

Full Length Research Paper

Employees' reactance and survival strategies in an underperforming Zimbabwean parastatal

Peter Sibanda^{1*}, Emmanuel Mavenga¹, Langtone Maunganidze² and Farai Ncube¹

¹Department of Human Resource Management, Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe.

²Department of Sociology, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana.

Received 02September, 2013; Accepted 28 October, 2014

This research is an analysis of employees' survival strategies in an under-performing Zimbabwean parastatal. It argues that employees' survival strategies may evidence failure of an organisation to accommodate changing realities under conditions of distress. The prevailing economic conditions in Zimbabwe may discourage employees from switching jobs even though they are not paid by their employer so that they pursue compensatory actions to survive. This study is based on qualitative research conducted among employees in a Zimbabwean parastatal, which has been struck in perennial performance challenges resulting in its failure to consistently fulfil its obligations to employees as evidenced by delays in salary payments, acute shortages of tools and poor labour relations in general. Employees have resultantly resorted to alternative survival means, such as theft, fabricating leave, moonlighting, including refusal to leave company's accommodation facilities. They perceive that management is ignorant of their plights, and their interests in formal collective job actions are eroded as they seem to be flogging a dead horse. These employees' survival strategies are believed to drain the entity's depreciating resources, with the further milking likely to have ruinous consequences. Most of these strategies are pursued in subtle and unobservable ways to evade immediate management action.

Key words: Employees' reactance, employees' survival strategies, parastatal.

INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean economy experienced its most acute state of vulnerability recording an unprecedented hyperinflation rate of 231 million per cent (unofficial) in the world ever (Kadzere, 2008; Jongwe 2008). The World

Economic Outlook database and IMF (2008) Zimbabwe report that annual inflation ratios escalated from 56.9% in year 1999 to 489 000,000,000 in 2008. This economic outlook affected the nation dearly and significantly

*Corresponding author. E-mail: psibandafunhiro@gmail.com/psibanda@msu.ac.zw. Tel: +26354260677, Ext 266,+263772906050.

Authors agree that this article remain permanently open access under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

NON- STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS: NRZ - National Railways of Zimbabwe; POS – Perceived Organisational Support.

affected business operations (Chiboiwa et al., 2010). The public sector was hard hit, with a rushed privatisation or commercialisation of many public entities that quickly flooded the corporate Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the sector, coupled by a fast deteriorating infrastructure, shortages of foreign currency, poor service delivery and skills shortages among other things. This was tied to a decline in investments as a result of the political risks in the country, aggravated by sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe following the adoption of the heavily contested Land Reform program in 2000. Resultantly, many sectors were paralysed (though the size of the impact was in some instances industry specific), including the transport sector, which represents one of the key sectors in the economy. The introduction of the multi-currency regime in February 2009 was hoped to change the Zimbabwean economic landscape, raising hopes for some stability and predictability in the economy, with the consequence of allowing companies to plan for the future (Mugumisi, 2010). These were short-lived, however, as it became more and more difficult to secure the new currency and trade using it.

This study zeroed in on one organisation that was hard hit in the transport sector, the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ). The entity has since its inception operated as the sole provider of railway transport services in Zimbabwe. Its existence is, and has always been of strategic importance to the country's industry and economy, but has suffered in performance as a result of the socio economic and political environment (Kaminski and Francis, 2011). The various economic challenges in the Zimbabwean economy (Ncube et al., 2013) saw the organisation being overwhelmed by a number of liquidity and related challenges to replace and maintain its old infrastructure, including the obsolete rolling stock and civil tracks. NRZ, just like other related parastatals in Zimbabwe found itself in a dire position going for months without paying its employees in spite of hopes that had been brought by the 2009 dollarization policy in the ailing Southern Africa country. The parastatal used to provide an efficient freight service for the then viable, agricultural, mining, and industrial and energy sectors that required affordable bulk rail services for the movement of their inputs both locally and across the borders, hence it was viable. Following the closure of the then sole supplier of the bulk of machinery and spares to NRZ, More Ware Pvt. Ltd. and the economic challenges in the country, the highly capital and labour intensive entity has had to import most of these, which further eroded the hopes of immediate recovery and revival of performance. This was compounded by the scaling or closing down of operations by its major customers such as ZISCOSTEEL, Zim Alloys, tobacco farms (such as Mount Hampden), Cold Storage Commission, Bindura Nickel Mine, etc.

This is notwithstanding that the NRZ traditionally boasted of superior performance providing a blue-print on

people management for the transport sector in Zimbabwe and beyond. Its performance has fallen drastically, causing the entity to join the now flooded Zimbabwe's Corporate Intensive Care Unit (ICU). With freight services having fallen from 9 million tonnes per year to less than 4 million, coupled by a monthly wage bill consuming more than 86% of revenues for its more than 6,000 employees, compounded by acute shortages of both raw materials and spares, with antiquated machinery (where the company also accrues an average deficit of \$3 million monthly), NRZ has a very long history of underperformance which has culminated in massive delays in salary and wage remittances to employees among other things. The cash flow problems contributed to the NRZ's failure to meet its day to day operational requirements such as purchase of fuel, critical spares for locomotives and wagons and payment of salaries, accumulating salary arrears of nine months. These factors have severely threatened employees' survival and well-being, raising questions on how employees are surviving in the organisation and in explaining their level of interest alignment. The research identified reasons that made employees continue to go to work when they were not being paid consistently, which would ultimately result in establishing possible explanations and recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

Based on the norm of reciprocity and consistent with the psychological theory, the strength of the employees' obligations to the organisation and their willingness to fulfil them depend on their belief that the organisation has fulfilled its obligations to them (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2002). Extreme organisational circumstances such as those faced by NRZ can cause employees to behave in unusual or unexpected ways, particularly when these threaten their survival. If not addressed within manageable proportions, the consequence of these behaviours may end up paralysing the organisation, leading to the collapse of the employment relationship.

That industry contexts determine firm's performance has been confirmed (McGahan and Porter, 1997), demonstrating their endurance in giving an industry a distinctive nature (Ehlers and Lazenby, 2004), giving rise to opportunities and challenges to organizations (French and Bell, 1984). On the other hand, Ansoff (1985) argues that the political, economic, social cultural and technological changes may provide a favourable or unfavourable impact to the performance of an industry and may present threats or opportunities for businesses. It can be argued that these macro-factors have mightily influenced negatively the performance of the transport sector and NRZ specifically. In the same vein, antecedents of "best-fit" approaches to HR (Boxall and Purcell, 2003) have emphasised that as organisations respond to these

contexts, the influence of external integration of HRM in the HR-firm performance equation becomes critical, where it is argued that HR strategies should be linked with industry specifics/contexts in order to achieve external fit, which is an important ingredient in influencing organisational performance. This external fit becomes relevant particularly if the organisation is to adapt and co-evolve with the changing business contexts.

The major consequence of failure to adapt is the collision of organisations with changing realities, evidenced by a failure by organisations to achieve effectiveness. These may consequently have spill-over effects of, in this case of NRZ, failing to meet even the obligations of the employment relationship, including payments of remuneration. This has a direct effect on the perceptions that employees develop concerning their valuation of the organisation or the perceived organisational support (POS) (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employees' behaviours, particularly their reaction to actions of management as representatives of the organisation is greatly attributed to the level of POS. Conflict arises when employees perceive that the organisation is not supporting them enough or not sufficiently fulfilling its obligations. As Lepak and Snell (2010) in Desler (2013) asserted, employees make decisions regarding how to act at work based on which behaviours they believe will lead to their most valued work-related rewards and outcomes. In this vein, HR practices such as remuneration send strong messages about organizational expectations from employees and what employees can anticipate in return (Rousseau and Greller 1994; Guest, 1998; Bussin, 2011), or the employer's value proposition (EVP) and are major mechanisms employees use to understand the terms of their employment, which in turn impacts on their behaviours and organizational performance (Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni, 1994; Ahmad and Schroeder, 2003). Employee rewards moderate the relation between employees' performance and organisational performance (Kalleberg and Moody, 1994; Paauwe, 2004; Lepak and Gowan, 2010; Desler, 2013) as a result of aggregated employees' performance, where the later may be measured by such factors as product and service quality, profit, customers' satisfaction and business growth. This is supported by various researches (Huselid, 1995; Mathis and Jackson, 2004; Tsui et al., 1997) that rewards influence employees' attitudes and behaviours including performance, which is a reflection of their perceptions and expectations, reciprocating the treatment they receive from the organization.

Contextualising survival strategies in organisations

The concept of survival strategies can be analysed at two levels. On the one hand, the focus is on an organisation

as the unit of analysis. In this context, a survival strategy represents evidence of failure by an organisation to accommodate changing realities to the extent that the primary interest lies on the survival of the business. The organisation's effectiveness will have been threatened on such issues as goals, means, stakeholder satisfaction, strategy etc., as a consequence of accumulating fundamental error, which may then demand it to be reactive rather than proactive. When an organisation's survival is threatened, it is likely that people issues are compromised in adjustment attempts to avoid collision. As an organisation adjusts its purpose to match with changing business realities, employees may perceive that the original objectives are no longer clear and relevant, and individuals' commitment to the overall goals may end up diverging and diminishing. There is also likely to be a metamorphosis of the HRM function in organisations where HR strategies and initiatives are used as legitimising tools for the power of those with dominant values to be felt and to capacitate them to control resources, particularly in decisions pertaining to people adjustments. Whilst these are pursued in the best interest of 'the organisation', their effects on employees may be negative. Another key dimension of survival strategies, which was the focus of this research, may be at the level of employees in an organisation, what may be regarded as employees' survival strategies. Redcliff (1986) in Owusu (2000) defines employees' survival strategy as a deliberate economic act by people with the ultimate motivation to satisfy the most elementary human needs. This is a consequence of individuals' reaction to the threat of a survival strategy at an organisational level; that is how employees actively adjust to external stimuli (conflict situation), which equally threatens their livelihood. It also communicates displeasure in these acts on the part of the employees involved, where they are only doing it to make ends meet, and would ordinarily not do, or stop if the immediate survival threat is removed. The challenge often occurs when this grows to become an internalized characteristic of the individual, and a new normal.

Psychological reactance theory and employees' survival in organisations

Reactance theory has been identified as a social psychological theory that explains human behaviour in response to the perceived loss of freedom in an environment (Brehm, 1966). Central to this theory is that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction (Edwards et al., 2002). Reactance, it is assumed, is experienced as individuals respond to, or accommodate the change in the environment, which ultimately helps them re-establish the freedom and control of a situation. When an individual's freedom is threatened, that

individual attempts to restore the freedom by exhibiting opposition or resisting pressures to conform (Brehm and Brehm, 1981). Similarly, when survival of employees is threatened in an organisation, they are most likely going to react by way of developing coping mechanisms, also called employee survival strategies in order to restore a freedom of control in their situation. Employees in organisations interpret organisational underperformance actively and consequently react against the threat of underpayment or non-payment in order to sustain the freedom of controlling their lives in and beyond the workplace. The corollary to this argument is the concept of *'fulfilment incongruence'* (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; 2004), which occurs when employees and employers hold opposing views of how either party was fulfilling their obligations to one another. Organisations that survive are those that successfully managed this state. One of the effects of fulfilment incongruence is wastage of resources, conflict and tension and subsequently reduced productivity which are all antecedents of organisational vulnerability.

In the light of the above, the primary purpose of the research was to analyse and explain the behaviours of employees in an organisation (NRZ) that is underperforming to the extent that survival of employees is threatened. These behaviours explain employees' survival strategies, where our focus is on individual employees who are threatened by the failure of an organisation to meet its obligations (particularly payment of salaries and wages), and where the concerned employees are not motivated to leave the respective organisation for 'supposed' greener pastures. To this end, the researchers investigated the performance challenges faced by the organisation, and then went on to establish how this performance affected employees. Attempts were then made to establish and explain the actions employees are engaging to mitigate their situations whilst simultaneously airing their dissatisfaction at work, and how these actions in turn motivate employees. The impacts of those adopted survival strategies on the performance of the NRZ were then assessed.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was mainly qualitative in nature, taking a case study design. This has the merits of providing a contextual analysis of events and their interrelation (Cooper and Schiendler, 2000). The study focused on six Bulawayo Urban departments, with a total staff establishment of 367 employees wherein 37 subjects were purposively selected. Purposive sampling was made to attempt to gather data from subjects that have spent more than five continuous years in the employ of the parastatal and therefore had handy experience of the challenges in the NRZ. The other purpose was to deliberately involve both managerial and shop-floor employees so as to avoid a level-based misspecification. Primary data were collected through the use of semi-structured and in-depth

interviews as well as moments of unstructured observation. Researchers observed participants in their work environment to gain a deeper understanding of their 'ordinary' daily routines at work. These were complemented by a content analysis of secondary sources such as company documentation, to include the Railways Act, Railways Payroll Manual, exit interviews and Strategic Plan handbooks and HR Reports. A thematic approach to data analysis was used in analysing data collected. Braun and Clarke (2006:79) define thematic analysis as "a qualitative analytic method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". This included a series of stages in the direction of Braun and Clarke (2006) assertion that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of paternal response or meaning within the data. The first step was to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns then information that fits under specific pattern is identified and placed with the corresponding pattern, as well as combining and cataloguing related patterns into sub-themes. Themes were identified by bringing together components of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone (Leininger, 1985) and then finally, building a valid argument for choosing the themes. Such themes are obtained by reading the related literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We attempt to explain the challenges faced by the NRZ and how they affected employees. We also attempt to answer the question; why do employees in the parastatal continue to go to work even though conditions do not permit? We conclude in illuminating the implications on workplace relations and management practices. Our argument is that these survival strategies of employees should be located in a context, as dependant on certain organisational conditions even though we do not specifically measure the correlates. We observed that NRZ challenges were largely triggered by the commercialization of the entity (in 2000), which was associated with the government's withdrawal of its financial support to the parastatal. Beer (2001) regards commercialisation as part of strategic management decision that involves a government department being given the autonomy to trade as a private company yet be still accountable and owned by the government. This government withdrawal from funding the parastatals has been blamed for being part of the neo-liberal policies/discourse influenced by the Economic and Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) of the 90s. Zimbabwe government is believed to have found itself as a victim of these 'anti-state' policies, which aimed at side-lining the state/government from active participation in economic issues. This had negative impact on overall performance of the NRZ and its capacity to achieve desired goals. Of course as a public institution, the goals of NRZ are not easily defined, but characterised by a very complex set of stakeholders with very different, complex, multiple and often vague interests (including political ones) which makes it difficult to delineate the specific goals of the

public sector organisation (Gottschalg and Zollo, 2007). According to Raftopoulos and Sachikonye (2000), the public sector of Zimbabwe is a direct or indirect creation of the politics of the land and from inception; these organisations have political goals to fulfil and embedded within them are also a lot of products of politics. This makes it a challenge to locate the dominant values that determine the direction of the organisation in terms of building a consensus on the goals of the entity.

As a creature of statute, the Railways Act Chapter 13:09 of 1980 provides that the NRZ is mandated to provide, operate and maintain an efficient system of public transportation of inputs; semi-finished and finished products of the productive sectors of the economy. As a result of its commercialisation, NRZ was expected to sustain itself through funding maintenance and rehabilitation of its infrastructure and locomotives, which was a costly exercise as traditionally it was subsidised. This affected the state of track system and fitness levels of rolling stock to be able to transport freight without delays caused by derailments and low train speeds due to speed cautions, thereby affecting the organization's capacity to generate revenue through its freight core business. This has been compounded by the liberalization of the Zimbabwean economy, particularly the transport sector where road haulage has emerged as a strong alternative mode of transport in direct competition with the NRZ, resulting in a railway freight decline from about 9 million tonnes in 2007 to less than 4 million tonnes per annum in 2009. The decline continued thereafter. The general reduction in business activity in the country, coupled by unreliable railway service (due to a deterioration of railway infrastructure and assets as a result of lack of maintenance and periodic rehabilitation of the track, which has in turn resulted in accidents and derailments) has created an opportunity for road transport providers that charge higher fares but are faster and reliable. Notably, there has also been a substantial flight of key staff. The Restructuring and Recovery in Railway Services Report (2009) reveals that in year 2000 the NRZ had 9 420 employees and by 2012 the number had declined to 7 602 as a substantial number of employees joined other railway bodies in the region and abroad. What makes this natural wastage unnatural is the level of employees leaving, the critical ones, who then get absorbed by competitor and other organisations.

One major reason leading to such an alarming rate of turnover is that the NRZ has been struggling to pay employees since the adoption of the multi-currency system in 2009, largely due to its poor financial position. Mutizwa's (2012) characteristics of most Zimbabwean organisations post the introduction of the multi-currency system in 2009 would be apt to describe the NRZ situation, including its loss of competitiveness, severely damaged balance sheet characterized by thin capitalization and impaired or obsolete assets, cost structures

totally misaligned with the size of business with overheads growing faster than revenues, liquidity crunch and inadequate management capability compounded by political meddling by policy makers. The establishment accrued salary arrears (of almost 10 months) that led to a nationwide strike in August 2011 by employees in a bid to compel management to commit themselves to paying employees their outstanding salaries and allowances. To date, this issue is to be finished. In the same vein, the NRZ has been inconsistent in remitting RAIMED and RHCBS funds hence affecting the availability of doctors and drugs in NRZ hospitals and clinics. This has pushed the welfare costs up for its employees who at the same time are thriving for survival, now with an additional medical insurance cost.

Owing to the continued underperformance of the NRZ, The New Ziana of Wednesday, 19 January 2011 indicated that the Government indicated its intentions to open up the rail sector which is facing collapse due to deepening challenges at the National Railways of Zimbabwe, currently burdened with a myriad of challenges including depleted fleet and ballooning recapitalisation costs, at the time estimated at about US\$274 million. The parastatal was also said to be battling to restore the railways network, half of which the World Bank had recommended for closure after deeming it to be dysfunctional. The then Minister of State Enterprises and Parastatals, Gordon Moyo indicated that the Government was considering a range of policies that included privatisation as efforts to turn around the sector. He mentioned that a committee comprising officials from the Ministry of Transport, the State Enterprises Restructuring Agency and the NRZ board was put in place to investigate and come up with recommendations on how to restore viability in a sector critical to the performance of the economy.

The NRZ management put in place various attempts strategies to arrest the challenges facing the organization including the establishment of a Joint Management Committee (Measures Committee) to consider measures of dealing with organization operational challenges. The committee, which constitutes management and employee representatives, is also used as a platform for information exchange and employee voice in general. These are known to be very instrumental in integrating stakeholders' interests (Rognes et al., 2010; Armstrong, 2011). Although this move was taken on the eleventh hour, it is believed that the engagement of employees as strategic stakeholders in the corporate governance and management issues in the ailing entity would go a long way.

Survival challenges of NRZ employees as a result of under-performance

The under-performance of NRZ at the moment generally

gives it less freedom to act, resulting in a failure to meet most of its commitments, including remunerating its workforce. Employee survival on the NRZ is affected by the entity's poor performance that has led to an erratic payment of remuneration, leading to the disengagement of employees. This is against the background that improper management of rewards affects employees' satisfaction (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2003) resulting in organizational conflict. Voorde et al. (2011) argue that when the survival of employees is guaranteed, it translates to the improvement of the wellbeing (happiness and relationships) of workers and eventually the organization's performance relationships.

Shop-floor respondents indicated that NRZ employees faced challenges such as, inability to pay rentals, school fees, bills and medical fees. Salary challenges led to the evacuation of employees from their lodgings, forcing a greater part of them to occupy the company's premises in retaliation to its failure to honour payment of rewards. Management was forced to consider this as exoneration to the crisis. Most employees have now resorted to walking to and fro work as they cannot afford the transport fare and the company does not provide alternate transport arrangements. Marriages have disintegrated as some employees fail to provide and sustain their families. When an employer fails to pay employee their due, the impact goes to the immediate...and extended family, with the latter being likely huge, considering the Zimbabwean values attached to an extended family.

Exit interview data showed that employees who left the organization cited unpredictable payment of salaries as one of the major reasons for resigning. The NRZ has been experiencing a high turnover rate of critical staff, having failed to honour the payment of the critical skills allowance that was introduced as a retention strategy over and above the agreed basic salary. Of course, such a turnover evidences the failure of the organisation to accommodate changing realities. In the short run, such challenges affect the labour relations climate of the organisation by increasing levels of social strain and ultimately, reducing employees' productivity. This has had the consequence of having management commit a lot of resources and energies to conflict management strategies. On the other hand, these challenges affect stress levels of employees, causing them to pursue compensatory entrepreneurial actions to get even and in this case, by using company's resources. In the long run, the increase in the rate of turnover for critical staff represents fresh challenges (in terms of replacement costs) on how the organization will attract such rare talented employees to keep it operational.

There was a general consensus amongst respondents that the payment of salaries and benefits at NRZ was inconsistent and that the organisation was 10 months behind in terms of its commitments to these, over and

above the other cumulative arrears in unpaid overtime and allowances. It was also indicated that the employer unilaterally slashed salaries from 55% to 75% of employees' net salaries, depending on job grades in 2013. At the same time, health and safety concerns of employees were generally ignored. Resultantly, employees have struggled to make ends meet, being unable to pay rentals, fees for their children, with some landlords expressing reluctance to offer accommodation to NRZ employees. This is only normal considering the employees have a very long history of underpayment or non-payment, unless of course one is accommodating them on a humanitarian basis. The situation also attracted a lot of media attention, raising interest at various levels about the looming disaster in the parastatal. Overall, this makes the employees feel the company is treating them like third-class citizens. Such an environment creates reduced POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and increased fulfilment incongruence (Morrison and Robinson, 2004) which are both seeds of conflict and tension. It has created a lot of uncertainty to employees, generating a decrease in their levels of interest alignment and engagement. Employees feel their concerns are not given priority and they are only considered relevant when the parastatal is running well. Mathis and Jackson's (2004) argued that compensation is one of the most important HRM practices given to employees to show that they are valued by the organization in which they are members, which would also eventually shape their attitudes and behaviours (including performance). Tsui et al. (1997) posited that employees retaliate to the treatment they get from the organization that they work for if they perceive such treatment to be unfair and this would affect productivity. It essentially confirms Barbash's (1979) observation that *"...the work society set(s) and maintain(s) a level of output or earnings which corresponds to the value the members place upon their efforts within existing conditions and pay and...the worker knows the conditions of the markets in which he sells and delivers his labour, and his policies are dictated by the practical necessity of avoiding overproduction..."* When employees perceive inequity as to the distribution or, availability of rewards, as in this case, they are likely to get motivated to engage in various compensatory behaviours to create equilibrium.

Employees' survival strategies in the NRZ

Behaviours of employees, their productivity and discretionary efforts at work are more a result of their values, and how they interpret the environment in which they survive, rather than the rules and prescriptions set by management. Resultantly, when they perceive that management does not care about them, they are likely to replace their traditional reality with the new reality, which

Table 1. Trends in unpaid vacation leave (UVL).

Yr	No. of workers on UVL	Working days lost	Hr of work
2010	23	226	1808
2011	35	331	2648
2012	123	1158	9264
Total	181	1715	13720

Table 2. Trends on sick leave.

Period	No. of days lost on S.L	Hr lost
2010-2012	332	2395

ultimately explains a change in employee behaviour. When NRZ employees come to work every day, management gets the impression that employees are satisfied, or have a hope for a turn of fortunes of the railway giant, but instead, the behaviours of some employees is explainable in the context of the existence of opportunities for theft, running private businesses and the management of small crimogenic institutions that sustain them overtime. Under such scenarios, even management is easily misled by statistic and fails to make informed and sound HR decisions; for example, where a lot of semi-skilled to unskilled employees have remained.

We discovered that the environmental circumstances that affected NRZ have created a condition where the dominant values of employees in the distressed organisation are incentives (employees' personal entrepreneurial activities that they engage in to complement their incomes, or essentially 'beat the system'). In this case, we conclude that an analysis of the changing realities may not be sufficient unless it also factors that workers are also changing as a result of the changing environments in which they work. A distressed organisation such as NRZ is likely to breed a lot of those rogue employees or agitators, who are high risk takers, innovative, and also change barriers in a system. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, the researchers investigated the various behaviours that employees display as a result of their dissatisfaction at work. Various aspects of the workplace were assessed, that could put pointers to the survival strategies.

Trends in terms of Vacation Leave - An analysis of the Personnel Payroll Manual was made to determine the trends in terms of staff absence by skilled employees. Findings reveal that the number of skilled personnel going on unpaid vacation leave was increasing since 2010 (Table 1).

Given that the organisation has not been paying its employees consistently, such an increase in the number

of UVL occurrences could be largely influenced by the employees temporarily opting out so that they look for profitable activities whilst still in the employ of the company, what has often been termed moonlighting. In other words, their availability at work would not improve the situation hence the need to get even by reducing their effort at work. Reward is one of the most critical elements that lead to HR outcomes such as employees' presence, trust, loyalty and commitment (Paauwe and Richardson, 1997). Therefore if employees realize that their efforts are not rewarded they may decide to go on unpaid vacation leave mainly to work for other organizations during the unpaid vacation period. Such a habitual pattern of voluntary absenteeism is a clear signal that employees have lost trust and commitment to the organization and would want to push additional costs to the employer to communicate their frustration. The employers may in some cases have to incur the cost of hiring temporary staff to provide cover.

Trends in terms of sick leave - Although sick leave is involuntary absenteeism it is the pattern of sick absence that raises suspicion that employees might be fabricating sick leave in order to get time to pursue other income generating activities as exoneration. An analysis of NRZ Personnel Payroll Manual Reports showed that trends for unskilled employees' sick leave have been increasing from year 2012 (Table 2).

On the one hand, this may be a sign that employees are using unorthodox means to create time to do their part time activities and supplement their inconsistently provided income. Employees respond to economic challenges they will be facing by finding other ways of survival. On the other hand, if these trends represent genuine sickness, then we can possibly explain the sickness as being largely induced by pressures of the workplace (stress related illnesses), ranging from insecurity about employment, to uncertainties on availability of pay, to capacity to fend for families without a steady income. These statistics, at a closer look leave a lot to be desired, particularly if analysed in tandem with length of service. Whilst length of service may in many instances be used as a measure of employees' satisfaction, it becomes a different phenomenon when there is a high level of loyalty even when the organisation is failing to meet its salary commitments. It may be

explained by the level of skills of the loyal, where perhaps some employees (especially shop-floor) have limited options.

Ironically, in spite of these challenges facing the company, the NRZ Personnel Payroll Manual Report of January 2013 showed that NRZ has a total of 6 609 employees who are more than five years in employment. One then wonders what keeps these employees in the company, which is failing to fulfil a now hygiene factor for basic survival. Lepak and Gowan (2010) cited in Desler (2013) argue that incentives influence employees on the job, other factors such as hope, job security, status that one is working, length of service and flexibility may motivate employees to remain with the organization. However, in some cases employees may continue working for an organization out of desperation especially if they do not have competitive skills and if the job market cannot provide alternative employment. They seek alternative survival means so they can afford to remain with the organization, surviving on the organization's resources, whilst taking time to nurse their pensions. Or alternatively, on a positive note, their stay in the company could be a clear indicator of their hope and believe in the company's future.

Interestingly, an analysis of the company's HR Annual statistical reports show that the number of employees who retired and accepted re-engagement has been increasing between 2008 and 2011. A total of one hundred and forty six (146) retired employees were re-engaged between 2008 and 2011. The acceptance of re-engagement by retired employees means that there are other alternative sources of survival employees engage in at NRZ despite the performance challenges that have impacted on the organization's capacity to remunerate employees. This could be further jeopardizing the organization's survival chances.

Time spent working - When employees spend their time at work without being occupied, they engage in entrepreneurial activities at work, such as welding their own items and typing their own work using company's resources. The NRZ has lost more resources this way. The research revealed that employees do not always spend their time doing specified duties. This may be evidence that they will be doing their own private work using the organization's resources as they will be seeking survival. As the NRZ sometimes run short of stationery and spare parts it becomes clear that employees are not always working, hence may take it as an opportunity to engage in their private businesses. Others even go for evening jobs elsewhere or weekend jobs where they get a reasonable income. This is also against the background of what respondents believed to be the huge pay differences between the lowest and the highest paid employee in the company, which may cause those who feel they are lowly paid to engage in alternative survival

strategies in order to equalize with their fellow workmates, particularly considering that differentials have no link with effort/performance. This issue has sparked public outrage in what has become known as 'Salarygate' scandals, which emerged following the publication of executive perks for some senior leaders in a number of parastatals and local authorities in 2013 and 14. The scandals have renege debates as to how executive compensation is determined in the public sector, particularly in parastatals and the quasi-government, what issues are considered in determining executive pay, whether merit matters, and how company performance, haemorrhaging economy, failed strategies, corruption etc. may be linked to the compensation of executives. Employees in the NRZ had also a strong feeling that there was a world of gap between the lowest and the highest paid employee, which was not only unjustifiable, but aggravating the ailments of the parastatal. Under these circumstances, employees would engage in alternative survival means in order to reduce this pay gap. In these conditions, and consistent with arguments by Kuhn (1961) and Fortado (2001) employees may be forced to employ own mechanisms to deal with conflict when management actions are deemed to have failed by employees. Some of the employees' behaviours may be functional copying mechanisms, or in other circumstances so damaging to management-employee relations but generally, the rationale for employees is to create leverage, normally at a premium to the organisation. Some sections of management, findings reveal, are fully aware of these employee survival strategies but argue that they serve to protect the company's position and would not ordinarily want to frustrate that.

Besides the aforementioned, employees traditionally rely on collective actions to exercise their power and voice their concerns, but eventually seem to be flogging a dead horse. Research findings showed that employees have reacted to NRZ's failure to address their concerns through various ways; including absence, collective job action, vandalization of property and pilferage. Other ways include retaliation to management decisions (for example, active resistance against eviction attempts from some NRZ's premises), collective job action (endless demonstrations amid countless negotiations that do not materialise into improvement of conditions of service). Of course, a lot of these collective actions were associated with a quick management response, as is the 'normal' case in Zimbabwe, to define them as illegal, according to prevailing legislation. Thereafter, little efforts would be put on checking on the reasonability of these so that they would attract immediate attention. On the other hand, some employees were said to be involved in theft, working in cohorts with criminals in the looting of company's property including electrical cables that resultantly paralysed the electric train availability.

The Overhead Catenary Systems Equipment (OCSE),

the electrified section between Harare and Dabuka was decommissioned as a result of theft of copper wire and transformer equipment resulting in the halting of the use of electric locomotives. On the other hand, theft of copper cables also led to the disablement of the signalling and communication system for trains control and movement, resulting in the NRZ reverting to its traditional archaic methods of train control and movement such as the paper order system. These are alleged to delay train movements, have a potential to increase the occurrences of accidents since they largely depend on human aptitude and memory. Allegations of indiscipline, corruption and mismanagement on the part of management also explain how they at their level, have also pursued their own survival strategies. Therefore this means that employees had a contribution to the organization's under-performance, which includes failure to transport the available freight in the economy. The NRZ experiences huge expenses that exceed revenue inflows and the major contributor to expenditure are salaries that amount to 86% of the total revenue generated. According to Redclift (1986) in Owusu (2000) employees deliberately engage in economic acts to satisfy their needs if the organization is unable to provide them with survival means. Such survival activities lead to the subordination of organizational goals hence contributing to the underperformance of the enterprise.

By and large, the solution to the performance of the ailing transport giant transcends NRZ's internal management controls. Of course this is beyond the scope of this paper (but is likely to be at a policy level), but we picked that the entity has failed to detect corporate sickness and take early pre-emptive action. The deterioration of the organisation has reached an advanced stage giving the organisation very limited options, which include government's intervention. The NRZ may need to involve employees directly or indirectly in order to enhance the quality of decisions. Employees' involvement and partnership is critical in problem solving and improves organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB). Employees feel that management must encourage employees to participate in company's affairs. Managerial employees felt that on the one hand, management and labour need to partner in finding common solutions to organizational challenges and to come up with an HR strategy to control expenditure especially HR costs, while on the other hand, they echoed the need for employees' participation and performance management that is supported by a sound reward management system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unexpressed employees' emotions do not necessarily die, but are stored only to be used in generally unobservable ways. These have long term consequences in terms of

having the effect of indirectly evading management's immediate attention and strategic traction. It then becomes difficult to tell how the organisation is losing as a result of its poor employee relations pulse. Evidence from research shows that the organization's inability to reward employees has caused them to seek alternative survival means, the majority of which negatively impact on NRZ's performance. These employees' initiatives, which ultimately reflect a very low level of interest alignment, become internalised characteristics of individuals hence worsening the already corrupt system. Whilst under normal circumstances, an organisation can experience employee riotous behaviours, the research identified that whenever there are opportunities to use the company resources for personal gains, these may provide a temporal avenue for employees, which ultimately has the consequence of delaying those industrial actions to certain levels. Employees' experiences of economic challenges are not the same as corporate. They are most likely to be hit harder because of their limited opportunities to seek alternative source of survival. During periods of economic hardships it is more common for organizations to adopt cost cutting measures in order to contain expenditure. However, when these measures cause a decline or delay in employee pay and benefits, they only motivate employees to engage in intra-preneurial activities that satisfy selves rather than the organisation. A Shona idiom '*mbudziinodyapayakasungirirwa*' (to mean a goat eats where it is tied up) explains how employees are resourceful and flexible, so that the survival strategies they follow to get out of any crises are sensible responses to contingencies. These survival strategies then cause productivity to suffer, especially when employees stay idle for long periods. This means HR and IR practitioners need to think '*post-normal*' to manage a psychological contract under environmental uncertainty. So is the need to look beyond traditionally observable and measurable indicators of the industrial relations pulse, to consider the subtle actions. Ultimately, employees' concerns and interests should remain primary. Finally, industrial relations affect productivity and employees' performance significantly as conflict drains a lot of energies and resources out of the organisation.

Indicators of social strain such as industrial conflicts and various employee behaviours; from strikes to sabotage; may be undertaken by employees to generally increase the cost to a company because money is not coming to them. Therefore, all indicators associated with costs should be investigated by HR and analysed in order to make an informed position for relevant decision making.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad S, Schroeder RG (2003). The impact of human resource management practices on operational performance: recognizing country and industry differences, *J. Operat. Manage.* 21:19-43.
- Armstrong M (2011). *A Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice*. Kogan Page Limited. London.
- Barbash J (1979). *Job satisfaction attitude surveys*. Paris, France: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- Beer M (2001). How to develop an organization capable of sustained high performance: Embrace the drive for results-capability development paradox, *Organizational Dynamics*, 29:597-619.
- Boxall P, Purcell J (2003). *Strategy and Human Resource Management*. Palgrave MacMillan. London.
- Braun V, Clarke V (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitat. Res. Psychol.* 3:77-101. ISSN 0952-8229
- Brehm JW (1966). *A theory of psychological reactance*. New York: Academic Press.
- Brehm SS, Brehm JW (1981). *Psychological reactance: A theory of freedom and control*. New York: Academic Press.
- Bussin M (2011). *The Remuneration Handbook for Africa*. Knowres Publishers. Johannesburg.
- Chiboiwa MW, Samuel MO, Chipunza C (2010). An examination of employee retention strategy in a private organisation in Zimbabwe. *Afr. J. Bus. Man.* 4(10):2103-2109
- Cooper D, Schindler N (2000). *Business Research Methods*. Seventh Edition. McGraw-Hill. Singapore.
- Coyle-Shapir JAM, Kessler I (2002). Exploring reciprocity through the lens of the psychological contract: Employee and Employer perspectives. *Eur. J. Work Org. Psych.* 11:69-86
- Desler G (2013). *Human Resource Management*. Thirteenth Edition. Pearson Education. Limited Essex.
- Edwards SM, Li H, Lee J (2002). Forced Exposure and Psychological Reactance: Antecedents and Consequences of the Perceived Intrusiveness of Pop-up Ads. *J. Advert.* 31(3):83-95.
- Ehlers T, Lazenby K (2004). *Strategic Management: Southern African Concepts and Cases*. Van Schaik. Publishers. Pretoria.
- Eisenberger R, Jones JR, Aselage J, Sucharski IL (1986). Perceived Organisational Support, In Coyle, J.A-M; Shore, L.M Taylor, M.S and Tetrick. L.R (Ed) 2004 *The Employment Relationship: Examining Psychological and Contextual Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.206-225.
- French WL, Bell CH (1984). *Organization Development: Behavioral Science Interventions for Organization Improvement*, Third ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ Prentice Hall.
- Furtado C (2001). *Criatividade e Dependência*. São Paulo: Cia. das Letras.
- Gottschalg O, Zollo M (2007). Interest alignment and competitive advantage. *Acad. Manage. Rev.* 32:418-437.
- Guest DE (1998). Is the psychological contract worth taking seriously? *J. Organ. Behav.* 19:649-664.
- Huselid MA (1995). The impact of human resource management practices on turnover, productivity and corporate financial performance. *Acad. Manage. J.* 38:635-672. <http://amj.aom.org/content/38/3/635>
- International Monetary Fund (2008). *Economy of Zimbabwe: World Economic outlook Database*.
- Jongwe F (2008). "Zimbabwe Inflation Soars to 231 Million Per cent: The Herald. 29 January 2009.
- Kadzere M (2008). "Zimbabwe: Inflation Soars". The Herald. 9 October 2008.
- Kalleberg AL, Moody JW (1994). Human resource management and organisational performance. *Am. Behav. Scientist* 37:948-962.
- Kaminski B, Francis N (2011) "Zimbabwe's Foreign Trade Performance during the Decade of Economic Turmoil. Will Exports Recover?" http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRANETTRADE/Resources/239054-1239120299171/5998577-1254498644362/6461208-1300202947570/Zimbabwe_Trade_Diagnostic.pdf
- Kuhn JW (1961). *Bargaining in grievance settlement: The power of industrial workgroups*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Leininger MM (1985). Ethnography and ethnography: Models and modes of qualitative data analysis. In: M. M. Leininger (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in nursing* (pp.33-72). Orlando, FL: Grune & Stratton.
- Lepak DP, Snell SA (2010). *The Human Resource Architecture: Toward a Theory of Human Capital Allocation and Development*. Acad. Man. Rev. 24.
- Mathis RL, Jackson JH (2004). *Human Resource Management*. Thomson Asia Press, Singapore.
- McGahan AM, Porter ME (1997). How Much Does Industry Matter, Really?, Special Issue: Organizational & Competitive Interactions (Jul., 1997): *Strat. Man. J.* 18:15-30
- Morrison EW, Robinson S (2004). The Employment Relationship from Two Sides: Incongruence in Employees' and Employers' Perceptions of Obligations. In Coyle JAM; Shore, LM Taylor, MS and Tetrick LR (Ed) 2004 *The Employment Relationship: Examining Psychological and Contextual Perspectives*. pp.206-225. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ncube F, Sibanda P, Maunganidze L (2013). The Competitive Advantages of Organisations in Zimbabwe's Hospitality Industry: A Case of Two Organisations. *JETEMS* 4(3):328-336.
- Owusu F (2000). *Livelihood Strategies, Economic Reform and Public Institutions. The tale of two medium sized towns in Ghana*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Minnesota.
- Paauwe J (2004). *HRM and Performance: Achieving Long Term Viability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paauwe J, Richardson R (1997). 'Introduction Special Issue on HRM and Performance', *Int. J. Hum. Resour. Manage.* 3(8):257-262.
- Raftopoulos B, Sachikonye L (2001). *Striking Back: The Labour Movement and the Post-colonial State in Zimbabwe, 1980-2000*. Harare: Weaver Press 27:316. ISBN 978-0-7974-2286-5.
- Rognes JK, Schei V (2010). "Understanding the Integrative Approach to Conflict Management". *J. Man.* 25(1):82-97.
- Rothwell WJ, Kazanas HC (2003). *Planning and Managing Human Resources*. HRD Press Inc. Massachusetts.
- Rousseau DM, Greller MM (1994). Human resource practices: Administrative contract makers. *Hum. Res. Manage.* 33(3):385-401.
- Rousseau DM, Wade-Benzoni KA (1994). Linking strategy and human resource practices: How employee and customer contracts are created. *Hum. Resour. Manage.* 33(3):463-489.
- Tsui AS, Pearce JL, Porter LW, Tripoli AM (1997). Alternative Approaches to the Employee- Organization Relationship: Does Investment in Employees pay off?. *Acad. Man. J.* 40.
- Voorde KV, Paauwe J, Veldhoven MV (2011). "Employee Well-being and the HRM-Organizational Performance Relationship: A Review of Qualitative Studies. *Int. J. Manage. Rev.* Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Oxford.

CITATIONS

- The NRZ Personnel Payroll Manual Report. September (2012).
- The Portfolio Committee on Transport and Infrastructural Development Report on the Operations of National Railways of Zimbabwe: 2012.
- The Railways Act Chapter 13: 09. (1980).
- Zimbabwe Report on Restructuring and Recovery in Railway Services. (2009).