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A Strategic Approach to Employee Retention at Nebraska Families Collaborative

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ABSTRACT

Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC) is a nonprofit organization that supports children and families who are at risk, in eastern Nebraska. They offer a variety of services with the goal of moving children toward safety, permanency and well-being. Organizations such as NFC rely heavily on the commitment of the employees to carry out their mission, as do many other non-profit social service agencies across the country. The overall goal of the project was to identify reasons for high turnover and to identify potential solutions to reduce turnover and increase retention in the workplace at NFC. The main objectives were to analyze data pertaining to employee turnover rates and explore possible causes for lack of employee engagement. We began by analyzing current and previous employee turnover rates at NFC for reference throughout the study. This data was also compared with other turnover data related to nonprofit social service organizations. Methods of this observational descriptive study included an extensive literature review pertaining to turnover rates and employee satisfaction in non-profit social service agencies and compared to results both in Nebraska and on a national level. We found that NFC had an average turnover rate of 36 percent last year and it was 42 percent for family permanent specialists. A survey was sent out to each of the employees within the organization concerning engagement and job satisfaction to give us a better understanding of where the issues were. The survey was created within the organization and was analyzed through Quantum Workplace. Focus groups were conducted and utilized to supplement the results from the survey. Through the survey, we found that the organization had an overall favorability rate of 69.4 percent and key drivers of low engagement in the organization were career outlook,

communication/change management, feeling valued, trust in senior leaders, and work/life balance. The impact of this project is to identify ways to increase employee retention in an organization and community where stability is crucial.

INTRODUCTION

Nebraska Families Collaborative is a nonprofit organization in Omaha that works with community partners to create a safe and effective system for children and families that are at risk in eastern Nebraska. In 2009, the five organizations known as: Boys Town, Child Saving Institute, Heartland Family Service, Nebraska Family Support Network and OMNI Behavioral Health worked together to create NFC and continue to provide their support today. Just recently NFC has changed its identity and the new name is now called PromiseShip. Due to the timing and the fact that the organization still offers the same services and has the same goals, it will still be referred to as Nebraska Families Collaborative. See appendix A for more details regarding this change.

NFC acts as an advocate for families by providing a variety of services that include: fostering/group home care, adoption and guardianship placement and training, in-home treatment, respite care, visitation supervision, family preservation, mentoring, aftercare, monitoring and family support. The organization uses a wrap-around approach to fulfill their mission which allows them to provide services to the families and children in their natural environment. The mission of NFC is to build on child, family, and community strengths so that all children and families are safe, healthy, and thriving. The overall goal of NFC is to move the families and children toward safety, permanency and well-being. From 2016 to 2017 NFC served 5,594 children and their families. Of those

children, 94 percent were in family based care, 85 percent were two or more siblings that were placed together, and 61 percent were children in kinship care (Nebraska Families Collaborative, 2018). The organization is made of 340 total staff members, majority of those falling into the category of permanency, which is the social work department (Refer to Appendix B for total staff breakdown).

As with many nonprofit social service agencies, there is the challenge of dealing with turnover issues within the organization, especially when it comes to the front-line staff. The national turnover rates are up to 25 percent each year in child welfare organizations (Sage, 2010). Another report found that there was an average of 22 percent of turnover for child welfare services and almost 12 percent accounted for administrators. Higher percentages have been recognized in states such as Texas, Florida and Wisconsin (Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2011). In 2017, it was recorded that the intention to quit for social workers was 43.2 percent (Cho & Song, 2017). When focusing solely on Nebraska, the annual turnover rate for employees working for child and family welfare services is up to 32 percent (Stoddard, 2017). One reason that high turnover is an issue is that it puts financial stress on an organization as it can be very costly (Sage, 2010; Selden & Sowa, 2015; Cho & Song, 2017). This is especially true in nonprofit social service agencies due to their lack of resources. With unpredictable turnover, organizations incur the costs of hiring new employees, training those employees, and continuing to provide employee education (Selden & Sowa, 2015). Another reason that turnover affects this type of organization negatively is the increase in the number of caseworkers that children and families are dealing with, which puts more stress on the situation (Sage, 2010; Young, 2017).

Families and children who are dealing with multiple case workers are at a higher risk of being put back into abusive situations and it creates conflict amongst families (Sage, 2010). A well-known study found that if a child had one case worker in their experience then they had a 74 percent chance of permanency. If their number of caseworkers increased to two or three in one year their percent chance of permanency decreased to 17 or 5 percent, respectively (Barrett & Greene, 2016). In Nebraska, it has shown to be an issue that caseloads are higher than they should be and turnover is negatively affecting the way that social service agencies are functioning (Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare [OIG], 2017). An annual report in Nebraska found that 17 percent of children had five or more caseworkers and 37 percent had 3 to 4 social workers (Young, 2017). Finally, high turnover in this type of organization can also affect the way that it performs and its reputation. If there are constantly new employees being trained in, it is difficult to maintain a highly skilled staff. This is a problem for nonprofits who are relying on their employees each day to carry out their mission (Selden & Sowa, 2015).

There is a gap in knowledge when it comes to the strategies of human resources departments and voluntary turnover in nonprofit organizations. Further research is needed to figure out how to keep employees that are excelling in the organization and which major factors are involved when it comes to those employees leaving the organization. It is also important to put a focus on this research to increase the overall satisfaction of employees working in nonprofit social service agencies (Selden & Sowa, 2015). The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that play a role in turnover at

NFC and potential innovative and unique strategies that will increase overall employee retention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Voluntary Turnover

Turnover within organizations can happen for a variety of reasons. These can include but are not limited to: new job opportunities, furthering education opportunities, retirement, dissatisfaction with some aspect of the job. These reasons can have very different effects on the organization and can be placed into different classifications. Figure one below displays the relationship between the different types of turnover. These include voluntary and involuntary, functional and dysfunctional, unavoidable and avoidable. Voluntary turnover occurs when an individual makes the decision to leave the organization whereas involuntary is when the organization chooses to let go of the employee due to poor performance or necessary employee cuts. Voluntary turnover can be broken down into functional and dysfunctional, which are subjective categories. Functional means there is a loss of employees who are easier to replace, and dysfunctional involves employees who are difficult to replace. Lastly dysfunctional can be broken down into unavoidable and avoidable. Avoidable occurs due to an employee being dissatisfied with their jobs, and unavoidable occurs when the employer has little control over the situation. An example of this would be an individual leaving because they are going back to school or their spouse got a new job opportunity elsewhere (Allen, 2008).
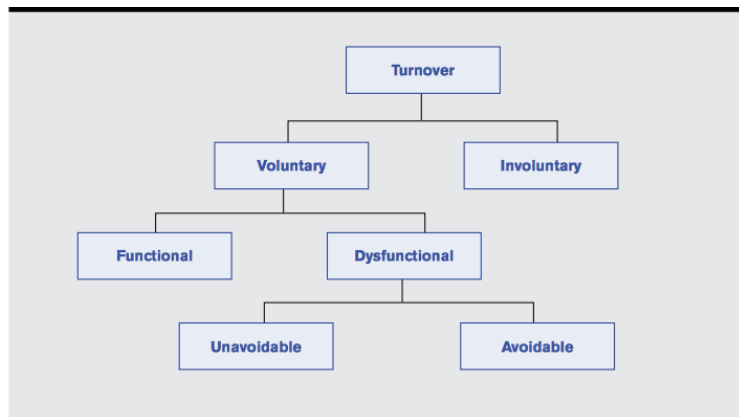
Figure 1 Types of Turnover (Allen, 2008).

Based on the previous definitions, it is important to focus on the voluntary and

avoidable turnover classifications because those types are often costly and detrimental

to the organization (Allen, 2008; Cho & Song, 2017). Turnover can be costly both

financially and functionally. Financial costs involve training and replacement costs and

functional costs involve losing skilled and trained staff members (Allen, 2008). A loss of

staff can also place stress on other workforce members, jeopardizing the quality of work

that is being performed (Sage, 2010). High turnover in child welfare organizations

means that there are children and families who have a longer process, and it can also

disturb the sustainability of the organization. A longer process for children to find a

permanent home can leave them in possible negative and/or abusive situations for a

longer period of time. This can also leave the families and children even more

vulnerable because they are being forced to deal with multiple case workers (Hayes,

2015). Overall, this type of turnover results in undesired training costs and onboarding

costs, vacancies in the organization, hours of work taken away from management, and

unfavorable situations for the families and children that are being served.

Retention and turnover are closely related but are two different measurements. Retention looks at the number of individuals who have remained at an organization divided by the number that started, in a given period of time. The time period needs to be specific and should be consistent, such as using a quarter or a year to measure the rates. Most time annual rates are used; however, it depends on the goal of the human resources team. The only individuals who are counted in this equation are ones who were employed by the organization throughout the entire time period. It is also important to decipher whether the whole employee population is being looked at, or just a specific department (Maurer, 2017).

Turnover looks at the number of voluntary leaves divided by the average number of employees during that time frame. Individuals who are let go from the organization should not be counted in this calculation. Much like retention, it is important to decipher a time frame and a population group beforehand. It is important to focus on both rates to create a strategy to solve the issue. Turnover describes individuals that leave and retention describes the ones that do not. Having a high turnover rate and a low retention rate means that there is not an adequate workforce to fulfill the mission of the organization. By analyzing these statistics, it is possible to find certain trends and to aid in creating retention strategies (Maurer, 2017).

Turnover and Employee Engagement in Social Service Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit social service organizations are entities that provide their services to improve the being of humans across the country. This can be specific individuals or communities that are being served. A social service agency in the nonprofit sector works to fulfill their mission for a specific reason (Human Services Guide, 2018). The

nature of the work that employees do in this sector may cause high rates of turnover

and low engagement in workforce. Major concerns that arise are financial costs, loss of

knowledgeable workers, and potential low performance of the organization. It is

especially important to focus on the social workers in the organization because of the

value of their work and their overall effect on the goals of the organization (Cho & Song,

2017). High turnover means that other employees in the organization may need to pick

up a greater workload and managers will have to spend extra time training new

employees that are hired. This could lead to greater potential for burnout and

disengagement (Barrett & Greene, 2016).

The rise in turnover rates in social service agencies has led some states to make

changes in their organizations. In Texas, they lowered their requirements, such as

education level, for social workers to have sufficient employees in these organizations.

The state allows new hires to have only their associates degree and some work

experience. This allows for sufficient numbers of social workers in the industry and

organizations do not have to pay employees with less experience as much. The amount

of time that is required for training has also decreased to prepare employees much

quicker. They've also adopted the strategy of giving out lower caseloads at first to help

new employees get on their feet. Other states such as New Jersey have put their focus

on creating development opportunities for their social services positions and helping to

make this a career rather than a short-term job (Barrett & Greene, 2016).

Employee engagement is an important factor to consider when looking at

reasons for turnover in nonprofit social service organizations, as it has shown to be

significantly related to turnover. According to Shuck, "employee engagement has been

defined as an "individual employee's cognitive, emotional and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes" (2011). High engagement in the workplace not only affects rates of turnover but is also related to productivity in the workplace, behaviors, and the quality of work that is being performed (Shuck, 2011). A framework that involves managing employees in nonprofit organizations is successful if it can increase the engagement of the workers, especially those who are directly providing services in the community (Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Possible Predictors of Turnover

Demographic factors are important to keep in mind when dealing with retention and turnover (Cho & Song, 2017). Studies have shown that older employees tend to be more engaged and more likely to stay at their jobs than younger individuals, as well as individuals that have been working with the organization longer (Cho & Song, 2017; Liss-Levinson, Bharthapudi, Leider, and Sellers, 2015). The longer a person has been at the job and the higher their education level is the less likely they quit (Cho & Song, 2017). Moreover, employees who are more engaged and enjoying their work environment, are more likely to stay (Cho & Song, 2017; Liss-Levinson, et al., 2015; Shuck, 2011).

There are a variety of reasons that individuals working for nonprofit social service agencies may be unsatisfied with their job. One reason is that they feel that there are not opportunities for advancement or promotion within their departments. A survey of nonprofit employees showed that 42 percent of employees felt that doing their job successfully would not improve their chances of being rewarded a promotion in the future (Opportunity Knocks, 2016). Another reason involves compensation and benefits.

In the same survey 47 percent of the employees said that they were not happy with their

wages, given their specific skills and the effort that they put forth. An additional reason

for high turnover rates is burnout and dealing with emotional issues at work. This is

especially an issue in an organization that deals with child welfare, since it is a high

stress job working with such a vulnerable population. Employees said that they receive

satisfaction from this type of work, but it can lead to high levels of stress and potentially

burnout. According to the previously mentioned survey, 45 percent planned to leave the

position that they were at, and many of those employees planned on staying within the

same sector when looking for new employment (Opportunity Knocks, 2016). A few

other reasons to consider are: negative characteristics of a job, distraught relationship

with co-workers or leadership, an unfavorable work environment, or the position is just

not a good fit for the individual (Allen, 2008). Although there is a great focus on reasons

why people leave their jobs, it is also important to focus on why they stay. There is

research that shows that employees become invested in their work environment and the

different connections they form. Leaving a job puts individuals at risk for losing those

relationships that they care about. Those people who do from strong connections, may

be more likely to stay because they feel both comfortable and a part of their

organization (Allen, 2008).

Potential Solutions

Creating and implementing a specific retention plan is crucial, especially when

sustaining top talent throughout the organization. A retention plan needs to be ongoing

and constantly improving to meet the needs of the current employees. This can be done

by utilizing a teamwork approach in the workplace. Research has shown teamwork is

necessary for successful coordination, keeping the workplace safe, and for providing the best possible care for the population they serve. There is more and more research being done about teamwork in the workplace, and results have shown the potential success in both healthcare and social care settings (Reeves, Lewin, Espin, & Zwarenstein, 2010). Research has also shown the importance of providing accurate job descriptions both in recruiting and in the hiring process. Hiring the best fit person for the job will aid in reducing turnover rates, and improve the quality of work being done within the organization (Allen, 2008). A study also found that retention can be addressed in child welfare workforce by addressing the culture of the workplace. Retention rates can increase by sustaining a culture that allows for employees to be autonomous as well as be a part of the change that is happening. By allowing employees to be autonomous, they can serve their clients on a case by case basis. Not having that independence in the workplace has been associated not only with the intent to quit among employees in the social services field, but also shown to lead to burnout (Kim, 2008; Sage, 2010).

Unique reward and recognition programs are key in finding a solution to the retention issue in the nonprofit sector, where resources are limited. Putting monetary compensation aside, recognition and reward systems are important in sustaining employee satisfaction. Pay has more to do with choosing a job initially, rather than giving people a reason to stay. Recognition events do not always need to be costly, rather just to let the employee know that they are appreciated and putting worth in the work they are performing. Recognition can be as simple as addressing individual work or publicly displaying this work for others to see. Other staff members may use this as motivation for their own job (Opportunity Knocks, 2016). Many human resource

professionals, in general, have said that having a recognition plan in place not only helped with turnover issues, but also helped to increase employees' engagement. This is the case in both for profit and nonprofit organizations. The organization can also reap the benefits by enticing staff members to adhere to the mission and the core values. "Rewarding employees for embodying organizational values demonstrates the organization's commitment to these values. This can help align workplace culture with these values and develop trust among employees" (Schramm, 2017).

There are several means by which employees can be recognized in the workplace. Recognition can be broken down into three types which include: formal, informal, and day-to-day. Formal recognition can be described as planned which recognizes employees for successful performance, such as employee of the month award. Informal is unplanned or spontaneous, which could be bringing an employee a cup of coffee, for example. This type is becoming more popular and meaningful in the workplace. The last type is day-to-day and involves giving employees positive comments and feedback on a daily basis. The best way to determine which type of recognition would be most successful in a specific workplace, is to know what the employees want. This could be very different for each workplace. Research has shown that individuals who receive some sort of recognition are over 10 times more likely to be engaged and dedicated to the organization. Giving an employee a compliment or praising them on an assignment can seem like a small task, but it can have a large effect. Compliments or praise can be delivered verbally or by writing, such as an email (Nelson, 2012). "Other effective types include: gift cards, nominal gifts, group games

and contests, celebrations and parties, trips and conferences, wellness programs, and development opportunities" (Nelson, 2012).

Conclusion

There is an apparent importance for retaining the workforce within the nonprofit social service sector, both for the organization and for the community Opportunity Knocks, 2016). Without educated and well-trained employees in the organization it is difficult to provide the quality of services that is necessary to help families. It is important to focus on factors that have been proven to lead to turnover and look that factors that are specific to the organization itself (Cho & Song, 2017). Employees within the sector are driven by the mission of the organization and are more apt to be satisfied with their job if they are performing work that they feel is necessary and important. An environment that allows staff to perform at their best and feel included in decision making, is one that will produce the most success. Keeping the most skilled and most fit individuals within the organization is vital, and is possible with an effective retention plan in place (Opportunity Knocks, 2016).

METHODS

This study was a cross-sectional convergent parallel study design that involved both quantitative and qualitative data. Both sets of data were gathered at the same time and addressed all employees at Nebraska Families Collaborative. It consisted of a multiple answer census survey that was measured with the Likert scale and focus groups. The survey used measurement strategies that were defined by Quantum Workplace. The results of the focus groups were used to supplement the findings of the survey. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the employee turnover rates at Nebraska Families Collaborative and how does that compare to turnover rates of nonprofit social service agencies throughout the country?

2. What are key drivers that affect employee turnover at Nebraska Families Collaborative?

3. What are possible solutions that will increase employee retention?

Developing a Management Retention Plan

The study was created using step one and two of the management retention plan shown in Appendix C. Organization data was analyzed looking at how many people were leaving the organization and what the percent turnover was. This would allow us to recognize that turnover is an issue for Nebraska Families Collaborative. In step two in "How should we proceed?", we performed our study and collected data regarding why individuals are leaving or staying. We utilized an employee survey and focus groups to come up with retention strategies that are specific to the organization. We also looked at other research regarding turnover in nonprofit social service organizations and best practices to look at the best strategies that other entities are using. Completing step one and two in the model will allow the organization to implement and evaluate a retention plan moving forward (Allen, 2008). It will also allow for the organization to reevaluate their current retention strategies. See current retention strategies in Appendix D.

Population and Sample Size

The population sample consisted of the employees at Nebraska Families Collaborative. Board members, volunteers, and interns were not included in the study population due to the nature of the research. The survey was administered throughout

the population to each of the employees, and select employees were asked to

participate in focus groups, based on time and department. There are 340 total staff

members which are broken down into their respected departments. See appendix B.

Each of those staff were administered the survey and 22 total employees were involved

in the focus groups and selected based recommendation from a supervisor and based

on department and availability.

Assessment

An existing census survey measuring engagement was administered online and

included every unit of the population. The survey was created by Quantum Workplace

and was used because the organization has worked with them previously with

employee surveys. Because of the relatively small population, the survey was sent out

via email to every member of the population (n=340) and provided results that would be

representative of the entire population. The survey provided results that were

completely anonymous apart from information about demographics and department.

The survey covered several categories including: team dynamics, engagement

outcomes, alignment with goals, diversity and inclusion, benefits and pay, culture and

values, manager effectiveness, communication/change management, career outlook,

tools and resources, work/life balance, trust in senior leaders, and feeling valued.

Employees were given multiple choice options based on a Likert scale. The survey also

considered demographic factors such as age, gender, generation, supervision level, job

title, race/ethnicity, and tenure. This allowed for comparisons between different factors

at the organization. The survey also gave employees the choice to add comments to

certain sections that they felt necessary to explain themselves or expand upon their thoughts.

Focus groups were conducted twice throughout the project to supplement the data collected through the employee survey. There were 11 individuals in each of the two focus groups and they were chosen based on recommendations from the different department managers. There were a variety of departments represented at each focus group to gain different perspectives. These departments included: Development, IT, Permanency, Quality Assurance, Team Support, and Human Resources. The focus groups were conducted to assess the variety of reasons that individuals in the organization may be dissatisfied in their position and would give them the intent to quit, and different ideas that they had to increase engagement. The information was used to supplement the data from the survey and to help develop retention strategies that are specific to Nebraska Families Collaborative. Survey questions and focus group questions are included in Appendix E and F for reference.

Outcome Measures

We defined employee satisfaction, in the survey, as level of engagement. Employee engagement methods can be used to measure the employees' overall feeling toward their organization (Quantum Workplace, 2018). These levels of engagement were broken down into three categories including: favorable, neutral, or unfavorable. The survey answer options were based on a six point Likert scale (answers ranging from 1-6). The choices for answers were strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree. Answers that fell into the categories of strongly disagree or disagree were measured as unfavorable for level of

engagement; somewhat disagree and somewhat agree into neutral for level of engagement; and agree and somewhat agree into favorable for level of engagement.

When measuring overall engagement of the organization, each person was placed into one of four categories. These included: highly engaged, moderately engaged, barely engaged, and disengaged. The following scores were placed into the corresponding categories based on their average score on the Likert six-point scale with six being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree:

- Highly engaged: equal to or greater than 5

- Moderately engaged: 4-4.99

- Barely engaged: 3-3.99

- Disengaged: less than 3

RESULTS

Agency Turnover Rates

When looking at current agency turnover data at NFC we found that the average turnover from November 2016 to October 2017 was 36 percent. The average turnover for strictly Permanency employees was 42 percent. There were 124 total employees that left the organization during this time frame and of those 124, 111 of them were voluntary and 13 were involuntary.

Survey Results

The survey was sent out to all 340 employees within the organization. There was an 82.5 percent response rate. Of those who responded 105 of them were considered highly engaged, 141 were considered moderately engaged, 32 were considered barely engaged, and one employee was considered disengaged. There was an overall

favorability rating of 69.4 percent. Figure two shows the average engagement level for each of the respondents.
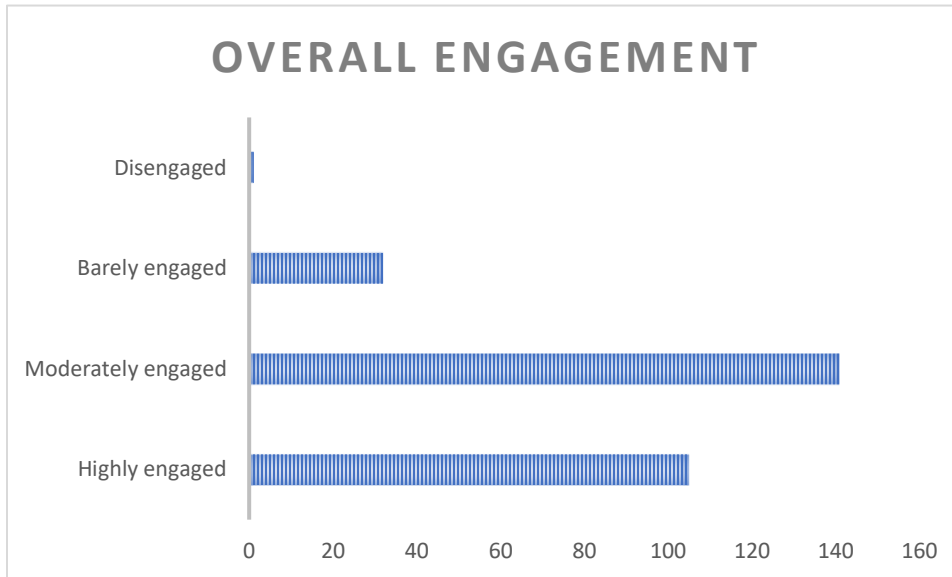
Figure 2 Overall Engagement

We looked at difference in engagement levels in multiple different categories such as age, generation, tenure, department, and different engagement factors. When looking at age we analyzed engagement levels based on age categories. The age categories were 25 years and under, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, and 56-65. For the 25 and under group, 30 percent were highly engaged, 59 percent were moderately engaged, and 11 percent were barely engaged. For the 26-35 year olds, 39 percent were highly engaged, 49 percent were moderately engaged, and 12 percent were barely engaged. For the 36-45-year-old group, 34 percent were highly engaged, 50 percent were moderately engaged, 14 percent were barely engaged, and two percent were disengaged. For the 46-55-year-old group, 48 percent were highly engaged, 44 percent were moderately engaged, and 7 percent were barely engaged. For the last group of 56-65 year olds, 42 percent were highly engaged, 47 percent were moderately

engaged, and 11 percent were barely engaged. Majority of the population fell into the
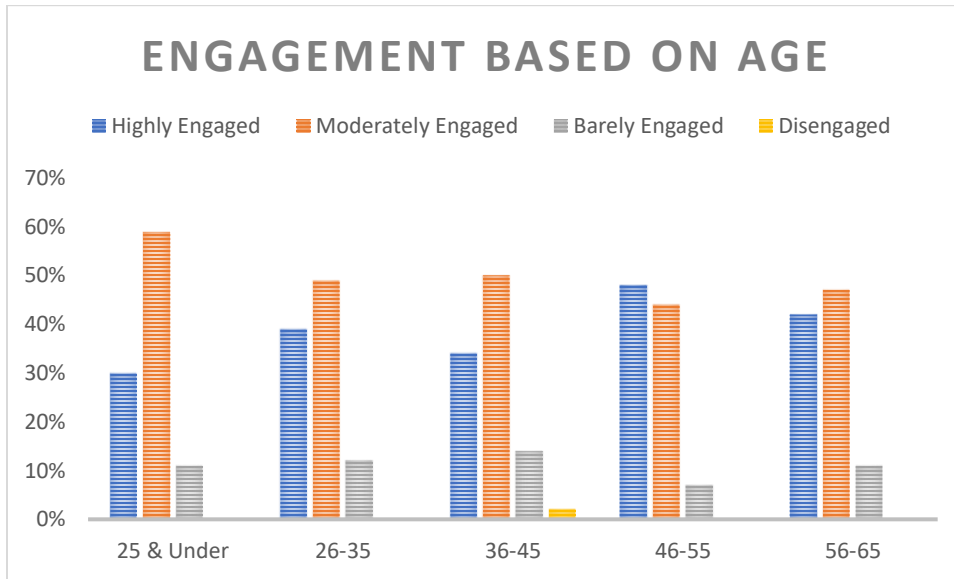
26-35 year olds group (112).

Figure 3 Engagement based on age

We also analyzed generational differences in engagement throughout the

agency. The generations were broken down into Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Gen X

(1965-1983), and Millennials (1984-2002). There was a large variation in the number of

employees in each generation. There were 31 Baby Boomers, 90 Gen X's, and 156

Millennials. The engagement results showed that Baby Boomers group, 52 percent

were highly engaged, 39 percent were moderately engaged, and 10 percent were

barely engaged. The Gen X group showed that 33 percent were highly engaged, 53

percent were moderately engaged, 12 percent were barely engaged, and two percent

were disengaged. The Millennials group showed that 37 percent were highly engaged,

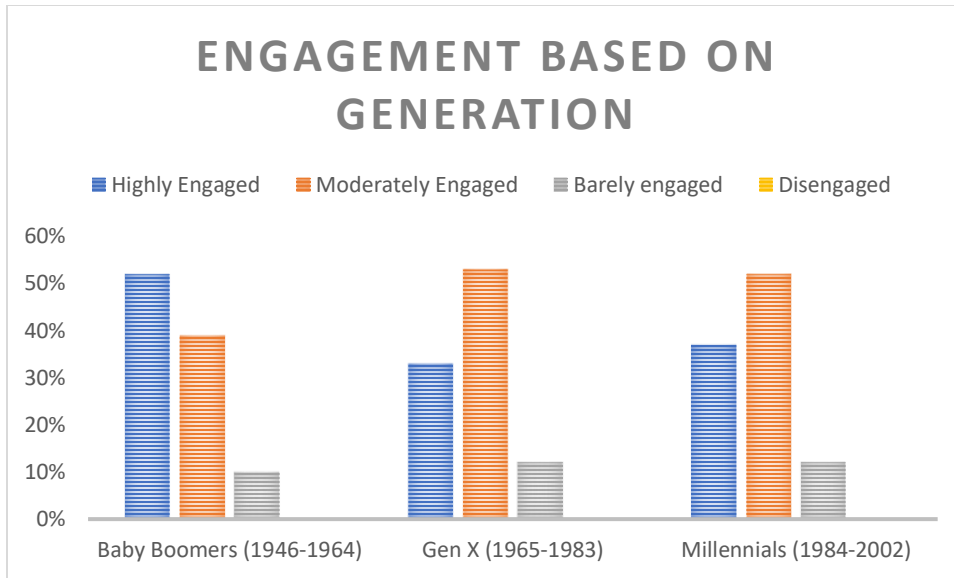52 percent were moderately engaged, and 12 percent were barely engaged.

ENGAGEMENT BASED ON GENERATION

■ Highly Engaged ■ Moderately Engaged ▤ Barely engaged ■ Disengaged

Figure 4 Engagement based on generation

Tenure is another factor that showed differences in engagement profiles. Tenure was broken down into 1-2 years, 3-5 years, 6-9 years, and less than one year. Each of those groups had 80 employees, 87 employees, 40 employees, and 70 employees, respectively. Of those who have worked at the organization for one to two years, 33 percent were highly engaged, 50 percent were moderately engaged, and 18 percent were barely engaged. Of those who have worked for three to five years, 40 percent were highly engaged, 53 percent were moderately engaged, and 7 percent were barely engaged. Of the group that has worked for six to nine years, 45 percent were highly engaged, 40 percent were moderately engaged, 13 percent were barely engaged, and two percent were disengaged. Out of the last group who has worked for less than a year, 34 percent were highly engaged, 56 percent were moderately engaged, and 10
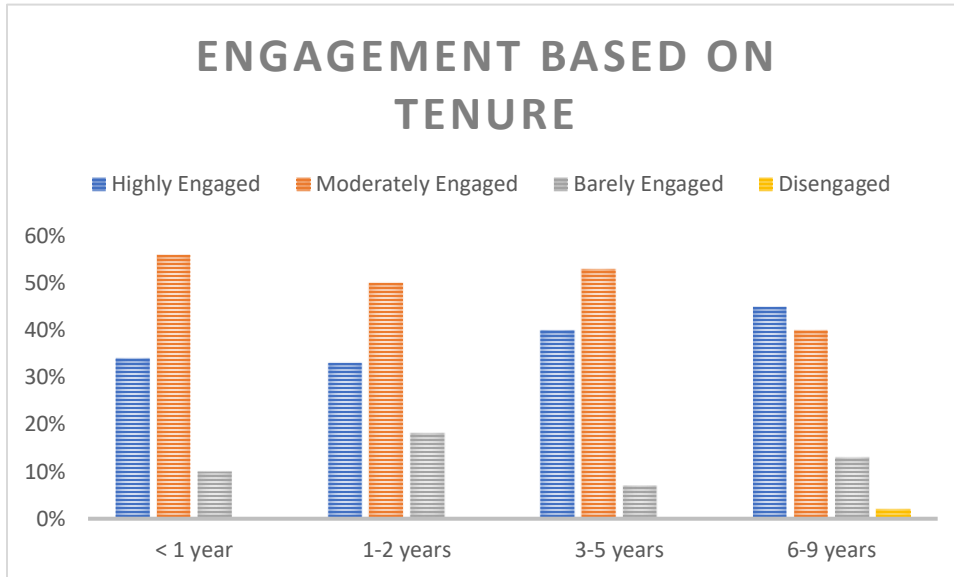
percent were barely engaged.

Figure 5 Engagement based on tenure

Each of the departments in the organization was broken down into their own

overall favorability rating. This was their overall favorability toward the organization in

general. Some of the departments had insufficient responses and were not analyzed in

these results. Accounting, operations, and program support workers had the highest

overall favorability ratings with 86 percent, 81 percent, and 81 percent, respectively.

Human resources, executive directors, and quality assurance had the lowest overall

favorability ratings with 54 percent, 60 percent, and 63 percent, respectively. Each of

these departments are small, as majority of the employees in the organization are family

permanency specialists. 148 family permanency specialists responded to the survey

and their overall favorability rating was 66.85 percent. Figure six shows the favorability

ratings for each of the departments that had sufficient responses and how they compare
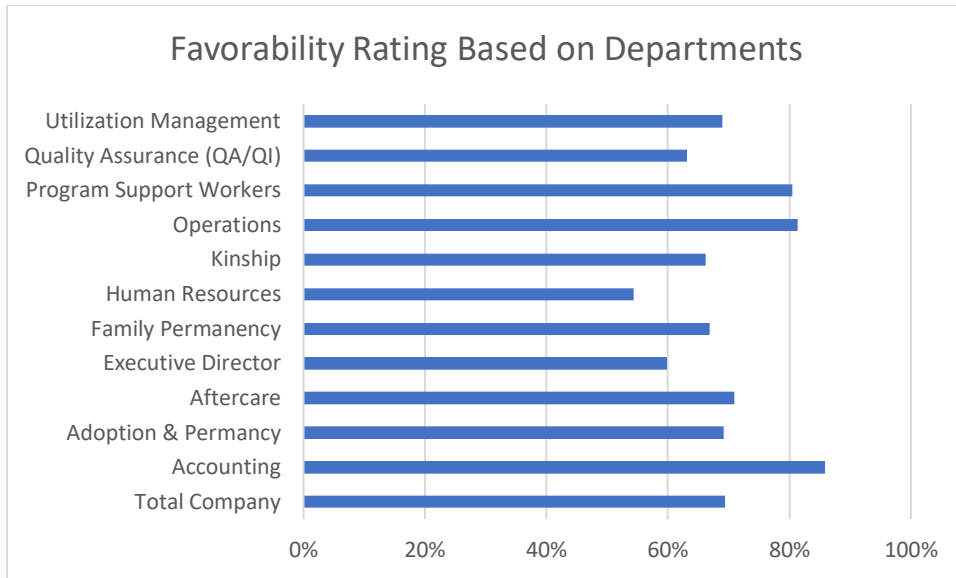
to the total company's result.

Figure 6 Department Favorability

The final piece of data that we analyzed were the different engagement

categories that we assessed with the survey. The categories with the highest

favorability were culture and values (75.1%), diversity and inclusion (75.3%), manager

effectiveness (76.2%), and team dynamics (76.7%). The categories with the lowest

engagement levels were career outlook (64.9%), communication/change management

(57%), feeling valued (51.2%), trust in senior leaders (57.1%), and work/life balance

(63.1%). Figure 7 shows a breakdown of each of the categories with their engagement
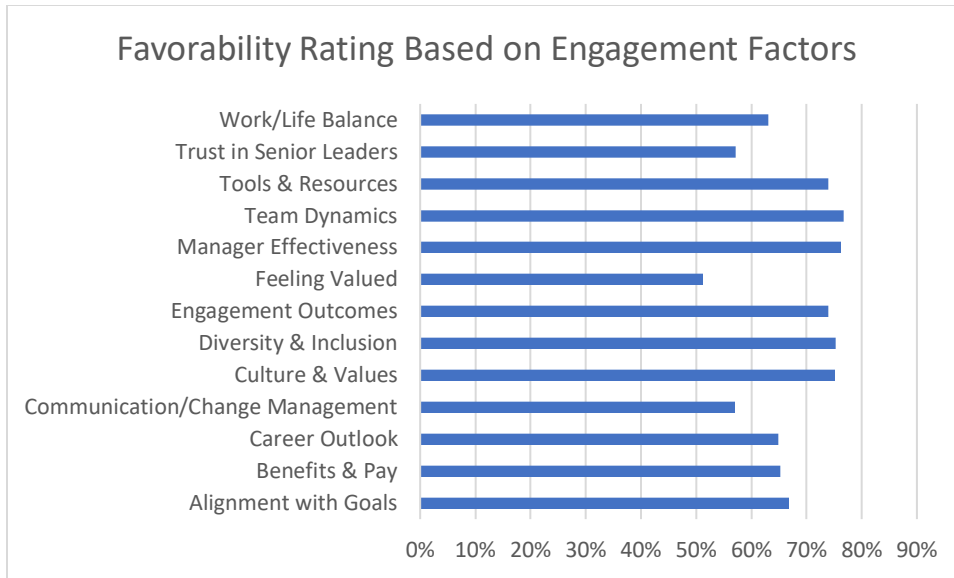
levels.

Favorability Rating Based on Engagement Factors

Engagement Factor	Favorability
Work/Life Balance	
Trust in Senior Leaders	
Tools & Resources	
Team Dynamics	
Manager Effectiveness	
Feeling Valued	
Engagement Outcomes	
Diversity & Inclusion	
Culture & Values	
Communication/Change Management	
Career Outlook	
Benefits & Pay	
Alignment with Goals	

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%   80%   90%

Figure 7 Engagement Categories

Focus Groups Results

Results from the focus groups were broken down into the same engagement categories from the previous section. The categories we chose to focus on were career outlook, communication/change management, feeling valued, trust in senior leaders, and work/life balance because of their low engagement levels on the survey. Common themes for career outlook included lack of opportunity for leadership roles within the organization. Those who are seeking a supervisory position feel that they are not publicly available and that when they become available they are given to specific people. Individuals within the company feel that they would benefit by understanding what possibilities are available to develop themselves and use that development to possibly move up in the organization.

"Positions that open up seem like they are created for someone specifically"

"NFC has a fairly flat structure that prevents people from getting promoted and

developing their skills beyond a certain point. This will always lead to higher

turnover"

A major theme during the discussion involving communication/change

management was miscommunications between the different departments in the

organization. Employees in the group mentioned how decisions would be made in one

department that would have an impact on other departments and they would be

unaware. Employees feel that cross-training would be helpful to for people to

understand how things work in the different sectors of the organization. Another major

concern in this area was with employee contracts. However, with a direct line of

communication with the supervisors, they feel that that this should not be a problem.

These communication barriers that exist make it difficult for departments to work

together and cause additional stress on the organization.

"Communication between departments needs improvements. Many people

appear to be working on similar projects without others knowing. The

collaboration is not always there"

"I have applied for a different job here and did not hear back before hearing it

from someone else that someone else got the job"

The next category addressed was feeling valued. Employees felt that the work

that goes into each of the families that NFC serves doesn't get recognized, especially

the families that require more effort than others. Another factor that was discussed was

the recognition efforts in place in the organization. An agency-wide recognition effort

exists however, not all the management team uses it. Employees felt it is important that

supervisors find which kinds of recognition efforts work for their team and be consistent

with those efforts.

"Often staff feel undervalued and underappreciated when they are doing really

important, difficult work"

"Supervisors need to know who and how to recognize their individual staff

members"

Trust in senior leaders was the next category. There was concern regarding

space and lack of facetime between the employees and senior leaders in the

organization. Another commonality was the concern regarding exit interviews and

employee surveys. There were questions about whether there were changes or a plan

in place with this information.

"Is anyone doing anything with the exit interviews? What is happening with that

information?"

"There is a lack of employees talking to their supervisor about what it is going to

look like when the executive team moves to the new building"

The final category was work/life balance. Individuals feel that they are

overworked in their position, especially with the nature of the work that NFC is doing.

Family permanency specialists have high case-loads; however, this has been improving

over time. A new issue that they felt needed attention was how cases were being

distributed. Employees felt that families who require more time and effort should not go

to new or inexperienced workers. They felt that it was also important for supervisors to

be able to recognize burn out in their employees and to be prepared to provide

feedback when they are struggling. Other ideas to combat burnout and overload

involved allowing employees to take on projects involving internal issues to take a break from their daily schedules, providing flex time for physical activity or self-care activities, and providing opportunities to get away from the desk throughout the work day.

"Smaller caseloads have made positive changes and have allowed all to have better work-life balance"

"We need more chances to get away from the desk but it's still included as part of the work day"

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

When comparing NFC to other nonprofit social service agencies we found that turnover in the organization in the past year was 36 percent which was higher than the average of 25 percent in the nation (Sage, 2010). The percentage was higher for the Family Permanency Specialists in the agency and those statistics were similar to the percentage of social workers in the country that had intentions to quit. The higher turnover rates and intention to quit for social workers may be related to the high pressure and stress that comes with the job and the fact that they interact with the families each day (Opportunity Knocks, 2016). Turnover numbers were also higher at NFC than the average for child welfare organizations in Nebraska which was 32 percent (Stoddard, 2017).

There was a high response rate to the survey, which may mean that employees want their voices to be heard and they trust that their input will have an impact on the future of the organization. The survey was used to measure favorability and engagement levels in the current employees. This helped us to understand the overall feelings and the different factors that may cause a person to leave. Through the survey,

we can see that individuals that are in the Millennials and Gen X generation groups are less likely to be highly engaged. We also found that the youngest group that is 25 years and younger are also less likely to be highly engaged. These younger individuals may not have advanced into a role or they may not feel like they have the experience in the field that they need to be successful. This might be a reason of the lower engagement. This is also true when looking at tenure. Those who have worked there for zero to two years were also less likely to be highly engaged. It may be important to focus on newer employees when it comes to retention strategies. This could be an improved training protocol or making sure new hires are very clear about the job description and what exactly will be expected of them.

Human resources, quality assurance, and executive directors had the lowest favorability ratings from the survey. It's important to focus on the departments that were lower than the organization average to see where the issues lie. If employees in human resources are not highly engaged in the organization, it may be difficult to implement a successful retention plan to keep high performing individuals in the organization. It's also important to realize that family permanency specialists make up majority of the employees at the organization and their favorability rating was also lower than the company average. These are the employees that are directly working with the families and should be included in working to increase favorability toward the organization.

We were also able to identify key drivers from the survey and focus groups that may lead to dissatisfaction and maybe even turnover in the organization. The factors that had the lowest engagement levels were career outlook, communication/change management, feeling valued, trust in senior leaders, and work/life balance. Utilizing

these key drivers in a retention plan will help to address issues related to the employees themselves. Career outlook issues can result due to a lack of opportunities in the organization or a lack of knowledge about those opportunities. When it comes to moving up in the organization it is important to recognize that there is an apparent ceiling, or a lack of opportunities. Creating and implementing a leadership development program might also help prepare employees for potential supervisor roles. Communication and change management will be especially relevant with the new brand and the new office building. New forms of communication will be necessary to combat confusion and miscommunications between different departments and between leadership and staff. It is also vital that the different departments are clear with what is going on and how their actions or decisions might affect others. Clear communication will also help to address the issue of trust in senior leaders. Breaking down barriers will be key to building trust and keeping all employees on the same page. Although there are many recognition strategies in place at NFC, another step might be to have supervisors take the time to find out what each of their employees' preferences for recognition to help them to feel valued. Some individuals prefer public recognition whereas others may like something as simple as an email. Also, being consistent in recognition techniques will help to improve engagement. If there is a system in place and only a portion of the organization is utilizing it, it will make it difficult to sustain. Overall, recognizing the difficulty of the work that is being performed at all levels of the organization is a good strategy to combat this issue. Work/life balance is an issue that is imperative to address because of the toll that the stress of this type of job can have. Although case load numbers are improving, employees feel that they need to be distributed differently. There are

strategies in place to help prevent burnout however, there may need to be more communication about that. It also may be helpful to educate employees on how to balance their work and their family life since some employees may not be prepared to maintain that balance. Focusing on these key drivers and improving upon specific concerns and barriers recognized in the study will help to increase engagement thus decreasing turnover rates. This will help the organization to perform at its best and bring stability to the families they serve.

Limitations

      Limitations of this study design are present with both the survey and the focus groups. With the survey, we used the Likert scale for measurement and this gives participants many options to choose from. Individuals may not interpret the questions and the different answers in the same way and they may shy away from choosing answers like "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" because they may have some mixed feelings on the topics. There were also employees who chose not to answer a few of the questions and those who did not respond to the survey at all. Some of the groups that were compared throughout the study such as age and department varied heavily with the number of participants in each group. This may make it difficult to generalize the results. The survey may also have been long and time consuming for some, which may influence their answers and completion rate. Employees may have also been hesitant to provide honest answers if they were uncomfortable with the questions. The focus groups had a sufficient number of participants however they were not selected based on the proportion of employees in each department. They were selected based on recommendations from supervisors and if it fit into their schedules.

Participants might have also felt hesitant to give completely honest answers with their peers present.

Moving forward

Moving forward, NFC needs to revisit their current strategies and utilize the results from the survey and focus groups to address these factors. To create and maintain an effective management retention plan, these strategies will need to be correctly implemented and constantly evaluated. Future research involving exit surveys and interviews would be beneficial for this type of organization. Rather than looking at the reasons for dissatisfaction of current employees, it would also be valuable to know the factors that led individuals to leave the organization.

CONCLUSION

Turnover and intention to quit is an issue in any organization but especially in nonprofit social service organizations. Their main goal is to carry out the mission and they rely on every employee to do so. The families and children that they serve desperately need stability with the family permanency specialists because of their instability at home. Improving employee retention by creating a well implemented plan is crucial. It would help to fulfill the mission and it would also help to improve the culture at the organization. Working for a company with great attitudes and positive people helps to increase employee engagement and decreases the intent to leave. Utilizing the survey and focus group results to focus on specific groups and the key drivers will help to implement a plan that is specific to the employees at NFC. Especially with the new brand and the new office building, successful communication techniques will be vital for the organization. Improving this factor will help to start improving upon the other factors

that were of concern. Overall, recognizing these key drivers from the study that are

specific to NFC, and utilizing them in a management retention plan, will allow the

organization to be successful in providing services and protecting the families and

children that they serve.

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SERVICE LEARNING/CAPSTONE REFLECTION

During my time at NFC, I learned a lot about how a nonprofit operates and how important the relationships are with partnering organizations. I also learned a lot about the work that goes into social services and all the specific services that they provide the families that they serve. The organization was much larger than I expected it to be and it also serves many families in the area. When I first started the project, I expected to work solely in the human resources department however I had the opportunity to work on projects in both human resources and the development department. This allowed me to develop more skills and learn more about the organization. I began my experience in September and finished in April. I worked with my preceptor, Dr. Viv Ewing who is now the Vice President of Administrative Services. I also worked with Lauren Peterson, who is the Development and Events Specialist. I also formed relationships with employees in the human resources department which was a great resource for my actual capstone project. With these relationships and resources, I completed many service learning projects along with my capstone projects. Service learning projects included: creating a nonprofit contact list based on the Nonprofit Association of the Midlands, employee recognition project, data entry for the employee giving campaign, planning for different events, leadership development application process and selection criteria, online system for press release information, and I worked on many daily tasks in the development department. The contact list that I created had all the nonprofits from the Nonprofit Association of the Midlands and each of their information including their executive director and their contact information. I also created an online system for press release forms. These forms were all hard copies and located in many different

places. I scanned them all into the computer and put them all into a system so they could be searched when needed. NFC is also in the beginning stages of creating a leadership development program. I created potential application documents and researched other program's selection processes. I also set up a meeting with the Kellogg Foundation for more information about their program and the availability of their materials for use. Another big project that I was the lead of was creating a relationship with 4imprint and choosing new employee giving and free giveaway items with the new brand. I chose new items to order based on price and what I felt would be appropriate gifts for employees. I sent in the artwork and worked with a representative to order these new items. Before ordering, I created a document showing each of the proposed new items and their prices along with comparisons of the items that were ordered the previous year. I presented these to executive employees to get approval before ordering.

I believe that my greatest contribution during my experience here was my help in the transition of the organization to the new brand and the new office building. There was a lot of daily work that came with preparing for the new branding project that I did and I helped to move the development to the new office building in Papillion. My greatest strength that I brought to this project was my ability to problem solve and think critically. I worked independently on a lot of my projects and worked through different issues that I came across. However, when I needed help with projects, I always had support around the organization. The largest challenge that came with this organization was that the new identity that NFC took on. They changed their name and their brand to PromiseShip which raised questions throughout the project. Although they changed the

name, the legal name stayed the same so the affiliation agreement was not affected. There were many changes happening within the organization so I had to be flexible throughout the process, whether that be with my hours in the office or changing my plan for what projects I was working on each day. I overcame this challenge by communicating effectively with my preceptor and other employees in the organization and allowing myself to be flexible with the work that I was doing. Through this experience, I learned about the many different opportunities that are available in the field of public health. I also learned about the importance of public health professionals in social services to improve the lives of families and children. My public health education prepared me for this experience by helping me to think strategically when making decisions and problem solve. I was also able to utilize my leadership skills by working independently and conducting my research in the organization.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

APPENDICES

Appendix A: PromiseShip

Recently Nebraska Families Collaborative has changed its name and logo to PromiseShip. The reason for this change was to be able to expand nationally without having Nebraska as its sole geographical region. The new name also allows for uniqueness and authenticity as the former name for the organization was easier to mix up with others. The new brand gives a better representation of the mission of the organization and the new name is intended to show a state of hope and new possibilities. The new vision statement is:

> "Through the works of PromiseShip, we envision connected communities filled with strong families who are self-sufficient and empowered with great hope for the future."

The new mission statement is:

> "PromiseShip tirelessly spans boundaries bringing powerful partners together to provide innovative solutions that transform life's uncertainty into family wellbeing."

Appendix B: Total Staff Breakdown

Total staff: 340

Breakdown by Department:

Accounting	10
Adoption & Permanency	7
Aftercare	8
Case Coordination	3
CEO	1
Community Initiative	1
Contract Management	4
Court Liaison	2
Development	3
Facilities	1
Human Resources	5
Independent Living	3
IT	3
Kinship	13
Legal	1
Marketing	1
Operations	6
Permanency	203
Program Audit	2
Program Support	15
Quality Assurance	11
Records	4
Team Support	7
Training	4
Triage	4
Utilization Management	18

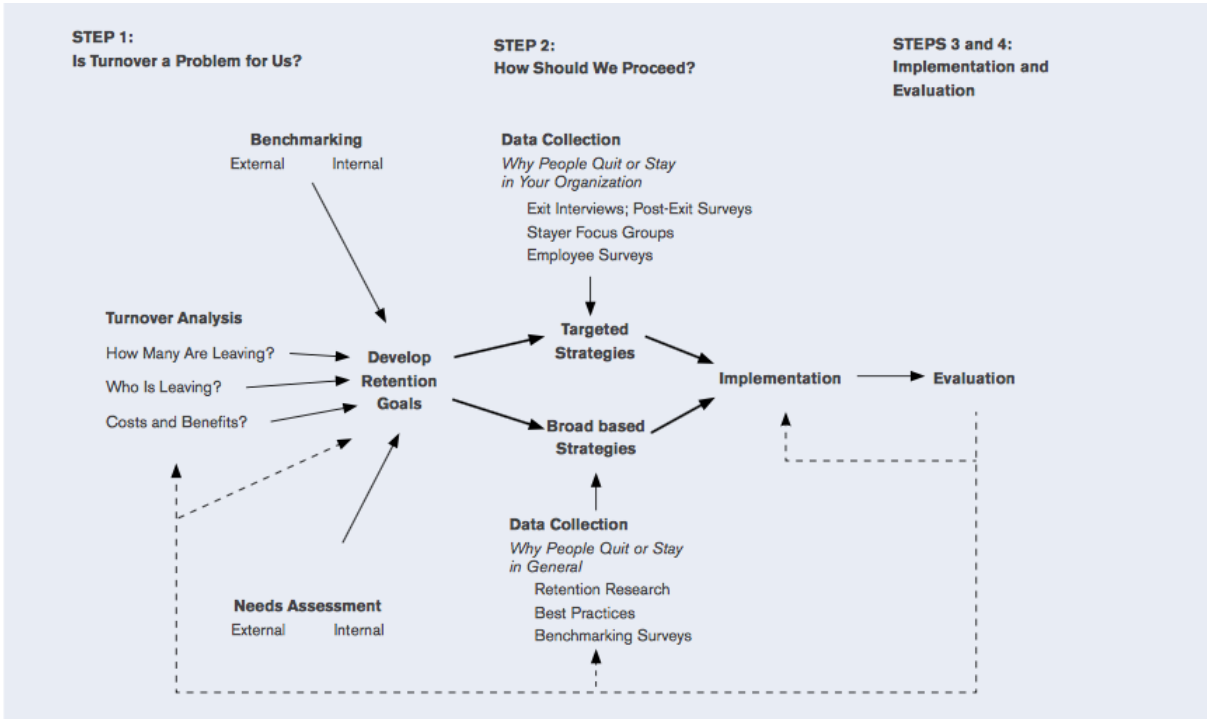**Appendix C: Developing A Management Retention Plan**

Figure 8 Developing A Management Retention Plan (Allen, 2008).

Appendix D: Retention Strategies Already in Place at NFC

There are several employee appreciation and retention strategies that are currently in place at NFC that should be acknowledged moving forward. These include:

- Career ladder for FPS
- Pay increase for FPS
- Provided new high powered tablets for FPS staff
- Expanded career path for managers
- Increased lunch and learns at colleges to build pipeline
- Offers employee referral program
- Implemented new family triage team
- Launched complex case team
- Holds check in meetings with CEO & COO, and HR
- Offers month employee appreciation events
- Provides on-site Yoga, massage, and pet therapy
- Provides food trucks and fresh fruit for staff
- Has employee activities committee and a wellness committee
- Hired new organization and development manager Nov 2017
- Planning new professional development program: Roll out Jan 2018
- Forming retention change management team for launch in 1st quarter 2018
- Researching minority affinity group feasibility for 2018
- Assessing implementation of state of the art child welfare technology (V. Ewing, personal communication, March 6, 2018).

Appendix E: Survey Questions

Alignment with Goals:

- I understand the agency's plans for future success
- I believe Nebraska Families Collaborative will be successful in the future
- I understand how my job helps the agency achieve success
- I know how I fit into Nebraska Families Collaborative's future plans

Benefits and Pay

- Considering the value I bring to the Nebraska Families Collaborative, I feel I am paid fairly
- My benefits meet my (and my family's) needs well
- We have benefits not typically available at other organizations

Career Outlook

- I see professional growth and career development opportunities for myself in this agency
- This job is in alignment with my career goals
- My job allows me to utilize my strengths
- I find my job interesting and challenging

Communication/Change

- My supervisor is an active supporter of changes that affect our team
- When I give feedback to management, it is well received and followed up on
- When the organization makes changes, I understand why

Culture and Values

- NFC consistently demonstrates our values of putting Families First
- I take pride in the work we do at NFC
- Collaboration and accountability are being encouraged by my team to achieve our vision
- I enjoy the culture at NFC

Diversity and Inclusion

- I believe a diverse workforce is important to achieving our organizational goals
- Everyone here is treated fairly regardless of race, gender, age, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation, or other differences
- My opinions seem to count at work
- The people I work with treat each other with respect

Engagement Outcomes

- My immediate coworkers consistently go the extra mile to achieve great results
- I enjoy doing my work
- I would like to be working at Nebraska Families Collaborative one year from today
- I am always thinking about ways to do my job better
- I recommend this agency as a great place to work
- It would take a lot to get me to leave this agency
- I am inspired by the work we do
- I feel accepted by my immediate coworkers
- I'm happy with my job
- I love the people I work with

Feeling Valued

- The agency makes investments to make me more successful
- The Executive Team of Nebraska Families Collaborative values people as their most important resource
- If I contribute to Nebraska Families Collaborative's success, I know I will be recognized
- The Executive Team of Nebraska Families Collaborative is committed to making it a great place to work

Manager Effectiveness

- My immediate supervisor cares about my development
- My immediate supervisor regularly gives m constructive feedback on my job performance
- I trust and respect my immediate supervisor
- I like working for my immediate supervisor
- There is open and honest communication between employees and supervisors
- I understand how my job performance is measured
- My immediate supervisor cares about me as a person
- My immediate supervisor helps me to be successful in my job

Team Dynamics

- I have a close and trusting relationship with one or more coworkers
- Goals and accountabilities are clear to everyone on my team
- I feel loyal to my immediate team or work group
- My team effectively collaborates leveraging individual strengths
- I know I can depend on the other members of my team
- The people I work with most closely are committed to producing top quality work
- I feel close to the other members of my work group

- There is cooperation between my department and other departments we work with

Tools and Resources

- I have the information I need to do my job well
- I have the materials and equipment I need to do my job

Trust in Senior Leaders

- I trust the Executive Team of this agency to set the right course
- I trust the Executive Team to lead the company to future success
- I believe the Executive Team of this agency is honest and trustworthy
- The Executive Team of this agency demonstrates integrity

Work/Life Balance

- I am able to adequately manage my work life balance
- Our culture supports my health and wellbeing

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

- Do you trust this organization?
- Do you trust that leadership is making decisions with your best interest at heart?
- How do you feel about current recognition methods at NFC?
- What are some potential improvements that are needed in the employee recognition program?
- How do you feel about the leadership style of your supervisor? Does it promote teamwork throughout the organization?
- What are some ways that could make it easier to collaborate across departments, as well as within the departments at NFC?