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Staff retention strategies in a humanitarian context: The challenge of the Generation Y

By

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Declaration

I, Synzi Dadié, declare that this research is my original work and that it has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have endeavoured to reference correctly all literature and sources used in this work. Finally, I recognize that the onus is on me to ensure that this work is fully compliant with the Dublin Business School's academic honesty policy.

Synzi Dadié   15/01/2015

Acknowledgments

Babanam Kevalam!

Acronyms

CAR: Central African Republic

CIPD: Charter Institute for Personal Development

CWW: Concern Worldwide

HQ: Head Quarter

HR: Human Resource

HRM: Human Resource Management

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

UK: United Kingdom

WHH: Welt Hunger Hilfe

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Abstract

The last decade, has seen an increase in the number of humanitarian crisis in a context of ongoing economic crisis. This has also increased the demand for humanitarian workers in a labour market that is progressively dominated by the Generation Y. At the same time high staff turnover has become a concern for humanitarian organisations as it reduces the effectiveness of their work and puts additional pressure on remaining staff.

In this study the issue of staff retention is explored and the external and internal factors affecting staff working in a humanitarian context are analysed. The objective of the study is to identify the most appropriate approach NGOs can adopt to improve retention of Gen Y staff working in a humanitarian context. NGOs will then be in a position to design a HR strategy that takes into consideration the specific needs and expectations of Gen Y staff. This is turn will allow for a more sustainable humanitarian workforce and more effective humanitarian action.

For the purpose of this research, primary data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with Gen Y expatriate staff in the Central African Republic and in Rwanda. Publication and studies on the subject were reviewed as a source of secondary data.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a general introduction to the topic. It also outlines the focus of the research and provides a clear rationale for the study. The objective, as well as the key questions of the research, will also be presented. Finally the structure of the document will be presented in the last section of this chapter.

1.2 Background

Humanitarian crisis are occurring more frequently, having an increasingly devastating impact on growing vulnerable populations around the world. With approximately 1.3 billion people living below $1.25 a day, the world encountered over 400 disasters of both slow[1] and rapid[2] onset in 2013, affecting in excess of 111 million people (GHA Report, 2013).

The latest crisis include the Syrian conflict, the ongoing war in Iraq and the Central African Republic, which have already left millions in dire need of substantial humanitarian assistance with long lasting impact on the livelihood of the affected populations, and the Ebola outbreak that is threatening a growing number of lives, mostly in West Africa. This is in addition to previous disasters such as the 2010 Haitian earth quake and the 2011 Pakistan flood from which thousands are still recovering. These recurring emergencies are resulting in increasing demands for assistance and putting more pressure on humanitarian organisations financially but also in terms of staffing. However, despite the need for more staff in order to face the global humanitarian challenges, humanitarian organisations are facing increasing staff retention issues.

On the labour market, Generation Y staff are predicted to become the dominant staff segment in the next decade and are "set to comprise 75 percent of the global workforce by 2025" (Harjani 2014). In such a context, understanding the

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[1] Disasters that arrive rapidly; eg. in the case of earthquakes, with no warning.
[2] Disaster resulting from events that occur slowly or progressively; eg: global warming, drought

challenges of recruiting and particularly retaining Gen Y staff is crucial. Therefore, the study will attempt to identify the most appropriate approach for NGOs to adopt to elaborate strategies to ensure Gen Y staff retention especially in the humanitarian context.

1.3. The Context of humanitarian missions

"Understanding the history of humanitarian action helps understand why it is the way it is today, and helps identify how it can, and maybe should, change in the future" (Walker and Maxwell, 2009, p.13).

The history of professional humanitarian action is believed to be rooted in the period of World War II, with the first action, officially and openly taken by the Red Cross, now ICRC, in providing assistance to war casualties on a neutral and humanitarian basis (Barnett, 2011). A humanitarian crisis is understood to be "a situation in which there is an exceptional and generalized threat to human life, health or subsistence" as a result of a particular disaster, either manmade or natural (Alert, 2010, p.111). For the purpose of this research the expression 'humanitarian context' broadly refers to the country of operation of the organisation regardless of the level of crisis within that country.

The Ebola crises in West Africa as well as the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, DRC and the Central African Republic, call for substantial investment in humanitarian operations. As such a humanitarian intervention is the "assistance, protection and advocacy actions undertaken on an impartial basis in response to human needs resulting from complex political emergencies and natural hazards" (Reliefweb, 2008, p.31).

A humanitarian crisis leads to a humanitarian context which is characterised by a lack or low presence of state, destruction of infrastructures, lack of social amenities, volatility and high security risks which as a result, can lead to or deepen a situation of poverty e.g. the situation in the Central African Republic. Individuals working in a humanitarian context are often subject to high levels of stress and

pressure due to both internal and external factors. Internal factors include the job, workload, living conditions, salary and general terms and conditions and relationship with the employer and colleagues. External factors relate to the general environment of the country, including security, infrastructure, social and health amenities, the people and the local culture. While internal factors can be determined and influenced by the employer, external factors are often outside of their influence.

It is important to note the difference between a humanitarian context and a development context. In the charity paradigm, these terms refers to different operational approaches as well and therefore different staffing requirements. A development context has similar characteristics of poverty as a humanitarian context but is politically more stable and secure. In humanitarian operations, staff are often given short term contracts and operations are conducted at a fast pace; while in a development context programmes have a longer duration thus extended contracts are given to staff and the context is more attractive to staff with families.

A humanitarian organisation also known as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), is a non-profit organisation dedicated to assisting individuals in danger, either victims of a disaster or trapped by their incapacity to fulfil their needs either basic or strategic. They are governed by commons principles including, for the most part; humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary, unity and universality.

1.4. Research objective

This research has one key objective: To identify the most appropriate approach for NGOs to adopt to ensure the retention of Gen Y staff in a humanitarian context.
The objective will be reached by first analysing a set of literatures that focuses on the issues related to the topic, and second through the analysis of data collected as a result of a field investigation conducted with humanitarian staff.

1.5. Research questions

This research is conducted around two main questions:
- ✓ What are the main challenges to consider in retaining Gen Y staff in the field in a humanitarian context?
- ✓ According to Gen Y staff, what factors are determinant in ensuring their commitment to their job in the humanitarian industry?

1.6. Field Investigation: Rwanda and the Central African Republic

For the purpose of this dissertation, a field investigation was conducted in two countries, Rwanda and the Central African Republic, based on their differences in terms of development, hardship, level of stability and presence of NGOs.

1.6.1. Rwanda

Having gone through one of the most acute human tragedies of the 20th century, the genocide of 1994, Rwanda has now become a stable, peaceful country of prosperity. Located in the region of the great lakes in Africa, it is also one of the smallest countries in Africa, covering only 26,338 km² with a population of 12,337,138 (Worldfactbook, 2014). From a humanitarian point of view, Rwanda is considered to be a development context. Rwanda is also considered in the humanitarian world as a family friendly country and many NGOs, including Concern Worldwide, see it as a relaxation destination for staff in challenging neighbouring countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo. Formerly considered as a French speaking country, Rwanda has now shifted to English as a national language.

1.6.2. Central African Republic (CAR)

CAR is a French speaking country located in the centre of Africa. At war since 2013 when a rebellion ousted former president Bouezizé, the country is enduring a situation of ongoing conflict, terror and deep instability. Considered as a fragile state (OECD 2013), CAR has seen the involvement of dozens of humanitarian organisation, trying to save lives and provide assistance to the people of this

country considered arguably as one of the poorest in Africa (The Economist (2013). With a population of only 5,277,959 and an area as vast as 622,984 km² it is one of the biggest countries in Africa (World Factbook 2014).

1.7. Rationale and justification

Humanitarian organisations are dealing with high staff turnover in a context of growing humanitarian crisis and deep financial downturn. Hence there is an urgent need to design strategies that can help greater staff retention in order to avoid the effect of high turnover. In addition, with the growing segment of Gen Y staff on the staff market, being empowered to face such a generation from an HR point of view, can help humanitarian organisations to anticipate further staffing crisis and implement an informed HR strategy that would secure a sustainable workforce. As a result, NGOs will be able to better focus on what they are dedicated to: saving lives.

In addition, this specific topic has not been investigated by many studies. In fact, some studies focus on general staff retention in humanitarian organisations, while others deal with the correlation between Gen Y and humanitarian work. But the link between Gen Y and staff retention in humanitarian organisations has not been the focus of strong research.

Alongside the contribution that this research seeks to make to humanitarian organisations, it is also relevant for my career perspective. I am aiming to further my career as a humanitarian worker at a senior management level. My past experience as a HR manager with a humanitarian organisation has provided me with a deep understanding of the difficulties faced by aid agencies in retaining Gen Y staff. Therefore, I have practical experience that provides me with the readiness to undertake this research and also use the outcome in a practical way, either by sharing the results with former colleagues or by implementing the most relevant recommendations to the situation that I will find myself in professionally. Hence, enhancing my management skills through the understanding of the Gen Y will be of great value to me.

Finally, the added value of this research paper is to serve as a working document that humanitarian organisation can use in order to understand how to approach Gen Y staff, and develop informed strategies that can help increase staff retention. Humanitarian agencies, NGO's management teams and their partners are the targeted recipient of this research.

1.8. Structure

This dissertation comprises six chapters. This chapter, Chapter One, introduced the topic and explained why retention of Gen Y staff by humanitarian organisations is the focus of the study. The research objective and questions were outlined and the choice of research methodology presented.

The first section of Chapter Two sets out a conceptual framework providing an understanding of the core concepts. An overview of the literature on staff retention in particular in the humanitarian context and related to Gen Y is presented before outlining an analysis of different theories from the literature on how to retain staff within an organisation.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology and provides the rationale to support undertaking a field investigation. The limitation of the overall methodology is also discussed in this section.

In Chapter Four an analysis of the data collected in the field is presented followed by a discussion of the findings linked to the theories analysed in the literature review.

The final chapter of the dissertation, Chapter Five, presents the overall conclusion from the study and some recommendations to humanitarian organisation, based on the findings of the field investigation. In addition, the limitations of the research as well as recommendations for further research are outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Six is a stand-alone section comprising the research skills development report. It discusses the motivation as well as the benefits of the MBA programme

for the researcher on a personal and professional level. This chapter also looks at the challenges and obstacles encountered during the academic programme.

1.9. Conclusion

This chapter has set the orientation of the dissertation by providing an overview of the topic. While presenting the structure of the research, this section also presented the justification of the topic and its potential contribution to the HR function in general and specifically in the humanitarian industry from a Gen Y perspective. In the next chapter an analysis of the literature will be provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter starts by exploring the characteristics of Gen Y and what motivates them. The issue of staff turnover and staff retention, focusing on humanitarian organisations will be analysed before examining the existing theories in the literature related to staff retention. These theories will be analysed in light of the humanitarian context and related to the specific case of Gen Y workers as to see how they could be helpful for retaining them in a humanitarian context.

2.2. Conceptual framework

2.2.1. Generation Y (Gen Y)

The global staff market is going through a generational transformation. Dominated for decades by baby boomer and Generation X, it is seeing a growth of the Gen Y staff segment, also known as the millennials or Gen Yers, who "will be the driving force behind cultural change for a long time to come" (Fritz, no date).

As a sociological concept, the terms 'generation' got particular attention from Karl Mannheim. He describes the term "generation" as "a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related age groups embedded in a historical-social process (1952, p.170). The span of a generation remains debatable from one researcher to another; however there is a common understanding that a generation would have a lapse of 20 years, with Generation Y referring to individuals born between 1980 and 2000. Individuals from Generation Y are described as having their specificity in the way that, professionally and socially, they respond differently to individuals from the preceding generations including Gen X. Therefore, they need to be dealt with accordingly.

Generally, Gen Y, unlike Gen X individuals, tend to behave as if they are the centre of whatever they get involved in, a result of their high level of self-esteem. Also, comically called Generation Why, they are used to being given the rationale for

everything. They also have a strong sense of ownership over whatever relates to them and they put their freedom first in most circumstances. Cogin (2012) describes them as independent, frank and confident. Nonetheless, they have a good level of collaboration as they "work well in team settings, are motivated by significant tasks, prefer open and frequent communication" (Chou, 2012, p.72).

Born in an era of technological advancement, they are proficient in using information technology tools. They see internet and applications such as social media as part of their daily life (Hobart, no date, p.9). Being brought up in a period of global financial comfort, they have not experienced financial difficulties and social downturn, like their parents (Asthana, 2008). Gen Y individuals are also family oriented and therefore are attracted by environment and jobs that do not prevent them from building relationship.

Gen Y at work

From a professional point of view, they are prone to be on the move and print their identity in their professional activities. In addition, being born in an era of evolving technology, Gen Y individuals would prefer an environment that allows them access to new media as well as new technologies at work. Furthermore, they believe that their expectations and concerns should be met by their employer and a clear career plan including training and development provided. A work-life balance is a key factor which influences the professional commitment of Gen Y staff, much more so than for older generations (Karp et al., 2002).

Their professional typology is summed up by Armour in terms of high expectations of self, ongoing learning, immediate responsibility and goal oriented (2005). While Gen X workers would be more sedentary professionally, Gen Y staff are believed to be change driven and therefore, difficult to keep in one company for a long period if they do not feel they can grow in the company. Exploring the comparison between Gen Y and Gen X professional, McNulty argues that "younger workers feel much less loyalty to institutions than do older workers. They also want

responsibility and expect to have input right away, whereas older workers expect people to earn their way up" (2006, npa).

While the financial incentives would be essential for workers in general, Gen Y staff are believed to be driven by job satisfaction rather than the income they get from it. This does not mean that they are not attracted by money; it also is essentially due to their age, with the oldest being 35 and the fact that their sense of social responsibility is not as significant as that of older generations. This also explains why their decision to change a job can be made easily regardless of the need for stability and sustainable income (Gursoya et al., 2008, p.449). Bowe goes furthers in the emphasizing their professional mobility:

> Here today, gone tomorrow, on to the next job. Attributed to becoming bored, seeking enjoyment or following the road, Millennials are known for moving on. In fact, many of our studies show that millennials leave their corporations at the two year mark. In comparison … Baby Boomers stay about seven years at a company before leaving (Bowe, 2012).

There is also a belief that employers will find it difficult to rely on Gen Y for long-term commitment as they tend to embrace a lateral progression rather than climbing the ladder horizontally. Gratton argues that Gen Y have a "lack of interest in traditional career paths that promote slowly" (2013, npa). They would rather like to take a management position despite their lack of experience. Angone concludes by arguing that unlike older generation, Gen Y members are not career focused (2014, npa).

What motivates them?

In terms of professional motivation, Gen Y workers are typically different to the preceding Gen X. Meier et al present Gen Y individuals as having "high self-esteem" (2010, p.2) and therefore they like to be praised and rewarded for their individual achievement as "they are the trophy generation that allows every child to get a medal or praise, leaving no one behind" (ibid). This includes financial or moral recognition. Interacting efficiently with Gen Y from a management point of view, require roviding clear direction and feedback seen as essential by Gen Y. As

argued by Tuglan (2009) strong leadership is important in keeping them motivated. Furthermore, unlike Gen X workers who use to believe that, "work is a thing you do to have a life (work doesn't define their life) […]" Gen Y believe that they have a life that cannot be undermined by their work. Hence they would be attracted by an organisation that can guarantee "a work-life balance with flexibility to define who they are in their job" (Meier et al 2010; p.2).

Overall, recognition, strong leadership as well as a healthy work life balance are some of the factors that motivate Gen Y workers.

From the elements above, it is possible to have an idea as of how challenging it is to manage and retain Gen Y staff. Next we will see how even more complex this can be for humanitarian organisations that operate in challenging or even volatile environments.

Gen Y and the humanitarian profession

Retaining staff also requires understanding the reason why a given staff decided to work not only for a particular company but also the industry in which the company is operating. For Fritz, the involvement in humanitarian work is mostly motivated by the idea of helping others, making a difference and changing the world (no date).

From a generational point of view, the perception of humanitarian work as a profession has shifted. Formerly considered as a professional activity undertaken without any particular education background and generally on a voluntary basis, it has now become a career with special training and qualification. In fact, many universities now offer specific degrees in development and humanitarian studies and some institutions even specialise in these studies, for example, Kimmage Development Studies Centre in Ireland. However, having a qualification does not ensure that an individual is adequately prepared or resilient enough to undertake humanitarian work and live far from home in a very different context. This leads us to the next section where the reasons for staff turnover in humanitarian organisations will be explored.

2.2.2 Staff turnover

Defined as the "measurable incidence of people joining and leaving an organization", staff turnover in the HR function can be motivated by various factors (Price, 2007, p.612). Staff turnover is measured as follow:

Figure 1: Measuring staff turnover (Clake, no date)

$$\frac{\text{Total no. of leavers over period}}{\text{Average total number of employer over period}} \quad \text{x 10}$$

It can either be voluntary, meaning that the organisation decides to end the service of a staff member in order to recruit another, or involuntary, where it is the staff that decides to leave the organisation. While voluntary turnover is implemented by employers in the perspective of a positive impact on the company, involuntary turnover can have a negative financial impact and cause disruption within the organisation as a new staff member will need to be recruited, integrated in the organisation and provided with the motivation to stay (Samuel and Chipunza, 2009; p. 411).

Staff turnover in humanitarian organisations

Staff turnover in the humanitarian sector is higher than average. In the UK, it was evaluated at 16% in 2011 (Woods, 2011), with 51% of organisations in the voluntary sector experiencing retention difficulties (CIPD, 2012, p.31). The comparative table below shows staff turnover rates from 2009 to 2012 in the UK. The figures include staff working in both head office and in the field, for NGO's.

Table 1: Median labour turnover rates in UK (CIPD (2012, p.30)

Median labour turnover rates, by industry sector (%)								
All leavers				Voluntary leavers				
Sector	2012	2011	2010	2009	2012	2011	2010	2009
Manufacturing and production	9.5 (25)	9.3 (38)	12.4 (44)	15.3 (80)	4.5 (23)	3.7 (35)	2.7 (42)	7.7 (75)
Private services	16.1 (75)	13.8 (96)	14.6 (77)	16.8 (150)	8.9 (71)	8.7 (82)	7.4 (71)	10.4 (129)
Public sector	10.1 (16)	8.5 (28)	8.6 (19)	12.6 (52)	1.9 (16)	3.4 (10)	5.8 (15)	7.6 (45)
Voluntary, community, not-for-profit	13.0 (16)	13.1 (11)	15.9 (15)	16.4 (38)	7.6 (26)	7.0 (24)	10.2 (18)	11.0 (35)

The table shows a slight reduction in general turnover in the humanitarian sector, from 16% in 2009 to 13% in 2012. However, involuntary turnover, which is related to voluntary leavers, is higher in the humanitarian sector compared to other sectors. Turnover can be due to a variety of factors. In the humanitarian industry, based on a study carried out on a number of aid agencies, salary and employment terms and conditions represent 50% of the reasons why people are leaving (Loquercio et al, 2006, p.9). Poor leadership, a lack of career opportunities, burnout and a poor work-life balance were also listed as key reasons for staff leaving. In addition "quality of life: working in conflict areas with a heavy workload, limited comfort and privacy is seen as a lifestyle that is accepted only for a certain amount of time by most aid workers" and in reality is not compatible with aspirations to having a family (Loquercio 2006, p.8).

Regarding the younger generation such as the Gen Y segment, Loquercio explains that "many young adults see their engagement with the aid sector as a limited period of their professional life, fearing that their market value could suffer from prolonged absence from their home country" (ibid). This brings out the dilemma of working in an industry from which they will find it difficult to transition to private companies that generally have the capacity to offer a more attractive employment

package. A lack of career opportunities is also a concern for many staff as in humanitarian organisations one can either work at the head office, generally in western countries or in the field, generally in developing countries where the highest position is Country Director or Chief of Party.

It is important to note that in terms of turnover, "the factors that cause some staff to leave are the same factors that make others stay" (Browell, 2001, p.48). Hence it is up to a particular organisation to look at those factors and act in a way that will have a positive impact on their workforce.

The impact of staff turnover on humanitarian organisations

Often presented as a reality that charity organisations[3] have to live with, high staff turnover remains a key issue to be addressed for the humanitarian industry as humanitarian assistance requires a continuum in its structure and workforce in order to provide sustainable assistance and insure the viability of the organisation (Loquercio et al, 2006).

Involuntary staff turnover can have an impact at various levels including increasing the workload of remaining staff while recruitment is underway which in turn can result in reduced morale or stress; decrease in programme quality; reduced capacity to respond to beneficiary needs; loss of institutional memory; as well as the loss of investment in the individual and the costs involved in recruiting a replacement. MSF Belgium estimated the cost of a failed recruitment, where the person leaves before the end of their contract, as over 3,000 € (De Calan, 2008, p.6).

So, overall high turnover "can be costly and disruptive to organizations" whereas "the acquisition, development and retention of talent, form the basis for developing competitive advantage […]" (Holtom, 2008, p.236). It is therefore important to explore ways to address the issue of staff turnover and to achieve greater retention.

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[3] For the purpose of this dissertation, the expression charity organisation equals humanitarian, development, or aid agency/ organisation

2.2.3 Staff retention

As a concept, "employee retention refers to the effort by which employers attempt to retain employees in their workforce" to prevent high turnover that would otherwise result in high "training cost, and loss of talent" (Smith, 2011, p.99). At the core of the HRM function, staff retention "involves taking measures to encourage employees to remain in the organization for the maximum period of time" (Singh and Dixit, 2011, p.442). This includes measures to create trust between the employer and the employee by putting in place attractive working conditions and viable career perspective for staff in the organisation. A strategic HRM function consists in "directing people, processes and HR systems to achieve strategic objectives so that individual goals are tied to the business needs of the whole organization" (Price, 2007, p.617). Its focuses on the people that remains a reliable source of competitive advantage of an organisation (Pfeffer, 2005).

For humanitarian organisation, staff retention is a key issue. This is highlighted by Irish based charity organisation Concern Worldwide for whom, attracting, developing and retaining high quality staff is one of their strategic objectives (2011, p.13).

Staff retention and the generation issue in the humanitarian industry

It is essential to understand the generation gap issue in a professional environment in order to reinforce professional cohesion and increase the performance of the organisation as well as staff retention (Kogan, 2007, npa). This is particularly important in the humanitarian context given how professional motivations differ between older humanitarian professionals who are leading the industry in terms of decision making and their younger peers that are in most cases working on the ground. Responding to the generation gap issue in order to avoid what Yang and Guy call the ''us vs. them'' mentality and further conflict, requires effective communication, acceptance and inclusion in the decision making process (2006).

The voluntary ethics that use to govern the humanitarian industry have now shifted. For the younger generation humanitarian work is perceived as a profession and they expect tailored competitive salary packages including supportive working and living conditions. Whereas the older generation traditionally started working for a humanitarian organisation on a voluntary basis, in difficult, remote settings with little or no contact with home for long periods of time. It was for them, charity work in every sense.

Nowadays social-cultural differences are no longer as shocking as the younger generation, through the internet, have increased access to information. Furthermore, the younger generation believe that their skills have monetary value and subsequently they should receive a competitive salary package. Hence, dealing with staff as unique individuals that have their specific strengths to contribute to the success of the organisation instead of focusing on their age is essential (Heng and Yazdanifard 2013, p.839).

Finally, there is also an issue of lack of visibility in terms of career future in humanitarian organisation once you get to a certain age. Hence, staff often choose to work with the United Nation agencies, donors or change industry altogether if they cannot find a position at the head office level.

2.3 Theoretical framework and discussion

In the literature, various experts debate a variety of approaches that often overlap on how to attain greater staff retention. These theories consider the needs of the staff and what motivates them and link to the recruitment process as well as staff management. While many approaches are provided in the literature, I will focus on the motivation theory, leadership, the impact of corporate culture on staff retention and the psychological contract, which in my opinion, are key in regard to the nature of humanitarian work. While discussing these, I will refer to the specific case of Gen Y.

2.3.1 Staff retention and motivation theory

Motivation theorists believe that an organisation can retain its best brains by implementing strategies that will motivate them. This theory is rooted in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). These needs can be divided into two categories: basic needs (psychological and safety) and strategic needs (belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation). Basic needs include food, shelter, employment and health and strategic needs include a sense of belonging (family, work), self-respect and respect from others, confidence and achieving one's potential. Motivation, from Maslow's perspective, lies at the higher level of the hierarchy, at the level of the strategic needs, but these will not emerge until the needs at the lower level, the basic needs, are satisfied. Maslow's theory is supported by Samuel and Chipunza (2009, p.413) who propose a set of variables that they believe are key for motivating staff and for greater retention: (a) a sense of belonging to the organisation, (b) freedom for innovative thinking, (c) provision of health & wellness programmes, (d) setting performance targets for subordinates and (e) job security.

The motivational theory is criticised by those that believe that it is too generalist. For them employers are different and cannot be subject to approaches that would apply to all. This includes Graham and Messner who argue that employers should focus on job satisfaction rather than trying to motivate their employees when they are not happy with their work. (1998, p.196).

At the core of the motivation theory, financial incentives are described as key motivators. This includes Taylor who believes that workers can be motivated by money and therefore, they should be paid a percentage of their wage as a reward based on productivity (1911). However money as a key motivator has limitations. Even though financial incentives can create competition between staff which can result in staff becoming more productive and increase their commitment to their employer, they can also reduce the sincerity of staff as "they tend to draw attention to and focus on activities and outcomes that are remunerated" (Feser, 2011, p. 123). Furthermore, monetary incentives can affect the collaboration between staff as it

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"can reduce desired social behavior such as cross-unit collaboration" while in humanitarian agencies, solidarity at work is crucial (ibid).

Advocating for another approach to motivation, Herzberg in his Two-Factor theory of motivation, supports Maslow but recommends a greater focus on people oriented factors such as working conditions and overall job satisfaction as main motivators for staff (Herzberg, 1966). The latter aspect appears to be most relevant for Gen Y staff when taking into account the argument of Asthana who states that Gen Y employees cannot stay in a job if they are not happy (2008, npa). Herberg's theory, unlike Taylor's, also seems more feasible for humanitarian organisations given that NGO's cannot, by principle, give their staff financial rewards.

As NGOs rely heavily on public donations and government funding they need to show that a high proportion of funds received are spent on beneficiaries and not on administration costs including staff salaries. Some NGOs even have policies in place dictating how much can be spent on indirect costs. ICRC, for example, has an administration expense threshold of 9.69% (2009, p.4). Therefore non-financial incentives need to be considered by NGO's. This includes moral recognition and acknowledgement.

Job security is also mentioned by Samuel and Chipunza as a core motivator. However, given the nature of the humanitarian industry, it is difficult to guarantee job security for employees. In fact, keeping the same position or continuing to work in the same country after a certain number of years is not possible in many NGOs. In Concern Worldwide becoming a permanent overseas staff is subject to terms that many staff would not be able to meet. The policy states:

> Anyone who has worked overseas for Concern on two successive standard fixed-term contracts with more than four years' continuous service can apply for an indefinite overseas employment contract with Concern, subject to a mobility clause […] (2012, p.14).

2.3.2. Staff retention and leadership

The definition of leadership varies from one author to another. Burns highlights the complexity of the topic by arguing that, "leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (1978, p. 2). However, a simple definition provided by Cartwright covers the core aspects of leadership which are the leader, the process as well as the leader's goal. He defines leadership as "the ability to obtain non-coerced, voluntary compliance which enables followers to attain goals which they share with their leader" (1983, p21). This definition emphasises the positive aspects of leadership as it takes into account the necessity of freedom, independency and will of the followers.

Leadership puts in relationship the leader and his followers. The style of leadership adopted is determinant in the fulfilment of the common goal. Two main styles of leadership are identified and broadly debated in the literature: transactional leadership and transformational leadership. In transactional leadership "leaders approach followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another: jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions" or in the case of employment, the accomplishment of job related activities in exchange for a financial incentive or using staff for his own career progress (Burns, 1978, p4). With transactional leadership, the leader has full power for decision making and does not delegate or share his leadership. This contrasts with transformational leadership where the "leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (Ibid). Hence transformational leadership gives more value to the individual employee's needs and desires and explores ways of empowering him.

A leader needs to adapt his style of leadership according to the characteristics of his employee or follower. Kelley's four-quadrant followership model categorises followers into four types: alienated, those that are critical and sceptic about the organization; conformist, those that obey and do what they are asked without questioning; passive, those that cannot do anything without guidance and exemplary,

those that find their own way in the organisation; they are independent, creative and team players (1992).

When looking at the characteristic of Gen Y individuals, mainly their sense of innovation their level of independence, confidence and team spirit, they fit better in the fourth followership. As such, I believe that Gen Y based on an analysis of their followership characteristics, would appreciate an employer who adopts a transformational leadership style, allowing them to realise their potential.

Leadership is presented as the corner stone for staff retention. It "plays a crucial role in increasing performance of organizations and individuals" (Gul et al; 2012, p.44) and "leaders have the responsibility of creating and sustaining a culture, where employees provide excellent service to all internal and external customers" (Cooper 2007; p.11).

This applies to managers who should see themselves as leader rather that simple manager, linked to their staff by work only. A core different between the two remains at the level of the margin of action that they give to their collaborators; "where managers act to limit choices, leaders fresh approach to long-standing problems and open issues to new option" (Zaleznik 1977; p.77). Transformational leader, acting with openness, communication, delegation of responsibility and creating condition for innovation, fit with the characteristic of Gen Y worker who will see in such a leader, a colleague to grow with.

The role of the manager as a leader is crucial and managers can act as a preventive agent of involuntary turnover. They can also help reinforce staff self-esteem among staff and can be influential in a staff deciding to stay or leave. According to an ICRC survey, 42% of respondents said that management had a strong influence on their decision to leave while "poor leadership/values/culture (cited by 40%)" was responsible for involuntary turnover (Loquercio et al 2006, p.8). Being at the frontline of the relationship between the company and the staff, managers and in particular line managers can detect early warning signs of a staff considering leaving and alert the organisation (RDM 2006; p.p. 47-48).

In addition, they can play a mediating role that prevent the escalation of conflict and help good relationship between colleagues as well as healthy environment at work. Such role is quite dependent on the leadership style Wells & Peachey (2011). As discussed earlier Gen Y staff prefer strong leadership so this is an important factor to consider when developing a strategy to retain Gen Y staff.

However, though effective leadership can have a strong impact on retention, it is important to acknowledge that good leadership can sometime fail to retain staff when the latter decide to leave, especially for personal reasons or to pursue their career ambition elsewhere.

2.3.3. Staff retention and humanitarian organisational culture

Organisational culture is presented in the literature as fundamental for greater staff retention. "Culture is pervasive; it influences all aspects of how an organization deals with its primary task, its various environments, and its internal operations" (Schein 2004; p.14).

Organisational culture combines a set of factors that guide a given organisation. "It is the characteristic spirit and belief of an organisation, demonstrated for example, in the norms and values that are generally held about how people should treat each other, the nature of working relationship that should be developed and attitudes to change" (Torrington and Weightman 1989; p.18). The psychological aspect of corporate culture is further emphasised by Nasir and Sabir, as they argue that it "can also be described as psychology, attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values (personal and cultural values) of an organization" (2012, p.1). The correlation between organisational culture and staff retention is made by Sheridan as he believes that corporate culture has a strong impact on staff retention (1992). The importance of culture for an organisation is further emphasised by Tharp as he argues that "culture is considered as the 'glue' that holds an organisation together and for others, the 'compass' that provides direction" (2009, P.2).

The culture of an organisation can be captured from different approaches and models, including the Hofstede Centre's six cultural dimensions, including power

distance, collectivism versus individualism; masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation versus short term normative orientation and indulgence versus restraint (no date).

An analysis of NGO's culture using Hofstede's six cultural dimensions helps understand where NGO's stand in general. In regard to two of the cultural dimensions set by the Hofstede's centre, NGO's dimensions are femininity oriented as opposed to masculinity, in contrast to profit companies. In fact, individual achievement and staff competition are not championed in NGOs. In addition, NGO's are collectivist and have short term normative orientation. Even though some tasks, including writing proposals for getting funds is done by an individual or a number of people in collaboration, NGO's do not reward the winner of the funds. Managers would rather recognise the whole team or the great work of the organisation all together.

This contrasts with the characteristics of Gen Y staff, that are tagged as the "Generation Me" by Main (2009) or "trophy kids" by Alsop (2008) meaning that they tend to achieve something expecting a personal reward or acknowledgement as is done by many multinationals where financial bonuses, awards and different types of rewards are used to create a competitive, creative and innovative workforce. One benefit offered by many NGOs to staff working in hardship posts is Rest & Relaxation where periodically staff take time off outside of the country in addition to their annual leave.

2.3.4. Staff retention and psychological contract

One of the approaches that require particular attention in relation to Gen Y retention in humanitarian organisations is the psychological contract.

The term psychological contract was first use in the 1960's to identify an informal type of contract between an employer and its employee. Traditionally, a relationship between employer and employee is established by a physical contract in the form of a document signed by both parties and legally valid. However, it is important to see beyond this formal contract when it comes to staff retention.

A psychological contract is defined as the unspoken pact that links a staff to his employer (Mackay, 2007, p.68). It aims to create a sense of loyalty towards the employer (ibid). Given that such a contract is established with the freewill of both parties, it bears a particular strength. Hence it "may be more influential than the formal contract in affecting how employees behave from day to day" (CIPD, 2014). The role of the psychological contracts is important in retention as it "motivates workers to fulfil commitments made to employers […]" (Kiewitz, 2004, p.120). However, though the psychological contract can help reinforce staff commitment, it also has a negative connotation for some and is described by psychologist Ed Schein, as a form of brainwashing (ibid).

Creating a psychological contract, especially with Gen Y staff, requires openness between employer and employee, honesty, mutual trust and the ability to share information timely. In relation to Gen Y, Ismaïl argues: "tell them the truth, don't try to pull the wool over their eyes" (2014, p.106). In this regard, employers should avoid seductive approaches by embellishing the job, its general terms and conditions or the environment of the position during the recruitment process. Though the presentation of the real picture of the position to the candidate can sometime be in contradiction to the notion of marketing the position where there is a tendency to present the most attractive aspects of the role to job seekers, it has the advantage of mentally preparing the staff, making him entirely responsible for his decision to take on the role and build a mutual trust. The opposite can result in staff becoming disillusioned, distrusting and demotivated and leaving the role prematurely.

On the other hand, in using the psychological contract employers should be aware that they are relying on soft factors such as management style and effective communication and are therefore dependent on the ability of the manager to strengthen the relationship. If breached, it can have a snow ball effect on productivity and the relationship between the staff and the employer (CIPD, 2014).

Nonetheless it remains a less costly and valuable approach as it "provides a convincing rationale for 'soft HRM' or behaving as a good employer. It offers a

perspective based on insights from psychology and organisational behaviour rather than economics" (CIPD, 2014).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the conceptual framework as well as the theoretical framework of this dissertation highlighting the factors behind staff turnover in humanitarian organisations and the complexity of staff retention. Staff retention has to be approached differently when dealing with Gen Y staff in respect to their particular characteristics. Based on the literature, retaining Gen staff in general and specifically in the humanitarian industry, requires a combination of approaches that can be afforded, by adapting them to the specific situation and organisational needs. This includes considering motivation factors, looking at the organisational culture, the role of leadership as well as the capacity for NGO's to reinforce the psychological contract between them and their employer.

In humanitarian organisations, given their financial restrictions as well as their organisational culture, it seems that non-financial motivational incentives, good leadership as well as the psychological contract are some of the approaches that deserve particular attention for overcoming the challenges of staff retention when particularly dealing with Gen Y employees. These approaches will be analysed further after the presentation of data from the field investigation which captured the perspectives of Gen Y staff on the subject of staff retention. But first, the methodology used for the investigation will be outlined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter the methodology used in undertaking the research is presented as well as the rationale for using the adopted research approach. The choice of research tools and the process of data collection are outlined. Finally, in this chapter some of the limitations of the research methodology are discussed and a number of ethical issues are also considered.

3.2. A qualitative approach

A qualitative approach was used for this research. Qualitative methods are methods that employ no quantitative standard or techniques (Sarantakos, 1993; p.437). They are clearly distinctive from quantitative methods which are deductive and use figures. A quantitative method tests a theory and is oriented to objectivism while a qualitative method is inductive, tries to generate theory and is more oriented to constructionism (Bryman, 2004; p.20). Hence, such a method does not fit with this type of research which aims to understand the opinions and feelings of the respondents in relation to staff retention within their professional industry. The choice of the qualitative approach was therefore motivated by the need to capture the specific sentiments of the respondents as well as their suggestions on how they could be retained. This includes understanding how their commitment to their employer is influenced by the internal and external work environment, by their experience and by the fact that they belong to the Gen Y personality typology.

3.3. Sampling Strategy

Sampling is "the process of choosing the research unit of the target population which are to be included in the study" (Sarantakos, 1993, p.125). For the purpose of this research, the targeted population is expatriate staff born after 1980, meaning that they belong to the Gen Y. Local staff were not included in the study because, in most cases, NGO's offer a good package to their local staff in comparison to the general local salary and work conditions. In addition, the exclusive choice of

expatriate staff is motivated by the fact that they work under different conditions, far away from their home country, shifting from a developed living environment to a remote or relatively difficult environment. The factors that may influence the wellbeing of an expatriate can be summed up as follows:

- ✓ Mobility restrictions (e.g. curfews, no go areas) which do not apply to local staff

- ✓ Health issues and poor health infrastructure

- ✓ High concerns about local security

- ✓ Bounded by international staff policies

- ✓ Change of living environment- from developed to developing countries

- ✓ Expatriate staff are in general in the highest position (strategic)

- ✓ Concerns with salary, work conditions, living conditions, social amenities (local staff are at home and already use to their environment)

- ✓ Expatriate staff are the most difficult to recruit and retain.

- ✓ Issue in having their family in the field

A purposive sampling approach is used. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling approach also known as "criterion-based" (Hogan et al., 2009, p.106). In this approach "participants are selected with the 'purpose' to represent a phenomenon in relation to specific characteristics, often socio-demographic […]." (ibid). The importance of this sampling approach is highlighted by Bryman who argues that it is "essentially strategic and entails to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling" (2004, p.333). Nine staff from six humanitarian organisations; Concern Worldwide, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mentor Initiative, Acted, RNC and Tearfund, operating in both the Central African Republic and Rwanda, were interviewed.

The sizes of the organisation as well as their global presence were determinant in choosing them. In addition, the choice of these particular organisations was also motivated by the fact that some of them are generally viewed by humanitarian

workers as a starting point, including Acted and Mentor Initiative, while others are regarded as middle career organisation, such as Concern Worldwide and Tearfund whereas the ICRC would be regarded as a long term employer, given that the ICRC has a more attractive employment package for expatriate staff. Overall, the main characteristics for the choice of the interviewees were their age, their status of expatriate and the humanitarian organisation they either work for or that they left.

In addition, I made use of multi-phase sampling in order to widen the data. In this technique, "each sample is adequately studied before another is drawn from it" (Bryman 2004, p.134). The advantages of such a method are that it "the information gathered at each phase helps the researcher to choose a more relevant and more representative sample" (Sarantakos1993, p.135).

3.4. Data gathering method

There are various data collection tools that can be chosen depending on the research approach, the data gathering constraints and the aim of the researcher. This research made use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. This was motivated by the fact that the interviewees were accessible directly. They also accepted to meet at a particular time based on an appointment. In addition, it was the fastest and most reliable way to collect data from the interviewees given that their schedule and the work environment would make it difficult for them to fill in a questionnaire.

The practicality of the interview is explained by Robson as a research method in which, the researcher asks questions hoping to receive feedback from the interviewee (2002, p.269). In semi-structured interviews, questions are prepared but the interviewer can decide their order during the interview (ibid, p.270). This was particularly useful in the investigation as the interviewees talked openly about any points that came to their mind. Hence I had to probe regardless of the order of the question. This is also due to the fact that some points of the topic were particularly important for some and not as relevant to others. This brought in the advantage of the interview which is that it "is a flexible and adaptable way of finding thing out" (Robson, 2002, p.272). In addition "it has the potential of

providing rich and highly illuminating material" (ibid, p. 273). On the other hand, it relies solely on what interviewees said and does not report their direct experience (Silverman, 2006, p.17)

Overall, the use of semi-structures interviews allowed a greater interaction with the participants, providing me with the opportunity to build on their answers in subsequent interviews.

3.5. Data gathering process

In May 2014, I was assigned by Concern Worldwide as General System Manager in Central African Republic. I arrived in the country on the 6th of May. It was agreed that I would conduct my research while completing my professional assignment. After having discussed my research with my manager who also accepted to be interviewed as he fit the criteria, I contacted directly staff from other organisations in order to seek their permission to be interviewed. Some were met during HR management cluster meetings in the country; others were introduced to me during field cluster meetings. In the Central African Republic, staff including myself were under permanent curfew from 7pm to 6 am and an intensive military conflict led to more restriction, isolation and fear. The open use of communication devices including voice recorders had the potential to create suspicion among the locals due to the political crisis. Due to their work schedule and their work policy it was difficult to interview some of the staff that I contacted through the contact list sent to all HR department of every NGO. In an environment where work schedule and personal life were not easy to manage, I conducted the interviews either at the office of the interviewee or at a hotel where many NGOs accommodated their staff.

In July 2014, I travelled to Rwanda for personal reasons and, in contrast to CAR, I met interviewees in a stable and friendly environment. I did not have any professional relationship with any of the interviewees and there was no pressure of any kind.

In both countries, I conducted the interviews with a voice recorder and permission was granted by the interviewee to record and transcript the discussion. However, the respondents requested to remain anonymous because of the sensitivity of the

topics for discussion and to protect their career. Though anonymity might seem to be a way for someone to not take responsibility for what he/she says, it is also allows for more openness and free flow discussion.

3.6. Research challenges and limitations

Conducting this research in the field, especially in CAR, a country that is enduring a political conflict, was quite difficult. A particular challenge in CAR came from the fact that interviewees had to be met outside of their work hours but within the limits of the curfew. In addition, I could not complete the process due to the intensity of the conflict as well as my professional assignment. This has delayed the whole dissertation process. Given that I then moved to Rwanda in the same period, I had to do more interviews and collect more data. Aside from these challenges, the research itself has some limitations including the exclusion of local Gen Y staff. Though the exclusive choice of expatriate was motivated by valid reasons, it is important to note that the issue of Gen Y retention should also be considered when dealing with local staff. This is particularly important because in some countries, for example Niger, where humanitarian operations are ongoing and there is a real security threat for expatriate staff international NGOs are moving progressively toward the use of more local staff. Apart from security reasons in many countries in Africa, local decision makers are also advocating for the recruitment of locals staff at the highest position within international non-governmental organisations; and where an expatriate staff is recruited, the choice must be justified to the local authorities and clearly documented. This is the case in Rwanda for example. Hence, further studies looking at the specific case of local Gen Y staff would be an opportunity to expand the debate raised by this research.

Another important limitation that might need to be addressed is that the research did not include expatriate staff from all age categories. This means that there are still opportunities to deepen the research on the topic by looking at other aspects of staff retention, not taken into account in this research.

3.7. Personal biases

Some of the interviewees are former colleagues and during the interviews I was influenced by their opinion on some issues that I was involved in. I also had a different perception from them on some issues that were raised. However, I focused on their opinion and used them with integrity.

3.8. Ethical issues

Researching staff retention in conjunction with Gen Y will require having access to data some of which will be private. This includes salary and rewards accrued by staff, the age of staff, details on the recruitment process of a particular organisation, including job descriptions and staff files. Disclosing some of this information was not always appreciated by some interviewees. Moreover, the research appeared discriminatory to some extent, against local Gen Y staff. This was perceived by a respondent as a lack of consideration for local staff.

These ethical issues were overcome by emphasising the focus, though limited, of the dissertation with further explanation on why expatriate staff were targeted. The data collection tools are very transparent and clear, including the use of the general NGOs mailing list to contact the interviewees. This was approved by my manager. A clear confidentiality clause was presented to the interviewees. However, even though they accepted the clause, they did not want to sign it to remain anonymous.

3.9. Conclusion

Conducted using a qualitative approach, this research involved the collection of data through semi-structure face-to-face interviews both in the Central African Republic and Rwanda. Respondents were targeted based on specific criteria including age group, the industry of operation and the status of expatriate. Though the researcher was sometimes emotionally involved in the data gathering process, he managed to preserve the essentiality and the authenticity of the data collected while also ensuring to preserve the identity of the respondent from whom important data was collected. This data will be presented and analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1. Introduction

The first section of this chapter aims to present and illustrate the results of the primary research conducted through nine semi-structured interviews. The findings will be directly linked to the main objective of the study. By doing so, the analysis aims to answer to the two research questions listed in chapter 1, as follow:

- ✓ What are the main challenges to consider in retaining Gen Y staff in the field in a humanitarian context?
- ✓ According to Gen Y staff, what factors are determinant in ensuring their commitment to their job in the humanitarian industry?

In the second section an interpretation of the findings is presented, linked to the theories discussed in Chapter Two.

4.2. Profile of interviewees

As mentioned earlier, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine humanitarian staff in Central African Republic and Rwanda, working at different professional levels. Seven staff, two female and five male, were interviewed in the Central African Republic and two staff, one female and one male were interviewed in Rwanda. The female humanitarian worker interviewed in Rwanda was on a personal trip but had previously worked for four years in Rwanda and four years in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The two female staff, in the Central African Republic were both on short deployments of three months duration, working as Deputy Country Director and Logistics Coordinator. A codification table presented below shows that the interviewees are generally at mid and end career level with one staff getting involved in the humanitarian profession only three months prior to the interview. This selection was made in order to have a variety of perspectives on the issue of staff retention, noting that some of the interviewees hold senior management positions and thus have decision making power whereas some are still at a junior level. The female staff interviewed in Rwanda has now taken a head

office level position in Europe. Working in head office and in a managerial position, she understands how decisions made about staff management in the field need to be well informed.

Anonymity, as promised to the respondent, will prevail in dealing with data collected from the interviewees. In addition their employers will not be directly mentioned even though the targeted NGOs are listed in the methodology section. Nor will they be able to trace the information loaded in this research. The codification of the interviewees, outlined below, was done to ensure anonymity.

Interviewees' identification code

The code is made up of the initials of the name of the country of interview, the initial of the interviewee's sex and a number going from 1 to 10 as per the number of interviewees in the country in question. E.g.:

CAR M1 = Central African Republic Male 1

CAR F2= Central African Republic Female 2

R F1 = Rwanda Female 1

Table 2: Interviewees identification codes table

Code	Position	Number of years in the field
CAR M1	Logistician	1 Year
CAR M2	HR Manager	4 years
CAR M3	Finance Manager	6 years
CAR M4	Project office	6 Months
CAR M5	Admin and Finance Officer	3 months
CAR F1	ACD	4 Years
CAR F2	Admin and Logistic officer	2 years
R F1	CD	8 Years
R M1	Admin and HR Manager	5 Years

4.3. Presentation of the findings

Findings from the interviews are organised under three sub-headings: Reality in the field; Commitment to the organisation and career perspective; and Respondents' recommendation.

4.3.1 Reality in the field

In this first section, discrepancies between the reality in the field and what staff are told at HQ prior to deployment during the recruitment process is discussed. It was also the occasion to discuss staff opinion on their salary package and work-life balance and how they cope with challenges of their working environment which for some involve high levels of stress.

> ➢ **Discrepancies found on the ground**

Discrepancies between the reality in the field and the information provided by HQ during the interview process were discussed at the start of the interview.

I asked:

"*Is there any discrepancy between what you were told during your recruitment and the reality here?*"

"*I think that it is difficult to rely on the information provided to you during the interview. I made my own investigation to have a better insight of what was going on in CAR. However, when I arrived, I was shocked by the complexity of the situation. Not specially in terms of the political conflict, but specially on the way life is, interacting with other, getting food and having no social life*" explained CAR F2.

CAR M4 went further, highlighting a deep discrepancy between the information received during the recruitment at HQ and the field reality.

"*What I am in now has nothing to do with what I was told. I would have liked something more accurate in order to prepare my mind*"

For R F1, the discrepancy between the reality in the field and the briefing information provided at the head office is due to a lack of investigation and current information. She referred to her experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo which she found shocking. She explained:

"*Many times, they rely on second hand information. The information is not always updated. I knew I would be deployed in the capital city of Congo, but I ended up doing most of my work in a little remote place, with very little initial information. I was shocked, and at many stages I thought about leaving.*"

For CAR M2:
"*I think that, even if the field is tough, good and accurate, let's says honest information can at least prepare our mind. I don't mind if I am told that it is difficult if in the reality it is going to be difficult*".

He went further explaining how honesty during the recruitment process influences his commitment:
"*I would prefer to have a clear idea of the condition here, even if I am informed that life is difficult in this country, It would not have made me change my decision to come. At least, my involvement will be honest, but I was told I will be living in a hotel as there was not enough space in our guesthouse, and look at where we are right now! It's disappointing*"

Respondents were also asked about the challenges they faced in their working environment:
For CAR M2, "*here, it's all about working, as you can see. There is curfew, almost no place to relax and no night life, it is really tough*".
CAR F1 had the same perception as other staff interviewed in CAR "*It's a challenging situation with an ongoing conflict and lot of security issues. It is quite difficult*".

We also discussed the impact of the working environment on staff family life as well as on their commitment to their organisation. To which CAR M1 responded:
"*It's too complicated and difficult, especially with the lack of good internet*

network. I would like to at least chat with my relative or even have some video conversation with my wife and daughter. But every time I tried, it ends up with some frustration due to bad connection. I am feeling disconnected".

For CAR F2, the field is more complex: "*It is not possible to have a family life here. Even if I was offered to bring my family, I would not do it; this country is not safe and there is almost nothing for family life*"

In contrast, for R M1, the environment in Rwanda is an opportunity for family life

"*One of the most important factors that keep me in my current position is the opportunity for a good family life in this country. I did not have that in many other countries. Rwanda is different. My kids are happy in this country, and it's giving me more focus in my work*".

R F1 had a different perspective as she was negatively influenced by both internal and external factors while in the field (for anonymity, a small section of her interview was deleted): She explained:

"*I finished my contract in [...] early*". "*At a certain point, I realised that I couldn't do it anymore. I realised that I have been in the country for over five months and I haven't built a social network. Nor could I find people I could de-stress with*". *Internally, I loved the work, the interaction with the locals, but I didn't have the support from my manager, no planning and the work in the remote area became more and more challenging*".

➢ **Salary and terms and conditions of employment**

I invited them to express their opinion on the general terms and condition of their employment.

CAR F1 noted "*for a humanitarian organisation, the salary treatment is pretty good. Well, on the other hand there is also competition between organisations. Therefore, they should try and be more competitive*"

CAR M4 argued:

"*It's ok. I think that the salary is fine for my level of experience. Anyway, I would not have accepted the position if the salary was not acceptable*"

His perspective was shared by CAR M5:

"*I cannot complain, I have enough to look after myself, and I pay for almost nothing here. The salary is not a problem. Even though I know that I cannot get rich with what I earn right now*"

R M1 explained that the salary treatment should be a prerequisite. He said:

"*I think that the package is good. When you include the education support for my child, the flights and the net salary, it's not bad at all. And that was one of the conditions before I take the position*".

According to R F1:

"*My salary is good; when I compare it to other Irish organisations, I think it is fine. I also found it fair when I was working there*".

> **Living and working conditions**

When looking at the living and working environment, respondents described it as very influential to their commitment.

A description is provided by R F1:

"*The work environment and the private home life, you got to have a time for breaks. And that is part of the HR function. I think they have to try to invest to make the living environment comfortable. It would be great that that the generator isn't heard outside the window. You know, it's something small, but it contributes to the dynamics. The generator is outside your bedroom, you want to sleep, the noise; and also it is important to be able to come back to a house where you feel comfortable*".

The importance of the accommodation as well as the work space was underlined.

According to R M1:

"*This was a very important factor for me deciding to work here. As you can see, we have a very good accommodation, the family is comfortable. It is motivating. I should acknowledge that Rwanda is different. I worked in Burundi and it's a completely different situation*".

"*There is a shared space, but you also have a corner where you can go and relax. Because you come home for dinner and people talk about work*" said CARF2.

However, this was not a problem for all respondents. CAR M3 noted:

"*It is a humanitarian context, and right now, most NGO are trying to establish in the country*" but he did add that "*the work is complicated; you need a bit of space and not have to be in a work environment every time*".

4.3.2. Commitment to their job and career perspective

Data in this section is related to the commitment of staff to their employer. Here, we looked at their expectations from their employer; the factors that they believed could be influential for retaining them in their current organisation or in the humanitarian industry, against those that can push them to leave, especially before the end of their contract. Their career perspective for the next 5 to 10 years was also discussed.

> ➢ **Pull and push**

We discussed the factors that could either make them leave or reinforce their commitment to their current employer.

For CAR M3, the relationship with colleagues is essential:

"*The work environment is quite stressful. However, a good team, communication and relationship with colleagues as well as the support from my manager is quite determent for retaining me in this NGO. Also and very important, is for me to have good access to internet, communication tools in order to switch off sometime and remain connected to my relatives and the outer world*"

CAR F2 insisted on the communication factors as well as on the support from head office as determinant for compensating the socio-cultural shocks and the lack of amenities in the field. She argued:

"Being evaluated, being appreciated, being listened to, to know that there is someone in HQ that you can go to and you can talk to. Obviously the living environment, the working conditions, the working hours as well as the people we work with are also important factors"

Her perspective was shared by CAR M1 who said:

"Can you imagine, I am sent in a country that I don't know, where security is a disaster, even though I like what I do, I still need to have a personal life. And here it is impossible. So, good access to internet can help. At least, it becomes a window towards other non-professional things. I also think that the head office cannot solely rely on the support from our line manager here. My manager is not helping me at all. In that case, I would expect to have access to someone at the head office at least to provide me support, but that is impossible in the current situation. I am waiting."

Respondent were also asked about their expectations from their current employer.

For CAR M2, the focus is more on the social environment as a strong retention factor. He explained:

"Given the security issue that we have here, I would expect my employer to organise some kind of gathering or social life for us, a bit like some local rest and relaxation sessions. This can make a big difference".

When asked about what motivates and what frustrates them the most CAR F2 replied:

"The good end result, good procedures and being listened to, are my main motivators. I feel frustrated when my concerns are not being addressed."

For R F1:

"Having an impact on the people is my main motivator. But when I feel that there is no support and I feel isolated like in Congo, I start questioning myself"

According to CAR F1, her commitment to the organisation is more dependent on what motivated her involvement in the humanitarian sector, rather than the work environment or other factors specifically related to her current employer. She said:

"I know that I cannot expect everything from my employer, but as long as I have an impact on the people I am supposed to help, to see that I am really working, I cannot complain; and if it happens that I am not happy I will try and work in another NGO since I believe in the work we do".

> ➤ **Career perspectives**

For R F1, the humanitarian industry is a long term choice if not a final profession choice:

"*My first career is development and humanitarian work, if I am not happy with my current employer, I will look for another job with another NGO*".

Respondents were asked about their career perspective in ten years from now.

R F1 explained that the humanitarian profession is definitely the final career choice for her. Having worked in the field and now based in the head office of her organisation, she seems to have made her choice. She argued:

"*I started my real professional life in the humanitarian industry, I saw many aspects of it and I realised how useful my work was for impacting on the poorest. Despite the ups and downs, I feel that I will be in this industry for a long time, at least for the next 10 years*".

A similar response was given by CAR F1:

"*I will still be in the humanitarian industry, focusing on nutrition, that's what I like and I am trained for it*"

CAR F2 was more specific about her ambition:

"*Despite all the frustration and stress, I think that I will still be doing humanitarian work and perhaps, I will be Acting Country Director or Country Director*".

CAR M4 and CAR M5 were not sure about their career perspectives.

CAR M4 said:

"*I am still a bit new in this job, so, I don't know, but so far, it is positive. We will see.*"

Whereas CAR M5 argued:

"*I did some jobs before accepting this position. And I am optimistic. Even though the environment is still difficult, I think that in a few years, let's say 5 years, I wish to be in a managerial position in finance with this or another NGO*".

However, the perspective was different for R M1:

"*Working with an NGO is a choice, but I am very flexible. If I find a good job with a multinational or any other company, I will go*".

4.3.4 Respondents' recommendations

Interviewees were asked to make some recommendations based on their experience, that could contribute to retaining them in their current organisation or at least, reinforce their commitment to the humanitarian industry. Recommendations were made in relation to different aspects, including work-life balance and the possibility to make life more viable and less stressful.

On this subject, CAR F2 questioned:

"*How do you live in the same house and work in the same house with people from several different countries. You don't talk about cultural differences. The office is downstairs and the house is upstairs. That is difficult for work and life balance. And because the curfew is 6pm, you can't go out so you work more. That is difficult*"

Furthermore, R F1 suggested:

"*I acknowledge the security policy, but having the office and the house in the same place, makes it sometimes difficult. Both spaces should be distanced one from the other. Even if the distance from work to office is very small, to walk from the office to home, to breathe, feel some fresh air and to have the feeling that you are leaving the office and going home, would make a big difference*".

Respondents also emphasised the need to use a source of energy that is not noisy especially in the compound. R F1 was particularly critical about the use of the generator. She first argued:

"I think that using a generator is not comfortable, the noise adds more on the stress that we go through."

And she recommended:

"They should find another energy source, perhaps solar energy. This is very important".

They also insisted on the need to have very good access to internet in order to connect with the outer world. For them, in fact, the access to internet and communication technology could compensate for the lack of socio-cultural amenities and strengthen their capacity to face the curfew. For CAR M1:

"At least if I have access to internet, I don't mind being locked inside during this curfew"

CAR M5 supported this sentiment:

"Internet is very important. Unfortunately, it is very slow here. But it helps me survive the crisis".

In R M1's opinion:

"There is not that much I can say, because life is interesting here, however, since we are not in an emergency situation, I think that using a laptop is not good. People need life after work, so the work stays at work. We should use desktops and have laptops on stand by for field trips. This is what I do and it works".

In relation to benefits and salary as a retention factor, CAR F1 argued:

"This is one field that employers should look at again in other to be more competitive and retain their staff". She continues: *"I think that the benefit of my employer is fair, but one thing I would look at is the consistency; the way the benefits of international staff from different countries are dealt with"*.

Regarding the decision at HQ level, R F1 believes that Gen Y staff should be involved in the decision making process in order to have Gen Y informed policies. She advocated for such an approach arguing:

"Their perspective and ours are different. However, our generation is becoming dominant in the field. So by consulting some staff of our age, especially those that understand our psychology, I think we can have field policies that take our needs into account".

For CAR M2, the focus was on the access to internet. He said:

"It's obvious that in this country, I cannot expect a luxury life, but I would definitely recommend that we have a better internet connexion. In the head office here, it work ok, but at home, it is more complicated".

4.4 Analysis of findings and discussion

4.4.1. Reality in the field

Regarding the reality in the field, interviewees put a strong emphasis on honesty and accuracy in the information provided to them prior to deployment. They believed that this could help avoid undue shock or disillusionment due to the discrepancy between the information they are provided during the recruitment process and the reality in the field. This highlights the importance of truth and honesty when dealing with Gen Y individuals as argued earlier by Ismaïl who advised that the truth should prevail when dealing with them (section 2.3.4). By telling the truth to Gen Y staff when recruiting them, an organisation can put them in front of their responsibility.

In the humanitarian profession, providing the truth about the job and working conditions includes giving accurate information about local infrastructure, the presence or not of social amenities and national security issues for which almost no NGO can be accountable. By doing so, the employer can reinforce the psychological contract with staff which according to Kiewitz, not only puts the staff in a position where he is ready to face the situation but foremost, motivates him to honour his commitment to complete his assignment (section 2.3.4). This was highlighted in particular by CAR M2 as he believes that honesty would reinforce his commitment: "*At least, my involvement will be honest*".

Furthermore, respondents outlined some factors that in their opinion are essential. This includes the work space which they believe should take their need for privacy into account and should also have a minimum comfort. In fact, separating the office from the house can make a big difference by helping staff switch off from work to home. They also mentioned the disturbing impact of the generator which in their opinion adds to the level of stress in the working environment that is already volatile.

In regard to the financial aspect, respondents explained that they should be fairly compensated for their work. This shows how the perception of humanitarian work had changed, shifting from the notion of voluntary work to a paid job like any other.

However, it should be noted that they did not complain about their salary and did not mention a greater salary package as a core retention factor. Instead they focused on other factors related to their overall work and living conditions in the field as well as the need for adequate support from their manager as well as acknowledgement at HQ level.

Overall, this is in contradiction with the findings of Loquercio et al who presented the salary as the dominant factor for turnover in the industry based (section 2.2.2). However, while Loquercio et al's analysis focused on humanitarian workers in general including field and HQ staff from every generation, the findings of this study suggest that when dealing particularly with Gen Yers, money is not a good factor for staff retention. Furthermore, as argued by Seager (2014), Gen individuals look beyond the financial factor, at a greater interest for achieving social good.

Respondent also made it clear how essential it is for them to have a family life; echoing the description provided on Gen Y individual by (section 2.2.1) noting that they are family orientated. This is particularly challenging for humanitarian organisations as working in volatile countries such as CAR, is incompatible with family life as echoed by Loquercio (section 2.2.2). In fact, most NGOs in CAR do

not have accompanied positions for expatriate staff as a result of the security issues and the socio-economic environment.

Overall, as acknowledged by Fawcett most "aid workers, basically have a pretty shrewd idea of what they are getting into when they enter this career, and dirty clothes, gun shots at night and lack of electricity do not surprise them" (2003; p.3). However, it is important to be aware that it is not the reality in the field itself that has to be changed when dealing with Gen Y staff, but rather, the way the field is portrayed to them prior to deployment in order to avoid undue disillusionment. Furthermore, while respondents acknowledge that NGOs cannot influence the external factors in the field such as the macro environment, they believe that there is enough they can do to make the work environment more viable and Gen Y sensitive.

4.4.2. Commitment to their job and career perspective

From the responses, it appears that respondents are motivated by the principal of assisting others, demonstrating a more professionally sedentary mind-set. Unlike Bowe (section 2.2.1) who believes that Gen Y staff get bored easily and are always thinking about the next job, respondents argued that the humanitarian profession is a choice and a career for them as mentioned earlier (section 2.2.1).

To ensure their commitment to the organisation, respondents also highlighted their desire for increased support from their managers and support and access to HQ especially when the support from their line manager fails. For respondents, humanitarian organisations that are very hierarchical, with the country director in the field being the final person that expatriates can interact with, should allow more communication, interaction and support at a higher level. This is an organisation culture issue as mentioned in (Section 2.3.3) based on the Hofstede six dimensions model. But also, this emphasises the importance of leadership, which at the field level can help ensure staff retention, not only by motivating the staff but by raising the awareness of HQ about the possible defection of a staff (section 2.3.2.).

4.4.3. Respondents' recommendations

Respondents recommended the importance of being acknowledged and valuated, as well as having their concerns heard. Described as trophy kids (section 2.2.1.), Gen Y individuals are very attentive to acknowledgement and praise. Non-financial incentives such as awards, individual feedback/acknowledgement or group messages are ways of praising them.

Having access to information and technology tools including great access to internet was a strong recommendation made by the respondents. As explained in the literature, Gen Y are technology driven and devote an important part of their time using social networks and new media including Facebook, Tweeter or YouTube (section 2.2.1.). Hence, it appears that in a humanitarian context, great internet should not be regarded as only important for work, but also as a vital tool for the life of the staff in the field.

Respondents also made recommendations in relation to their living environment. They advocated for the use of another source of energy in replacement of the generator that they find noisy and disturbing. In fact, pointing out the impact of the noise of the generator on their ability to cope with their environment which in turn can lead to health problems (Ernst, 2011). This can be particularly problematic in a humanitarian setting where, as explained by respondents, the level of stress is high and staff might need some time of calmness and relaxation.

By also emphasising the importance of having their house and office separated regardless of the distance, in order to be able to mentally switch from work to home, respondents reiterated their attachment to a work-life balance, which according to Meier et al (2010), is an essential condition for retaining Gen Y workers.

On the same line, one respondent believes that humanitarian employment should be designed differently in an emergency context to a development context. The use of laptops in emergencies and desktops in a development context was suggested as a

way to help staff in a development context better separate their work from their private life.

In relation to the financial aspects of their employment, respondents did not make any particular suggestion apart from sensitizing their employer to be aware of the competition between NGO's on one hand and between NGO's and the profit sector on the others. This suggests that the challenge of retaining staff in a humanitarian field does not depend on the financial factors which respondents consider to be acceptable and negotiated before accepting the role.

Highlighting the issue of the generation gap, R F1 suggested that staff that understand the typology of the Gen Y segment, should be involved at each level of the organisation including at the HQ level and be consulted when making decisions in order to have Gen Y informed policies. This is particularly important in the HR department where staff management in the field is designed. The inclusion of Gen Y employees can thus help bring about a new perception of the humanitarian profession which the new generations consider a career.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the data collected during the field investigation was presented and analysed at the light of the literature. Based on the analysis, the conclusion of this dissertation will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the overall conclusion of the study. The data collected from the interviews, as well as the information accessed through the literature review, constitute the basis for the conclusion. The limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also outlined.

5.2 Research conclusion

The objective of the research is to identify the most appropriate approach for NGOs to adopt to ensure the retention of Gen Y staff in a humanitarian context.
The study focused on the challenges of retaining Gen Y staff in a humanitarian context and sought to answer the following two questions:

- ✓ What are the main challenges to consider in retaining Gen Y staff in the field in a humanitarian context?
- ✓ According to Gen Y staff, what factors are determinant in ensuring their commitment to their job in the humanitarian industry?

The literature presented in Chapter 2 highlighted different approaches that could be adopted to improve staff retention: motivational theory, good leadership, organisational culture, as well as the psychological contract. While each approach has its value they each presented some limitations when it came to the retention of Gen Y staff in a complex humanitarian context.

To capture the perspectives of Gen Y staff on the subject, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Central African Republic and Rwanda. Staff, from six NGOs, at various levels in their career, were interviewed.

The analysis of the humanitarian context in Chapter Two revealed the challenges staff often face in the field including heavy workload, substandard living conditions, security concerns, poor social and health amenities and unhealthy work-life balance. These challenges were confirmed by the interviewees working in Central African

Republic and one interviewee who had worked in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The interviewees acknowledged that for the most part, external factors related to the country environment cannot be influenced by their employer but internal factors can be influenced. As highlighted in the literature review on Gen Y honesty is important for them. Discrepancies between the information they received during the recruitment process and the reality on the ground was highlighted and was clearly not appreciated. Thus, clear and accurate information should be provided to staff prior to deployment in order to prepare them mentally. This approach will reinforce the psychological contract between the employer and the employee.

In addition, the investigation found that financial incentives, which are often cited as a key retention tool, are not as relevant for Gen Y staff who are " motivated by more than money—things like recognition, security, and fair treatment matter a great deal" (Pfeffer, 2005, p.98). In fact, the interviewees, in general, were satisfied with the salary terms and conditions and although they mentioned that an appropriate salary was a prerequisite to their engagement, they argued that factors such as appropriate working and living conditions, receiving professional and psychological support including acknowledgment of their work from their employer and having links to headquarters were all determinant in ensuring they stayed in their role. Hence, alongside the psychological contract, managers of Gen Y staff should adopt a transformational leadership style; ensuring staff feel valued, involved and supported. In addition, while it is complex to change or redesign the corporate culture of an organisation, it is advisable to prioritise the wellbeing of staff, motivating them by satisfying at a minimum their basic needs as advocated by Maslow and Herzberg and then aiming to meet their strategic needs.

In conclusion, the research suggests that the psychological contract appears to be the most appropriate retention approach for Gen Y staff in a humanitarian context, blended with strong transformational leadership. Organisations also need to review their organisational culture and ensure that the specific characteristics and needs of Gen Y are taken into account in the organisation's values and beliefs.

Finally here is a list of challenges for further reflection for humanitarian agencies to take into account based on discussions with the respondents:

- ✓ How can accurate information be provided to staff prior to deployment without compromising the recruitment process?

- ✓ How can life be made more viable for staff in volatile settings?

- ✓ What mechanisms can be put in place for expatriate staff to have a family life while in the field?

- ✓ What non-financial incentives can be introduced to demonstrate acknowledgment of staff achievements and ensure they are motivated?

5.3. Limitation and Recommendations

5.3.1 Limitations

This investigation was conducted exclusively on Gen Y expatriate staff in the field and their specific challenges were presented. One of the limitations of this research is that the investigation was conducted with a small number of staff. Therefore the experience of the respondents does not reflect the whole humanitarian industry. In addition as argued Silverman interviews "do not appear to give us direct access to the fact […] but instead offer indirect representation of those experience" (2006, p.117). Therefore the experiences of the respondents were not observed during the investigation in order to verify if what they told me was an accurate reflection of their experience on the ground.

The exclusion of local Gen Y staff from the survey is another aspect that contributes to the limitation of this study. In fact, even though the choice of expatriate staff was made intentionally, it is important to be aware that there is a growing requirement for local staff in higher positions in many developing countries as a result of security concerns which often have a greater effect on expatriate staff and in particular Western staff.

Finally the term 'Gen Yer' was used to identify and categorise individuals born between 1980 and 2000 and suggests that every member of this generation have the

same characteristics and needs. It also assumes that the same approach to motivate, to lead and to manage them would be applicable to all staff in this category. This is of course questionable because humans are not automated and each individual within the Gen Y segment has his own particularity and ambition.

5.3.2 Recommendations

I would therefore recommend that more research is carried out with a greater number of Gen Y staff. In addition I believe it would be beneficial to carry out a study focused on national Gen Y staff.

Looking at the challenges listed in the conclusion, I would recommend that humanitarian employers increase their knowledge of Gen Y, adapt a tailored strategy to manage them and share the knowledge and strategies with everyone in the organisation. This should be done in consultation with the staff in question.

From a management perspective, I agree with Loquercio (2005) when he argues that in humanitarian agencies, managers often have technical but not particular people skills and therefore, humanitarian agencies need to invest in training managers in order to develop their capacity to lead and retain their staff.

5.4 Conclusion

Staff turnover is a serious concern for humanitarian organisations faced with an increasing demand for assistance. Given that Gen Y staff (born between 1980 and 2000) "will soon rule the world" both at a social and professional level (Bersin, 2013), this study was undertaken to try to identify the most appropriate approach NGOs should adopt to increase the retention of Gen Y staff in humanitarian organisations. The characteristics and perceptions of Gen Y along with the concepts of staff turnover and staff retention, in particular in a humanitarian context, were presented in Chapter Two. Various approaches for staff retention were also analysed and their suitability for Gen Y staff in a humanitarian context were explored. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with Gen Y staff in Central

African Republic and Rwanda to gain their perspective on the topic. The results of the interviews were presented in Chapter 4.

Despite the complexity of Gen Y individuals from a professional perspective, they are a growing segment of the labour market and do offer opportunities for humanitarian agencies to be more effective and have a greater impact on their beneficiaries. However it is important that organisations design a HR strategy that in turn will allow the organisation to meet the needs and expectations of Gen Y staff. The study concluded that the psychological contract appears to be the most appropriate retention approach for Gen Y staff in a humanitarian context but needs to be blended with strong transformational leadership. Employers are also advised to review their organisational culture and ensure that the specific characteristics and needs of Gen Y are taken into account in the organisation's values and beliefs.

As I am concluding this research, I believe that humanitarian organisations can overcome the retention challenges related to Gen Y staff as long as they accept that "they don't live for work [but rather] work to live (Asthana 2008).

Chapter 6: Reflections on learning and skills development

6.1. Introduction

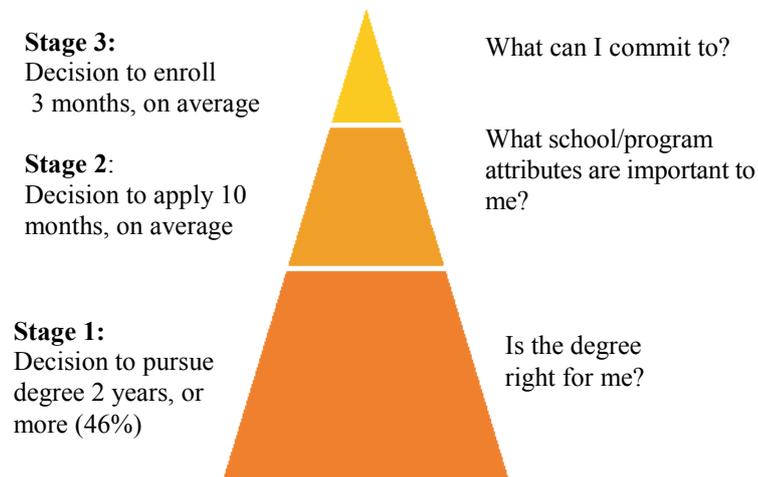> "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know."
>
> Albert Einstein

This enlighten thought of Albert Einstein emphasises the infinity of learning but also the fact that knowledge can surprise the learner. The MBA programme was an extremely resourceful experience that opened my mind to the world of business that I had no particular notion of despite my previous studies. My learning style supported me in understanding and applying the knowledge shared by the lecturers and the whole course documentations.

Doing the MBA course

As I was prospecting my professional future, I realised that I had a gap in my CV in terms of relevant professional experience. I also had an interest in working at people management level within a humanitarian organisation. Even though I had a qualification in Development Studies, it did not provide me with the capacity to manage staff in the field. Hence, I decided to do the MBA, first for its business focus and practical orientation including HRM, but also for its prestige and uniqueness in the world. The following process suggested by Bruce contributed to my decision to do the MBA:

Figure 2: Stages in MBA Decision-Making (Bruce 2006)

Stage 3:
Decision to enroll
 3 months, on average

What can I commit to?

Stage 2:
Decision to apply 10 months, on average

What school/program attributes are important to me?

Stage 1:
Decision to pursue degree 2 years, or more (46%)

Is the degree right for me?

As per the figure above, stage 1 was very different for me. Given that I had previous degrees, I decided within a few months that the MBA was a good option for me. I chose DBS because I found their programme very rich and flexible and the content of the DBS MBA responded to my expectations. When looking at the value of the MBA, Bruce presents a set of options (2006, p.2):

1. Preparation to get a good job in the business world
2. An increase in your career options
3. Credentials you desired
4. Opportunity to improve yourself personally
5. Opportunity for quicker advancement
6. Development of your management knowledge/technical skills
7. An increase in earning power
8. Opportunity to network and to form relationships with long-term value
9. Job security

Among these values, I was aiming for 2, 4, 5 and 6.

6.2. Learning

" 'learning styles' refers to the concept that individuals differ in regard to what mode of instruction or study is most effective for them" (Pashler et al 2009, p.106).

The literature identifies two main groups of learners among students: visual learners learn best by seeing information (pictures, graphs etc) and verbal learners prefer to hear the information (Pashler et al p.106)

Belonging to the group of verbal learners, I was comfortable with debates and discussions with teachers and colleagues. Hence, I realised that I needed to enhance my ability to learn through visual information which was a major part of the presentations. I also needed to improve my listening capacity. Being "the number-one skill, hiring managers identify as most important to effectively conduct

business" (Evans 2012) listening skills was detecting as a personal weakness. I particularly needed to improve this skill as I was specialising in HRM. Hence, the MBA process was a great contribution in such a perspective.

6.3. Skills Development

The MBA helped me develop a number of skills that are beneficial to me both at a professional level and at a personal life. These include:

Research Capacity and Analytical Skills

Conducting research requires a number of skills that I had not fully developed, from an academic point of view, prior to the MBA programme. With the large amount and disparity of literature and information on the chosen subject, I needed to be selective and decide which information was relevant. I enhanced my ability in this perspective and furthermore, I improved my capacity to use a variety of sources including soft and hard copy documents and online sources. But perhaps even more important, I greatly increased by ability to critical analyse information and theories I accessed in the literature.

Showman and al (2013) believe that creativity, judgment, communication, organisation and persistence are essential skills to have when carrying out research. At this stage of the dissertation, I can confidently say that I used all of these skills when carrying out the field investigations.

Team building skills

Team work was also part of the MBA programme. Undertaking group work with academic colleagues contributed to my understanding and enhanced my perception of group dynamics. In fact our groups were multicultural and students were from different professional backgrounds. Rather than being a weakness, these characteristics of the groups were an important factor to my personal growth. I further understood that a group has to be organised in a manner that it can achieve

its objective. In fact "the simplest way to improve a group's dynamics is for one or more group members to learn to manage the discussion, and thus help a group accomplish its goals" (Nazzaro and Trazzabosco; 2009, p.5). Collaborating with colleagues has helped me to understand the different phases of a team as presented by Nazzaro and Trazzabosco (ibid).

Figure 3: Team phases (Nazzaro and Trazzabosco; 2009, p.5)
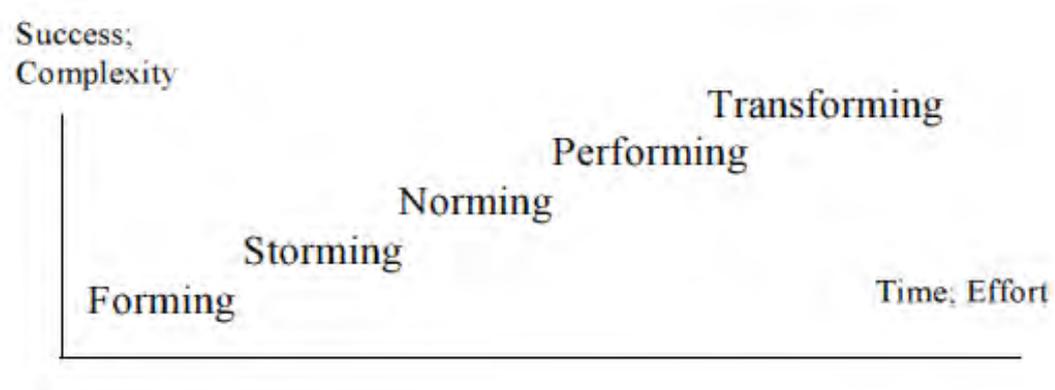
At each phase communication and team spirit was important. Achieving good results in the coursework, required solidarity, dedication and the capacity to listen to and accept the contribution of each team member. Overall, working in group helped me learn more than I did individually due to the variety of contribution of each team member.

Communication and language skills

Regarding the linguistic aspect of the course, I significantly improved my understanding, spoken and written English. I shifted from thinking in French which is my native language to thinking and writing in English. This is a significant bonus for me as it will serve me in my professional life.

Business as a particular field has its own terminology and form of communication, for example, in marketing, the communication goes from body language to spoken language when interacting with clients. Through observing the lecturers, seeing colleagues' presentations and practice I learned to improve my style of communication and capacity and confidence to sell an idea or a product to an audience. The marketing project that my group worked on during the marketing course, was an advertising campaign for Three Mobile. The success of the presentation, based on the feedback of the lecturer, is evidence of our creativity and how we were able to use concise and straightforward terms and expressions in order to make an impact.

6.4. Obstacles, personal weakness and the MBA

Time Management

This research has tested my time management skills. Though I did finalise the dissertation as planned, I do acknowledge that time management was one of my weaknesses. I relied too much on my ability to be productive in a short time and it sometimes delayed finishing tasks that could have been done in a quicker manner.

This weakness was addressed by self-setting deadlines for each task including the dissertation which consumed more time that planned.

Decision making

A good decision

Decision making is a core element in business management. The first decision I made was to enrol for the MBA. The decision was motivated by the fact that I had some doubts about my professional future based on the only qualification that I had and my lack of experience in people management. I was confident that it was a good decision. Today, I can say that it was one of the best I made in my academic life.

A bad decision

However, I made a bad decision during the MBA process when I accepted a three months deployment as HR Manager in Central African Republic before having completed the dissertation. My three months in the Central African Republic were very intense and the environment was not conducive for studying. The experience in many ways enriched my study as I gained an invaluable practical experience related to the research topic and grew professionally and on a personal level but I had to delay the MBA dissertation process which resulted in difficulties in managing my time. I believe now that I should have refused the position and completed the dissertation before accepting a job.

Referring to this experience, I realise how important it is to think twice before accepting an offer, might it be in business or in another field, as a given decision can affect more in the life of an individual that he thinks.

Six weeks after I returned from my mission in Central African Republic, my family and I moved to Rwanda for personal reasons which again proved to be very disruptive in trying to complete the MBA. In addition, since I moved to Africa, my translation business got really busy. Hence I had to find time to balance my family responsibilities, my business, and my studies.

6.5. Towards improving my decision making skills

Following on from the previous section, I realise I need to improve my decision making skills. Kahnmean and Lovallo suggest an approach where the decision maker removes himself mentally from a given situation in order to consider the decisions that are relevant for the problem in question (1993). In this approach, a level of detachment is required in order to not make decisions based on emotion and foremost, to be more realistic. I underestimated the challenge of completing an MBA dissertation. I thought that I could multi-task, working in a difficult and insecure environment and at the same time writing a dissertation while completing from time to time tasks related to my translation business.

Dedication and perseverance

If there one thing that is most needed to complete the MBA, it is dedication and perseverance. In fact, during these two years part-time studies, there were moments of frustration due to various factors including personal and professional issues. I also had moments were I was exhausted despite my continual interest in the topic of the dissertation. However, my ambition and the perspective of the MBA, were a source of motivation as I knew that I had made the right choice, for me and my family. It was therefore important for the dissertation that I chose a topic that interests me.

6.6. Personal achievement

A job right after the MBA courses

Having been recruited as System Manager was a great achievement as the result of the MBA. Though I consider accepting the job as a bad decision given its overall impact on the dissertation process, the fact that I was offered a position as a manager right at the end of the last MBA semester provided me with the conviction and pride that the MBA is a very valuable qualification. In fact, though I had other relevant qualifications, the HRM skills I acquired during the MBA were the most needed skills for the position. This is evidence that the MBA is valuable on the job market.

A deeper understanding of the HR Function

As an aspirant for the specialisation in human resource management, I increased my understanding as well as my knowledge of the field through the academic materials but also through the research in the field where I had a practical exposure on how staff feel and want to be managed in a particular situation. The importance of HRM for the strategic objectives of an organisation was underlined during the HRM course and by this research.

Planning and developing my own business

The overall objective of undertaking the MBA on the short term was to work at a people management level for an NGO and on the mid and long term to run my own business.

During the course, I learnt very practical tools including how to design a business plan, market research, client analysis, SWOT analysis, market penetration and so forth. Having gained these skills, I was able to redesign my approach to business and plan and position my translation business.

As an example of the business strategy I put in place for my business I understood that, in the short run, it is better that I set up a translation business targeting humanitarian organisations rather that looking to work with all types of client as I have a deep understanding of humanitarian work and also have a wide network of ex-colleagues in NGOs that can contribute to the success of my business. I also position myself as low cost, by putting in place a strategy where clients will pay a fixed amount per year based on their general volume of documents to be translated per annum. Hence I would give them a bonus of 10 to 20% of volume translated per year for free and also guarantee my annual income from the clients.

6.7. MBA, what is next….

At this stage, I realise that the MBA programme, which combined theoretical and practical methods, has contributed to my intellectual and professional progress.
The knowledge and skills that I acquired, not only in the particular field of study, HRM, but also related to other topics including marketing, project management, international management , process management and financial management have enhanced my understanding of business and improved my level of confidence to set up and manage a business.

6.8. Conclusion

I believe that the MBA was a good choice for my professional life especially on the long term. It opened my mind to the business world and provided me with resourceful skills for being a successful business man. Though it was a challenging process given my family situation and my mission in the Central African Republic, it helped me realise the importance of decision making skills, team work and planning.

I would strongly recommend the MBA to those that have business ambition. However, I would also recommend that once it is started, MBA students should strive and complete their dissertation before getting involved in any other task as it requires a lot of effort.

Finally, having developed personal and professional skills through the MBA program at Dublin Business School, I now feel ready to do what it takes to be a successful businessman.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Semi-structure interview guide

Field reality

What is you understanding of humanitarian work?

How would you describe the field you work in?

What are the factors that influence your relationship with your colleague?

How was the field described to you prior to signing your contract?

And is there any discrepancy between the information that you were provided during the recruitment process and the reality on the ground? How does that impact on you?

Commitment to the organisation

Explain why you left your previous job?

What are your expectations from your hierarchy?

Can you tell me about your ups and down in the field?

Is this an experience that you would do again? Why?

Career perspective

I would like to know about your experience so far in the field

How do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years from now professionally?

Why did you decide to work in the humanitarian field? Why specifically this organisation?

Recommendations

Would you like to make any recommendations to your employer?

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