



## Factors Affecting Talent Retention of Non-Academicians in Malaysia's Premier Education University

**Ahmad Amri bin Zainal Adnan**, *Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Perak, a.amri@fpe.upsi.edu.my*

**Raja Muhamad Yusof Raja Aziz**, *Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjung Malim, Malaysia*

**Arsalan M. Ghoury**, *Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjung Malim, Malaysia*

**Muhamad Shahbani Abu Bakar**, *Universiti Utara Malaysia*

**\*Corresponding Author**

**Abstract.** Retention and turnover are two issues that remain to be in the spotlight of both human resource professionals and researchers. The rise of gen-y and gen-z in the workforce could bring forth new needs and preferences. This study tends to uncover the factors that underlie the retention and turnover of employees in the Malaysian higher learning institution setting and to compare the literature for similarities and differences in the subject matter. Respondents were non-academicians in a premier education university. The survey uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The survey was done using a ranking method questionnaire consisting of 10 items for retention factors and 10 items for turnover factors. Respondents were asked to rank the items from 1 (most determinant) to 10 (least determinant). Descriptive analyses were used to interpret the data. An open-ended question was also asked the respondents to understand their choices (to stay or quit). Besides the interview method, the study also utilized past literature and reports for analysis. The result showed that in the higher learning institution setting, the retention and turnover determinants are slightly different from other industries, but in general, the manager's behavior still is the underlying cause of these determinants.

**Keywords:** Talent Retention; Non-Academician; Education.

Received: 12.07.2020

Accepted: 09.08.2020

Published: 11.09.2020

### INTRODUCTION

This study was done to explore the factors that affect talent retention among non-academicians in a higher education institution setting. Although retention and turnover have been the talk of researchers and practitioners for decades, the rapid change of work setting and the entry of younger workers (Y and Z generations) into the workforce prompt the need to re-examine the factors that could affect them in the workplace. Pandita and Ray (2018) mentioned that retention of a younger workforce is more difficult as compared to other demographics. Young and inexperienced employees tend to have a low level of satisfaction about jobs and careers, thus have a lower commitment to the organization (Zhang, 2016).

The 2019 Retention Report (Work Institute, 2019) estimates that the cost to lose a U.S. worker is USD15000, and voluntary employee turnover have nearly doubled from USD331 billion from 2010 to USD617 billion in 2018. Clearly, employee turnover is a costly but still, a survey of 1068 human resource professionals from all over the world by CIPD (2017) shows that over half of organizations do not calculate the cost of labor turnover and just two-fifths (37%) of organizations undertook specific initiatives to improve staff retention in 2016 (private sector more to do so compared to public sector).

In Malaysia, an AIA Vitality 2019 survey of 17595 employees from 230 organizations shows that 51 % suffering from at least one dimension of work-related stress (Suresh Ram, 2019). Furthermore, a report cited from Astro Awani shows that more than 400,000 or 25% out of 1.6 million government servants are at high risk of stress caused by work strains especially those in the health, education and security sectors (Sharom Abu Bakar, 2019). Yet, talent management implementation is still far behind in the Malaysian education institutions (Adnan, Kareem & Razak, 2019). Barkhuizen, Mogwere, and Schutte (2014) also confirms that talent management practices remain problematic in government institutions such as higher

education. This phenomenon will most likely affect the turnover of the education sector workforce or at least lower the performance of the employees. Thus, this study sought to understand the underlying causes that may retain employees from turnover.

## METHODS

This study is based on surveying the employees using a questionnaire to the administrators in a public university. Interview sessions were also done to get in-depth data on the issues pertaining to the study. In this study, both primary and secondary sources were used to gather data. Results from the questionnaire and interviews are the primary data source, while various journals and reports were the secondary data source.

The target population was the administrators in 10 main departments in the university. Random sampling was used to select 113 respondents from the 10 departments for this survey which include administrators of different gender, ages, level, and working experience. Among the 56 males and 57 females surveyed, 18.6% (21) are executives and 81.4% (92) are non-executives. The majority of the respondents (64.6%) are from Gen-Y and Gen-Z (20-39 years old), 28.3% are in their 40's, 6.2% are in their 50's and just 0.9% in their 60's. In terms of working experience in the organization, 46.9% are between 3 to 10 years of service. 30.1% have been working for more than 10 years, and 23% under 3 years. The 10 respondents of the interview sessions were also among the 113 chosen for the survey.

The instrument used for quantitative data collection was based on past literature and reports regarding retention and turnover factors (Robison, 2008; Zhang, 2016; Kossivi, Xu, & Kalgora, 2016; Pandita & Ray, 2018). 10 retention and 10 turnover factors were listed for the respondents to rank in order from the most determinant (1) to the least determinant (10) factors. The respondents were also given space to add other factors that they might think relevant. Descriptive analysis was used and presented in bar charts. While for the qualitative data analysis, an open-ended question was asked to the respondents to explore their preferences whether to stay or quit from the current organization if they had the chance to do so and why. The data obtained from the interviews act as supporting evidence for the quantitative data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study has taken ten parameters for the analysis of retention determinant factors and another ten parameters for the analysis of turnover determinant factors.

### Retention determinant factors

The results of the survey can be view in figure 1. 21.2% of the respondents voted 'working with great people' as the most determinant retention factor in the university. The administrator in a university got the pleasure of meeting and working with influential people from academicians, motivators to politicians. A lot of programs were initiated by the university such as exhibitions, seminars, symposiums, forums, and volunteerism activities. Almost every program will be attended by someone of high status or influence in society. Thus, the administrator got to meet and interact with them. One of the respondents said:

*"I enjoyed doing my job. I engaged with a lot of people in this organization."* (Respondent 3)

'Competitive pay and benefits' came up second on the list with 18.5% respondents voting for it. This is not surprising since the Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey Report in 2017 noted that 32% of respondents considered improving benefits and learning and development opportunities as two of the most effective methods to retain staff. Failure to provide sufficient and competitive compensation and benefits could well result in a turnover as more than 9 out of 100 employees quit because of compensation and benefits (Work Institute, 2019).

Although public universities do not pay as much as the private universities, the salary and benefits offered are standards and regarded as sufficient for most public servants. One of the benefits offered to most public university employees is the opportunity to pursue higher education while working in the organization. The respondent confessed that this is one of the reasons why he or she decided to stay in the organization:

*"I am able to pursue higher education while working in this organization."* (Respondent 7)

This finding is in line with the 2018 Workforce Learning Report that shows 93% of employees would stay at a company longer if it invested in their career (Linkedin, 2018). The temptation to leave the organization is lowered when an employee feels that he or she is presented with the chance to learn and

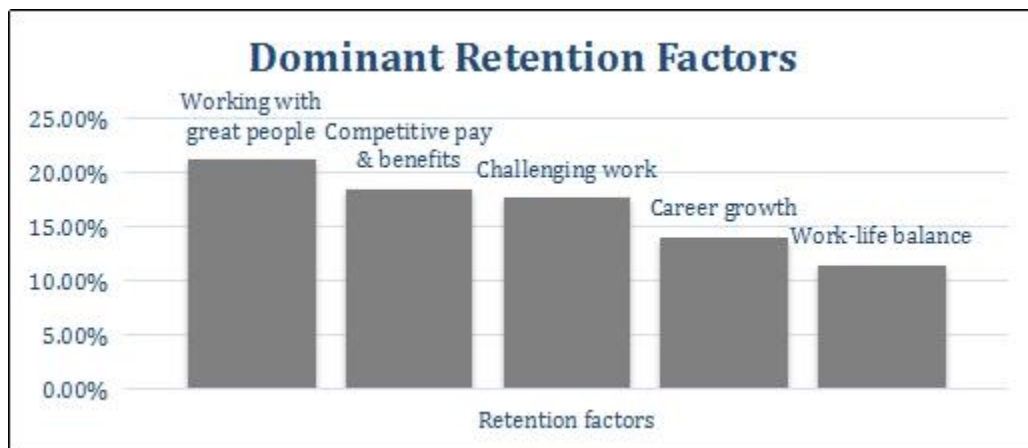
grow. This is backed by findings suggesting that employees' career concerns, goals, and plans are important for retaining them (Coetzee & Stoltz, 2015).

'Challenging and exciting work' came in third in the list with 17.7% of the vote. Although non-academician employees do mostly administration work, the nature of a university allowed them to harness and learn much more. Research, publication, teaching, mentoring and consultation are the main activities that differentiate a university from other institutions. These activities and more enhance the intellectual capacities of the citizens of a higher learning institution. The respondents felt that the unique working environment of a university is very meaningful:

*"All the work that I've been doing all this while is very meaningful to me."* (Respondent 3)

*"I'm happy working in this organization because I get more experiences from day to day."*  
(Respondent 6)

Having a sense of meaningfulness to work can increase job satisfaction, thus increasing employee retention. Allan, Batz-Barbarich, Sterling, and Tay (2019) found that meaningful work predicting job satisfaction, work engagement and commitment, which subsequently predicted withdrawal intentions. The positive and significant correlation between the meaningfulness of work and job satisfaction was also confirmed by Keleş and Findıklı (2016). We can say that the respondents in our study found a job-fit that suite their interpretation of meaningful work.



**Figure 1:** Dominant retention factors

### Turnover determinant factors

As indicated in the bar chart in figure 2, the top turnover factor according to the respondents is "bad relationship with the boss" (23.9%). Almost a quarter of the employees we surveyed chose this factor. As the old saying says, "People don't quit their job, they quit their bosses." Retention is a decision that can be influenced by the employee's emotions, which can be affected positively or negatively by the actions undertaken by employers (Pandita & Ray, 2018). Data from over 250,000 U.S. employees, including 37,061 employees who quit their jobs in 2018 proves that more than 11 out of 100 quit because of manager or supervisor behavior such as poor communication, unprofessionalism, lack of support and lack of manager competence (Work Institute, 2019). Superior behavior also has a significant effect on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Zhang, 2016). In this case, the immediate supervisor didn't give enough appreciation and recognition to their subordinates. A respondent mentioned this in the interview session:

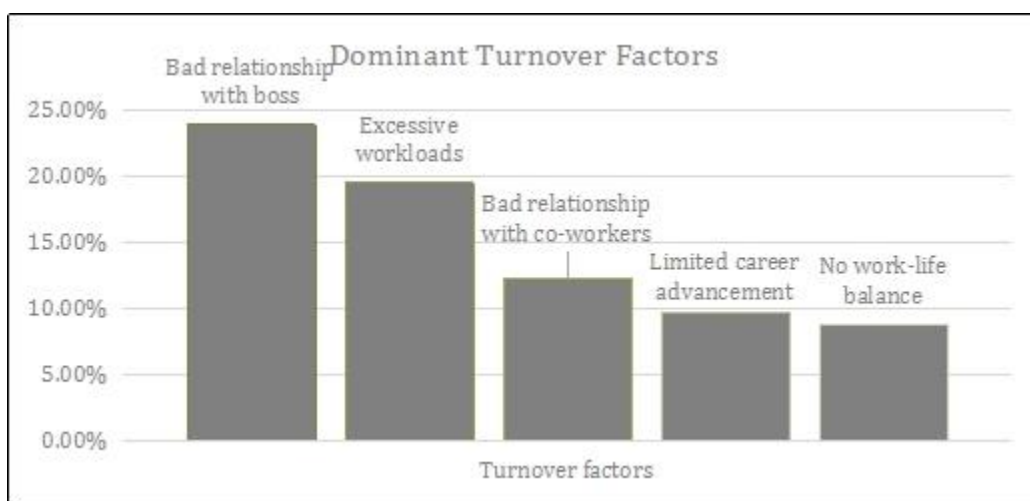
*"Lack of appreciation from the superior."* (Respondent 1)

A recent survey of over 25,000 employees across the world by TINY pulse (2018) shows that 21.5% of employees that don't feel recognized when they do great work have interviewed for a job in the past three months. They conclude that employees who have not received recent recognition are two times more likely to be job hunting, and employees who don't feel valued at work are 34% more likely to leave their companies within the next year.

The next biggest factor that affects employee turnover according to the survey is 'excessive work'. At 19.5%, this factor is commonly addressed by an employee of higher education institutions. For instance, researches done in two public universities found that 22.1% to 23.3% of their academic staff were stress

(Noor & Ismail, 2016). Job overload is one of the many stressors that could be the source of pressure in the workplace (Mohd Makhbul & Muhamad Hizam Sheikh Khairuddin, 2013) particularly among academicians. Another survey shows that more than 8 out of 100 employees quit for well-being (Work Institute, 2019). Inevitably, managers play an important role in employee retention. Meta-analysis, polls and exit interviews of 10,609 business units (U.S. working population) over the past 30 years by Gallup confirmed that at least 75% of the reasons for voluntary turnover can be influenced by the managers (Robison, 2008).

'Bad relationship with co-workers' is another factor that employers need to be aware of. In this survey, 12.3% of the respondents think that co-worker's negative behaviors can influence the decision to quit their job. This finding is consistent with the TINY pulse (2018) survey. They found that employees who say there is a low level of respect between colleagues are 26% more likely to quit their jobs. Although the respondents did not elaborate on how the relationship between co-workers affects their preference to leave the organization, negative attitudes and communication breakdown may well be the reasons. According to Zhang (2106), many factions or small groups within a department or inter-department will complicate the relationship between colleagues and they will need to spend a lot of energy to handle the intricacies of the relationship.



**Figure 2 : Dominant retention factors**

There is also a consistent and interesting finding from the survey. 14.1% of the respondents agree that career growth is an important retaining factor and 9.7% said 'limited career advancement' may cause a turnover. This finding stressed the importance of career development in an organization. According to Work Institute (2019), lack of growth and development opportunity, and no advancement or promotional opportunity is the leading cause of employee turnover in the U.S. since 2013 to 2018, recorded an increment by 32%. In another survey, employees who feel they are progressing in their careers are 20% more likely to still be working at their companies in one year's time (TINY pulse, 2018).

Two of the ten interviewees said they wanted to quit if they have the chances to do so contributed their intention to these factors:

Limited warrant for an executive position (limited career advancement). (Respondent 2)

"I've been doing the same job... Does not have a good job rotation system to allow career enlargement." (Respondent 5)

Aside from career development, another critical factor to consider for retention is the work-life balance for employees. Deery and Jago (2015) identified the importance of managing work-life balance to retain talented staff. João and Coetzee (2012) also pointed out the ability to balance one's work and life as a key factor in retaining professionally skilled staff. 11.5% of the respondents in this study noted that work-life balance is important to employee retention and again 8.8% confirmed that no work-life balance will cause a turnover. The situation is the same for the workforce in the U.S. where work-life balance is the second most cited category for turnover, trended up 20% since 2013. Work-life balance is also cited as more important to generation-x and generation-y (Work Institute, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

From this research, we conclude that most of the determinants of retention and turnover remain the same for the past years, but in the higher education setting, 'working with great people' unexpectedly top the table compared to factors such as career development, benefits, and work-life balance. According to the Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey in 2017 done by CIPD (2017), the most effective methods chosen by organizations to address retention are increasing learning and development opportunities, pay and improved benefits. This does not seem the case for higher education institutions. It may be due to the unique environment in a public university where employees get to engage with many high profile individuals as mentioned above.

The same result can be observed for employee turnover, where career advancement and work-life balance did not make it to the top three determinant factors. But overall result complies with previous literature, that most factors can be prevented by the manager. According to Work Institute (2019), more than 3 in 4 employees (76.8%) who quit were preventable and could have been retained by their employers. The bad relationship between employer and employee due to lack of engagement techniques can be reduced through engagement training and enlightening. The bottom line is, employees need to feel appreciated and recognized for their work.

The practical implication of this study related directly to how an organization manages its talent. As talent management practices reported significantly related to intention to quit (Plessis, Barkhuizen, Stanz, & Schutte, 2015), it is crucial for an organization to align the practices with hard data. Gandy, Harrison, and Gold (2018) suggested a proactive approach to be adopted in the organization's talent management so that it can retain the best talent. Based on the findings, higher education institutions can customize their talent management strategies to focus on the determinants of retention and turnover for their talent.

Meanwhile, the social implication of this study can be related to management behavior. Successful employee turnover strategies might significantly lower the cost of talent turnover. Managers need to be trained on how to engage their employees properly, listen to their employees and improve work culture. Managers also need to understand that employees nowadays will not tolerate unprofessional behavior as the talent market is getting smaller and the war for talent is getting more fierce.

## REFERENCES

- Adnan, A. A. Z., Kareem, O. A., & Razak, A. Z. A. A. (2019). Challenges of Talent Development Implementation Among Non-Academic Staff in a Malaysian Higher Learning Institution. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9(3), 102–112.
- Allan, B. A., Batz-Barbarich, C., Sterling, H. M., & Tay, L. (2019). Outcomes of Meaningful Work: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Management Studies*, 56(3), 500-528. doi.org/10.1111/joms.12406
- Barkhuizen, N., Mogwere, P., & Schutte, N. (2014). Talent Management, Work Engagement and Service Quality Orientation of Support Staff in a Higher Education Institution. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(4), 69–77. doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n4p69
- Coetzee, M., & Stoltz, E. (2015). Employees' satisfaction with retention factors: Exploring the role of career adaptability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 89, 83-91. doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2015.04.012
- CIPD. (2017). *Resourcing and talent planning survey report 2017*. Retrieved from CIPD website: <http://www.cipd.co.uk/resourcingandtalentplanningsurvey>
- Deery, M., & Jago, L. (2015). Revisiting talent management, work-life balance and retention strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 453–472. doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-12-2013-0538
- Gandy, R., Harrison, P., & Gold, J. (2018). Talent management in higher education: is turnover relevant? *European Journal of Training and Development*, 42(9), 597-610. doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-11-2017-0099
- João, T. F., & Coetzee, M. (2012). Job Retention Factors, Perceived Career Mobility and Organisational Commitment in the South African Financial Sector. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 22(1), 69-76. doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2012.10874523
- Keleş, H. N., & Findikli, M. A. (2016). The effect of the meaningfulness of work on job satisfaction, job stress and intention to leave. *Global Journal of Business, Economics and Management*, 6(2), 61-69. doi.org/10.18844/gjbem.v6i2.1370

- Kossivi, B., Xu, M., & Kalgora, B. (2016). Study on Determining Factors of Employee Retention. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4, 261-268. doi.org/10.4236/jss.2016.45029
- Linkedin. (2018). *Workforce Learning Report*. Retrieved from Linkedin website: <https://learning.linkedin.com/resources/workplace-learning-report-2018>
- Mohd Makhbul, Z., & Muhamad Hizam Sheikh Khairuddin, S. (2013). Stress among Malaysian Academics: A Conceptual Study. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 196-211.
- Noor, A., & Ismail, N. H. (2016). Occupational stress and its associated factors among academician in a research university, Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Public Health Medicine*, 16(1), 81-91.
- Pandita, D., & Ray, S. (2018). Talent management and employee engagement – a meta-analysis of their impact on talent retention. *Industrial and Commercial Training*. doi.org/10.1108/ICT-09-2017-0073
- Plessis, L. Du, Barkhuizen, N., Stanz, K., & Schutte, N. (2015). The management side of talent: Causal implications for the retention of generation y employees. *Journal of Applied Business Research*, 31(5), 1767-1780. doi.org/10.19030/jabr.v31i5.9390
- Robison, J. (2008). *Turning around employee turnover*. Retrieved from Gallup website: <http://www.news.gallup.com/businessjournal/106912/turning-around-your-turnover-problem.aspx?version=print>
- Sharom Abu Bakar. (2019, June 3). Penjawat awam berisiko tinggi alami tekanan kerja. *Astro Awani*. Retrieved from Astro Awani website: <http://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/penjawat-awam-berisiko-tinggi-alami-tekanan-kerja-209280>
- Suresh Ram, B. (2019, Nov 15). Survey: Malaysian employees are overworked, sleep deprived, unhealthy. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from website: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/11/539026/survey-malaysian-employees-are-overworked-sleep-deprived-unhealthy>
- TINYpulse. (2018). *2018 employee retention report*. Retrieved from TINYpulse website: <http://www.tinypulse.com/hubfs/2018%20Employee%20Retention%20R>
- Work Institute. (2019). *2019 retention report*. Franklin, TN: Work Institute.
- Zhang, Y. (2016). A Review of Employee Turnover Influence Factor and Countermeasure. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 4, 85-91. doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2016.42010