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Abstract

Employee retention among outsourced workers remains a significant organizational challenge, owing to the fact that these employees frequently perform comparable roles to permanent employees while receiving unequal benefits. Such disparities erode perceptions of fairness, job security, and organizational belonging, lowering motivation and increasing turnover intentions, particularly in skill-intensive industries such as oil and gas. In response, this study looked at how strategic motivators affect employee retention in Kenyan oil and gas companies. The study used Resource Dependency Theory and a pragmatist philosophy to guide the research, which used a mixed-methods approach. The study targeted 219 oil and gas firms and drew a sample of 125, collecting responses from 211 Heads of Human Resources and Procurement, resulting in an 84.4% response rate. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data, and their validity and reliability were confirmed via expert review and Cronbach's Alpha. Descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analyses were used to test hypotheses and determine statistical significance. The independent variables accounted for 52.9% of the increase in employee retention. Strategic human resource motivators had a positive and statistically significant effect on retention ($\beta = 0.207$; $p = 0.011$). Based on these findings, the study recommends that the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection create sector-specific outsourcing frameworks that mandate annual vendor compliance reporting on outsourced employee retention indicators. Policy frameworks should address disparities between permanent and outsourced employees by mandating inclusion in training, career development, remuneration reviews, and welfare initiatives in the oil and gas industry. Firms are also encouraged to improve HR governance by using standardized contracts, risk management systems, and strategic alignment of outsourcing decisions to increase outsourced employee retention. Lastly, organizations should assess which HR functions generate the most value when outsourced to improve employee support and satisfaction.

Keywords: *Strategic, Human Resource Outsourcing, Motivators, Outsourced Employee Retention, Oil and Gas Companies*

1.0 Introduction

The oil and gas sector consistently encounter ongoing difficulties concerning elevated labour turnover and the retention of proficient personnel. Replacing employees in this sector is expensive and time-consuming, as the departure of seasoned staff frequently leads to significant skill deficiencies and operational interruptions (Harhara et al., 2015; Kimemia & Kamunjeru, 2014; AlMohamed et al., 2022). The industry's growth is increasingly hindered by a diminishing talent pool, an ageing workforce, and turnover intentions, which collectively impede efforts to attract and retain specialised expertise, despite continuous investments in new projects (Elomami, 2015; Al-Musali & Ku Ismail, 2016; Gerard, 2019; Abudaqa et al., 2022).

Human resource outsourcing involves transferring all or a portion of a business function to an external entity referred to as a vendor (Khan et al., 2022). Motivators for human resource outsourcing (HRO) are the principal factors that organisations assess prior to opting to outsource HR functions (Seth & Sethi, 2011). Common motivators encompass the reduction of operational expenses, a focus on core business functions, access to specialised knowledge, process improvement, enhanced flexibility and scalability, expedited service delivery, increased user-friendliness, and the avoidance of union-related limitations. However, despite these benefits, organisations frequently articulate apprehensions regarding the potential loss of managerial control and the exposure of the firm to security vulnerabilities (Zwysen, 2024; Namita & Gohana, 2020; Erfurt, 2007; Asatiani et al., 2019).

Outsourced employees are individuals formally employed by a contracting firm but are designated to deliver services at a client organization that possesses its own permanent personnel. The contracting firm manages administrative and employment issues, whereas the agency and the client jointly oversee the worker's management. Therefore, outsourced employees' function under dual authority, deriving oversight from both the outsourcing provider and the client organization (Houseman, 2000; Boswell et al., 2012; Muindi et al., 2021). Labour outsourcing in the Oil and Gas sector adversely impacts employment relations, as numerous contract workers have reported diminished job satisfaction and weak organisational commitment, undermining workers' economic welfare and consequently reducing performance (Obi et al., 2021; Enabunene and Chukwuemeka, 2024).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The retention of outsourced personnel has become challenging for organizations due to the similar terms of engagement as client employees and the desire for a psychological contract of belonging to the client company, which complicates retention strategies. Gerard (2019) observes that the impact of organizational practices on employee retention within the oil and gas sector is inadequately studied, highlighting a distinct gap in the literature. Also, Belanger et al. (2024) recognize the retention of highly skilled personnel as an ongoing challenge in the oil and gas sector. Sumbal et al. (2017) demonstrate the deficiency of empirical research regarding knowledge retention within an ageing oil and gas workforce, a limitation that directly affects overall retention outcomes. In addition to these academic issues, Kenya Law Reports record 493 published cases from 2014 to 2024 that underscore the precariousness of outsourced workers, noting problems such as unjust labor practices, wage inequities, discrimination, limitations on unionization, rights infringements, and substandard working conditions compared to permanent employees (Search - Kenya Law, n.d.). These findings highlight significant research and policy deficiencies regarding employee retention, especially in outsourced employment contexts in Kenya.

Employee turnover in the oil and gas sector constitutes a considerable organizational and financial obstacle in various contexts. Worldwide, the United States faces replacement costs

for specialized oil and gas professionals that can surpass 400% of an employee's annual salary (Gerard, 2019). The United Arab Emirates (UAE), despite its preeminent status in the sector, encounters significant retention challenges, as roughly 15% of the workforce expresses intentions to depart, foreshadowing potential turnover without effective retention measures (Suwaidi & Akmal, 2022). This issue is especially pronounced at the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), which records a turnover rate of 28% (Alshehhi et al., 2023).

The National Oil Corporation of Kenya has encountered turnover rates surpassing 10%, with a workforce predominantly marked by brief tenures: 66% of employees have been employed for less than five years, 25% for five to ten years, and merely 9% for over a decade (Maliku, 2014). In comparison, industrial gas companies listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange exhibit lower turnover rates of approximately 7% (BOC, Kenya, 2023). These patterns collectively highlight ongoing retention difficulties within the oil and gas value chain in both developed and emerging economies.

Extensive empirical research on employee retention within the oil and gas industry is thoroughly documented (Sumbal et al., 2017; Gerard, 2019; Belanger et al., 2024). However, a considerable empirical deficiency exists in Kenya's oil and gas sector, where scant research investigates the impact of human resource outsourcing motivators on the retention of outsourced personnel. Moreover, current research is geographically limited and methodologically disjointed seldom concentrating on Kenya and infrequently employing integrated mixed-methods approaches to thoroughly examine outsourcing retention dynamics.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The study sought to assess the effect of strategic motivators on employee retention among oil and gas companies in Kenya.

1.3 Research Hypothesis

The study tested the following hypothesis in view of the objective; strategic motivators do not have a significant effect on employee retention among oil and gas companies in Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

The section presents the literature review, theoretical framework and conceptual framework.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework depicts the authors' conceptualization of study relationships. The study is based on Resource Dependency Theory. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) and Thompson (1967) argue that an organization's survival and operation are dependent on its ability to acquire critical resources from the external environment and build relationships with stakeholders, as critical resources are unevenly distributed. Most importantly, the concept of power is inextricably linked to the control of critical resources. Resource dependence, power imbalance, and interorganizational relationships remain central concepts in Resource Dependency Theory (Johnson, 1995; Lee, 2025). Resource Dependence Theory has been criticized for several flaws, most notably its emphasis on external constraints, which tends to downplay internal organizational processes and managerial agency (Cobb, 2014). Critics also argue that the theory ignores important determinants of organizational behavior, such as institutional pressures, organizational culture, and leadership dynamics, which influence decision-making beyond resource management (Lee, 2025).

Resource Dependency Theory informs human resource outsourcing motivators by creating new forms of interdependence between organizations and their outsourcing partners (Hillman et al., 2009; Ngila & Makhamara, 2022). Its use in human resource outsourcing is to motivate the

provision of critical resources through scalability and access to expertise while controlling costs and access to experts. Human Resource Outsourcing (HRO) presents significant challenges, including increased employee turnover, which has a negative impact on motivation, job satisfaction, and overall organizational commitment (Farhat-ul-Ain & Siddiqui, 2020). Outsourced employees frequently receive lower pay and fewer benefits than in-house employees, face job insecurity, particularly during economic downturns, and feel excluded because they are viewed as external rather than integral to the organization. Poor cooperation, inadequate compensation, limited social protections, a lack of health insurance, unequal job tenure, poor working conditions, and insufficient management oversight all contribute to negative perceptions of HRO (Klaas et al., 2001; Obi et al., 2021; Hafizh et al., 2022; Wardah, 2024; Sakib et al., 2023). Reducing turnover, particularly in long-term projects, is a shared goal of both service providers and client organizations (Fisher et al., 2008).

Strategic Human Resource Outsourcing (HRO) identifies cost management as a motivator (Bullock, 2018). Cost management improves cost predictability and access to specialized resources, strengthening workforce ecosystems and supporting goals like cost optimization, management, efficiency, and overall cost savings (Brown et al., 2023; Githae et al., 2018). Human resource outsourcing in the oil and gas sector reduces labour and operational costs significantly (Nwenekorum et al., 2022; Jehan, 2024). Ngila and Makhamara (2022) highlighted that outsourcing HR activities resulted in cost savings initiatives at Total Oil Company in Kenya. The findings identified cost savings as a critical benefit of human resource outsourcing. Critics of cost-centric outsourcing point to its negative consequences for outsourced workers and limited strategic value. According to empirical evidence, outsourced employees frequently face wage penalties compared to non-outsourced workers, as well as uneven labor outcomes and deterioration in employment conditions (Bergeaud et al., 2021; Bilal & Lhuillier, 2021; Obi et al., 2021). In addition, cost reduction ignores the broader strategic and organizational advantages of outsourcing (Mohammed & Kinyua, 2023; Langerman & Marnewick, 2025).

Dzakpasu (2021) defines employee expertise as specialized knowledge and skills acquired through external specialists to improve company capability and efficiency. The oil and gas industry rely heavily on skilled workers, who account for a sizable portion of the workforce (Haak-Saheem, 2020). Outsourcing has emerged as a strategic solution aligned with global best practices, allowing the industry to access scarce technical expertise - petroleum engineering, drilling operations, and safety compliance - amidst fierce competition for qualified talent (Jehan, 2024). Employee retention is the process of attracting and retaining highly qualified and experienced employees in order to achieve organizational goals (Alhmoud & Rjoub, 2020). Evidence suggests that outsourcing can reduce outsourced employees' emotional attachment and sense of investment in their work due to resource disparities compared to client employees (Ikeije & Nwaoma, 2015; Boswell et al., 2012). The oil and gas industry face a significant retention challenge, with negative consequences (AlMohamed et al., 2022).

Compensation is commonly defined as the total package of financial and non-financial rewards offered to employees in exchange for their contributions to the organization (Mahadi et al., 2020; Shah and Asad, 2018; Singh, 2019). The oil and gas industry have linked compensation, a human resource management practice, to increased job satisfaction, which in turn supports employee retention (Mohamed, 2019; Ojo, 2020; Habsi et al., 2021; Rafi et al., 2024). In contrast to these studies, other findings show that compensation alone has a limited impact on long-term employee retention, with factors such as work-life balance, stress, and organizational conditions often playing a more decisive role (Mahadi et al., 2020; Michael, 2023; Cunningham et al., 2023; Speicher and Francis, 2023). Career advancement is a systematic process that aims to align employees' personal goals with the strategic needs of the organization. It includes

actions taken by both employees and organizations to achieve career goals and meet job demands (Kiragu and Marwa, 2022). According to Shrestha and Prajapati (2024) and Kiragu and Marwa (2022), effective career management and advancement opportunities are critical in achieving this alignment. Professional development and career advancement opportunities have been identified as critical in enhancing employee retention within the oil and gas industry (Gerard, 2019; Yang et al., 2023).

2.2 Empirical Review

The study examined a large body of empirical evidence, as detailed below. Mohamed (2019) investigated employees' perceptions of how future outsourcing would impact their careers and pay satisfaction at the Libya Oil Company's Oil Transportation Department. Using data from 184 male workers across two operational sites, the study revealed a significant positive relationship between individuals' perceptions of outsourcing's impact and their pay satisfaction. It also demonstrated that employees' perceptions of how outsourcing would affect both their personal roles and professional prospects were strongly related to their level of compensation satisfaction. While the study provides useful insights, its applicability to Kenya's Oil and Gas sector may be limited due to differences in institutional contexts and resource availability. Moreover, the study only included male participants and focused solely on compensation as a retention factor, which may have introduced bias and limited the scope of its conclusions.

Obi et al. (2021) investigate the impact of outsourcing on employment relations at the multinational corporation Shell Petroleum Producing and Development Company (SPDC) in Nigeria. The findings indicate that outsourcing has a negative impact on worker performance in Nigeria. Many contract employees at SPDC report dissatisfaction with their jobs and a lack of commitment. To address this, SPDC should eliminate unfair labour practices, improve working conditions for outsourced employees, and invest more in their professional development. However, because the study only looked at one multinational oil company in Nigeria, its findings are limited in their applicability to other sectors or countries with different labour markets and outsourcing arrangements. Enabunene and Chukwuemeka's (2024) study at the Nigeria Petroleum Development Company explored the relationship between outsourcing and employee performance, but did not address employee retention, which is a crucial aspect of outsourcing outcomes. The study discovered that outsourcing has a significant impact on staff performance and raised concerns that current outsourcing practices may jeopardise employees' economic welfare, with broader implications for national economic development. Although the study provides useful evidence on outsourcing and performance, its single-firm focus and narrow emphasis on performance limit generalisability and leave important outcomes such as employee retention and long-term employment relations underexplored.

In summary, while existing literature provides strong evidence on human resource outsourcing and employee retention, there is a significant gap in Kenya's oil and gas sector, with few studies investigating how outsourcing motivators affect outsourced worker retention. Current research is also geographically limited and methodologically fragmented, with little emphasis on Kenya and little use of integrated mixed-methods approaches to fully understand outsourcing-retention dynamics. This study sought to fill this gap by examining how strategic HR outsourcing motivators influence employee retention in Kenya's oil and gas companies, using a mixed-methods design.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This section introduces the conceptual framework that will guide the study. It demonstrates the link between strategic human resource outsourcing motivators cost management and employee

expertise and employee retention outcomes, as measured by compensation satisfaction and career advancement. The framework proposes that strategic outsourcing decisions have an impact on outsourced employee retention in Kenyan oil and gas companies.

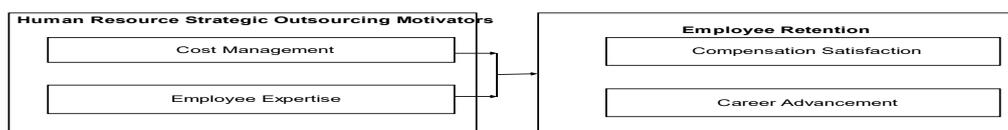


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

3.0 Research Methodology

This study used a pragmatist research philosophy, which advocates for the use of a mixed methods research design to increase credibility and reduce bias by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches (Plano Clark, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). A semi-structured questionnaire with closed-ended items measuring HR outsourcing motivators and employee retention on a 5-point Likert scale was used to collect quantitative data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in SPSS version 26 and Microsoft Excel for analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach was used to analyse qualitative responses, with NVivo 14 providing support for systematic coding and theme development. The study targeted 219 oil and gas firms from a population of 430, selecting 125 companies using the Olonite sampling method. Data were collected from 211 Heads of Human Resources and Procurement, yielding an 84.4% response rate. Stratified random sampling divided firms into groups, whereas purposive sampling selected appropriate respondents. Expert review and Cronbach's Alpha were used to confirm validity and reliability, and Daystar ISERC and NACOSTI provided ethical approval. All participants provided informed consent.

4.0 Results and Findings

This section presents the empirical findings of the study based on descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and hypothesis testing. The results examine the extent to which strategic human resource outsourcing motivators influence employee retention among oil and gas companies in Kenya. Quantitative findings are presented through statistical tables, followed by interpretation of the results in relation to the study objective and hypothesis.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive findings indicate strong consensus that cost management and access to specialized expertise are the dominant drivers of human resource outsourcing decisions in Oil and Gas companies in Kenya.

Table 1: Strategic Outsourcing Motivators

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
The desire to lower HR expenditure motivates outsourcing decisions	3.91	0.731
External expertise through outsourcing provides competitive advantage	3.91	0.931
Cost management through outsourcing allows better budget predictability	3.78	1.069
The need for highly skilled professionals motivates outsourcing decisions	3.70	0.971
Our organization outsources to access specialized expertise	3.67	1.213
HR outsourcing allows quick access to top-tier talent	3.67	1.213
HR outsourcing helps achieve greater cost efficiency	3.63	1.116
Our organization outsources HR primarily to reduce operational costs	3.21	1.278
Average	3.69	1.065

Strategic motivators identified cost management and access to expertise as the most influential factors in HR outsourcing decisions. Respondents stated that outsourcing increases cost efficiency, budget predictability, and eliminates severance liabilities during economic downturns or restructuring exercises, which is especially important in capital-intensive petroleum operations. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has identified cost reduction and cost control as primary motivations for outsourcing (König & Koskela, (2013); Sako & Tierney, (2005) Brown et al., (2023); Seth & Sethi, (2011); Klaas et al., (2001); Lacity & Hirschheim, 1993). In addition, this is consistent with evidence from Mejabi et al., (2024), Jain and Saini, (2010), and Soita and Gichinga (2016), who all identify expertise acquisition as a key outsourcing driver. The findings suggest that organizations should outsource to address internal skill shortages and acquire specialized knowledge that would otherwise take significant time and money to develop in-house. Firms that leverage external expertise improve operational efficiency while also strengthening employee relations through better task execution and knowledge transfer. This perspective goes beyond the traditional emphasis on cost reduction, indicating that outsourcing decisions in the sector are guided by a combination of financial, operational, and capability-enhancing considerations rather than an exclusive focus on minimizing costs (Mejabi et al., 2024).

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The study used Pearson’s correlation analysis to describe the key relationships. Correlation analysis indicates a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between strategic motivators and employee retention ($r = 0.588, p < 0.05$). This implies that strategic considerations such as cost efficiency and improved budget predictability and access to specialized expertise are associated with enhanced retention levels. Outsourcing strategies that integrate financial efficiency with expertise therefore appear to foster stronger employee commitment and reduce turnover intentions.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

		Employee Retention (r)	Strategic Motivators		
Employee Retention (r)	Pearson Correlation	1.0009			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
Strategic Motivators	Pearson Correlation	.588**	.277*	.323*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study's findings show that strategic outsourcing motivators cost management and access to employee expertise have a positive and statistically significant impact on employee retention in Kenya's oil and gas sector. The unstandardised coefficient ($\beta = 0.207$, $p = 0.011$) indicates a significant correlation between strategic HR outsourcing motivators and employee retention.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive effect of strategic human resource outsourcing motivators on employee retention. The analysis assessed whether cost management and access to specialized expertise significantly explain variations in employee retention among oil and gas companies in Kenya. The regression results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Coefficient

Model	Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.364	0.220		1.655	0.099
	Strategic	0.207	0.081	0.210	2.557	0.011

The multiple regression results indicate that strategic motivators exert a positive and statistically significant influence on employee retention ($\beta = 0.207$, $t = 2.557$, $p = 0.011$). A one-unit increase in strategic motivators is associated with a 0.207-unit improvement in employee retention. This suggests that outsourcing decisions driven by cost efficiency and access to specialized expertise enhance retention by improving the effectiveness with which critical human resource functions are managed. The null hypothesis stated that there is no significant effect of strategic motivators on employee retention among oil and gas companies in Kenya. Since the p-value (0.011) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The findings confirm that strategic outsourcing motivators significantly influence employee retention, indicating that well-structured outsourcing strategies strengthen employee value propositions and improve retention outcomes.

4.4 Discussion of the Study Findings

The study found that strategic motivators significantly improve employee retention ($\beta = 0.207$, $p = 0.011$). This suggests that outsourcing with clear goals, such as cost efficiency and access to specialized expertise, supports better retention outcomes. The findings are consistent with previous research by Nwenekorum et al. (2022), who discovered a positive and statistically significant relationship between logistics outsourcing and job efficiency and employee retention among oil and gas firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Also, Jehan (2024) stated that outsourcing 4,000 employees in the oil and gas sector contributed to the development of a

skilled, diverse workforce in Egypt. This allows for reduced recruitment and administrative costs, as well as the redirection of resources toward innovative initiatives in energy project management. In addition, improved employee welfare led to higher satisfaction and retention rates.

On the contrary, this findings contradict the findings of Obi et al., (2021) that show that outsourcing has had negative implications for worker performance, with many contract employees reporting low job satisfaction and weak organizational commitment, and Enabunene and Chukwumeka (2024) that outsourcing significantly affects staff performance and highlighted concerns that current outsourcing practices may undermine employees' economic welfare, with wider implications for Mohamed (2019) assessed how employees in the Oil Transportation Department of Libya Oil Company perceive potential outsourcing and their satisfaction with current pay. Employees' perceptions of outsourcing's impact on their roles and profession were found to have a significant relationship with their level of pay satisfaction.

5.0 Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of strategic motivators on employee retention in Kenyan oil and gas companies. The research demonstrated that strategic motivators have a statistically significant positive impact on employee retention in Kenyan oil and gas companies. Organizations that outsource to improve operational effectiveness and specialized expertise are more likely to retain employees than those that priorities short-term cost reduction. Therefore, strategic motivators are linked to stronger employee retention. Outsourcing decisions that are informed by a clear strategic intent result in a more compelling value proposition for outsourced staff, which in turn increases the likelihood of their retention within the organization.

6.0 Recommendations

Several recommendations are suggested to improve employee retention by leveraging the drivers of human resource outsourcing, as indicated by the findings. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection should establish sector-specific outsourcing guidelines that necessitate annual vendor compliance reporting on outsource employee retention. Sector-specific frameworks should also be mandated by policy frameworks to reduce the disparities in career development and compensation between permanent and outsourced staff. In the Oil and Gas sector, institutions encourage the integration of outsourced workers in training, career development, remuneration review, and welfare initiatives. Further, organizations should fortify HR governance by implementing risk management systems and standardized contracts to improve the continuity of outsourced employees.

Subsequent research is consequently advised in numerous critical domains. Initially, comparative studies between outsourced employees and company employees, as well as the factors that contribute to employee retention. These will emphasize the critical comparators and provide insights into sector-specific policy frameworks. Secondly, the utilization of vendor relationship management as a motivator for human resource outsourcing will provide additional insights into the factors that influence human resource outsourcing. Third, the inclusion of outsourced employees as respondents will reduce the likelihood of bias in the results. Fourth, the generalizability of the findings should be improved by expanding future research to other sectors.

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