



THE LANDING MATTRESS MODEL: STAFF RETENTION STRATEGY

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Abstract

The *Landing Mattress Model* is a visual and practical framework used to cushion, absorb, and support the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital. It is divided into four constructs that correspond to the High Jump Analogy. As such it entails one taking the first step of approaching the cross bar, that is, the run before the jump which is synonymous to the recruitment and pre-boarding processes. This is followed by takeoff, that is, the moment the athlete launches toward the bar which is also synonymous to the onboarding and first engagement processes. The third step is the bar clearance when the athlete attempts to cross over the bar- which is synonymous to the adaptation and performance processes, and finally, landing when the athlete falls and makes contact with the mattress which is also synonymous to organizational support and retention infrastructure. The *Landing Mattress Model* offers the opportunity for organizations and new hires to absorb the pressures through mentoring, meaning-making, moral and psychosocial support, work-life balance or versatility to change in order to enhance retention.

Keywords: turnover, adaptation, performance, engagement, organizational support, onboarding, recruitment, retention

1. What is the *Landing Mattress Model*: Staff Retention Strategy?

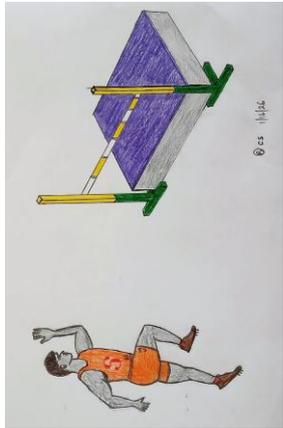
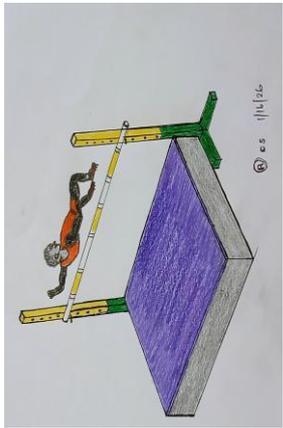
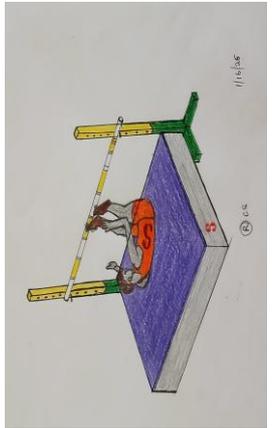
The *Landing Mattress Model* is a visual and practical framework used to cushion, absorb, and support the integration of the new employee into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital. It is divided into four constructs that correspond to the High Jump Analogy:

- Approach (the run before the jump-Recruitment and pre-boarding),

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- Takeoff (the moment the athlete launches toward the bar, onboarding and first engagement),
- Bar Clearance (the athlete's attempt to cross over the bar- Adaptation and performance), and
- Landing (the fall and contact with the mattress—organizational support and retention infrastructure). This tool offers the opportunity for organizations and new hires to absorb the pressures through mentoring, meaning-making, moral and psychosocial support, work-life balance or versatility to change in order to enhance retention (Silumba, Abellanosa, Laguiwas, 2025).

1.1 The *Landing Mattress Model*

Approach	Take Off	Bar Clearance	The Landing
			
Recruitment and Pre-boarding	On boarding and first engagement	Adaptation and performance	Organizational support and retention infrastructure

1.2 The Basic Idea

By strengthening employee-employer relationships to enhance engagement, stimulating work, motivational leadership and recognition of staff efforts or following the five steps in transforming cultures and increasing competitive edges, it is likely that organizations depend solely on one aspect of staff retention, which emphasizes on management’s understanding and decision making on how to avoid staff turnover.

Unfortunately, that management’s understanding and decision-making, which places emphasis on decision-making theory as key to the provision of staff retention, undermines the individual employee’s expectations, adaptability to change, and organizational environment. As a result, a gap exists between organizational decision making and organisational environment role in cushioning, absorbing and supporting new employees into the organization and it is a gap that we find imperative for organizations to understand.

The Landing Mattress can help diminish that gap. It is a practical tool that helps organizations and new employees to sufficiently implement retention strategies rather than theoretically acknowledging them. It also places emphasis on meaning-making, adaptability, innovation and personal growth, which resonate with contemporary perspectives on employee engagement and psychological safety (Constantin, 2025).

1.3 History

In 2025, special education teachers Cassim Silumba, Noemi M. Abellanos and Krisha Vanessa M. Languiwas were researching staff retention strategies at special education schools in California and Texas in the United States of America. By studying what organizational retention strategies were available in workplaces that can positively impact the performance and profitability of a special education organization, the teachers discovered that there was a visible impact of staff turnover on delayed daily routine procedures. This had a ripple effect, which led to substandard customer satisfaction and statements of dissatisfaction from stakeholders. They noted that staff turnover emanated from employers' inflexibility and inconsiderateness in providing a balance between work and employees' personal lives.

As a result, Silumba, Abellanos and Languiwas proffered a metaphorical representation of organizational environment that cushions, absorbs and supports the integration of new employees into an organisation so that there is organizational effectiveness and sustainability. They named this tool the Landing Mattress Model: A Metaphorical Representation of Staff Retention Strategy. This model hinges on the high jump landing mattress softness or stiffness effect on the bony tissues' geometries as a synonym of the prevailing environment in organizations fostering adipose thickness in accommodating new hire hence providing a rigid substrate and immediate job dissatisfaction, or soft-tissue foam's tri-phasic elasticity reducing internalised pressures on the new hire.

Through the High Jump analogy, the teachers came up with processes through which they use comparison of simpler to complex situations. If used in organizations, the analogy-based instruction may lead to a more effective and flexible way of learning about organizational environments in order to integrate new staff recruited. Incorporation of the high jump techniques metaphorically in the Landing Mattress Model may help in achieving specific changes in organizational support and retention infrastructure by absorbing well the new high and improving staff retention.

The aspects of constructs in The *Landing Mattress Theory* that correspond to the High Jump Analogy were laid out as follows:

Theory Construct	Corresponding High Jump Analogy
Recruitment and Pre-boarding	Approach: The run before the jump
Onboarding and First Engagement	Take-off: The moment the athlete launches toward the bar
Adaptation and	Bar Clearance: The athlete's attempt to cross over the bar

Performance	
Organizational Support and Retention Infrastructure	Landing: The fall and contact with the mattress

To use the Landing Mattress Model, one would look at the model constructs, which list four distinctive stages from a high jump athlete’s point of view and determine the running pace, momentum as he/she launches toward the bar, the bar height in order to clear it, and the impact of the fall. Then, the new employee would be well cushioned, absorbed and supported in the integration into an organization. As a result, staff retention is enhanced, and there are organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

2. Explanation of the Landing Mattress Model

Refer to the detailed Landing Mattress Model diagram in the above section – print a copy, and it will help you to comprehend what follows.

2.1 The Landing Mattress Model Construct 1

2.1.1 'The Approach' or 'Running Phase' or 'Recruitment and Onboarding'

The first construct is also known as the 'Momentum Gathering phase'. This is the stage under which an organization attracts, screens and prepares potential employees, thereby forming expectations in the potential employees.

The aim in any organization should always be to develop the expectations of every potential employee because employees are most valuable and effective when they have a clearer understanding of work expectations. The approach phase can be seen as the momentum-gathering period where the organizational values, visions, and mission are effectively laid out through effective recruitment and onboarding communications. In so doing, elements of confusion, conflict or misunderstanding are clarified through question-and-answer segments during both the recruitment interviews and the onboarding process.

The recruitment team members logically facilitate the development of realistic, practical expectations, not only the ones laid down in the application job description, during this phase. At the same time, it is during this stage that there is the provision of adoption of coping skills, anticipated organizational culture, challenges and rewards. The recruitment team members tend to bring out their established management style being implemented at that particular organization. Potential employees start with moderately getting acquainted and integrated into the organizational setting, and that enhances relationships with internally existing members because gradually knowledge about the realistic expectations, coping skills, anticipated organizational culture, challenges and rewards is shared openly. Acquaintance and integration can be expanded once the potential employee has been hired and is undertaking the onboarding process, which shapes the new employee’s understanding of their practical roles, organization’s culture and relationships within the organization. This process marks the commencement of meaning-making and comprehension of the realistic expectations.

The shaping of new employees' readiness and ability to adjust to the organisation is set at this stage. Meaningful transition of employees as they assume new responsibilities helps shape behavior, and connect the new and existing employees. The recruitment team members tend to offer a positive and inclusive culture, and a strong employer brand with a good public reputation in attracting top-notch employees. As such, during this momentum gathering phase, the creation of a highly reputable, inclusive, multi-cultural, and accommodating mindset in prospective employees' minds helps foster confidence and incorporates individualised integration with the new organization.

Peer coaching, proactive job shadowing and hands-on engagement with organizational activities are also done during this initial approach in order to gather enough momentum for the bar clearance (adaptation and performance) stage. Mentoring during pre-boarding programs enhances the rapid transmission of new employees to productivity and inculcates a strong, lasting employee-employer relationship. Strong mentoring makes people feel more comfortable and understood, as there is clarification of duties and responsibilities. Not only do the recruitment team members play a pivotal role in accommodating new employees during this stage, but other existing members can help a new employee gain the required momentum to adapt and perform by offering individualised personal experiences that assisted them with their integration with the organization. The momentum gathering can also be maximised by the creation of new employees to existing employee relationships with existing employees, which fosters individuals' openness with information about expected behaviors and personal conduct to the organization and its members. Mentors and existing employees can either exacerbate or alleviate staff turnover. Hence, maximum and tactful momentum gathering through recruitment and pre-boarding is a crucial component in staff retention in an organization.

2.2 Underlying Beliefs in the Approach Phase

LMM beliefs are understood from organizational and individual perspective:

Core beliefs:

- The organization and individuals generally benefit from the employer-employee relationship.
- Both organizations and individuals thrive to have an increased staff engagement and loyalty.
- The organization and individuals have a smooth transition in adapting to one another.

Note: Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretations of the recruitment and pre-boarding processes. Refer to Silumba, Abellanosa, and Languiwias, (2025). The Landing Mattress Model: A Metaphorical Representation of Staff Retention Strategy. *European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*. 9(2): 210-236.

3. The Landing Mattress Model Construct 2

3.1 'Take Off' or 'Launch Toward the Bar', or 'Onboarding and First Engagement'

The second construct is the launch toward the bar as the new employee takes initial in-person engagement with the organization.

Shaping both the organisation's capacity to lay the appropriate foundation, build confidence in the employee's capabilities and develop lasting relationships leads to solidification of staff retention, enhanced organizational performance, and personal commitment. Directors and organizational managers should utilize onboarding and first engagement processes to influence new employees' early engagement, productivity and long-term retention. Through the provision of onboarding and first engagement processes, employees' understanding of their roles, organization's culture and relationships is shaped. Lack of which may make the new employees defiant with the organization and lack a sense of belonging, which makes them contrary to the organization's vision, mission and goals. Whereas, provisions that make the new employees compliant and subservient to the organization's vision, mission and goals.

It is during this launch towards the bar clearance stage that the organization provides an environment which balances institutional cohesion with flexibility. As such, completion of necessary employment paperwork, policy acknowledgement, mandatory safety training, mandatory behaviour training, incident and emergency reporting training, among other baseline legal compliance surety are undertaken during this take-off stage. These are non-negotiable, obligatory organizational procedures that are used to bind employees, and serious consequences result in non-compliance. Therefore, the foot one uses to launch their body toward the bar becomes crucial in the construct of take-off that determines new employee engagement and belonging. The momentum gathered during the approach stage should assist an employee to set themselves afloat him/herself high up in the sky in order to successfully clear the bar.

Organizations should integrate their culture by outlining its values, traditions and mission during the onboarding experience of new employees in order to cultivate personality and commitment with the organization. Management can then facilitate lasting relationships among the new hires recruited and existing staff through the creation of networks, social events and more mentorship programs. Recognition of special events in employees' lives, employees' achievements, helps foster connection among the existing employees and assists with the easy navigation of the new organization's facilities. The process of fostering connection among the existing employees and assisting with ease sailing in the new organization's facilities relates to the processes described in Tayla Bauer's 4C framework- Compliance, Clarification, Culture and Connection, which provides a buffered environment that promotes increased employee retention.

New employees should have a clearly outlined role orientation and what is expected of them, as this eradicates situations of role confusion and role conflict. At times, if there is a lack of clarity about any person's responsibilities, expectations and position,

it provides room for conflict, which may be detrimental to the organization. As such, provision of role-specific orientations, distinct expectations of each employee and a befitting performance plan becomes critical in eradicating role confusion. This entails clearly outlining the chain of command and also the organisational chart of the company. The reporting relationships should be clear, as it enhances communication and comprehension of workflows. Work burnouts, frustrations and stress that affect employees as a result of role conflict and role confusion are therefore uprooted. Hence, employees will go the extra mile in achieving immediate and long-term organizational goals.

3.2 Underlying Beliefs in the Take-Off phase

LMM beliefs that underlie this phase are:

Core beliefs:

- The organizational culture builds employees' identity and engagement with the organisation.
- Lasting relationships lead to increased staff retention, increased organizational performance and staff commitment.
- The onboarding process represents a foundational process for integrating new employees into an organization.

Note: Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretations of the onboarding and first engagement processes. Refer to Silumba, Abellanosa, and Languiwias, (2025). The Landing Mattress Model: A Metaphorical Representation of Staff Retention Strategy. *European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*. 9(2): 210-236.

3.3 The Landing Mattress Model Construct 3

3.3.1 'Bar Clearance' or 'Crossing Over the Bar' or 'Adaptation and Performance'

The third construct is the successful execution of the jump or maneuver over the bar as the new employees adapt to the operations of the organization and enhance organizational performance.

This construct sees to it that there is adaptive performance as newly employed assume duties and or take over old responsibilities from existing employees. Adaptive performance could be achieved through the motivation of staff and encouraged meaning-making so that employees visualize the potential losses and gains associated with organizational changes that are taking place. As employees process and comprehend the meaning of change within an organisation, adaptive performance is enhanced. This calls upon behavioral and attitudinal modifications and adjustments in both the new employee and the existing ones. Any resistance to behavioral and attitudinal modifications and adjustments results in failure to clear the bar and injuries (serious consequences), that is, staff turnover, which is detrimental to organizational performance.

Ratifications and adjustments of employees' behaviors and attitudes are crucial in maintaining and restoring the stability in the holistic state of the organization which boosts organizational performance. Management could make use of versatile workspaces

and the introduction of supplementary behaviours among existing staff. As such, employees tend to use voluntary behaviors to work and adapt in new environments. Pure ratifications and adjustments of existing work behaviors for the employees and by employees themselves are key in the adaptation to any new occupational or interpersonal-related changes. Psychological, behavioral and attitudinal adjustments in people facilitate the ease of adaptation to environmental changes.

The aim of performance adaptation should be the quick alteration of one's behavior so that we are able to accommodate challenging situations, stressful work, learn new procedures and cultural and physical tolerance of any new changes in life. They call upon the performance adaptation, which sees to it that employees alter their behavior to meet environmental demands, a new situation or a change of staff. During this stage, the adaptive performance of employees sees to it that they are also able to handle emergencies or crisis situations, solve problems creatively, handle work stress, learn new tasks and procedures, demonstrate interpersonal adaptability, and demonstrate cultural and physical oriented adaptability obtain the knowledge that is adaptive to the new state of the environment, hence the Landing Mattress Model's High Jump analogy which metaphorically compares simpler to complex situations encourages employees to clear the bar-adapt and perform.

By accommodating others, appreciating their views and opinions, we tend to understand more the tasks and procedures laid upon us. This enables better comprehension, effective teamwork and increased organizational performance. At the same time, by fusing social learning (copying or imitating what existing employees are doing) [*Refer to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory*] with innovation (using personal trial and error effort) [*Refer to The Diffusion of Innovations Theory*], organizational members obtain the knowledge that is paramount to the new the environment change adaptation. As such, people should avoid over-dependence on individual learning as we are bound to make personal mistakes that are counter-productive to organizational performance, especially in customer satisfaction.

3.4 Underlying Beliefs in the Bar Clearance Phase

LMM beliefs that underlie this phase are:

Core beliefs:

- The mean-making generally contributes to adaptive performance.
- Behavioral, attitudinal and psychological modifications are paramount to organizational adaptation to change.
- The integration of social learning and individual learning has a positive impact on organizational performance.

Note: Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretations of the adaptation and performance processes. Refer to Silumba, Abellanosa, and Languiwias, (2025). The Landing Mattress Model: A Metaphorical Representation of Staff Retention Strategy. *European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*. 9(2): 210-236.

3.5 The Landing Mattress Model Construct 4

3.5.1 'Landing' or 'Fall and Contact with Mattress' or Organizational Support and Retention Infrastructure'

The fourth construct is also known as the 'settling phase'. This stage hinges on the softness or stiffness effect of the landing mattress on the bony tissues geometrics. The effect is likened to the existing organizational environment, which fosters a rich, accommodating thickness to new employees. Hence, a rigid substrate and immediate job dissatisfaction or soft-tissue foam's polyphasic elasticity increases internalized pressures on the new employees.

The processes by which management displays managerial competencies and information sharing is crucial at this phase of staff retention. The more the support one gets from supervisors and management, the quicker he/she masters tasks and the better the performance. The sharing of critical on-the-job information creates a less restrictive working environment. This can occur in situations where management creates better infrastructure, which outlines a conducive organizational culture. Management should set a retention infrastructure which sets the tone and *modus operandi* through which the organization works. If the majority of the people accept the set *modus operandi*, there are higher chances that they will continue to engage with such organizations. As such, management should set straight how the rule book applies to day commencement, leave days, and any other company protocols available, among other things.

Generally, people are accepted in society because of how they are branded and where they are coming from. The more successful an organization they come from, the more accepted it becomes. Landing in a reputable organization makes people feel more comfortable, and once one feels that the environment is engaging, he or she would be encouraged to stay longer and discover more. As such, this becomes a win/win situation as the organization would yield higher productivity, improved retention rates and success across the board with the employee getting recognition beyond the organization and improved market value.

Management should create an environment that defines clear roles, responsibilities, and organized reporting channels that see to it that smooth flow of information is achieved both horizontally and vertically in the organization. An efficient communication process which enables clarity of the well-calculated flow of information would make every team member aware of who reports to whom. Hence, by creating a supportive organizational environment and strong retention infrastructure, employees are provided with a strong cushion absorbing and supporting their integration into an organization. This would contribute more to staff retention and customer satisfaction.

3.6 Underlying Beliefs in the Landing Phase

LMM beliefs that underlie this landing phase are:

Core beliefs:

- Managerial competencies and information sharing contribute to employees' soft landing in a new organization.

- Organization's brand adds value to the employee's acceptance in society.
- Better retention infrastructure plays a predominant role in attracting employees to an organization.

Note: Underlying beliefs shape the organization and individual perceptions and interpretations of the organizational support and retention infrastructure processes. Refer to Silumba, Abellanosa, and Languiwias, (2025). The Landing Mattress Model: A Metaphorical Representation of Staff Retention Strategy. *European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*. 9(2): 210-236.

4. Other Related Theories

It is helpful to study along the Landing Mattress model with the Zinger Model on Employee Engagement, which promotes the strengthening of employer-employee relationships to enhance engagement, the Employee Retention Connection Model, which defines stimulating work, motivational leadership and recognition of staff efforts; and the Integrated System for Retaining Employee Model, which sets five steps to be followed by organizations in transforming their cultures and increasing their competitive edges. The familiar proposition is prolonged staff retention, steps to follow for organisations to provide an environment that cushions, absorbs, and supports the integration of the new employees into an organization that benefits all facets of organizational human capital

The Landing Mattress model is also guided by Human Capital Theory. In the contemporary business environment, Human Capital Theory helps foster a critical supply of scarce resources and knowledge to increase organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

A safe landing of new employees in practice guided by an improved recruitment policy may be useful in attracting and retaining them. A guiding performance adaptation further promotes employees' behavior alteration to meet environmental demands, a new situation or a situational change. As such, the Landing Mattress Model potentially bridges new and existing employee relationships and builds socially cohesive workplace environments. In essence, the landing mattress model is designed to provide a strong cushion that absorbs and supports the integration of the new employee into an organization. It should be key to organizational efforts aimed at building increased staff retention and improved performance.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest in reporting.

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