

## Exploring the Cost of Management Turnover in the Canadian Restaurant Industry



**Jacqueline Simard**

University of Guelph

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## Introduction - The Hidden Expense We Don't Like to Talk About

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The cost of restaurant management turnover. High-level employees quitting any organization voluntarily presents major problems affecting every industry. In Canada, the problem is incredibly relevant as Canadian Restaurateurs continue to face a growing labour shortage of skilled candidates. The restaurant industry posts some of the highest turnover in the country, and has the second highest job vacancy rate of all sectors at a consistent 4.5% in Canada. (Statistics Canada, 2018) For the first time in 2018, Restaurateurs rated labour costs and recruiting and retaining employees their top 2 challenges facing the business. (Restaurants Canada, 2018) With rising labour costs, lack of available talent, and economic indicators predicting a slowdown or possible recession in the near future, restaurateurs must be diligent to reduce costs wherever possible in order to remain competitive and profitable. (Restaurants Canada, 2018)

The cost of turnover is difficult to calculate and is never presented as an expense line on an income statement, as costs are absorbed into a variety of expense categories. There are no accounting systems designed to evaluate the financial impact of voluntary turnover. Research from a variety of organizations in a variety of industries presents concrete dollar amounts in wild variations. For example, a 2009 study was conducted to evaluate the cost of labour turnover in Australian four and five star hotels and found that the cost of replacing a management or executive level employee averaged \$109,909 after considering direct costs and indirect costs such as loss of skills, inefficiency, and loss of expertise. The same study also found the average cost of replacing an hourly employee at \$9,591. (Davidson, Timo, Wang, 2009) A comprehensive report by Deloitte found that the cost of voluntary turnover for management level employees was on average \$109,676 per employee when evaluating direct costs and loss in productivity. (Erickson, 2016) Research shows that while managers tend to understand that turnover is costly, few have strategies in place to reduce and mitigate turnover. (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000) This paper will explore factors contributing to both indirect and direct costs associated with restaurant management turnover, and will provide a general framework for restaurateurs to understand the financial impact of losing key managers within their restaurants.

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## Direct and Indirect Costs associated with Voluntary Restaurant Management Turnover

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While recruiting, selecting, interviewing, hiring, and training present a variety of direct costs associated with management turnover, there are also a variety of factors that indirectly create costs associated with voluntary turnover. This timeline of events and representative costs can best be displayed graphically.



This graph is loosely based off a model proposed by Zimmerer (1971). Zimmerer's model created 6 formulas and associated costs to help managers analyze the true costs associated with the loss of an employee. It accounts for direct costs involved in losing an employee, such as costs involved with hiring an employee, severing off employees, and training costs. It also recognizes the loss of productivity from having a vacant position, and the additional lost productivity during the time that an employee takes to reach full competency within their role. Zimmerer estimated that for positions that require a college degree, this time to reach full competency could be estimated to be around 5-7 months after their training concludes.

This paper will explore the direct and indirect costs associated throughout the timeline of the loss of a new employee, the subsequent hiring, training, and period of employment it takes them to become fully competent in their role through a framework of costs associated and related directly to the Canadian restaurant industry.

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## Day 1 – Your Restaurant Manager Quits

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Whether your restaurant manager quits voluntarily or is terminated, your restaurant will be facing a management vacancy very soon unless a new hire has been lined up, trained, and is ready to start working. There are a number of factors to consider that can have financial consequences for the business and place undue stress on employees and hourly staff members.

1. The restaurant will be understaffed upon the restaurant manager's departure. Overtime hours will be required from existing management, supervisory, or hourly staff members to fill the gap until the new employee is hired and trained.
2. Guest service, upselling sales, and operations execution may suffer. This may result in lost upselling opportunities, less stringent management of costs, and diminished levels of guest experience.
3. Immediate, unplanned training may be provided to current staff members in order to execute the lost manager's essential duties. This requires the time of senior management and the employee receiving the training.
4. Staff and managers may be denied vacation requests which can demoralize employees, increase stress, and lower employee engagement.
5. If an employee is terminated and severance is required, this represents an additional direct financial cost.

Points 1 and 2 represent the largest financial costs of vacant positions. While some salaried management may choose to work additional hours until the gap is filled and cost savings can be achieved this way, it is not a sustainable practice. In an industry already notorious for long work hours, prolonged overtime hours can affect employees negatively in a myriad of ways that can lead to potential impacts on financial performance. In a study conducted on nurses working long hours and shift work, lack of proper sleep caused by extreme work hours lead to declines in neurocognitive functioning and performance. Sleep deprivation reduces the ability to remember and learn new facts and skills, can make employees irritable and poor tempered, reduce communication skills, and lessen the ability to cope with emotional demands of a workplace. (Caruso, 2014) These skills are exceptionally important for managing

employees and serving guests. Sleep deprivation also deteriorates decision-making ability and increases risk-taking behaviour. Poor decision making, lack of ability to properly manage staff and guest experience can lead to costly mistakes for the business that can impact the restaurant financially. Replacing the vacant manager with additional overtime provided by other managers also represents an opportunity cost for activities that are not being completed properly due to a lack of time. This can include budgeting, properly managing labour and food costs, supervising staff properly, visiting guest tables, and continued training for staff. Lack of execution as a result of overworked managers can directly financially impact the business. These factors represent indirect costs the restaurant may incur financially.

If a restaurant decides instead to have staff members work overtime to cover the vacancy, perhaps by paying overtime to hourly cooks in order to cover a Sous Chef vacancy, this represents a real direct cost to the business. There are also real costs associated with unplanned training that may be executed in order to cover the basic duties of the now departed employee which represents an additional direct cost. For example, if a Chef unexpectedly departs and a Sous Chef must undertake all of the restaurant ordering while the position is vacant, this will require immediate unplanned training with real costs.

Leadership turnover also affects employee turnover and levels of employee engagement. Gallup has conducted extensive research in 2012 which found that higher employee engagement resulted in lower turnover rates, higher customer ratings, higher profitability, lower shrinkage and absenteeism, and higher quality and levels of productivity. Manager engagement has a ripple effect on team engagement in restaurants. Highly engaged, well liked managers are 59% more likely to have an engaged group of employees. In high-turnover businesses like restaurants, highly engaged staff members result in 24% less annual turnover and higher customer ratings. (DeKoster, 2018) Turnover of management staff has real implications on turnover for hourly staff and their performance, which can impact the restaurant financially.

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### Months 1 to 3 – Recruitment and Selection

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Recruitment, selection, and hiring can account for a significant portion of direct costs associated with replacing an involuntarily departed employee. Direct costs associated with this portion of the talent management process includes:

1. Human Resources and Senior Management's time to write and post a job advertisement and reach out to internal networks
2. Costs associated with posting to job boards
3. Internal referral fees if applicable

4. Time to review applications and resumes, time to select candidates to call and schedule interviews
5. Direct costs associated with hiring tools such as personality and competency testing for candidates
6. Time to interview candidates. In many organizations, this includes 2-3 interviews with senior level management staff
7. Food and beverage comped for candidates if applicable
8. Reference and criminal record checks
9. Travel expenses for candidates if applicable
10. Time incurred from salary and employment negotiation and drafting and presenting of employment contracts
11. Potential signing bonus or relocation costs
12. Miscellaneous administrative time on behalf of management and human resources
13. In some cases, restaurant owners must additionally pay an external recruitment fee equal to 15% - 20% of the new hire's first year salary if they are unable to hire using their own resources.

Indirect Costs associated with recruitment are presented as the opportunity cost for restaurant managers and human resources involved in the recruitment process. Does the time taken away from these senior managers affect their ability to do their job as effectively as possible? Does it distract them from key job functions that impact financial performance? Does it delay key restaurant operational initiatives? Does it lead to overtime hours with previously established effects that include increased stress, lack of sleep, and lack of engagement that can impact financial performance?

In addition to opportunity costs from lost time of key managers, there are real risks that happen during the hiring process that can negatively impact restaurant financial performance. If the restaurant is under extreme pressure to fill a vacancy, there's a possibility that a poor hiring decision is made. This could be the result of falling into a variety of bias traps due to the pressure of the vacant position. Framing bias is the tendency to choose candidates based on immediate context rather than the candidate themselves. (Pendell, 2018) For example, if a restaurant desperately needs a Chef and there is only one candidate that can start immediately, management may hire a subpar candidate rather than one that is a more suitable fit. If that candidate departs or does not perform to an acceptable level, management must start the recruitment process over incurring significant additional costs. According to research from Gallup, companies that hire from the top 20% of candidates in their field see 41% less absenteeism, significantly fewer safety incidents, 59% less turnover, higher customer satisfaction rates, higher productivity, and even 21% higher profitability. (Dvorak & Pendell, 2018). Additional research from Gallup notes that only 10% of those in managerial roles possess the qualities and talent to be great

managers. (Nolan, 2018) With these factors in mind, coupled with the current labour shortage in the Canadian restaurant industry, finding the right talent can be exceptionally difficult, and poor hiring decisions can significantly impact financial performance of a restaurant.

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### Months 3 to 5 – Training and Onboarding

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Training and onboarding of employees is an essential activity restaurants must undertake if new hires are to be successful in their roles. In addition to orienting new employees into the key activities of their roles and introducing company culture, training is an essential part of employee development. Onboarding and initial training is key to creating a great first impression for new employees, and subsequently, key to retaining them in the first 18 months of their employment. (Boyle & Harter, 2018) Training is a costly activity. It requires a significant investment of time from senior leadership and human resources, alongside any necessary training materials and programs. Bersin by Deloitte estimates that the average first-year orientation and training costs per hire can incur direct costs in excess of \$3,000. (Erickson, 2016)

The following are direct costs associated with training:

1. Training materials
2. Training Programs
3. Time from Human Resources for onboarding paperwork and administration
4. Investment of time from Senior Management
5. New uniforms and equipment

Training presents a simpler opportunity to measure the direct financial costs of hiring a new management employee within a restaurant. How many training hours are involved? How many human resources hours are involved? What is the direct expense for training materials and programs? These costs are more easily tracked and will contribute to turnover costs.

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### Months 6 to 9 – Hitting Your Stride, Overcoming Lost Productivity

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Productivity within restaurants is a complex concept with many considerations that are not easily quantifiable, yet must still be considered when pondering the cost of management turnover. While productivity is more easily measured in industries such as manufacturing and customer support services, the matter becomes more complex in restaurants. Some measures of productivity may be measured in

table turnover rates and revenue growth, but productivity in a general sense relates to *operational success*. Loss of productivity represents a complex indirect cost and considers factors stemming from expertise, team cohesion, employee engagement, and relationships built with suppliers and guests. Lost productivity represents the opportunity cost of not having an excellent, well trained, and experienced manager in place. These lost productivity costs can be applicable to both front of house and back of house managers.

It can include factors such as the following:

1. Management's ability to recover guest service complaints
1. Additional costs associate with labour scheduling mistakes and inefficiencies
2. Additional costs associated with ordering and supplier mistakes
3. Additional costs associated with technology and reporting mistakes
4. Additional costs associated with food & beverage ordering mistakes
5. Opportunity cost of a great manager's ability to upsell and engage team in upselling
6. Improper use of equipment resulting in damage or inefficiencies
7. Disengaged staff from leadership turnover
8. Lack of mastery required to gain operational efficiency
9. Delay in operational changes for the restaurant
  - a. New menu launches
  - b. New employee initiatives
  - c. Opening for patio season
  - d. Etc.

Lost productivity represents the new Sous Chef ordering the wrong type of beef, or ordering excess food due to anxiety about running low on par levels. Lost productivity represents the new Service Manager struggling to handle guest service complaints and being too hasty to comp meals when guests complain. It represents the lost sales from having to delay new menu launches, and the lost opportunity to participate in marketing initiatives for the restaurant.

While lost productivity represents the largest challenge in quantifying, research in other industries list lost productivity as the most substantial cost to organizations as a result of involuntary turnover. In Deloitte's calculation, lost productivity from management turnover represents a loss of \$120,900 per employee. (Erickson, 2015) In Hinkin & Tracey's study of turnover cost, lost productivity represented nearly 60% of the cost of turnover related to hourly front desk associates at a variety of hotels across America. (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). In an additional study conducted in 2006 of 262 Burger King restaurants, higher turnover of management staff resulted in higher turnover levels of hourly staff, higher customer wait times, and loss of productivity. This loss of productivity and efficiency results in lower levels of sales and profit. (Kacmar, Andrews, Rooy, Steilberg, Cerrone) While there is some research

related to loss of productivity in a quick service restaurant setting, there is more research to be done in order to outline further loss of productivity costs. Evidently, there are a long list of factors that can ultimately result in mistakes, inefficiencies, and poorer financial performance. Having well-trained, competent managers in place can have significant positive impacts on financial performance, and the turnover of those managers represents a substantial cost in regards to lost productivity and operational inefficiency.

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### Implementation – What Can We Start Measuring?

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While restaurant operators measure key metrics of financial performance down to the hour for labour and food cost, the same effort is not made to quantify the cost of involuntary turnover. While it may be impossible to track every penny from indirect and direct costs associated with management turnover, some key metrics can be introduced for measurement that can be quantified by restaurant operators to begin giving them some insight into the true costs of involuntary management turnover.

Below are a list of actions your organization can take to begin quantifying some of the costs associated with turnover:

1. **Label and separate labour costs associated with covering a vacant management position.**
  - a. Identify on a weekly basis which employee hours were worked due to the management position being absent. Include overtime and additional shifts for supervisors taking the manager's place.
2. **Make a concerted effort to analyse the cost of hiring a new manager based on the costs associated with the dismissal, recruitment, and hiring of a new candidate outlined in the paper that can be quantified.**
  - a. Assign a hiring manager to quantify each of the 13 identified costs found in the "Recruitment and Selection" section of this discussion paper for several new management hires.
3. **Create an expense category for trainee error**
  - a. Many POS systems require a reason for altering or changing a guest's bill. As outlined in this paper, lost productivity occurs through slower service execution and mistakes being made by new trainees. Create an option to track alterations and compensations to guest bills due to trainee error. Management staff should also be able to identify additional expense lines that result from trainee errors (such as incorrect food purchasing) and be able to label these expenses as such.

#### 4. Track training costs per management hire

- a. Assign a hiring manager to quantify each of the 5 cost categories associated with training identified in the “Training and Onboarding” section of this paper.

Many of these key metrics require quantifying an investment of time from human resources and management staff. This investment of time should be calculated as such:

$$[(\text{Personnel's annual salary} + \text{benefits expense}) \div \frac{52 \text{ Weeks}}{(\text{Average Weekly Hours Worked})}] \times \text{hours committed}$$

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### Conclusion – Some Food for Thought

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The cost of restaurant management turnover in both the front of house and back of house is not simply the cost to hire and retrain someone new. Management turnover has plenty of unintended

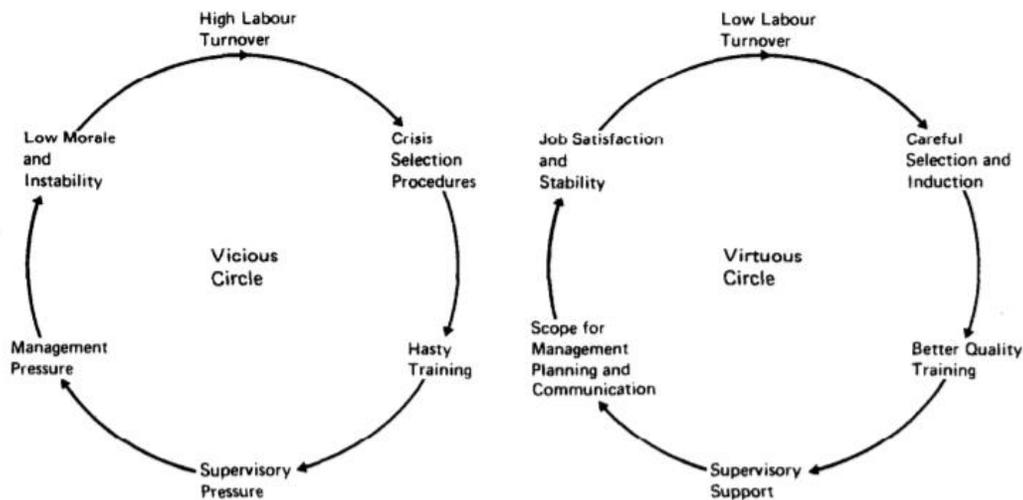


Figure 2. The self-reinforcing nature of labour turnover

1. Source: [https://www.sciencedirect-com.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/search/advanced?docId=10.1016/0024-6301\(82\)90121-2](https://www.sciencedirect-com.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/search/advanced?docId=10.1016/0024-6301(82)90121-2)

consequences that can affect restaurant operations and ultimately lead to potentially significant impacts on financial performance. Both direct and indirect costs associated with vacant positions, attracting, selecting, and hiring, as well as training, opportunity costs, and lost productivity may present significant hidden financial costs to the Canadian Restaurant Industry. Key retention practices and initiatives can overcome these challenges. Research by Rothwell (1982) presents a model of labour turnover and retention that applies to Canada’s restaurant industry. Labour turnover can be lead by either a virtuous or vicious cycle, with clear evidence presented that the latter leads to exceptional costs in an industry battling low margins and a labour shortage.

Combatting voluntary turnover and increasing retention amongst management is of critical importance for restaurants in Canada. Restaurant management turnover presents a difficult challenge to an industry under pressure, but equally presents an opportunity. Measuring some key metrics related to management turnover can give restaurant operators a glimpse into some financial impact on their business. From a purely financial perspective, addressing restaurant management turnover provides the Canadian Restaurant Industry an opportunity to mine for additional margins through investment in restaurant management retention.

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