



**ASSESSMENT OF COVID-19 JOB RETENTION STRATEGIES IN MALAWI'S
MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY**

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for a similar purpose. Where other people's work has been used, I have appropriately acknowledged them.

Nelson Mwakanema

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

I am honoured to dedicate this work to my beloved late daughter, Faith Mwakanema, whose memory inspires me to persevere and strive for greater accomplishments.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certifies that this thesis represents the student's work
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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to assess job retention strategies implemented by manufacturing companies that managed to retain their employees at a time when companies faced declining demand, disrupted supply chains, and issues related to employee well-being amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the qualitative methodology, the study analysed the operationalisation of these retention strategies and examined the opportunities and challenges encountered by these companies throughout the period. Face-to-face interviews with human resource managers from the companies revealed that managers used a variety of strategies, including offering motivational incentives and implementing cost-cutting strategies such as limiting risk allowances and promoting leave-over payments, with a focus on meeting wage obligations. Effective communication, addressing misinformation, complying with government regulations, and prioritizing employee well-being were all critical factors in employee retention. Further, Managers ensured worker safety and productivity by modifying operations to avoid contagion. These findings indicated that HR managers within the manufacturing sector transcended conventional HRM practices, demonstrating optimal efficiency in resource utilisation. However, the study exposed challenges like employee demotivation due to bonus suspensions and reward eliminations, wage gaps, and reduced risk allowances, all contributing to lowered morale and productivity. The research recommended that HR managers should prioritise employee well-being and explore alternative methods to motivate staff during crises to achieve long-term job retention and high productivity levels.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the introduction, and background of the study, and discusses the problem statement, research questions, main objective and specific objectives. It discusses the justification of the study and provides a structure on how the chapters have been outlined, and finally, it provides a conclusion.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Malawi was among the countries that experienced a rise in unemployment as many companies resorted to layoffs for cost containment. (Hamouche, 2021, 1). The manufacturing industry which comprises the majority of small and medium industrial activities such as food processing, textiles and production of consumer goods (*FINAL-20-06 Industrialization (1020)*, n.d.), suffered the worst with a 13% workforce shrink (Government of Malawi, 2021). From the perspective of these companies, the layoffs were necessary, as attested by Muhome (2020), who argued that it was appropriate to terminate a contract of employment as an operational requirement when cost-containment measures failed. Although the layoffs were necessary during the period, it was worrying to note that viable jobs were destroyed, which obstructed the future of Malawi's economic recovery. The pandemic proved that job retention was impossible for many industries, especially the manufacturing industry in Malawi, however, some companies within the same industry managed to retain their employees. this research aims to assess the COVID-19 Job Retention

Strategies (CJRS) implemented by these companies to propose a new path for the practice of HR in times of crisis in developing countries.

1.1 Background of Study

Job retention is one of the factors that help organizations achieve their goals, as suggested by Vasques (2014) who explains that employee retention is a means that companies use to uphold experiences and knowledge. At the macro level, it is one of the factors that contribute to economic stability as it provides job security, more personal income, and more expenditure on goods and services. However, COVID-19 imposed an economic challenge on employers who were left with no option other than retrenchment (Mzale, 2021). COVID-19 started in the city of Wuhan in China and became an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), on March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). Since the year 2019 when COVID-19 was identified, the ILO (2020) reported that the pandemic and resulting lockdown caused 114 million people to lose their jobs, and 255 million lost working hours in full-time jobs, which led to a loss in labour income amounting to \$3.7 trillion worldwide (ILO, 2020). In Malawi, the onset of the pandemic occurred in April 2020 (WHO,2020) and exhibited rapid proliferation. It was projected that the pandemic would impact labour income with an estimated loss of MK 84.6 billion in monthly earnings which was evidenced in 2021 when about Six thousand jobs were lost (Mzale, 2021). As a result, the labour market became saturated and the unemployment rate increased by 6% (Statista, 2023), career shifts from different fields were observed in the search for economic dependence. The pandemic became one of the root causes of the highest suicide cases in Malawi since 2019 with a 57% increase (Chitete, 2020). It was worrying to note that companies that laid off at that time lost a skilled

labour force which imposed a threat on the country's economic recovery.

The manufacturing industry was among the industries that battled with both external and internal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As explained by Harapko, (2021) externally the industry was affected by the disruption of the global economy and disconnected global supply chain. The industry was challenged internally by microeconomic effects such as weak counter-cyclical fiscal measures that provided manufacturing companies with the liquidity they needed to meet operational requirements. However, some companies within the industry survived and retained employees, while others regained their positions and implemented the same. This raised important questions such as; what CJRS did these companies use to preserve the skills, talents, and knowledge they dearly valued? how did such strategies work? and what difficulties did the companies encounter while implementing the strategies? the study was conducted by interviewing different human resource (HR) managers who retained employees from different companies within the manufacturing industry with the objectives of identifying the CJRS that they used, evaluating how the CJRS were patronised, identifying challenges that the companies encountered and evaluating opportunities involved in the strategies to contribute information to the CJRS that focus on manufacturing companies operating in low-income economies such as Malawi.

1.2 Problem Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged global HR practices, with employee retention emerging as a particularly affected aspect (Elayan, 2021). The situation in Malawi resulted in higher unemployment as the informal sector, which accounted for most of the country's labour force, turned to layoffs and redundancies (Thula et al., 2020, 1).

Recognising the need for retention during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic, different individuals devised different retention strategies. Köhler et al., (2022) observed that in certain countries, issues related to layoffs and income loss were mitigated through the introduction of furloughing and wage subsidies. For instance, the Republic of South Africa, as a developed African nation, implemented wage subsidies and furloughing to bail out companies that suffered waste due to the pandemic (Köhler et al., 2022). The methods called for government funds to be granted to companies to pay the wages of workers who were unable to work owing to the pandemic's impact (OECD, 2020). However, the applicability of such measures in developing countries, including Malawi, remained a matter of contention, with the OECD (2020) asserting that furloughing and wage subsidies were economic weight-draining.

Notably, the government of Malawi through The Ministry of Labor, Skills, and Innovations in Malawi responded by providing COVID-19 workplace guidelines, a temporary statute aimed to provide a framework for industrial relations during the pandemic. While offering strategies to mitigate COVID-19-related shocks, such as rules safeguarding jobs and incomes and ensuring health and safety, the guidelines did not provide specific directives for employee retention strategies in the manufacturing sector (Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, 2020). In this context, the Ministry of Labour, Skills, and Innovations in Malawi (2020) encouraged employees to explore creative solutions for resilient corporate operations, suggesting a need for adaptive strategies in the face of unprecedented challenges.

As evidenced by the absence of established strategies to address layoffs in manufacturing companies in Malawi during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study seeks to assess and

elucidate the strategies employed by manufacturing companies in Malawi that successfully preserved employment positions in the absence of layoffs.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 Main Objective

The main objective of the study is to understand COVID-19 job retention strategies that were used in Malawi's manufacturing companies.

1.3.2 Specific Objective

To attain the overall objective of this study, the following specific objectives are used:

1. To explore CJRS employed by manufacturing companies in Malawi.
2. To analyses the operationalization of the CJRS employed by manufacturing companies in Malawi.
3. To evaluate the opportunities associated with using CJRs in manufacturing companies.
4. To analyse challenges faced by the manufacturing companies in Malawi during the operationalization of the CJRS.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Which CJRSs were being employed by manufacturing companies in Malawi?
2. How were these CJRSs operationalized?
3. What were the opportunities for adopting CJRSs?
4. What challenges were encountered during the operationalization of the CJRSs?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research study provided information on strategies for job retention that manufacturing companies operating in low-income countries use. At the time of the study, more job retention schemes were suggested by different scholars however many of these studies focused on developed countries. Some of the CJRS commonly shared included capital injections and wage subsidies to failing companies. Although the result proved positive as the schemes managed to prevent a surge in unemployment, mitigated financial hardship and buttressed aggregate demand by supporting the incomes of workers on reduced working time, the plans were economy weight-draining (OECD, 2020), which made the strategies unhealthy for medium-sized economies to implement during the recession. The findings of the research provide more options on strategies for job retention in low-income countries like Malawi, and the insights have far-reaching implications for a similar crisis since the pandemic is not the last the corporate world will experience.

In research conducted by Thula *et al* (2019), it was suggested that the government was to implement fiscal bailout policies on businesses to retain employees and maintain national economic performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the report from UNDP (2020), the government in line with these suggestions disbursed loans as a fiscal bailout initiative to traders and implemented cash transfer programs for people affected to meet their daily needs. However, neither workers nor employers in the manufacturing industry received financial support to meet job retention plans. It was necessary to identify the strategies that the companies in the industry used to survive, the strategies provided a portfolio of job retention strategies necessary for the industry in times of crisis which needed to be documented for academic reference.

Additionally, a study on job retention is important to determine the nature of industrial relations in the time of crisis in Malawi. The study helps to evaluate how labour laws come into play and how important they are in the operationalization of the CJRS. The temporary statutes that were presented to the labour industry during the period of the pandemic required employers to protect jobs and income, safeguard the health and safety of employees, ensure business continuity and promote innovative business solutions through social dialogue (Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, 2020). However, Muhome (2019) asked for labour practices that conformed to the labour regulations enforced by the government to ensure equity in enhancing industrial peace, accelerated economic growth, social justice, and matters connected therein. The study conducted assessed CJRS adopted in the Manufacturing industry and analyzed how the CJRSs were operationalized to meet these facets that were required by labour statutes during the period of the pandemic in the quest to mitigate economic hardships.

1.6 Organisation of the Chapters

The study follows a structured format comprising five broad chapters, preceded by preliminary pages containing acknowledgements, dedications, abstract, table of contents, list of tables, and list of figures. Chapter One serves as the introduction, delineating the study's background, research problem, objectives, the justification of the study, and the concluding remarks. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature, while chapter three elucidates the research methodology. Chapter Four is dedicated to presenting findings, initiating discussions and conducting analyses; The study concludes with Chapter Five, which provides the conclusion and recommendations.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has set the stage by providing an introduction and background to the study, emphasizing the growth in unemployment attributed to layoffs amid the COVID-19 pandemic and its related effects. The problem statement highlighted the need for innovative job retention strategies during a crisis and exposed the need to assess CJRS employed by manufacturing companies that effectively retained employees during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi. The chapter has further discussed the study objectives with the main objective focusing on assessing CJRS in Malawi's manufacturing industry.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section critically reviews the literature about job retention amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It starts with an introductory overview of Malawi's Manufacturing industry and the historical evolution of job retention in general. The exploration encompasses the definitions of important concepts and several job retention programs used by various countries. Additionally, the section analyses both the opportunities and challenges associated with different retention strategies. Within this context, the section expounds the analytical framework for the study which provides the framework used in analysing the effects of enforcing labour regulations in manufacturing companies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, the section covers the theories of job retention, providing a theoretical foundation for the analyses.

2.1.1 *An Overview of Malawi's Manufacturing Industry*

Malawi's manufacturing industry, while small in comparison to more industrialized nations, is critical to the country's economic landscape. According to Malawi Economic Outlook, (2023), the manufacturing sector contributes significantly to the country's GDP. Agro-processing, textile and apparel manufacturing, chemical manufacturing, and small-scale food and beverage production are all common types of manufacturing activities in Malawi (*Malawi Economic Outlook*, 2023.). Though it has a diverse range of manufacturing activities, the Malawi economic Outlook (2023) reflects the country's reliance on agriculture, with agro-

processing playing an important role within the larger manufacturing framework.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted global supply chains and significantly impacted trade and production activities worldwide (Harapko, 2021), the manufacturing industry in Malawi faced significant challenges. According to Stuart *et al* (2021), the pandemic caused disruptions in many manufacturing sectors around the world, including Malawi. Malawi's manufacturing industry experienced a downturn as a result of strict lockdowns, transportation restrictions, and disruptions in raw material availability (Thula et al., 2020). The consequences were felt most acutely in sectors such as agro-processing, where reliance on a consistent supply chain and market access became critical for long-term operations (MwAPATA Institute et al., 2020).

The pandemic's impact on Malawi's manufacturing industry was exacerbated by the country's pre-existing economic vulnerabilities, in addition to global disruptions. The Economic Outlook (2023), for example, highlights the structural challenges faced by Malawi's manufacturing sector, such as infrastructural limitations, access to finance, and a heavy reliance on agriculture. These difficulties heighten the industry's susceptibility to the pandemic's shocks. The importance of strategic planning and adaptation within Malawi's manufacturing landscape became clear, emphasising the need for diversified production and improved resilience (Thula et al., 2020). Stuart et al (2021) suggested the need to maintain the labour force and preserve skills as one way of showcasing resilience and maintaining economic productivity.

Following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Malawi's manufacturing industry faced an urgent need for job retention strategies that could strengthen employment resilience and contribute to the country's overall economic stability. The pandemic's vulnerabilities highlighted the importance of maintaining a skilled and motivated workforce in the manufacturing sector. According to Stuart et al, (2021), adopting job retention strategies has become critical to mitigating economic fallout and preserving employment opportunities in the aftermath of unprecedented challenges. Implementing effective job retention measures not only served the immediate interest of preserving livelihoods but also helped the industry recover, fostering a more robust and adaptable manufacturing landscape in Malawi.

2.1.2 Historical Evolution of Job Retention

The diversion in the perspective of job retention observed during the pandemic exemplifies the adaptable nature of job retention dynamics. Over time, the circumstances around job retention changed, as were attitudes about it and the methods used to implement it. This section explains the founding intentions of job retention and its changes spanning human resource management's early years, contemporary management, and the COVID-19 Pandemic era.

Hussainy's (2019) research on employee retention effectiveness revealed that job retention programs were not prevalent in HR practices until the late 10th century, they come into play later due to the rise of industrialization. During this period, concerns about labour turnover surfaced attributing to high labour demand, which led to seasonal and cyclical layoffs (Owen 1995). Owen (1995) further highlighted the detrimental impact of high labour turnover rates on companies, resulting in increased hiring, training costs and irregular income flows for

workers. To address these challenges, strategies such as employee satisfaction initiatives and welfare activities, as outlined by Own (1995) were employed. By the end of the 20th century, these strategies successfully reduced turnover. However, as Hom et al. (2019) pointed out, there wasn't a single specific approach that emerged to fully address the consistently high turnover rate. Instead, it was recognized that a combination of different strategies was effective. Owen (1995) pointed to the development of internal labour markets and the implementation of different strategies, encompassing seniority-based compensation and on-the-job training as some of the strategies commonly used during the period. The 1920s marked a significant shift, with a general decrease in labour turnover and the introduction of new employment relations.

By the turn of the 20th century, companies in the U.S. began adjusting their hiring procedures, a trend that expanded to other companies (Owen, 1995). These strategies employed during the 1920s persisted and were recognized as integral forms of job retention in modern human resource management literature (Hussainy, 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a reevaluation of job retention strategies, as highlighted a by Stuart et al (2021), acknowledging the subjective nature of job retention during a period posing risks to life. The flexibility of retention strategies, as seen in historical contexts, indicates that these strategies are responsive to environmental requirements. Managers in manufacturing companies who effectively navigated job retention during the pandemic exemplified this dynamic nature.

2.2 Definition of Concepts

2.2.1 *Job Retention*

The profound understanding of "job retention" is that it is a process of lowering job turnovers, it is considered a process in which employees are encouraged to remain with an organization for a maximum period or until the completion of a project (Kaur, 2017). Kaur's extended view suggested that the practice helps organizations to have effective employee communication; and commitment, reduce the substantial cost involved in hiring and training new staff and enhance workforce support for critical corporate initiatives. Sultan Nazia & Bushra (2013) define the term as an effort by a business to maintain a working environment that encourages staff to remain with the company. Similarly, Mc Koen (2020) considered job retention to be one of the systematic approaches to HR, which he defines as an employer's systematic effort to create and foster an environment that encourages available employees to stay employed by having policies and practices in place that address their diverse needs. From these definitions, it is noted that job retention is the idea of employers, which involves propagating mechanisms that satisfy employees to stay on the job to reduce the cost of hiring new employees, and thereof.

Following such notions, there are two critical issues about job retention that were to be addressed during the COVID-19 pandemic; first, it is shown that retention is generally initiated by management, which indicates that retention is one of the management prerogatives instigated by the Unitarist approach to industrial relations. According to Salamone (2000), the Unitarist view assumes that management is what manages and makes decisions in an organization, however, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, this view was challenged as employees in Malawi were allowed to make their own decisions as deemed by

health and safety requirements. The Ministry of Labor, Skills, and Innovation in Malawi (2020) provided a guide for workers during the period of the pandemic, where employees were allowed to withdraw from work if there was imminent danger or a high risk of exposure to Coronavirus (COVID-19 workplace guide 2020. sect. 4.2). The implication was that, despite efforts to retain employees, the decision to stay was no longer unitarily decided by the employer.

Secondly, the definitions provided show that job retention is considered a cost management mechanism for organizations. It is a strategy used to mitigate employee turnover, which increases hiring costs and productivity (Kaur, 2017, 162). However, job retention during the pandemic became one of the costly practices of HRM due to companies' failure to meet production and the accumulation of enough revenues required to meet salary obligations. With many businesses facing substantial revenue slumps, employers had to make tough decisions involving employee retention and wages, which led companies to prioritize layoffs (Thula et al., 2020, 21). Despite that the view of job retention as a cost management mechanism was challenged, retention remained important during the pandemic as suggested by Stuart et al, (2021). It required a new approach which could not only be propagated by employers' wish to mitigate expenses for rehiring. Rather, job retention during the pandemic required a different perspective, which included employers providing strong income support to workers on reduced working hours to alleviate financial hardship for many workers and support aggregate demand (OECD, 2020).

Based on these arguments, the study asserts that the prevailing concepts of retention fell short of meeting the requisites for effective job retention during the pandemic. It supports for

redefined perspective on job retention. This departure from the conventional approach, which accords employers' unilateral power in retention decisions mainly to reduce management costs, suggests a shift towards an approach that focuses on employee motivation and the critical need for increased financial investment by employers. Hence we assume that COVID-19 job retention is a redefined approach emphasizing employee motivation and increased financial investment by employers to effectively retain employees during the pandemic, departing from the traditional unilateral cost-focused methods.

2.2.2 *Good Working Environment.*

Working conditions, according to Ahmad & Khan, (2019), are considered a broad aspect of the organisational process that includes the totality of forces, actions, and other influential factors that are potentially competing with employees' activities and performance. Brenner (2004), defines working conditions as the ability of employees throughout organizations to share knowledge. According to Brenner's perspectives, the working environment in an organisation is viewed as a channel that enhances the free flow of knowledge within organisations. Bushiri (2014) clarifies that employees' willingness and performance improve when the problems he identified in his research were tackled, which included problems with flexibility in the working environment, work norms, supervisors' interpersonal relations with subordinates, the use of performance feedback, and the provision of work incentives in an organisation.

On the other hand, Opperman (2002) defines the working environment as composed of three major sub-environments: the technical environment, the human environment, and the organisational environment. He explains that the technical environment refers to tools and equipment, which are supposed to be in good shape to work with. The technological

infrastructure includes elements that enable employees to perform their respective responsibilities and activities, which is similar to Brenner's understanding of the work environment grounded on the ability to share knowledge. While discussing the human environment, Opperman (2002) refers to peers and others with whom employees interact, such as work groups and interpersonal environments, which Muhammad et al. (2017) expound as the psychological components of the work environment. They claim that work conditions are shaped by how employees engage with the culture of their organizations, which includes psychological well-being besides physical working conditions. Unlike Brenner's view, this viewpoint implies that the working environment includes competence, the tools and the ability to execute work flexibly. Comparing the three understandings of the working environment by these authors, it is shown that the working environment is a broader perspective, that encompasses the flow of knowledge, access to work equipment, and interpersonal relations.

Despite having these several underlying components to make a work environment, they all contribute to the principle of employee retention. A pleasant workplace environment encourages workers to stay as summarised by Bushir (2014). A statement made by Hussainy (2019) revealed that an unpleasant work environment and poorly organized offices and factories made workers uneasy while they were at work.

Considering the work environment's importance, creating a positive work environment and providing a good working environment in the pre-COVID-19 period were considered essential for employee retention. The studies show that a workplace that is conducive to productivity, collaboration, and growth keeps employees and makes them feel valued and motivated to stay

with their companies. Employees with access to comfortable workspaces, flexible hours, competitive salaries, and other benefits were more likely to remain loyal to their employers (Kim-soon, 2015). This shows that as companies navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic, it became evident that employees continued to prioritise a positive working environment, that required a rich knowledge flow, access to necessary work equipment and strong interpersonal relations for effective retention strategies, which all show the enduring need for the supportive and conducive work environment in fostering employee commitment and satisfaction during unprecedented times.

2.2.3 *Short-time Working*

Short-time work is considered a job retention management strategy used instead of layoffs to adjust labour inputs and costs in response to a significant decline or disruption in business conditions (Mosley, 2020, 7). The strategy effectively contributes to greater adjustment via working hours, and employment stabilization (Giupponi and Landais 2018) as companies can hold as many employees as possible. Abraham and Houseman (1993) add that short-time work and stronger dismissal protection in its early years distinguished some countries from liberal regimes, where employment protection was less stringent and adjustments were traditionally made more through layoffs than through flexible working hours, Houseman (1994) discovered that short-time work, unsurprisingly and overwhelmingly, protected long-term employment relationships, though Hijzen, Martin and Venn (2011) found that temporary workers bore a greater share of the risk of job loss even in the presence of job retention policies. This suggested that before the COVID-19 crisis, employers' support for working time flexibility in the form of short-time work assisted in avoiding unemployment by reducing redundancies in the face of a temporary economic downturn.

In different management contexts, short-time work schemes take different forms; for example, short-time work in which working hours are or have to be temporarily reduced to zero so that workers effectively take a temporary leave from work is considered distinct from more flexible short-time work schemes. In this context, a study by OECD (2022) referred to it as temporary layoffs, such a distinction is somewhat arbitrary because some short-term work schemes permit but do not require a complete stop of work. This was especially noticeable in some countries during the COVID-19 pandemic when both short-term work and furlough schemes were made more flexible in terms of the degree of working time reduction (OECD 2020). Drahokoupil & Müller (2021) point out that part-time furloughs and short-time work schemes with the option of reducing working time by 100% were common before the COVID-19 crisis. Still, it is sensible to distinguish between short-time work and furlough schemes. While short-time work schemes are aimed primarily at stabilizing existing jobs by providing labour cost relief to companies in times of low demand, furlough schemes are meant to provide economic assistance to temporarily unemployed workers.

This understanding shows that both short-time work and furlough schemes are historically successful job retention strategies that have allowed businesses to respond to changes in market conditions without having to implement mass layoffs. In maintaining long-term employment relationships and establishing a stable workforce, they have been especially beneficial.

2.2.4 *Induction and Orientation*

Job orientation is understood as the process of introducing new employees to their job roles and responsibilities, as well as the company's culture and values, Induction or orientation procedures are used in the workplace to introduce new hires to the corporate culture,

regulations, structure, and hierarchy, as well as their job responsibilities (Hussainy, 2019). It is an important part of onboarding that helps ensure successful integration into the workplace. Hussainy (2019) acknowledges that since it gives new hires time to adjust and settle in, the process is an important factor in employee retention. The process helps workers feel more relevant to the company and adapt better to its surroundings. This relationship between an orientation program and employee retention is confirmed in the work of Hussainy (2019), who discovered that employee turnover is reduced when employees know to whom they are accountable. In their remark, Akdere & Schmidt, (2008) suggest that a well-structured orientation program influences employees' levels of job satisfaction and moulds their attitudes and perceptions of work and the company.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique challenge to implementing effective job orientation strategies due to social distancing measures put in place across many countries worldwide. Many organizations shifted from traditional face-to-face meetings to virtual ones using online tools such as video conferencing platforms (Karl et al., 2021). While the approach worked well in some cases, Karl et al. (2021) noted that it did not provide the same level of personal interaction between employers and employees, which was key to creating strong relationships between the parties during the onboarding process.

2.3 COVID-19 Job Retention Strategies

Upon realizing the need for new approaches to Job retention practice, different economies strived to come up with the best strategies for retaining jobs, this section discusses some of the research-based job retention strategies.

2.3.1 *Wage Subsidies and Capital Injections*

Some countries operating in middle-income countries in Africa such as Botswana adopted CJRSs which aimed at mitigating a proportion of the salaries of furloughed employees, the scheme provided wage subsidies to support employers who were failing to pay their employees and encouraged short-time work schemes as a means of retaining viable jobs (Galeragwe, 2020). These schemes were provided at the macro level not only to encourage furloughing but also to mitigate the operational costs of failing companies.

2.3.2 *Flextime and working from home*

In Malawi's industrial relations several strategies were put in place to combat layoff, but at the macro-level, the government of Malawi encouraged stay-at-home policies guided by The Malawi Public Health Act, (2020) where working from home was encouraged. At the micro level, some companies adopted Flextime and teleworking as endorsed in the *COVID-19 Workplace Guide* by the Ministry of Labor, skill and Innovation (2020), which supported the prevention of the spread of Coronavirus and controlled layoff. However, these strategies remained in question for manufacturing companies whose work could not be done remotely.

The COVID-19 workplace guide by the Ministry of Labor, skills and Innovation (2020) provided several strategies that aimed at helping employers mitigate financial constraints and retain employees. Some of such that comprehended with the manufacturing setting included sanitary measures such as; regular wiping of workstations, doorknobs, telephone keyboards, and all other work objects, decongesting workplaces by introducing shifts to avoid overcrowding in line with COVID-19 preventive measures, arranging work in way that allowed for the physical distance of at least a meter from other people, limit or shut down

non-essential activities, limit the number of visitors to the workplace and designate waiting space for authorized visitors, post in every workroom, a notice specifying the number of persons who were to be employed in the room at any one time, allowing employees with fever and flu-like symptoms COVID-19 symptoms to stay at home, report any suspected case of COVID-19 to relevant authorities, arrange for isolation of any person who had developed COVID-19 symptoms at the work site, while awaiting medical attention and arranged health surveillance of employees who had close contact with the suspected cases, provide appropriate personal protective equipment to high-risk and strictly to front-line workers, and assess business liability for workers' compensation, particularly in sectors with high work-related exposure to COVID-19. These preventive measures provide workplace safety and prevent the contagion that enhances the decision for retention.

2.3.3 Innovative Fiscal Support

On the other hand, the government of Malawi disbursed loans through MARDEF as a fiscal bailout initiative to traders and implemented cash transfer programs for affected people. According to Tembo (2020), the social cash transfer program targeted ultra-poor and labour-constrained households. The monthly cash transfer of about MK 7000 was given to people working mostly in the informal sector to meet their basic needs for three months. The cash transfers were later extended to vulnerable families living in urban areas who were affected by income losses due to the pandemic. Although cash transfers did not directly affect job retention, they did manage to maintain many employees' living standards and lighten the employer's load.

Since there were no direct Job retention schemes imposed at the Macro level on the labour

industry in Malawi, job retention strategies were proactive based on the awareness and workplace manuals given from time to time as compared to a few developing countries in Africa which embraced furloughing and wage subsidies Galeragwe, (2020).

2.4 Operationalization of COVID-19 Job Retention Strategies

To operationalize a variable under a study, Martinez et al., (2022) explain that a researcher has to begin with a concept and conceptualisation of that concept that is clearly defined and outlined by a theoretical foundation. This means that operationalisation is a process of turning abstract concepts into measurable observations, which was observed as different countries developed strategies to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on Human resources. Among the many CJRS which were put into practice by these different countries, this section described wage subsidies and capital injection as macro-level approaches to Job retention while remote working, and flextime as micro-level approaches. The aim is to understand how these schemes were operationalized and how effective they were in the countries that adopted them.

2.4.1 Wage Subsidies and Capital Injections

According to OECD (2020), Capital injection and Wage subsidy schemes were widely adopted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development OECD countries where employers were discouraged from laying off employees and promoted furloughing. In line with the OECD (2020) the payments for the furloughed employees were provided by respective governments, in some cases, the governments provided wage subsidies or capital injections to the failing companies. The schemes were provided to employers to meet the salary constraints of the employees and production costs. In the U.K. as explained by

oecd.org, the government introduced an unprecedented package of measures in March 2020 to protect millions of jobs and incomes to help ease the financial burden for businesses and the UK population. The report from the organization attested that these schemes provided the necessary liquidity to firms to hold on to their workers including their talents, and experiences, and allowed them to pick up operations quickly when economic activity recovered without going through the process of hiring and training new workers. The schemes allowed firms to adjust working hours at Zero costs and greatly reduced the number of jobs at risk of termination as a result of liquidity constraints (OECD, 2020).

One of the major progress achieved through the adoption of these CJRS was the decrease in the unemployment rate in the countries that adopted the scheme unlike those that did not. European countries which adopted the CJRS managed to maintain the employment rate. In France for example it was reported by the OECD Employment Outlook (2021) that at the height of the crisis job retention schemes supported almost 60 million jobs more than ten times as many as during the financial crisis and managed to save 21 million jobs, managed to limit the rise in unemployment in the country and the entire OECD region. In Africa, these strategies were implemented by middle-income countries such as Botswana where Galeragwe, (2020), explained that the Government introduced a wage subsidy to assist companies to retain employees during the state of the emergency period which commenced in April 2020. The government provided a COVID-19 relief fund to finance wage subsidies. The fund provided 50% of the basic salary of employees of affected companies for three months with the possibility of an extension (Galeragwe, 2020). With such efforts, Galeragwe, (2020) alluded that jobs were retained and companies that were greatly hit by the pandemic managed to survive. From the look of the two economies discussed, the CJRSs adopted were initiated

and supported by the governments. Employers on the other hand had a role to keep the employee's jobs. The coordinated efforts of the state and employer-provided job security allowed continued business operations.

2.4.2 *Working from Home*

This was one of the approaches that the public sector in Malawi commonly adopted during the period of the pandemic, it was a strategy that required employees to take home their daily work. Aczel *et al* (2021) in their research _ *Researchers working from home; Benefits and Challenges* argue that the term typically covered working from any location other than the dedicated area provided by the employer. From the perception of the Authors, the strategy proved positive as greater job motivation and satisfaction were achieved. It was best for Malawi's industrial practice as it propelled social distance, one of the proposed methods of reducing the COVID-19 pandemic. However, according to Armstrong (2010), Working from Home was not a viable solution for all types of work. The author argued that it was not just service and front-line staff that were unable to make use of home-working, but also companies in manufacturing whose products required other means of keeping employees to their jobs. Despite that working from home had provided a positive retention strategy, it remained an inequitable strategy for the manufacturing industry, whose work required manual labour. (Osuna & Garcia, 2021)

2.5 Opportunities in implementing Job retention strategies.

2.5.1 *Training and Development Opportunities.*

This aspect is highlighted in the broad context of fostering a positive working environment, specifically within the technological environment of an employee, however, it is imperative to underscore this aspect as a targeted and specific activity in the comprehensive retention

strategies. The workforce needs to be upgraded regularly because the business world is heavily reliant on technology and is affected by the constantly shifting environment (Presbitero et al., 2015). In their research, Presbitero et al (2015). noted that, due to shorter product and technology life cycles, updating staff competencies and abilities is a responsibility that both employers and employees prioritised (Presbitero et al., 2015). Following this assertion, companies spend a lot of money and resources upgrading employees' competencies and skills. The companies provide a variety of training and development opportunities to help employees feel that they are always growing, learning, and maintaining their competitiveness in the workforce (Muhammad et al., 2017). In his research, Hussainy (2019) showed that training practices have a large influence on employee retention, and bring about a positive relationship between employees and employers. Thus, organizations that provide continuous training and skill upgrading programs gain a competitive advantage, satisfy their employees, and retain their valuable employees.

2.5.2 Maintained Income Support

During the pandemic, the government's fiscal support played a crucial role in maintaining income levels for lower-paid employees, compensating for part of their income loss. Research by Hussainy (2019) underscores the significant impact of competitive pay on employee retention, defining it as a leveraging factor for retaining talents. In the pre-COVID-19 era, companies faced pressure to consistently evaluate their employee remuneration packages to retain talent. When the companies during the period of the pandemic failed to afford regular pay, government support alleviated financial strain, enabling employees to maintain their income. These income support were instrumental in fostering a sense of appreciation among employees, resulting in heightened morale, productivity, and motivation (Denise, 2007).

2.5.3 *Defined benefit plan*

The implemented CJRSs effectively prevented any disruption in employees' length of service that would have occurred due to potential layoffs. These measures played a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of service and upholding pension benefits for the workforce. Bodie et al. (1988) defines a benefit plan as a pension plan in organizations that guarantees workers a certain amount of money in retirement, which is typically calculated based on length of service or employment history and salary. The benefits are part of employees' remuneration; therefore, they are capable of raising employees' standards of living. Benefits, just as salaries and other compensations, are influencing factors that employees consider in job satisfaction and become part of the reasons employees stay with an organization (Klonoski, 2016). Following these benefits, it is imperative to note that job retention provides service members with defined retirement packages, on the other hand helping employers to maintain organizational culture and performance.

2.1 Challenges Faced in the Implementation of CJRS

2.1.1 *Escalation of Public Debt*

As mentioned by Torrington *et al* (2008) HRM functions are often influenced by the decisions of the policymakers, the Environment as well as the socioeconomic status of governments. Similarly, the factors that helped OECD countries and some middle-income countries in Africa to achieve the CJRS were government support through the introduction of temporary COVID-19 Fiscal policies. Part of the UK's Economy was operated through tax collection under Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) which was the country's tax authority agency (UK Coronavirus Act, 2020). The act required the agency to collect taxes, pay child benefits, enforce tax and customs laws, and enforce the payment of minimum wage by an

employer. The government allowed the agency to enact the Coronavirus Act 2020 as a temporary statute that regulated and directed the Coronavirus Job retention schemes. The act authorised the treasury to direct the public funds which were part of the countries' source of income to contribute toward 80% of the individual wages of furloughed employees. (UK Coronavirus Act, 2020). Both the governments and fiscal policies helped in influencing the adoption of CJRS.

However, these schemes contributed to the crippling of the economy, the UK experienced the greatest recession in 2020 with a 22.1% decrease (Luckwell, 2020). In an interview with David Milliken the London Reuters, an online news agency explained that the country expected to raise taxes after the coronavirus pandemic to solve the increased public debt. From the experience of the UK, the scheme was economic weight-draining and was applicable as a temporary measure of mitigating layoffs only; there was still a need to have a permanent retention scheme that would cordially meet the country's economic demands, and sustain the industrial relations needs.

2.1.2 Unequal Distribution of Benefits

Few countries in Southeast Africa adopted the wage subsidy campaign and managed to retain Jobs. In South Africa, the policy served as a core component of the government's policy response which reached millions of workers. However, the challenges reported were that there were vulnerable groups that were overrepresented amongst the recipients over that time which could not substantiate the issuing of the temporary employer-employee relief scheme (TERS). The benefits were higher in relative terms for lower-wage workers (Köhler et al., 2022). In Botswana as published by the government of Botswana (2020) the related scheme, known as

the COVID-19 wage support scheme was directed to specific industries which were directly impacted by the pandemic such as the tourism sector, export-oriented enterprises, ICT/BPO sector and SMEs, other industries which experienced third party effects were left out which crippled the count cyclical fiscal measures.

2.1.3 Communication Gap and Efficiency Concerns

The well-known macro-level option offered in Malawi was short-term work in the form of flexible working (Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, 2020). Some of the strategy's known challenges included a lack of face-to-face engagement, which resulted in less effective work communication, and a weak work-family barrier, which resulted in reduced efficiency (Bakhsh, 2021). Bakhsh (2021) stated that the method necessitated effective network connections and cutting-edge technological equipment, making the job retention program costly while still putting other workers' jobs at risk. This demonstrated that, by logic, job retention, whether part-time or full-time, was best suited for short recessions and it demonstrated that short-time work was restricted to developed economies.

2.2 Analytical Framework

An analytical framework is a coherent set of models (schematic representations of a situation) associated with a methodology which allows a connection to be made between theoretical proposals (generalisations) and empirical observation. (Marc, 2009). He further asserts that the analytical framework must be realistic, interdisciplinary, comparative, generalisable, reflexive and operational. Analyzing how labour laws were implemented during COVID-19 and how they affected job retention, Marc's (2009) definition of an analytical framework becomes critical. This framework, essentially a structured set of models, aids in connecting theoretical aspects of labour laws to real-world observations

made in the job market during the pandemic.

2.2.1 Labor laws and COVID-19 in Malawi

The outbreak of COVID-19 had an unprecedented impact on the global economy, leaving many businesses and employees struggling to cope. This was particularly true for Malawi, where labour laws were inadequate in providing solutions for job retention during the pandemic (Muhome, 2020). In light of this, it was important to consider the existing Malawian labour laws, such as the *Malawi - Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act, 1997 (No. 21 of 1997)*, and the specific COVID-19 workplace guides, in line with many job retention strategies. Analyzing how these laws were applied and interpreted within the context of the pandemic was necessary to reveal how employers and employees benefited from the strategies and how the strategies were implemented effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic called into question the implementation of labour regulations governing job retention. The Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act in Malawi (sect.18 (a)) provided that it was the duty of every employee at the workplace to take reasonable care for the safety and health of himself and others. Torrington *et al* (2008) added that such Health and Safety reasons were among the unfair reasons for dismissal. During the period of the pandemic, this law was still binding to employees who were symptomatic and required to stay away from the workplace. It allowed them to be maintained and provided with undisturbed remuneration and other privileges. On the other hand, the Employment Act (2010) allowed employers to bargain over the terms of contractual agreements in unforeseeable circumstances, which was restated in the COVID-19 Workplace Guidelines, by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020); The bargain areas included wages and other related compensations. The provision of full wages and other benefits to employees on sick leave

challenged retention during the pandemic as it required employers to provide income support to many workers on reduced or zero working hours amid the company's economic fall. The employer's relief from the burden was only found in the consideration of the pandemic as an unforeseeable circumstance, which allowed bargaining on the terms of contractual agreements.

However, during the pandemic for job retention to be successful employees needed maintenance of income from the employer (OECD, 2020). The conflict in the application of the two labour statutes posed a big challenge to industrial relations in Malawi at a time when many employers did not know what to do (Muhome, 2020). According to Muhome (2020), employers took measures that were outside the ambit of the law such as furloughing and salary cuts, while others declared employees redundant as a lawful measure of cost containment. Employee retention became irrelevant for many organisations, propelled by the failure to enact in-time temporary laws that regulated labour practices in the manufacturing industry, which were provided a year after the beginning of the pandemic.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a blueprint borrowed by the researcher to build the house of the research inquiry (Adom & Hussein, 2018). This section contains theories that explain the reasons for the existence of the problem under study. The research study critically sought to understand how manufacturing companies in Malawi managed to retain their employees and how they maintained their position during the pandemic period, using theories about organizational change in adapting to environmental demands as a benchmark.

Organizational adaptation studies were concerned with organizational change in the classical

period when the scientific approach to management was developed, heavily influenced by Chandler (1962). Organizational adaptation was grounded in the concept that businesses must change to keep up with changing market conditions or shifting environmental factors to remain successful. The theories contend that organisations change their strategies as the environment changes. This intentional decision-making undertaken by organisational members led to reduced distance between an organisation and its economic and institutional environments (Sarta et al. 2021). The contingency theory was one of the cutting-edge theories that emerged from the concept of organizational adaptation.

2.3.1 Contingency theory

The research study used contingency theory, which was developed in the modern era of management by Fred Fiedler in the 1960s. The theory suggests that there is no best way to organize a corporation, lead a company, or make decisions. Instead, it argues that the best course of action is determined by internal and external circumstances. Further, the theory suggests that managers are not supposed to be rigid in their approach to environmental demands, but rather encouraged to be flexible. Morgan (2006) expanded the theory further by stating that organizations are open systems that need careful management to satisfy and balance internal needs and to adapt to environmental circumstances, hence, there is no one best way of organizing. Following the assertions, Morgan (2006) concluded that the appropriate form of management depended on the kind of task or environment one is dealing with, and management is supposed to be concerned, above all else, with achieving alignment and good fits.

Following these assumptions, the COVID-19 pandemic and its imposed threats on human resource management were regarded as new ambiguous phenomena requiring a special

approach distinct from any other approach used by managers in retaining skills before COVID-19 which require contingency approaches. To develop such approaches efficiently, managers had to satisfy and carefully balance internal demands with environmental circumstances as open systems, as Morgan (1986) assumed. Considering the internal needs, managers had to think of meeting the satisfaction of the employees during the period in which retention of the employees was part of it. At the same time, they had to meet sanitary standards to avoid contagion and facilitate a good working environment for the employees as deemed by the Malawi Public Health Act (2020). Besides that, the CJRS was developed to balance the profitability of the organizational activities with the costs that the CJRS required. Considering job retention during the time of the pandemic as an open system that required a balance between the internal and external demands of the organization, it was necessary to benchmark the adaptation of CJRS by different companies that retained employees throughout the pandemic by the contingency theory.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other hand, managers were required to develop CJRS that were relevant for the pandemic's indefinite future. As a result, HRM was regarded as being at the heart of reforming firms' operations throughout the crisis period, as well as a catalyst for organizational change that navigated to an unknown future. (Jain, Shrivastav, & Vijetha, 2022). Managers needed to establish retention methods that kept essential components of their organizational functions in place so that the entire system continued to run without incurring future costs for recruiting, training, and development of new personnel. Such retention tactics necessitated adaptability to meet the many environmental demands that the HRM process encountered.

The assumption that there is no best approach to organizing employees was extended by

Fiedler (1960), who explained that the ability to develop and adapt the best fit of management was dependent on leaders. He assumed that leaders had a good member relationship with employees. From this view, Fiedler (1960) suggested that leaders made changes if they were well-accepted and respected by employees. He further extended that situational favorability could be achieved according to the degree of task structure, in which the availability of tasks determined the number of employees to work on the task, and that the extent to which tasks were defined provided a clear picture of what was to be done and a willingness to accomplish it. He concluded by arguing that the leader's position and power contributed to his flexibility in adapting to change. Fiedler's extended view on contingent theory assisted in understanding that job retention strategies adopted by various companies were possible either because of managers who had a good relationship with their employees, who in turn pledged loyalty to their organizations, as suggested by), Martensen & Grønholdt, (2006) who suggest that loyalty, among other factors, was dependent on a successful interplay between employees and managers. Or, the availability of information, which required managers and employees to develop strategies that were best suited to their organizations.

The theory helped to explain why different companies' CJRS were dependent on relationships, power, and situational favorableness in different manufacturing companies. On the other hand, understanding that a good fit was subjective, based on the different perceptions of the contractual employment parties, was useful. As a result of the best fit, either employees or employers suffer. Regardless of the circumstances, the ultimate goal of survival was pursued. Some organizations considered retrenchment during a financial crisis to be the best fit for survival, while others considered job retention to be the best fit, even though it disadvantages the employer. This entailed that out of the many CJRS that different companies adopted, not

all were effective or met employee satisfaction, but all aligned organizations to thrive in the COVID-19 financial crisis.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introductory overview, reflecting on the manufacturing industry in Malawi and the historical evolution of job retention. It has offered clear definitions of underlying concepts related to job retention and it has outlined some known job retention strategies, all aimed at enhancing employee-employer satisfaction. The chapter identified opportunities for implementing CJRS while acknowledging important challenges, such as increased debt levels and unequal distribution of benefits. The analytical framework of the study has been provided anchored in the labour laws in Malawi, emphasizing their implications on manufacturing companies. The chapter concludes by providing the contingency theory as the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The chapter discusses the research methodology adopted by the study. It covers the research design, study sites, study population, sampling method, sample size, data collection procedure, study period, research management method, data analysis plan, ethical considerations and a conclusion of the chapter.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach; this approach seeks to understand the lived experiences of participants in their context (Creswell, 2016). The approach helps to carry out an inquiry process for understanding a social or human problem, asking to build a complex, holistic picture with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducting the process in natural settings. Furthermore, Creswell (2016) explains that the design calls for a thoughtful discussion and systematic interpretation of issues or phenomena from the perspective of the population being studied to generate new concepts. In these regards, qualitative methods played a crucial role in conducting the research, as they were essential for comprehending the experiences of the participants within their work environments during the emergence of new crises and how they adapted to these circumstances. A face-to-face interview was suggested for the study to gather different perspectives on job retention as the research sought to understand COVID-19 job retention strategies used by human resource managers in Malawi's manufacturing industry. According to Kothari's (2004), the approach facilitates a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena. On the other hand, the approach proved beneficial in maintaining social distance, thereby reducing the likelihood of

contagion. This approach differed from other interview techniques that involved group settings, and it was particularly relevant given that the study was conducted during the ongoing pandemic.

3.3 Study Sites

The study focused on manufacturing companies that were in Blantyre and Lilongwe districts despite many districts that had manufacturing companies in Malawi during the time of the research. This was like that because the two districts statistically had many manufacturing companies and provided easy access to data for the study. The selection of the sites facilitated the efficient use of time and financial resources to conduct the study.

3.4 Study Population and Sample Size

The study population, defined by Saunders et al. (2009), is the entire set of cases from which a sample is drawn, consisting of human resource managers employed by large manufacturing companies, which were regarded as the top employers in Malawi's labour market. Manufacturing companies with more employees were more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic and were more likely to implement preventive measures, necessitating data collection for the study. During the time of the study, there were over fifty such companies in Malawi; however, the population of the study was limited to all human resource practitioners whose manufacturing companies did not retrench during the COVID-19 crisis. According to Kothari (2004), sample size refers to the number of participants or observations included in a study. There was ambiguity in the specification of sample size in purposive sampling because it could not be determined how many participants would be involved before data collection. As such, the sample size was generated during data collection. In agreement with the approach, Creswell (2016) argued that sampling size in purposive sampling is based on the

researcher's judgment grounded on the expected heterogeneity of individuals. Hence, the sample size was determined by the saturation of data during the time of collection, which was reached after interviewing twenty (20) participants from different Manufacturing companies.

Managers employed in manufacturing companies specializing in food processing, textiles, and the production of consumer goods constituted the majority of participants in the research. The education level of the participants showed that the majority, fifteen of the participants, had a bachelor's degree in human resource management or a related field, three were diploma holders, and the least, two, were master's holders. On average, these participants accumulated five years of work experience. This demographic profile indicated that the participants had a thorough understanding of human resource management (HRM) principles, and their HRM expertise may have enabled them to provide more in-depth and nuanced perspectives on the job retention strategies used by their manufacturing companies during the COVID-19 outbreak. Their insights into job retention strategies during the pandemic were more informed and valuable for the study.

3.5 Sampling Method

This is a procedure in which a smaller sample of participants is chosen to represent essentially what a larger population can present if every member of the larger population was asked the same questions. (Creswell, 2016). The participants were sampled using both snowballing and purposive sampling techniques. Snowballing, a technique in which existing participants provided referrals to recruit the required samples (Creswell 2016), was used to identify companies that did not retrench throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. To get the right participants for the study interviews, the researcher used purposive sampling, a technique that

required using experts' knowledge of the population (Creswell, 2016). The researcher during the study decided what needed to be known and set out to find people who were willing to provide the information through knowledge or experience. In the study, the HR practitioners whose companies managed to retain employees throughout the COVID-19 pandemic were sampled for interviews.

3.6 Data Collection

The research study adopted interviews as a technique for collecting data. This method entailed the delivery of oral-verbal stimuli and responses in the form of oral-verbal responses. (Kothari, 2004). Unstructured questions were used in the interviews, and participants were asked to explain the phenomenon in greater detail; unstructured interviews, according to Saunders et al. (2009), did not involve a system of a pre-planned set of questions, but instead relied on spontaneity and follow-through. The approach to the research interviews provided effective contextual material to develop answers to the objectives of the study. The interview process involved one-on-one sessions to emphasize authenticity and spontaneity and validity was strengthened through the open-ended nature of questions and member checking.

Amid the onset of COVID-19, the unique nature of the situation resulted in a scarcity of data regarding retention strategies. The utilization of interviews played a crucial role in acquiring fresh insights, contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of this emerging HR practice. Notably, this approach differed from other strategies, like group focus and table interviews, as it circumvented group interactions and material exchange. This alignment with social distancing measures mandated by public health regulations at that time was a key aspect. To uphold reliability, a steadfast interview approach and thorough documentation were consistently maintained.

For efficient data collection, the participants were provided with information about the study and what was required of the research problem. This approach necessitated a reduction of the likelihood of obtaining biased responses that would have resulted from unpreparedness to adequately gather information for the interview. To collect information in greater depth and to facilitate smooth discussion, the interviews were conducted in English and Chichewa according to the respondent's preference, with Chichewa, the local language, being translated into English during data transcription. Because the study required learning English, and the data collection tools were provided in English.

3.7 Study Period.

The study adopted the cross-sectional data collection procedure, which Creswell (2016) defined as a study examination that is done at one point. The advantage was that it was less time-consuming than other approaches. In the study, participants were approached at once except at the time when the data collection procedure was interrupted. The period for data collection, analysis, and generation of results was three (3) months, from 1 May 2022 to 2 August of the same year. Based on the availability of the participants, the researcher collected data in Lilongwe for 14 days and the same number of days in the Blantyre study sites, and data analysis was done during the last month of the period.

The study adopted a thematic data analysis approach; in this type of data analysis, the researcher provided codes to qualitative data to identify themes or patterns for further analysis concerning research questions. (Saunders et al, 2016). To avoid data piling up and leakage, raw data collected on a tape recorder during the interviews was transcribed into writing before the next interview. Different responses were accorded different codes, which helped identify

similarities and differences in answers to research questions. The codes generated from this exercise were mapped based on the similarities to formulate themes for the findings of the research study. To ensure efficiency and effectiveness in data analysis, NVIVO data analysis software was used. It was a qualitative data tool that was efficient in analyzing data that was collected through interviews. Data collected from each participant was documented, given a code for identification, and kept safe on a personal bookshelf. Analyzed data was kept on the personal hard drive and backed up on Google Drive to ensure that it was not lost. The accessibility of data was solely for the researcher; those who wanted to use it were asked to give prior consent, stating the reasons and usage.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

To ensure that respondents' privacy and rights were considered during the data collection process, several ethical measures were considered. Firstly, the introduction and identity cards were presented to the participants for confirmation. Secondly, the recruitment of the participants was voluntary, where the researcher obtained the respondents' informed consent and allowed them to sign. During data collection, however, participants were allowed to withdraw if they were uncomfortable by verbally expressing their displeasure to continue with the interview.

Thirdly, during the procedure, the researcher explained the relevance of the research study and its usefulness and assured participants that the study was intended for educational purposes. The approach encouraged participants to freely participate in the interview. The mode of participation was strictly face-to-face interviews; when other forms were required during the process, the researcher sought consent from the participant. Lastly, the researcher made sure that the anonymity and confidentiality of responses were honoured to protect the participant's

privacy, as suggested by Kumar (2011).

3.9 Limitations of the Study

The primary challenge of the study was accessing top-level management officials as respondents. To mitigate this issue, the respondents were first approached ahead of the interview and were allowed to suggest the best time for the interviews and were informed about the duration of their participation for planning purposes. When the interviews were interrupted, the respondents were allowed to advise the interviewer and the interview was rescheduled.

Another challenge was the potential for distortion and misrepresentation of sensitive information required for this study. To prevent this, the researcher asked for and obtained informed consent before data collection, and the participants were reassured that the data was intended solely for academic purposes. Some respondents were unapproachable, despite having been provided with informed consent in advance. This limited the amount of data collected, however, the saturation point was eventually reached with the companies whose participants were available.

3.10 Conclusion

The third chapter of the research provided a comprehensive overview of the methodology used for this study. The chapter began by outlining the research design and explaining why a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this investigation. The study population and sampling techniques, as well as the population size, were mentioned, followed by a detailed discussion of the data collection period, management procedures, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The findings of this study are presented in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This section presents and discusses the research findings about the study's objectives, incorporating relevant literature to give the context and meaning of the findings. The purpose of the study was to assess the CJRS that manufacturing companies used in Malawi, and the objectives were to examine the CJRS employed by the manufacturing companies in Malawi, analyze how the CJRS were operationalized, examine challenges associated with the operationalization of the CJRS, and determine opportunities for adopting the CJRS. As stated in Chapter Three, the study population consisted of human resource managers employed by large manufacturing companies that did not retrench during the COVID-19 crisis.

4.2 Exploring CJRS Used by Manufacturing Companies in Malawi

This research study's first objective was to analyse the retention strategies used by manufacturing companies in Malawi. A thorough analysis of the data uncovered several crucial strategies, including the suspension of bonus schemes and financial rewards; introduction of short-term work; limiting the provision of risk allowances; encouraging leave instead of payment; Combating misinformation, Adherence to government guidelines and providing employee support, Prioritising employee well-being. Further analysis revealed that these CJRS were implemented by managers who noticed a decline in revenue, and the specifics of the CJRS types that these various managers adopted and the factors that

influenced their choices are discussed in the following section.

4.2.1 CJRS Categories Adopted by Manufacturing Companies During the Pandemic.

During the interviews, one of the questions asked participants to describe how they maintained wage obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some participants, particularly those in markets that weren't significantly affected, mentioned that they continued to generate income and could afford to pay salaries to their employees. For example, a respondent from the food processing industry stated, *"We don't plan layoffs because the company has sufficient reserve funds to support salaries, and the market for our products remains stable, as everyone still needs cooking oil even during the pandemic."*

From such statements two different kinds of CJRS were realized during the study. The first category included CJRS adopted by manufacturing companies whose market was not disturbed during the pandemic, these were companies that produced necessary products that the public needed at the time, such as food. Although these companies' markets were not essentially disturbed at that time, however, statements like *"the company was not affected, however, some of the employees were affected and production went down because of the loss of labour force to death"* showed that they faced financial constraints which were not only as the result of death but also as the result of employee's anxiety due to workmates COVID-19 diagnoses, inadequate personal protective equipment which encouraged absenteeism. These issues had an impact on productivity and profitability, causing financial constraints for the companies.

The second category of CJRS was realized from non-essential service providers during the

pandemic, such as textile manufacturers. In contrast to the previous category, this category of CJRS was linked to a decline in marginal demand and supply that adversely affected manufacturing companies' business operations (Bakaert, Engstrom, & Ermolov, 2020). The decline in supply was a consequence of a disrupted global supply chain, which made raw materials difficult to acquire as supported by Harapko (2021). On the demand side, these manufacturing companies experienced a decline because of the public's immediate reaction to the pandemic. This finds support from Del Rio-Chanona et al (2020) who argued that Demand for products or services that exposed consumers to infection risk became low. The CJRS adopted by this group of companies comprised manufacturers that faced low demand for products and services as the result of the direct impact of the pandemic and the partial lockdown imposed by the Malawi government.

The existence of two distinct CJRS categories lends support to the contingency theory developed by Fiedler (1960) in organizational management by demonstrating that various strategies were developed to meet various environmental demands. The first category of CJRS was created in response to the indirect impacts of the pandemic and was intended to support and lessen employee stress brought on by the spread of the illness among coworkers and misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic. The second category of CJRS was created to reduce employee churn in the face of scarce raw materials and market contraction, which necessitated a balance between a large number of employees and their low profitability to meet salary obligations. These two categories adopted by these manufacturing companies each included several CJRSs, as seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: COVID-19 Job Retention Schemes and their Categorization

CJRSs Adopted by Manufacturing Companies Facing Demand and Supply Decline Challenges.	CJRSs Adopted by Manufacturing Companies Facing Workforce-related Challenges.
1. Suspension of bonus schemes and financial rewards. 2. Introduction of short-time working. 3. Limiting the Provision of risk allowances. 4. Encouraging leave instead of payment. 5. Utilizing capital reserves to finance human resources.	1. Combating misinformation 2. Adherence to government guidelines and providing employee support. 3. Prioritising employee well-being 4. Provision of financial benefits and appreciations as motivators for unskilled labour

4.2.2 CJRSs Adopted by Manufacturing Companies that Faced Demand and Supply Decline.

Five CJRSs were identified by companies that faced a decline in demand and supplies. CJRSs adopted were meant to sustain salary obligations and meet operational requirements for continuity and job retention programs. These CJRSs included suspension of bonus schemes and financial rewards, preventing the provision of risk allowances, holding off salary increments, encouraging leave instead of payment and utilizing Capital reserves to finance human resources. Suspension of Bonus Schemes and Financial Rewards Employers needed to

provide employees with as much income as possible throughout the pandemic. Since the companies lost some income, they needed to adjust expenses as well while providing a possible economic income to their employees. The majority of the respondents agreed on the point that they implemented long-term budget plans that outlined the salary payment schedules, which were replenished by reduced expenses that were directed to rewards and bonuses.

Compensation management strategies such as bonuses and rewards increase employees' motivation, performance, and retention (Safuan & Kurnia, 2021), and they were even necessary during the pandemic, as suggested by Elsafty & Ragheb (2020). However, these manufacturing companies opted to halt the provisions of such for a while to concentrate on the salary obligation. The establishment was necessary because, unlike financial incentives, which were decided upon under the employee prerogative of management as stated in the Malawi Employment Act (2010), salary obligations were mandatory and enforced both in the Employment Act. (2010) and the COVID-19 workplace guidelines by the Ministry of Labour Skills and Innovations in Malawi (2020).

Nevertheless, participants acknowledged the consequences associated with the strategy. They pointed out that since bonuses and other financial incentives are linked to increased employee motivation and performance, suspending them had a considerable impact on employee motivation and retention. However, it was deemed necessary for these manufacturing companies to adhere to legal requirements and make sure that workers received their basic salaries. This knowledge proved helpful in making decisions about upcoming crises or difficulties, allowing businesses to develop sensible plans that put employee welfare first while still adhering to labour obligations.

4.2.2.1 *Introduction of Short-Term Working.*

Short-term work as a management strategy to adjust labour inputs and costs in response to a significant decline or disruption in business conditions (Mosley, 2020, 7) was discovered to be an effective strategy for retaining skilled labour during the pandemic as presented by some participants. It allowed companies to provide wage support to employees despite revenue downturns. The participants who used this approach elaborated that this was accomplished by reducing employee remuneration to no less than half a week's pay and requiring both parties to agree on work hours. Short-term work for some participants was adopted as a means of preserving valued talents by providing all employees with hands-on experience. This allowed workers to continue working and receiving training during the downturn, which helped them maintain their skills and productivity (Osuna & Garcia Pérez, 2021).

Furthermore, the majority of the participants from different manufacturing companies expounded that they used short-term work not only to manage their finances and retain skilled labour but also to achieve social distancing and combat contagion. Due to the pandemic, the physical work environment underwent numerous changes, including the installation of sanitization stations, safety barriers, temperature monitoring, workspace reorganization, and the provision of PPE for both workers and clients. The ILO (2022) supported these workplace modifications, and companies used short-term work to avoid the costs associated with remodelling offices to accommodate many employees at once. Larger businesses required more stations, which increased operating costs and made it difficult to maintain employee safety while enforcing the required distance controls. However, by providing services to all employees at different times, these manufacturing companies made the best use of the limited

sanitation resources available. This strategy significantly increased employee retention throughout the pandemic, because it provided a safe work environment that complied with health and safety regulations (Armstrong, 2010).

During the interviews, it was revealed that the implementation of shift work during the pandemic provided a novel method of incorporating employee engagement and skill preservation. Employees were able to continue working and maintain their expertise even as production was reduced by using shifts. Employees were encouraged to share the less available work for them to practice and gain job experience. Short-term employment allowed workers with specific skills to stay connected to employers while also allowing them to return to productive work when the economy recovered. (Osuna & García Pérez, 2021). One of the most widely used short-term working strategies was rotational shift work, in which employees worked 4 hours a day while others worked 8 hours, depending on the employee-to-workspace ratio. The companies were able to retain several employees while providing a manageable income.

The study identified some differences in short-term work strategies between the COVID-19 pandemic and the preceding period. Before the pandemic, companies primarily used short-term labour to manage cyclical demand for their goods and services to retain skilled labour and keep labour costs under control (Mosley, 2020). Short-term work, on the other hand, was used during the pandemic to limit COVID-19 spread at work and avoid social contact, while also retaining skilled labour with fewer working hours. However, in all the periods, companies used short-term employment to manage their finances, prevent layoffs, and retain skilled labour in the face of economic hardship (Hijzeni & Venni, 2011)

4.2.2.2 *Limiting the Provision of Risk Allowances*

At the time of the study it was noted that the participants adopted the strategy in two ways, some companies completely stopped providing risk allowances to employees during the period of the pandemic, while some companies provided risk allowances to specific employees. Some respondents mentioned that their manufacturing companies stopped providing risk allowance as one of the cost-mitigating strategies, while some offered risk allowance to employees whose work required direct contact with customers, or occasionally given to employees who were meeting or working with visiting expatriates.

This demonstrated that some manufacturing companies emphasized cutting off allowances during the pandemic to control expenses and retain employees. The mechanism was possible because the granting of a risk allowance was acknowledged by Malawian labour laws as being equivalent to any other type of work benefit that was subject to an employer's power of management following the collective bargaining agreement (Malawi Employment Act. Sec. 3). This section was challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic when the government issued a declaration that the public sector had to provide risk allowances to frontline workers (The Malawi Public Health Act, 2020), and the Employers Consultative Association of Malawi (ECAM) issued the same (Buitelaar, 2021.), however without sector boundary, it was required that employers had to pay compensation to infected and those working in high-risk areas. The provision was extended to uncertain death caused by occupationally acquired Coronavirus (Buitelaar, 2021) and with the ECAM's guide to risk allowance employers developed different perceptions of how to approach risk allowances. Some companies decided to provide the risk allowance to their employees and some did not.

Many manufacturing companies made different choices about risk tolerances to better fit their

organizational environments. The first group of participants who did not provide risk allowances acknowledged the need to provide risk allowances, but they gave special consideration to those individuals who were most susceptible to occupational dangers and viewed this obligation as optional. They decided to make the workplace more secure and reduce the spread of the coronavirus rather than provide allowances. The decision to discontinue providing risk allowances was taken for two reasons: First, it was due to the company's inability to compensate all employees as a result of the outbreak limiting their financial capacity to continue providing risk allowances. Secondly, they did not want to ruin work relationships. They could not withhold allowances from some workers and give them to a selected group of highly valued workers. The managers thought doing so would only serve to fuel employee resentment, as was the case for health workers during the COVID-19 and Ebola outbreaks (Chersich et al., 2020; Raven et al., 2018) pandemics. These companies viewed jealousy as a cause of violent actions at work that reduced companies' productivity (Desteno et al, 2006). This is to say that manufacturing companies which decided not to give the risk allowance to their employees did so to build relationships with their employees and not to drive them away. Financial restrictions and the need to uphold good relations with all employees drove the decision to stop offering risk allowances. This strategy is in line with the human relations school of thought, which places a strong emphasis on the value of positive interactions between leaders and subordinates in achieving organizational objectives (Mayo, 1945). The study revealed that the strategy contributed effectively to lowering costs and preserving positive working relationships with the workforce.

The other group of participants selectively provided the allowance to employees and managed to reduce expenses by identifying a few employees who deserved the allowance. Some

managers identified frontline officers who had direct contact with the customers or people outside the workplace as deserving of the allowance, while for some eligibility depended on whom the workers were attached to, those who worked with the external expatriates were given the allowance. In a few instances, the provision of risk allowance also depended on the assessment of contagion, which involved an agreement between the managers and the employees to assess the employers' vulnerability to the contagion of Coronavirus while at work, agree on the risk and strategize a way to avoid it, follow through the strategy, and made the provision of risk allowance a last resort. This strategy was used in companies that experienced an Ebola outbreak where risk assessments were conducted to identify employees who were at a higher risk of virus exposure, and some institutions provided incentives such as risk allowances to these employees to motivate them to continue working and protect themselves from the virus (Ambituuni et al., 2015)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Malawi's manufacturing sector faced the challenge of providing risk allowances to employees. Depending on the employees' level of exposure to the virus, some companies completely stopped offering risk allowances, while others continued to do so for a subset of their workforce. This shows that job retention during the pandemic depended on managers' flexibility to provide incentives that motivated the employees. The strategies are related to the contingency theory, which contends that to maximize effectiveness, organizations should adopt flexible strategies that are dependent on the circumstances (Donaldson, 2001).

4.2.2.3 *Encouraging Leave instead of Payment.*

When participants were asked how their organizations planned to control organizational expenses, one of the participants said “*Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, Manufacturing*

companies routinely encouraged payment instead of leave for continuous production. Employees who had accrued their leave days were paid an amount equal to their work over the time they worked while on leave. However, during the period of the pandemic as a control measure of organizations' expenses, employees with accrued leave days were forced to go off for their days". The presence of multiple statements from various companies during the analysis showed that a lot of companies supported taking leave instead of providing leave encashment, as a measure to manage organizational expenses.

Leave days during the time of the study were mandatory by the labour laws. However, the specific period for an employee to go on leave remained an agreement between employer and employee (Malawi's Employment Act, 2010, Sec 45 (1a)). During the period of the pandemic, the participants explained that it was different as the COVID-19 workplace guidelines by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020) allowed employers to send their employees on leave, and the initial date for the leave was unitarily decided by the employer as a mechanism to bail the employer from the cost of holding employees on the organization. The Employment Act of Malawi (2000), on the other hand, provided that employers were supposed to offer leave grants to the employees who went on leave, but throughout the pandemic, some of the manufacturing companies resented the compensation, it was noted that some employers did not provide leave grants for the leave period of their employees due to financial hardships. The pre-COVID-19 furloughing practice, in which employees were put on temporary leave without pay for the duration of the leave, is an example of unpaid leave to rescue businesses from financial difficulty (Baranik et al., 2018). Even though employees were allowed to leave without grants, they were still considered employees by their employers, received all the advantages that came with being one and were paid wages.

These findings showed that the decision to encourage leave rather than offer leave encashment during the pandemic served two important purposes. First, the purpose was seen in its implementation as a strict framework for managing employers' financial resources and surviving difficult times. Second, it advanced the government's public health agenda by enabling workers to stay at home and halting the virus's spread. This strategy, in particular, is in line with contemporary management techniques that place a high value on encouraging work-life balance and workers' well-being, which have been shown to improve job satisfaction, employee retention, and overall organizational performance (Aybars, 2007). As a result, the promotion of leave rather than leave encashment during the pandemic signified a shift to a more modern method of managing human resources in the manufacturing sector, and the reason that the strategy helped to retain employees over the period may have favourable effects on organizational performance and job retention in Malawi's manufacturing sector.

On the other hand, the strategy advocated a —one-size-fits-all approach to management discussed in chapter two, which explained that management practices should be varied to meet the particular requirements and difficulties of each organization (Donaldson, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic posed unique difficulties for Malawi's manufacturing sector, and organizations were able to respond to the emergency by promoting leave rather than leave encashment as they previously used to. By putting their employees' health and well-being first, the companies lowered the risk of infection in the workplace and implemented long-term business continuity.

4.2.2.4 Utilizing Capital Reserves to Finance Human Resources

The analysis of the study showed that some manufacturing companies were able to retain their workers because they had sufficient capital reserves to cover their employees' salaries and other benefits. The few participants responded that their companies had built up more profits

before the pandemic, which they invested back into their failing businesses to fund staff retention initiatives during the period of the pandemic. For some participants, such plans were designed to span the first five years of the pandemic without leading to layoffs. While for some of the manufacturing companies, the plan could not last the full five years and they planned to lay off employees if the government's curfews and partial lockdowns were prolonged.

Before the pandemic, withdrawals from the capital reserve fund were meant to pay for future expenses and carry out long-term facility projects, as stated by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (2014). However, during the pandemic, these reserves were used to take care of urgent organizational requirements, like meeting financial obligations (Zhang et al., 2023). This strategy had flaws even though its goal was to successfully achieve employee retention. Companies became vulnerable to using up funds that could have been used for capital investments, potentially resulting in lower stock prices or credit ratings (Kim et al., 2020). If this strategy had not been viable, it might have eventually resulted in layoffs and additional harm to the standing of the business as well as to employee morale (Zhang et al., 2023). Many manufacturing companies that paid employees from capital reserves rather than regular profits stopped raising salaries after realizing these shortcomings. This step was taken to maintain their financial stability and make sure the strategy would be implemented over the long term.

The majority of participants confirmed that during the period of the pandemic, the manufacturing companies they belonged to did not increase salaries due to the low incomes that the businesses faced. Salary increments were enforced by the government and at times it

was the employer's prerogative, the employers were requested to meet the government salary threshold set in consultation with workers and employers associations (Employment Act, 54 (3b)). During the pandemic, this obligation was held off by the COVID-19 workplace guidelines endorsed by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020) which allowed employers to halt increments. On the other hand, it became the employer's prerogative to increase beyond the current wage limit if the companies made profits, which was difficult during the period of the pandemic. This gave reasons for companies that used capital reserves to hold off increments as both the labour laws and employment agreements supported it during the pandemic.

When salaries are not raised, employees suffer negative effects like decreased engagement and motivation, low morale, and decreased job satisfaction (Yousef, 2016). According to studies on fair and open compensation practices, it is noted that salaries should be in line with organizational objectives and market rates, and staff members should feel valued and recognized for their work (Milkovich et al., 2001). However, there are times when having to delay pay increases is necessary due to budgetary constraints (Shaw et al., 2002), but Employers need to effectively communicate with their workforce in these situations and offer different types of appreciation and incentives to maintain the level of motivation (Milkovich et al., 2001). HR practitioners in the manufacturing industry agreed that they had to effectively communicate with their employees to express appreciation and provide alternative forms of compensation, such as flexible work schedules. Some of the participants mentioned that the best ways to deal with the economic challenges the companies were facing were determined with the help of the employees. These responses showed that employee communication was a priority for manufacturing companies to execute freezing of salary

increments over the period.

The section showed and examined CJRSs that were implemented by manufacturing companies which were experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the decline in demand or supply brought on by COVID-19 and its impacts. Suspension of Bonus Programs and Financial Rewards, Short-Time Working, Refraining from Offering Risk Allowances, Encouraging Leave Instead of Payment, and Paying Salaries with Capital Reserves were some of the Strategies Adopted. The CJRSs that were implemented by manufacturing companies whose market thrived during the pandemic because they provided necessary goods and services are provided and discussed in the next section.

4.2.3 CJRSs that were Adopted by Essential product manufacturers.

In Malawi, according to the Employment Act (2010), essential services are defined as those crucial service sectors whose disruption puts people's lives or general well-being at risk. According to ILO (n.d), important service providers include healthcare establishments like hospitals and pharmacies, food retailers including grocery stores, utilities like water and electricity suppliers, waste management entities, telecommunication companies, postal offices, financial institutions like banks and insurance firms, agricultural establishments like farms and agricultural input dealers, fuel distributors. Media and communication providers including newspapers and broadcasters. Security institutions such as the police and the Military.

Following the list, the manufacturers of food products were among the essential service providers at the time of the pandemic in Malawi. The Job retention strategies used in these Manufacturing companies were comparable to the ones that the previous category highlighted,

although a few distinctions were noted. These distinctions were noted from some remarks presented by the participants during the research, which showed that in contrast to earlier strategies intended to ensure that workers continued to get an income, these new strategies aimed at motivating and encouraging job commitment. While some manufacturing companies had no issues with employee income security, keeping employees on board was a challenge due to employees' concerns about contagion, receiving false information, and other pandemic consequences on human well-being to some manufacturers. To reduce the employee turnover that such factors could result in, the companies planned for CJRSs that provided access to information, enhanced employees' communication, provided workplace guides and support, and provided serious and timely responses to employees' welfare.

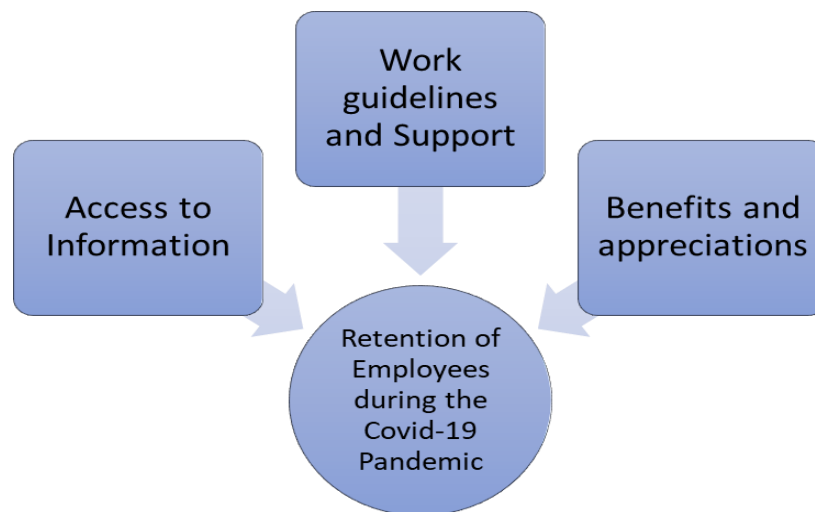


Figure 1: Illustration of CJRS used by Essential products Manufacturers during the COVID-19 pandemic

4.2.3.1 Combating Misinformation

The study revealed that COVID-19 misinformation had a negative impact on manufacturing companies, particularly with regard to employee retention. According to the majority of responses gathered, some employees were hesitant to use personal protective equipment (PPE) because they thought the pandemic was a Chinese government plot to control the population, argued by Douglas, (2021) as a COVID-19 Conspiracy theory. Such ideas caused frontline workers to have unfavourable opinions toward pandemic preparedness measures, to be absent more frequently, and to experience more stress (Munyenyebe et al., 2021). The study also showed that in addition to decreased productivity and higher rates of employee turnover, misinformation encouraged resentment against safety measures, compromising workers' health and safety and reducing trust and collaboration between employees and management. This was evident in statements such as; *“Covid-19 is dependent on whether, during the cold season it hits hard and the company reacts according to the intercity of the infections”*.

The solution required managers to actively communicate factual information about daily pandemic trends, employee health issues at work, organizational changes, and potential outcomes to combat misinformation. This approach was in line with suggestions made by the ILO and Fattah (2020), who place a strong emphasis on the need for employers to stay in constant contact with their staff to address issues and clear up any false information they came across. The study found that the managers used effective communication and daily check-ins, employee engagement and manager interaction as tools to facilitate the provision of updated and right information.

4.2.3.2 Effective Communication and Daily Check-Ins

The study examined daily check-ins, defined as briefings designed to provide essential information on particular challenges to support informed decision-making and offer workable answers (Maggin et al., 2015). The study found that these briefings were either delivered verbally or in writing, and then there was a question-and-answer period to get feedback. The managers fostered a positive work environment by highlighting open communication and the need for safety precautions during their daily check-ins. As a result, the implementation of this approach resulted in lower stress levels, increased employee involvement, and increased workplace efficiency, these outcomes aligned with Azim et al., (2020). Daily check-in provided a room for effective communication about the pandemic and allowed employees to get the right information. Reddy and Gupta (2020), support the strategy by arguing that effective communication is critical in limiting the spread of COVID-19 and mitigating its negative impact on public health.

4.2.3.3 Employee Engagement and Manager Interaction during the Pandemic.

Employee engagement as a personal interaction between managers and employees to improve their work experience, results in a strong emotional connection between employees and their companies, which influences their willingness to put in extra effort at work (Pradhan et al., 2017). At the time of the study some published information was found to be deceptive (Garcia et al., 2020, 1) or undermined both government and organisational intentions regarding job retention. Line managers were encouraged to

share pandemic information by forming care groups, providing training, and addressing pandemic-related conspiracy theories at work. These initiatives aimed to provide accurate information to counteract misinformation that employees were exposed to and instil trust. The strategy enhanced the importance of information and Communication in the development of Trust as stated by Azim et al., (2020). According to Reddy & Gupta, (2020), increased access to valuable information within the organization not only instils trust, but also positively affects employees' perceived risks, behavioural control, and subjective norms. Furthermore, sharing information about the organization and its surroundings enabled employers to empathize with employees and provide solutions to pandemic-induced anxiety and concerns (Reddy & Gupta, 2020). According to ILO and Fattah (2021), maintaining regular communication with employees during the pandemic was critical for identifying those who were concerned about their health and potential workplace changes. Following these arguments, it showed that assigning line managers to have ongoing dialogues with employees improved worker interactions, fostering mutual understanding of COVID-19 information. This approach ultimately reduced stress, increased motivation, and strengthened employees' willingness to stay with their employers.

4.2.3.4 Withholding Information and Dispelling Misconceptions.

Some managers restricted access to specific information, such as details that could harm employee performance or emotionally charged news, such as pandemic-related deaths. They withheld information about the pandemic's effects to keep their workforce motivated and actively dispelled employee misconceptions. These HR managers devised

novel strategies for encouraging and motivating employees while alleviating the anxiety and stress caused by the pandemic. Strategic management achieves and maintains a competitive advantage through the development and implementation of strategies that align with the organization's goals, vision, and mission.

The study discovered a link between managers' perspectives on the pandemic and their decision to keep employees. This was realized from some participants who encouraged their employees to work during this period conceptualising that COVID-19 was a hoax. One participant said that the pandemic posed a minimal threat in Africa therefore there was no reason to worry, while another participant said “*it is just another infectious disease*”. This presented a differing perspective from the one outlined by the WHO (2020), which characterized the pandemic as highly contagious and potentially lethal to people. Participants who held these views revealed that the pandemic affected African manufacturers because of the economic consequences for industrialised countries, which disrupted the global supply chain. Surprisingly, promoting virus-related conspiracy theories proved to be an effective motivator for employees feeling overwhelmed by uncertainties about their future. These managers created an environment in which employees remained engaged and empowered in their roles by providing information that contradicted mainstream beliefs.

Some manufacturing companies even used conspiracy theories in team-building exercises or group discussions, allowing employees to explore different perspectives on the virus without fear of being judged or criticized. For example, one of the participants, when asked about intentions of providing risk allowance to employees who were working at the time, answered “*Why provide risk allowance to people who are dying?*” meaning health precautionary

measures were more important than financial incentives at that time. This company valued flexible working hours as a strategy over financial incentives. Such open communication also helped to keep the workers have a common understanding of the pandemic and its impacts.

Furthermore, one participant mentioned that organizations included conspiracy theories in employee training programs to boost engagement and stimulate creative problem-solving skills. The participants used different conspiracy theories to probe views and understanding of the employees about the pandemic. Presenting alternative explanations for aspects of the pandemic sparked lively discussions among employees, resulting in innovative ideas and solutions that benefit both parties regarding productivity or cost-cutting initiatives. Mohome (2020) affirmed that employers were able to retain their employees despite the global health crisis and the potential risks of going to work by using conspiracy theories as a form of coercive engagement.

4.2.3.5 Adherence to Government Guidelines and Employee Support

During the crisis, employers took measures to ensure employee satisfaction and retention, as they recognised its importance for maintaining operations. During the study, it was found that organizations with unaffected markets during the pandemic focused on fostering employee satisfaction to encourage retention. This was achieved by offering job opportunities and skill development training, keeping employees engaged, and improving their skills. Central to these retention strategies was the protection of employees from the COVID-19 pandemic. By prioritizing empathy and employee well-being, companies experienced increased loyalty and productivity (Bahadur et al., 2019). By government-mandated precautionary measures, organizations developed company-specific standards that aligned with their work environments while adhering to the government's issued guidelines on control measures.

When the government implemented virus prevention policies, managers found relief as it provided a framework to address the shock and uncertainty surrounding job retention. The participants alluded to the fact that companies adopted sanitary measures prescribed by health authorities, including social distancing, face masks, disinfectants, and infection detection tool kits. According to Mzumara et al. (2021). These actions alleviated employee anxiety related to contagion fears. Supporting employees during this critical period led to enhanced organizational performance and reputation (Sainju et al., 2021).

HR departments in various manufacturing companies adapted and enhanced their preventive measures to fit their workplace environment, in addition to the government's established prevention guidelines. For example, when the government made masking mandatory, some managers provided washable masks to relieve employees' need to purchase disposable masks daily. Maintaining social distance in crowded manufacturing workplaces was difficult; thus, companies divided workspaces into smaller sub-workstations to ensure at least a one-meter distance between employees. Some participants reported setting up large rooms as duty stations to avoid overcrowding in departments with many employees. Furthermore, employers encouraged employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine even though it was not required by law, and they provided mental health support services for employees who were stressed as a result of personal life changes brought on by the pandemic or workplace pressures. Facilitating counselling sessions and encouraging open dialogue between managers and employees assisted them in dealing with these situations more effectively. These employee support strategies met the ILO requirements for ensuring employee health and safety during the pandemic, which included risk assessments, preventative measures, occupational health services, mental health, and psychosocial support (ILO, 2021).

According to the findings of the study, protecting vulnerable employees during difficult times such as the COVID-19 pandemic requires intervention from both the government and employers to emphasize the importance of following workplace policies and improving working conditions, as alluded to by Naidoo (2020). Companies that prioritized employee support and followed policies were more likely to keep their employees. In line with these findings, Sainju et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of promoting employee happiness to foster a positive work culture that boosts job satisfaction and loyalty.

4.2.3.6 Prioritizing Employee Well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on manufacturing companies, causing managers to adjust their operations and strategies to prioritize employee safety while meeting customer demands. This was revealed by various respondents' statements, indicating a shift toward prioritizing employee welfare as the organizational goal during this time period. Managers created a supportive work environment by ensuring job security, providing additional health benefits, and responding quickly to employee concerns.

This emphasis on employee well-being is consistent with the Soft HRM model, which recognizes employees as an organization's most valuable asset and emphasizes employee well-being, development, and satisfaction as critical to organizational success (Bratton & Gold, 2012). As a result of the pandemic's forced closure of many manufacturing companies, job insecurity increased, raising concerns about layoffs, wage cuts, and reduced working hours. Managers shifted their focus to human resources and their welfare to retain employees, creating direct communication channels and involving employees to mitigate insecurity and preserve labour skills for the post-pandemic period. The study revealed that managers prioritized employee well-being over maximizing productivity, resulting in a more secure work environment and an increased proclivity for innovation, agreeing with Torre et al.

(2021). The findings showed that a shift to the soft HRM model, emphasizing employee well-being as a critical factor in organizational success, could benefit organizations during times of crisis by helping them retain employees.

4.2.3.7 Provision of Financial Benefits and Appreciation as Motivators for Unskilled Labor

The study revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, some manufacturing companies continued to provide financial benefits to employees. One of the participants indicated that financial incentives were a motivator for employees, particularly unskilled workers. Managers believed that providing monetary benefits, such as bonuses to those who showed up for work, motivated more people to work. Employees who were unable to work due to the pandemic, on the other hand, lost their bonus earnings. Highlighting the importance of financial rewards for many unskilled workers, according to previous research by Podsakoff et al. (2010) unskilled labour force is more motivated by earnings than the skilled labour force.

Surprisingly, the study agreed with this argument as it was revealed that the unskilled labour force managed to work despite the pandemic threat, and many did not report COVID-19-related illness when compared to skilled workers. Fear of losing income was one of the reasons given by participants as to why employees did not disclose their COVID-19 status. Furthermore, employees with larger families were more concerned about earning enough money to support their families, leading them to continue working despite the risk of contagion. The findings suggest that one of the reasons that job retention during the pandemic was possible is because of the fear of losing economic dependence by employees. Manufacturing companies that continued to provide financial benefits had a better chance of retaining employees during the pandemic. Kehoe & Wright, (2010) emphasizes that financial rewards are among the important motivators for employees and can lead to higher levels of

engagement and commitment to the organization.

4.3 Analysing the Operationalisation of CJRS

This was the second specific objective of the study aimed at analysing the operationalization of CJRSs in the Manufacturing Company in Malawi. The analysis was based on a synthesis of the management prerogative of employers and labour laws in Malawi. Labour practices in Malawi were required to comply with government-enforced labour laws to ensure equity in matters relating to improving industrial peace, accelerating economic growth, social justice, and related issues (Muhome, 2012, 109). On the other hand, the Malawi Ministry of Labor Skills and Innovation demanded employers to review their business practices and look for innovative ways to strengthen their resiliency as an organisation (Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, 2020). Despite being constrained by the temporary laws of the time, employers had the advantage of directing and filling in any gaps that the statutes deemed appropriate for the organization and the employees as stated in the Malawi Employment Act (2010). In researching operationalizing the CJRS, it became evident that the application of both labour laws and employers' judgement greatly impacted decision-making around bonus schemes and financial reward suspensions, implementation of short-time working, risk allowance limitations, encouraging leave rather than payment, combating misinformation, adherence to government guidelines, and providing employee support.

4.3.1 The Role of Labour Laws in CJRS Operationalization

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some manufacturing companies managed to retain jobs by adhering strictly to the government-set standards of operation. Those who supported and prioritized employee well-being complied with the government by implementing laws to guide employers. The majority of the participants noted that they chose to provide job security

and healthy facilities at work because the government wanted them to do so. The responsibility of addressing employee concerns fell on HR managers, some of whom utilized labour laws and pandemic updates to judge their decision to retain employees. These manufacturing companies recognized the importance of considering the needs and desires of human resources as the primary consideration in determining work conditions to achieve employee growth and development, as noted by Budd et al. (2004), which were enriched with the guide of labour laws.

In order to provide guidance to the general public and workplaces regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the Malawian government published rules and regulations, such as the *COVID-19 workplace guidelines*. Which the participants argued to have adopted them. The majority of companies in the manufacturing sector adopted the COVID-19 sanitary standards provided by the Ministry of Health along with the labour laws, which served as the foundation for retention strategies. From the labour statutes, employees were expected to have access to pertinent information as soon as possible, and social dialogue was used to create a consensus on preserving jobs and ensuring business continuity as well as to engage in the search for creative solutions to reduce terminations.

The incense of labour laws and guiding principles was also seen during the critical analysis of some of the strategies like the use of Capital reserve to enhance retention programs, the use of COVID-19 protective equipment and the implementation of sanitary measures to create a safe working environment to reduce the rate of infections and safeguarded jobs as well as the continuity of organizational operations, which were all highlighted and influenced in the COVID-19 Workplace Guide in Malawi by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation,

(2020). According to four participants in the study, to abide by the government guidance on labour practice during the time they shifted their organisation's attention from the quantity of production, which had previously been a gauge of growth in profitable organizations (Puspitaningtyas et al., 2018) and increased quality of employee wellbeing. Although such strategies decreased financial assets that were meant for increased production, they improved the well-being of employees. The finding suggested that the choice to engage employee-wellbeing-centred approaches to retention was successful because of the government, 's frequent provision of workplace guidelines during the period.

4.3.2 The Role of Employers' Management Prerogative in CJRS Operationalization

Despite that the government and its regulatory bodies provided rules for the period of the pandemic managers had to improvise to make the rules fit in their work environments. This meant that some CJRSs did not directly require government supervision, some of these strategies included cutting off bonuses; rewards, risk allowances and other compensation to fit the economic hardship during the period of the pandemic. The strategies depended on the employer's authority as explained in the Employment Act of Malawi sec 50 (4). Employers revealed that they were legally allowed to make changes in the financial benefits during the period of the pandemic as long as they provided reasonable notice and followed other applicable laws and regulations.

This meant that the employers did not necessarily need consent from employees before making changes related to their financial benefits packages. However, it was always best practice for employers to consult with their employees whenever possible before

implementing major changes like these (Kuyea & Sulaimonb, 2011). In the COVID-19 workplace guidelines by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020), it was required that these strategies be engaged per agreement with the employees. However, in all the cases, the strategies abided by the guiding statutes. The findings suggested that there was a significant focus on retention among managers in the manufacturing sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, as emphasized by Stuart et al.'s call for retention to be considered an equally important task for managers as other HR practices. This implies that managers recognized the importance of employee retention during this period of uncertainty and invested significant effort in developing retention strategies to preserve jobs and ensure business continuity.

4.3.3 *Contradictions in CJRS and Compliance with Labor Law*

Although it was required that employers had to provide the best-fit strategies for their organization during the period of the crisis, some of the strategies adopted were derailed from the labour laws. Some of such strategies were analysed by providing access to the information requested by the COVID-19 Workplace Guidelines endorsed by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020). Some responses showed that some of the manufacturing companies refrained from the provision of COVID-19-related information, others willingly discredited its effects on employees as a means of avoiding stressing employees, while others opted to work overnight in disguise of the government-enforced social distancing on employees. Employers needed to communicate what they perceived as right during the crisis as beliefs and values lead organisations from conservative to innovative (Abbas & Asghar, 2020). however, holding the realities of the Coronavirus effects on the organization from employees, imposing COVID-19 conspiracy theories such as the —pandemic is a hoax, and Managers' avoidance of masks to show employees that the pandemic was not lethal as noted from some of the

participants' responses, contradicted the operating statutes in the period. The COVID-19 Workplace Guide by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020) requires covering the nose and mouth with disposable tissues following the Coronavirus Prevention, containment and Treatment Measures.

It was noted that the majority of the participants recognised that denial of access to information provided room for unlawful industrial practice. Some of the other strategies mentioned included the CJRSs such as payment of day wage instead of monthly payments and working at night in disguise of enforced COVID-19 preventive measures that violated both the Employment Act (2010) and COVID-19 workplace guidelines by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, 2020. The Employment (2010) Act stated that the wages payable to an employee were to be done following the terms of the employment contract (Employment Act, sec. 50), Furthermore, section 50 (b) commended wages to be paid not less than once a month in the case of the employee whose wages were fixed on a monthly or yearly basis. According to the analysis, some employers changed the payment scheme of full-time employees from monthly to daily wages without consultation. However, this imposed a great implication on the application of labour laws not until the provision of The COVID-19 Workplace Guidelines by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020), which allowed a reduction of the wage bill upon employer-employee agreement. The contradiction was that manufacturing companies with limited access to information adopted the strategies without agreeing with their employees or the representative bodies. Introducing night shifts in disguise for COVID-19 measures that the government imposed on workplaces was an indirect communication that discredited the hazards of the pandemic. In the manufacturing industry, the practice provided room for congestion against the suggested strategies that the government and the health sector

advocated during the period. According to Maidstone et al., (2021), the workers on the night shifts were more prone to contagion unlike those on the day shift.

4.4 Evaluating Opportunities for Using CJRSs in Malawi's Manufacturing Industry

The study's objective was to look into job retention strategies used by Malawi's manufacturing industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study identified the following advantages of using CJRSs in manufacturing companies.

4.4.1 Unboxed HR Practices for Organizational Health

Three participants during the study revealed that the approaches they took to manage required them to go beyond what the government required. One of these participants argued that Employers had to ensure that contagion was kept out of employees' homes for retention to be possible by providing washable masks to employees who could not afford them. Another one explained that the possibility of retention was difficult because it posed a threat to life, the employees needed unconventional means to encourage them to work beside monetary rewards and the company introduced care groups for stress management, and instilling positive beliefs about the pandemic. The third participant explained that the employer created open communication so that employees who needed attention could reach the office for help at any time, which was unusual before the pandemic. By implementing unboxed HR practices, the implementation of CJRSs provided a new way of thinking in industrial relations. In this approach, the inventory of organizational health included employee health and wellness maintenance needs. (Miles, 1965) Employee retention during the COVID-19 pandemic was defined further by going the extra mile in how managers approach organizational health. (Abbas and Asghar, 2020).

During the study, it was discovered that three participants used pandemic preparedness strategies that exceeded government guidelines. One participant emphasized the importance of employers preventing the spread of the virus in employees' homes to retain employees, such as providing reusable masks to those who cannot afford them. The second participant mentioned that ensuring employee retention was difficult due to the threat to life; thus, unconventional methods, such as introducing care groups for stress management and promoting positive beliefs about the pandemic were required. The third participant emphasized the importance of open communication, which allowed employees in need of assistance to contact the office at any time - something unusual before the pandemic. The introduction of CJRSs resulted in a shift in perspective on industrial relations due to these innovative HR practices. This approach viewed organisational health as an inventory, with employees' health and well-being needs to be addressed (Miles & Ritchie, 1968) During the COVID-19 pandemic, employee retention required going above and beyond regarding organisational health (Manurung, 2012)

4.4.2 The Mechanism for Efficient Resource Utilization.

During the COVID-19 crisis, most people worked in shifts to reduce overcrowding and infection transmission. Shift work schedules benefited both employers and employees because employers could keep their workforce without requiring full-time availability, while employees received some form of compensation. The participants contended that numerous employees were given access to limited contagion-prevention resources. According to these perspectives, these workforce retention approaches were chosen and implemented with efficient resource management as a top priority. During the pandemic, flexible work strategies were critical for promoting employee well-being and job performance while also optimizing

resource usage, according to Arora and Anon (2022), who argue that these measures result in lower expenditure on office space and transportation.

4.5 Analysing challenges with the Operationalisation of CJRS.

The third objective of the study was to examine the challenges faced by the manufacturing companies that implemented job retention strategies during the time of the pandemic. Section 4.4 and its following sections provide and discuss the findings concerning specific strategies.

4.5.1 Challenges of Suspending the Provision of Bonuses and Rewards

Elsafty and Ragheb (2020) recommended that HR managers play their roles in maximizing the level of employee satisfaction by offering assistance and financial benefits to workers during the pandemic. The compensation and benefits packages, which included bonuses and rewards, were thought to be the primary motivators for employees. As such, they played a critical role in retention efforts (Shtembari et al., 2022, 1). When manufacturing companies stopped offering these compensations, there was a sudden change in lifestyle and expenditure that demotivated the employees. During the period of the study, it was noted that employees working in manufacturing companies were more satisfied with their bonuses besides their monthly packages because they were used to receiving more bonuses and benefits, which increased their standards of living. As some participants argued, the loss of benefits meant a change in their lifestyle, which they found more difficult and stressful to adjust to. This showed that since scrapping bonuses and rewards was inevitable for some manufacturing companies, the managers needed other ways of motivating employees.

4.5.2 Challenges of Introducing Short-Term Work

Short-time work involves reducing the number of days worked per week or cutting back on overtime hours, as previously discussed. The majority of the manufacturing companies

adopted this approach as a way of managing costs during the pandemic while still keeping some staff employed. However, this had a negative effect on workers' wages and incomes. The average wage rate for manufacturing workers in Malawi decreased by 8% between March 2020 and April 2021 compared with pre-pandemic levels (World Bank, 2020). Many developing countries in Africa that adopted the strategy suffered the same fate during the COVID-19 pandemic (Weber et al., 2020). That meant that even though people were still employed, they were earning less money than before the pandemic began. Employees who were already struggling financially before the pandemic found themselves unable to make ends meet due to these reduced wages. Further, those who relied on overtime pay found it difficult to adjust their budgets accordingly if they no longer received additional income from extra hours worked each week.

Some manufacturing companies that adopted short-term work used shift work to reduce hourly wages, and the strategy introduced a wage gap among the employees. A gap was created between the shifters and stayers in the manufacturing companies. The stayers, especially the line managers who coordinated the employees, maintained their wage rate unlike the shifters, which created a huge difference in the wages earned among the employees working in the same organization. This prompted jealousy and affected coordination among employees, as seen in a previous study by Desteno et al. (2001).

4.5.3 Challenges of Preventing the Provision of Risk Allowances

These payments were intended to be incentives for employees who took additional risks while performing their duties. Many employees working in manufacturing companies in Malawi were entitled to the risk allowance due to their exposure to dangerous machinery and chemicals. Scrapping risk allowances during the time of the crisis was one of the more

difficult decisions for employers, especially considering the financial implications it had on the employees. A risk allowance, just like other compensations, was important to improve employee wellness and increase earnings for standard life. The scrapping of the risk allowance meant that these privileges were taken away, and the standard of living among the employees whose work required the use of the risk allowance provision declined. Which threatened the level of job retention that the managers wanted to achieve. On the other hand, removing these payments helped reduce costs and ensure that businesses remained viable during that period of economic uncertainty; however, it led to decreased morale among employees, which affected productivity levels within the workplace. Employees who worked with external employees received the allowance, while others offered it to employees who had direct customer contact. Favouritism and competition among the employees were both induced by the adoption of the risk allowance, which agreed with the findings by Chersich et al., (2020); Raven et al., (018). Companies that paid a risk allowance to staff members who had direct customer contact reported dissatisfaction from employees whose jobs did not involve dealing with outsiders. Employees who were unable to collaborate with outside experts exhibited resentful behaviour, which increased absenteeism and decreased productivity.

4.5.4 Challenges of Paying Salaries from Capital Reserves

The study discovered that companies that paid employees out of the capital reserve lost their borrowing power as a result of a decline in their assets and exposed themselves to insolvency. The capital reserves, which were built up from capital surplus rather than directly from companies' operations, were intended to be used as a reserve for future unforeseen events to help the company's capital (Security and Exchange Commission of the United States, 2014). However, during the pandemic, most companies adopted the use of a capital reserve to

support capital for their operations. The researcher observed that some manufacturing companies resorted to selling some of their used assets to raise the capital reserved to meet their salary obligations. These companies decreased the number of assets they had available to serve as surety guarantees for debt purchases and exposed themselves to liquidation. However, the majority of manufacturing companies employed the tactic as a temporary measure to hold onto employees throughout the pandemic period.

4.5.5 Challenges of Providing Workplace Guidelines and Support

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of workplace guidelines provided by the Ministry of Labor, Innovation, and Skills presented several challenges for businesses (ILO, 2020). Some standards were expensive to maintain, while others were difficult to enforce. It was especially difficult for manufacturers to ensure that their employees followed safety protocols such as wearing masks, social distancing, and frequent hand washing. Large corporations found it difficult to effectively supervise the requirement to wear masks. Compliance with coronavirus prevention measures was also influenced by employees' willingness to follow the rules. According to Kazungu et al. (2021), the provision of masks, hand sanitizers, and coronavirus test kits increased company operating costs. Companies that implemented the COVID-19 workplace guidelines by the Ministry of Labor, Skills and Innovation, (2020) were required to provide masks and hand sanitizers to all employees and customers to prevent infection. The cost of supplies increased employers' expenditures.

Further, Stemler (2021) explained that different firms responded differently to the government's guidance to mitigate COVID-19 shocks. The Ministry of Labor, Skills, and Innovations implemented workplace guidelines in 2020, intended to provide a framework

for employers to follow in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the guidelines were not always applicable to all industries, leaving some workplaces in a difficult spot. For example, manufacturing companies were unable to switch to remote work, while companies that had already adapted to certain practices found their policies challenged. This was supported by previous research by Smărăndescu et al. (2022), who argued that some employees found government-imposed policies like teleworking stressful.

The data analysis indicated that many employers were not even aware of the government-issued workplace guidelines. With the implementation of the temporary labour regulations coming later than anticipated, many employers were left without the necessary guidance on how to adjust to the new regulations. Manufacturing companies in Malawi faced a unique challenge with the Ministry of Labor's late arrival of the temporary labour regulations and the Workplace Guide. Companies had to come to terms with the guide despite not having the chance to provide input on what would be best for their industries. It led to some employers missing the chance to weigh in on whether they wanted to encourage vaccination and certain special benefits, while other companies dismissed the existence of the pandemic altogether. There was a disconnection between the Ministry and those within the industries, leaving the companies to grapple with a set of rules that may not have been in the best interests of their businesses.

While these measures enabled companies to provide much-needed assistance to their employees, the reactive nature of these programs, in particular, made it difficult for employees to maintain their person-environment fit. Kristof (1996) argued that the degree

of congruence between an individual's attributes and those of their work environment was likely to be influenced by abrupt changes in work arrangements. Some participants, for example, reported employee resentment if their team had to carry extra workloads due to a member being on sick leave due to contagion. Furthermore, these programs were often inflexible since were mandated by the government, which caused some participants to argue that convincing investors to understand the need to retain employees while also allocating capital to this purpose was difficult,

4.5.6 Challenges of the Provision of Financial Benefits and Appreciations

The provision of financial benefits was primarily used by companies whose product markets were not disturbed as a result of the pandemic, and these companies made sure that business operations continued unabated and production levels were high enough to satisfy the market's demand. The CJRS was implemented to give employees the highest level of satisfaction. However, some employees who were cautiously working in a risky environment like the COVID-19 environment did not support the strategy, which limited the level of satisfaction for employee retention, as argued by Munyenembe et al. (2021). Further, some participants who used financial incentives to motivate employees during the pandemic reported unintended consequences. They discovered that financial rewards based on employee performance caused dissatisfaction among those whose performance was harmed by the pandemic. This finding is consistent with previous research by Desteno et al. (2006), who argued that rewarding employees selectively during times of crisis can increase resentment and negative behaviours. These findings showed that the

provision of financial rewards required balancing with other incentives. Managers needed to provide other forms of rewards to employees who did not deserve financial rewards over the period.

4.5.7 Challenges of CJRS Implementation as a Fair Labor Practice

Some Managers and policymakers in the manufacturing industry who adopted CJRS during the time of the pandemic faulted in decision-making and policy adoption as it depended on integrating and making sense of much information (Schippers & Rus, 2021, 1). They were making decisions under time constraints amidst the pandemic. There was much information to process with uncertainty which failed to search and share information, update and make decisions based on the current trends.

On the other hand, Managers during the unprecedented crisis had new situations at their disposal, Hamouche, (2021) explained that HR managers during the crisis needed to control the spread of the virus, protect employees from contagion, and develop employee awareness of the importance of the prevention measures implemented in the workplace which were all contrary to their daily routines. Health and safety against the pandemic became a new practice of HRM which prompted a trial and error approach to enrich the desired change. However, in the search for a new direction of new job retention strategies the CJRSs that did not comply with the Labor laws were prone to causing industrial exploitation and needed more scrutiny to be further applied in the new HR practice

Furthermore, due to a lack of effective monitoring and implementation, the CJR's application violated the applicable laws at the time. Many workers were found to reside in cramped quarters and densely populated areas, where disease transmission was almost certain. The managers' plan to depopulate and provide masks was only feasible inside the workplace; however, outside of the workplace, employees were exposed, endangering the sanitary procedures in place.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique set of challenges for employers in terms of job retention strategies. The CJRS was introduced to help manufacturing companies retain their employees during the crisis, but there were still many challenges that needed to be addressed. These included the challenge of rewarding employees appropriately, responding quickly and effectively to employee needs, scrapping financial benefits such as bonuses or overtime pay, using capital reserves to meet salaries and dealing with short-time working in manufacturing companies. These issues were compounded by the fact that many businesses operated on a medium scale and lacked access to resources needed for effective job retention strategies. This meant that employers had to find more creative solutions if they had to navigate the period successfully. Employers were supposed to take steps to develop innovative approaches which would enable them not only to survive but also thrive in an uncertain future. With careful planning and strategic thinking, it was possible for manufacturing companies across Malawi, regardless of size, to overcome such obstacles and emerge from the crisis strong.

4.6 Conclusion

The research aimed to assess COVID-19 job retention strategies in Malawi's manufacturing industry, specifically by examining the types of strategies employed by manufacturing companies in the country, analyzing how these strategies were implemented, identifying the challenges encountered during implementation, and determining the opportunities associated with these strategies. The findings are summarized in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study based on the findings and provides areas for further research. The chapter starts by providing the main conclusion of findings on each objective, then provides Areas for further research and ends with necessary recommendations...

5.2 Main Conclusion

The study's main objective was to assess COVID-19 job retention strategies in Malawi's manufacturing industry, specifically by exploring CJRS employed by manufacturing companies in Malawi, analyzing how these CJRS were operationalised, evaluating the opportunities associated with the strategies, and analysing the challenges faced during implementation.

With respect to the first objective which required exploring CJRS that were used by manufacturing companies in Malawi the researcher discovered that for manufacturing companies to retain employees during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malawi, managers needed to be flexible in providing motivating incentives to their employees. Some Manufacturing companies decided to cut costs by discontinuing risk allowances for their employees, while others provided them only on a limited basis. Employee retention in the manufacturing sector

was negatively affected by misinformation, but effective communication and daily check-ins were used to provide accurate and up-to-date information. Employee engagement and manager interaction aided in dispelling misinformation and fostering trust. Prioritizing employee support and adhering to government guidelines were important factors in employee retention. This meant that implementing a soft HRM model that prioritises employee well-being may be beneficial during times of crisis. Companies modified their operations to prevent the virus's spread, implemented social distancing measures, and provided personal protective equipment. Employees were also given access to mental health services to help them cope with personal and workplace stresses.

For Malawi's essential product manufacturers, job retention strategies were implemented to ensure employee income security and job commitment. These manufacturers recognized the concerns about contagion, false information, and other pandemic consequences on human health and implemented a variety of strategies to address these concerns. These strategies included improving communication, providing workplace guides and support, and responding to employee concerns promptly. Employees, for example, were given access to information to educate them on COVID-19, its symptoms, and preventive measures. Regular updates on the pandemic, health and safety measures, and company operations improved communication. Workplace guides and support were also provided to ensure that health and safety protocols, such as social distancing, were followed. To retain employees and ensure organizational success during times of crisis, the study emphasizes the importance of maintaining employee well-being, adhering to government guidelines, and management's flexibility to change.

With respect to the second objective, which sort to analyze the operationalisation of CJRS in manufacturing companies. The study found that the choice and implementation of strategies were successful because of the government's frequent provision of workplace guidelines during the period, and employers' authority to adapt and improve the organization's situation. Although it was required that employers provide the best-fit strategies for their organization during the period of the crisis, some of the strategies adopted were derailed from the labour laws. However, the findings suggested a significant focus on retention among managers in the manufacturing sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With respect to the third objective, the study looked at the challenges faced by Malawi's manufacturing companies that implemented the CJRS during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees were demotivated as bonuses and rewards were suspended, and there was a wage disparity among employees. The elimination of risk allowances also resulted in lower morale and productivity. Paying salaries from capital reserves reduced the company's borrowing power and exposed it to insolvency, whereas providing workplace guidelines and support was costly and difficult to monitor. Employee welfare responses were reactive and inflexible, and financial benefits and appreciation were limited. Finally, implementing the CJRS as a fair labour practice was difficult because it required integrating and making sense of a large amount of data. These findings suggested that to ensure prolonged high job retention and productivity levels, HR managers must find alternative ways to motivate employees during crises.

The Last objective sort to determine the opportunities for using CJRS, with a particular emphasis on the use of CJRSs, the study discovered two benefits to using CJRSs in the manufacturing industry. Firstly, the implementation of unboxed HR practices that exceeded government guidelines resulted in a shift in perspective on labour relations. These innovative human resource practices viewed organizational health as an inventory, which included addressing employees' health and wellness needs, and resulted in a new way of thinking about employee retention during the pandemic. Secondly, CJRSs facilitated resource utilization, with flexible work strategies critical for promoting employee well-being, job performance, and resource optimization. According to previous research, these measures resulted in lower expenditures on office space and transportation. Following these findings, the research suggested some recommendations.

5.3 Areas of Further Study.

In light of the national crisis, several areas of further study can be explored to generate more knowledge. To begin, it is critical to broaden the current study to include industries other than Malawi's manufacturing industry. This will aid in gaining a better understanding of how retention strategies affected different sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as identifying common themes and issues. It can also show how different industries can learn from one another's experiences and develop effective strategies to avoid layoffs in the event of a future pandemic

Second, research can be conducted to investigate potential workplace exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on the manufacturing sector or other industries in

Malawi. . This research will aid in identifying key areas that require action to prevent future employee exploitation.

Thirdly, during the pandemic, an in-depth study of labour relations enforcement can be conducted to identify areas of weakness and opportunities for improvement. Dialogues with employers, employees, and labour authorities can help to better understand the problems and find viable solutions.

Another area of investigation could be the creation of a direct communication channel between policymakers and micro-level stakeholders such as employers and employees. This will improve dialogue and cooperation during crises and help to reduce communication delays among different policymakers.

Lastly, investigating the long-term effects of risk allowance strategies during pandemics can provide insights into the most effective methods for managing workplace risks. A longitudinal examination of companies that utilized different strategies can be conducted to identify the respective outcomes. These areas of study can help policymakers make informed decisions and develop effective policies to manage future pandemics.

5.4 Policy Implication of the Study

Having conducted interviews with HR managers from different manufacturing companies to assess the CJRS they implemented during the COVID-19 crisis the research noted that the adopted retention programs addressed the short-term need to retain talent and served as a temporal retention mechanism in the face of uncertainty. Nevertheless, the flawed execution of CJRSs produced a platform for unlawful labour behaviours, the study

suggests the following points as ways of enhancing the successful future of retention strategies during uncertainties.

- i. Companies that have sufficient financial bases should prioritise financial support to their employee during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. This will help to alleviate exploitative labour practices and ensure that employees do not risk their lives for fear of losing income.
- ii. During times of uncertainty, such as a pandemic, the labour ministry should establish a platform where employers can inquire and receive answers to their questions. This will assist employers in determining the best way to implement safety measures without exploitation. According to the study, when the pandemic vaccine was introduced, some employers were unsure whether or not to mandate it for their employees during the crisis. The government actively participate in the retention of manufacturing firms to relieve employers of the sole responsibility. Measures such as the distribution of washable masks, which resulted in increased operational costs for employers, could be managed by government organizations such as the Malawi Corporation for the Handicapped (MACOHA). By implementing these policy recommendations, the policymakers could assist manufacturing companies in maintaining their retention programs and protecting employees' well-being during times of uncertainty, such as a pandemic.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Table of Participants' Work Experience

Less than 3 years	3	15%
Work Experience	Frequency	Percentage
3-5 years	3	15%
more than 5 years	14	70%

APPENDIX 2: Interview Guide

Topic: Assessment of COVID-19 Job Retention Strategies in Malawi's Manufacturing Industry.

Objective A; Examining CJRS used by manufacturing companies in Malawi

- 1) Covid-19 affected the operations of many companies which forced many of the companies to retrench employees. In the case of your organization, how were your organization's human resources affected by the Pandemic?
 - a. Explain how the pandemic prompted your organization to retrench.
 - b. How did you manage to find an employee if you were reemployed?
 - i. Explain how difficult or easy was to identify previous employees than the new team
 - ii. Explain the reason under which contract were these employees employed, permanent or part-time
 - iii. How much of your work requires skilled labour forces?
 - c. Explain how your organization can retain jobs during the period of the pandemic.
 - i. Can you explain some of the retention strategies that were adopted?
 - ii. How did you develop the retention strategy?
 - iii. How many retention alternatives did you have?
 - iv. If many which ones have been used?

v. Why did you choose the said strategy (s)?

vi. If the organization uses Many strategies of retention, how do they complement to each other?

2) What plans do you have for your employees in the case of a prolonged Covid-19 pandemic?

a. Can you explain your plans for your human resources regarding retrenchment or retention?

b. How will you retain the current labour force if you don't have plans to retrench?

c. How do you think will your plan of retention be successful?

Section B. Analysing Operationalisation of CJRSs

1. Out of several strategies of Retention why do you think your organization use the said strategies?

a. How did you develop the retention schemes for your organization?

b. How do you implement the strategy to ensure effectiveness?

c. Do you think your retention program will cover all your Jobs?

i. If yes, retention during the pandemic is economic weight draining how do you manage to pay salaries and meet other remunerations of your employees?

- ii. If no, what criteria did you use to select the amount of labour force for retention?
- d. Where some employees are retrenched, there is a high probability of job insecurity, disruption of organization culture, depression and mental health disorders among others, how do you manage the surviving employees?
- 2. What kind of support would you wish from the Macro Level Human Resource Planners on your retention plans?
 - a. Where there are health risks, employees have a right to stay away from work as required by the Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act, 1997, what measures have you put in place to influence your employees to remain with the organization?
- 3. Some organization encourage their employees to take some time off to recharge during the period of the pandemic, what do you think about such approaches to your work?

Section C; Examining Challenges of CJRSs encountered during the operationalization

- 1. How would you rate your retention program on a scale of 1 to 10?
 - a. If it does not reach 10 what faults does the strategy have?
 - b. If it's rated 10 What are the anticipated failures in the program?
- 2. There are issues of health and safety where employees are encouraged to observe social distance how do you ensure that such measures are put into practice?

- a. Where life is at risk human beings choose other alternatives, in your case there is a life-threatening pandemic how do help you your employees to get rid of such life shocks?
 - b. COVID-19 is contagious and all people are cautious of where their relatives go, this means that the approach that your organization adopts should ease the anxiety of your employees together with their relations, how true is this assertion according to your retention strategy?
3. The Cure for the pandemic has not been discovered yet, which suggests that the
4. The pandemic might continue for some time; how will your strategy hold until the situation stabilizes?
 - a. What contingent plans does your organization have to hold onto skills and talents?
 - b. One characteristic of a strategy is that it should meet the organization's financial capability, whereas retention in a period where locked down restricted customers is uneconomic. How do you intend to hold on to the idea of retention for the unforeseeable future of the pandemic?

Section D. Analyse opportunities that Manufacturing industries have through adopting CJRSs.

1. The government in resolutions to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic established a lockdown which failed many companies reach to their targeted Markets, in your case how close are you close to your customers

2. If the Market is still striving there are possibilities that many companies within the industry are gambling for the same, how good are your retention schemes to make the organization competitive?
3. If the market is affected and the level of production has reduced, why do you think you need a retention program?
 - a. Companies compete over resources among which market is among them, in a time where there are no markets companies close, why do you think retaining a job in such circumstances remains important?
4. The labour Market is saturated now with different skill sets as a result of mass retrenchments from different companies within the industry when a company lays off an employee there are possibilities that it will find that skill when the situation stabilizes, in your case why do you think you should retain employee while there is an abundant labour force