**Antecedents and outcome of turnover intention: Evidence from Public Sector in Malaysia**

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine the work environment factors that influence turnover intention. This study also examines the impact of turnover intention on one aspect of employee characteristic known as commitment. The data of this study have been collected through survey among 212 public sector employees in Malaysia. This study reveals that job insecurity, perceived organizational support, work-life balance and training are the work environment factors that influence turnover intention in this context. In addition, this study reveals that turnover intention is negatively and significantly related to commitment.

Key word: Turnover intention; public sector; Malaysia

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**Introduction**

Turnover intention refers to the conscious and deliberate willingness to leave an organization (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Turnover intention has continuously received attention among academic scholars. This is due to such work attitude and behavior may have influence on employees (e.g. quit their jobs) and organizations (e.g. causing harm to organizational performance) (Chang, Wang & Huang, 2013).

The focus of previous studies is mainly to identify the factors that predict turnover intention. One of the reasons is because if the antecedents of turnover intention can be identified in advance, organizations can develop appropriate interventions to enhance competitive advantage and prevent avoidable visible and invisible costs (Chang et al., 2013). A range of factors that predict turnover intention have been identified. The factors include perceived organizational support (Dawley, Houghton & Bucklew, 2010), job insecurity (Staufenbiel & Konig, 2010; Mauno, Cuyper, Tolvanen, Kinnunen & Makikangas, 2014), psychological contract breach (Chin & Hung, 2013), work-life balance (Mohd Noor, 2011), career development (Weng & McElroy, 2012), salary (Joarder, Sharif & Ahmmed, 2011) and job stress (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012).

Despite the effect of the previous factors on turnover intention have been empirically justified, there are two limitations of previous studies. First, the effect of previous factors on turnover intention have been tested in non-public sector context, such as at the insurance industry (Chin & Hung, 2013), and the manufacturing firm (Dawley et al., 2010). Second, the effect of these factors on turnover intention have been examined separately in different contexts. As a result, the understanding about the factors that predict turnover intention in a particular organization is limited. This study is conducted to address these gaps by simultaneously examine the effect of the previous factors (perceived organizational support, psychological contract breach, work-life balance, career development, salary, work stress) on turnover intention in the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia.

In addition, research that explores the impact of turnover intention is still lack of evidence in the literature. Few studies have explored this issue and found the link between turnover intention and turnover (Bedeian, 1991; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Cho & Lewis, 2012). This study will expand this area of research by testing the relationship between turnover intention and commitment. This study posits that high turnover intention will reduce employee commitment. Such argument could be possible because researchers such as Chang, Wang and Huang (2013) and Griffeth, Horn and Gaertner (2000) argue that those employees with turnover intentions are likely to commit with unpleasant behavior in organizations.

**Literature review**

*Job insecurity and turnover intention*

Job insecurity is considered as a hindrance stressor that indices undesirable strain reactions (LePine, Podsakoff & LePine, 2005). Job insecurity can increase withdrawal behavior such as turnover intention. This is confirmed by the meta-analysis of Sverke et al (2002), which found a positive relationship between job insecurity and turnover intention. Another study that has been conducted among employees of medium-sized German wholesaler for electronic products also found that job insecurity is related to higher turnover intention (Staufenbiel & Konig, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Job insecurity is positively related to turnover intention

*Perceived organizational support (POS) and turnover intention*

POS is defined as the employees’ general belief that their work organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The employees’ level of POS is based on the treatment they received from their organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The organizational treatment can be either favorable or unfavorable. Favorable treatment received from the organization is valued more by the employees if it is perceived as being given freely rather than forced by external constraints such as changes in a union contract or government policies and regulations. In contrast, unfavorable treatment would result in undesired employee outcomes (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Based on this argument, it could be when employees have a general belief that their work organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being, this kind of believe can decrease their conscious and deliberate willingness to leave an organization. A study conducted among 346 employees in a manufacturing firms in the United States has confirmed that POS is negatively related to turnover intention (Dawley, Houghton & Bucklew, 2010). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived organizational support is negatively related to turnover intention

*Work life balance and turnover intention*

Work life balance can be defined as the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003). Previous study have relate work life balance with positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, improve employee health, loyalty, productivity and organizational image. On the other hand, the researchers also argue that work life balance decrease unpleased behavior such as stress and absenteeism (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). In line with this argument, this study posits that work life balance could decrease turnover intention. A study by Mohd Noor (2011) has confirmed that work life balance was correlated negatively with turnover intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Work life balance is negatively related to turnover intention

*Job stress and turnover intention*

Job stress can be defined as a negative psychological state resulting from the interaction between a worker and his or her work environment (Mosadeghrad, Ferlie & Rosenberg, 2011). Job stress is a serious threat that can cause employees to display several negative behavioral reactions such as turnover intention. A study by Mosadeghrad and colleagues (2011) among 740 employees of Hospital care in Iran reveal that job stress was positively related to employees’ turnover intention. Another study among 286 employees of the Iranian National Drilling Company also found a positive relationship between job stress and turnover intention (Arshadi & Damiri, 2013). Similarly, another qualitative study among teachers in China showed that high levels of job stress is one of the reasons for the Chinese teachers’ turnover intention (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Based on previous evidence, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Work stress is positively related to turnover intention

*Psychological contract breach and turnover intention*

The psychological contract refers to the unwritten promises that employees perceive the employer to have made regarding training, promotions, or other significant job-related factors not specifically recognized in formal contracts (Rousseau, 1995). Psychological contract breach (PCB) occurs when employees believe that their employer has failed to fulfill such promises (Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood & Bolino, 2002). Few studies have found that the psychological contract breach can cause turnover intention among employees. For example, a study among 553 insurance industry workers’ showed that turnover intentions was positively affected by the psychological contract breach (Chin & Hung, 2013). Similarly, a study among telemarketers of 7 call centers also reveals that a psychological contract breach is significantly associated with turnover intention (Cho, Cheong & Kim, 2009). Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 5: Psychological contract breach is positively related to turnover intention

*Training and turnover intention*

Training typically involves providing employees the knowledge and skills needed to do a particular task or job (Werner & DeSimone, 2012). Joarder, Sharif and Ahmmed (2011) proposed that training will negatively related to turnover intention. Other researchers argue that training may reduce turnover decision among employees because training is an indication of management commitment to building a life-long relationship with the employees (Samuel & Chipunza, 2009). Although, there is still a lack of evidence to support the link between training and turnover intention, however, one study reveals that training has a significant effect on employee job satisfaction and commitment, which in turn decrease the employee turnover intention (Cheng & Waldenberger, 2013). Similarly, a study by Ashar, Ghafoor, Munir and Hafeez (2013) also found that training is positively related to employee commitment, which in turn decrease their turnover intention. Based on previous basis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 6: Training will negatively related to turnover intention

*Salary and turnover intention*

It was posited that salary satisfaction could reduce turnover intention (Cho, Cheong & Kim, 2009). Such argument has received support from a few empirical studies. For example, a qualitative study among teachers at the Jilin Province of China showed that one of the reasons of turnover intention among Chinese teachers is the low salary (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Similarly, a quantitative study among employees of a private university in Bangladesh shows that salary is one of the dimensions of human resource management that has a significant and negative influence on employee turnover intention. Indeed, the salary was found to have a strong negative influence on turnover intention (Joarder, Sharif & Ahmmed, 2011). Based on the above empirical evidence, below is the proposed hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7: Salary is negatively related to turnover intention

*Career development and turnover intention*

Career development is an ongoing process by which individuals progress through a series of stages, each of which is characterized by a relatively unique set of issues, themes and tasks (Greenhaus, 1987; Werner & DeSimone, 2012). Previous study found that employees who receive career development opportunities will repay their organization with a pleasant behavior such as extending their self-fulfillment, which in turn lead to reduce their turnover intention (Tan, 2008). In addition, one study found that if employees satisfy with their career, this positive psychological outcomes can lead to low turnover intention (Joo & Park, 2010). Moreover, a study by Weng and McElroy (2012) reveals that career growth (e.g., career goal progress, professional ability development) was negatively related to turnover intention. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 8: Career development is negatively related to turnover intention

*Turnover intention and commitment*

It has been argued that turnover intention will have a negative effect on organizational effectiveness because those employees with unrealized turnover intentions are likely to resort to other types of withdrawal behavior (Chang et al., 2013). This argument has received empirical evidence that shows the positive effects of turnover intention on turnover in the organization (Bedeian, 1991; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Cho & Lewis, 2012). Based on these facts, this study posits that turnover intention may also decrease employee commitment in organization. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 9: Turnover intention will negatively related to commitment.

**Methodology**

*Sample*

This study was conducted in a public sector organization in Malaysia. 212 management and professional employees have participated in this study. The data were collected through questionnaires.

Among the respondents, 48.6 percent (*n* = 103) were male and 51.4 percent (*n* = 109) were female. 26 percent (*n* = 54) are still single, while 74 percent (*n* = 157) of them have married. In term of age, 23.6 percent (*n* = 50) of them are between 20 – 30 years old, 46.2 percent (*n* = 98) are between 31 – 40 years old, 19.8 percent (*n* = 42) are between 41 – 50 years old, and only 10.4 percent (*n* = 22) of them are between 41 – 50 years old. In terms of work experience, 13.7 percent (*n* = 29) of them have worked in the public sector less than one year, 15.6 percent (*n* = 33) of them have worked in the public sector between 1 – 5 years, 26.4 percent (*n* = 56) of them have worked in the public sector between 6 – 10 years old, and 44.3 percent (*n* = 94) of them have worked in the public sector more than 10 years old

*Measures*

This study used previously published measure as details below

Commitment was measured using 3 items developed by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner and Gremler (2002). An example of the items is ‘I am committed to this company’. The measure was validated in a recent study by Walsh, Bartikowski and Beatty (2014).

Turnover intention was measured using the 3 items from Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996) and Brashear, Lepkowska-White and Chelariu (2003). An example of the items is ‘I have searched for a new job’. The measure was validated in a study by Hur, Rhee and Ahn (2016).

Salary was measured using the 4 items from Langford (2009). An example of the items is ‘I am satisfied with the income I receive’. The measure was validated in a study by Presbitero, Roxas and Chadee (2016).

Training was measured using the 3 items from Langford (2009). An example of the items is ‘There is a commitment to ongoing training for the staff’. The measure was validated in a study by Presbitero, Roxas and Chadee (2016).

Career development was measured using the 3 items from Langford (2009). An example of the items is ‘I am given opportunities to develop skills needed for career progression’. The measure was validated in a study by Presbitero, Roxas and Chadee (2016).

Work life balance was measured using the 3 items from Langford (2009). An example of the items is ‘I can be involved in both work and non-work related activities’. The measure was validated in a study by Presbitero, Roxas and Chadee (2016).

Perceived organizational support was measured using the 3 items from Paille, Grima and Dufour (2015). An example of the items is ‘My organization appreciates my contribution’. The measure was validated in a study by Paille, Grima and Dufour (2015).

Job stress was measured using the 3 items from Boreham, Povey and Tomaszewski (2016). An example of the items is ‘The demands of my job leave me feeling stressed’. The measure was validated in a study by Boreham and colleagues (2016).

Job insecurity was measured using the 3 items from Boreham, Povey and Tomaszewski (2016). An example of the items is ‘My employer regularly puts off people if business declines’. The measure was validated in a study by Boreham and colleagues (2016).

Psychological contract breach was measured using the 5 items from Robinson and Morrison (2000). An example of the items is ‘I have not received everything promised to me in exchange for my contributions’. The measure was validated in a study by Robinson and Morrison (2000).

**Data analysis**

The data of this study have been analyzed through structural equation modeling technique. As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), this study estimated a measurement model using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) prior to examining the structural model relationships.

The measurement model that included all items showed a good fit. For example, the value of chi-square (χ2) / degrees of freedom (*df*) is 2.053. According to previous researchers (e.g., Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell 2007; Williams, Vandenberg & Edwards, 2009), the score of χ2/df between 2 and 5 can justify the good fit of a particular model. The comparative fit index (CFI) also showed acceptable value, which is 0.911. In addition, the value of the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) achieves acceptable value (0.070), which is below 0.10. According to Hair et al. (2010) and Williams et al. (2009), SRMR value less than 0.10 is considered a good model.

In addition, all indicators loaded strongly and significantly on their respective factors, and the standardized loadings ranged from 0.453 to 0.929. The result of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable has also exceeded 50 percent, indicating the convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, the square roots of AVE estimates are greater than the corresponding interconstruct correlation estimates, indicating discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010).

After estimating the measurement model with a confirmatory factor analysis, the second stage of analysis involved estimating the proposed relationships. All the fit indices suggest a reasonable fit between the model and the data. For example, the value of chi-square (χ2) / degrees of freedom (*df*) is 2.201, and the CFI value is 0.90.

The results indicate that job insecurity is significantly and positively related to turnover intention (coefficient = +0.515, critical ratio = 5.639, p < 0.001). In addition, the results of the analyses indicate that perceived organizational support (coefficient = -0.370, critical ratio = 2.833, p < 0.01), work life balance (coefficient = -0.191, critical ratio = 2.011, p < 0.05) and training (coefficient = -0.561, critical ratio = 3.296, p < 0.001) have significant but negatively related to turnover intention. Finally, the analysis shows that turnover intention has a significant, but a negative relationship with commitment (coefficient = -0.489, critical ratio = 6.310, p < 0.001). The analysis results indicate an insignificant relationship between the psychological contract breach (coefficient = +0.124, critical ratio = 1.159, p > 0.05), career development (coefficient = +0.398, critical ratio = 1.945, p > 0.05), salary (coefficient = +0.191, critical ratio = 1.881, p > 0.05), job stress (coefficient = -0.140, critical ratio = 1.865, p > 0.05) and turnover intention.

In summary, the previous results support hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9 of this study. However, the analysis results do not provide support to the other hypotheses proposed in this study (Hypothesis 4,5,7 and 8). A discussion of the findings is presented in the following section.

**Findings and discussion**

This study is conducted to examine two issues related to turnover intention in the context of public sector organizations in Malaysia. First, to identify the antecedents of turnover intention. Specifically, to examine the effect of job insecurity, perceived organizational support, psychological contract breach, work life balance, job stress, career development, training and salary on turnover intention. Second, to examine the effect of turnover intention on commitment. These two issues have been tested using survey data among 212 public sector employees in Malaysia.

The results of data analysis show that there are four antecedents of turnover intention in the context of public sector in Malaysia; job insecurity, perceived organizational support, work life balance and training. The findings are in line with previous studies, especially related to the effect of job insecurity, perceived organizational support and work life balance on turnover intention. Although there are similarity of findings, this study is unique because the findings are based on the data from public sector organizations, which is different with previous studies that based on data from private sector employees (e.g., Sverke et al., 2002; Staufenbiel & Konig, 2010; Dawley, Houghton & Bucklew, 2010).

In addition, this study is unique because it provides empirical evidence about the link between training and turnover intention. The finding support the proposal of few researchers (e.g., Joarder, Sharif & Ahmmed, 2011; Samuel & Chipunza, 2009) that indicated training will negatively related to turnover intention.

In regard to the second issue, this study predicted that turnover intention would have a negative relationship with commitment. The results of the analysis indicate that a significant and negative relationship exists between turnover intention and commitment. This provides support for the final hypothesis of this study implying that when employees have intention to leave the organization, it subsequently decreases their commitment toward their job. The finding presented here extends the research by previous studies (e.g., Bedeian, 1991; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Cho & Lewis, 2012) who found the link between turnover intention and turnover.

**Limitations and suggestions for future study**

First, this study applies a quantitative research design where the data were collected through a questionnaire survey. Future studies should consider collecting deeper qualitative data from their respondents. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods would provide an opportunity for more in-depth and richer explanations of why employees have intention to leave and how turnover intention affects their work commitment (Brown et al., 2011).

Second, there are also limitations that need to be placed on the generalizability of this study beyond the current organization where it was conducted. The data for this study were collected from public sector organizations in Malaysia. Clearly, replication is necessary to test the relationships reported here.

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**Acknowledgement**: This paper is based on the research that funded by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS), Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia