

Key Factors that Motivate Employees in an ODL Institution: Some Experience from the Zimbabwe Open University

Daniel Ndudzo
Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

The research sought to identify factors that motivate employees at the Zimbabwe Open University. Many organizations are realizing that they have to establish an equitable balance between the employee's contribution to the organization and the organization's contribution to the employee. Theories of motivation argue that employees are more likely to perform well in organizations where they get praise, recognition for work done, love, friendship and a sense of belonging. The study used quantitative and descriptive research methodology. Stratified random sampling was used to select respondents of various staff grades in the University. The questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. The study revealed that the Zimbabwe Open University employees are highly motivated to work for the University. The research concluded that ZOU employees were mainly motivated by staff development opportunities, delegation of authority and the ZOU allowance. The study recommended that the University should introduce recognition awards, invest more in the provision of work related resources, improve institutional communication and ensure the timeous release of the ZOU allowance to boost employee motivation.

Background of the study

The Zimbabwe Open University is the sole State Open and Distance Learning University in Zimbabwe. Understanding the concerns of employees through tools such as employee surveys enable organisations to implement policies and procedures that can improve staff retention. Employee surveys are used by companies to measure employee satisfaction levels, track changes in employee satisfaction over time and improve overall satisfaction and retention. The general understanding has been that conditions of service have improved in universities but a survey has not been carried out to determine the level of staff motivation across the different grades, in the University under study.

This study therefore sought to investigate the levels of staff motivation at the Zimbabwe Open University with a view to articulating critical factors that motivate or demotivate staff. It is expected that the research findings, if implemented, will assist in addressing those factors that contribute to or militate against employee motivation at the Zimbabwe Open University and possibly in other Open and Distance Learning institutions in the Region.

Statement of the problem

The Zimbabwe Open University's strategic plan 2010- 2014 emphasizes extraordinary effort by all staff to restore the performance of the institution to levels anticipated in the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan. This level of performance requires highly motivated employees in the institution. There is very little information concerning employee motivation in higher

educational institutions in Zimbabwe especially in ODL. This study therefore seeks to identify key factors that motivate employees at the Zimbabwe Open University.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to identify critical factors that motivate or militate against staff motivation at the Zimbabwe Open University.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify factors that motivates employees to work for the Zimbabwe Open University.
- To identify factors that demotivate employees to work for the Zimbabwe Open University
- To recommend motivational strategies that can improve employee engagement at the Zimbabwe Open University.

Key research questions

The study sought to address the following questions

- What are the factors that motivate employees to work for the Zimbabwe Open University?
- What factors demotivate employees to work at the Zimbabwe Open University?
- Which factors can be recommended for the Zimbabwe Open University to improve employee engagement?

Justification of the study

The subject of employee motivation is critical for the survival of the Zimbabwe Open University and other ODL institutions since it is the quality of people working for the organization that will determine the success or failure of the organization. It is therefore hoped that the findings of this research, if implemented, will assist the University and other ODL institutions in addressing critical factors that motivate or demotivate employees at the workplace, given the role that high-caliber and well motivated staff play in institutional productivity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines practices distilled from the literature on motivating staff. This is done because the subject of employee motivation is of particular interest to any organisation owing to the crucial role it plays in the fulfillment of the vision, mission and goals of an organisation. Helliegel, Slocum, and Woodman (1992) describe motivation as the force acting on or within a person that causes the person to behave in a specific, goal-directed manner.

Human Resources Model (Porter, Bigley and Steers 2003)

The HR model views employees as being motivated by a complex set of interrelated factors, such as money, need for affiliation, and desire for meaningful work (Porter et al 2003). The HR Model sees employees as reservoirs of potential talent and suggests that it is managerial responsibility to determine the best methods of motivating staff. (Redman and Wilkinson 2001). There appears to be a basic assumption in this model that people want to contribute positively to a job. For instance, employees are pre-motivated to do a job, thus the more they are motivated the more meaningful the job

becomes to them (Porter et al 2003). However, if this is not the case employers should seek to make the job motivating by redesigning the job and by making it more varied or autonomous (Mabey and Salaman, 1995). From a motivational perspective, managerial tasks include determining the best use of the workforce's resources, assist employees in the achievement of goals in an organisational context, introduce a philosophy that leads to greater employee participation in decision making and set up a situation where both the organisation and the employee meet their goals. (Porter et al 2003).

Hierarchical Model of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation (Vallerand 2001)

Vallerand, 1997's Hierarchical model of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation provides a framework for organizing and understanding the mechanisms underlying intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation that is driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself and exists within the individual rather than relying on external pressures or a desire for a reward. Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation that is influenced by the desire for an external reward such as salary or incentive. Much research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has shown that motivation can vary due to social and personal factors and that it can influence several types of outcomes (Vallerand, 1997, 2001).

The above mentioned theories summarise factors that have a strong bearing on employee motivation. The study therefore explored employee's perceptions about their working conditions at ZOU using the above mentioned theoretical underpinnings.

Methodology

This research on the evaluation of employee motivation at ZOU utilized the quantitative and descriptive survey design. The survey method is good for generalizations and explanations (Newman, 2000). The questionnaire instrument was used to collect information from ZOU employees.

Sample

A total of seventy five (75) staff members selected through stratified random sampling participated in the study. This is about 25% of the total ZOU staff compliment at the National Centre and Harare Region. The ZOU salaries pay roll was used to come up with a stratified random sample.

Data Collection Procedure

An employee of the HR Department administered the questionnaires to all the staff members who were randomly selected. The completed questionnaires were then analyzed using the SPSS package. Out of the ninety (90) questionnaires that were sent out 75 were returned and that constituted 83.3% of the distributed questionnaires.

Findings

A total of seventy five (75) staff members from the ZOU National Centre and the Harare Region participated in the study. Most of the employees, 54% have served the University for more than 5 years. Of these, the majority (67.70%) were male. 80% of the participants were below 50 years. 75% of the respondents were married.

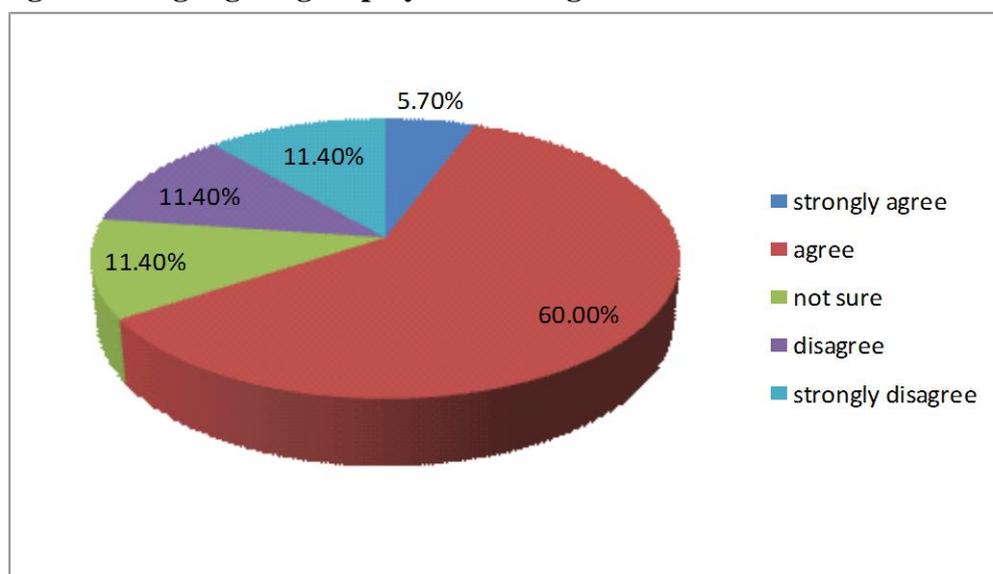
MOTIVATORS (FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE ZOU STAFF)

The study revealed that, the following factors motivate employees to work for the Zimbabwe Open University.

Staff development opportunities

The study highlighted that 72.3% of the respondents indicated that employees are satisfied with staff development opportunities at ZOU. The exemption from payment of ZOU fees by staff and their dependants motivates most employees at ZOU. The study indicated that 80% of the respondents are below 50 years and this may mean that most of the ZOU employees and their dependants could be motivated to pursue University education by virtue of their age.

Figure 1.0 highlighting employees' feelings on attractive remuneration at ZOU

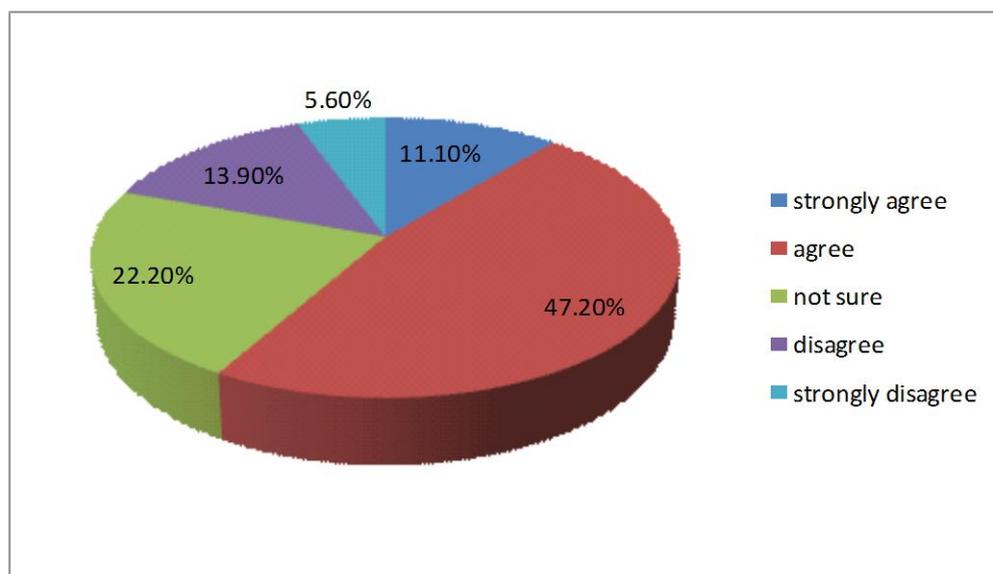


The study also revealed that most participants agreed that the salaries they are getting match the responsibilities of their work in the ZOU. Of the 75 participants in the survey, (65.7%) indicated that ZOU, through assistance from the government of Zimbabwe, was paying competitive salaries which matched salary scales of other Institutions of Higher Learning in Zimbabwe.

Job grading and satisfaction

The study revealed that most of the employees at ZOU are satisfied with their job positions and grading. Of the seventy-five employees who participated in the research, 58.4% stated that employee's tasks and responsibilities are clearly organised. This implies that employees at ZOU have got clear job descriptions. The majority of the respondents, 79% found their jobs to be very challenging.

Figure 1.1 showing employees' respond on job security at ZOU



The study confirmed that 58.3% of the respondents indicated they are satisfied with job security at ZOU. Job security is the sureness that an employee will not lose his/ her job without prior notice unless and until the organization or the individual agrees to do so. A secure and stable job with the right challenges gives peace of mind to an employee thus employee retention is likely to improve in an organisation.

Provision of performance feedback by supervisors to subordinates

Most participants, 58.9% of the respondents indicated that supervisors provided employees with performance feedback. This shows that relations between employees and their supervisors are cordial. When employees understand leadership expectations through regular appraisals and feedback, they may find it easier to perform their job. When a supervisor evaluates an employee's performance he/she can provide specific objectives, and ways to improve staff value to the organization. If an employee struggles in one aspect of his/her performance, through direct communication the employee is encouraged by his/her supervisor to improve his/her performance.

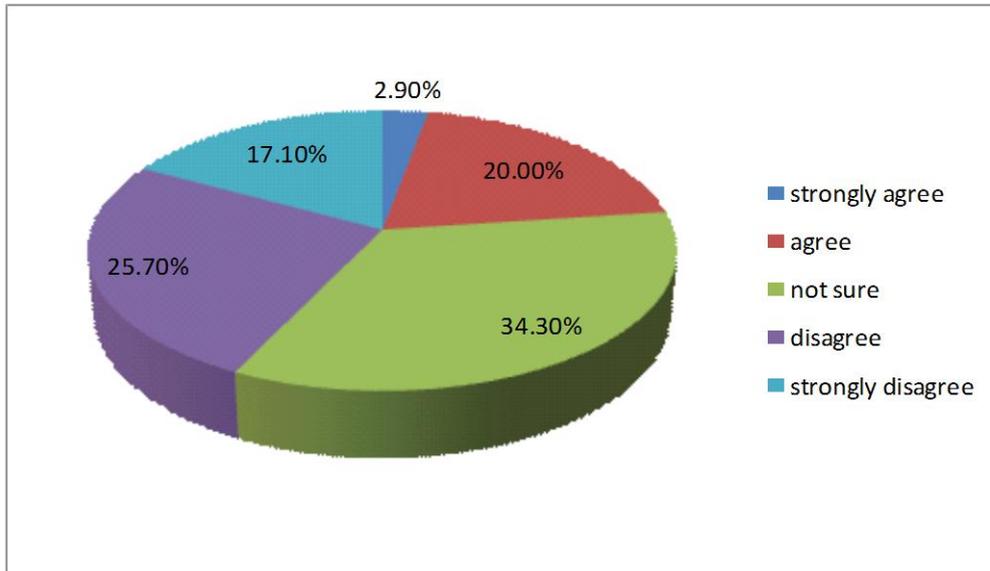
Delegation of authority

The study highlighted that 70% of the respondents felt that there is delegation of authority at the Zimbabwe Open University. This implies that subordinates feel trusted by their supervisors which helps to promote team spirit.

Demotivators (Factors that demotivate ZOU employees)

The following factors demotivated employees to work at ZOU.

Figure 1.2 showing staff's feelings on recognition of outstanding employees at ZOU

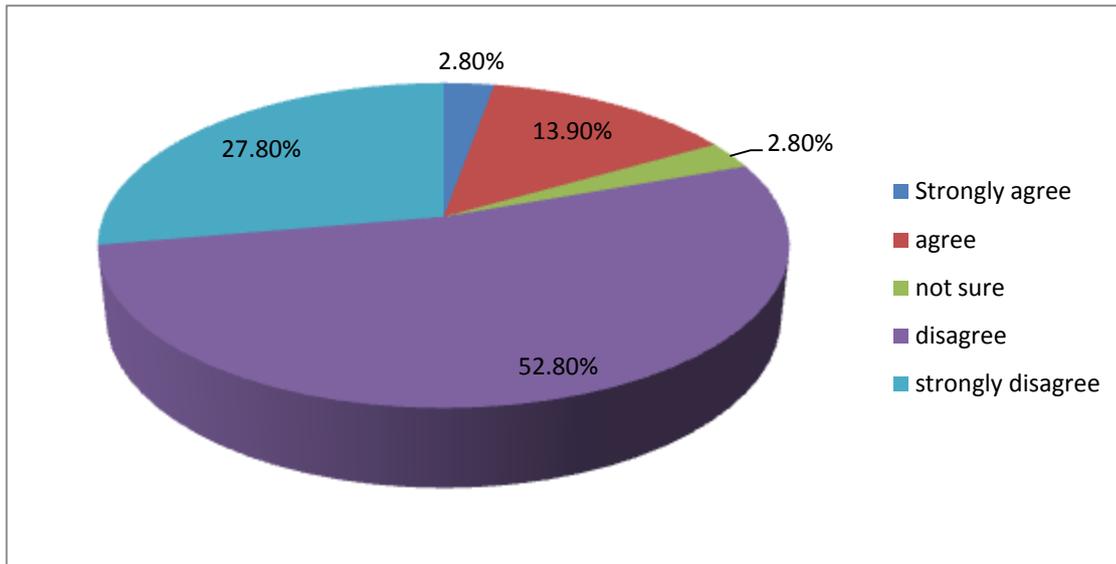


The study revealed that 77, 1% of the respondents felt that individual effort is not rewarded appropriately at ZOU. This finding may suggest that the Zimbabwe Open University is not recognizing and rewarding individual employees for doing a good job. This factor may account for the lack of motivation found among some members. Recognising employees' outstanding performance may encourage staff innovativeness. Research has proven that employees who get recognized tend to have higher self-esteem, more confidence, and more willingness to take on new challenges,(Deci 1975). The failure to recognize and acknowledge employees' performance may have a very detrimental effect on employee engagement as they will feel that they are being taken advantage of. Employees felt that their direct managers did not recognise their good work and expressed concerns about not receiving sufficient rewards through the current performance management system.

Office space and furniture

The study confirmed that 55.6% of the respondents are not satisfied with the quality of office furniture at ZOU. The study further revealed that 62.8% of the respondents were not satisfied with the provision of office space at ZOU. Most employees highlighted that ZOU should invest more in the provision of quality office furniture and spacious office space that match international standards.

Figure 1.3 showing staff's respond on resources allocation at ZOU

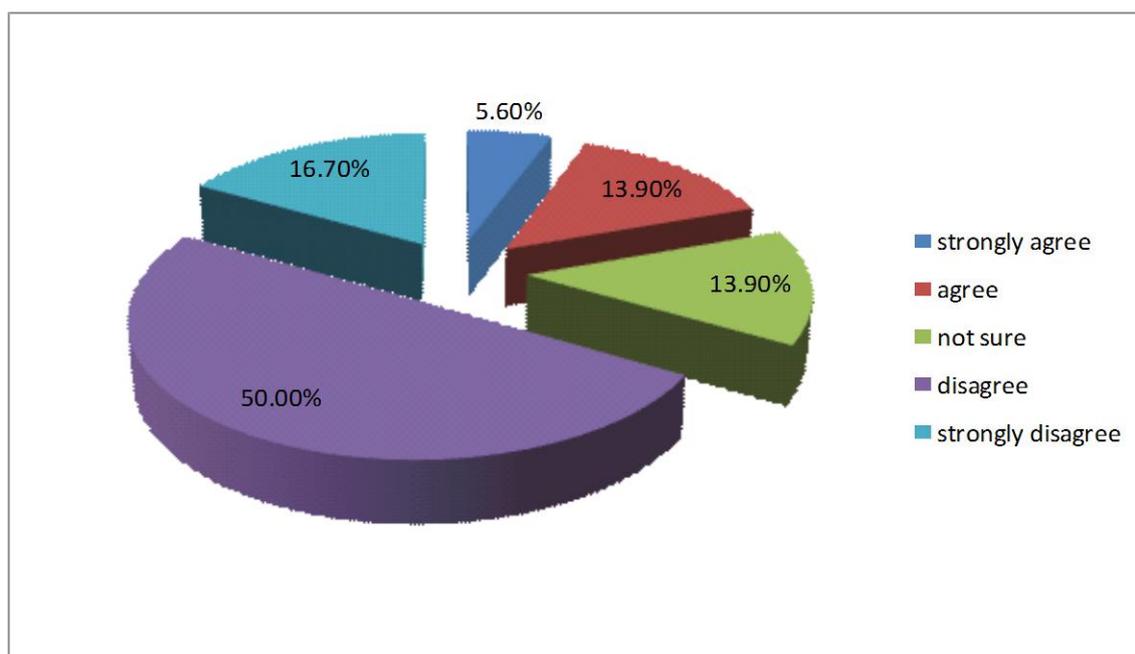


Asked whether ZOU provided sufficient resources to employees, (83.5%) of the respondents strongly felt that ZOU did not provide sufficient resources to achieve organisational objectives. The research highlighted that inadequacy of resources led to some employees into using their own personal funds to purchase basic office requirements like bond paper.

Unavailability of housing and car loans

The research revealed that 85% of the respondents indicated that the unavailability of housing and car loans, demotivated ZOU employees. Most employees highlighted that the University should facilitate the availability of housing schemes and car loans.

Figure 1.4 showing employees' feelings on communication of job challenges at ZOU

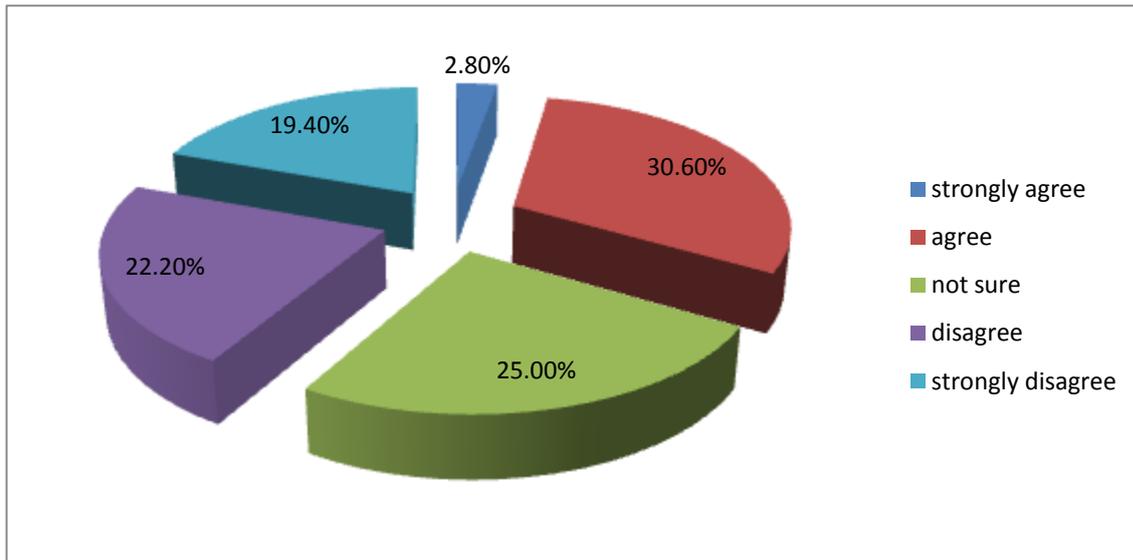


The study confirmed that 80.6% of the respondents felt that employees are not satisfied with the manner that job challenges are handled at ZOU. Most employees indicated that there was no platform at ZOU to air out work related challenges to management. If management does not avail clear communication platforms to address job challenges employees may lack enthusiasm in doing their assignments and University projects may be slow and inefficient to complete.

Involvement in decision making

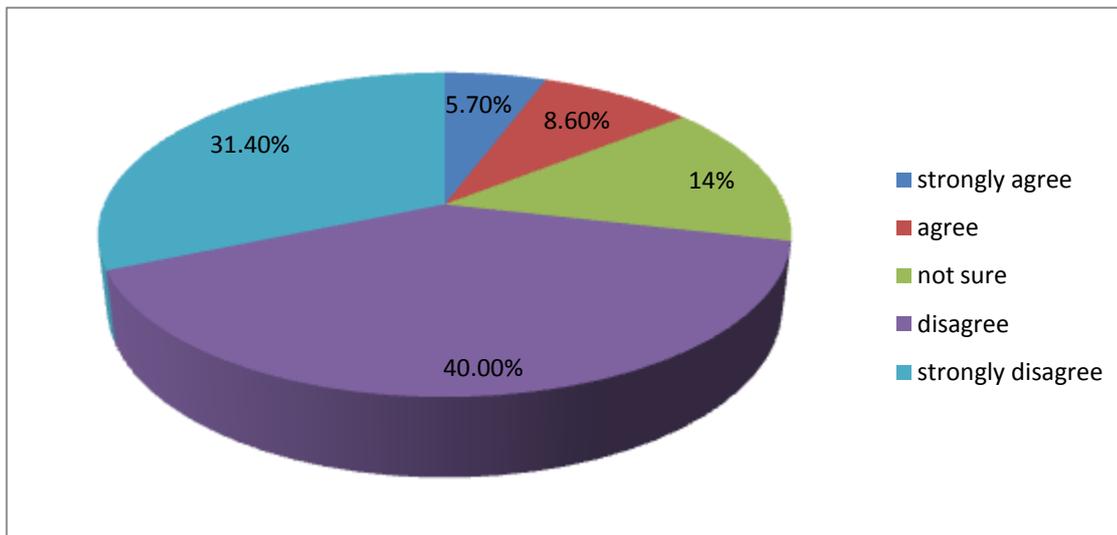
The study highlighted that 72.8% of the employees felt that employees were not involved in key decision making at ZOU. Participatory decision making will promote a shared vision within the University thereby enabling a clear strategic direction for the organisation. Deci (1975) asserted that “when people have some say about what they do and how they will do it, they become ego involved and committed to do it (p. 223).” This idea relates to the concept of participative management which promotes employee involvement in key decision making. (Deci 1975)

Figure 1.5 showing employees' respond on appointment process and promotion at ZOU



The research revealed that 66.6% of the respondents revealed that employees are not satisfied with the appointment process and promotion. Most employees felt that the top management was not fully abiding by the appointment and procedure manual when appointing and promoting employees. The employees insisted that ZOU management should enhance transparency and openness in all the University's promotion processes.

Figure 2.0 showing staff's feelings on ZOU monetary allowances



The study highlighted that 77.4% of the respondents indicated that the ZOU employees were demotivated by the irregular disbursement of the ZOU allowance. ZOU employees felt that the University was depriving them of their benefit by the non payment of the ZOU allowance in time.

Provision for leisure activities

The research revealed that 83.3% of the respondents indicated that employees were not satisfied with the way ZOU promoted leisure and sporting activities. Most of the ZOU employees indicated that the University is not doing enough to promote sporting activities.

Sporting activities provides a platform that cement social relationships among ZOU employees thereby boosting team orientation within the organisation

Mistrust at ZOU.

The study observed that 67.8% of the respondents indicated that there is an atmosphere of mistrust at ZOU. This could be due to autonomous decision making at the University. Participatory decision making may promote a sense of belonging on the part of employees who may also feel being trusted.

The research revealed that the above mentioned push factors demotivate employees to work for the Zimbabwe Open University. The University should address these factors to avoid a high turnover rate of employees which can be costly to the organisation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study bring to the fore several motivational issues confronting the Zimbabwe Open University employees. The study has clearly shown that the majority of respondents are motivated to work for the University by basic physiological needs like attractive salaries and allowances, exemption from payment of the Zimbabwe Open University fees for the family, job security and a favourable working environment. It is also important to note that a significant number of respondents identified inadequate work related resources such as stationery, office space and furniture, non-rewarding of outstanding employees, the irregular disbursement of ZOU allowances as key employee demotivators at the Zimbabwe Open University. The research suggested that the University should invest more on the provision of adequate work related resources, provide recognition awards for outstanding employees and ensure a regular disbursement of the ZOU allowance. These recommended strategies would best serve the human resources interests of the Zimbabwe Open University and allow it to attain its envisioned World Class status in the near future.

Recommendations

Basing on the above research findings, it is recommended that the Zimbabwe Open University should address the following issues:

- The University should explore further strategies that promote both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation so that workers are motivated to perform. Examples of approved schemes which require urgent implementation are, Worker of the year award; Vice Chancellor's trophy for the most improved worker, Long service award, Unit of the Year Award etc. These together with improved performance appraisal systems will create a desire for recognition which helps to promote employee engagement.
- Communication must be improved throughout the various units and departments. Regular Unit/faculty meetings, notice boards, internal magazines/bulletins are some less costly strategies to improve communication on work related challenges.
- Wherever possible, the University must avail adequate work related resources such as stationery, office space and furniture so that employees can successfully accomplish their tasks. In addition, there is need to create more transparency in the allocation of scarce resources in the University.
- The Zimbabwe Open University should regularly disburse the ZOU allowance to avoid frustration of staff.

REFERENCES

Deci, E.L. (1975). *Intrinsic motivation*. New York: Plenum Press.

Hellriegel, D., Slocum, J. W., and Woodman, R. W. *Organizational Behavior*, West Publishing Company, St. Paul, MN, 1992.

Herzberg F. (2003) *One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?* Harvard business Review 81 (1) 87- 97

Jack, T.D. (1993)*Managing Change Cases and Concepts*. Richard D. Irwin. Inc. Sydney, Australia

Kim D. (2006). *Employee Motivation: Just Ask Your Employees*. Soul Journal of Business – Volume 12, Number 1 (June 2006) Namseoul University, Cheonan

Laschinger, H. K. S., "A Theoretical Approach to Studying Work Empowerment in Nursing: A Review of Studies Testing Kanter's Theory of Structural Power in Organizations", *Nursing Administration Quarterly*, 20 (2), 1996, 25-41.

Mabey, C. and Salaman, G. (1995) *Strategic Human Resource Management : A Reader*. Oxford : Blackwell

Poole, M. 1999. *Human Resource Management: Critical Perspectives on Business and Management*. London, UK. Routledge.

Porter, M.E, 2004, *Competitive advantage: Creating and sustaining superior performance*. USA. Free press.

Porter L.W, Bigley G.A, Steers R.M, 2003, *Motivation and Work Behavior*, Seventh Edition, McGraw-Hill.

Pelletier, L. G., Fortier, M. S., Vallerand, R. J., & Brière, N. M. (2001). Associations among perceived autonomy support, forms of self-regulation, and persistence: A prospective study. *Motivation and Emotion*, 25, 279-306

Redman, T and Wilkinson, A.(2001) *Contemporary human resource management*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Vallerand R.J. (1997). Towards a hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Zanna M.P. (eds), New York: Academic Press; 271-360.