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‘I love you – goodbye: Exit Interviews and Turnover in The New Zealand Hotel Industry’

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from data analysis of 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 object of the paper is to discuss the efficacy of the exit interview process in these organisations. The paper is placed in the context of high turnover rates in Australia and New Zealand, and the strategic challenges that these rates of turnover bring to the hospitality and tourism industry. Consequently the theoretical foundations of employee turnover and exit interview efficacy are discussed in the literature review. Findings raise discussion questions regarding the effectiveness of information provided by the exit interview process, and furthermore lead the authors to ask how organisational improvement can be directed if there is a process in place that fails to provide applicable employee feedback?

INTRODUCTION

The Hospitality and Tourism industry is a large and rapidly growing part of New Zealand and Australia’s economies. Many industry associations, employers, government departments and academics in New Zealand and Australia are increasingly concerned about the high levels of turnover in tourism and hospitality industries. Three recent reports, *The Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation, 2007*, *The Draft New Zealand Tourism Strategy to 2015* and *The Hospitality Standards Institute Employment Profile of the Hospitality Industry 2007*, highlight the potential damage that labour market pressures are bringing to the industry:

Irreparable damage to our brand will result if labour shortages mean that Australia is unable to deliver on the expectations created by promotional activities. One of the major workforce challenges facing the industry is how to reduce staff turnover.

(The Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation, 2007)

The biggest impediment to achieving or exceeding forecast growth lies with a shortage of appropriately skilled labour for the sector. Significant tourist volume has been possible through the availability of relatively cheap labour. Further growth on this basis can be considered to be severely constrained.

(The Draft New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 – 2007)

Industry representative, from every region, were unanimous in stating the current labour shortages will increase over the next five years. (Hospitality Standards Institute - LIASE Report, 2007)

The current labour market conditions of low unemployment are exacerbating the critical levels of employee turnover in the hospitality sector as a whole. According to Statistics New Zealand (2006), the hospitality sector has a turnover rate of 29.2% for 2006 as opposed to 16.7% national average for all work sectors. However, recent figures discussed at the 2006 New Zealand Hotel Council Conference, put hotel employee turnover as high as 60%. This very high turnover rate is occurring in a labour market with historically low unemployment of

3.8%, (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Thus hotels are faced with the strategic human resource management challenge of very high turnover in a time of intense labour scarcity and skills shortage. Given the hotel industry employees 17,000 people and has a *minimum* annual turnover average of 29.2%, the annual cost of turnover to the hotel industry using the above equation comes to just over US\$17 million or NZ\$22 million at current exchange rates.

Labour turnover and weak employee commitment to the organisation have the potential to negatively impact on the quality of services. This is particularly important in a market which is competitive at the local level, as well as at the global level as New Zealand attempts to increase its share of international tourism. Addressing these turnover issues therefore, is a matter of increasing the industry's competitive edge, through providing a satisfying workplace for employees. In order to develop appropriate workplace strategies, however, it is necessary to discover the perceptions of employees themselves. One of the most common tools used to gather employee perceptions regarding turnover is the exit interview.

LITERATURE

International focus on turnover

Turnover has been a focus of intense international research in Human Resource Management discipline for many years (March & Simon, 1958; Porter & Steers, 1973; Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978; Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Greenhalgh (1980), in Boxall, Macky and Rasmussen (2003) points out that the body of literature on employee turnover is vast, to the extent that it would challenge any author to cover it all. Boxall, Macky and Rasmussen (2003) instead refer readers to comprehensive reviews on the turnover literature in Price (1977), Cotton and Tuttle (1986), Tett and Meyer (1993), Hom and Griffeth (1995) and the most recent meta-analysis by Griffeth, Hom and Gaertner (2000), highlighting just some of the key themes:

- Turnover is higher in organisations with high employment instability, either perceived poor job security or higher layoff rates.
- Unemployment rates affect turnover – low unemployment and a tight labour market affects employee perceptions of ease in gaining alternative employment.
- Job satisfaction is consistently negatively associated with employee turnover.
- The extent to which employees feel their contributions are valued is inversely related to their turnover rates.
- Congruence between employee and employer preferences for work hours, shift structures and employment types (full-time, part-time) reduce turnover.

The work of Wanous (1992) is of particular interest for hospitality organisations, as it focuses on premature turnover and the role of socialisation in turnover. According to Wanous (1992) and Allen (2006), turnover is the highest among new entrants. 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 at an exit interview.

Hospitality Focus on Turnover

Turnover has also been a topic of long and intense international research in the hospitality sector (Wasmuth & Davis, 1983; Lashley, 2001; Brien, 2004). One stream of this research has focussed on quantifying the cost of turnover in hospitality, (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000; Woods & Macaulay, 1989; Lashley, 2001). Simons and Hinkin (2001) approached the quantitative problem from a different perspective and demonstrated that employee turnover is

strongly associated with decreased profits. A second stream of research has sought to uncover causes and provide solutions to hospitality employee turnover (Brien, 2004; Poulston 2005). These authors highlight almost every area of hospitality management as a potential cause of employee turnover, and required site for improvement. These include selection, orientation and retention, the self-image of the industry, training, management development, employee voice and empowerment, long term development, pay and rewards. The pool of potential causes and cures for turnover appears limitless.

Exit Interviews

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). A principal aim of conducting exit interviews is to provide employers with information to help prevent the loss of other employees, for example, through the identification of training and development needs (Green, 2004). The interviews are a two way process, as the 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. 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.

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. Woods & Macauley (1987) conducted research on 27 American hospitality organisations finding that organisations too often centred the interviews on the reasons for leaving, rather than the attitudinal and organisational causes for turnover, leading them to stress that exit interview methodology has immense influence the quality of the information collected. Exit interview theorists suggest that a person-to-person interview often negatively affects the results of those interviews (Phillips & Connell, 2003). 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, Woods & Macauley's (1987) research mentioned that fictitious reasons for departure are often cited at exit interviews as employees are reluctant to cite reasons that condemn the actions of the organisation, management and supervisors in open interviews.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Hotel Brand X

Hotel X operates in New Zealand and is experiencing high levels of voluntary turnover, with a total turnover rate of 67.5% in 2005 (personal communication, July 6th, 2006). Hotel X worldwide consists of over 4,100 hotels. 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 data is represented in two levels. Table 1 represents national data, based on twelve hotels for 2004 and sixteen hotels for 2005. Data from this national level covers 661 exit interviews for 2004 and 911 exit interviews for 2005. Tables 2 and 3 represent a single hotel case study and show 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.

All data is based on a standardised, two page exit interview sheet, which is filled out by the employee in the company of a representative from the Human Resource Department of the hotel. The first page of the exit interview form is quantitative in nature, where information such as gender, tenure and department are recorded. In addition, the employee's tick a box from a pre-selected list of "Reasons for Leaving" (Table 1). The second page of the exit interview form contains qualitative sections, where the employee can write comments regarding their reasons for leaving and reflections on conditions (Table 2 and 3). The exit interviews are generally completed in the employees last week of work – usually on the last day. 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. Table 4 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 tables represent qualitative answers to question based around Working Conditions, Managerial Relationships, Training and Relationships with Colleagues (Tables 5-8). All data is based on a standardised, two page exit interview sheet, which is filled out by the employee in the company of a representative from the Human Resource Department of the hotel. The exit interviews are generally completed in the employees last week of work – usually on the last day. Both hotel groups attempt to interview every leaving employee, but in cases of abandonment or refusal, a small minority of employees are not represented in this data.

FINDINGS HOTEL BRAND X**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	4	16	17	-	2	25	7	8	14	-	1	19
Hospitality Career Opp – Other	9	11	12	-	2	37	6	11	14	-	2	63
Industry 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
Totals	42	74	91	1	8	438	51	97	97	0	19	621

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, whereas 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. Managers and supervisors are far more likely to be leaving for reasons of internal transfer.

A clear trend in Table 2 is that employee's state that 'nothing' could be done to stop them from leaving. Almost 60% of employee's exiting in 2004 stating this and 53% of exiting employee's stating this in 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', 'travel', 'new experiences'. The employees offer a wider range of specific reasons for leaving in 2005 than 2004, (e.g. 'family moving', 'would have liked more job advancement'). 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 to enact organisational change.

Table 2
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
Total	22	100	23	100

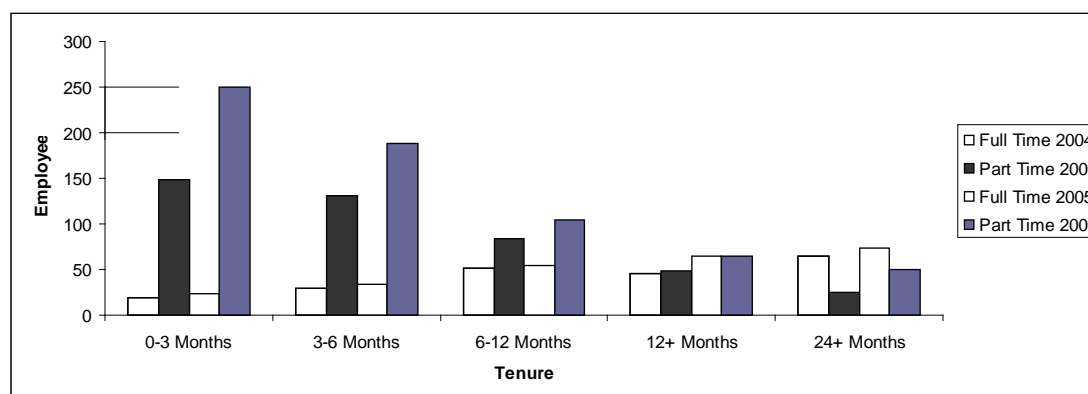
As Table 3 illustrates, a large percentage of employees (40.9% in 2004 and 34.7% in 2005) stated that they really enjoyed working for the hotel. The drop from 2004-2005 could concern the hotel. However, there would seem to be little evidence of major organisational problems that could be worked on. Apart 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 3
Final Message for the General Manager (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
Total	22	100	23	100

A clearly significant trend in the graph (Figure 1) 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 1
Tenure Comparison of Full and Part Time Employee Turnover (2004 & 2005)



FINDINGS - HOTEL BRAND Y

Table 4 is a qualitative analysis of the various reasons cited by the staff for leaving Hotel Brand Y. Travelling 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 4
Reasons stated for exit

General reason stated	No. of responses	% of responses
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
Total	166	100.0

Table 5 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 5
Working Conditions

General reason stated	No. of responses	% of responses
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
Total	150	

As evidenced by the results in table 6, managerial relations were mostly considered as good (twenty-seven percent and fifteen percent felt that managers have 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 6
Managerial Relationships

General reason stated	No. of responses	% of responses
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
Total	168	

Table 7 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 7
Training

General reason stated	No. of responses	% of responses
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
Total	153	

Table 8 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 8
Relationship with colleagues

General reason stated	No. of responses	% of responses
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
Total	134	

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, or failed to do, something that has resulted in the employee deciding to leave.

Employees say 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.

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. The 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

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.

Exactly *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 (Allen, 2006). 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.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Turnover research has focused excessively on the antecedents, and has neglected the consequences and prevention of turnover, resulting in significant gaps between the conceptual research and the management practice. There are advantages for Hotel Brand X and Y continuing to conduct exit processes such as interviews, yet for them to realise the real synergies that can be gained from exit processes they need to address the suggested deficiencies. 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. 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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