



THE LANDING MATTRESS MODEL: A METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF STAFF RETENTION STRATEGY

**Cassim Silumba¹ⁱ,
Noemi M. Abellanosa²,
Krisha Vanessa M. Laguiwas³**

¹Chancelight Behavioral Health,
Therapy and Education,
United States of America

²University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines,
Philippines

³Central Mindanao University,
Philippines

Abstract:

This study interrogated the phenomenon of organizational staff retention strategies available in workplaces, with a particular focus on how retention can positively impact the performance and profitability of an organization, the causes of employee turnover and the impact of staff turnover on customer service and organizational success. The study was carried out in selected special education schools in California and Texas in the United States of America. The study utilized the qualitative research methodology approach, with a case study being selected as the research design. By adopting a qualitative research approach, the aim of the study was to unpack the causes and impact of staff turnover in special education schools and to propose a model in which organizations can eradicate the staff turnover drawback in order to ensure sufficient and reliable increased staff retention. The population included the newly hired staff, special education teachers and program directors in California and Texas in the United States of America. A snowball sampling technique was used to select participants because it enables access to respondents who are difficult to reach via conventional methods. Data were collected through semi-structured online interviews and document analysis. Findings pointed out that staff turnover was destructive and negatively impacted customer service and organizational success. Staff retention strategies found included the ability to perceive meaning and adapt to change at the onset to de-escalate staff turnover, an environment that encourages innovation and limitless potential for personal and professional satisfaction and growth. The study recommends the development and implementation of the Landing Mattress Model in special education schools to cushion,

ⁱ Correspondence: email cassimsilumba@gmail.com

absorb, and support the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital.

Keywords: turnover, adaptation, performance, engagement, organizational support, onboarding, recruitment, retention

1. Introduction

Special education schools in California and Texas in the United States of America have, for a long time, faced a critical challenge with staff turnover. The termination of teacher training grants by the Department of Education further deepens the acute shortage of special education teachers (Training and eTracking Solutions, 2025). Apart from improving the instruction of struggling students and those with disabilities, the education system by special education facilities has managed to maintain compliance with the disability rights laws that see the provision of supportive outcomes for individual students with disability. However, special education facilities operate with reduced resources, which might negatively impact staff retention and increase staff turnover. In order to retain staff in this competitive environment, organizations came up with staff retention strategies. Several staff retention models were proffered before, which include the Zinger Model on Employee Engagement, the Employee Retention Connection Model, and the Integrated System for Retaining Employee Model.

As such, one of the biggest challenges facing organizations in these contemporary times is employee turnover. The most costly and disruptive drawback faced by organizations today is early staff turnover. Al-Suraihi, Samikon, Al-Suraihi and Ibrahim (2021) highlight that the phenomenon of staff turnover has become a permanent problem for organizations such that it has a detrimental effect on organizational performance and profitability. One of the important matters in organizational management is employee turnover and retention of valuable, skilled employees, and securing new hires is critical to employers as they are essential to the success of an organization.

1.1 Background of the Study

This study emanates from the main question for the study: What organizational staff retention strategies are available in workplaces that can positively impact the performance and profitability of an organization? This key question is supported by the Policy Analysis for California Education Report (2020), which makes it clear in the executive summary that California is in the midst of a severe and deepening shortage of special education teachers (Ondrasek, Carver-Thomas, Scott and Darling Hammond, 2020). Therefore, it is worth examining how comprehensive and proactive policy solutions can be implemented to address the severity of the shortage and the multifaceted challenges of high turnover.

Ondrasek *et al.* (2020) opine that the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing indicates the expansion of high-retention pathways into teaching that both

recruit and retain teachers, as well as solutions that reduce attrition. This makes an interrogation of staff turnover and staff retention strategies very crucial in this study. To augment the points on high turnover rates in special education, Gilmor, Mason-Williams and Bettini (2024) quote School Pulse Panel (2024), which reported that 21% of schools had at least one vacancy in special education and 55% of the schools had difficulties filling special education teacher positions. This was due to high turnover rates, which saw 15% of special education teachers and staff leaving their schools each year.

Carpenter (2025) maintains that teacher turnover in Texas State has ticked higher since the pandemic. Based on Texas Education Agency statistics, staff turnover has currently been hovering roughly 20 percent for the past two years, that is, the 2022-23 period (Carpenter, 2025). Based on Carpenter's insight, it becomes evident that as the Texas State teachers and staff continuously turn from their employment, Texas State strives to hire for tough-to-fill positions and retain teachers. Consequently, the Texas Education Agency Commission has put in place strategies for hiring and relying on more first-year teachers and uncertified teachers.

The study by Carpenter (2025) focused on what the commission was doing about teachers and not the educational environments in which these teachers and staff are. Organizational environments should not suppress staff retention; rather, they should promote it so that the new employees are cushioned, absorbed and supported into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital.

Organizations without talented employees will have difficulty reaching their desired goals and objectives since inadequate employee retention strategies typically result in employee turnover (Igbinola, Joel, Igbadumbe, and Peter, 2022). The impact of excessive employee turnover is significant capital loss due to increased recruitment costs, training costs and work disruption. Most of the time, when one individual quits an organization, the knowledge vacuum creates work for remaining team members, which may result in burnout (Ekhsan, 2019). Henceforth, it is imperative for organizations to create an environment that will encourage staff to stay recruited.

Among the environmental factors that influence staff turnover are better working conditions for exceptionally skilled labor, increased demand in the industry, and cultural and social factors of the organization's environment. Mabaso, Maja, Kavir, Lekwape, Makwasane, and Khumalo (2021), Ekhsan (2019), and Singh (2019) seem to have overstated the retention strategies and listed employee participation in decision making, organization's reputation, future expectations, provision of incentives, and job extensions among other variables that can motivate employees to stay employed at an organization. Kumar and Mathimaran (2017) posit that management team decisions are responsible for the failure or success of any organization, and they placed emphasis on the decision-making theory as key to the provision of staff retention. At the same time, emphasis is placed on staff retention strategies available and the management teams in making decisions that might negatively or positively influence organizational performance. This study sought to provide a framework for an organizational environment that cushions,

absorbs, and supports the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital.

The two states have not written a (formal) framework that is followed for a model that addresses staff retention in special education facilities. Carpenter (2025) made attempts; Dunlap (2025), Taxes AFT (2025), Mabaso, *et al.* (2021), Ekhsan (2019) and Singh (2019) to address staff retention in the organizations, but they failed to answer the question of a model on staff retention in special education facilities be it at district, private or government level. So, this study is an attempt to cover that gap.

Observations from the researchers as special education instructors and staff are that some special education facilities (district, private and government) keep struggling with staff turnover, and that has affected their organizational performance. For example, Dunlap (2025) laments the state of Texas's ability to retain teachers and hire for tough-to-fill positions. In numerous recommendations by the state panel convened by the Texas Education Agency in 2023, being shouted louder for a more considerate approach in retaining teachers and staff in schools, a few proposals have been put into action. Hence, the US Government Accountability Office (2024) noted the negative impact of staff turnover, as some students with disabilities did not receive sped services or had delayed services caused by staffing limitations. These retention strategies become meaningless when no tangible steps are taken to reinforce them.

Other local solutions for teacher recruitment and retention are temporary and provide substandard credentials and permits, which are costly, especially the Short-Term Staff Permits (STSPs) or waivers like the One-year, emergency-style permits issued to individuals who have not yet completed teacher preparation or demonstrated subject-matter competence (Carpenter, 2025). The main challenge of staff retention that was brought by Carpenter (2025), Dunlap (2025) and Texas AFT (2025) was to make special education schools make speedy staffing recruitment to fill in the gaps created by staff turnover. This was detrimental as it is time-consuming to yield qualified teachers, staff and positive results. These states' investments in special education teacher and staff recruitment and retention magnified their state budget and paid no regard to the retention of existing staff by providing cultural and social factors of the organization's environment (Mabaso *et al.*, 2021; Ekhsan, 2019 and Singh, 2019). Hence, from this observation, the organization's environment played a crucial role in influencing organization's recruitment and retention of staff.

There is evidence of different types of staff retention at the organization's disposal. In this regard, Battish, Gordon, Kepler, Larcker, Tayan and Yu (2021) suggest that an organization's capacity to attract, retain and develop its top talents determines its success. The higher cost of turnover when employees with high-complexity tasks leave the organization is just unbearable. Schabasser (2024) cited a study conducted by Gallup, which reported that more than half of the employees are open to leaving their employers, with 22% of its respondents actively looking for new employment and 29% waiting to seize any opportunity that comes their way (Employee retention and Attraction). With the disruption of the team's social life, loss of intellectual assets and disruption of the

related stakeholders' performance, there is a need to safeguard the organization's valuable know-how and skills gathered through years of training and experience.

Although there are several models of staff retention proffered before, they seem to offer unique recommendations for keeping the employee turnover rate at a reasonable level. The list includes the Zinger Model on Employee Engagement, which promotes the strengthening of employer-employee relationships to enhance engagement, the Employee Retention Connection Model, which defines stimulating work, motivational leadership and recognition of staff efforts; and the Integrated System for Retaining Employee Model, which sets five steps to be followed by organizations in transforming their cultures and increasing their competitive edges. This paper, however, sought to proffer an all-inclusive model that provides an organizational environment cushion, absorbs, and supports the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Human Capital Theory. In the contemporary business environment, Human Capital Theory helps foster a critical supply of scarce resources and knowledge to increase organizational effectiveness and sustainability. Knowledge, skills and abilities are invaluable assets which are fundamental tools of organizational sustainability (Wuttaphan, 2017). This encourages organizations to constantly and continuously educate and train human resources capital to keep abreast with rapidly changing trends of global technology to maintain the competitiveness of the organization.

Human capital should be studied with a critical lens considering educational context, training, migration and health interpretations that perpetuate retention and provision of positive value to the organization in the future. Managers and directors in organizations need to earnestly explore human capital perspectives. This helps organizational management to critically maximize the source of value creation to their organization. Human capital theory helps to improve a firm's performance and accumulation of employees' knowledge, skills, and ability to invest in humans through training and education that enhances an effective employee's capacity to perform at work.

In this paper, the researchers deployed human capital theory to navigate the staff retention strategies employed by organizations in curbing staff turnover. Some of the objectives of human capital theory are to increase organizational productivity through investing in individual growth through education, training and experience, build a unique workforce, and develop human capital that adapts to changing and demanding environments as well as to intellectual and physical capacity in individuals' performance (Tian and Toth, 2024). In the same vein, contemporary research has increasingly focused on non-cognitive skills such as personality traits, self-control, and creativity, having a greater financial impact in the labor market (Lindqvist and Vestman, 2011). The

researchers can safely say human capital theory is not just an invaluable asset capital investment drive, but it also changes societies as we move away from staff turnover to staff retention.

3. Statement of the Problem

The staff retention strategies employed by organizations for curbing staff turnover should not go unnoticed. These should also be developed into a model that creates an organizational environment that cushions, absorbs and supports the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital.

3.1 Main Research Question

The main research question that framed this study was:

- What organizational staff retention strategies are available in workplaces that can positively impact the performance and profitability of a special education organization?

3.2 Research Sub-Questions

This study was framed by these sub-research questions.

- What causes employees' turnover?
- What is the impact of staff turnover on customer service and organizational success?
- How can organizations eradicate the staff turnover drawback to ensure sufficient and reliable increased staff retention?

3.3 Significance of the Study

The results of this study were beneficial to Special Education schools in identifying causes of staff turnover. That urged them to incorporate human capital ideologies in eradicating staff turnover and ensure sufficient and increased staff retention through the creation of an organizational environment that cushions, absorbs and supports the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital.

4. Methodology

This study utilized qualitative research methodology. Tenny, Brannan and Brannan (2022) aver that qualitative methodology is concerned with uncovering knowledge about how people feel and think in circumstances in which they find themselves. As qualitative researchers, in this study, we were more interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense (Merriam, 2009) of the organizational staff turnover and how their experiences in human capital may help retain staff for the

performance and profitability of an organization. In this study, the researchers explored participants' perspectives to answer the questions of the eradication of the staff turnover drawback to ensure sufficient and reliable increased staff retention. The interpretative or qualitative paradigm gave the researchers more room to investigate through interviews and conversations with participants what colleagues in their respective organizations and program directors feel about staff turnover and how they can ensure sufficient and reliable staff retention.

The study was carried out with a phenomenological approach where the researchers looked at the staff turnover phenomenon and then proffered a specific, tailor-made model of the employee in a new hire environment, exploring the effects of landing staff contact, experienced staff resistance to change, staff engagement in organizational activities and other staff turnover factors. Under this approach, a qualitative research method was utilized in gathering data. There was the use of interviews from one newly hired teacher, five newly hired staff members who had just resumed employment and the researcher's workplace. These six individuals worked as the seeds of initial respondents who were later used to leverage social connections in the snowball sampling method employed in this study.

4.1 Population and Sample

The population for the study included the newly hired staff, teachers and program directors in California and Texas in the United States of America. Studying the whole population was virtually impossible; therefore, a sample of the newly hired staff, teachers and program directors was used. To strengthen the representativeness of the sample and generalize the research results, the researchers used non-probability sampling, specifically snowball sampling, because it involved asking initial respondents to refer to others who met the study's criteria and allowing the researchers to widen their sample through social networks (Hair *et al.*, 2020). According to Pasikowski (2023), the snowball sampling method entails accessing respondents who are difficult to reach via conventional techniques. The researchers leveraged connections of respondents through friends, colleagues in their organizations, and program directors to increase the response rate and save time.

During the conduct of the researchers, they accessed respondents from two states in the USA, and the snowball sample offered a practical solution for accessing respondents who were in different states and cities with the researchers, hence increasing response rates and gaining deeper insights into the staff turnover phenomenon under investigation. This methodology was quite useful due to the sensitivity of the topic- staff turnover. Etikan, Alkassim and Abubakar (2016), in Silumba and Chibango (2018), argue that the entree to a group is gained through people one knows and that cascades to know others, and through them, entree to new circles is enlarged.

Despite the benefits of this technique, the researchers came across some drawbacks. One of the major drawbacks was a lack of control over sample size and composition (Pasikowski, 2023). The researchers could have had an uneven sample size,

with California groups being overrepresented and Texas groups being underrepresented or totally excluded. The researchers addressed this and ensured the validity and reliability of the data collected by following a step-by-step guide which had specific key stages. These steps include and are not limited to target population definition, seed initial respondents, leverage social connections, control referral chains, track and record data collected, and finally evaluate and make necessary adjustments (Ting *et al.* 2025). To avoid bias and maintain diversity, the researchers restricted the number of referrals to between 5 and 8 per seed (initial respondent), and these were selected from the two different social circles so that they broaden and balance the sample size.

5. Findings and Discussions

The participants generally responded well to the research questions asked. Most of the respondents showed a vast grasp of staff turnover and how detrimental it was to organizational effectiveness and sustainability. They also acknowledged that elements of the landing mattress model can be used by organizations to subdue staff turnover in order to ensure sufficient and increased staff retention through the creation of an absorbing organizational environment.

5.1 Causes of Staff Turnover

All these organizations, with different values, visions and beliefs, their valued and newly employed staff will depart from these setups where effectiveness and sustainability would have been definite. Following this realization, the organizational environment ought to serve as a key foundation for sufficient staff retention. This helps to accommodate all staff and stakeholders at the organization and yield organizational sustainability and effectiveness. In cognizant of this virtue, one teacher who left an institution after only serving it for three weeks had this to say:

"My ideology of children's behavioral therapy or treatment differed greatly from what the Area Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) wanted to implement during my first weeks at the special education school. Hence, I could not take it along, and I felt that it was all wrong. I didn't want my conscience to haunt me in my life, so I decided to move on."

The gist of the participants' argument in the above quotation is that the pace of change puts continuous pressure on organizations, and staff need to be agile and efficient to adapt. This conforms with Parker *et al.* (2010) in van den Heuvel *et al.* (2020), who noted that proactively dealing with change requires energetic resources from employees to adapt successfully. Hence, work engagement and meaning making enable employees to make sense of challenging events during changes within the organization.

As expected, work engagement is key employee experience during the first weeks of change in that both initial and increasing levels of engagement predict attitude-to-change at the end of the transition phase of less than 6 months (van den Heuvel *et al.*,

2020). This attitude-to-change could be noted in participants, and another newly recruited teacher had this to say.

"I am having challenges with my staff as they are not supportive at all. Most of our students are one-on-one, and after carefully planning my lesson, I expected the staff to take part in the teaching and learning process of these autistic children, but they left me to do all the work. I can't move from one student to another, given that they have different Individual Educational Plans (IEPs). This leaves me burnt out every day, and I am actively looking for a new employment opportunity that comes my way. I will take it and leave this unbearable job, which does not have staff support."

van den Heuvel *et al.* (2020) argue that the employee's ability to perceive meaning at the onset of the change is paramount at the individual level as it relates to work engagement and indirectly predicts attitude-to-change after the first transition weeks. The existing staff's failure to provide support due to their inability to perceive meaning and adapt to change at the onset escalates staff turnover.

In cognizant of this virtue of meaning-making and adaptive performance and work engagement, one staff member had this to say:

"The only holding factor for me to go to another school is that my sponsor has tied me to this school through a contract I signed with them. Otherwise, the treatment I have received from the experienced staff here is so frustrating that I cannot tolerate it. Barely a week after assuming duty here, I was told not to talk or escort a student to the bathroom because I was not (Crisis Prevention Institute) CPI-trained. Little did I know what CPI entails or was all about. My concern was on building rapport with students so that I can understand their behaviors, hence can successfully implement their behavior intervention plans (BIPs). In short, the experienced staff at this school did not make my first moments at this school pleasant."

The important thing to notice about this quotation is that the meaning-making and attitude-to-change can relate to initial levels of predictive supervisor-rated adaptive performance and long-term work engagement (van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2020).

Employers are sometimes inflexible and do not provide a balance between work and employees' personal lives. Hence, new staff are deprived of a platform to take part in the decision-making process, even though those decisions affect their jobs (Rajan, 2019). Participants cited the *inconsistencies regarding the assignment of duties* as an instrument for escalating staff turnover. One staff member expressed frustration by saying that,

"I feel that inconsistencies in assigned duties make our job difficult. For example, I was called in to be a ride-along with students and one morning around 7am, someone felt like I should just stop. Imagine having already adjusted my time schedule every day to fit in

the ride along with students, only to be told not to. I was stressed and felt that I should look for work elsewhere where my presence is of value."

Burton *et al.* (2013) in McCabe and Ruppar (2023) purport that the small pool of applicants, fewer benefits and lower salaries contribute to the shortage of special education teachers and pose the challenge of hiring and retaining special education teachers and staff.

The researchers found out that teachers showed disappointment and frustration at being forced to toil alone without help from supporting staff and administration. This was captured by one teacher who said that,

"As teachers, our survival at this school depends on support from paraprofessionals, instructional assistants and service providers so that we adhere to the demands of the job. Unfortunately, we come across staff who are so resistant to change. A colleague teacher had to quit after only working for a week. The staff was unsupportive, and it looked like they negatively influenced the students to exhibit behaviors toward him. The pressure was just too much so that it was difficult for him to handle the students alone. Sometimes, the students were taken out of the classroom and came back with bad behaviors. So, the staff would intentionally trigger the students' behaviors and leave them to the teacher to de-escalate them."

Thus, the Landing Mattress Model is not only restricted to newly hired staff, but it goes all the way to teachers. There are compulsory teacher intervention sessions and meetings with students whose behaviors are escalating and distracting from the learning schedule of others at this school. This is a subtle attempt to frustrate and disappoint new staff who do not belong to the existing cluster of staff at the school. Igbinola *et al.* (2022) argue that organizations without talented employees will have difficulty reaching their desired goals and objectives since inadequate employee retention strategies typically result in employee turnover. Hence, the need for supportive paraprofessionals, instructional assistants and service providers.

5.2 The Impact of Staff Turnover on Customer Service and Organisational Success

Staff turnover can go to the extremes of impairing the reputation of service providers when there is a low level of efficiency of the new staff recruited, disturbed flow of work, damage and failure to capture data due to lack of knowledge of new staff (Rajan, 2019). Hence, newly recruited staff are overwhelmed with workload, which they sometimes do not understand due to a lack of knowledge. Participants cited the behavior and chart-level forms as crucial data-capturing instruments for special education facilities. One new staff member said that,

"I once felt embarrassed when asked to capture behavior data sheets, point level sheets and chart level sheets. For real, for real, I did not know what to do and I could see the conflict

among the existing staff because they lacked enough knowledgeable staff to do the assigned duties."

Rajan (2019) opines that the lack of knowledge impairs the reputation of the organizations due to the low level of efficiency of the new staff recruited. This, in turn, provides a high workload and tiredness of existing staff and teachers and might hinge negatively on organizational performance (Abdali, 2011).

At the same time, the researchers noted that special education students need additional and specialized services, as there is no need to overlook students' diversity and the use of continued inclusive practices.

A teacher participant said that,

"The challenge is that local people do not prefer the working conditions and caliber of students we have. Children with disabilities are a bit challenging. Hence, we rely on international staff coming to work on exchange programs. Unfortunately, these staff have limited time frames and with new laws, we are failing to secure staff, and as of this academic year alone, we failed to secure six international staff. This becomes a big challenge and overburdens the staff on the ground."

Berry and Gravelle (2013), in McCabe and Ruppar (2023), posit that teachers in rural special education may find they lack job efficacy or satisfaction because their position requires them to undertake multiple roles and responsibilities for large caseloads with varying needs. In some cases, participants felt isolated and lacked access to other team members to assist them.

The researchers also found that teachers showed emotional stress and burnout due to the demands of their jobs in special education facilities. This was captured by one teacher who said that,

"As a special education teacher, I experience emotional stress and burnouts when dealing with student behaviors. The pressures I experience from parents who expect me to take care of everybody's scratches or injuries from their child make me exhausted. The writing of incident reports (IRs) and behavior intervention reports (BIRs) every day leaves me with high levels of exhaustion. Moreover, some staff are not supportive when it comes to tracking behaviors or checking students' injuries during the day, which makes it difficult for me to account for every student's behavior or self-injury behaviors (SIBs)."

Thus, emotional stress and burnout of new staff, if not addressed quickly, might lead to costly turnover. Ding (2024) and Fore, Martin and Bender (2002) argue that special education lies at the extreme of high burnout rates. Igbinola *et al.* (2022) argue that organizational change requires the support of an immediate supervisor, proteges' skill development acquired from the mentoring service of the supervisor, which affects the proteges intents to stay with the employer.

5.3 Eradication of Staff Turnover Drawback to Ensure Sufficient and Reliable Increased Staff Retention

In cognizant of staff retention strategies, one program director had this to say;

"One of the strategies that has worked for me in retaining staff in my organization is the offering of a sign-on bonus to any individual who is successfully recruited. For example, our organization offers up to 10 thousand US dollars sign-on bonus to any therapist, like Speech Language Pathologist, Area Curriculum and Instruction Specialist, Occupational Therapist (OT), paraprofessionals, Special Education Teachers and School Social Workers. This has seen us drawing Virtual Speech Language Pathologists to our institute, and they end up assuming on-site full-time jobs."

In this sample quotation, it can be noted that the organization offers an environment that encourages creative expression and limitless potential for personal and professional satisfaction and growth.

McCabe and Ruppar (2023) purport that the day-to-day experiences of inclusion and dealing with students with extensive support needs require people who can serve as reliable communication and learning partners. One teacher participant cites the retention strategy that might be useful in retaining strong staff and said that,

"When it comes to strong opinions and resistance to change, it would be better for the organization to promote from within since they already understand how the school organizations work. Unfortunately, the existing staff find joy in abusing others and are not willing to upgrade themselves."

Kurth, Ruppar, Toews, MacCabe, McQuestion and Johnson (2019) support the notion by noting that Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams justify segregated settings because students require individualized and specialized instruction. Hence, an individual teacher or staff member who better understands the dynamics of individualised and specialized students is the ideal candidate for promotion in these settings. One special education teacher had this to say,

"It needs a strong character to be an employee in this organization. That way, you can absorb the force exerted on you by the already established employees. At times, I become ignorant of what they are trying to do or say and just implement my changes as a teacher."

The notion of a supportive environment with supportive existing employees was captured by the new employee from a special education school J, who said,

"During my first weeks at this school, I was fortunate enough to meet a patient and accommodating mentor. I was so scared to work with some students who had aggressive behaviors, and my mentor helped me to work around such students. She even advised me

about the non-phone company policy because I was fond of informing my friends about my new job experience regardless of time. That mentor was very informative about the real issues that mattered about my job as an Instructional Assistant and job expectations."

Another visible impact of staff turnover is a delay in daily routine procedures. This has a ripple effect, which leads to poor customer satisfaction and complaints from stakeholders (Rajan, 2019; Nanyonga and Friday, 2023). This was captured by the program director from special education school D who said,

"The district was displeased about the way our school is run due to staff turnover so it transferred quite a few students from our school to where they thought students would get the required services. Fortunately enough, we managed to improve our recruitment policy and employed experienced staff which saw an overhaul of the services we provided. Within a period of six months, we were getting recommendations from the same district. We enrolled and replaced more than twice the number of students who had previously transferred to other schools. Staff turnover has disrupted the performance of our organization."

These sentiments concur with Nanyonga and Friday (2023), who argue that employee turnover affects employee performance because they are disrupted from their daily work performance. It can be noted in the above statement that management had to focus on their recruitment policy to attract experienced teachers to improve customer satisfaction and get compliments instead of complaints from stakeholders. Thus, the Landing Mattress Model will not only improve organizational performance, but it also goes all the way to service provision and customer satisfaction.

5.4 The Landing Mattress Model

Given that staff turnover has been detrimental to organizational effectiveness and sustainability, it may not be very easy to eradicate the vice completely. Be that as it may, this study offered a Landing Mattress Model (L.M.M.) or framework that may be adopted to cushion, absorb, and support the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital. A specific tailor-made model of the employee in a new hire environment has been developed to explore the effects of landing staff contact, experienced staff resistance to change, staff engagement in organizational activities and other staff turnover factors.

To ensure sufficient and reliable increased staff retention, the research developed a model called The Landing Mattress model which hinges on the landing mattress softness or stiffness effect on the bony tissues geometrics as a synonym of the prevailing environment in organizations fostering adipose thickness in accommodating new hire hence providing a rigid substrate and immediate job dissatisfaction or soft-tissue foam's tri-phasic elasticity reducing internalized pressures on the new hire. Bearing in mind that it is a truism that organizational effectiveness and sustainability come from the stock of

knowledge and characteristics workers have, as enshrined in the Human Capital Theory, the organizational environment becomes a conglomeration in the integration of the new employee in the organization. The L.M.M proposed has four constructs as follows.

5.5 Metaphorical Representation of Theory and Constructs

- a) Approach (Recruitment and Pre-boarding),
- b) Take-Off (Onboarding and first Engagement),
- c) Bar Clearance (Adaptation and Performance),
- d) Landing (Organizational Support and Retention Infrastructure).

Approach: How an organization attracts, screens and prepares potential employees, forming expectations.

Take-Off: The initial entry of the employee into the organization- training, welcome and cultural integration.

Bar Clearance: Early challenges, performance expectations and initial assessment testing the employee's ability to "clear" expectations.

Landing: The critical stage of how well the organization absorbs the pressures on the new hire through mentoring, emotional support, work-life balance, and adaptability to change to determine retention.

The Landing Mattress Model (Theory) is a metaphorical representation of an organizational environment that cushions, absorbs and supports the integration of the new employee into an organization. The core theoretical notion is that organizational retention capacity of staff is influenced by how well the organization absorbs the pressures on the new hire through mentoring, emotional support, work-life balance or adaptability to change (Rajan, 2019).

When integrating into an organization, a person's psychological safety, emotional pressures and onboarding experience can influence their immediate and long-term job satisfaction. As such, when individuals experience emotionally disturbing pressures, they react consciously and engage in a flight or freeze physiological reaction, which ultimately results in turnover. Additionally, organizational systems, raw exposure during integration, organizational culture, short- and long-term adaptability and organizational substrates interact with each other in absorbing and supporting the integration of new employees into the organization.

There are different components of the organizational environment (mattress composition) that foster support or cushion the integration of new employees into the organization. At the center of the organizational environment is the organization's readiness to integrate and contact with the new hire. These are the fundamental phases and components that one holds about recruitment, onboarding, adaptation and performance, and organizational support and retention structure in general and specific work environments. These underlying components and phases must be addressed for effective staff retention to occur.

5.6 Application to the Jumping Paradigm: Alignment of Theory Constructs with the High Jump Analogy

High Jump analogies are processes through which researchers use comparison of simpler to complex situations. Analogy-based instruction can lead to a more effective and flexible way of learning about organizational environments to integrate new staff recruited into organizations. Metaphoric interventions in The Landing Mattress Theory might incorporate high jump techniques to achieve specific changes in organizational support and retention infrastructure by absorbing well the new high and improving staff retention.

Aspects of constructions in The Landing Mattress Theory correspond to the High Jump Analogy as follows:

| Theory Construct | Corresponding High Jump Analogy |
|---|---|
| Recruitment and Pre-boarding | Approach: The run before the jump |
| Onboarding and First Engagement | Take-Off: The moment the athlete launches toward the bar |
| Adaptation and Performance | Bar Clearance: The athlete's attempt to cross over the bar |
| Organizational Support and Retention Infrastructure | Landing: The fall and contact with the mattress |

The researchers' primary and secondary areas of research with this theory are intervention with new work environments, new marriages, relationships, new churches, among other new encounters in life. Also, researchers' ratings of theory quality are based on generalizations, clarity, coherence and evidence.

5.7 Paradigm Phases of The Landing Mattress Model

5.7.1 The Metaphoric Framework

Just like the high jumper needs a well-cushioned landing mattress to absorb impact and prevent injury, a new hire needs a supportive organizational environment to absorb the "shock" of entry and reduce turnover. The mattress represents organizational readiness and support, while the athlete represents the new hire.

5.7.2 Approach

The organization's recruitment and pre-boarding processes mark the initial process explaining staff retention through the analogy of an athlete's high jump landing on a mattress. The recruitment and pre-boarding process shapes both the organization's capacity to retain staff and the individual employee's expectations about the organization. Dickson and Isaiah (2024) define the recruitment process as the initial stage of the onboarding process where candidates are selected. As such, it facilitates the integration of employees into an organizational setting and enhances relationships with existing internal members and stakeholders. It is at this point that momentum is gained.

As the recruitment team imparts information, facilitate the development of realistic expectations and not only the ones laid down on the application job description, and provide adoption of coping skills, organizations and individual employees are acquainted with various aspects of prospective workplace, organizational culture anticipated challenges and rewards, (Dickson and Olson, 2024) and established management style being implemented at that particular organization.

The introduction of new hires to existing teams and organizational practices is not easy unless there is a meaningful transition for employees as they take on new responsibilities (Jeske and Olson, 2021). For example, an individual is immediately attracted by a work environment, competitive total reward packages which include compensation and benefits. An organization that sets the stage for new employees' expectations about how to behave, connect with existing staff is bound to retain more staff because the first experiences shape employees' readiness and ability to adjust in the future (Karambelkar and Bhattacharya, 2017).

Therefore, an organization which offers a positive and inclusive culture and strong employer brand with a good public reputation during the recruitment process may generally attract top-notch employees. If the prospective employee thinks, "the reputation of this company is superb and its brand is internationally recognized", or "the positive and inclusive multi-culture approach of this company will make me feel at home and it would be great if I strike an opportunity to be part of this team", it is likely to impact on the new hire's expectations and cause them to feel accommodated and incorporated in integration with the new organization.

Pre-boarding motivates and engages new employees shortly after they are hired as they are peer coached, proactively do job shadowing and get to have hands-on engagement with organizational activities (Garg, N., Murphy, W. and Singh, P., 2021). This notion concurs with Dickson and Isaiah (2024), who purport that the enhancement of business performance through employee engagement and retention, devoid of employee turnover, is achievable through employee participation in the onboarding process. Hence, effective onboarding and pre-boarding programs enhance the rapid transmission of new employees to productivity and inculcate a strong, lasting employee-employer relationship. The onboarding process makes employees feel more comfortable and understood while they clarify their responsibilities (Sharma and Stol, 2020).

On the other hand, if the prospective new hire feels that there is a lack of flexible work arrangements which do not allow them to take time off during important events in the employee's life, it is likely to impact the new hire's expectations and concerns about their social and psychological well-being. Especially, when they are denied time off during funerals or celebrations, when they have not yet accumulated enough sick time off. Rajan (2019) argues that sometimes inflexibility and failure to provide a balance between work and employees' personal life deprive new employees of the platform to take part in the decision-making process on decisions which affect their jobs. The Landing Mattress Theory LMT is based on the athlete's (new hire) approach during the run-up (momentum gaining phase) before the jump denoting how the organization attracts,

screens and prepares potential employees thereby forming both the organization's expectations of the new hire's strengths and contributions to the organization and the individual's expectation of the organizational flexibility, brand and reputation, and compensation and benefits among others.

5.7.3 Underlying Beliefs in the Approach Phase

Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretations of the recruitment and onboarding processes. LMT beliefs are understood from organizational and individual perspective:

Core beliefs:

- The organization and individuals generally benefit from the employer-employee relationship
- Both organizations and individuals strive to have increased staff engagement and loyalty.
- The organization and individuals have a smooth transition in adapting to one another.

5.7.4 Take-Off

The organization's onboarding and first engagement processes mark the second process explaining staff retention through the analogy of an athlete's high jump landing on a mattress. The onboarding and first engagement processes shape both the organization's capacity to lay the appropriate foundation, build confidence in the employees' capabilities and develop lasting relationships, which in turn leads to increased staff retention, increased organizational performance, and commitment (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo and Tucker, 2007).

Lida, Nneka, Hinson, Kauwell, and Keith (2025) emphasize that onboarding represents a foundational process for integrating new employees into an organization, significantly influencing their early engagement, productivity and long-term retention. Bauer (201) recognizes onboarding as a strategic, multi-dimensional experience that shapes employee's understanding of their roles, organization's culture and relationships within the workplace. New employees become compliant with the organization and have a sense of belonging, which makes them aligned with the organization's vision, mission and goals.

If an organization provides an environment which balances institutional cohesion with flexibility, employees are obliged to be engaged with the organization and thus are retained for a longer period. During onboarding, new employees are compelled to complete necessary employment paperwork, policy acknowledgement, safety training (Bauer, 2010), mandatory behavior training, incident report (IRs) and behavior emergency reports (BERs) training, among other baseline legal compliance surety. These non-negotiable, obligatory organizational procedures enforce employees to be bound and failure to comply results in serious consequences. This, therefore, becomes the initial

step on the constructs of take-off in the high jump that the athlete (new employee) takes that enhances engagement and belonging to an organization.

During the take-off, new employees must have a clearly outlined role orientation and know what the organization expects of them. This helps to clarify and eradicate situations where there is role confusion and role conflict. At times, there is a lack of clarity about the new employee's responsibilities, expectations and position within an organization. For example, a teacher might be asked to prioritize provision of instruction and adapt curriculum and lessons to meet the specific needs of students, religiously implementing the IEPs and at the same time, being told to follow class schedules. This creates a conflict between their role as implementers of the curriculum and creators of a supportive learning environment, and their role as a team member who sees to it that the IEP goals are run, recorded and achieved every academic day. As such, the organization should provide role-specific orientations, set clear expectations for each employee and have a proper performance plan in place (Bauer, 2010). All the work burnouts, frustrations and stress that affect new and existing staff caused by role conflict and role confusion are therefore eradicated. New and existing staff will therefore go the extra mile in achieving immediate and long-term organizational goals.

At the same time, integration of organizational culture, which outlines its values, traditions and mission, is paramount during the onboarding experience of new employees. This helps employees build identity and engagement with the organization (Bauer 2010 in Lind *et al.* 2025). Once these have been incorporated, the management duties hinge on facilitating lasting relationships among the new hire recruited and existing staff through creating networks, social events and mentorship programs (Bauer 2010 in Lind *et al.* 2025). One notable event is the Big Bus Tour blending trip organized by a Special Education Facility in California, which was followed by dinner at an exquisite restaurant, where the new employees connected with the existing employees and were assisted with ease in navigation of the special education facilities. The application of Tayla Bauer's 4C framework- Compliance, Clarification, Culture and Connection during the Take-Off construct of the LMM provides a cushionary environment that promotes increased employee retention.

5.7.5 Underlying Beliefs in the Take-Off Phase

Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretations of the onboarding and first engagement processes. LMM beliefs are understood from organizational and individual perspective:

Core beliefs:

- The organizational culture builds employees' identity and engagement with the organization.
- Lasting relationships lead to increased staff retention, increased organizational performance and staff commitment.
- The onboarding process represents a foundational process for integrating new employees into an organization.

5.7.6 Bar Clearance

The third and crucial process in explaining staff retention through the analogy of an athlete's high jump landing on a mattress is the bar clearance, which entails adaptation and organizational performance. Failure to clear the bar results in injuries (serious consequences), that is, staff turnover. During the change implementation phase, the coming in of new employees with newly assigned duties or taking over old responsibilities from existing employees needs work engagement as a pivotal contributor to adaptive performance (van den Heuvel *et al.* 2020). Motivation of staff plays a key role in innate tendencies of individuals to retain, protect and foster valued resources (Hobfill *et al.*, 2018). In this case, mean-making makes employees visualize the potential losses and gains associated with organizational changes that are taking place. Henceforth, processing mean-making and work engagement values in the employees can subsequently relate to adaptive performance.

When it comes to change in the work environment, there is a need for employees to have behavioral and attitudinal modifications and adjustments. These ratifications and adjustments help employees, either newly recruited or existing ones, maintain or restore the equilibrium in well-being of the organization as well as organizational performance (Cameroon 1894) in van den Heuvel *et al.* 2020). To clear this bar, van den Heuvel *et al.* (2020) proposed two crucial aspects: the introduction of flexible workspaces and extra-role behaviors among existing staff. These will see the use of discretionary behaviors for employees to work in new environments. Hence, it calls for pure modification of existing work behaviors for the employees to adapt to new work-related or socially related changes (Sarta, Durrand and Vergne, 2021).

In addition to environmental change adaptation, organizational members need to fuse social learning (copying or imitating what existing employees are doing) with innovation (using personal trial and error effort to obtain the knowledge that is adaptive to the new state of the environment (Braham and Poblete, 2024). Overreliance on individual learning entails a costly effect, as one is bound to make personal mistakes that are detrimental to organizational performance, given the importance of customer satisfaction. Puranam (2018) hails the effect of accurate beliefs on adaptability as the timing of individual learning helps in enhancing social learning and increasing organizational stability and performance.

Baard, Rench and Kozlowski (2014) urge individuals and team members to adapt quickly to new tasks and job demands. They call upon the performance adaptation, which sees to it that employees alter their behavior to meet environmental demands, a new situation or a change of staff. During this stage, the adaptive performance of employees sees to it that they are also able to handle emergencies or crisis situations, solve problems creatively, handle work stress, learn new tasks and procedures, demonstrate interpersonal adaptability, and demonstrate cultural and physical oriented adaptability (Charbonnier-Voirin and Roussel, 2012). As such, it calls for psychological, behavioral and attitudinal modifications in the employees, which is facilitated to adapt to environmental changes, hence ease the clearing of the bar. This will go a long way in

making every employee integrate with organizational changes, hence increasing staff retention.

5.7.8 Underlying Beliefs in the Bar Clearance Phase

Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretations of the adaptation and performance processes. LMM beliefs are understood from a social and individual perspective:

Core beliefs:

- The mean-making generally contributes to adaptive performance.
- Behavioral, attitudinal and psychological modifications are paramount to organizational adaptation to change.
- The integration of social learning and individual learning has a positive impact on organizational performance.

5.7.9 Landing

The last construct in the Landing Mattress Model is the landing, that is, the organizational support and retention infrastructure process. The landing needs to be a strong, comfortable mattress, which in this case comes from the management whose managerial competencies and information sharing play a critical role during the introductory process of a new employee to the organization (Jeske and Olson, 2021). Employees master new tasks quickly, perform better and are retainable when supervisors and management are open to offer more support and to share more information than an environment which is restrictive to information and unsupportive to new staff (Ellis, Nifadkar, Bauer, and Erdogan, 2017).

Gokhul and Panneerselvam (2016) argue that better infrastructure may have a lesser impact on retaining employees, but when it comes to attracting employees to the organization, it plays a predominant role. Retention infrastructure paves the way for how an organization operates, hence outlining the culture of the organization. This includes how the rule book applies to delayed start to the day by employees, issues related to leave days, and the protocols available, among other things. The higher the level of acceptance to these infrastructures, the higher the continuance of employees to engage with the organization (Gokhul and Panneerselvam, 2016).

In addition, the retention infrastructure includes the organization's brand and how it adds value to the acceptance of employees in society. Society tends to accept employees as settled people when they are coming or working for an organization with improved infrastructure (Padhi, Mitra and Paul, 2020). The landing on the new organization becomes comfortable when the organizational environment is engaging to the employees, and Gokhul and Panneerselvam (2016) purport that this ultimately leads to higher productivity, better retention rates and improved organizational success across the board.

As such, the organization must lay a structure that defines employees' roles, responsibilities, and reporting channels that are organized so that information has a

smooth flow both horizontally and vertically in the organization. Streamlining the communication process enables clarity of the strategic flow of information, as every team member would be aware of who reports to whom. Hence, a supportive organizational environment and strong retention infrastructure provide the final landing for the employees. This will go a long way in absorbing every employee's integration with a new organization and new work environment, hence improved staff retention.

5.7.9 Underlying Beliefs in the Landing Phase

Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretation of the organizational support and retention infrastructure process. LMM beliefs that underlie this landing phase are:

Core beliefs:

- Managerial competencies and information sharing contribute to employees' soft landing in a new organization.
- Organization's brand adds value to the employee's acceptance in society.
- Better retention infrastructure plays a predominant role in attracting employees to an organization.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the organizational staff retention strategies available in workplaces that can positively impact the performance and profitability of an organization within the special education school settings in California and Texas, the United States of America. The findings demonstrate that although retention strategies such as job satisfaction, training, rewards and organizational performance tolerance are widely acknowledged, they are not being fully utilized to foster a safe landing of new employees in practice. Improved recruitment policy attracts and retains experienced teachers and staff; hence an organization improves customer satisfaction and gets compliments instead of complaints from stakeholders. The lack of a guiding performance adaptation further limits the alteration of employees' behavior to meet environmental demands, a new situation or a change of staff. Hence, the potential of the Landing Mattress Model in bridging new and existing employee relationships divides and builds socially cohesive workplace environments. In essence, the landing mattress provides a strong cushion absorbing and supporting the integration of the new employee into an organization, and it should be central to efforts aimed at building increased staff retention and improved organizational performance.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion on organizational staff retention strategies available in workplaces that can positively impact the performance and profitability of an organization, the researchers recommend that the special education facilities should implement the LMM to ensure a conducive cushionary environment that promotes

employee retention. Besides providing a sense of belonging to new staff recruited, it will help with improved organizational performance and service provision to students with disabilities.

Acknowledgements

The authors appreciate many individuals who worked to advance the accuracy of the Landing Mattress Model in the California and Texas State Departments of Education and Special Education Facilities.

Data Availability Statement

No additional data from this study is available.

Authors Contributions

Cassim Silumba, Noemi M. Abellanosa, and Krisha Vanessa M. Laguiwas were responsible for gathering the information that comprised the content of the study and prepared and edited the manuscript.

Funding Statement

This study was not supported by external funding.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest in reporting.

About the Authors

Cassim Silumba, Special Education Teacher. Academic education; Med Educational Management, BA, PGDE. Research interests: Management, Education and Conflict Resolution. Participations: Reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes (2017); Women and Church Leadership in Mutoko District (20218); Child Marriages in Nyamuzuwe Community, Zimbabwe: parents and guardians conniving (2018); Theoretical and Practical reasons for paragraph writing mistakes (2018); Online education in promoting education in COVID-19 outbreak in Zimbabwe: challenges and

solutions (2020); The conflict of social distancing and Shona cultural norms in the face of covid-19 (2022).

Noemi M. Abellanosa, Special Education Teacher. Academic education; PhD in Educational Planning and Management, MA in Education, MA in Educational Administration, BA. Research interests: Human Resources, Social Sciences, and Language and Arts.

Krisha Vanessa M. Laguiwas, Special Education Teacher. Academic education; MA in Education, BA, Certificate in Special Education Needs. Research interests: Human Resources, Social Sciences, and Language and Arts.

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