



# Talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the literature relating to retention of good employees and the role that work-life balance (WLB) issues have in an employee's decision to stay or leave an organisation. The paper begins with a brief overview of the seminal material in the more generic management literature and then tailors the discussion to the hospitality and tourism industry using literature from the hospitality and tourism journals.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper provides an overview of the key employee turnover literature within the hospitality and tourism industry for those academics researching in this area, with specific attention given to the role of WLB issues in the turnover decision-making process. The paper also provides a theoretical and practical framework for industry to develop strategies for reduced employee turnover, with a focus on the role that balancing work and family plays in these strategies.

**Findings** – The key findings emerging from this literature review focus on job attitudes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, personal attributes such as positive and negative affectivity, the role of WLB in employee turnover and, finally, the strategies provided to alleviate high turnover rates.

**Originality/value** – Recommendations to management are presented for both government and organisational consideration. These recommendations include the need for legislation on maximum, as well as minimum working hours, good role models at the workplace, flexible working hours and arrangements, sound recruitment and training opportunities and company family friendly work policies.

**Keywords** Retention, Job satisfaction, Employee attitudes, Stress

**Paper type** General review

## Introduction

Maintaining a stable workforce is a key element in effective talent management strategy and yet over the years this has been something of a challenge for hospitality and tourism operators. Research into the retention of talented staff is ongoing and this article examines the findings from such research to put forward strategies for industry consideration.

There are four key themes to the current research. Firstly, the article examines the literature on models of turnover and the subsequent implications of these models. Seminal work by researchers such as Porter and Steers (1973), Mobley *et al.* (1979) and Price (1977) has underpinned work in this area by Cotton and Tuttle (1986), Griffeth and Hom (1995), Deery and Iverson (1996), Deery and Shaw (1999) and Ghiselli *et al.* (2001), these latter three being located in the hospitality and tourism industry. Much of this research examines the role that constructs such as organisational commitment and job satisfaction play in contributing to employees' intentions to leave an organisation. The second theme addresses the personal attributes of job stress and turnover intentions play in the decision to leave an organisation.



The third theme emerging from the literature examines the role that work-life balance (WLB) plays in employee turnover. Work by Wang and Walumbwa (2007), for example, investigates the role that family friendly programs have on work withdrawal, while Dagger and Sweeney (2006) specifically focus on quality of life issues and employee turnover. Finally, research on the fourth theme on strategies to achieve higher retention rates is discussed. Maxwell's (2005) research, for example, into the role of managers in WLB policies and practices informs this fourth theme.

This article, then, scopes the literature to identify past and ongoing debates around perspectives, causes, solutions and organisational strategies surrounding labour turnover and identify the implications of these for approaches to talent management. The article focuses around four themes that appear frequently in the hospitality employee turnover literature. These are the role of job attitudes such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment, personal attributes such as positive and negative affectivity, the role of WLB in employee intention to leave and, finally, the strategic role that organisational activities such as training and career development can play in retaining staff.

### Theme 1: job attitudes

The constructs of job satisfaction and organisational commitment have been consistently found to influence employee turnover and have underpinned studies by Tutuncu and Kozak (2007), Robinson and Barron (2007) and Carbery *et al.* (2003). Much of the debate in previous research has focused on whether it is organisational commitment or job satisfaction that has the greatest influence on employee turnover and, although this issue is examined in the hospitality literature cited here, other issues relating to these job attitudes are also incorporated into the studies. For example, the work by Carbery *et al.* (2003) investigate that the psychological contract, career expectations and managerial competencies have in the decision to leave an organisation. In concluding, the authors found that "a combination of demographic, human capital, psychological attributes and hotel characteristics, explain significant variance in turnover cognitions of hotel managers" (p. 671).

Robinson and Barron (2007), on the other hand, focus on the issues of deskilling and standardisation that lead to a lack of job satisfaction and organisational commitment and ultimately to the decision to leave the organisation. Research by Tutuncu and Kozak (2007) concur with these findings, noting that the work itself, the pay and supervision within the hotel industry can lead to job dissatisfaction and then employee turnover. Many of these studies use the job descriptive index (JDI) by Smith *et al.* (1969), in which the key components of job satisfaction are the work itself, pay, co-workers, supervision and an overall job satisfaction variable. The work by Walmsley (2004), for example, uses the JDI dimensions testing the perceptions of these aspects according to both employers and employees. Substantial differences were found between their perceptions. Gustafson's (2002) study on employees in private clubs in USA confirms the role that low pay, and the opportunity for better pay, plays in the decision to leave an organisation. In addition to these considerations, Lam *et al.* (2002) also focus on the role that mentoring and training play in new employees' decisions to leave an organisation. Importantly, they have found that training new employees significantly mitigates their desires to leave the organisation.

Finally, the work by Ghiselli *et al.* (2001) and Stalcup and Pearson (2001) examine the causes of turnover using management data. Lawrence and Pearson's study is particularly interesting in that it examines both voluntary and involuntary causes. They note the similarities and differences between the causes cited by the employees and those cited by the organisation. In terms of differences, none of the employees cited a lack of skills or a lack of motivation as a cause, whereas the managers cited these as important influences on the decision to leave. Managers, on the other hand, did not cite integrity or the ethics of the property as causes, as did the employees. There were, interestingly, more similarities than differences between the two surveys and issues such as the organisational culture and work-life conflict were cited in both. Research by Ghiselli *et al.* (2001, p. 36) also examines the role that job satisfaction and life satisfaction has on the turnover decision. They found that "managers who were more satisfied with the intrinsic components of their jobs, more satisfied with their life and (relatively) older were less likely to leave their position imminently" (Table I).

### **Theme 2: personal employee dimensions**

The second theme focuses on attitudes that the employees have that contribute to their desire to leave an organisation. Psychological dimensions such as job burnout and exhaustion were examined by Lee and Shin (2005) where the job burnout construct used had the three components of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and diminished personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion, on the other hand, refers to a lack of energy "due to excessive psychological demands" (p. 100). Their study used a number of other dimensions including examining the role of positive and negative affectivity on an employee's intention to leave. The authors found that turnover intention was positively correlated with negative affectivity, workload, exhaustion and cynicism. These items were negatively correlated with vigour, dedication and absorption. In their regression analysis, the items of cynicism and workload were the significant predictors of turnover intentions.

The research by Karatepe and Uludag (2007) also tests, among others, the relationship between exhaustion and employees' intention to leave the organisation. Their study found that frontline employees who had difficulty in spending time with their family or in keeping social commitments were likely to be emotionally exhausted. This, in turn, impacted negatively on their job satisfaction and ultimately influenced their intention to leave the organisation. Karatepe and Uludag discuss the relationship between these personal employee dimensions and WLB and the implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

The final article discussed in this section is that by Rowley and Purcell (2001). While this article examines a number of causes and strategies relating to employee turnover, it does elaborate on the impact that stress and job burnout have on the employees' intentions to leave an organisation. In particular, these authors specify the impact that job overload, through "deliberate understaffing, temporary staff shortages and unrealistic task criteria" (p. 169), together with impact of bullying, has on retention rates in hotels. Table II provides a summary of the key literature in the area of personal employee dimensions.

In summary, then, the pressures that hospitality and tourism employees are under appears to significantly contribute to employee turnover and the lack of staff retention. The excessively long hours, style of management and conflict between work and family life, present barriers to making the tourism work environment an attractive and stable one.

Authors	Focus	Sub-theme
Tutuncu and Kozak (2007)	The study investigates the factors affecting job satisfaction in the Turkish hotel industry and confirms previous findings that high levels of job satisfaction positively affect employees' intentions to stay in the organisation	Management and job attributes
Robinson and Barron (2007)	The research examines the role that deskilling and standardisation of job attributes has on chefs' attrition rates. It proposes a framework to examine the phenomenon in more detail	Deskilling and standardisation of hospitality jobs
DiPietro and Milman (2004)	This research focuses on fast food restaurant employees finding that nine job characteristics such as better pay, flexible working hours and improved chances of promotion would encourage the employees to stay	The role of good working colleagues and humane supervision in job satisfaction
Walmsley (2004)	This article examines the extent of labour turnover in tourism businesses in the UK resort of Torbay. The study compares the perceptions of employees and employers as to the causes of turnover. Employees rated a almost all causes provided, except for personal causes, as more significant causes than did the employers	Differences between management and employee perceptions
Carbery <i>et al.</i> (2003)	This article found that the more psychological, perceptual and affective variables were better predictors of employee turnover than the normative predictions found in the hospitality literature	Management and job attributes
Gustafson (2002)	The key finding from this research into hourly paid employees in private USA clubs was the importance of the development of a team environment to mitigate employee turnover	Management and job attributes
Lam <i>et al.</i> (2002)	This study, located in the Hong Kong hotel industry found that subjective norms and training were related to turnover intentions and mentorship and the job itself were related to organisational commitment	The importance of training
Stalcup and Pearson (2001)	The research uses a triangulation approach and examines involuntary and voluntary causes of turnover. Several themes emerged including the importance of career advancement, the organisational culture and the impact of work-life conflict and job characteristics	Management job attributes and work-life conflict
Ghiselli <i>et al.</i> (2001)	The article provides an examination of the relationships between job satisfaction, life satisfaction and turnover intent. It found that intrinsic satisfaction, life satisfaction, age and race were predictors of turnover intention	Management job attributes and work-life conflict

Table I.  
Job attitudes

**Table II.**  
Personal employee  
dimensions

Authors	Focus	Sub-theme
Karatepe and Uludag (2007)	The study develops and tests a model of the effects of work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion and intrinsic motivation in northern Cyprus hotels. The results showed that intrinsic motivation is significantly related to emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment, which, in turn, influence employee intentions to leave the organisation	Work-life balance
Lee and Shin (2005)	This article examines the psychological dimensions such as job burnout, engagement and exhaustion. The authors found that the most significant predictor of turnover intentions was the job burnout dimension of cynicism	Job burnout and cynicism
Rowley and Purcell (2001)	These authors investigate the role that potential causes of turnover such as, among others, stress and burnout, mobility, false expectations and poor management practices have on an employee's decision to leave an organisation. They provide strategies for managing the "churn" of hospitality employees	Strategies for mitigating high turnover levels

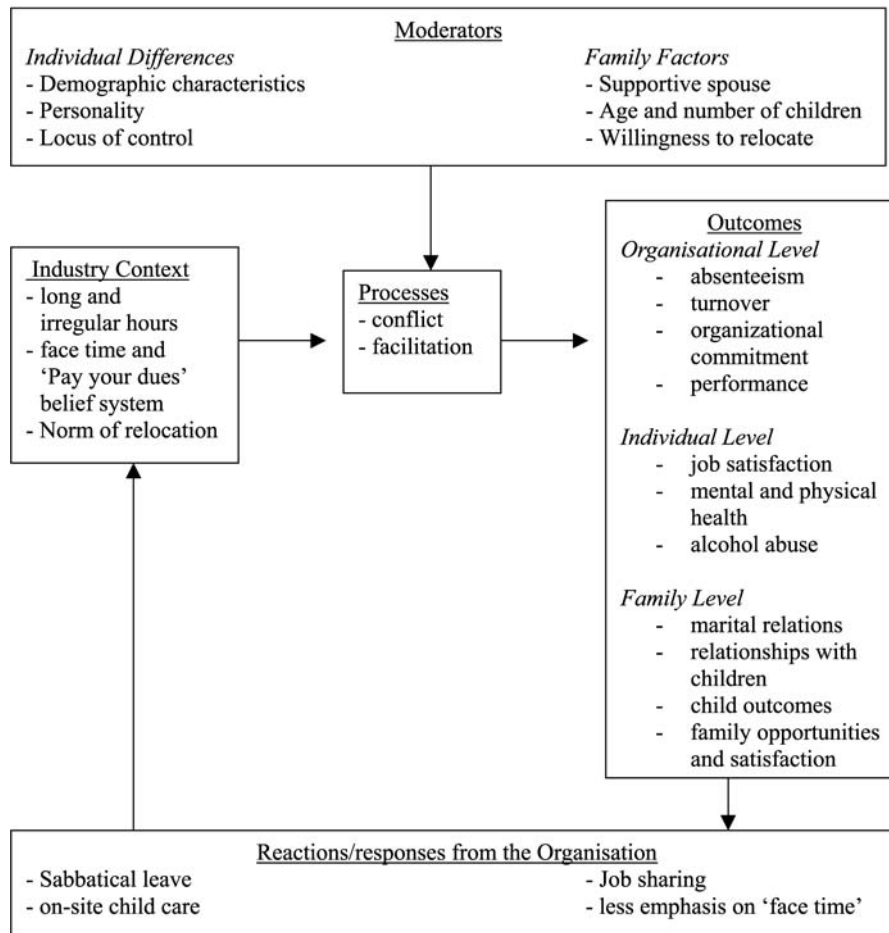
The toll that the conflict between work and family/life for hospitality and tourism employees, is discussed in the next section.

### Theme 3: work-life balance

The issues relating to obtaining a WLB have received substantial attention over recent years, especially in the area of contemporary organisational research. Less attention, however, has been given to researching the impact of WLB in the hospitality area (Mulvaney *et al.*, 2006). These authors discuss the impact that non-work factors such as job stress and burnout have on an employee's intention to leave an organisation and, in particular, they focus on the roles that job stress, work-family conflict and the characteristics of the job have on this vital decision. Their research, together with that of Mulvaney *et al.* (2006) has more recently provided the underpinning for future work in this area. Their model, presented here in Figure 1, includes many of the variables frequently associated with the antecedents of employee turnover, variables such as the long and irregular hours.

These authors suggest that the levels of conflict between work and family will be impacted or moderated by the levels of support employees (in this case, managers) receive, the personal attributes they bring to the job, the industry norms and the way all these components are managed in the workplace. Mulvaney *et al.* (2006), Cleveland *et al.* (2007), Namasivayam and Zhao (2007) and Karatepe and Uludag (2007), together with Rowley and Purcell (2001), argue, in various ways, that these components work to effect job satisfaction and organisational commitment and ultimately lead to employee turnover.

The research note by Cullen and McLaughlin (2006, p. 510) offers a different perspective on the WLB issue. Cullen and McLaughlin discuss the notion of "presenteeism" defined as



Source: Mulvaney *et al.* (2006)

**Figure 1.**  
A proposed model of  
work-family issues for  
hotel managers

“an overwhelming need to put in more hours or, at the very least, appear to be working very long hours”. They argue that there are three rationales that reinforce presenteeism as a managerial value in hotels. These rationales are that firstly, it appears to be the belief of hotel managers that they have a duty to provide emotional support to their staff and need to be available to provide counselling. The second rationale is that hotel managers see themselves as the face of the hotel and need to be continually present to be this. Finally, the authors argue that it is the very nature of the industry, the constancy and complexity of running a hotel that is open at all times, that makes it appear vital that managers be available for excessive long hours. All of this “presenteeism” of, impacts negatively on life satisfaction and the WLB (Table III).

The issues surrounding WLB, those of the long hours, the exhausting work and the stress that arises from customer related activities are only just being examined in any

Table III.  
Work-life balance

Authors	Focus	Sub-theme
Namasivayam, and Zhao (2007)	The study examines the relationship between work-family conflict (WFC), job satisfaction (JS) and organisational commitment (OC). The study found that WFC related negatively to JS, but this is mitigated is the employee is highly committed to the organisation	The role of job satisfaction and organisational commitment
Cleveland <i>et al.</i> (2007)	This research focuses on three distinct hotel groups – new employee entrants, hotel managers and their spouses. The authors found that there was agreement between the three groups on the role that the time demands and the need to be available at all times contributed to their levels of stress	The role of stress
Karatepe and Uludag (2007)	The study develops and tests a model of the effects of work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion and intrinsic motivation in northern Cyprus hotels. The results showed that intrinsic motivation is significantly related to emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and affective organisational commitment, which, in turn, influence employee intentions to leave the organisation	The role of emotional exhaustion and intrinsic motivation
Mulvaney <i>et al.</i> (2006)	This article provides a framework to examine the organisational level inputs to work-life relationships for hotel managers. It concludes by presenting innovative practices to address work-life concerns	Management strategies for balancing work and life
Cullen and McLaughlin (2006)	This article examines the concept of presenteeism and the impact that this phenomenon has on hotel employee satisfaction and intentions to leave the organisation	



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substantial way in the hospitality industry. Interestingly, however, there is sound literature on the success or otherwise of initiatives to combat this issue of WLB and this is addressed in the next theme that examines the strategies to reduce employee turnover.

#### **Theme 4: organisational strategies to assist employee retention**

This theme, that of the organisational strategies to assist in retaining employees, comprises the largest number of articles for the purposes of this article. Many of the research studies focus on the functional human resources (HR) activities such as recruitment and training. Examples of these are from Collins (2007), Dermody *et al.* (2004) Reynolds *et al.* (2004) and Martin *et al.* (2006) who focus on the important role that appropriate recruitment plays in retaining good staff. Improving the quality and quantity of hospitality staff appears to be dependent on improving the image of the industry, together with more strategic ways of managing work rosters and workloads. Demody *et al.* argue that hourly paid staff are best motivated and attracted to the industry through incentive pay programs and innovative benefits such as cash bonuses, flexible work schedules and mentoring programs. Hospitality recruiters need to be more aware of the skills and attributes such as computing and language skills required by the hotel during the recruiting phase – basic allowance for sustenance rates (BAS, 2007) argues that many recruiters are not sufficiently strategic in this area.

Another HR function, and therefore a potential retention strategy, that receives attention in the literature is that training. Research by Chiang *et al.* (2005) examined the relationship between training, job satisfaction and the intention to stay in the hospitality industry. The findings suggest that training quality was positively related to training satisfaction, job satisfaction and intention to stay. Related to the concept of training is that of education and the type of training given by training providers such as universities and vocational institutions. A study by Hjalager and Andersen (2001) explores the difficult question of whether tourism employment is merely contingent, temporary work or whether it is actually a career. These authors address this question through examining research sites in restaurant and catering, accommodation and travel services. They conclude by stating that:

Due to its structure, rapid shifts and the social character of its jobs, tourism seems to be an industry that, more than any other industry in the economy, attracts the ultramobile, the virtual, and the boundaryless (p. 128).

They also suggest, however, that due to the lack of research into the ways that careers and professions develop, it is possible that the industry may develop into what we would now consider to be a profession. Such findings are most informative and perhaps suggest that vocational training and on-the-job training would be more appropriate for the industry. Such findings also have ramifications for the way we view the turnover rates in the industry. The work by O'Leary and Deegan (2005), examining the career progression of Irish tourism and hospitality management graduates, in many ways confirms the findings of Hjalager and Andersen as does that by Pratten and O'Leary (2007) who argue that hospitality and tourism students need to be encouraged to look further afield than those promoted by their training institutions.

The approach taken by Wildes and Parks in their research on food servers, looks at the influence that internal marketing has on employee retention. They argue that building



strong relationships within the organisation reduces turnover and, furthermore, promotes recommending behaviour of employees of the hotel to friends. Interestingly, and contrary to the work by Hjalager and Andersen (2001), a third of the food servers saw their jobs as professions and as having a career.

The area that has most recently been a focus for examination regarding the retention of staff is that of the role that balancing working and family life has in turnover decisions. The research by Doherty (2004) and Maxwell (2005) provide insights into the link between the work-life conflict and employee turnover. Maxwell suggests that managers are key to the initiation and implementation of WLB policies with some of those policies being the introduction of flexible working hours and arrangements, providing better training, breaks from work and better work support. All these strategies not only address WLB issues but also enhance employee retention. Doherty also examines WLB strategies, especially as they relate to women, and notes that such strategies may only assist women when the labour market is tight. She argues, too, that a stronger equal opportunities approach is problematic in that it draws attention to the difference between men and women's working preferences and needs. She suggests that there be a greater and clearer set of rights as well as assisting male managers to provide more balanced lives for both male and female workers (Table IV).

### **Discussion**

The literature pertaining to the retention of staff has, over the last years, focussed on traditional causes such as the lack of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. In addition, the role that stress and various components of stress such as emotional exhaustion and job burnout, has taken a more "front-of-stage role" in being identified as a significant cause of employee turnover. Stress has frequently been incorporated into studies on turnover, but the literature presented here suggests that it is now being perceived as an issue/variable in its own right. The various components of stress, emotional exhaustion and job burnout such as cynicism and sabotage have received greater attention than previously given. Such a focus suggests that stress and its various parts is a growing concern for both the industry and researchers and its impact in employee retention, or lack thereof, is an area that demands more attention by both industry and the academic community.

The most recent addition to the research into employee retention is the role that obtaining a balance between work and life has in an employee's decision to remain with the organisation. It would appear that the conflict between these important dimensions of human activity can cause both job dissatisfaction and hence an intention to leave the organisation as well as causing conflict with family members and family activities. Strategies to ameliorate these tensions have been introduced into a number of organisations, but there is still substantial improvement and trailing of such initiatives to ensure a better balance.

Strategies to ensure a WLB are among many that have been suggested in the literature to retain staff. The most common strategies put forward, apart from the WLB ones, focus on the role that recruitment and training have in improving job satisfaction and organisational commitment and hence employee intention to stay. What is concerning, however, is that these strategies have been suggested to assist in employee retention for some time now and yet, there appears to be little improvement in the rates of employee retention. It is possible, therefore, that strategies such as more focussed

Authors	Focus	Sub-theme
Collins (2007)	This study examines whether methods of recruitment could be improved to alleviate high levels of turnover, particularly in the first year of service	Recruitment
Pratten and O'Leary (2007)	This research note addresses the causes of the shortage of chefs in the UK and suggests that trained chefs should look at alternatives to restaurants in order to use their skills and training and therefore are not lost to the industry through labour turnover	Training
Marchant <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Marchant <i>et al.</i> analyse the determinants of the educational mismatch and worker mobility across occupations and firms in the hospitality industry. They examine these and other factors in employee turnover	Education and training
Martin <i>et al.</i> (2006)	The main focus of this study was the examination of the factors and barriers on the recruitment and retention within the Scottish tourism industry	Recruitment
Chiang <i>et al.</i> (2005)	This article examines the relationship between training, job satisfaction and the intention to stay in the hospitality industry. The findings suggest that training quality was positively related to training satisfaction, job satisfaction and intention to stay	Training, training quality and job satisfaction
Maxwell (2005)	This study by Maxwell notes, among other findings, that work-life balance (WLB) initiatives have been introduced to improve employee retention. Her findings suggest that the effectiveness of the initiatives rests with line management and that, if successful, there are numerous benefits including reduced turnover	Management strategies to combat WLB issues
O'Leary and Deegan (2005)	The role of career progression of Irish tourism and hospitality graduates is examined in this study where the findings suggest that there are implications for both employers and course designers to assist in ameliorating the high attrition rate of graduates from the industry	Career progression and development
Wildes and Parks (2005)	These authors investigate the positive role that the internal customer satisfaction of food servers has on employees' intentions to remain with the organisation	Internal customer satisfaction
Dermody <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Dermody <i>et al.</i> 's study examines the job motivations of restaurant employees for remaining in their jobs. While pay is one factor in their decision to either stay or leave, other dimensions such as co-workers, flexible working hours and the atmosphere of the restaurant encouraged staff to stay	The role of pay in job satisfaction and employee retention

(continued)

**Table IV.**  
Organisational strategies  
to assist employee  
retention

Table IV.

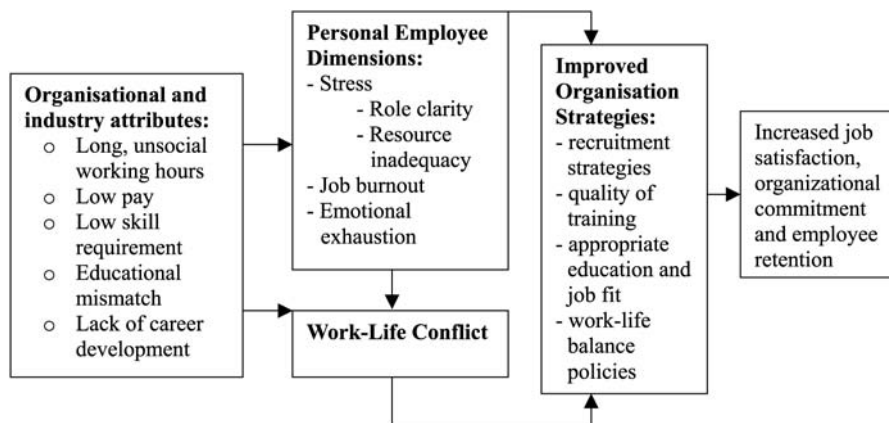
Authors	Focus	Sub-theme
Doherty (2004)	Doherty's research on work-life balance (WLB) initiatives explores the main barriers to women's progress, highlighting the long and unsocial hours that women in management in the hospitality industry need to undertake in order to develop their careers. Although WLB initiatives were introduced to assist in reducing turnover and improving career opportunities, many of these initiatives have not worked. Implications for management are provided	WLB initiatives
Reynolds <i>et al.</i> (2004)	The work by Reynolds <i>et al.</i> is an exploratory study of seasonal workers in US based restaurants and examines retention strategies for implementation by managers to reduce turnover	Management strategies
Hjalager and Andersen (2001)	This article examines the role that dedicated training has in retaining staff within the Danish tourism sector. In particular, it found that while turnover among unskilled employees is extremely high, there were significantly better retention rates were found among employees with vocational or professional tourism training	Training and education

recruitment strategies and better quality training programs need to be combined with other elements to achieve the most effective outcome. Figure 2 brings together the various themes and strategies from the literature to suggest a more holistic framework for improving employee retention rates.

The framework presented in Figure 2 provides organisations with a more holistic method of examining the causes of low employee retention as well as suggesting ways to improve job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Such a framework requires further examination of each of the variables within the key categories of the organisational and industry attributes, personal employee dimensions and improved organisation strategies. It is suggested here that this framework should underpin future research in this area. Specifically, it is suggested that organisations undertake a strategic approach to ameliorate employee turnover by firstly addressing the organisational and industry attributes as outlined in Figure 2. More equitable and flexible rostering of staff designed to alleviate the number of unsocial hours worked per employee is a strategy within the control of the organisation. Similarly, the provision of mentoring and a “buddying” system of on-the-job training would assist in the professional development of staff. Management need to be aware of the signs of employee stress and have the capacity to provide counselling and stress management activities such as time out and relaxation methods. Finally, it is argued that organisations need to monitor levels of stress and work-life imbalance through longitudinal surveys; adopting these strategies provides an opportunity to further the relationship between researchers and practitioners within tourism.

### Implications for the workplace

The implications for the workplace in retaining staff from this review of the literature include a range of actions at both the government and organisational level. Assuming that the previous research is correct in that WLB issues impact negatively on staff retention, an imperative for governments is to legislate, not only for minimum hours of work, but also maximum hours of work. In Australia, for example, it has been found that according to the Relationships Forum Australia report by Shepanski and Diamond (2007), more than 20 per cent of employees work for 50 hours or more a week and more than 30 per cent work on the weekend regularly. Two million Australians also spend at



**Figure 2.**  
A framework for  
improving employee  
retention rates

least 6 hours of family time on Sundays working, without compensating for it during the week. At the organisational level, there are a number of actions that can be adopted to retain good staff as well as assist in balancing work and family life. These include:

- providing flexible working hours such as roistered days off and family friendly starting and finishing times;
- allowing flexible work arrangements such as job sharing and working at home;
- providing training opportunities during work time;
- providing adequate resources for staff so that they can undertake their jobs properly;
- determining correct staffing levels so that staff are not overloaded;
- allowing adequate breaks during the working day;
- having provision for various types of leave such as carer's leave and "time-out" sabbatical types of leave;
- rewarding staff for completing their tasks, not merely for presenteeism;
- staff functions that involve families;
- providing, if possible, health and well-being opportunities such as access to gymnasiums or at least time to exercise; and
- encouraging sound management practices.

These recommendations are made to assist organisations to retain their talented staff and to not only retain them but to provide a more holistic experience that includes a balance between their work environment and their home life. In so doing, employee turnover causes such as stress, work overload, low job satisfaction and little organisation commitment can be alleviated and retention rates of good staff improved.

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