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MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN THE CULINARY INDUSTRY IN SEMARANG: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This study explores management strategies used to retain employees in the culinary industry in Semarang, Indonesia. The study is motivated by the labor-intensive nature of culinary businesses, where employee continuity is closely related to service quality, operational stability, and the preservation of organizational knowledge. Previous hospitality research has identified compensation, supportive work environments, career development, leadership, employee well-being, and work meaning as relevant dimensions of retention. However, less is known about how these dimensions are combined into practical retention strategies in culinary businesses operating in an Indonesian urban context. This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach. Data are planned to be collected through semi-structured interviews with culinary business owners, managers, supervisors, and employees in Semarang who have direct experience with employee retention practices. The data will be analyzed thematically through familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation. The study focuses on how managers understand employee turnover, which retention practices they implement, how employees perceive those practices, and what organizational conditions encourage employees to remain. The findings are expected to provide an empirically grounded understanding of retention strategies that can be applied by culinary businesses with different levels of organizational resources.

Keywords: *employee retention, management strategy, culinary industry, hospitality, qualitative study*

I. INTRODUCTION

The culinary industry is a labor-intensive service sector in which employees play a direct role in shaping customers' experiences and the continuity of daily operations. Unlike many back-office settings, culinary businesses depend on employees who interact with customers, prepare products, maintain service standards, and coordinate activities under time

pressure. Employee turnover can therefore create operational disruptions, increase recruitment and training requirements, and weaken service consistency. Recent hospitality literature continues to identify employee retention as a significant managerial challenge, particularly because the sector is characterized by demanding work conditions and changing employee expectations [7], [15].

Retention is not determined by a single managerial practice. Recent studies indicate that employees' decisions to remain may be related to organizational support, compensation and benefits, work design, career development, leadership, social relationships, job identity, and the meaning employees attach to their work [4], [9], [2]. In hospitality, employee experiences are also influenced by interactions with supervisors, coworkers, and customers. Positive social exchanges may strengthen motivation and reduce employees' intention to leave [5].

The post-pandemic labor environment has further encouraged hospitality organizations to reconsider how work is designed and how employees are supported. Bansal et al. [2], for example, found through qualitative interviews with hospitality managers that job and work redesign can contribute to employee well-being and retention. Meanwhile, Akosa et al. [1] emphasize that career experiences in hospitality are shaped by individual, organizational, and sociocultural factors. These findings suggest that retention strategies should be examined as a combination of managerial practices rather than as an isolated human resource policy.

Although the hospitality retention literature is growing, research specifically examining how culinary businesses in Indonesian cities construct and implement employee retention strategies remains limited. Existing studies frequently focus on hotels or use quantitative approaches. Qualitative research can provide a different contribution because it allows researchers to explore how managers explain their decisions and how employees interpret retention practices in their everyday work. This is particularly relevant for culinary businesses, where formal human resource systems may differ substantially across establishments.

Semarang provides a relevant setting for examining this issue because its culinary sector includes restaurants, cafés, food outlets, and other food-service businesses with diverse organizational structures. The present study therefore asks: (1) How do culinary business managers in Semarang understand employee retention and turnover? (2) What management strategies are used to encourage employees to remain? (3) How do employees perceive the effectiveness and fairness of these strategies? and (4) What organizational conditions influence employees' decisions to stay?

The objective of this study is to explore management strategies for employee retention in the culinary industry in Semarang and to understand these strategies from both managerial

and employee perspectives. The study is expected to contribute to the hospitality and human resource management literature by providing contextual qualitative evidence from an Indonesian culinary setting.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employee Retention in Hospitality and Culinary Work

Employee retention refers to organizational efforts and conditions that encourage employees to remain with an organization over time. In hospitality, retention is particularly important because employee turnover can affect service continuity, organizational knowledge, recruitment costs, and the quality of customer interactions. A recent review of hospitality turnover literature organizes antecedents across individual, team, and organizational levels, demonstrating that turnover is influenced by multiple interconnected factors rather than one isolated variable [8].

Research on hospitality careers also shows that retention is connected to employees' perceptions of career prospects and professional identity. King et al. [7] argue that attraction and retention in hospitality should be considered through multiple levels of identity, including individual, organizational, and professional influences. Le et al. [9] further show that job pride and meaning of work can be relevant to turnover intention, indicating that retention can involve both extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions.

2.2 Management Strategies for Employee Retention

Management strategies for retention may include compensation and benefits, supportive supervision, recognition, training, career development, communication, work redesign, and employee well-being. Evidence from hospitality research suggests that pay and benefit satisfaction is associated with turnover intentions, while perceived organizational support can help explain this relationship [4]. At the same time, retention cannot be reduced to financial rewards because employees also respond to social and organizational experiences.

Career development is another important dimension. Akosa et al. [1] identify career dissatisfaction and turnover as continuing challenges in hospitality and propose an integrated view that connects individual, organizational, and sociocultural factors. Similarly, research on hospitality employees across career stages indicates that career commitment can change over time and that occupational self-efficacy, family support, and organizational commitment can shape these trajectories [14].

Work environment and job design are also relevant. Bansal et al. [2] show that redesigning jobs and work arrangements can support employee well-being and retention. Positive guest-employee interactions may also satisfy employees' social needs and contribute to their willingness to remain [5]. These findings support an approach in which retention is understood as a bundle of organizational practices experienced by employees in their daily work.

2.3 Conceptual Focus

Based on the literature, this study focuses on five interconnected dimensions: (1) compensation and rewards, (2) work environment and employee well-being, (3) leadership and communication, (4) training and career development, and (5) recognition, belonging, and meaning of work. These dimensions are used as sensitizing concepts rather than predetermined variables. The qualitative analysis remains open to additional themes that emerge from interviews.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design because the objective is to understand how retention strategies are experienced and interpreted by managers and employees in culinary businesses. A qualitative design is appropriate for examining practical management processes, perceptions, and organizational experiences that may not be fully captured through standardized survey measures.

Research Setting and Participants. The study will be conducted in culinary businesses located in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The study targets restaurants, cafés, food outlets, and similar culinary businesses that employ paid staff. Participants will be selected purposively based on their direct experience with employee management. The proposed sample is approximately 10–15 participants, consisting of business owners or managers and employees. Employee participants should preferably have worked at the organization for at least six months so that they have sufficient experience to discuss retention practices.

Data Collection. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. Interview questions will cover reasons employees stay or leave, compensation and rewards, work schedules, supervisor relationships, communication, recognition, training, career opportunities, workload, and suggestions for improving retention. With participant consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes will be used to document relevant contextual observations.

Data Analysis. The interview data will be analyzed thematically. The process will involve familiarization with the transcripts, initial coding, grouping related codes, development of candidate themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and interpretation. The

analysis will combine deductive sensitizing concepts derived from the literature with inductive themes emerging from participant accounts.

Trustworthiness and Ethics. Credibility will be strengthened through comparison of managerial and employee perspectives, repeated review of transcripts, and the use of direct participant quotations in the final analysis. Participants will receive information about the purpose of the study and their participation will be voluntary. Names of participants and businesses will be anonymized in the article. Data will be used only for academic purposes.

Table 1. Proposed Semi-Structured Interview Guide

No.	Core Interview Question
1	1. What are the main reasons employees stay or leave this culinary business?
2	2. What strategies does management use to encourage employees to stay?
3	3. How are salary, incentives, bonuses, or other rewards used in employee retention?
4	4. How would you describe the daily work environment and workload?
5	5. How do supervisors communicate with and support employees?
6	6. What forms of recognition or appreciation do employees receive?
7	7. Are training and career development opportunities available?
8	8. How are work schedules, leave, and personal needs managed?
9	9. What management practices make employees feel valued or committed?
10	10. What changes would make employees more willing to remain with the business?

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Note: The subsection below is intentionally structured as an analytical framework. It should be completed using the actual interview data and direct quotations after fieldwork. No participant findings are fabricated in this draft.

4.1 Reasons Employees Stay or Leave

This theme should present participants' explanations of why employees remain or consider leaving. Possible areas to examine include compensation, workload, scheduling, relationships with supervisors and coworkers, alternative employment opportunities, career prospects, and perceived respect. The analysis should distinguish between managerial explanations and employee experiences.

4.2 Compensation, Rewards, and Recognition

This section should examine how salary, incentives, bonuses, meals, service charges, attendance rewards, or informal appreciation are experienced by employees. Prior hospitality research

indicates that pay and benefit satisfaction can be associated with turnover intentions, but financial rewards should be interpreted alongside organizational support and job characteristics [4].

4.3 Work Environment, Workload, and Well-Being

The analysis should explore workload, working hours, scheduling, physical demands, interpersonal climate, and employee well-being. Qualitative evidence from hospitality research suggests that work and job redesign can support employee well-being and retention [2]. The study should identify which work conditions are perceived as supportive or burdensome in Semarang's culinary businesses.

4.4 Leadership, Communication, and Employee Support

This theme should analyze how owners, managers, and supervisors communicate expectations, resolve problems, provide feedback, and respond to employee needs. The analysis can examine whether employees perceive leadership as supportive, fair, accessible, and consistent. Positive social and organizational interactions are relevant to employee motivation and retention in hospitality settings [5].

4.5 Training, Career Development, and Future Prospects

This section should investigate whether employees see a future within the business. Interview data can reveal opportunities for skill development, promotion, role expansion, mentoring, or learning. Recent hospitality research emphasizes the importance of career experiences and development in understanding retention and career commitment [1], [14].

4.6 Belonging, Job Pride, and Meaning of Work

The analysis should examine whether employees experience pride, belonging, social connection, or meaning in their culinary work. Research indicates that job pride and meaning of work can be related to lower turnover intention in hospitality, although the strength of these relationships may vary across cultural contexts [9].

4.7 Integrated Retention Strategy

The final analytical theme should connect the individual findings into a practical retention strategy. Rather than treating compensation, leadership, work environment, and career development as independent mechanisms, the study should identify how managers combine them in everyday practice and which combinations employees perceive as meaningful.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study is designed to examine employee retention as a multidimensional management issue in the culinary industry in Semarang. The literature indicates that retention can involve compensation, organizational support, work design, leadership, career development, social

relationships, job pride, and meaningful work. The qualitative design will allow these dimensions to be examined through the experiences of managers and employees rather than treating retention as a single measurable variable.

After the interviews are completed, the final conclusion should identify the dominant retention strategies found in the participating culinary businesses, explain how employees interpret those strategies, and describe the organizational conditions associated with employees' willingness to stay. Recommendations should then be derived directly from the empirical themes and should distinguish between low-cost managerial practices and resource-intensive interventions.

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