrates that the turnover sequence differs across individuals.

Until recently, literature on the antecedents of the hospitality turnover process has been limited. Despite this limitation, Poulston (2005) has identified a novel cause of attrition as being constructive dismissals. Poulston (2005) suggests, from a survey of 28 Auckland hospitality workplaces and 535 under-graduate hospitality students, that constructive dismissals are strongly associated with casual employee turnover within the hospitality industry. According Poulston (2005), Hom & Griffeth (1995) and Mobley (1982), supervisors and full time employee are stated as being the prime cause of this behaviour through 'writing unfair rosters and hassling staff to get rid of them' (Poulston, 2005, p. 24).

According to Wanous (1992) and Allen (2006), organisational turnover is the highest among new entrants and is especially problematic for hospitality organisations because of the significant investment in recruitment, selection and training. Allen (2006) states that premature turnover provides hospitality organisations with little opportunity to recover a significant return on investment. One of the principal drivers of premature withdrawal is 'inadequate socialisation' (Birchfield, 2001, p.34). Socialisation is seen to reduce uncertainty and anxiety and therefore create congruence between individuals and an organisation, transforming an outsider into an effective and participating insider. Issues such as inadequate socialisation and the resulting dissonance can be explored with departing employees in an exit interview.

### **Exit Interviews**

Exit interviews are considered to be a powerful tool for analysing turnover (Mok & Luk, 1995). An exit interview is a discussion, which can vary in structure and formality, between the departing employee and the employer, designed to get information about their employment experience and motivations for leaving (Evans 2006; Rudman, 2002, Stone, 2005). The content discussed in such an interview can be wide ranging, including reasons for leaving; perception of management and organisation; satisfaction with job, working conditions, organisational climate; socialisation issues; training received and career opportunities. A principal aim of conducting exit interviews is to provide employers with information to help prevent the loss of other employees later, for example, through the identification of training and development needs (Green, 2004). The interviews are a two way process, as meeting with departing employees in an exit interview also gives employers an opportunity to express their feelings (Knouse, Beard, Pollard, & Giacalone, 1996).

Engaging employees in a dialogue just prior to their departure may encourage them to consider returning in future as an employee and/or as a longer term stakeholder in the form of a customer, organisational advocate etc. For the conversation to be meaningful and the data of value, it is vital for a climate to be created in which both parties feel comfortable to enable them to gain a direct insight into employees' opinions of the role, work processes, relationships and the organisation. Accordingly open-ended questions should be asked and ideally the interview

should be conducted by a human resource person or someone other than the employee's immediate supervisors (Schachter, 2005).

Feldman & Klaas (1999) generated four hypotheses to test how exit interview procedures influence exiting employees' self-disclosure of their reasons for departure. They conclude that employees tend to disclose their honest reasons for leaving when data is treated confidentially and fed back by human resource managers in aggregate form, when it does not result in a negative reference from their direct supervisors, and when they believe that in the past the employer has taken action on problems identified in exit interviews.

Employees who leave an organisation can provide considerable insight into the problems they faced during the tenure of their employment (Deery, 2000). Conversely, exit interviews have been criticised as an intrusion into an employee's right to privacy and that they are of more benefit to the organisation than to the employee. Fottler, Crawford, Quintana, & White (1995) suggest that they can be a way to keep an employee that the organisation does not want to lose, although for many departing employees actions taken as a result of an exit interview may be *too little too late* to retain them.

According to research by Wood & Macauley (1987) on 27 American hospitality organisations, the exit interview methodology used for data collation has immense influence the quality of the information collected. They found that organisations too often centered the interviews on the reasons for leaving, rather than the attitudinal and organisational causes for turnover. In no cases were the interviews concerned with the 'individual and organisation fit' (Wanous, 1992, p. 56). Fottler, et. al. (1995) posits that employee attitude surveys yield far more reliable information than did the exit interviews. They found that from surveys organisations could learn how employees viewed their jobs, their supervisors, their working conditions and other aspects of the organisation. They also noted that attitude surveys gave the organisation time to intervene confidently and address the identified problems.

Another methodological consideration is that exit interview theorists suggest that a person-to-person interview often negatively affects the results of those interviews (Phillips & Connell, 2003). Researchers have also found that the 'responses given during exit interviews are often substantially different from those given in interviews conducted a month or more after the termination' (Wanous, 1992, p.45). Despite these suggestions, hospitality organisations still conduct exit interviews in a person-to-person format and run them on the day before or day of departure (Macky & Johnson, 2004). In addition, Wood & Macauley's (1987) research mentioned that fictitious reasons for departure are often cited at exit interviews. The reason for this is the employees are reluctant to cite reasons that condemn the actions of the organisation, management and supervisors in open interviews.

Lefkowitz and Katz (1969) believe that a post-termination questionnaire method is a better way to obtain valid information than an exit interview. Furthermore Feldman & Klaas (1999) believe that exit questionnaires may generate more reliable and valid information, while also being more efficient to administer in terms of cost and time. Many organisations have also developed a web-based system for conducting their exit questionnaires. The data gained from any form of exit process though may be of questionable use if immediate line managers are not given meaningful results and/or encouraged to make changes regarding training, relationships and processes based on analysis of the feedback from departing employees.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Most of conceptual and empirical research on voluntary turnover was found to be conducted on samples of medical nurses or office workers in the United States (Blau & Boal, 1989; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Dougherty, Bluedorn, & Koen, 1985; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978; Steers & Mowday, 1981; Wanous, 1992). Therefore practical applications into the New Zealand hospitality arena may differ from conceptual theory, due to different economic, social and political factors. This study examines turnover within two New Zealand hotel brands, through an analysis of exit interview data collected from 2001 to 2005.

### **Hotel Brand X**

Hotel X operates in the New Zealand hospitality industry and is experiencing high levels of voluntary turnover. In 2005 Hotel X New Zealand saw a total turnover rate of 67.5% (personal communication, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006). Hotel X worldwide consists of over 4,100 hotels. Hotel X Regional HR office is responsible for the development and growth of the Hotel X New Zealand and the Pacific region. The data for the research has been gathered by the Regional Human Resource Co-ordinator for a multi-site hotel group in New Zealand. The national data represents the growth of the organisation from twelve hotels in 2004, to sixteen sites in 2005. The data is based on standardised exit interviews that are run by various human resource managers in the national operations. The hotel group attempts to interview every leaving employee, but in cases of abandonment or refusal, a small minority of employees are not represented in this data.

The data is represented in two levels. Tables 1 to 3 represent the first page of the exit interview. This is national data, representing twelve hotels for 2004 and sixteen hotels for 2005 and covers more generic, demographic data including:

- The gender of the employee
- Whether the employee was permanent or casual
- Employee's length of employment
- Employee's primary reason for leaving

Data from this national level covers 661 exit interviews for 2004 and 911 exit interview for 2005.

Tables 4 and 5 represent the second page of the exit interview. This data is based on a single hotel case study and represents a more detailed attempt by the hotel to gain qualitative feedback from the departing employees. This data covers 22 exit interviews for 2004 and 23 exit interviews for 2005. Human Resource Managers of Hotel X collate all exit interview data at the end of each month and enter the data into Excel spreadsheets which are sent to the regional offices. The data received for this report was obtained from the regional offices and was analysed using Excel.

### **Hotel Brand Y**

Hotel Brand Y represents a stand alone site that is part of an international chain. At this stage, only one site carries the brand in New Zealand. Hotel Brand Y is a leading global hospitality company, with over 2,900 hotels in more than 80 countries. Following initial consultation about the research, exit surveys were provided by the Human Resource Manager of Hotel Brand Y. Approximately 170 exit interviews were provided. The exit interviews were conducted by the HRM team with staff between 2001 and 2004 inclusive. The hotel group attempts to interview every leaving employee, but in cases of abandonment or refusal, a small minority of employees are not represented in this data.

Tables 6 and 7 represent exits by position and by department. Table 8 summarises the employee reasons for leaving Hotel Brand Y and in many ways reflects the data represented in Table 1 for Hotel Brand X. The exit interview for Hotel Brand Y differs from Hotel Brand X in that the last four tables represent answers to question based around organizational themes – Working Conditions (Table 9), Relationship with Management (Table 10), Training (Table 11) and Relationship with Colleagues (Table 12).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - HOTEL BRAND X**

The seniority of employee's leaving is greatly influenced by whether they are full-time or part-time workers as depicted in Table 1. The great majority of part-time workers are in 'coal face' roles, where as the full-time workers are more likely to be supervisors or management (up to 53% of exiting employee's in 2004).

Floor Level workers have more varied reasons for leaving and greater rates of abandonment, firing, discipline related exits, returning to education and fixed term contracts. They are more likely than managers or supervisors to be leaving for reasons of external opportunities, where as managers and supervisors are far more likely to be leaving for reasons of internal transfer.

Also of note is the Job Abandonment data, as 77% of the Job Abandonment cases are part time workers and occur within the first six months of service. Only 3% of Job Abandonment cases are full time workers and only 2.4% of cases occur after one or more years of service.

**Table 1**  
**Exit Data by Reasons and Staff Position (National Data)**

Reason	2004 Exits						2005 Exits					
	Full Time Staff			Part Time Staff			Full Time Staff			Part Time Staff		
	Mgt	Sup	F/L	Mgt	Sup	F/L	Mgt	Sup	F/L	Mgt	Sup	F/L
Transfer	14	17	11	-	2	12	19	22	11	-	4	17
Overseas Travel	5	10	12	-	2	108	5	20	15	-	-	86
Home Obligations	2	8	4	-	-	40	4	8	5	-	-	56
Relocation	2	2	8	-	-	28	2	6	7	-	3	44
Pregnancy/Health	1	1	3	1	-	9	2	1	2	-	1	14
Own Business	1	-	1	-	-	4	-	5	-	-	-	4
Lack of Hours	-	-	-	-	-	26	-	-	-	-	3	24
Shift Work	-	-	1	-	-	3	-	2	-	-	-	13
Job Dissatisfaction	1	4	2	-	-	4	1	5	2	-	1	29
Visa Expired	-	-	6	-	-	5	-	-	1	-	-	9
Career Opp – Hospitality	4	16	17	-	2	25	7	8	14	-	1	19
Career Opp – Other Industry	9	11	12	-	2	37	6	11	14	-	2	63
Education/Study	-	-	6	-	-	38	1	-	5	-	-	60
Retirement/Redundancy	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	1	1	-	1	4
Travel Difficulty	1	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	8
Fixed Term Contract	-	-	2	-	-	45	1	1	8	-	1	88
Insufficient Promotional Op.	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	1	-	-	-
Insufficient Training	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Unhappy with Mgmt Style	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	2
Monotonous Job	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Lack of Recognition	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Heavy Workload	-	1	-	-	-	5	-	1	-	-	-	2
Personality Conflict	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-
Working Conditions	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Rate of Pay	-	1	-	-	-	2	2	-	5	-	-	10
Job Performance	1	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
Termination by Hotel in probation	-	-	3	-	-	6	-	1	2	-	-	10
Job Abandonment	-	-	1	-	-	28	-	-	1	-	1	47
Broke House Rules	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>621</b>

A clearly significant trend in the graph (Figure 3) is that the full-time employees in both 2004 and 2005 are leaving after a reasonable amount of service time (for hospitality). In 2004, 52% of workers left after one year of service or more. In 2005, 54% of workers left after one year of service or more. By contrast, part time workers are leaving sooner. In 2004, 81% of part-time workers left the organisation before completing one year of service. In 2005, 83% of part-time workers left the organisation before completing one year of service.

**Figure 3**  
**Tenure Comparison of Full and Part Time Employee Turnover (2004 & 2005)**

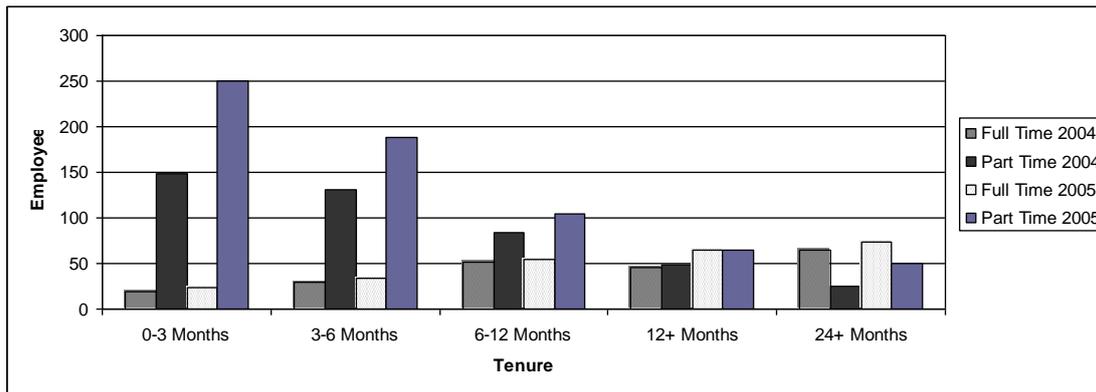


Table 2 depicts the four categories of reasons for turnover as related to controllable versus uncontrollable turnover and then involuntary versus voluntary turnover. Controllable turnover encompasses measures taken by the organisation, often with the cooperation of the employee, such as transfer, retirement/redundancy and fixed term contracts.

Uncontrollable turnover consists of both involuntary turnover and voluntary turnover. Involuntary turnover relates to actions by the organisation to cease the employment relationship, including unsatisfactory job performance, termination by the hotel during probation, job abandonment and breaking house rules. The voluntary turnover statistics are significant as shown in Table 2 and instigated by the employee for a number of reasons (as demonstrated in Table 1) such as overseas travel, relocation, other career opportunities etc.

**Table 2**  
**Categorisations of Turnover (National Data)**

	2004 Exits		2005 Exits	
	F-Time Staff	P-Time Staff	F-Time Staff	P-Time Staff
Controllable Turnover	47	64	66	123
Uncontrollable Turnover =	165	385	186	536
▪ Involuntary Turnover +	8	40	7	71
▪ Voluntary Turnover	157	345	179	465

Table 3 depicts the exit totals by gender. Interestingly the numbers of male and female full time exiting staff are not too dissimilar. The scenario for the part-timers is quite different though with significantly more females leaving over both years.

**Table 3**  
**Exit Totals by Gender from National Data (2004 and 2005)**

F-T Staff 2004		P-T Staff 2004		F-T Staff 2005		P-T Staff 2005	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
105	104	196	246	112	136	262	395

A clear trend in Table 4 is that employee's state that 'nothing' could be done to stop them from leaving, particularly with almost 60% of employee's exiting in 2004 stating this. In 2005, 53% of exiting employee's state that nothing could be done to stop them from leaving. The organisation could take comfort from a slight drop in these figures from 2004-2005. The idea that 'nothing' could be done to stop these employees from leaving is followed up in most cases by a qualifier e.g. 'personal reasons', 'temporary employee', 'travel', 'opportunities', 'new experiences'.

The employees offer a wider range of specific reasons for leaving in 2005 than 2004. Examples are 'family moving', 'would have liked more job advancement', 'more flexible shifts'. Overall, when you add 'no response' to the 'nothing' comments, there is a picture of a very un-committed workforce, that offers very few concrete reasons for leaving that could be fed back into organisational change.

**Table 4**  
**Potential Measures to Prevent Staff Member Exits (Single Hotel Case)**

Responses	2004 Exits		2005 Exits	
	Total responses	%	Total responses	%
Nothing at all	5	22	2	9
Nothing: Leaving for personal reasons	3	13	1	4
Offered more flexible hours/shifts or a new role	3	13	1	4
Nothing: I was temporary	3	13	1	4
Paid me more	2	9	2	9
Nothing: I want to travel	1	4	1	4
Nothing: I have a new opportunity	1	4	4	18
Nothing: I need new experiences/skills	1	4	3	14
Use my skills, provide recognition	0	0	2	9
Family moving	0	0	1	4
No response	4	18	5	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>

As Table 5 illustrates, a large percentage of employees (40.9% in 2004 and 34.7% in 2005) stated that they really enjoyed working for the hotel. The drop from 2004-2005 could concern the hotel. However, there would seem to be little evidence of major organisational problems that could be worked on. Apart from limited, unqualified comments on improving communication, staffing, training and raising pay rates, there is very little feedback that can be used to improve organisational performance. There does not appear to be any strong links between this qualitative data the major reasons for leaving data provided in Table 1.

**Table 5**  
**Final Message for the General Manager from the Exiting Staff Member (Single Hotel Case)**

Responses	2004 Exits		2005 Exits	
	Total responses	%	Total responses	%
Thank you it was great	9	40.9	8	34.7
Communicate better, thank staff in person	3	13.6	2	8.6
Nothing	2	9	0	0
Things are heading in the right direction	1	4.5	1	4.3
There are a few problems: Staffing and training	1	4.5	3	13.3
I want to come back after study	1	4.5	0	0
You have let a great employee slip through your hands	1	4.5	0	0
Pay staff more	1	4.5	0	0
No response	3	14	9	39.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - HOTEL BRAND Y

Table 6 depicts the various positions held by staff that were interviewed at their time of exit. The F&B Production and Service staff accounted for the highest exit figures of the hotel followed by the Front Office staff.

**Table 6**  
**Positions held by staff on exit**

	<i>No: of responses</i>	<i>% of responses</i>
Chef	25	15.2
Banquet attendant	7	4.2
Bar staff/manager	12	7.3
Room attendant	5	3.0
Housekeeping staff	11	6.7
Kitchen hand	10	6.1
Receptionist	16	9.7
Reservationists	4	2.4
Catering/Conf Sales	7	4.2
Assistant Manager	6	3.6
Accounts & Finance staff	3	1.8
Concierge/Porter	9	5.5
Restaurant staff	3	1.8
F&B Attendant	29	17.6
Doorman	3	1.8
Cashier	3	1.8
Night Manager	3	1.8
Telephonist	5	3.0
Other	4	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 7 shows the level of staff exiting via department. Again it is clear that the majority of staff exiting were from F&B (twenty-five percent) and Front Office (twenty-five percent).

**Table 7**  
**Exits by Department**

	<i>No: of responses</i>	<i>% of responses</i>
Front Office	41	24.7
Kitchens	36	21.7
Housekeeping	17	10.2
Food&Beverage	42	25.3
Restaurant	3	1.8
Finance	3	1.8
Concierge	2	1.2
Sales/Catering Sales	8	4.8
Maintenance	1	.6
Bar	13	7.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 8 is a qualitative analysis of the various reasons cited by the staff for leaving Hotel Brand Y. Traveling has been identified as the most common reason for leaving the job (thirteen percent) followed by moving from Auckland (thirteen percent) and dissatisfied with management (eleven percent).

**Table 8**  
**Reasons stated for exit**

<b>General reason stated</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
going to travel	22	13.3
moving out of Auckland	21	12.7
dissatisfaction with management	18	10.8
going to study	12	7.2
Another job offer	12	7.2
better pay elsewhere	11	6.6
pursue change in career away from hospitality	11	6.6
better working hours elsewhere (inc. not doing shift work)	9	5.4
Other reason	8	4.8
no opportunity for future job development	8	4.8
family reasons	7	4.2
not getting enough work hours	6	3.6
to become self-employed	5	3.0
time to move on	5	3.0
job was not challenging enough	5	3.0
cannot get to work (transport problems)	3	1.8
physical stress of job	2	1.2
disciplinary action	1	.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 9 shows that almost half of existing staff (forty-eight percent) were of the opinion that everything was good. The layout of facilities falls next in line with thirteen percent suggestive of the scope for improvement.

**Table 9**  
**Working Conditions**

<b>General reason stated</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
All is good	72	48
Hard / long work hours	7	4.6
Don't get breaks	1	.6
Need more training	5	3.3
Equipment needs improving	11	7.3
Job is very physically demanding	5	3.3
Layout of facilities could be improved	19	12.6
Interdepartmental clashes	1	.6
Lack of staff car parks - transport	2	1.3
Uniform problems	4	2.6
Kitchens too small – bad air flow	8	5.3
Bad staff food	8	5.3
Staffing problems	7	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	

As evidenced by the results in table 10, managerial relations were mostly considered as good (twenty-seven percent and fifteen percent felt that managers has good standards and considered them as very good. But, on an operational level, peer-like performance is observed as the lowest, scoring less than two percent of the responses.

**Table 10**  
**Managerial Relationships**

<b>General reason stated</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
Manager is fair	8	4.7
Operates like a peer	3	1.7
Managers are not supported by senior management	5	2.9
Manager is not supportive	5	2.9
Manager is good communicator, good mediator, good organizer	20	11.9
Lack of communication with management	14	8.3
Managers hard to access or not there	13	7.7
Manager lacks skills	9	5.3
Manager is a liar	4	2.3
Manager has high standards – is very good	26	15.4
Manager does not take action	5	2.9
Manager is good	46	27.3
Manager is stressed	4	2.3
Manager is rude, confrontational, has temper, is too demanding, has bad attitude	6	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	

Table 14 reveals that by and large employees feel training was good (thirty-four percent), which was followed by fourteen percent of responses stating that the training imparted was basic and on the job.

**Table 11**  
**Training**

<b>General reason stated</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
Already new what do to	7	4.5
Too busy to get training done	8	5.2
Training was basic – mostly on the job	21	13.7
Good – plenty of training	52	33.9
Training is below average for Hotel of this type	16	10.4
Was not told about training options	4	2.6
Training not resourced sufficiently	3	1.9
Excellent, learnt allot	17	11.1
Fidellio training very good	3	1.9
Training could be better	6	3.9
Training needs more management support	4	2.6
No formal training provided	4	2.6
Dropped in deep end, taught myself	5	3.2
Need refresher courses	3	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	

Table 12 shows that more than half of the respondents (fifty-six percent) enjoyed friendly and good relationships with their colleagues, followed by twenty-five percent who did not have any problems.

**Table 12**  
**Relationship with colleagues**

<b>General reason stated</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>% of responses</b>
Fun, friendly, good	75	55.9
OK, no problems	34	25.3
Colleagues not focused	5	3.7
Don't get on with workmate	4	2.9
Feel left out of workplace relationships	3	2.2
Workmates are rude, bully	7	5.2
Not good at all, worst staff ever worked with	2	1.4
Workmates don't work hard	2	1.4
Workmates need more patience, need to listen	2	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>134</b>	

## DISCUSSION

Overall the data from these tables paints a picture of a reasonably happy workforce that hasn't highlighted any outstanding organisational failure as the cause of their decision to leave. While the data from Hotel Brand Y indicates some generalized dissatisfaction (management, pay, hours), few specific links can be made to organizational change. The 'reasons for leaving data' for both brands shows a strong trend towards transfer, relocation, travel and external opportunities. While Hotel Brand X part-time workers show much more varied reasons for leaving (health, lack of hours, education) there is little indication that the organisation has 'done something', or 'failed to do something' that has resulted in the employee deciding to leave. Employees feel they are leaving because they have seen a better opportunity or else they have had to move. Overall, the data for both organisations raises questions about employee commitment to those organisations. The hotel brands appear to be losing the battle to hold employees both against other hospitality organisations, but also against opportunities offered in other industries. A key question is why these employees feel that any of these 'outside' changes result in an irreversible decision to leave.

Furthermore service length within Hotel Brand X's properties illustrates, what Wanous (1992) refers to as 'premature' turnover, in which there is a lack of congruence between individuals and the organisational culture. It is stated that when an individual enters an organisation the early experiences are likely to be positive, creating a honeymoon effect. It is suggested that the hiring organisation presents their most favourable side to potential individuals during the recruitment and entry processes. As stated by Boswell & Boudreau (2005) this portrayal of the organisation in a more positive light contributes to higher individual expectations. This 'initial high' (Wanous, 1992, p. 4) of the new job is likely to wear off, when individuals become established and their expectations are not met. This results in a decline in job satisfaction, known as the hangover effect, which will eventually lead to voluntary turnover. This is partially due to New Zealand's image as a work experience destination (Spoonley, 2004) and the hospitality industry being characterised by historical practices and accepting employee turnover as the norm. No service length data exists for Hotel Brand Y to test this 'premature turnover' hypothesis.

Taken as a whole, the data provided by both hotel brands exit interview process is very limited in its application to organisation change. The information contained in the above table provides a clear picture of *what* is happening, but little information about *why*. The data sourced from the exit interview process is basically descriptive – we can see percentages and breakdowns of position, service time, and 'main reason for leaving', but at the end of this process we are left with the following conclusion - the vast majority of employees who are leaving voluntarily are doing so because they feel other activities will be more rewarding to them. These activities may be travel, education, working for another hospitality organisation or working in another industry completely. The majority of employees feel there is very little the employer could do to stop this from happening. Given the considerable time and resources allocated to the exit interview process, this is scant return.

Even where Hotel Brand Y has tried to focus employee comments into several organisational themes (Work Conditions, Managerial Relations, Training and Colleague Relations), the feedback provides little useful information. In the Work Conditions category, almost 50% of employees feel everything is good, while the main complaint is frustratingly aimed at physical facilities, probably the one thing management can't change! In the Managerial Relations category, a significant 61% of employees rate their managers as good or excellent, while the largest complaint (16%) relates to managers being hard to contact and communicate with. The Training category is probably the most concrete area of organisational change feedback with only 47% of employees rating their training as good. It is here that we can see effort could be applied to improve the employee's employment experience. Finally the Colleague

Relationships category is a strange inclusion. A full 81% of employees rate their colleagues as good, but questions must be raised about the usefulness of this category for organization change purposes.

The data tables describe a workforce which shows very little commitment. This is the finding that needs to be questioned vigorously. The reasons for leaving are almost irrelevant – the reasons for lack of commitment are far more important. There results call for a radical re-conceptualisation of what should be asked in exit interviews and how the exit interview process should be undertaken. If virtually no useful data can be generated for the hotel brands as far as organisational improvement is concerned, then why continue investing time and money in this process? The information gathered during exit interviews will have little meaning for the hotels unless the data, once analysed was used to address trouble spots and effect organisational change.

### **Re-Conceptualizing Exit Interviews**

Based on the literature and findings discussed in this paper, the following tentative suggestions are made for re-designing exit interviews.

Feldman & Klaas (1999) conclude that employees tend to disclose their honest reasons for leaving when data is treated confidentially, when it does not result in a negative reference from their direct supervisors, and when they believe that in the past the employer has taken action on problems identified in exit interviews. Hotel Brand X and Y should consider emphasising the confidential nature of the exit interview information to employees and consider showcasing changes in hotel practice that have been brought about as a result of exit interviews. This concrete linking of exit interviews to organisation change could demonstrate the importance of exit interviews to employees and thus improve the quality of information given during these interviews.

Exiting employees may engage in ‘positive reporting’ if the interview is conducted while they are still working in the organisation and yet to complete exit process such as collecting a final payment and securing a referee. Researchers have found that the ‘responses given during exit interviews are often substantially different from those given in interviews conducted a month or more after the termination’ (Wanous, 1992, p.45). Hotel Brand X and Y may wish to consider researching the validity of this finding by running a pilot study using written exit interviews, one month after the employee has left the organisation. There are obvious practical limitations regarding the tracking and contacting of employees in this suggestion, but even limited feedback could shed light on the usefulness of post-partum exit interviews.

Wanous, 1992 and Fottler, et. al. (1995) argue that the exit interview methodology used for data collation has immense influence the quality of the information collected. They conclude that organisations all too often focus on the reasons for leaving in interviews, rather than the attitudinal and organisational causes for turnover. It is this question of *what* questions should be asked in exit interviews that is of greatest interest to the authors of this paper. Hotel Brand X and Y should consider focusing exit interview questions around key organisational and attitudinal *hot spots*, from which suggestions for changes in organizational practice could be made.

Issues such as inadequate socialisation and the resulting dissonance must be explored with departing employees in exit interviews. Wanous (1992), Allen (2006), and Birchfield (2001) all argue that premature turnover is of key importance to organizations and that issues around socialization are crucial to the control of that turnover. The findings presented in this paper

further highlight the importance of premature turnover for Hotel X, with 83% of part-time workers leaving before one year of service in 2005.

As result of turnover research focusing excessively on the antecedents of turnover, and neglecting the consequences and prevention methods, discrepancies between ideal and actual practice have been plentiful. An example of these discrepancies is that according to exit interview theory employees who leave an organisation can provide considerable insight into the turnover problem. However empirical research has found that methodologies and research outcomes have often resulted in inaccuracies and deficiencies in exit interview knowledge. An example of a shortcoming in a few conceptual models (Mobley, 1982; Price & Mueller, 1981; Wanous, 1992) is that they focus primarily on internal variables that organisations have control over, whilst disregarding the external variables which, according to recent theorists (Allen, 2006) are equally important (e.g. unemployment, labour markets).

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Turnover research has focused excessively on the antecedents, and has neglected the consequences and prevention of turnover. As a result this highlights the significant gaps between the conceptual research and the management practice. The concept of exit interviews superbly illustrates this gap, since conceptual research states that exit interviews are a powerful tool to combat turnover, however analysis of the outputs of exit interview data shows that few links can be made back to organisational improvement.

There are advantages for Hotel Brand X and Y continuing to conduct exit processes such as interviews. Gathering significant statistical data could allow them to gain greater insight in to motivations for departure and allow them to monitor trends as well as forecast turnover levels. However for Hotel Brand X and Y to realise the real synergies that can be gained from exit processes they need to address the suggested deficiencies discussed in the literature and demonstrated in this paper. The practice of exit interviews can be very costly, particularly if the right questions are not asked, and especially if the information collated is never used. Unless an effective and safe process is designed there is also the added risk that people do not divulge the truth in the exit interview about the real reasons of their departure, thus making the process largely redundant.

Organisations typically focus the exit interviews on the reasons of leaving, rather than the attitudinal and organisational causes for turnover. This focus results in data that fails to inform organisational improvement. Having argued that employee attitude surveys, unlike exit interviews, generate high-quality reliable information about the organisation, a serious question mark hangs over the efficacy of exit interviews.

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