

MANAGING EMPLOYEE TURNOVER AND RETENTION: THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Ashique Ali Jhatial

PhD Scholar, School of Management, Bradford University, UK

Syed Naimatullah Shah

PhD Scholar, Brunel Business School, Brunel University, UK

Misbah Bibi Qureshi

*PhD Scholar, Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies,
University of Leeds, UK*

Jamshid Adil Halepota

PhD Scholar, Brunel Business School, Brunel University, UK

Abstract

In increasing competitiveness and financial performance of the organizations, employee retention plays a significant role. This study presents review of literature on the subject. A large amount of literature has been reviewed to find the significances of human resources management practices and organizational culture factors. This study identified these factors as a predictor of employee turnover and retention in organizations. By applying possible research engines, this study finds out that aforementioned organizational factors also relate to employees' overall satisfaction and help them to make decision regarding staying in organization. The current review also highlights that the literature on current state of employees' turnover and retention is very limited especially in context of Pakistan which requires scholarly research contribution to better understand and conceptualize characteristics and complexities surrounding employee quitting and retention. The contribution of this research article is to propose a conceptual framework based on the gaps in the literature for further empirical research in context of Pakistan. Conclusions and future implications for theory, practice and further research are discussed in last section.

Key words: human resource management, turnover, retention, organizational culture, attitude of boss.

Introduction

Employee turnover and retention have received significant focus of attention by management practitioners and academia in more recent past owing to ever-increasing competitiveness and

need of strengthening financial performance of organizations (Felps, Mitchell, Hekman, Lee, Holtom and Harman, 2009). As a result, employee retention has been centre-piece of management to avoid costs of recruitment, placement and training on new entrants (Hwang and Chang, 2008). Most of the research scholars in Western countries have focused on the main predictors of employee turnover and retention in manufacturing and service sectors (Moore and Burk, 2002; Khilji and Wang, 2007). The main focus of research remained on to find out organizational factors and demographic factors related to employee turnover and retention. Organizational factors such as human resources management (HRM) practices, organizational culture, attitude of boss and employees' personality traits received much attention (see detailed discussion in conceptual framework section).

The research literature surveyed by this article identified that most of research has been conducted on the causes and consequences of employee turnover in Western countries by ignoring the contexts of developing countries (Hale, 1998; Abbasi and Hollman, 2000; Moore and Burk, 2002; Khilji and Wang, 2007). As a result, several important questions of academic and management practice have been raised in this study. Broadly speaking, these academic questions address the existing gap in the previous research literature. Firstly, the findings of research studies conducted in western cultural work environment may not be applicable in cross-cultural work settings, especially in Pakistani and other developing societies due to socio-political, legal, and economic conditions of developing nations differ from developed world. Secondly, generalization of western model specifications in the developing countries may invite different results. Thirdly, the locus of control, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-monitoring issues may vary across cultures which affect employee perceptions and attitudes. Lastly, developing countries particularly Pakistan has been ignored in almost all management research which necessitates a robust and rigorous research contribution. Pakistan in developing countries' context presents distinctive socio-economic, political, legal, elite administrative/management and religious culture set its case altogether different than other developing countries.

In order to add a significant research contribution on the subject in context of Pakistan, this study reviewed and critiqued peer-reviewed literature published in international journals on the emerging subject of employee turnover and retention in the core field of human resource management (HRM). This study centrally addresses to the limitations of existing literature in the context of Pakistan. This review of literature on the current state of employee retention identifies that there exists interrelationship of HRM functioning, organizational culture, attitudes of boss and employees' individual differences e.g. personality traits of employees which influence employee decision making. The integrated impact of all organizational factors collectively generate employees' satisfaction and commitment which ultimately leaves strong influence on decision regarding staying or quitting the organization (Afzal, Khan and Ali, 2009; Felps et al., 2009; Lee, Gerhart, Weller and Trevor, 2008). Previous research missed out to contribute on the interrelationship of organizational factors with turnover and retention. Additionally, this area is under-researched especially in context of Pakistan as on to date, only single research study has been published by Khilji and Wang in 2007. The contribution of Khilji and Wang (2007) also bears a number of limitations and also failed to come up with general model on employee turnover and retention in context of Pakistan.

Based on the gap in previous literature, the main premise of this research article is to propose a conceptual framework to examine specific role of HRM, organizational culture and the attitude of boss on employees' decision to quit or stay in the organization. Moreover, this survey of literature also finds it important to look at the relationship of employees' personality traits with quitting and staying in the organization. In order to present detailed view on the gaps in the literature, following section highlights key literature on the subject. Literature review will be followed by detailed discussion regarding justification of conceptual framework.

Literature review

The employee turnover and retention have roots deep in the history. Cotton and Tuttle (1986) witness that since early 1900's a

large number of qualitative and quantitative studies have been published on the subject. Turnover unanimously referred by many authors as "cessation of member from organization for finding acceptable alternative work role" (March and Simon, 1958; Mobley, 1977; Price and Mueller, 1981; Steers and Mowday, 1981). Whereas retention is defined as "a systematic effort by employers to create and foster an environment that encourages current employees to remain employed by having policies and practices in place that address their diverse needs"¹. In today's competitive world, organizations seem more concerned about the departure of talented employees, because quitting delivers double blow e.g. a loss of key talented employees who form 'competitive advantage' and costs of recruitment & selection and training processes for new entrants to fill in the vacant positions. Managing employee retention therefore has earned great deal of attention of academic scholarship and management practitioners equally (Michell et al., 2001).

Over the years, the major focus of research has remained on organizational, demographic and work attitudes as predictors of employees' turnover and retention. Most of the research contributed in the subject has been published in context of Western and developed countries' organizational work settings. Among the major turnover and retention predictors include satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement as attitudinal variables (Mutchinsky and Tuttle, 1979). Other turnover and retention predictors found were job alternatives, (Maertz and Campion, 1998); autonomy, organizational justice, job stress, pay, promotional chances, and social support (Kim et al., 1996); person-organization fit (O'Reilly et al., 1991); job incompatibility (Chan, 1994; Villanova et al., 1994); work-value congruence (Cable and Pearsons, 1999; Werbel and Gilliland, 1999); citizenship behaviour (Chen et al., 1998); task-related ability (Jackofsky and Peters, 1983); job performance (Martin et al., 1981; McElroy et al., 2001); absenteeism (Farrel and Stamm, 1998); biographical data (Casio, 1976); organizational, work, and personal factors (Porter and

¹ Workforce Planning for Wisconsin State Government (2005). *Employee retention*. <http://workforceplanning.wi.gov/category.asp?linkcatid=15&linkid=18>

Steers, 1973). An increasing body of research has also examined the relationship of HRM practices, organizational culture, attitudes of supervisor and personality traits with employees' satisfaction, commitment, turnover and retention in Western developed countries by ignoring case of developing countries particularly Pakistan (Khilji and Wang, 2007). Consequently, based on this gap in literature, we propose following conceptual framework. The conceptual framework (i.e. next section) depicts interrelationship of HRM practices, organizational culture, attitudes of immediate boss/supervisor and personality traits individually and collectively have strong impact on employee satisfaction and retention and vice versa. Next section presents detailed discussion on conceptual framework and factors influence employee retention in organization.

Conceptual framework

Based on the gap in literature, this study proposes following conceptual framework (Figure 1) and categorically argues that employees' decision to stay or to leave the organization may contain five phases. It is therefore, proposed in research framework that integrated HRM practices, conducive organizational atmosphere and mentoring attitude of supervisor/boss (stage one), impinge upon personality dimensions of employees (i.e. stage two) which help generate overall satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour (stage three), ultimately happy and satisfied employees make stay decision and vice versa (at last stage). Following section presents detailed discussion on conceptual framework in light of the gap in previous literature.

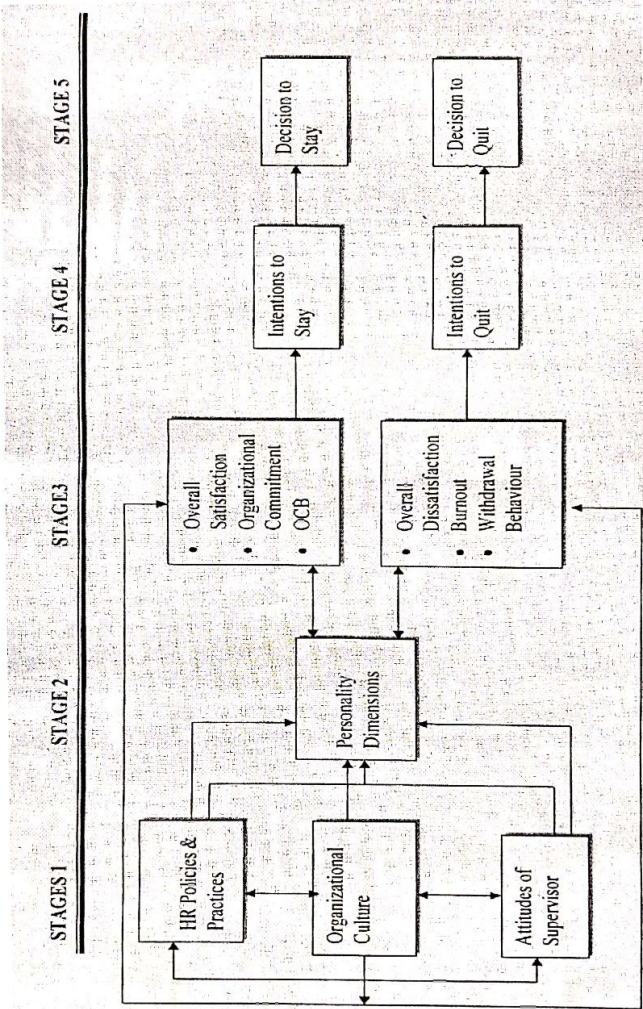


Figure-1 Conceptual Framework

HRM practices

HRM referred as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets i.e., the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the business. In simple sense, HRM means employing people, developing their resources, utilizing, maintaining and compensating their services in tune with the job and organizational requirement (Armstrong, 2006). Significant amount of literature published in 1990s to date report that HRM practices play pivotal role to motivate and retain talented employees at work such as Agarwal and Ferrat, 1999; Dessler, 1999; Husselid, 1995; Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999; Khilji and Wang 2007. The groundbreaking research philosophy of Pfeffer (1994; 1998) of "*putting people first*" turned upside down of coercive leadership style of managing people at workplace. His philosophy earned great deal of support in United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) and abroad. Academia and HRM practitioners alike began new discourse on his work (Arthur, 1994; McDuffie, 1995; Delaney and Husselid, 1996; Delaney and Doty, 1996; Husselid and Becker, 1996; Wood, 1995; Conway, 1998). Pfeffer (1994; 1998) argues that particular set of HRM practices accompanied by complementary HR bundle are assumed to achieve maximal performance at work. He further argued that this theory can be generalized regardless company, industries and national contexts. Conversely, many authors have also questioned the generalization of 'HR best practices' with reference to their inconsistency, complexity of national cultures, and organizations, (Marchington and Grugulis, 2000; Paul and Anantharaman, 2003; Wright and Boswell, 2002). Current state of literature suggests that such theory has not been tested in context of developing countries particularly in Pakistani organizational environment. Consequently, this study conceptualizes that effective HRM practices will have positive impact on employees' satisfaction and will raise organizational commitment for stay decision and vice versa. Next section illustrates the relationship of organizational culture concerning to employee turnover and retention.

Organizational culture

Charles, Hill and Jones (2001) provided a comprehensive definition of organizational culture as "the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organization and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization". In light of this definition, the HRM functioning in any organization occupies central position in establishing and maintaining fairness, equitability, shared understanding and ethical standards in organization, this thinking gives birth to organizational culture (Kane-Urrabazo, 2006). The research study of Covey (1991) argues that well-built culture containing four major elements such as trust and trustworthiness, empowerment, consistency and mentorship boost the satisfaction and reduce turnover at workplace. Denison (1996) demonstrated that employees' behaviour at workplace is the manifestation of the organizational culture and also drives employees' performance and satisfaction. O'Reilly et al. (1991) study suggests that person-organization fit is a significant predictor of commitment, job satisfaction and intention to quit, irrespective of employees age, gender, and tenure.

Since 1980s, Hofstede's legendary research contributions in organizational psychology demonstrated that national cultures vary across the countries. Hofstede (1998) identified five main cultural dimensions which vary across culturesⁱⁱ. He further argued that cultural values reflect work attitudes like satisfaction with boss and satisfaction at work. Judge and Cable (1997) report that applicant's personality traits profoundly interact with organizational culture and they seem attracted if culture matches their personality. Unfortunately, all literature cited above belongs to western nations context and none of the study comprehensively examined case of Pakistan. This further enhances aspiration to contribute to fill in the research gap in context of Pakistan. Conceptual framework,

ⁱⁱ Hofstede, Geert (1980) found five dimensions of national culture in each country to have profound impact on work related values which reflect at workplaces in all organizations across the world. Those five factors are low vs. high power distance, Individualism vs. collectivism, Masculinity vs. femininity, Low vs. high uncertainty avoidance and Long vs. short term orientation.

therefore, proposes that organizational culture in association with HRM practices is a manifestation of employees' satisfaction and commitment in Pakistani organizations as well. Effective HRM functioning with culture of trusting, mentoring and teamwork in organization will promote employees' positive thinking. As a result, outcome of such positive organizational culture will enhance employee retention or vice versa. After underscoring theoretical relationship of HRM practices and organizational culture, next section presents attitude of boss as core factor which impinges upon employee turnover and retention.

Attitudes of immediate boss/supervisor

Attitude is referred as a tendency to respond positively or negatively towards a certain idea, object, person, or situation. Supervisor's attitude at workplace influences an employee's cognition, behaviour, choice of action, and responses to challenges. The significant number of studies has examined the linkages explicit attitude of immediate boss/supervisor with employees' job attitudes such as satisfaction commitment, turnover, and retention. Research studies of Bacharach and Aiken (1979) and Lam et al., (1999) indicate that positive, helping, familial and constructive attitudes of boss at workplace have demonstrated greater satisfaction, commitment and higher rate of retention. The findings of the research of Fleishman and Harris (1998) report that if supervisor is with low consideration and high structure leadership style then employees' grievances and turnover intentions will be high. Much recent investigations have reported that there are several ways for boss/supervisor to show abusive, destructive or sadistic behaviour at work which directly affects employee satisfaction and commitment. The supervisor's destructive behaviour identified by the studies include abusive (Hornstein, 1996; Tepper, 2000), health endangering (Kile, 1990); petty tyrants (Ashforth, 1994); bullies (Namie and Namie, 2000); derailed (Schackleton, 1995); intolerable (Lombardo and McCall, 1984); psychopaths (Furnham and Taylor, 2004) and harassing (Brodsky, 1976). The most recent study of Einarsen et al. (2007) report that leader's destructive behaviour directed at workplace violates the legitimate interest of organization and it raises overall employees' dissatisfaction.

Schaubroeck et al. (2007) conclude that destructive leadership style strongly related to employee stress, dissatisfaction and intention to quit. Tepper et al. (2001) found that personality dimensions such as conscientiousness and agreeableness moderate the relationship between abusive supervision at workplace employee's decision to stay. Smith and Canger (2004) reported that supervisor traits of agreeableness, emotional stability and extroversion with low level of conscientiousness were found significantly related with subordinate ratings of satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. After a careful review of literature cites, this study in conceptual framework proposes that attitude of boss (positive/negative) will be significantly correlated with employees, satisfaction and commitment in Pakistani organizational work settings. Boss' attitude will also influence his/her employees' decision making process whether to stay or leave. Social psychologists (for example, Judge et al., 1997; Vinson et al., 2007) maintained that employees' dispositional traits also help predict work-related attitudes such as satisfaction, commitment, intention to quit, following section sheds more light on the view.

Personality Traits

Personality psychologists have strong opinion that employees' personality traits are directly linked with work-related behaviors. The study of Jenkins (1993) reported that personality traits help in prediction of employees' satisfaction, commitment, turnover and retention. Judge et al. (1997) devised construct of core self-evaluations by focusing on four broad dispositional traits including self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control and emotional stability to measure job satisfaction at workplace. In more recent investigation researchers suggest that four dispositional traits are best predictors of overall satisfaction and performance at workplace (Allen et al. 2005; Bauer et al., 2006; McCulloch and Turban 2007; Mount, Ilies and Johnson, 2006; and Vinson et al., 2007).

This review of literature identifies that most of the research studies have been conducted in the Western countries' work settings. Moreover, this article finds out that previous research studies missed out to look at interrelationship of HR practices,

organizational culture, attitudes of boss/supervisor and employees' personality dimensions with employee turnover and retention. Consequently, it constitutes serious research gap in the literature, which needs to be addressed. It is, therefore, proposed in this study that there exists interrelationship of HRM practices, organizational culture and attitude of boss with focus on individual personality traits which subsequently impact employees' decision to quit or stay in organization. The major objectives of this research article are enlisted in succeeding section followed by method applied for this survey of literature.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

Present study aims to present critique on existing literature of managing employee turnover and retention and propose conceptual framework on the interrelationship of HR practices, organizational culture, and attitudes of immediate boss/supervisor elements and how personality dimensions. This study, thus attempts to achieve following key objectives review of literature:

- (i) To review and critique literature on employees turnover and retention,
- (ii) To examine interrelationship of HR practices, organizational culture and attitude of boss and its interaction with employees' personality traits,
- (iii) To propose conceptual framework (model) for further empirical study,

Methods

This study is based on extensive literature review published mainly in journals of HRM, OB, organizational studies domains between 1980 to date. We carried out survey of literature through <http://scholar.google.com/> and online services of our universities following key words were used:

- Employee turnover or quitting,
- Employee retention,
- Impact of HRM practices on employee retention,
- Impact of organizational culture on employee retention,
- Impact of attitude of boss/supervisor on employee turnover and retention,
- Impact of personality dimension of employee quitting.

Procedure of reviewing literature

Firstly, research papers on the topic of this research were selected based on literature, theory or empirical evidence in different countries contexts. Secondly, large number of papers were downloaded and reviewed, in order to have most relevant research studies. Thirdly, abstracts, theories, methods, conclusions and recommendations were reviewed. Fourthly, including and excluding methods were adopted. Finally, research papers which were most relevant to the central research question of this study were selected for detailed review and reference. In most recent study of Jonson (2009) used similar method for literature review which is commonly used for surveying literature. Since this is a survey of literature article, which will be followed by empirical research through in-depth interview and questionnaire methods later, next section points out limitations of this research article and implications for future research work.

Limitations and Implications

This survey of literature suggests a number of limitations. The literature and empirical evidence in context of Pakistan is very limited, only single relevant study of Khilji and Wang (2007) was found on the subject of 'employee turnover and retention' which also bears several limitations. Additionally, most of the research studies cited in this article belong to Western and developed countries. Consequently, findings and model specifications of such Western research may not be equally applicable in cross-cultural work settings in developing nations especially Pakistan. Therefore, it establishes academic and research gap which calls for a significant research contribution to fill the gap. Present review of literature, therefore, focuses on 'reviewing trends and themes in turnover and retention literature', supplemented with findings from relevant, quantitative, qualitative studies. Authors emphasize that Pakistan' context is comparatively under-researched which witnessed by the study of Khilji and Wang, 2007. Against all these odds, authors have ensured that available literature is carefully examined and critiqued, yet some studies may have been missed out. This survey of literature helps authors in identifying research gap and proposing conceptual framework to embark upon the trajectory of next phase of exploratory research followed by

quantitative study. Next last section presents overall conclusions and implications for research work.

Conclusions and Future Research Directions

This paper reviews the existing management research by putting special focus on research done in the context of Pakistan. The current article highlights Western management literature which ignored context of developing countries. As a result, previous literature fails to build the understanding of Asian (developing countries) management perspectives in general and Pakistan in particular. Consequently, it has developed academic and research gap which requires a significant research contribution to the broad domain of management studies. This research, therefore, opens up new dialogue in academic and professional settings in Pakistan. In order to create and disseminate update knowledge regarding the subject of this research, the current team of authors aims to conduct exploratory phase of research by employing in-depth interview method. In particular, Pakistan-focused research may allow management researchers to extend and revise existing models, theories and academic knowledge through the consideration of new contextual variables. The fine-tuning of existing theories may allow researchers to develop new theories and constructs which maybe generalizable at national level.

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