

## Motivation of University Academic Staff In Zimbabwe. A Case Study of Zimbabwe Open University (2009 – 2014)

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**Abstract:** The research was conducted in order to ascertain the level of motivation among Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) academic staff and problems arising therefrom. The study was confined to ZOU academic staff at the National Centre and Harare/Chitungwiza Regional Campus. Existing literature indicated that money possesses significant motivating power in as much as it symbolizes intangible goals like security, power, prestige and a feeling of accomplishment and success. Financial rewards were the oldest and certainly the most fundamental applied performance practice in organization settings. The study used a descriptive survey design. It was a mixed methodology research. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data which was analyzed using largely descriptive statistics and content analysis. The major findings were that; there were more male academics than females at ZOU. Most academics were holders of the masters' degree and a significant number was pursuing the doctorate degree. Majority of the academics were satisfied with the exemption from payment of ZOU fees for their studies or those of their spouses and bonafide children. Generally, they were satisfied with their working conditions although a significant number was not satisfied with the level of remuneration as they felt it was not matching their work especially in an Open and Distance Learning set up like ZOU. Working conditions such as long working hours including working during weekends, inadequate office space, absence of research grant and lots of administrative work involved were de-motivating. On the other hand, staff welfare like assistance during times of bereavement, sound health and safety working environment, granting of study leave whilst earning full benefits and support to get bank loans, timeous payment of salary and the entitlement to annual bonus, motivated them most. The study recommended that the university should improve on awarding of extrinsic motivators and to also streamline the heavy workloads of academics so that administrative issues should be tackled largely by the support staff.

**Key Words:** Academic staff, Brain drain, Human capital, Job satisfaction, Motivation, Motivators, Needs.

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### I. Introduction and background

The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) is a state owned open and teaching and learning (ODL) institution. It was established on 1 March 1999 so that it would increase access to tertiary education and training in the country by according opportunities those in all corners of the country who could not access university education. ZOU strives to become a flourishing and reputable university institution not only in Zimbabwe and in Southern Africa but also among the international fraternity. ZOU has ten [10] Regional Centres in the country which are as follows: Mashonaland Central; Mashonaland West; Mashonaland East; Manicaland; Midlands, Matabeleland South; Matabeleland North, Bulawayo; Masvingo and Harare/Chitungwiza Regional Centre. At the time of this study, ZOU had eight hundred and fifty-one (851) employees and these included Academics and Non-Academics staff according to records of the Human resources department as at 20 February 2015. Academic staff consists of Professors, Senior lecturers, Lecturers and Teaching Assistants whilst the Non-Academics consists of the Administrators, Clerical, Secretarial, Technicians and the General workers. The top management consists of the Principal Officers; these are the Vice Chancellor, Pro-vice Chancellor–Academic Affairs, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Corporate Planning and Business Development, the Registrar, the Librarian, Finance director and the ICT Director. These report to the University council which is appointed by the Chancellor, who is the State President after recommendations by the parent ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development which rationalizes conditions of service for all state university.

In 2007 and 2008, universities were severely affected by brain drain as the country faced the highest hyperinflationary period to date. Government struggled to pay its workers including university staff and when the multicurrency regime was introduced in 2009, there was a blanket rate of salary of \$50 per month (USD) for each government worker, which was later raised to \$100. Neighbouring countries were by then offering far

much higher remuneration than the paltry amounts paid to. For example, by then, South Africa was paying about 8000 rands for teachers and university lecturers around 15 000 rands per month and that attracted a lot of Zimbabwean teachers and lecturers. The intended to identify key factors that motivate academic staff at Zimbabwe Open University as well as areas of dissatisfaction.

## **II. Statement of the problem**

Universities are driven by intellectual property, which includes qualifications and skills but also motivation and staff engagement. However, recent years have seen local universities including Zimbabwe Open University encounter operational challenges due to lack of motivation of skilled personnel. The main problem that was encountered by the Universities was high brain drain of skilled manpower especially after the hyperinflation of 2007 and 2008. Brain drain over the past few years had worsened the situation as Zimbabwe continually lost the human resources to wealthier nations such as South Africa and Botswana. In order for the University to reduce skills flight and increase job satisfaction, the paramount importance is to address the questions; what really is motivating academic staff, or what appropriate motivational initiatives and approaches should be used to attract, retain and fully engage university academic staff?

## **III. Research objectives**

The following were the objectives of the study;

- 1.To evaluate current motivational strategies used for academics by ZOU.
- 2.To find out challenges of motivating ZOU academic staff.
3. To recommend ways of improving academics' motivation in ZOU.

## **IV. Research questions**

The study sought to answer the following research questions;

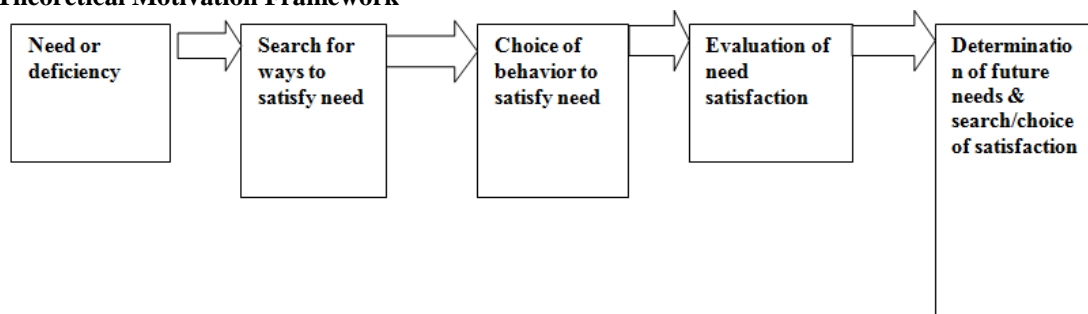
- 1.What were the current motivational strategies used for academics by ZOU?
- 2.Which challenges affected the motivation of ZOU academic staff?
- 3.What can be done by ZOU to improve motivation of its academic staff?

## **V. Literature review**

### **5.1 Definition of Motivation**

Is a complex phenomenon which looks at forces coming from within a person that account for the willful direction, intensity and persistence of the person's efforts toward achieving specific goals, where achievement is not due solely to ability or environmental factors" according to Hitt (2009). Motivation actually describes the level of desire employees feel to perform, regardless of the level of happiness. Employees who are adequately motivated to perform will be more productive, more engaged and feel more invested in their work. When employees feel these things, it helps them, and thereby their managers to be more successful. (Maslow, 1970; McGregor, 1970).

### **5.2 Theoretical Motivation Framework**



**Figure 1: Motivation framework** (Cole, 2004)

An unsatisfied need creates tension that stimulates drive(s) within an individual. These drives generate a search behavior to find particular goals that, if attained, will satisfy the need and reduce the tension. Motivated employees are in a state of tension; to relieve the tension they exert effort. If this effort successfully leads to the satisfaction of the need, it reduces tension. This tension-reduction effort must also be directed towards organizational goals (Cole, 2004).

### **5.3 The Benefits of Motivation**

Jubenkanda (2004) as well as Stoner (2012) state the following benefits

- Puts human resources into action.
- Improves level of efficiency of employees.
- Leads to enhanced achievement of organizational goals.
- Builds friendly relationship.
- Leads to stability of work force.
- Enhances innovation and change management.
- Enhances commitment.
- Stimulates job satisfaction.

### **5.4 Extrinsic motivation**

It is related to tangible rewards such as salary and fringe benefits, security, promotion, contract of service, the work environment and conditions of service (Mullins, 2005). These are what need to be done to or for people to motivate them. They are often determined at the organisational level and may be largely outside the control of the individual managers. Extrinsic motivators can have an immediate and powerful effect but will not necessarily last long (Mullins, 2005; Armstrong, 2009). Bernard cited by Stoner (2012) proposes the following are incentives for employees: Salary, Wages and Conditions of Service; To use salaries as an effective motivating tool, personnel managers must consider four major components of salary structures. These are the job rate, which relates to the importance the organisation attaches to each job; payment, which encourages workers or groups by rewarding them according to their performance; personal or special allowances, associated with factors such as scarcity of particular skills or certain categories of information professionals, or with long service; and fringe benefits such as holidays with pay, pensions, and so on.

Akintoye (2000) asserts that money remains the most significant motivational strategy. As far back as 1911, Frederick Taylor and his scientific management theory described money as the most important factor in motivating the industrial workers to achieve greater productivity. Taylor advocated the establishment of incentive wage systems as a means of stimulating workers to higher performance, commitment, and eventually satisfaction. Money possesses significant motivating power in as much as it symbolizes intangible goals like security, power, prestige, and a feeling of accomplishment and success. Katz, in Sinclair (2005) demonstrates the motivational power of money through the process of job choice. He explains that money has the power to attract, retain, and motivate individuals towards higher performance. For instance, if an information professional has another job offer which has identical characteristics with his current job, but greater financial reward, there is the probability that, that worker would be motivated to accept the new job. Financial rewards are probably the oldest and certainly the most fundamental applied performance practice in organization settings. However, financial rewards do much more than pay employees for their contribution to the achievement of organizational objectives. They are a symbol of success, a reinforcer and motivator, a reflection of one's performance, and a source of reduced anxiety. Cultural values seem to influence the meaning and value of money.

### **5.5 Intrinsic Motivation**

This is related to psychological rewards such as the opportunity to use one's ability. It is a sense of challenge and achievement, receiving appreciation, positive recognition and being treated in a caring and considerate manner. Psychological rewards are those that can usually be determined by the actions and behaviour of the individual managers (Mullins, 2005). Intrinsic motivators are concerned with the quality of work life, and are likely to have deeper and long term effect because they are inherent in individuals and are not imposed from outside (Armstrong, 2009).

### **5.6 The rate of staff turnover**

Vanderberg and Nelson (1999) suggest that most turnovers in organizations emanate from a lack of motivation. Dissatisfaction could be due to a lack of psychological fulfillment in the job, perceptions and realities of non-commensurate remuneration, and an unwelcoming climate within the organization. This dissatisfaction, and the resulting decision to leave, can come at a significant cost to the organization, which includes the loss of skilled individuals and their expertise, disruption in the operations of the organization until appropriate replacements can be found, and difficulty in attracting new employees if the reasons for the departure of former employees are such that they make others unwilling to work for the organization (Vanderberg and Nelson, 1999). Retention issues are also influenced by pull-factors which derive from the larger environment within which the current organization operates.

### 5.7 Brain drain affecting motivation

Brain drain has been defined as the permanent or long term international emigration of skilled people who have been the subjects of considerable educational investment by their own societies (Michael, 2004; Armstrong, 2009). Universities in Africa have been facing many challenges in their capacity to retain academic staff resulting in enormous brain drain due to work, poor conditions of service, low remuneration (Ologunde and Asaolu, 2005). In the context of higher education in Africa, brain drain has been described as a process through which a significant number of academic staff is lost to other countries (Ishenga, 2006). According to Wickramaseku (2002) between 1985 to 1990, the continent lost at least 6 000 professionals mainly doctors, engineers and university lecturers. Brain drain result in African economies losing their best human resources and the money used to train them. The continent is being deprived of much needed human resources in the form of University academic staff who contribute to the economic growth of a country.

Zimbabwe was not spared by brain drain especially during the period of economic deterioration in 2005-2008. During the period under review a considerable number of lecturers (academics) and non-academic staff at ZOU left Zimbabwe for greener pastures. During that period a lot of professionals left the country. There was nothing to motivate staff members at ZOU, there was hyperinflation and even salaries were not accessible at banks. According to Mihyo (2007) in a study of African universities recommends that universities should take the issue of academic staff motivation seriously in order to seriously retain staff and facilitate effective teaching and delivery of knowledge. However, from a management perspective, this task requires better matching motivation approaches with all the employees' needs. Thus the starting point of any motivation approach will be clear understanding of those factors that motivate people in a given context so that there is better matching of motivation approaches with employees' needs.

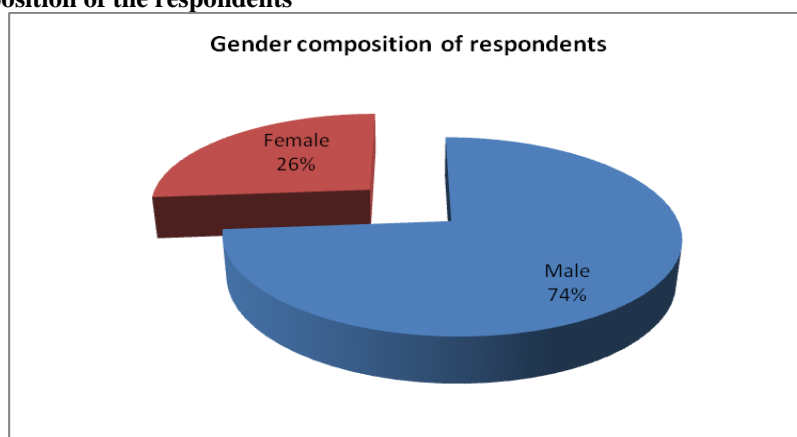
Studies are starting to show that not only money is the most important motivator but also intangible motivators (Cole, 2004). It is against this background that this study attempts to investigate the motivators of university academic staff. Management must be aware that employees have their values, attitudes and sentiments that affect their performance to a large extent and that these values, attitudes and sentiments differ from one employee to another. To understand what motivates the individual worker, management must know their wants, needs and values (Skinner, 1953). It is assumed that once the needs are known, they will adequately be matched with a potential to instill high levels of motivation which can result in high level of retention and performance from academics as the factors that will induce people to contribute as efficiently and effectively as possible are those that satisfy their needs (Stoner, 2012).

## VI. Research methodology

The methodology was premised on the use of *mixed methods*, that is combining both qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher used the *descriptive survey research design* (Leedy and Omrod, 2016). The *target population* comprised of academic staff at the National Centre and Harare/Chitungwiza Regional Centre. A *semi-structured questionnaire* was the only research instrument used which embraced both aspects of qualitative and quantitative data (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). A pilot study for pre-testing the questionnaire was carried out before the conducting of the final data collection in order to improve data validity and reliability. *Analysis of data* was done using largely descriptive statistics for quantitative data (closed questions) and content analysis including some narrative statements for the qualitative data (open ended questions). *Research ethics* were observed throughout the conduct of the study (Njaya and Choga, 2011).

## VII. Research findings and results

### 7.1 Gender composition of the respondents



**Figure 2: Showing gender composition of respondents**

The majority of respondents were males. This was supported by the Human Resources records of February 2015 which showed that ZOU had more male academics than females

### 7.2 Grade composition of respondents

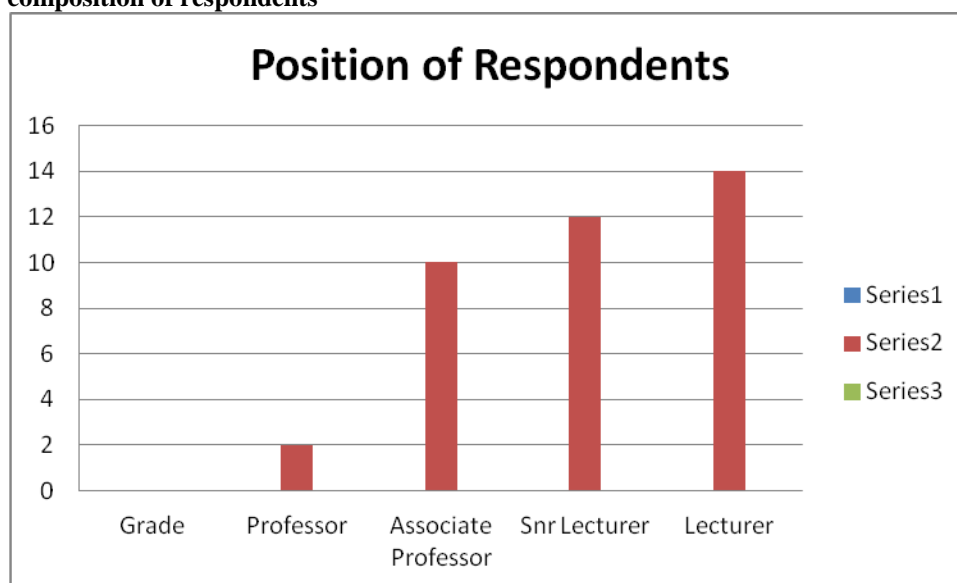


Figure 3: Showing posts of respondents

The research showed that the majority of the academic staff at Zimbabwe Open University are in Lecturer grade. The majority of the Lecturers are holders of masters' degrees and some are pursuing higher degrees.

### 7.3 Level of adequacy and satisfaction for the various types of incentives received by academics

Table 3

ZOU Incentive or Benefit	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Not sure %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
Transport allowance	25	17	5	25	28
ZOU allowance	28	24	0	27	21
Study Leave	41	37	0	13	10
Cellphone allowance	12	15	6	35	32
Exemption from payment of fees	47	38	0	15	0
Contact leave benefits	8	7	25	37	33
Sabbatical leave benefits	17	20	18	28	17
Sponsored research work	5	8	12	42	33
Sponsored publications	10	15	13	40	22
Sponsored research conferences	5	12	8	45	30
Funeral assistance of close family member	52	32	6	7	3
Exam processing daily allowance	23	18	3	30	26
Acting allowance	6	8	34	24	28

Academics were mostly satisfied with the exemption from payment of fees at ZOU, study leave and the ZOU allowance as well as the financial assistance during bereavement of a close family member. Issues to do with research and publications funding appeared to be the most neglected areas which caused poor rating.

### 7.4 Rating of Top 5 incentives/ benefits offered by ZOU

Table 4

Incentives	Rank
Funeral/ Bereavement financial assistance	1
Exemption from payment of fees by staff member or his/her spouse or child	2
ZOU allowance	3
Study Leave	4
Exam processing daily allowance	5

**7.5 Other benefits or arrangements that motivated academics**

**7.5.1 Loan facility**

One of the respondents had this to say

*‘‘Since arrangements to have bank loans, I have been able to buy a nice vehicle, secured a residential stand and was able to complete my DPhil studies with a South African university’’*

**7.5.2 Fixed dates for ZOU Allowance and salary payment**

One academic said

*‘‘Thumbs up to ZOU (Human resources department) for consistently ensuring that we get our ZOU allowance around the 15<sup>th</sup> and salary around the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month. This makes planning possible. The good thing is that the ZOU allowance comes mid-month when I am almost cent less (broke) and I will be cushioned up to the actual pay day’’*

**7.5.4 Time off duty if one worked during weekends e.g. tutorials and exam processing**

There was provision for taking leave days if someone worked during weekends or after normal working hours during exam processing.

**7.5.5 Career progression and promotion**

ZOU promoted its staff who deserved or were due, without much restrictive measures like other universities. The fact that on average, there were 2 calls for promotions in a year, signified the intention to promote academics from being lecturer, to tenured lecturer, then senior lecturer, then associate professor and full professor.

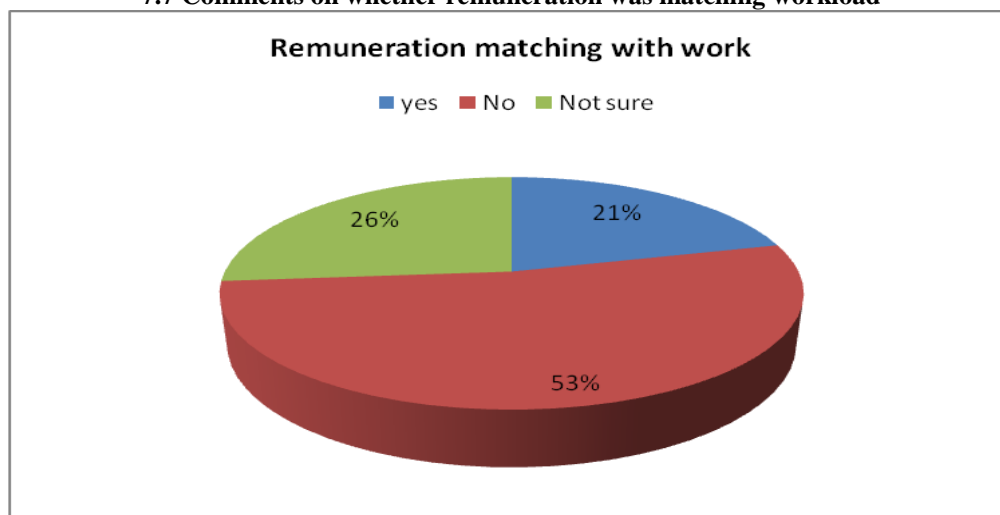
**7.6 Comments on remuneration level of satisfaction**

**Table 5**

Satisfaction with remuneration	Percentage
Yes	46
No	54
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

There were mixed feelings on the level of satisfaction based on remuneration although it was slightly skewed in favor of those not satisfied.

**7.7 Comments on whether remuneration was matching workload**



**Figure 4: showing whether remuneration matched work load**

The majority of the respondents seemed discontented as they said that their remuneration was not commensurate with the work they were doing.

**7.8 Other factors which affected motivation of academics**

7.8.1. *Heavy workloads that also included lots of administrative work.* Some at the region cited many instances where they are called by the National center or faculties to perform some duties even at short notice.

7.8.2. *Congested venues for tutorials.* This was as a result of the Harare regional campus not having its own facilities. The venues were also booked by other universities and even churches and created serious shortages at times

7.8.3. *Lack of access to offices.* Some said that they were not allowed to operate after certain hours e.g. after 1700 hrs or during weekends unless permission had been sought or if there was an event warranting one's presence e.g. graduation ceremony. This affected time to do research since during the day and week days, there was hardly any time to do so.

7.8.4. *Inadequate office space.* The majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the quality of office space at Zimbabwe Open University Some offices were being forced to share offices due to shortage of offices and this was not ideal especially when one wanted privacy or wanted to offer counselling services to student(s)

7.8.5. *Lack of involvement in certain key decisions affecting academic work.* Some academics cited issues like introducing of e-learning, e-marking or deadlines to do with assignment, course work and research projects submissions. Their input was usually not called for. This was also attributable to what others called poor leadership. They highlighted that at times those in senior positions did not consult the "grassroots" who anchor the University.

7.8.6 *Dual reporting system.* Some academics said that they had problems regarding reporting structure e.g. reporting to two supervisors, one at the region (Regional director) and one at the faculty (Chairperson or Dean). This matrix structure at times brought conflicts and different decisions e.g. if someone wanted to take time off or a leave. This brought at times conflicts and frustration.

7.7.7. *Differences on grading and benefits between academics and non-academics.* Some academics were not happy with the preferential treatment given to non-academics and felt some of their grades were higher and even their benefits e.g. relatively more allowances and other perks such as allocation of university vehicles for used.

7.8.8. *Withdrawal of payment for writing Modules.* The writing of modules was cumbersome and involved a lot of time and costs, yet the university had withdrawn the payment for module writing which used to motivate academics. As a result, reviewing and writing of modules was problematic and some programs were taking long to take off.

7.8.9. *Reduced exam processing allowance.* The respondents cited reduction of the allowance as very demotivating and felt the work they did during exam processing was very pivotal to the reputation of the university, yet they got meagre allowances

7.8.10. *Lack of Research funding.* The research revealed that academics worked long irregular working hours without getting time to do research. The study revealed that there was lack of institutional funds to conduct research as the major reason leading to poor quality of research work.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

The results and findings showed that motivation of academics in ZOU was balanced in terms of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, which showed that the university was trying its best despite dwindling government support and economic challenges.

## **IX. Recommendations**

### **Recommended Motivational strategies**

#### **9.1 Training**

Areas should include having research workshops to help academics with writing journal articles, publications and conference papers. One area should be the need to acquaint academics with the use of SPSS for data presentation and analysis especially if research is quantitative. Also training of MyVista e-learning platform on the ZOU website should be done regularly instead of being a once off event, in order to take care of new staff members or those who would have been away on study, sabbatical, contact and vacation leave during the time the training would have been done.

#### **9.2 Financial incentives**

ZOU should continue to provide the ZOU allowance which is paid mid-month since the original agreement would end in July 2017. This was a positive move since other institutions of higher learning did not provide it to their staff. This was meant to cushion staff during then mid-month when some would be financially constrained. There was also need to review the daily exam processing, transport and cell phone allowances should financial resources permit.

#### **9.3 Sabbatical and Contact Leave**

The university needs to improve as those who enjoyed these benefits were very few. There was need to facilitate such types of leave by working closely with other universities rather than having an individual organise for himself or herself. Sabbatical leave placement partnerships with other Universities can be done so that a certain percentage for placement for ZOU staff can be accepted per semester or year.

#### **9.4 Communication**

Communication must be improved throughout the organization. There must be regular meetings, information should be displayed on notice boards. Also having an online internal magazine, should be a less costly strategy to improve communication in ZOU. Effective communication in the workplace plays a prominent role in developing long lasting employee motivation. One of many positive benefits gained from well established organizational communication is improved relationships. Suggestion boxes can be introduced and can be mounted on strategic positions where they can be easily seen.

#### **9.5 Recognition for long service or performance**

There is need to recognize outstanding performance e.g. through launching the Worker of the year Awards as well as the Long service awards e.g. for those who would have served 10, 15, 20, 25 years etc. Awards play a motivational role in academia and any society because they cater for the need for one to be recognized by others. The University can set up an Awards Committee. The committee would liaise with the Faculties, Departments, Units and Regional Centers (campuses) to identify outstanding employees. For long service awards, the responsible committee should liaise with the Human Resources Unit to identify employees who will have served longer, and should be categorized. Awards form an important part of the motivation system in a society.

#### **9.6 Flexibility**

The Zimbabwe Open University should be flexible on the operations of academics. Workplace flexibility is key to attracting and retaining talent. Academics should be allowed to stay extra hours doing their work or their studies or research work even well after normal working hours and weekends. There is need though to put effective security measures in place.

#### **9.7 Funding research activities**

The university should also establish research centers to coordinate the research activities e.g at each region, faculty etc. There is need to establish linkages and partnerships for collaborative research with local and international partners. The University should identify, assess and undertake programs that will attract funding for research and even the donor community in order to boost the level of funding. Improved funding will also help academics to publish research articles in refereed journals and attend more research conferences, thereby gaining mileage in their promotional endeavors.

#### **9.8 Availing more Office Space**

The study recommended that the University must avail adequate work resources such as stationery, furniture, equipment, air conditioning, comfortable chairs and more spacious offices, so that academics can successfully accomplish their tasks on time. Offices can be demarcated so that there is privacy. This will create a more conducive work environment. Productivity and efficiency are directly affected by how people work, and this equally is affected by their work environment.

#### **9.9 Job Design**

Academics work involve high levels of skill variety; task significance and autonomy. This enhances them to be more responsible and accountable for their acts. There is need to reduce the high workload of academics in ODL due to a lot of administrative work they perform. There is need to streamline operations of academics and non-academics and in addition, **job enrichment** is called for.

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