

EXAMINING THE DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP STYLES ON TURNOVER INTENTION

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Abstract: *Organization performance will be affected when there is a high number of employee turnover. One of the factors that influence turnover intention is leadership style. This study will specifically be focusing on Path-Goal Theory (PGT) which consists of four leadership styles. When employees feel comfortable with the organization environment, they will feel satisfied and least likely to think about turnover. The objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between turnover intention and leadership styles, with job satisfaction acting as the mediator. Grounded on the Path-Goal Theory (PGT) and Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study proposes a quantitative research approach that involves academic staff from private higher education institutions as respondents. The method of simple random sampling will be implemented. Subsequently, this study intends to employ Smart Partial Least Squares (SmartPLS) to scrutinize the data and evaluate the hypothesis development. This study highlights the importance of promptly undertaking a study on the impact of leadership style on academic staff to decrease the rate of turnover at private higher education institutions.*

Keywords: *Academic Staff; Social Exchange Theory; Leadership; Path-Goal Theory; Turnover Intention*

Introduction

Problems regarding employee turnover happen around the world (Roy et al., 2024). Employees no longer stay loyal to one organization, instead they turn to another organization when they feel not satisfied with their current organization. The same situation also happens in Malaysia where the employee turnover rate in all sectors has increased from 10.1% in 2009 to 27.9% in 2019 (Saleh et al., 2022), especially in private education sector (Orpina et al., 2022) with 45.45% of employees' turnover compared to only 18.18% at public higher education institutions (Ooi et al., 2022).

Employees are the backbone of an organization where the success of an organization can be significantly impacted if there are high cases of employee turnover. The educational section is an important element for the country. For education-based organization, offering a high quality of service is vital which makes the academic staff are their main and significant of the system (Kaur & Kaur, 2023). Therefore, if there is the absence of competent and experienced academic staff, the organization will encounter difficulties in providing high-quality service to its customers. Since the impact of employee turnover is huge in terms of financial, resources and time, the management needs to control and pay attention to it (Ainer et al., 2018).

The educational institutions, especially the private sectors, are competing to attract students to join their organization and need to prove that they can provide a high quality by having academic staff that are experienced. Thus, academic staff with experience must be retained since the success and quality of a university play a major role in bringing in new students (Paul & Kee, 2020). To achieve this success, the organization needs a competent leader (Saleh et al., 2022). Since there are many leadership styles that a leader can apply in leading the organization, choosing the right style is very important. Therefore, the leaders need to understand which style is suitable to be applied to the environment. Academic staff will be influenced by leaders who possess the knowledge and skills to effectively inspire, motivate, acknowledge, encourage, reward, stimulate, and establish individual relationships with them (Mwesigwa et al., 2020). This can encourage their retention inside the organization and drive them to reciprocate the management's support by delivering optimal services.

Employees are less likely to have turnover intention when they experience great job satisfaction. Organizations need to ensure that they can provide elements that can give satisfactions towards their staff (Yong et al., 2023). There are various factors that influence job satisfaction and one of them is leadership style. Job satisfaction is said to have a negative and significant relationship with leadership style (Zhou et al., 2021). This study will assist leaders and the organization in determining whether their leadership styles are appropriate given the situation and the preparedness of their academic staff. Most of the research on turnover intention has been concentrated on the health sector, with limited studies conducted in the education sector, particularly in relation to private higher education institutions. Research in the field of Malaysian education typically concentrates on public institutions, neglecting private institutions (Ramasay & Abbudullah, 2020). In addition, most research revealed that turnover intention is influenced by the leader's leadership style (Carter, 2020). This study will support the Path-Goal Theory (PGT), which has four styles that leaders can employ. Therefore, this study will try to determine which leadership style is the most suitable to reduce the academic staff turnover intention.

Literature Review

There are a lot of study relating with employee turnover. The employee turnover happens when the employee start thinking or have the intention to do it. This literature review will discuss the theory associated with turnover intention.

Turnover Intention

Social Exchange Theory (SET) explained that if employees perceive that the company demonstrates concern for their well-being, they will respond by engaging in advantageous behaviors for the organization, and the same applies in reverse (Blau, 1968). Turnover intention can be described as an individual's intention to leave their current position in the organization (Sija, 2021). Turnover intention is when the employee has the probability to leave their job due to a discrepancy between their motivation and the working conditions they experience (Ponomariov et al., 2021). There are two types of turnover intention: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary turnover is the act of an employee choosing to either remain or depart from organization (Hosen, 2022). This decision is typically harmful and destructive to the organization (Mobley, 1982). Nevertheless, involuntary turnover can be defined as the organizational intervention in an employee's choice to remain with or depart from the organization (Hosen, 2022). This sort of turnover refers to the termination and downsizing of employees who have been identified as underperforming (Price, 1989) or engaging in misconduct (Hosen, 2022). Employee turnover is a serious issue that affects the organization, however, there have not been enough studies and research carried on about it (Hosen, 2022).

Path-Goal Leadership Style

According to the Path-Goal Theory (PGT), there are leadership styles that a leader can apply; directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented. Directive leadership will give specific directions and instructions for a subordinate's performance on a specific task (Northouse, 2021). There are many contradictory results from studies between directive leadership and turnover intentions (Itesa & Burchell, 2025). While a supportive leader refers to a leadership style in which leaders demonstrate concern for the well-being of their people by providing emotional support (Northouse, 2021). They are said to have empathic and easy to approach by their followers (Itesa & Burchell, 2025). Meanwhile, when a leader values their employees' contribution and opinions, he is said to apply the participative style (Northouse, 2021). They could facilitate consensus on the most suitable implementation solution, thereby leading to reduced turnover intentions (Itesa & Burchell, 2025). The achievement-oriented leaders will set high goals and standards for subordinates and motivate them to achieve it (Northouse, 2021). The leader fosters staff development and challenges followers to excel and achieve their utmost potential (Itesa & Burchell, 2025). Study on nurses in private hospital in Jordan found that all leadership style did not influence their turnover intention (Smama'h et al., 2023). Managers in Rwanda that practice a directive and supportive leadership style when managing nurses and midwives able to reduce the turnover intention (Ngabonzima et al., 2020). All the leadership style under the PTG is suitable for nursing home administrators and nurse managers (Casey, 2022). A study done on employees of project-based organizations in Kabul found that the participated leadership style has a positive and significant relationship with turnover intention (Ayaz et al., 2021).

Job Satisfaction

Most research found that job satisfaction influence by leadership style (Zhou et al., 2021). Nurses and midwives in Rwanda who are familiar with directive and supportive leadership

style have high job satisfaction (Smama'h et al., 2023). The job satisfaction of Nigerian polytechnic lecturer has a negative impact to turnover intention (Ayaz et al., 2021). When an employee has high job satisfaction, the turnover intention will be lower, however, if they are not satisfied, the turnover intention will be higher. However, an employee who is highly satisfied with their work will still consider turnover if they didn't have a good relationship with colleagues and supervisors (Otache & Inekwe, 2022).

Research Methodology

This research will apply a quantitative method. The method of simple random sampling will be implemented to identify the leadership style and its relationship with turnover intention mediating with job satisfaction. The questionnaire will be distributed to the academic staff at private higher education institutions. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation will be used to analyze the demographics of the respondents and the study variables using SPSS. It will also run the PLS-SEM to test the hypotheses using SmartPLS.

Discussion

Organization needs to seriously consider the number of employees turnover in their organization. Even though most research is done focusing on the health services sector, other sectors are not exceptional in this situation. Like employees in the service sector, education services sector employees are also important to the organization. They are the backbone of the organization because they have the skills and experience to serve the customers. Losing this skillful employee will be a loss to the organization because of their tacit knowledge that they have. To reduce the turnover intention among employees, management needs leaders with a good leadership skill since it was found that leadership style influences turnover intention (Smama'h et al., 2023; Ngabonzima et al., 2020). Even though there are studies that found that leadership style has no relationship with turnover intention (Itesa & Burchell, 2025), but other research found the opposite result. Similarly, there are contradictory results on research on job satisfaction and turnover intention. Studied on polytechnic lecturer found that job satisfaction and turnover intention to have a negative relationship (Ayaz et al., 2021), but others studied the contra result. This shows that the relationship of turnover intention, leadership style, and job satisfaction are varied according to environment.

Conclusion

This study will contribute to the existing literature by identifying the suitable leadership style under Path-Goal theory to reduce the turnover intention among academic staff at private higher education institutions. The findings of this study will serve as a guide for other researchers, education institutions, leaders or managers, policy makers and the government. This study can be a guideline to leaders in understanding the suitable leadership style to apply towards academic staff. The management of the organization could also use this study to give appropriate leadership training or courses in helping the leaders to manage their staff.

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