



WHY ORGANIZATIONS CONTINUE TO LOSE GOOD EMPLOYEES

Examining Leadership, Culture, and Operational Factors

A RESEARCH-INFORMED EXECUTIVE WHITE PAPER

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PEOPLE | OPERATIONS | GROWTH

Executive Summary

Organizations invest significant time and money in recruiting qualified employees. Yet when those employees leave, the response usually centers on filling the vacancy rather than understanding why it opened in the first place.

Some turnover is natural. People leave for career advancement, compensation, relocation, and changing personal priorities. But when an organization repeatedly loses capable employees, particularly from the same department, under the same leadership, or within the same operating environment, the pattern is telling leaders something.

Research consistently shows that retention depends on more than pay and benefits. Leadership practices, organizational support, job satisfaction, workload, role clarity, and involvement in decision-making are all associated with whether employees intend to stay or leave (Hur & Abner, 2024; Park & Min, 2020). That raises a critical question for leaders:

Are we addressing the causes of turnover, or repeatedly responding to its consequences?

This white paper examines three interconnected areas that contribute to recurring departures:

- **Leadership:** how management practices, communication, accountability, and support shape the employee experience.
- **Organizational Culture:** the everyday experiences, relationships, and working conditions that drive engagement and commitment.
- **Operations:** the processes, structures, workloads, and systems that determine whether employees can perform effectively.

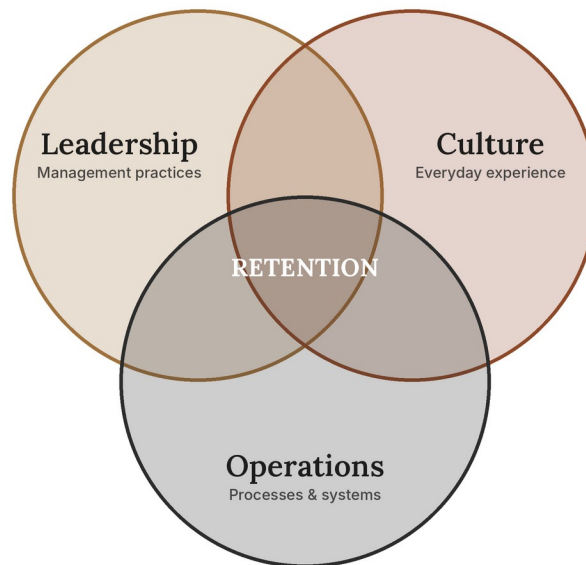


Figure 1. Retention sits where leadership, culture, and operations overlap.

No organization can prevent every departure. The goal of this paper is to help leaders recognize patterns, examine the conditions behind them, and treat retention as a shared leadership, operational, and strategic responsibility.

A NOTE ON THE EVIDENCE

The research cited in this paper primarily measures turnover intention, meaning employees' stated plans to leave, rather than actual departures, and most studies identify associations rather than direct causes. Findings from specific industries may not apply equally everywhere. Used appropriately, this research points leaders toward the conditions most worth examining in their own organizations.

1. Understanding the Problem Behind Employee Turnover

When a valued employee resigns, leaders typically ask why that individual left. Was it compensation? A better opportunity? Personal circumstances? These are reasonable questions, but they rarely tell the whole story.

Consider an organization that loses several employees within a few months. Each resignation comes with its own explanation, yet beneath them may sit the same recurring conditions: leaders who are hard to reach, inadequate training, unclear expectations, or unsustainable workloads. When departures are examined one at a time, those common threads stay hidden.

A meta-analysis published in *Public Administration Review* identified job exhaustion, job satisfaction, role ambiguity, organizational commitment, and participation in decision-making as important predictors of employees' intentions to leave (Hur & Abner, 2024). Although the study focused on public-sector employees, its lesson applies broadly: workplace conditions, not just individual circumstances, shape whether people stay.

LEADERSHIP CONSIDERATION

When turnover recurs, don't search for a single explanation that fits every employee. Look for the common organizational conditions shaping their experiences and decisions.

2. Leadership: The Influence of Management Practices

Leaders shape the conditions under which employees perform. Employees depend on them for direction, communication, resources, decisions, and support. When those elements are inconsistent or unavailable, even strong performers become uncertain, frustrated, and unable to meet expectations.

Consider a nurse manager charged with improving patient discharge times who receives little guidance on priorities, timelines, or decision-making authority. When she hits an obstacle that requires a decision above her level and leadership is slow to respond, progress stalls, yet she is still held accountable for results shaped by circumstances outside her control. Repeated over months, experiences like this erode job satisfaction and an employee's belief that the organization has her back.

Research in nursing supports this connection. A 2024 meta-analysis of eight studies involving 5,754 nurses found a moderate negative relationship between perceived organizational support and turnover intention: the more supported nurses felt, the less likely they were to report plans to leave (Galanis et al., 2024).

PERSPECTIVE FROM PRACTICE

"Across military commands and Am Law 100 firms, I have seen the same pattern: capable people rarely leave because the work is hard. They leave when they feel unsupported in doing it."

— Dr. Tanyeka Lambert

Questions Leaders Should Consider

- Are expectations communicated clearly and consistently?
- Do employees have access to leadership when guidance or decisions are needed?
- Are managers equipped to lead, develop, and support their teams?
- Is accountability applied consistently across the organization?
- Are employees encouraged to raise concerns before they become larger problems?

Effective leadership requires more than assigning responsibilities and evaluating outcomes. It requires ensuring employees have the direction, support, and resources to meet expectations.

3. Organizational Culture: The Experience Behind the Mission Statement

Most organizations communicate values such as integrity, collaboration, respect, accountability, and excellence. But culture isn't defined by values on a website or in an employee handbook. It is defined by everyday interactions, management decisions, and how employees actually experience the workplace.

The gap between stated and lived values is where culture breaks down. A nonprofit may champion collaboration while its program and development teams rarely share information. A law firm may promote open communication while associates hesitate to raise concerns with partners. A healthcare practice may call staff development a priority while offering little time or support for it. Employees notice these inconsistencies, because organizations reveal their real culture through what they consistently practice, not what they say.

Research reinforces the importance of daily working conditions. Park and Min's (2020) meta-analysis of turnover intention in the hospitality industry identified work attitudes, job strain, and role-related stressors as significant factors. While the strength of these relationships varies by industry, the message is consistent: how work feels day to day matters.

Closing this gap is the focus of the **LamCo S.A.F.E.™ Workplace Culture Framework**, which equips leaders and employees to recognize and respond to behaviors that erode trust and to build a psychologically safe workplace.

EXAMINING THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Organizational leaders should consider whether employees:

- Understand how their work contributes to organizational objectives.
- Feel comfortable communicating concerns and offering suggestions.
- Receive consistent and constructive feedback.
- Experience fairness in how workplace expectations are applied.
- Have meaningful opportunities for development.
- Believe leadership responds appropriately to recurring challenges.

These questions do not suggest that employee satisfaction should replace accountability. Performance expectations and organizational support must work together.

An organization can maintain high standards while ensuring its culture helps employees meet them.

4. Operations: When Processes and Systems Contribute to the Problem

Turnover is usually treated as a human resources or leadership issue, but operational conditions deserve equal attention. Employees work within systems the organization creates: workflows, reporting structures, approval processes, training procedures, communication channels, and performance expectations. When those systems are unclear, inconsistent, or inefficient, they put unnecessary obstacles between employees and their work.

Consider a law firm where staff routinely face delayed approvals, incomplete information, overlapping responsibilities, and procedures that vary from one practice group to the next. A capable, committed paralegal can still struggle, not from lack of ability, but because the surrounding processes don't support execution. Left unaddressed, that friction becomes frustration, added workload, and dissatisfaction.

Role clarity is a central part of this picture. Junça Silva and Rodrigues (2024) found that role ambiguity was associated with employees' job involvement, job satisfaction, and intentions to leave. Because the

study was cross-sectional, it cannot establish cause and effect, but it reinforces role clarity as a practical lever leaders can address.

OPERATIONAL WARNING SIGNS

- **Unclear roles and responsibilities.** Employees are uncertain about ownership, decision-making authority, or accountability.
- **Inconsistent onboarding and training.** Preparation varies by department, supervisor, or available resources.
- **Inefficient workflows.** Tasks are routinely delayed by outdated, overly complicated, or poorly communicated processes.
- **Uneven workload distribution.** Certain employees or teams absorb extra responsibilities without added capacity or resources.
- **Limited process accountability.** Recurring problems are handled case by case without examining the processes behind them.

Not every operational problem leads to turnover, but these conditions shape the work experience and belong in any retention review.

Before concluding that an employee isn't meeting expectations, leaders should ask whether the systems supporting that employee have been clearly defined, communicated, and evaluated.

5. Why Employee Retention Is Also a Business Growth Concern

The cost of a departure reaches well beyond the open position. Organizations lose institutional knowledge, absorb recruiting and training expenses, experience disruptions in service delivery, and shift heavier workloads onto the employees who remain.

In client-facing organizations, the impact compounds. When an experienced employee leaves a law firm or healthcare practice, the organization can lose knowledge of client and patient preferences, established workflows, and relationships that support quality service, while the remaining team works to cover the gap.

Gallup estimates that replacing an individual employee can cost one-half to two times that employee's annual salary (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). Actual costs vary by role, labor market, and operating model, so leaders should also measure turnover using their own data, including:

- Voluntary turnover and retention rates
- Turnover patterns by department, role, and supervisor
- Recruitment and onboarding expenses

- Time to fill vacancies and reach full productivity
- Overtime or temporary staffing costs
- Client service disruptions and workload redistribution

Viewed through this lens, retention is not just an HR metric. It is a driver of performance, client experience, and business continuity.

6. Executive Self-Assessment: Looking Beyond Resignation

Before launching another retention initiative, use the questions below to guide a leadership discussion. Rate each area honestly.

AREA	REFLECTION QUESTION	RATING
Leadership	Do employees consistently receive clear expectations and timely guidance?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No
Communication	Can employees raise concerns without unnecessary barriers or fear of unfair consequences?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No
Culture	Do employees' everyday experiences reflect the organization's stated values?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No
Training	Are onboarding and development practices consistent and sufficient for assigned responsibilities?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No
Operations	Are recurring workflow challenges investigated and addressed?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No
Accountability	Are responsibilities, decision-making authority, and performance expectations clearly defined?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No
Workload	Does leadership periodically assess workload distribution and employee capacity?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No
Retention	Does the organization analyze turnover patterns rather than treating each departure as an isolated event?	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No

These questions are designed to prompt discussion; they are not a validated assessment instrument. Areas marked "Partly" or "No" point to where further investigation is warranted.

A thorough assessment draws on multiple sources: employee feedback, leadership perspectives, organizational records, and operational data.

7. Moving From Awareness to Action

Recognizing a problem is only the first step. Meaningful improvement requires a structured approach. Organizations can begin with five practical steps.

STEP 1 Examine Turnover Patterns

Review departure data for trends by department, role, tenure, supervisor, and timing. Separate voluntary turnover from other separations and track patterns over time.

STEP 2 Gather Multiple Perspectives

Use employee interviews, leadership discussions, confidential surveys, and stay or exit interviews. Complex organizational issues rarely have a single explanation, so avoid relying on one viewpoint.

STEP 3 Evaluate Organizational Conditions

Examine leadership practices, culture, role clarity, training, workloads, and processes to determine whether challenges are isolated or reflect broader organizational conditions.

STEP 4 Prioritize Improvements

Build recommendations around your findings, capacity, and strategic priorities. Not everything can or should be addressed at once, so focus first on the changes most relevant to your organization.

STEP 5 Measure and Reassess

Set clear indicators, such as retention trends, employee feedback, workflow efficiency, and training effectiveness, and review progress at defined intervals. A new policy or program is only a starting point; consistent measurement shows whether it is working.

8. Conclusion: Addressing the Conditions, Not Just the Departures

Turnover is not automatically a sign of dysfunction. Some departures are expected, unavoidable, or unrelated to workplace conditions. But recurring losses should prompt leaders to look for patterns.

Organizations that focus only on replacing employees miss the opportunity to strengthen leadership, improve the employee experience, and fix operational inefficiencies. The more productive question is not how to retain every employee, but whether the organization has created the conditions for capable people to perform well, grow professionally, and contribute to long-term success.

Often, turnover isn't the problem. It's a symptom of conditions that deserve a closer look.

For leaders committed to sustainable performance, understanding those conditions is the place to start.

About the Author

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Dr. Tanyeka Lambert is a retired U.S. Navy veteran and business strategist who aligns people and operations for growth. She brings more than 30 years of experience inside complex organizations. During 20 years of distinguished service in the U.S. Navy, she led high-impact programs, directed project management and process improvement initiatives, and established governance and accountability frameworks that strengthened operational efficiency. She also directed enterprise-level training and talent development and advised attorneys, departments, and senior military and government leaders.

Her advisory work also includes counseling attorneys at Am Law 100 firms on client development, marketing, and business development, guiding a healthcare services startup from formation through operations, and supporting healthcare professionals with marketing and business development. She has also served on nonprofit and advisory boards, contributing to strategy and growth.

Today, she partners with leaders at every stage, from entrepreneurs launching new ventures to executives guiding established organizations, to turn priorities into actionable strategies. Known for bringing structure and accountability to complex initiatives, she helps organizations execute with clarity.

Dr. Lambert holds a Doctor of Business Administration and a Master of Business Administration and is the creator of the LamCo S.A.F.E.™ Workplace Culture Framework. Having held a Top Secret/SCI security clearance while collaborating with federal agencies, she brings discretion, sound judgment, and professionalism to sensitive business and organizational matters.

About LamCo Business Strategies

LamCo Business Strategies partners with leaders across industries, with particular depth in the legal, healthcare, and nonprofit sectors, where highly trained professionals and their support teams must work as one. We advise business owners, CEOs, managing partners, executive directors, practice administrators, and HR and talent leaders who are navigating challenges in growth, workflow, leadership, culture, and retention, or working to close the gap between strategy and day-to-day execution.

Our work focuses on four areas:

- **Leadership, Culture & Change:** *Your people.* Leadership development, culture assessments, employee engagement, and LamCo S.A.F.E.™ workplace culture training
- **Professional Services & Client Growth:** *Your clients.* Client development, marketing, business development planning, and executive coaching
- **Business & Organizational Strategy:** *Where you're going.* Organizational assessments, facilitated strategic planning, and clear priorities, goals, and measures of success
- **Strategic Operations & Organizational Effectiveness:** *How you get there.* Workflow review, role clarity, accountability structures, and process improvement

We help organizations turn strategy into action, and action into results.

People. Operations. Growth.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

Is your organization experiencing recurring turnover, operational inefficiencies, or leadership and engagement challenges? An **Organizational Health Diagnostic** can help identify patterns, evaluate contributing conditions, and establish clear priorities for improvement.

Contact LamCo Business Strategies to start the conversation.

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