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Hourly employee retention in small and medium attractions: the Central Florida example

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Abstract

The major objective of this study was to explore the reasons behind hourly employee turnover in the amusement park and attraction industry. Data were collected from 172 hourly employees in 13 Central Florida small and medium-size facilities. The results empirically confirmed that hourly employees' retention was predicted by self-fulfillment and working conditions rather than monetary rewards. More specifically, employees who had positive experience with regard to consistent working hours, sense of fulfillment with their job, positive experience with performance reviews, longer tenure with their current employer, higher level of satisfaction with the job, and previous work experience were more likely to stay with their current employer.

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1. Introduction

The employment market in the US has gone through remarkable transformations in the past two decades. First, the majority (81%) of the new jobs created since 1993 were in categories paying above-median wages. Second, a large majority of new “good” jobs in many industry and occupation categories were more likely to be filled by non-college graduates. Third, the expansion in strong labor market generated rising real (inflation-adjusted) wages for most workers, especially among low-wage workers, and fourth, workers' fears of job loss declined ([US Department of Labor, 2000](#)). At the turn of the twenty-first century, the US unemployment rate was at

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4.1%, the lowest it has been in 29 years (US Department of Labor, 2000), and employers were faced with the challenge of recruiting and retaining employees.

Employment in the tourism and hospitality industry also had its challenges. In 1998, the travel and tourism industry directly generated over 7.5 million jobs. An additional 9.4 million jobs were supported by indirect and induced sales, resulting in a total of 16.9 million jobs (Travel Industry Association of America, 2000). To meet consumer demand, employment in major travel and tourism sectors was forecasted to grow in excess of 21% between 1996 and 2006 (Travel Industry Association of America, 2000).

Furthermore, in the past 10 years, average hourly earnings in the services sector have grown faster than in all other industries except finance, insurance, and real estate. Service sector hourly earnings exceeded the average for all other private industry sectors (Travel Industry Association of America, 2000). While the prospects for employment are relatively high, the hospitality industry is faced, like many other sectors of the economy, with the challenge of recruiting and retaining employees. The labor market pool is getting smaller, and the turnover rate is high. In the hotel industry, for example, turnover rate is estimated between 60% and 300% annually (Foley, 1996). Turnover costs are soaring and usually include “separation costs,” “replacement costs,” and “training costs.” In the hospitality industry, some estimate these costs to be between \$3000 and \$10,000 per hourly employee (Woods and Macaulay, 1989).

Recently, Hinkin and Tracey (2000) developed a computer program for assessing the cost of employee turnover. The program consists of a number of variables that calculate the total direct (e.g. advertising, signing bonuses, and formal training) and indirect costs (e.g. reduced productivity of new hires and disruption to the work effort of existing employees) of turnover.

Employing in the amusement park and attraction industry is not an easy task as human resource managers are challenged with unique recruiting, selection, training and development processes, especially of hourly employees. Employee retention, job enrichment, motivation, and other on-the-job issues like safety and discipline are additional concerns for employers in many amusement parks and attractions.

While data is unavailable regarding employee turnover in the amusement park and attraction industry, many facility operators are concerned with the future of employment in the industry. For example, a recent survey of general manager members of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions revealed that employees were among the top three management priorities. In the same study, general managers also perceived the prospects for seasonal employees in the amusement park and attraction industry to be worse in the next 5 and 10 years, respectively (Milman, 2001).

While many amusement parks and attractions provide detailed training for hiring, motivating, and retaining employees, most of the information was derived from other sectors of the hospitality industry or other segments of the economy. To date, no major research was conducted with regard to hourly employee retention strategies and the identification of methods to reduce turnover rate.

1.1. Previous research on employees' turnover and retention

Turnover can take several forms. *Voluntary turnover* occurs when employees leave a company because of their own free will. *Involuntary turnover* takes place when employees are dismissed, laid off, or forced to retire. *Functional turnover* takes place when poor performers leave, and *dysfunctional turnover* transpires when good performers leave (Woods and Macaulay, 1989; Dalton et al., 1982). *Unavoidable turnover* occurs when an organization has no control over the reasons for an employee's exit (e.g. spouse's relocation) and *avoidable turnover* takes place when employees leave a company for better pay, better working conditions, etc. (Woods and Macaulay, 1989; Dalton et al., 1982).

Most of the literature on turnover addressed the causes, effects, and results of turnover. Numerous studies found that turnover rate was associated with employees' demographic and personal characteristics, overall job satisfaction, organization and work environment, job contents and intrinsic motivation, external labor environment, employees' perceptions of alternative jobs, absenteeism, lateness, and job performance (MacHatton et al., 1997; Pizam and Ellis, 1999; Boles et al., 1995).

LaLopa (1997) addressed the unique customer service component in the hospitality industry in the context of turnover. More specifically his study investigated whether dealing with customers and a bona fide career interest would significantly increase the predictability of organizational commitment and turnover.

More recent studies on the cause of turnover include Baum et al. (2001) examination of the relationship between hotel employees' demographic characteristics and job satisfaction, Stalcup and Pearson's (2001) model to identify the causes of management turnover in situations where there was a breakdown in the employee–employer relationship, and Pizam and Thornburg's (2000) study of the causes of absenteeism and voluntary turnover in the hotel industry.

Other studies attempted to find the relationships between intervening variables and retention. For example, Susskind et al. (2000) suggested that perceived organizational support strongly influenced job satisfaction and organizational commitment. They also concluded that the intent to quit a job was influenced by both job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Susskind et al., 2000). Deery and Shaw (1999) investigated the relationships between employee turnover and organizational culture and Kaak et al. (1997) explored the concept of turnover culture among non-supervisory hotel employees.

Several studies also looked at the impact of multicultural training practices on employee turnover rates. Lee and Chon (2000) studied the impact of diversity on turnover in the restaurant industry, and You (1998) investigated the role of nationality in predicting turnover behavior in the US and South Korea.

Some studies also recommended retention programs that could reduce turnover and its effects. These included realistic job previews, job enrichment, workspace characteristics or socialization practices (Pizam and Ellis, 1999). Boles et al. (1995) suggested the use of pre-employment application demographics to reducing employee turnover.

The trade literature is inundated with prescribed studies to tackle turnover and reduce retention (Hampton, 2000; Shanahan, 2000; Schreiber, 2000; Baumann, 2000; Hensdill, 2000). It is important to mention, however, that most of the studies addressed management retention or full-time employees, but neglected to address the important resource of hourly employees, especially in the hospitality industry.

In their attempt to find and keep employees, many companies use incentives such as pay, benefits, promotions, and training. However, these efforts often miss their goal, as some research indicated that the front line manager is the key to attracting and retaining employees (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999).

The major objective of this study was to explore the reasons behind hourly employee turnover in small and medium amusement parks and attractions. The study also attempted to explore key employment-related issues that might be helpful to reduce hourly employee turnover rate, and to identify employment characteristics that would increase retention. Since the study was exploratory in nature, no major hypotheses were developed.

For the purpose of this study, an *hourly employee* was defined as “an employee who works in an amusement park or an attraction facility on an hourly basis for a period of at least 6 months.” *Employee turnover* was defined as the “number of persons hired within six months to replace those leaving or dropped from the workforce.” *Small and medium amusement park and attraction facilities* were defined as “gated commercial facilities that offer entertainment for a single admission price, employing a minimum of five hourly employee and a maximum of 500 hourly employees.”

2. Methodology

The research project adopted a case-study approach by collecting data from hourly employees in 13 small and medium-size Central Florida amusement parks and attractions.

2.1. Instrument development

A self-administered questionnaire was developed based on the literature review and several one-on-one interviews with operators and human resource managers in the amusement and attraction industry. The questions included items pertaining to the respondents' current job responsibilities (4 items), respondents' job search process (2 items), respondents' previous employment experience (2 items), and respondents' evaluation of their current employment experience (10 items). Other questions asked the respondents to evaluate their level of importance of employment characteristics (22 items) and their perceived manifestation of these employment characteristics by their employers (22 items).

To predict retention, respondents were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with their current job (1 item), their likelihood to refer someone to their current place of employment (1 item), and their likelihood to remain with their

current employer (1 item). The last set of questions asked respondents to assess employment features that would make them move to another company (13 items), and demographic characteristics (6 items).

2.2. *Data collection*

The questionnaires were distributed through human resource departments of each of the thirteen facilities participated in the study. A total of 446 questionnaires were distributed to the 13 facilities, proportionally to the number of hourly employees employed by each facility. Human resource managers randomly chose subjects in each facility. The participants returned 172 questionnaires to yield a response rate of 38.56%.

3. Findings

3.1. *General profile of the respondents*

The respondents participating in the study represented all age groups and had a median of 36–40 years. The most prevailing age groups represented in the sample were: 19–25 years (25.1%), 41–50 (16.2%), 51–60 (16.8%), and over 61 years (16.2%). A large proportion of the respondents were married (41.4%), and the rest were single (39.1%), divorced/separated (13.6%), and widowed (5.9%). Most of the respondents had a high school diploma (46.2%), a community college degree (24.3%), or a technical diploma (13%). The gender distribution between males and females was 37.1% and 62.9%, respectively (Table 1).

3.2. *Respondent's current job responsibilities*

The respondents participated in the study worked in their attractions an average 3.5 years and a median of 2–4 years (Table 2). They had responsibilities in a variety of areas, mainly in guest relations (22.9%), merchandise (12.9%), food services (11.2%), and maintenance (8.8%). Other areas included entertainment shows, ride operations, custodial services, security, and characters (Table 3). The hourly employees participated in the study worked an average 30.44 hours per week and a median of 32 hours per week. A plurality of the respondents worked between 31–40 h per week (47.6%), while a small proportion of the sample (18.4%) worked less than 20 hours per week.

3.3. *Respondents' job search process*

Respondents were asked to indicate what sources of information they used to find their current hourly job. Over one-third of the respondents said that they found out about their current job through referral by another employee who had worked in the attraction (33.9%). Others just dropped by the facility looking for a job (23.4%) or

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Gender	%	Age group	%	Educational background	%	Family status	%
Female	62.9	18 or under	4.8	Grade school	1.8	Single	39.1
Male	37.1	19–25	25.1	High school	46.2	Married	41.4
		26–30	7.2	Technical diploma	13.0	Divorced/ separated	13.6
		31–35	4.8	Community college degree	24.3	Widowed	5.9
		36–40	9.0	College degree	12.4		
		41–50	16.2	College advanced degree	2.4		
		51–60	16.8				
		61 or over	16.2				
Total	100.0	Total	100.0	Total	100.0	Total	100.0
<i>N</i> = 170		<i>N</i> = 167		<i>N</i> = 169		<i>N</i> = 169	
Mean = 1.37		Mean = 4.84		Mean = 3.07		Mean = 1.86	
Std. dev. = 0.48		Std. dev. = 2.3		Std. dev. = 1.22		Std. dev. = 0.87	
		Median = 5.00		Median = 3.00		Median = 2.00	

Table 2
Employment tenure in current amusement park or attraction

Length of time	%
1. Less than 6 months	15.2
2. 6–12 months	17.5
3. 1–2 years	12.3
4. 2–4 years	25.1
5. 4–6 years	15.2
6. Over 6 years	14.6
Total	100.0
<i>N</i> = 171	
Mean = 3.5 years	
Std. dev. = 1.65	
Median = 2–4 years	

saw an ad in a newspaper or a magazine (19.9%). A smaller proportion of the respondents learned about their job through other members in their community (4.7%), job fairs (4.1%), school or university recruitment (2.9%), internal job postings within the current attraction (2.9%), or TV advertising (1.2%) (Table 4).

The participants in the study were also asked what attracted them to their current job. A very large proportion of the respondents mentioned that employee working-environment (46.7%), flexible working hours (45.1%) and interaction with people of different backgrounds (44.0%) were the most important motives that attracted them

Table 3
Respondents' main area of responsibility

Responsibility	%
1. Guest relations	22.9
2. Merchandise	12.9
3. Food Service	11.2
4. Maintenance	8.8
5. Entertainment shows	7.6
6. Ride operations	4.7
7. Custodial services	3.5
8. Security	2.4
9. Characters	0.6
10. Other	25.3
Total	100.0

N = 170

Table 4
Sources of information used by the respondents to find their current job

Source of information	%
Referral by another employee who had worked here	33.9
Just dropped by looking for a job	23.4
Newspaper/magazine ads	19.9
Through other members of my community	4.7
Job fair	4.1
School/university recruitment	2.9
Internal job postings (within the current organization)	2.9
TV ads	1.2
Other	14.6

Note: Percentages add up to more than 100% due to multiple responses

to their current job. Other issues included: ease of commute (27.7%), job tasks (26.1%), reputation of the organization that they work for (21.7%), the fact that friends or family members had already worked for the amusement park or the attraction (20.1%), pay level (18.5%), employee benefits (15.2%), and free admissions and discounts (14.7%) (Table 5). Please note that extrinsic motives such as pay level, employee benefits, and free admissions and discounts were not among the top reasons for hourly employees to choose their current place of employment.

3.4. Respondent's previous employment experience

The majority of the participants in the study (76.5%) had previously worked for another employer, however, less than one fifth had worked in the amusement and attraction industry (16.2%) or in other hospitality operations like hotels or food

Table 5
Employment characteristics that attracted respondents to their current job

Job attraction characteristic	%
Employee working environment	46.7
Flexible hours	45.1
Interaction with people of different backgrounds	44.0
Ease of commute	27.7
Job tasks	26.1
Reputation of the organization	21.7
Friend/family member already works here	20.1
Pay level	18.5
Employee benefits	15.2
Free admissions and discounts	14.7
Other	14.7

Note: Percentages add up to more than 100% due to multiple responses.

Table 6
Previous employment history

Previously employed	%		
No	23.5	In what area:	%
Yes	76.5	Amusement parks and attractions	16.2
		Other hospitality industry	30.0
		Non hospitality industry	53.8
Total	100.0	Total	100.0
<i>N</i> = 170		<i>N</i> = 130	

services (30.0%). The remainder of the sample (53.8%) had worked for non-hospitality businesses (Table 6). Respondents indicated that they had left their previous job mainly due to “personal reasons” (38.3%) or “job-related reasons” (24%).

3.5. Respondents' evaluation of their current employment experience

Respondents were asked to evaluate their employment experience with their current employer on a variety of issues. For each statement, respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale, where “1” indicated “strong disagreement” and “5” indicated “strong agreement.”

It appears that most of the respondents agreed that their job responsibilities were very clear to them (mean = 4.47), that their managers knew them “as a person” (mean = 4.21), and that working in their amusement park or attraction was fun (mean = 4.18). The respondents also agreed that they were recognized as individuals in their organization (mean = 3.92), and that they had a sense of fulfillment with their current job (mean = 3.88) (Table 7).

Table 7
Level of agreement or disagreement with statements regarding current employment experience

Statements	Mean	Std. dev.
My job responsibilities are very clear to me	4.47	0.77
My manager knows me as a person	4.21	1.00
Working here is fun	4.18	0.92
In this organization, I am recognized as an individual	3.92	1.13
I have a sense of fulfillment with my job	3.88	1.05
I would like to further my education while working here	3.64	1.31
I would like to further my career while working here	3.52	1.28
I would like to work somewhere else in the future	3.35	1.41
I could do a better job than I am doing now	3.06	1.27
I would like to find another job soon	2.65	1.40

Note: 1 to 5 scale, 1—strongly disagree; 5—strongly agree.

Respondents also agreed, though not as strongly, that they would like to further their education (mean = 3.64) and their career (mean = 3.52) while working at their current job. They also disclosed that they would like to work somewhere else in the future (mean = 3.35), however, they denied that they would like to find another job soon (mean = 2.65) (Table 7). Respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that they could do a better job than they did (mean = 3.06) (Table 7).

3.6. Level of importance of employment characteristics and actual experience on the job

Respondents were asked to evaluate 22 employment characteristics with regard to their perceived importance. They were also asked to assess to what extent each of these characteristics was evident and implemented in their current place of employment. Each variable was evaluated with regard to level of importance on a 5-point scale where “1” indicated “unimportant” and “5” indicated “very important.” In addition, employees’ actual experience of these employment characteristics was measured on a 5-point scale where “1” indicated “poor experience” and “5” indicated “excellent experience.”

Respondents indicated that the most important employment characteristics were: nice people to work with (mean = 4.58), humane approach to employees (mean = 4.56), introductory training (mean = 4.55), clear information on job tasks (mean = 4.52), and fun and challenging job (Mean = 4.47). The least important employment characteristics were perceived to be: health benefits for the employee (mean = 3.83), retirement plan (mean = 3.62), health benefits for the employees’ family (mean = 3.51), employee meals (mean = 3.37), and availability of day care facilities (mean = 2.57) (Table 8).

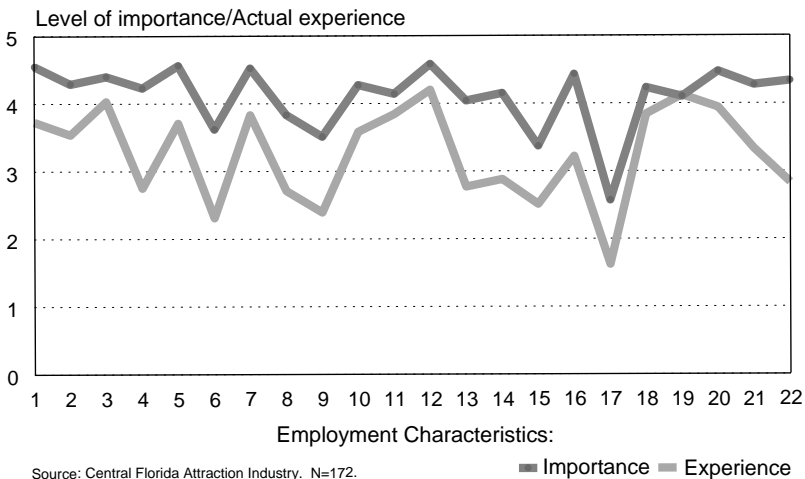
However, when the importance of these employment characteristics was compared with the actual experience of the employees, the data revealed discrepancies in all of the 22 employment characteristics. Employees attributed higher importance to all 22 variables but their on-the-job experience was poorer (Figures 1 and 2).

Table 8

Comparison between level of importance and actual experience of respondents' employment characteristics

Employment characteristic	Level of importance		Actual experience	
	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.
1. Nice people to work with	4.58	0.79	4.20	1.04
2. Humane approach to employees	4.56	0.86	3.71	1.28
3. Introductory training	4.55	0.88	3.73	1.18
4. Clear information on job tasks	4.52	0.86	3.83	1.14
5. Fun and challenging job	4.47	0.87	3.94	1.13
6. Company communication to employees	4.43	0.89	3.22	1.33
7. Flexible working hours	4.40	0.98	4.03	1.21
8. Other	4.33	1.14	2.83	1.72
9. Ongoing training	4.29	1.01	3.54	1.19
10. Consistent working hours	4.27	1.03	3.58	1.31
11. Performance reviews	4.27	1.08	3.33	1.42
12. Pay	4.23	1.06	2.75	1.30
13. Convenient travel to work	4.23	1.07	3.84	1.22
14. Paid vacation	4.15	1.28	2.88	1.66
15. Company policies	4.14	1.06	3.84	1.16
16. Parking	4.10	1.07	4.12	1.13
17. Advancement opportunities	4.04	1.22	2.77	1.35
18. Health benefits (for me)	3.83	1.58	2.71	1.59
19. Retirement plan	3.62	1.51	2.31	1.49
20. Health benefits (for my family)	3.51	1.65	2.39	1.54
21. Employee meals	3.37	1.51	2.51	1.42
22. Availability of day care facilities	2.57	1.63	1.62	1.10

Note: Level of importance: 1 to 5 scale; 1—unimportant, 5—very important.
Actual experience: 1 to 5 scale; 1—poor experience; 5—excellent experience.



Source: Central Florida Attraction Industry. N=172.

■ Importance ■ Experience

Fig. 1. Hourly employees' perception of employment characteristics: level of importance versus actual experience.



Source: Central Florida Attraction Industry. N=172.

Fig. 2. Hourly employees' perception of employment characteristics: Gap summary between level of importance and actual experience.

The most significant gaps were recorded in the following employment characteristics: level of pay (means 4.23 and 2.75, respectively), retirement plans (means=3.62 and 2.31, respectively), paid vacations (means=4.15 and 2.88, respectively), advancement opportunities (means=4.04 and 2.77, respectively), and health benefits to the employee's family (means=3.51 and 2.39, respectively). Although these employment characteristics were not perceived to be the most important, they seem to be more easily measurable and calculable than all other employment characteristics.

Pearson correlation revealed that employees who worked more hours per week attributed higher importance levels to: health benefits for themselves ($r = 0.361$), retirement plans ($r = 0.340$), advancement opportunities ($r = 0.246$), paid vacations ($r = 0.233$), pay level ($r = 0.216$), and family health benefits ($r = 0.215$).

In addition, Person correlation revealed that younger employees attributed higher importance to advancement opportunities ($r = -0.344$), paid vacations ($r = -0.210$), availability of daycare facilities ($r = -0.208$), and employee meals ($r = -0.206$).

T-test analysis revealed that females attached significantly higher importance levels to company policies (mean=4.31) and the opportunity to work with "nice people" (mean=4.72) than males (means=3.78 and 4.31, respectively).

Males, on the other hand, attached higher importance level to free employee meals (mean=3.75) than females (mean=3.03). Furthermore, employees who had previously worked for another company attached higher importance levels to retirement plans (mean=3.84) than those who did not (mean=3.21).

Employees who had previously worked for another company also attached lower importance levels to company policies (mean=4.04) than those who did not (mean=4.44).

3.7. Job retention indicators

To find out respondents' retention propensity, the participants in the study were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with their current job, their likelihood to refer a friend or a family member to their current place of employment, and their likelihood to remain with the current employer in the next 12 months. Each of these three variables were measured on a 5-point scale, where "1" indicated a low level of satisfaction or likelihood, and "5" indicated a high level of satisfaction or likelihood.

The data indicated that 42.9% of the respondents were "satisfied" and 28.6% of the respondents were "very satisfied" with their current job (Table 9). Over one-half of the respondents were also "likely" (35.5%) or "very likely" (20.7%) to refer friends or family members to their place of employment (Table 10), and almost two-thirds of the respondents were "likely" (19.5%) or "very likely" (43.9%) to remain with their current employer in the next twelve months (Table 11).

Table 9
Respondents' level of satisfaction with current job

Level of satisfaction	%
1. Very dissatisfied	4.8
2. Dissatisfied	6.5
3. Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	17.3
4. Satisfied	42.9
5. Very satisfied	28.6
Total	100.0

N = 168
Mean = 3.84
Std. dev. = 1.06
Median = "satisfied"

Table 10
Respondents' likelihood of referring friends or family members to work in the respondent's place of employment

Level of likelihood	%
1. Very unlikely	10.7
2. Unlikely	13.6
3. Somewhat likely	19.5
4. Likely	35.5
5. Very likely	20.7
Total	100.0

N = 169
Mean = 3.42
Std. dev. = 1.26
Median = "likely"

Table 11
Respondents' likelihood to remain with current employer in next 12 months

Likelihood	%
1. Very unlikely	10.4
2. Unlikely	8.5
3. Somewhat likely	17.7
4. Likely	19.5
5. Very likely	43.9
Total	100.0

N = 164
Mean = 3.78
Std. dev. = 1.36
Median = "likely"

Table 12
Correlation between respondents' level of satisfaction with their current job, likelihood to refer a friend or a family member to their employer, and likelihood to remain with their current employer in the next six months

	Level of satisfaction with current job	Likelihood to refer a friend or a family member	Likelihood to remain with current employer
Level of satisfaction with current job?	1.00		
Likelihood to refer a friend or a family member?	0.540	1.000	
Likelihood to remain with current employer	0.471	0.396	1.000

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Analysis of the data indicated that these three predictors of retention (level of satisfaction with their current job, likelihood to refer a friend or a family member to their current place of employment, and their likelihood to remain with the current employer in the next twelve months) were highly correlated.

Pearson correlation confirmed that highly satisfied employees were more likely to refer someone they knew to their employer, as well as to remain with their current employer in the next 12 months. Furthermore, employees who were likely to remain with their current employer were also likely to refer someone to their place of employment (Table 12).

Pearson correlation revealed that employees who were more satisfied with their job reported better experience on their job with regard to "having a fun and challenging job" ($r = 0.435$), company communication to employees ($r = 0.418$), humane approach to employees ($r = 0.411$), pay level ($r = 0.405$), performance reviews ($r = 0.395$), consistent working hours ($r = 0.373$), and company policies ($r = 0.371$).

Employees who were more likely to refer a friend to work at their current employer reported better experience on their job with regard to company communication to employees ($r = 0.448$), humane approach to employees (0.394), consistent working hours ($r = 0.388$), their perceived pay level ($r = 0.385$), performance reviews ($r = 0.384$), and having fun and challenging job ($r = 0.375$).

Employees who were more likely to remain with their current employer reported better experience on their job with regard to consistent weekly working hours ($r = 0.477$), the implementation of their performance reviews ($r = 0.45$), having fun and challenging job ($r = 0.446$), advancement opportunities ($r = 0.445$), humane approach to employees ($r = 0.433$), company communication to employee ($r = 0.427$), and perceived pay level ($r = 0.427$).

3.8. *Employment features that would make employee move to another company*

Respondents were asked to assess thirteen employment features that would make them move to another company. Each trait was assessed on a 5-point scale where “1” indicated “no value” and “5” indicated “very high value.” While the analysis of the data revealed that all employment traits were potentially significant motivators to move to another company, the most valuable employment features were perceived to be: better pay (mean = 4.42), better health benefits (mean = 3.98), more humane approach to employees (mean = 3.94), improved chance of promotion (mean = 3.94), and improved employee communications (mean = 3.78) (Table 13).

3.9. *Prediction of hourly employee retention*

A step-wise multiple regression was conducted to identify what factors would predict employment retention in the attraction industry. The dependent variable was

Table 13
Employment traits that would make employee move to another company

Valued characteristic	Mean	Std. dev.
1. Better pay	4.42	1.09
2. Better health benefits	3.98	1.32
3. More humane approach	3.94	1.19
4. Improved chance of promotion	3.94	1.36
5. Improved employee communications	3.78	1.29
6. Flexible working hours	3.77	1.33
7. Improved working hours consistency	3.77	1.27
8. Better company policies	3.69	1.31
9. Better retirement plan	3.68	1.44
10. Nicer people to work with	3.57	1.43
11. Different management style	3.49	1.41
12. Larger organization with more resources	3.41	1.48
13. Easier travel to work	3.33	1.49

Note: Level of importance: 1 = no value, 2 = low value, 3 = some value, 4 = high value, 5 = very high value.

“likelihood to remain with the current employer in the next 12 months.” The independent variables consisted of the following 74 variables: respondent’s current job characteristics (2 variables), respondent’s previous employment experience (1 variables), respondent’s evaluation of current employment experience (8 variables), level of satisfaction with the current job (1 variable), level of importance of employment characteristics (22 variables), actual experience regarding employment characteristics (22 variables), employment traits that would make employee move to another company (13 variables), and demographic characteristics (5 variables).

The results indicated that five variables significantly affected respondents’ likelihood to remain with their current employer and the variance explained by the regression was 36.4% (Table 14). More specifically, respondents who are more likely to remain with their current employer had the following characteristics:

1. Positive experience with regard to consistent working hours.
2. Sense of fulfillment with their job.
3. Positive experience with performance reviews.
4. Worked more years for their current employer.
5. Were more satisfied with their current job.
6. Worked previously for another employer.

It is also evident from the findings that the most significant retention predictors were associated with intrinsic fulfillment and working conditions that were not necessarily associated with monetary rewards. None of the retention predictors were

Table 14

Multiple regression of likelihood to remain with the current employer on a variety of employment and demographic characteristics

	Standardized coefficient beta	<i>r</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ² change	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Experience with consistent working hours	0.248	0.446	0.194	3.787	0.000
Sense of fulfillment with the job	0.196	0.533	0.277	2.736	0.007
Experience with performance reviews	0.168	0.562	0.304	2.504	0.013
Length of service with current employer	0.187	0.587	0.331	3.192	0.002
Level of satisfaction with current job	0.189	0.609	0.354	2.636	0.009
Previous work experience	0.118	0.620	0.364	1.980	0.049

$R^2 = 0.36$.

associated with fiscal issues like pay level, paid vacation, health benefits (both for employees and their family) or free employees meals.

These findings were consistent with [Buckingham and Coffman's \(1999\)](#) study that concluded that while talented employee may join a company because of its charismatic leaders, its generous benefits, and its world-class training programs, their productivity and retention is determined by the relationship with the immediate supervisor.

The results of this study clearly indicate that hourly employees retention could be increased by offering employees consistent working hours and timely performance review. Immediate supervisors have the discretion of scheduling and timely performance reviews. The findings also indicate that job retention of hourly employees could improve if employees would be more satisfied on the job and would have a sense of fulfillment. This is also consistent with Buckingham and Coffman's recommendations that supervisors and managers should help employees become more of who they already are and to treat each person differently by catering to their specific needs ([Buckingham and Coffman, 1999](#)). Finally, employee retention in the attraction industry could also be attributed to loyalty to their current employer, manifested in the number of service years, as well as previous experience with another employer.

4. Conclusions

This research project was a first attempt to study hourly employees' perception regarding their employment experience in the amusement park and attraction industry. With many amusement facilities and attractions relying on hourly employees for their operation, the findings highlighted key variables that might indicate potential strategies for reducing turnover and increase retention.

The study was conducted in Central Florida, one of the world's largest destination for amusement parks and attractions. The area offers an extensive array of job opportunities, and the variety and divergence of job offerings may provide an insight regarding employees' preference and overall perceptions of various employment opportunities. While the findings may not be applicable to all geographical locations, some implications may be adopted by using the Central Florida example.

The study concluded that that the most powerful indicators to predict hourly employee retention were: Positive experience with regard to consistent working hours, sense of fulfillment with the job, positive experience with performance reviews, longer tenure with the current employer, higher level of satisfaction with the job, and previous work experience. The empirical data suggested that the most significant retention predictors were associated with intrinsic fulfillment and working conditions rather than monetary rewards. These conclusions were consistent across the board among all age groups, gender, educational level, and marital status, as no statistically significant differences were found between any subgroup.

These findings are consistent with [Pizam and Thornburg's \(2000\)](#) study that concluded that hourly employees were more inclined to voluntary quit their job.

Voluntary turnover was also associated with factors like poor relationships with co-workers, dissatisfaction with the job, and disappointment with pre-employment expectations (Pizam and Thornburg, 2000).

As the labor pool continues to shrink, employers must adopt creative strategies to keep their employees and attract new ones at the same time. Many practitioners and human resource managers suggested effective retention strategies. Recent recommendations suggested offering substantial benefits packages even to part-time and seasonal employees. In addition to higher hourly salaries, many businesses in the services industry are now forced to offer medical and dental coverage as well as participation in the company's 401(k) plan and stock options plans (Leming, 1998). Other employers offer hourly employees tuition assistance, bonuses at frequent intervals, paid vacations, health club memberships, life and disability insurance, and even aid in adopting a child (Sanson et al., 2001).

Such developments suggest a new paradigm in the retention and hiring front, but this relatively new standard should be evaluated with cautious. While competitive salaries have always been perceived as a top priority for employee retention, empirical research like the one presented, indicated that this may not always be the case. Other studies also recognized the significance and magnitude of non-monetary incentives. For example, in their bestseller *The Top 100 Best Companies to Work for in America*, Levering and Moskowitz (1993) concluded that the best companies to work for received high ratings in pay and benefits, but also in other matters such as opportunities (including promotion within), job security, employee's pride in their work or the company, openness and fairness to all employees, and camaraderie and friendliness (Levering and Moskowitz, 1993). Furthermore, the 2000–2001 *Hay Employee Attitudes Study* concluded that “while pay for performance is the avowed goal of most companies, employees do not feel that this goal is being achieved.” (The Hay Group, 2001).

Compensation has become an expected reward for hourly employees, just for coming to work, and employees expect more than that. Many firms, especially in the attraction and amusement industry that rely heavily on hourly employees are likely lose their valued employees if they failed to offer intrinsic rewards to their employees that give value and meaning to their work experience.

Employers in the amusement and attraction industry should create a positive work environment where hourly jobs should be designed with a sense of fulfillment and intrinsic satisfaction built in it. Hourly employee loyalty can also be sustained through the encouragement of motivation, energy, and innovation. In addition, as many hourly employees have flexible working hours expectations, employers should also do their best to accommodate a diverse labor pool and recognize their employees' other personal obligations.

This could be achieved by providing an “operation meaning” through mission, values, and corporate vision that could be communicated through behavior rather than relying on printed or posted mission statements. As hourly employees report directly to their supervisors, the “operation meaning” concept should be clearly communicated to supervisors, middle managers, administrators, and other full-time employees that have an impact on the environment and working

conditions of hourly employees, especially in the amusement and the attraction in industry.

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