
Talent Management and Turnover Intention: The Moderating Effect of Employee Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The government of Malaysia has identified several key digital areas to drive the growth in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry. Given that, it becomes crucial to ensure that employees who worked in the ICT industry can be remained to realize the Malaysia aspiration. This calls for a study to examine some reasons to ensure that the ICT employees have less intention to turnover and leave the industry. Turnover intention and intention to quit have been used interchangeably by the previous scholars in the existing literature. Given that, this study is designed to investigate the effect of talent management (TM) on ICT employees' turnover intention (TI). Additionally, employee engagement (EE) will be tested as a moderator for the relationship between talent management and ICT employees' turnover intention. The findings of this study will first, assume that there is a high level of turnover intention among ICT employees in Malaysia. Second, the results will indicate that talent management is proven to affect turnover intention among employees in the Malaysian ICT industry. Third, the results will show that employee engagement moderates the relationship between talent management and turnover intention. Therefore, this study believes that the higher level of talent management within ICT organizations may be one of the best strategies to make ICT employees engage more; thus, can lower the level of turnover intention among them.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Each member of the organization plays an important role in performing their duties in order to achieve goals and objectives set by the organization. Employees are the important stakeholders, a strong support and backbone of every organization. Most of the organizations would want

to retain their employees as they hold value in their ability to keep the productivity running, their skills and experience are much needed to encourage better performance. Moreover, the 2021-2025 Twelfth Malaysia Plan (12MP) stresses that a skilled workforce is necessary to support the

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transition of all economic sectors towards knowledge-intensive activities, drive labour productivity gains, and attract investment into Malaysia. An efficient and inclusive labour market will resolve mismatches in workforce demand and supply, and enable all Malaysians to participate in and benefit from the nation's economic growth and it is important to make sure that skilled workforce to stay with their job. This study believes that the goal can be achieved through a good talent management practiced by the organization.

The focus of this study is the employees working in the ICT industry in Malaysia. The ICT industry in Malaysia is overseen by Ministry of Communications and Multimedia. Looking from the industry perspective, ICT industry is needed to be studied for because of its role as an enabler of other industries that strives to strengthen technology absorption ranging from agriculture and manufacturing to legal and healthcare; also, to support ecommerce business said Puan Azizah Hamzah, the Director of K-Economy (Knowledge Economy) Section, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department (OpenGovAsia.com, 28 October 2017).

Besides, ICT industry has the highest contribution of RM247.1 billion in 2017 to the Malaysian economy (ICT Industry Outlook Report; PIKOM 2019). Previous study (Saraih *et al.*, 2017) described that whenever any of their employees tend to think about leaving the organization beforehand, it would poorly reflect to the circle process to recruit and later to select qualified candidate to replace the vacant position. The rotation of this cycle involves money to be spent by the organization called as turnover cost. Hence, further explanation about employees' TI is much needed and the necessity to investigate the relationship between TM, TI, and EE will be filled in this study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Turnover Intention

An extensive amount of previous studies about turnover intention (TI) have been conducted for the past decades. Various researchers provided a wide range of turnover definitions. Therefore, this study refers TI as an individual's estimated probability that he or she will leave an organization at some point in the near future (Chen and Lien, 2008) which best describes ICT employees as the respondent. According to previous scholars Price and Mueller (1981), there are two types of turnover; voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover. Voluntary turnover happens in a situation where an employee decided to leave or quit the organization which the decision made is initiated by the particular person. Consequently, the empty position will most likely to be replaced with another candidate.

On the contrary, involuntary turnover differs when it happens in a situation where an employer decided to terminate an employee (Theron *et al.*, 2014). Any type of termination that is caused by factors such as illnesses, retirement, and death are uncontrollable/inevitable factors,

which also categorized under the scope of involuntary turnover as well (Pietersen and Oni, 2014). Dalton and Todor (1979) argued that some appropriate level of turnover is acceptable or more likely to be beneficial for organization as they will give these newly hired employees an opportunity to perform better and offer fresh ideas in order to elevate organizational performance.

However, if the level of voluntary turnover is exceeding to a higher level, it may bring harm and detrimental to neither organization nor employees themselves (Saraih *et al.*, 2016). This is supported by (Z. Ahmed *et al.*, 2016) who tested a significant relationship between employees' turnover and organizational effectiveness described that, it would be such a great loss for organization if employees in the telecommunication sector voluntarily quits because it requires more money to replace them. Therefore, it is important to comprehend the factors that lead to turnover intention before they make a decision to quit. Hence, this study will investigate voluntary turnover instead of involuntary turnover because it is more practicable, possible to measure and relevant for organization as described by previous study (Price and Mueller, 1981).

On top of that, based from the perspective of the industry, a recent data on the level of TI has been found from the Institute of Labour Market Information and Analysis (ILMIA) in 2017, the Ministry of Human Resources reported that the average turnover rate is 20% which 16% from the total percentage represents voluntary turnover which means voluntary turnover has higher level of turnover rate compared to involuntary turnover. Not only that, this study also found that Malaysia is at second highest as comparison of high voluntary turnover rates among all major Asia-Pacific markets (e.g. India, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and China) at the rate of 13% (Radford Trends Report, 9 November 2016).

Therefore, these two evidences show that Malaysia still suffers a high level of voluntary turnover among its employees. Comprehensively, this data obtained represents all industries in Malaysia in general and provided the percentage is ambiguous and does not inform well at what level does turnover intention was at. The level of turnover intention could be a high level, low level or medium level. On that account, since TI predicts the actual turnover (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Harter *et al.*, 2003), this study will reveal the level of TI specifically among ICT employees in Malaysia. Hence, hypothesis 1 is developed as follows;

H₁: There is a high level of TI among ICT employees in Malaysia.

Talent Management

According to Lockwood (2006), TM is the implementation of integrated strategies or systems designed to increase workplace productivity by developing improved processes for attracting, retaining and utilizing people with required skills and aptitude to meet current and future business needs. Theoretically, to the best of researcher knowledge

there is scarcity of empirical studies that have been conducted to test the relationship between TM and TI; particularly in Malaysia. A few empirical studies on the relationship between TM and TI have been done in Botswana (Barkhuizen and Schutte, 2017), South Africa (Plessis *et al.*, 2015), Pakistan (Rana and Abbasi, 2013) and Netherlands (Rana and Abbasi, 2013).

Previous studies (Glaister *et al.*, 2018; Doh *et al.*, 2013) argue that issues in managing talents are universal but more critical in the emerging market economies where talent shortages highlight an urge need for organization to practice TM. For example, issues such as employees get a non-competitive rewards and benefits, training provided is not fully utilized by the employees, and mismatching between supply and demand of human capital that may lead to TI were being reported happening in Malaysia (Kaliannan *et al.*, 2015).

Hence, to deal with these issues, TM acts as an effective tool that may help organization to retain talented employees. The implementation of TM into organizational practice will source the right talent; build up training and development for employees to meet market and demand, strategize and managing risks. Hence, this study perceives TM as an important factor that needs to be discussed more since it has been mentioned to become a key factor in determining employees' TI in Asian countries (HR in Asia, 17 November 2016).

Findings from previous studies (Plessis *et al.*, 2015; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2015) have supported that there is a negative relationship between TM and TI. This indicates that high level of TM leads to lower level of TI. Furthermore, Barkhuizen *et al.*, (2015) explained that the result also shows TM practices as significant predictor towards teachers' in Botswana's intention to quit; poor implementation of TM practices will enhance their TI.

On the other hand, (Rana and Abbasi, 2013) who examined that effective TM has potential to reduce employees' TI in the telecommunication sector in Pakistan has surprisingly, rejected the hypothesis. However, the study concluded that TM still has a meaningful impact on employees' TI and advices corporate leaders to be more vigilant and conscious while developing succession and career development plans for the employees to retain them. Not only that, (Hoogervorst, 2009) also did not supported the relationship between TM and TI. However, according to the limitations given in the study, TM was not measured equally in each organization.

Moreover, 16 TM practices have been taken into account; some has impacted TI such as succession planning and assessment centres. This shows that some parts of TM practices still influence employees' TI. Those are more likely to have better findings if they are being tested separately. Besides that, a case study by (Zhang, 2014) found that TM practices (e.g. talent attraction, talent development and talent retention) have influenced employees' TI and she clearly stated that there is a lack of

empirical investigations in the TM field as most of TM studies did. As discussed in the literature above, hypothesis 2 is developed as follows;

H₂: Talent management has a negative relationship to ICT employees' TI.

Employee Engagement

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement (EE) is defined as the harnessing of organization member's selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. Generally, this definition has been widely used by researchers all over the world in accordance to the growing number of all kind of published materials and as a result, so much has been explored. Saks (2019) and Welch (2011) both have consensus on EE on its role that has been continuously essential and relevant where its ideology has magnetized a lot of attention from business people, consultants, practitioners, policy makers as well as the researchers.

This shows that EE is important to be studied for. In conjunction to this, previous researchers (Rodrigues and Maria, 2019) who adopted qualitative method on their research study and discussed the importance of EE towards organizational success has confirmed that, employees engage better and deliver satisfactory performance when they are being treated right by the organization. Other findings have also supported that organization with engaged employees has greater employee retention, efficiency, productivity and development, as well as employee and customer satisfaction (Malik, 2013; Lockwood, 2007; Silverthorne, 2001).

It is being said that when employees are engaged they not only connected to work but also expressing a continuous investment of their physical and psychological energies towards their work which will result in maximum performance outcomes (U. Ahmed *et al.*, 2018). Also, (Carter *et al.*, 2018) who found EE to be significantly correlated with job performance suggested that, human resource management (HRM) practitioners should increase organizational efforts such as putting EE into human resource (HR) policies and practices in order to raise EE level (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015).

Based on previous studies, the relationship between EE and TI has been proved to be strongly supported (Liss-Levinson *et al.*, 2015; Shuck *et al.*, 2014; Memon *et al.*, 2014). For example, (Memon *et al.*, 2014) stated that, employees who possess higher level of EE tend to less likely leave the organization. In addition, to strengthen this stance, the result of empirical evidence indicates that EE is contributed statistically significant to low employees' TI who have been working in the petrochemical laboratory (Van Schalkwyk *et al.*, 2010). A clear consensus was obtained from all of these previous researchers that they

agreed that employees who experience higher level of engagement are expected to have fewer tendencies to leave the organization.

However, this is unexpectedly contrary to results obtained by (Milliman *et al.*, 2018) who found engagement did not have effect to TI. In this regard, it may be due to other stronger factors influencing TI regarding the nature of the hospitality industry as it has been also observed that frontline hospitality employees are often be the target to excessive workloads, role stress, and burnout (Karatepe, *et al.*, 2012). Apart from that, (Liss-Levinson *et al.*, 2015) explained that HR department should give extra attention on how to focus on improving EE because the study argues that it would be less likely for employees to leave if he or she stays longer in the organization.

More importantly, employers are advised to put extra effort in looking after things that may courage or discourage employees to stay in their positions such as organization policies, informal practices because it is necessary to keep employees adapt with changes that occur in current situation. In conclusion, the literature above agrees with how EE is important and scholar should consider examining EE with more other constructs.

Employee Engagement as a Possible Moderator

Based on the existing literature, this study presents four justifications on why EE is used as a moderator. Firstly, this study fulfils the requirement from previous scholars (Baron and Kenny, 1986) who strongly stated that, moderator variables are typically introduced when there is an unexpectedly weak or inconsistent relation between a predictor and a criterion variable.

This study has found several studies that tested the relationship between TM and TI to be inconsistent (Barkhuizen and Schutte, 2017; Plessis *et al.*, 2015; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2015; Rana and Abbasi, 2013; Hoogervorst, 2009). Secondly, (Macey and Schneider, 2008) examined EE has provided a framework that gives better understanding about the element of EE. In their study, they argued that the concept of EE still suffers from lacking of its precision and also suggested that through associating EE with other variables perhaps will reveal the nature of EE to a greater extent. Hence, this study will be tested TM and TI with EE as moderator in correspondence to what has been suggested in the study that the concept of EE would be more useful if it merges into the same model with any other variables regarding psychological state and the behaviour it implies.

Thirdly, it is also supported by previous studies who tested EE as moderator (Chang, 2016; Caroline *et al.*, 2015; Sang *et al.*, 2014; Oluoch, 2014; Heriyati and Ramadhan, 2012) in their studies. For example, (Chang, 2016) examined the cross-level interactions of servicescape, customer emotions and behavioural intentions accompanied by service climate and EE as one of the moderators. The finding has supported that EE moderates customer emotions that leads

to positive behavioural intentions. Similarly, this study believes that EE will generate the same result towards TM as the predictor to ICT employees' TI specifically in the Malaysian context. Fourthly, by looking from the industry perspective, Datuk Wan Hisham Wan Salleh, President and CEO of Dale Carnegie Training Malaysia, emphasized on the importance of EE in an organization. He argued that with less people willing to stay in the same job, experts predict that turnover rates may increase to 65 per cent. However, the ability to retain talents (TM) by organization plays a significant impact and may prevent high level of TI from happening (New Straits Time, 14 April 2016). Therefore, as theoretically and practically of justifications given above, this study attempts to examine the role of EE as a moderator in the relationship in the relationship between TM and ICT employees' TI. Hence, hypothesis 2 is developed as follows;

H₃: Employee engagement moderates the relationship between talent management and ICT employees' TI in Malaysia.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

According to Gouldner (1960), the social exchange theory (SET) is originated from the idea of norm of reciprocity which refers to a mutual exchange of benefits between two or more units. SET also best to be understood as a reciprocal win-win situation from both units. From the perspective of organization-employee relationship, both parties are exchanging benefits and it could be tangible or intangible benefits. Previous study described that a feeling of obligation arises from this exchange when employers are supportive to their employees (Wang *et al.*, 2005) while other study extends this by suggesting that similar exchange or interactions between colleagues may promote the same sense of obligation and desire to reciprocate with positive behaviours (Li *et al.*, 2009).

In line with this, (Choi *et al.*, 2014) have demonstrated that when employees feel they are being treated well and feel satisfied while experiencing positive and meaningful environment, they will in return, voluntarily encouraged to bring out positive outcomes. In other words, employees will contribute back to the organization by giving better commitment, being engaged to the job and more likely will triggers greater desire to stay longer and be loyal to the organization. Furthermore, current research (Harden *et al.*, 2018) agrees and stated that individuals engage in behaviours that are motivated by an expected reciprocal behaviour. Besides, they also argues that information technology (IT) professionals engage with interactions occur between supervisors and employees which in return, this exchange leads to better organizational commitment as well as lowering TI among them (Harden *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, this applies to this study as well.

Although studies on the relationship between TM and TI are scarce, this study found (Plessis *et al.*, 2015) who tested the employees' perception of the organization TM

practices has significant negative relationship with employees' intention to quit in the recruitment industry in South Africa has similarly relying on SET. Other study (Bui and Chang, 2018) also adopted SET to examine soft and hard TM practices towards public officials' TI in Danang city government, Vietnam.

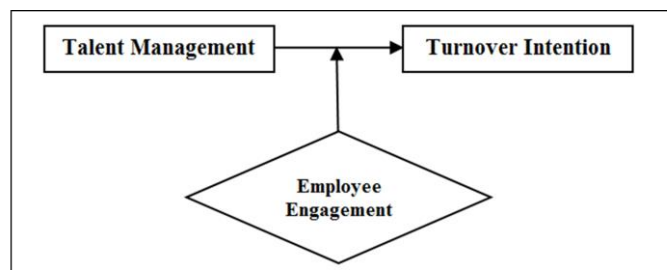
They assumed that, by relying to SET, employees who satisfied with government's soft and hard TM practices will less likely to leave the organization because it develops reciprocity norms to both parties. This shows that SET is reliable to conceptualise the interrelationship between the relationship of TM and TI. As noted in the literature above, this study argues that if an organization can provide good TM to the employees, it will benefit the employees and in return, the employees will reciprocal and increase their level of engagement towards the organization, thus, it will reduce the level of TI among ICT employees in Malaysia. The low level of TI will be beneficial to the organization. That is how the

interrelationship between TM, TI, and EE works. In conclusion, in exchange for good TM provided by organization to employees, organization may obtain its benefit through less of employees' TI and able to retain talents as well. Therefore, this also explains on how SET supports mutual reciprocal of TM, TI, and EE between organization and ICT employees in Malaysia.

Research Framework

By relying on the Social Exchange Theory (SET), Figure 1 proposes the research framework which consists of independent variable (TM), moderating variable (EE), and dependent variable (TI). As schematically illustrated in the Figure 1, there is direct relationship between (1) TM and TI; and (2) EE and TI. This research framework also proposes that (3) EE moderates the relationship between TM and TI.

Figure 1:
Research Framework



3 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the cross-sectional quantitative approach with survey questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. The population of this study is 204 972 ICT employees in Malaysia. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 384 for the population of 204 972 ICT employees is acceptable. Other than that, this study also uses a sample size calculator (e.g. Raosoft software) via online to further strengthen the determination of sample size and it appeared to be 384 as well.

In Section A, this study developed 5 questions in order to obtain data regarding the demographic background for all respondents (e.g. age, marital status, level of education, ICT segments and job level). In Section B, 6-items of data regarding respondents' perception towards their TI were adapted from (Bothma and Roodt, 2013) and will be examined by using five-point Likert scales from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. As comparison, (Revilla et al., 2014) argued that five-point scale is better than seven-point scale due to better quality and validity of data gathered. They added that one of the benefits of smaller scale is that respondent may answer the questionnaire faster and easier. These items were widely used in previous empirical studies with the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of $\alpha=0.80$.

In Section C, TM will be assessed with 15-items adapted from (Plessis, 2010) HCI Assessment of Talent Practices scale. However, although the total 45-items of HCI Assessment of Talent Practices has a Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha=0.97$), this study only selected the subscales of talent acquisition ($\alpha=0.77$), talent development ($\alpha=0.84$) and talent retention ($\alpha=0.79$) in line with what is meant by TM investigated in this study. Lastly, in Section D, EE will assessed with 5-items adapted from (Plessis, 2010) HCI Assessment of Talent Practices; talent engagement with score of Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha=0.81$) and also adopted 9-items of EE scale from (Thomas, 2007) with score of Cronbach's alpha of ($\alpha=0.89$). All of the study variable scales (e.g. turnover intention, talent management and employee engagement) will be measured on five-point scale which ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

The data gathered will be analysed by using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 3.0 software. This starts with the initial screening and preliminary analysis discussion. The findings will be presented in two-step process of PLS path model assessment as recommended by (Henseler et al., 2009). Firstly, is the measurement model assessment which includes a view to

determine the individual item reliability, internal consistent reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Secondly is the structural model assessment, where the results of path coefficient, level of R^2 value, effect size and the assessment of predictive relevance will be reported. Lastly, PLS-SEM complementary result analysis which analysed the role of EE as moderator will be presented.

CONCLUSION

In theoretical perspective, due to the lack of TM empirical studies, this study also contributes by investigating direct relationship between TM to ICT employees' TI in Malaysia. Other than that, the moderating effect of EE between the relationships of TM to TI is another contribution of this study. Since TM is a set of integrated strategies or systems designed to increase workplace productivity (Lockwood, 2006), the researcher would like to suggest for future researchers to examine the impact of TM or the effectiveness of TM towards organizational performance in Malaysia. Looking from a practical perspective, the result will assist the Malaysian government to reduce the rate employee turnover and enhance the implementation of TM within industries in the Malaysian context. Therefore, this study believes that a good TM provided by organization will lead to better engagement of employees; thus, lower the TI level occurs in the organization.

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