CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

The Effects of Leadership Style on the Retention of Public Employees

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Public Administration, Public Sector Management and Leadership

By

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of graduate school, work and life. This work is dedicated to my parents, Inocencia and Angel, who have always loved me unconditionally and whose good examples have taught me to work hard for the things that I aspire to achieve. I would also like to dedicate this work to my awesome cohort group. Meganoush, Brenda, Knar, Maria, Mandy, Nerses and Ruby, you are the coolest. Thanks for all the help and memorable experiences.

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Abstract

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The research problem and purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between manager leadership styles and employee retention. In describing the methods used and procedures used in studying the problem, the data was collected through an extensive review of peer reviewed literature on the topic of leadership styles and retention outcomes. After a vast review of the literature currently available, the findings conclude that there are many reasons why employees leave and retention remains a problem, but some leadership styles can mitigate turnover and assist in the possibility of employee satisfaction and possible retention. The dominant leadership styles that seem to indicate more effectivity are usually styles where the leader is more participative, communicative and motivational. It more closely resembles a transformational leadership style.

Introduction

Currently, the topic of retention and turnover has become a vital part of what public management must address and concentrate on. It has been found that about 15%-20% of new hires become turnovers in public agencies by the first year. In the journal, "Employee Turnover and Organizational Performance: Testing a Hypothesis from Classical Public Administration", Meier and Hicklin state, "The average turnover for these organizations is slightly lower than that for U.S. federal government (16.1% for the 12 months ending in July 2004…" (Meier and Hicklin, 2008). Employee retention is important to an organization because it entails considering its effects on finance, training, leadership and public service. The many effects that retention has on many areas of public service makes it an interesting topic of inquiry. This study identifies some general problems that may be the cause for employee turnover. In some cases, the problem may be due to having to work in extremely stressful environments, employees finding better paying jobs, and finding better job locations. Other times, it is due to employee's cultural relationships with coworkers and superiors. As a current county employee, the experiences collected lead me to believe that the county is encountering challenges in retention and turnover. Considering the current problem in retention, this study would like to focus on the effects of leadership style on employee retention, and advance that a participative coaching style by managers would help to mitigate employee turnover. It is also important to understand that the county is interested in retaining employees to mitigate financial loss and to continue to be efficient in providing the services that it is mandated to provide. Most importantly, it is an important issue that the leadership and management need to consider to continue to have a functional

organization. When the county's hiring process and allocation of funds for hiring are very tedious, better strategies should be sought to maintain the current workforce.

As mentioned previously, conducting research on this topic would greatly benefit public agencies. The topic of employee retention has not had ample investigation and additional investigation can be beneficial. Phillip E. Crewson includes a piece by P.C. Light, "Indeed, although recruiting and retaining quality employees serves as the bedrock of American governance, some have observed that research on this issue has been sporadic and, in some cases, lacking scientific rigor (Light, 1992)." (Crewson, P., 1997). The conduction of a research project on this issue would highlight current practices and could also bring about vital information that would allow agencies to better plan strategies for mitigating employee turnover and financial loss.

Literature Review

After reviewing the current literature in this area, this study has found important deficits, discrepancies and conflicts in the current research. In some cases, the results found are inconsistent and conflicting. The current literature on the topic of employee retention and the possible causes of high employee turnover rates does not render a substantial amount of research. The current literature is scarce in several important areas.

Understanding Retention

Several assumptions have been made about why government agencies are not able to retain employees. Some of these assumptions include the perception that government agencies have a low priority in hiring quality employees, poor pay drives away good employees, ineffective planning precipitates losses, and the assumption that the government cannot compete with the enticements that the private sector can offer (Crewson, 1997). Others have focused on commitment, Bradley Wright cites, "Commitment at the organizational level primarily influences employee retention (Mathieu and Zajac 1990), whereas commitment at the job level-job involvement and goal commitment- is more closely associated with employee work effort or performance." (Wright, 2007). Others like Ker and Slocum (1987) and Kopelman and Colleagues (1990) argued that employee retention may vary across organizations due to organizational culture values. They state, "Those authors suggested that an organization's cultural values influence its human resource strategies, including selection and placement policies, promotions and development procedures, and reward systems. Different strategies result in psychological climates that foster varying levels of commitment and retention among employees working in different organizations." (Sheridan, 1992). They differentiated

cultural values and strategies as having a teamwork culture or an individual reward system. In another study by Meyer and Allen (1997) and others, have suggested that organizations value O.C., organizational commitment, because it has a positive impact on job performance and work motivation and decreases absenteeism and turnover. (Camilleri and Van Der Heijden, 2007). Other researchers have focused on the social and behavioral science portion of this area of study. Steijn (2008) found that Public Service Motivation (PSMs) effect on public employee job satisfaction and intention to stay in their jobs was stronger when employees felt that their work was useful to society (Perry, 2010). Recent research distinguishes among those who exit public service. In particular, this study suggests that women, minorities and new employees leave their positions in disproportionate numbers. A study conducted by K. Riley, Turner et al. (2005) found that more than one-third of officers who left the Cincinnati police force had less than one year of service and that nearly two-thirds who left had less than five years (Wilson, Dalton and Grammich, 2010). Yet, other authors have focused on incentives to view the recruitment and retention of employees. According to Ezra and Deckman (1996), "demographic changes in the workforce, such as the dramatic increase in the number of women with children under age 17 between the 1960s and the 1990s, indeed produced a change in public employee compensation preferences. As a result, benefits related to work and family balance now are necessary for effective human resource management (e.g., employee recruitment and retention) in the public sector." (Kim and Wiggins, 2011). These studies have demonstrated the current focus of research on employee retention and the current assumptions about employee retention and turnover.

In some of the current research, we find some conflicting and contradictory research about the effects that are caused by employee turnover. This recently emerged argument posits that turnover may provide positive benefits to the organization, at least up to a point. The empirical implication of the Abelson and Baysinger argument is that the relationship between turnover and organizational performance is that of an inverted U-shaped curve. Low to moderate levels of turnover generally benefit organizational performance by bringing in new blood and better-trained employees, but such benefits decline as turnover increases. Above some level of turnover, any additional turnover imposes more costs than benefits and thus detrimentally affects performance (Meier and Hicklin, 2008). Other Authors distinguish between turnover that is voluntary and involuntary for reasons of measuring turnover but still argue that turnover has both positive and negative effects on an organization. Wilson, Dalton, Sheer, and Grammich state, "Turnover has both positive and negative effects on an organization and its employees. Allowing agencies to rid themselves of poor performers is often good and helps the organization advance, introduce new ideas, increase productivity and performance, and facilitate change (Ahlrichs, 2000; Birati and Tziner, 1995: Hom and Griffeth, 1994; McEvoy and Cascio, 1987; Williams and Livingstone, 1994)." (Wilson, Dalton, Sheer, & Grammich, 2010).

Leadership and Its Effect on Retention

There is some current work that is relevant to leadership styles and retention of employees. Sewon Kim, Toby M. Egan, Woosung Kim, Jaekyum Kim, in "The Impact of Managerial Coaching Behavior on Employee Work-Related Reactions", have provided empirical support to the hypothesized conceptual model of managerial coaching outcomes in organizations. The conceptual model was adequately supported by the sample data. Further investigations suggested managerial coaching has a direct impact on employee satisfaction with work and role clarity and an indirect impact on satisfaction with work, career commitment, organization commitment and job performance. The study's findings offer evidence regarding prospective, but unexamined, benefits of managerial coaching. Their findings can also be used for the selection and developing of effective managers and leaders through understanding and better managements of employee attitudes and understanding in organizations. Managerial coaching is often considered a successful way to enhance employee performance and prepare future managers and leaders in organizations (Kim, Egan, Kim, Kim, 2013). Managerial coaching is defined as an effective managerial and leadership proactive that advances employee learning and effectiveness. It mainly happens in one-to-one conversations and it applies active listening, questioning and constructive feedback for improving work and organization relevant issues. In a different study, Norma M. Riccucci a Board of Governors Distinguished Professor of Public Administration at the School of Public Affairs and Administration, Rutgers University, Campus at Newark, has published work on management and leadership skills. Drawing from the work of Laurence Lynn, she offers 7 factors that can influence an "execucratic's", an executive bureaucrat, effectiveness. The seven factors are political

skills, situational factors, experience in government, technical expertise, strategy, personality and management and leadership skills. The last one, management and leadership skills, which includes the ability to plan, organize, communicate clearly, and set realistic goals defines a good manager. She also states that "good" leaders must motivate staff, appreciate them and use the organization to good effect. In addition, she states that effective leaders must also be fair, understanding, knowledgeable about agency politics, and experts in their fields. Most importantly, leaders must adapt their leadership styles and behaviors to the particular circumstances and situations. Finally, she states that the personality of the leader affects his or her success. She explains that personal attributes and style would lead us to concluded that an execucrat is cooperative or adversarial, honest or deceitful, fair or unfair, aggressive or passive, reserved or outgoing, flexible or rigid, modest or egotistical. But she believes that although these are ingredients for success, these personality attributes are conditioned by situational factors (Riccucci, 1995). In another study by Soonhee Kim, in the work titled, "Participative Management and Job Satisfaction: Lessons for Management Leadership", Kim argues that both public and private sectors agree that participative management improves employees' job satisfaction. His study explores the relationship between participative management in the context of the strategic planning and job satisfaction in local government agencies. Kim's study tests 3 main hypotheses, his first hypothesis is that employees who believe that managers in their units use a participative management style are more likely to express higher levels of satisfaction with their jobs. The second hypothesis tested is that employees who perceive strategic planning processes in their work units as more participative are more likely to express higher levels of satisfaction with their jobs. The third hypothesis is that employees who

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believe they have effective communications with their supervisors in their work units are more likely to express higher levels of job satisfaction. Through the condition of county employee surveys, Kim was able to find that managers who use participatory management style correlated with job satisfaction and a participative strategic planning process. As expected, effective communication with supervisors was also positively correlated with job satisfaction and a participative strategic planning process. As expected, managers' use of a participative management style, participative strategic planning processes, and effective supervisory communications were positively associated with high levels of employee job satisfaction. Kim cites, "With respect to organizational performance and individual productivity, absenteeism and retention are significant targets for current human resource management in both the private and public sectors (Kim, 2002). Specifically, several researchers (Eby et al. 1999; Pierce, Rubenfeld, Morgan 1991; Thomas and Velthouse 1990) have argued that enhancing individuals' perceptions of empowerment and fair treatment may intensify affective reactions toward work and ultimately, reduce rates of turnover and absenteeism." (Kim, Egan, Kim, Kim, 2013). In the study by Jon Aarum Andersen, in the work titled, "How Public and Private Managers Differ in Leadership Behavior", Aarum Andersen aims to investigate whether there are behavioral differences between public and private sector managers. He investigates behavioral dimensions including leadership style, decision-making style, and motivational profile. After an analysis of 459 managers in four organizations in Sweden reveal significant differences in behavior between public and private mangers. However, no difference was found among public managers. His study explores 2 hypotheses, the first one argues that there are significant differences between public and private managers in leadership behavior

(leadership style, decision-making style, and motivational profile). The second hypothesis argues that there are significant differences among public managers in leadership behavior (leadership style, decision-making style, and motivation profile). This study found that there are significant differences between public and private managers regarding leadership styles and motivation profiles distributions. Additionally, the study found that public and private managers differ significantly in leadership behavior, but not in decision-making styles. Aarum Andersen concludes his study by providing an explanation for differences in leadership behavior, he states, "Three explanations for the differences in leadership behavior between public and private sector managers are presented. The first refers to organizational differences leading to behavioral differences. The second has to do with the choice of profession or vocation. Finally, the criteria used for promoting people to leadership positions may present yet another explanation. These explanations may cause differences in leadership behavior between public and private managers. The same factors may also explain why the public managers exhibit similarity in leadership behavior. Public and private managers may differ in behavior, but basically they face the same challenges of achieving organizational goals with or through other people." (Andersen, 2010). This study would suggest that public and private leaderships are different but that an effective public sector manager would need to tailor his style to public sector employees. It would be vital to a public-sector manager to adjust his leadership behavior to help increase the satisfaction of employees and help to mitigate turnover.

There are various characteristics or leadership styles by management that are very important to how the employee finds satisfaction in the organization and chooses to remain at the organization. In "Building Employee Commitment to Change Across

Organizational Levels: The influence of Hierarchical Distance and Direct Mangers'

Transformational Leadership", Hill, Seo, Kang and Taylor define transformational

leadership as leaders who generally have been found to be more effective than

transactional leaders in situations involving change. Transformational leadership

behaviors include articulating and presenting a clear vision, displaying charisma,

motivating employees through inspiration and intellectual stimulation derived from

exposing them to new and complex ways of thinking, and being considerate of their

individual needs and desires." (Hill, Seo, Kang and Taylor, 2012). In this same study, the

authors find that good top management communication is also very important to the

employee. They state, "Perceived top management communication (top-down and bottom

up) effectiveness partially mediates the negative relationships between hierarchical

distance and employees' affective and normative commitment to change such that

hierarchical distance is negatively related to perceived top management communication

effectiveness, which in turn is positively related to (a) affective commitment to change

and (b) normative commitment to change." (Hill, Seo, Kang and Taylor, 2012). In

another study related to communication, Ashish Mahan, James W. Bishop and Dow

Scott, have considered top management communication. They hypothesize that trust in

top management mediates the positive relationship between employee involvement and

organization commitment. They define communication as the degree of clarity and

completeness in the messages sent by top management to employees. They state, "This

study found that employment practices such as top management communication and

employee involvement are pivotal in building high levels of trust in top management,

which in turn, generates high levels of organizational commitment." (Mahajan, Bishop

and Scott, 2012). Other researchers state that the study of ethical leadership is an important topic in understanding the effects of leadership in organizations. Avey, Wernsing and Palanski consider the hypothesis that ethical leadership is positively related to job satisfaction. Their results suggest that ethical leadership matters in today's organizations. Their results indicate that ethical leadership influences both employee job satisfaction and psychological well-being in unique ways. They have found that by stimulating feelings of psychological ownership on the part of employees, ethical leaders may enhance job satisfaction. Their study has sought to investigate ethical leadership and related factors in organizations. Results from this study suggest that practicing ethical leadership may, enhance voice from employees and provide valuable insight on business process and recommendations, promote psychological well-being, promote psychological ownership in employees taking responsibility for work projects and enhance job satisfaction which potentially reduces turnover and employee complaints (Avey, Wernsing and Palanski, 2012). These results indicate that effective top-down communication is very important to the employee. In a different study conducted by L. Wesly Wager, found that leadership styles are more influential to employees than a perception that an immediate supervisor has some influence over his superiors. He states, "Thus far, the findings indicate that: (a) the manifestation of the supportive style of leadership assists the supervisor in fulfilling his role obligations; (b) the belief by subordinates that the supervisor can exercise influence upwards in the hierarchy (over his own boss) also assists the supervisor in fulfilling his role obligations, but it is less closely related to the fulfillment of these particular role obligations than is the style of leadership which the supervisor employs; (c) hierarchical influence and style of leadership interact

in such a way that the greatest effect on the fulfillment of these obligations occurs when a supervisor with substantial influence utilizes the supportive style of leadership; thus, the greater the influence which the supervisor is believed to have upwards in the social structure, the greater the effect of the supportive style of leadership on the fulfillment of the supervisor's role obligations; but (d) as noted above, this effect of the supervisor's hierarchical influence on his style of leadership may be of questionable significance, because, though consistent, when appropriate statistical controls and comparisons are introduced, the magnitude of the facilitative effect is limited." (Wager, 1965). These findings are important because they have implications about how important a supportive style of leadership can be. In this work, it is evident that a supportive style is more effective in influencing employees than a supervisory leadership style can be. Another very important point in retention was made by Shawn Smith and Rebecca Mazin, in their work, they argue that communication is vital to the retention of employees and they ask if poor communication by individual managers can create retention problems. They state, "Absolutely, and this problem is exacerbated because many managers think they are better communicators than they actually are. There is an overused, yet true, saying that people do not leave their jobs, they leave their bosses. In employee exit surveys, the most frequent employee complaints about former supervisors involve poor communication skills. This isn't surprising, because businesses do not always hire and promote managers based on their communication and management skills. Many individuals possess a wealth of knowledge in their fields and are highly skilled in the technical aspects of their jobs, but they fall short when it comes time to assign projects, convey expectations, and make employees feel good about working for the team." (Smith and Mazin, 2011). Their work

indicates that it is very important to have good communication to have employment satisfaction. Having good communication can also help in mitigating high turnover rates. Smith and Mazin state, "When employees are unhappy in the workplace, when morale and productivity lag and turnover is high, the root problem is usually not compensation. Generally, these difficulties will be people-driven, stemming from poor communication, a perceived lack of appreciation and recognition, lack of clear paths for career growth, and unresolved grievances and conflicts." (Smith and Maxin, 2011). In another study conducted by Tracey Trottier, Van Wart, and Wang, considered leadership styles by management. They looked specifically into transactional and transformational styles by management. Their studies concluded that both styles play a significant part of federal management, but that transformational had a slight edge. They state, "How significant of an effect does leadership have to follower satisfaction? It has an enormous effect. The six leadership factors are statistically significant in a model predicting follower satisfaction, and three of the six leadership factors exceed standard satisfaction areas such as pay, promotion, coworkers, and working conditions, and only personal fulfillment of the job exceeds them. This is in agreement with findings of Buckingham and Coffman (1999; see also Kim 2002) but at some variance with the retention/turnover literature, which does not generally highlight the importance of leadership to this degree (e.g., Fottler, Shewchuk, and O'Connor 1998). The study also examines the transactional or transformational leadership debate in government settings, which are traditionally more constrained, even in an increasingly results-oriented and entrepreneurial environment. On average, transformational leadership is slightly more important in terms of both

perceptions of leader effectiveness and follower satisfaction in the federal case, despite the substantial conceptual expansion of transactional leadership for this study.

The problem of turnover has many dimensions but some research experts have some interesting suggestions. Previous studies of employee turnover have suggested the importance of taking a macro perspective in studying human resource retention. Mobley (1983) criticized the traditional research focus on relationships between individual variables and job terminations. He stated, "human resource managers cannot attempt to manage employee turnover by influencing the termination decisions of each employee. Instead, the overall termination rate is an organizational number that must be effectively controlled." (Sheridan, 1992). This view by Mobley is important and can be applied to public sector retention evaluations. Other recommendations were given by Jeremy M. Lewis. He offers a list of 5 items to consider. In his first item, he believes managers should plan and analyze, conduct evidence-based analysis of retention needs, know employees and their needs, advocate for staff, conduct exit and "stay" interviews. In his second recommendation, he offers and idea on how to reduce financial impact. He believes the agency should use realistic job previews, consider assessment-center methods in hiring and promoting. Hire pre-trained or pre-certified employees. Think twice about service contracts. The third recommendation considers pay. He believes that agencies should enhance compensation and perks, pay employees what they are worth, offer apprentice salary during training, offer education incentives, and use career ladders. In the fourth recommendation, he states that a manager should understand what engagement is and how to engage employees. He states that employees should be allowed to experience other duties through work diversity and shadowing. Employees should also

be allowed to participate in decision-making, should be recognized for accomplishments and should be allowed to voice their feedback. In the fifth and final recommendation, Lewis recommends that the manager communicates the goals routinely and effectively, be fair and transparent in all aspects of policy, reduce unnecessary bureaucracy select and maintain effective leaders (Wilson, Dalton and Sheer, 2010). The suggestions provided here are important and help by providing an expanded view on the topic of retention and help by recommending ways in which a manager can be more effective in retaining employees.

Research Design

In the research design section, good methodology and data collection methods will be important. This study will include a qualitative research design that will focus on the processes and meanings. Since the data collected will be of qualitative form, it will be used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. The study will be a survey and collection of secondary data which will consist of journal articles, scholarly reviews, and books. As stated previously, in planning the data collection methods, this study will collect data from other literature that have relevance to retention and conduct qualitative interviews with county employees that have personal accounts on the quality of leadership provided to them. The survey will focus on how they feel that leadership affects the desires of employees to continue with the organization or leave to other employment options.

As part of the survey to be conducted, the survey respondents will be provided with prompts from which they can write out their thoughts. The survey will consist of the following questions:

1. What do you like the most about the leadership style of your current supervisor?

2. What do you like the least about the leadership style of your current supervisor?

3. Can you describe the leadership style of your current manager/ supervisor?

4. What leadership characteristics do feel are more efficient in bringing employee satisfaction?

5. How can management improve?

6. Can you describe the current culture of the agency in general?

After the collection of survey data, the results will be analyzed and compared with the current literature to validate the effectiveness of different leadership styles on the retention of Los Angeles County employees.

In anticipating limitations of my study, I anticipate to find challenges in finding access to respondents at county agencies. In order to find participants to my data collections I will need to consult with county administrators and local public officials. Other limitations to consider will be the use of secondary data. I will need to find data that is current and relevant within a topic that is scarce in research currently.

Ethical considerations will be an important part of the study. We will need to ensure the privacy of all respondents in our data collection design. The data collected will be stored and protected in a manner that cannot be disclosed without the consent of the individual respondents.

As stated previously, this inquiry will be very beneficial to the topic of public employee retention and will bring more research to the problem of employee turnover and loss of financial resources. The intent of this inquiry is to bring more support for the use of different approaches to the management of employee retention and turnover. As we have seen, the current research is not sufficient. Very little research has been conducted on the current strategies of retention practiced in the public sector. It would be very beneficial to everyone, both administrators and tax payers, to support research in this area since the objective should be to use financial resources very prudently and efficiently.

Conclusion

Through this critical review of the current literature on public employee retention, this study has found that management is very important to retention. The literature reviewed above suggests that employees want to have good incentives and good cultural climates in which to work in. The findings suggest that there are many dimensions to the problem of turnover and employee retention. The early assumptions were that retention is mostly affected by the hiring of low quality employees, poor pay, ineffective planning that precipitates losses and the assumption that the government cannot compete with the private sector, as mentioned by Crewson. We find that there are many more areas that an agency and management can focus on to mitigate employee turnover. Cultural values and psychological climates foster varying levels of commitment and retention among employees as it was stated by Sheridan. Organizational commitment has been found to impact job performance, motivation and the decreasing of absenteeism and turnover. Yet, other researchers have found that incentives are very important for retention. According to Ezra and Deckman, there is a change in public employee compensation preference. Employees now look for benefits related to work and family balance. Conversely, the arguments by Abelson and Baysinger present the idea that moderate levels of turnover are good for the organization because bringing in new employees with new ideas and by being better trained can be beneficial to the organization. Wilson, Dalton, Sheer, and Grammich also argue that turnover is both good and bad. Allowing agencies to rid themselves of poor performers helps the organization to advance, introduce new ideas and facilitate change.

In relation to management style, Kim, Egan, Kim and Kim have provided empirical evidence that managerial coaching behavior is beneficial by having a direct impact on employee satisfaction, role clarity, and by having an indirect impact on work, career commitment, organizational commitment and job performance. The work by Riccucci also suggests support for the coaching style in management. She states that managers must be fair, understanding, knowledgeable of politics, experts and must adapt their leadership style and behaviors to particular circumstances and situations. Other researchers such as Soonhee Kim support the benefits of a coaching style in management. He argues that both public and private sectors benefit from a participative management style because it improves satisfaction through better communication and results in job satisfaction. In Addition, the work by Hill, Seo, Kang and Taylor support the benefit of a transformational leadership style due to the satisfaction of employees in having a clear vision, charismatic leader, having an inspirational leader, having a leader that stimulates them intellectually and having a leader that is considerate of their individual needs and desires.

The results provided here support the argument that a participative coaching style would benefit the county in mitigating the problem of turnover and retention. The results suggest a benefit to having management that is attentive to the needs and desires of the employees, a management that is participative and involves employees, and a management style that has good communication with employees. There is much more that can be done to retain workers than to just focus on the common assumptions that the government only hires low quality employees, that poor pay drives workers out, and that the public sector cannot compete with the private sector. It would be beneficial to apply the recommendations here in taking a macro perspective of the turnover problem and to apply

more scientifically based solutions to the problem. The county can improve in retaining employees to mitigate financial loss and continue to be efficient in providing the services that it is mandated to provide. Most importantly, when the county's hiring process and allocation of funds for hiring are very tedious, better strategies should be sought to maintain the current workforce.

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