Retention Strategies in Turbulent Times

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ABSTRACT

While attrition and retention of staff receive attention in human resource management literature in business and corporate contexts, less attention is given to the application of management and leadership responses to issues of retention and attrition of staff in voluntary community welfare organisations. This paper addresses some of the issues that alerted the management of a voluntary welfare organisation to the need for focused attention on attrition and retention in a context of rapid organisation growth and social environmental change. While the writer derived a number of insights from the human resource management research field, the focus of this paper is on the application of those ideas in a voluntary welfare organisation needing to give greater emphasis to professional decision making input and discretion. The paper emphasises both christian values and professional sensitivities in a balance between necessary attrition and prudent retention management.

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly assumed that attrition of staff in a work organisation is an indicator of the health or un-health of the organisation (Oliver, 1998). This may well be the case, but it is difficult to establish the links between attrition and un-health. Retention of staff beyond reasonable limits may not always be desirable either. ' Downsizing' is now a familiar, taken for granted term throughout the business world (Leatt et al.,1997). Downsizing is often crudely conducted by corporations, with disastrous results for them when an economy begins to recover (Kouzmin, 1996). Downsizing also does little for staff morale (Murphy et al., 1996). Employees have learnt that " loyalty" seen as long-term commitment to an organisation is not always repaid by the organisation with loyalty, so why, employees ask, should they give it?

These and other issues are confronted in the literature on staff attrition and retention (Balmer and Baum, 1993; Dabscheck, 1994; Fottler 1995; Anderson, 1977; Gardner and Palmer, 1997). This paper seeks to bring some of the insights and issues from the literature to bear on the Singapore Anglican Welfare Council (SAWC), a voluntary welfare organisation with a christian foundation underlying its charter. This paper does not attempt to deal anywhere nearly exhaustively with issues such as attrition, retention, morale or motivation. It is an exploratory attempt at synthesizing some ideas (Price, 1981) about attrition and retention which seem to work in SAWC as a voluntary welfare organisation. SAWC will continue to be aware of signals pointing to attrition, and to think and act towards them strategically. Such organisations as SAWC are in the non-profit

sector and, as such, may pose different issues from salaried work organisations in the consideration of attrition and retention issues. SAWC might not have confronted attrition and retention as an issue at all but for certain difficulties that arose from rapid organisation change in 1997-98 in response to new governmental and societal challenges. SAWC recognised that, in a relatively small organisation which depends more on dedication and goodwill rather than on high salaries and stock options, retention of capable and satisfied staff is a matter for ongoing management attention. SAWC also began to appreciate a particular need for paying attention to attrition and retention when its staff members grew in numbers as SAWC is about to assume yet new and larger mental health (psychiatric rehabilitation) responsibilities in the year 2003. Unexpected turnover of key staff, it seemed, could be disastrous.

To some degree, some staff turnover is inevitable and can even be beneficial (Patrickson, 1994; Jenkins, 1998). Some trickle of leavers makes way for the recruitment of " new blood" and facilitates the career progression of those who remain. However, high and unexpected turnover can be a reflection of negative job attitudes and low staff morale and may need to be mitigated by counter-measures. Exiting staff can also bring poor publicity to the organisation from which they have resigned. Remedies are necessary to manage staff attrition in a way that causes least disruption to the lives of its staff and to the work of the organisation. A voluntary welfare organisation should, most importantly, care for its own staff.

Singapore enjoyed a near full employment rate up to late 1997. It was only in 1998 that there were difficulties in the labour market because of the Asian economic downturn. Few, if any agencies, had kept records of staff turnover, or conducted and kept records of exit interviews. This was particularly the case for voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs).

THE VWO SCENE IN SINGAPORE

VWOs in Singapore are experiencing unparalleled levels of individual and family stress and anxiety among clients with the Asian economic downturn beginning in 1997, with increasing workload on remaining staff due to downsizing, and the need to increase the professionalism of staff to meet the higher level of demands posed by the service users.

' Downsizing' , a common practice in commercial organisations, can be a poor practice because of a sudden drop in efficiency and resulting loss of customers or clients (Fisher et al., 1993). Some United States companies (Murphy et al., 1996) which have undergone downsizing in economic downturn had great difficulties in building up their pool of expertise in time to cope with the economic upturn. Healthcare organisations experienced decreased clinical quality, reduced patient satisfaction, and increased staff turnover (Murphy et al., 1996). In contrast, Japanese companies which tend to retain their core workers, are seen to have a competitive edge when the economy recovers (Leatt et al., 1997).

Another side of downsizing (Lin and Vassar, 1996) is reflected in the quality and longevity of employee loyalty which tends to currently be " manufactured" , or turned off like a tap. Loyalty has a different connotation today; what used to mean a life-long commitment now refers to commitment for only a reasonable period of time or as determined by personal advantage. In the current circumstances, where the so-called ' psychological contract' is being re-visited and revised by management and employees alike (Kouzmin, 1996), staff who resign for wider career exposure opportunities should not necessarily be regarded as simply disloyal but might be given the opportunity to return. This freedom is especially necessary in circumstances where very high quality levels of worker input are required. Staff suffering " burnout" (executive director' s research diary, May 1998) may need a break from an intense situation eg some staff leaving SAWC have said, at exit interview, that they enjoyed the work very much but needed time out, and some said they may well want to return (exit interview, 10 Feb 1999). This writer drew the tentative conclusion from this and other exit interviews that the perceived freedom to depart and return may be an important consideration in managing staff satisfaction in VWOs. It is therefore necessary for an organisation to manage its staff turnover, planned or unplanned, very well, as it

can be a significant and costly phenomenon in maintaining care facilities. Factors affecting quality care and cost in the healthcare services as a result of turnover include:

a) reduction in client care output of present staff who have to orientate new staff;

b) heavier work pressures on existing personnel having to cover extra duties; and

c) reduced efficiencies due to absenteeism when staff suffer stress-induced illness (SAWC leave records, 1998).

In the case of Christian VWOs, which have no necessary monopoly on compassionate care, there are also strong driving persistent christian values towards compassion, care and concern for the disabled and the disadvantaged. It is of course true that christian VWO's organisations have, at times, absorbed less caring societal values and have tended to adapt merely the control and efficiency practices of secular organisations; it may even be, too, that Christian VWOs have sometimes tended to care for the "down and out" better than their own employees.

STAFF ATTRITION IN SAWC

SAWC, like any other VWO in Singapore, has experienced substantial turnover of staff over the past four years, but it has been incremental rather than radical in its perceived effects on SAWC. SAWC started small in 1986, with a "family", even paternalistic, culture, when face-to-face relationships were possible because it was small. There was, then, no overwhelming insistence on authority or control relationships. When SAWC grew bigger and received government subsidies, a greater emphasis on accountability, policies, procedures and authoritative control measures necessarily developed. So, too, did a greater emphasis on professionalism.

The charter mission of SAWC was to care for families and children amongst the poor and needy, and to care for those with psychiatrical disabilities, with the love of Christ through the provision of a shelter for families, women and children in crisis, and a residential cum day-rehabilitation centre for the psychiatrically disabled.

SAWC is a community-based care provider which had two mental health centres and two crisis shelters in 1997. It is well regarded by government authorities as its two mental health centres are funded by the Singapore Ministry of Health (MOH). Its two crisis shelters are also funded by the Singapore Ministry of Community Development (MCD). It has also been an affiliate of the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) since 1967 (NCSS Affiliation Certificate, 1967). It had, in 1999, been given a grant of half a hectare of land to start an integrated rehabilitation centre, named the Simei Care Centre, a joint project with MOH for 120 residential care places and 150 day care places with a clubhouse (End Note 1) for those with psychiatric disabilities in Singapore, the buildings to be completed in the year 2003.

CHALLENGES CONFRONTING SAWC

Each of SAWC's four crisis and rehabilitation centres is supervised by a head who reports to the executive director at the headquarters, who in turn reports to the executive chairman. The executive chairman has brought senior military experience to bear on the formative growth period of SAWC, and offered stability and consolidation of SAWC efforts. After May 1997, the executive director received training under the doctoral program of the University of Western Sydney – Nepean; she recognised that the greater government involvement through financial subsidies and the associated accountability required an even higher level of professional recruitment and professional standards in delivery of services. She started first to re-create the earlier family culture (Pare, 1996) but found it to be paternalistic and lacking in potential for professional freedom, and decided to move into team-building and participative management among operational staff, herself acting more as a facilitator (Emery, 1995). This was in keeping with the new professionalism expected of a learning organisation (Senge, 1990a).

Attrition, then, became an issue in 1997 continuing into 1998 because there was a number of key staff exiting. Staff attrition refers to fundamentally the exiting of staff, and retention to the keeping

of staff in the organisation (Newstrom and Davis, 1993; Herman, 1991).

SAWC had grown especially quickly for a VWO in Singapore, particularly since 1986. A number of events occurred in 1997 to cause management reflection on the rapid growth of the organisation. August 1997 was the beginning of the so-called economic downtown in Asia although SAWC was not immediately affected by the downturn However, positions that became vacant were not automatically filled, ie attrition by natural wastage. The non-filling of positions caused additional workload for those remaining; non-filling also prompted the executive director to an emphasis on in-house training of various kinds including psychiatric rehabilitation skills and functional assessments; participative management and team building; to better equip those remaining. The executive director's engagement in a doctoral program in May 1997 caused her to reflect in a systematic way about the growth of the organisation; the opportunities and challenges which were confronting the organisation; the staff relationships between senior management and the executive committee of SAWC; and the developmental needs of the staff who were being recruited increasingly as professionals with professional commitment rather than, as earlier, lay people with a personal calling to help the needy.

A closer relationship with the government was also developing as SAWC gained a growing respect for its work from government bodies, and as SAWC found it necessary to have capital and recurrent assistance to continue to develop and progress its work. The synergistic relationship with government was not new but the variety and extent of the relationships were. SAWC was working with families in crisis and with those with psychiatric disabilities who were referred to it by hospital and other social agencies including churches.

Of the 30 staff currently (1999) employed by SAWC, about half at any one time are overseas staff, mainly from the Philippines and Myanmar. They come to work with SAWC, generally on two year contracts and reside in the various welfare centres of SAWC. They work as rehabilitation staff and general housekeeping staff. Viewed from an employment perspective, they are therefore a quite stable component of the SAWC staff. In a sense, they could also be too easily taken for granted for that reason. Events in 1998, particularly, were to change any such complacency. The remainder of the staff are Singaporean Chinese except for one Philippino permanent resident, and one Malaysian (1999). These latter staff members tend to be the more senior staff who serve as heads of the two crisis centres and of the two psychiatric rehabilitation units; also, as senior administrative and finance officers. They are therefore core members of SAWC whose employment tenure and stability is crucial to SAWC's continued growth and development in pursuance of its charter. The overseas staff and the local staff are closely related in the work of the centres so that what affects the well being of each touches on the other.

One has to recognise the phases of development that have occurred in SAWC since 1986. Then, SAWC was a relatively small organisation in which close face-to-face relationships were possible in a cohesive family culture (Tseng et al., 1935). The style of management could be seen as benevolent and even paternalistic towards an essentially lay worker staff.

As the work of SAWC expanded in different, geographically separate centres, the face-to-face relationships were no longer quite so spontaneous or possible except at formally arranged get-togethers, program or policy meetings, and Christian fellowship meetings. When this development occurred it was deemed necessary to formalize policies, programs and procedures in a way that sometimes irritated the staff who saw their role as primarily devoted to client care and rehabilitation.

By 1997, the executive director saw the need, first of all, to try to re-develop the previous family culture (Goldberg, 1997). However, this re-created family culture had a feeling of the older authoritative and paternalistic style of management about it. The executive director recognised that the new professionals working for SAWC needed greater professional autonomy. A new form of leadership and a different culture was now required (Chapman, 1999).

This emerging form did not develop easily or without some anxiety (Gilmore, 1997; Klunk, 1997). Some of the management and executive committee members saw the need for greater control over

the new developments occurring under the aegis of SAWC. Others saw the need to accommodate a professional staff's requirement for greater inputs into the program developments.

In 1998, there was a decisive moment when senior case managers (including heads of centres) felt it necessary to approach senior management in order to secure more receptive channels of professional communication and to have some change in the overall style of management since there had been a growing tendency towards more, and more exacting, bureaucratic procedures as the work of SAWC diversified. The moves towards participative management had stimulated a keen desire for greater involvement in decision making and a greater desire to receive feedback on proposals put forward by the professional staff.

Senior staff asked for a meeting to resolve their concerns which did not at the time eventuate. They voiced their concern strongly and as a group, indicating a high degree of cohesion and professional purpose. It was this voice that triggered a whole new series of initiatives focussed on the issue of attrition and retention. It was realised that, without a concerted package of measures (Hirschman, 1970), critical turnover of senior staff, who felt they could not appropriately affect the professional direction of SAWC, could be very detrimental to the organisation.

The executive director then seriously reviewed the literature on attrition and retention of staff (Balmer et al., 1993; Barker et al., 1994; Brooks, 1994; Anderson, 1997; Bazigos et al., 1997). Some of the ideas then implemented were derived from journals in human resource fields (Beer,1997). Other materials came from the New Testament letters dealing with leadership and community relationships (1 Timothy, ch 1-6).

While readers may be familiar with many of the initiatives from the scholarly secular literature, the context in which they were being applied in SAWC was that of a Christian VWO, not a corporation of salaried employees hired at market rates and promoted on regular and standard performance evaluation basis. The active use of New Testament and theological material in order to develop the spiritual model was an integral part of what happened next; more importantly, that spiritual model (Fernando, 1986) being developed in SAWC required constant and continuing implementation or praxis. The foundation principle of this spiritual model that was developed was, working with one another in truth and love, meekness and humility, based on the teachings of Christ, in the provision of service to the poor and disadvantaged.

It so often happens that, in the corporate world, new human resource management packages like 360 degree evaluation (Antonioni, 1996) are implemented enthusiastically at first, only to be discarded once the novelty has worn off. The spiritual model however required continuing application of ideas that seem to work for those concerned (executive director research diary, July 1998). In what follows, an account is given of the responses that were made to the warning signals of possible significant attrition (Wagner et al., 1998). With significant new cooperative undertakings with government scheduled to occur in 2003, SAWC has taken any loss of key staff in future years very seriously, especially since in those years staff numbers could more than double. The dedication of the local staff and overseas staff cannot be taken for granted.

Figures on attrition and retention in Singapore VWOs have not apparently been generally or systematically kept. The governmental counterpart agency dealing with community welfare organisations was only able to indicate that counsellors and social workers stayed somewhere between one to three years. This has been SAWC's experience at senior staff levels as well (SAWC Records of Staff Turnover, 1996-1999).

The Quest for Solutions

SAWC, in recognition of the value of key and general staff, instituted an inter-linked series of measures aimed at the retention of staff and the management of attrition. The ideas for managing the attrition/retention issue that came from human resource management sources included:

a) Strategic planning

Up to 1997 the programs of SAWC were largely driven reactively by the perception of emerging

needs (Parker, 1977) as they were perceived by management. Substantive welfare needs and staff exigencies required SAWC to deal with the most urgent needs which were families in crisis (including battered wives and children), and rehabilitation of those with psychiatric disabilities. In a sense, staff were recruited on the basis of their evidenced compassion and skills to meet such needs.

It became apparent in 1997 that there needed to be a strategic focus, an overall vision for the ways in which staff come together to integrate their resources across all programs (Bazigos et al., 1997). Up to 1997 staff came from different disciplinary backgrounds such as social work, psychology, and occupational therapy, and practiced their disciplinary skills in often divergent ways as they saw best. These divergent forms of practice caused the staff, overtime, to express concern about their confusion as to the most effective ways of dealing with client needs. Divergent disciplines also produced a tendency to less than cooperative behaviour as each practice insisted on its own methodology. To mitigate this divergence and any inter-personal differences arising from it, a model originating from the Boston Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre at Boston University (Anthony, 1990) was adopted in 1998 by the executive director in on-going consultation with professional staff and through systematic training of them (Hendry, 1996). The unified model also offered, among other things, a basis for systematic functional assessment of patients, application of relevant skills in psychiatric rehabilitation, case and family management, and confirmed the importance of systematic documentation of patient assessments on a basis recognised across disciplines. This model offered the potential for a coordinated response by staff and a strong focus for all rehabilitation activities. Staff reacted very favourably to this model (executive director's research diary, Jan. 1999), and high morale, an important factor in retention (Jenkins, 1988) was increased and continues at a high level, as reflected in senior staff meetings and in centre activities.

Not only was morale lifted but staff felt that their professionalism was being respected and enhanced. There was even more regular in-service training (weekly) from January 1998, and there were also created opportunities for staff to attend SAWC sponsored external educational courses; some staff are now considering these opportunities. A training manual is being prepared so that new staff in future will share the benefits of this integrated approach (Ramsay, 1996).

b) Participative Management

With the increasing recruitment and deployment of professionals in SAWC (as opposed to dedicated laypeople), the executive director had, from 1997, sought to involve key staff (King, 1986) in decision making, program direction and management. These included finance meetings and devolved centre budgets, meetings to deal with center operational problems, and case manager meetings. Earlier, these had been at the discretion of the executive director; later, such meetings would be initiated by centre heads within the SAWC policy framework. Lateral problem solving between centres became a regular practice. New policies would be discussed with centre heads themselves before implementation and their observations were fed back to the SAWC executive committee. Centre heads were encouraged to involve overseas staff and clients in the centres' operational decision making.

c) Non-Punitive Environment

One of the features of Senge's (1994) Fifth Discipline is the creation of a non-punitive learning environment (see also Sherer, 1997). Senge's (1994) 'spirituality' emphasis has often been noted in the review of his work (MacStravic, 1996; Mahoney, 1997).

Professional staff in SAWC expressed the need to take decisions without any overwhelming anxiety for mistakes honestly made; otherwise, they claimed, the freedom to express ideas and take professional action appropriately would be inhibited and morale could suffer. While boards of investigation are held occasionally on any purportedly inappropriate practice, a Christian emphasis on humane handling of issues is becoming apparent. Employee counselling in such situations is now a regular feature of restoring staff working relationships (Strutton et al., 1997; Eorthwick, 1989). There has been a conscious and continuing attempt to remove the paraphernalia of authority and impersonal or distant personnel procedures to the extent possible. Collegial

exchange show a humility and transparency in staff relationships and mutual support (executive director's research diary, Jan 1999).

d) Informal Communication

It has already been noted that openness and participation in professional dealings in SAWC is more and more encouraged. Included in the renewed emphasis on multi-lateral communication (Thomson, 1993; Jerrick et al., 1994) is the introduction of a mentoring system which involves an executive committee member being readily available to staff of each centre as a feedback and, where necessary, grievance handling mechanism (Wille, 1994; Vanessa and Roberta, 1996); informal feedback on staff performance; job rotation through different centres to introduce variety of work; a suggestion scheme; and achievement recognition awards for centres. While none of these mechanisms are new in the human resource literature, it has, since 1997, been a deliberate continuing policy in SAWC to enhance broad communication mechanisms including feedback. Again, staff report satisfaction that their contributions are recognised as vital (executive director's research diary, Dec 1998).

e) Organisation Development

The term, organisation development, has highly formalised meanings in human resource management circles (Bazigos and Burke, 1997; Stein et al., 1996). For this author, it means an emphasis on the development of the organisation as a whole, with special concern for the balance between necessary change and the achievement of stability and order. In a way, this dialectic has been created, on the one hand, by the executive chairman who, with his military background, has provided a corporate anchorage to the outside world and a channel to SAWC's important stakeholders, and has, with the executive committee, created the necessary policy framework; and, on the other hand, by the executive director who has argued for needed and gradual change, especially in recognition of professional staff needs, and of the newer society-level programs which SAWC has taken on. The Lewinian (1975) dialectic model of change comes to mind in this connection. The chairman sees to the policy articulation and progression of the initiatives which the director and staff formulate. An important aspect of organisation development, from the executive director's perspective, has involved the creating of a learning environment where she acts, increasingly, as facilitator among senior managers (Proudman, 1997).

f) Recruitment and Exit Measures

To this point, this paper has been concerned with process issues relating to staff involvement and morale (Herman, 1991; Thomson 1993; Thornely et al., 1993; Emery, 1995; Elizur, 1996; Joplin et al., 1997), and to certain organisation development matters.

The emerging culture (since 1997) in SAWC has involved creating space to confront inevitable societal change and the need for increasing professionalism in response to that change. Improved staff selection approaches (Anderson, 1997) are a necessary part of getting a 'goodness of fit' between the worker and the strategic and operational problems of the SAWC organisation.

SAWC used to recruit staff, using the selection committee chairman and executive director only. It is now involving the relevant senior professional and administrative staff. In 1997, reliance had been put on a senior staff member to recruit, that recruitment choice then being endorsed by the executive director and chairman. This type of selection, too, has not always produced a "goodness of fit" of the staff recruited. Till 1998, compassionate educated lay-people, with a demonstrated calling, were the backbone of SAWC; graduates in any discipline with a calling were seen as adequate, and younger graduates were often chosen because of their lower starting salaries in a welfare organisation on a stringent budget. On the other hand, more mature graduates with previous welfare organisational experience had brought with them models of care which they were not always willing to change. Such practices have not proved to be the most satisfactory way of together accommodating professionals and SAWC strategies.

Enlarging the selection panel appropriately is one way of attempting to make suitable selections. Requiring applicants to deal with SAWC problem scenarios at interview may well prove to be a

useful diagnostic of future staff suitability. There is, however, no substitute for training and enculturation (Chapman, 1999) after entry carried out in the context of those professionals already operating quite effectively within the organisation. Most of the recruits since 1986 have had a professed Christian commitment which enables them to work sympathetically within a Christian organisation framework.

The holding of entrance interview records (Tallie and Sabir, 1995) has not been a standard practice in SAWC but is now being considered for its indicative usefulness as a measure by which to compare post-entry organisation and professional compatibility. Neither had exit interviews been kept systematically or formally. SAWC has only recently been accumulating a useful body of experience by which it can discern the probable factors behind satisfactory retention or unnecessary attrition.

There is nothing necessarily disadvantageous about attrition of key staff so long as the causes do not derive from poor organisation and management practices. SAWC needs to know where it has " failed" . Professionals have tended to leave for career enhancement reasons because of what they perceive to be irritating bureaucratic documentation (executive director research diary July 1998). In-house training needs to prepare professional staff for greater accountability to meet both government involvement with voluntary welfare organisations and a more self-aware professionalism.

Equally, there is nothing unsatisfactory about staff leaving to gain different work experience or enhanced qualifications, or simply to avoid " burnout" , to take a break (Fisher et al., 1993). SAWC has, however, in the past tended not to take staff back after leaving. It is part of respect for the newer professionalism for staff to be able to leave and to return and the organisation has gained from the enhanced professionalism, experience and stability of such staff.

g) Enhancing The Role of Overseas Staff

It was said earlier in this paper that overseas staff may have tended rather to be taken for granted, perhaps because they were on short-term contract, perhaps because they had fewer opportunities to express ideas, perhaps because they were holding the seemingly more routine roles at lower organisation levels. Whatever the reasons, in 1998 their concerns were joined with those of the senior staff in seeking freer communications and a still more open and caring style of management.

It was realised in SAWC that a variety of measures was needed if effective performance and harmonious working relationships (Joplin and Daus, 1997) were to be maintained, including what Maslow (1954) would have seen as physiological needs - for example, dietary requirements were an issue in the centres where overseas staff reside; pay and working conditions, and recreational outlets, also became an issue.

SAWC has, therefore, reviewed its relationships with overseas staff, not only at the physical and affiliation levels identified by Maslow (1954) but also at the levels of achievement recognition and reward (Smither et al., 1996; McCoy, 1999).

The cultural differences among the overseas staff and their contributing national cultures in SAWC are now also better recognised. Singaporean staff have created, out of their own resources, a fund for overseas workers' recreational and affiliation needs. Overseas staff are Christians embraced within the community of SAWC, but now with a growing SAWC recognition that the overseas staff have cultural differences needing to be recognised, respected and expressed (Emulti, 1993). There is still a sense of differential treatment among the overseas staff which needs to be addressed: Philippino workers whose English language is often more fluent than that of other overseas staff have tended to be recruited into higher level jobs within the organisation, creating some concern. These cultural and, specifically, language needs are to be addressed if staff satisfaction among overseas staff is to be maintained.

CONCLUSION

A warning signal was received in SAWC in 1998 when professional staff voiced concerns about

professional discretion and their ability to participate and communicate freely as professional staff in strategic and operational decision-making.

It was recognised that attrition and retention are not just organisation behaviour terms but can be pressing issues for organisations which have not thought more systematically about them. Nor are these terms that can be taken at face value; attrition is not necessarily all bad, and retention may not be a total good. These concepts need to be thought through and applied sensitively in the contexts in which they become issues.

VWOs are no doubt also a special case, different in some aspects from large corporations employing salaried professionals at market rates and able to afford side-benefits of various kinds. Entrance and exit interviews tell some of the story to which voluntary organisations need to listen. But they are only part of an on-going need to create and continualty maintain a learning environment where early warning signals are able to be heard before the " bush fires" of exiting staff became critical.

Process theories of motivation (as cited by Newstrom and Davis, 1993) suggested that greater emphasis needed to be placed on the need for professionals to have a sense of achievement, and tangible recognition of their achievement. Professionals do actively review their recognised achievements as contributing to their sense of well-being within SAWC (executive director's research diary, Dec. 1998).

Overseas staff have shown too that they are actively assessing the roles that they can play and the satisfactions they are able to achieve in relation to other staff. Equity theory (Smither, 1996) put the spotlight on this source of concern. Expectancy theory (Smither, 1996) was also an important contribution to this author's understanding of the continual assessments that workers make of the contributions they offer and the rewards that they perceive that they can receive in return.

In a Christian welfare organisation a spiritual model needs to be joined with an integrated professional model so that calling and commitment work together. These models cannot be imposed but must rather be evolved: the voices of Christian calling and professional judgment need to be in harmony through a guiding and facilitating management and leadership. The learning environment of Senge (1994a) is a prerequisite to this evolution, as is Lewin's (1975) model for securing change.

Retention of key staff needs continuing leadership influence and management attention. Attrition, while not always harmful, should not derive from careless inattention. A variety of strategies is necessary for balanced organisation development, useful retention and sensible attrition.

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