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Organisational Practices, Individual Characteristics and Employee Retention in the Energy Industry in Malaysia

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Abstract:

Employee retention is a very important dimension of human capital management in a contemporary business environment. High rates of turnover and shortage of skilled, professional employees have become a serious threat to growth of industry and commerce whereby failure to address employee retention can result in negative consequences to productivity, profitability and growth. Employee retention is also a critical issue within the energy industry in Malaysia. This study seeks to analyse whether organisational practices (supervisory support, internal promotion, career development) and individual characteristics (personal values and employee commitment) can significantly contribute to employee retention within exploration and production companies in the energy industry in Malaysia. As such it seeks to identify the variables that have a significant contribution towards employee retention. These variables can be sustainable, non-monetary mechanisms of employee retention used to devise better measures to attain employee retention. The findings of the study reveal that all the study variables contribute to employee retention. A higher-level analysis indicates that employee commitment and internal promotion contribute significantly towards employee retention. When analysed as a group, individual characteristics have a greater contribution towards employee retention. The objectives of the study, research design and findings are discussed in depth in this report.

Keywords: Human capital management, Employee retention, Energy industry

1. Introduction

Malaysia faces a shortage of skilled employees especially in highly specialized technical industries (Ministry of Human Resources, 2015). This is a salient feature in the energy industry (Manager A, 2010). In this study, the energy industry analysed encompasses the oil and gas industry. This industry comprises of various divisions based on work function. The divisions include exploration and production, processing, refinery, retailing, shipping and a broad range of auxiliary support services. The industry is divided into upstream and downstream divisions based on work activity. The upstream division starts with the exploration phase. In this phase, the operator companies carry out a series of studies to determine the availability of oil resources. When oil is discovered, the appraisal phase starts whereby feasibility studies are conducted to determine the economic viability of developing the specified area into an oilfield. The exploration and production phase involve planning, financing and managing the oil and gas project. The third phase is the development phase where the operator company establishes facilities for drilling and extracting oil and gas. The upstream work activities officially end here. After extraction of oil and gas, the downstream division continues work in the refinery phase and retail phase. They are involved in refining, transporting, retailing and marketing oil and gas as well as related products and services. The volume of work functions and tasks in the oil and gas industry are extensive. Therefore, a lot of work tasks are subcontracted out to service companies. They perform work on a contract basis for operators. Human resources in service companies perform work for operator companies in the oil and gas industry and many other industries such as power generation, agriculture, shipping and mining. The energy industry faces a severe shortage of technical employees and high levels of employee turnover (10%-30%) (Pricewaterhouse, 2012). This is a very lucrative industry that contributes significantly to national revenue. The oil and gas industry generates 44% of federal government revenue (Economy of Malaysia, pp. 13, 2016). The end product (petroleum and other fuel) is a staple resource for many other industries and individuals. Given its pivotal position, price of petroleum yields a heavy influence on establishing the prices of many other goods and services as well as foreign exchange rates. As this industry is vital to the growth of the Malaysian economy, it is important to ensure smooth operations so that long term growth and development can be achieved with fewer obstacles.

In order to achieve this goal, the oil and gas industry requires a constant availability of primary and secondary resources. A primary resource which represents the backbone of the entire industry is human capital. A large pool of technical expertise is required to carry out functions in exploration and production. A shortage of technical expertise becomes a huge obstacle to the operations of the

industry. Further analysis about antecedents that have led to the shortage highlight the occurrence of high levels of employee turnover. The extent of shortage is explained in the following diagram.

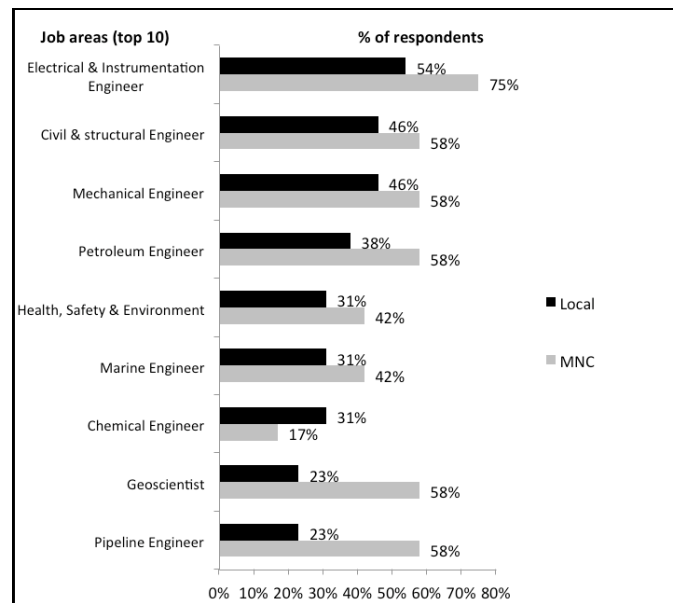


Figure 1: Technical employee shortage by job area for local and multinational oil and gas companies
(Source: Pricewaterhouse, pp. 61,2012)

The technical employee attrition rate among oil and gas companies in Malaysia range from 10% to 30% (Pricewaterhouse, 2012). According to the Talent Corporation labour database (2012) the attrition level is expected to increase over the following years. Similarly, the current shortage of technical employees is also bound to increase in the near future. The trend in talent shortage is on the rise and greater shortages are anticipated in the future. Exploration and production companies in the oil and gas industry have had to forgo lucrative exploration and production contracts due to this acute shortage in manpower supply. Under such circumstances in the oil and gas industry, it is certainly advisable to upgrade measures and methods of employee retention so that existing technical employees can be successfully retained in the workforce to continue smooth operations.

The purpose of this study is to investigate variables that can significantly enhance employee retention in the energy industry. As such this study seeks to analyse whether organisational practices (supervisory support, internal promotion, career development) and individual characteristics (personal values and employee commitment) can significantly contribute to employee retention within the exploration and production companies in the energy industry in Malaysia. As such, it seeks to identify the variables that have a significant contribution towards employee retention. These variables can be sustainable, non-monetary mechanisms of employee retention used to devise better measures to attain employee retention.

The objectives of the study are:

- i. To determine the relationship between supervisory support, internal promotion, career development, personal values, employee commitment and employee retention;
- ii. To determine the contribution of organisational practices (supervisory support, internal promotion, career development) and individual characteristics (personal values, employee commitment) leading to employee retention;
- iii. To determine if there exist any differences between organisational practices and individual characteristics towards employee retention.

2. Literature Review

Increasing levels of talent deficit have led to a struggle among competitors to acquire talented employees. Helpert (2006) posits that the financial impact of talented employee turnover can be up to 200% of the leaving employee's salary. The advancing growth of technical industries, government plans to expand and develop new technical industries and global competition have added to the burden of recruiting and retaining skilled, experienced employees. Under these circumstances, organisations face a dire need to address employee retention. The urgency to address employee retention is further aggravated by increasing levels of employee attrition that have resulted in "extensive financial costs, disruption of co-workers, additional work-unit stress, reduction in quality of work-unit and diminishing ability to adapt to uncertain environments" (Mustapha et al, 2010). Often, offering higher salaries have been viewed as the mechanism to retain employees. This may not be true in many cases. It is not feasible to set a ceiling salary level and this option is not sustainable during recession. Industries highly dependent on resources whose costs fluctuate frequently are unable to continue offering higher monetary payouts. Higher financial payouts are also not a viable option in the long run especially in industries that face high fluctuating prices for their product. Alternate mechanisms of retention which are more sustainable have to be devised.

Porter and Steer's (1973) developed a theoretical framework about employee retention. The model illustrates that retention (dependent variable) is dependent upon extrinsic rewards (\$), advancement opportunities, constituent attachments, investments and non-work influences (independent variables). This framework was one of the first models that clearly explained the variables that may contribute to employee retention. The framework anchors five important variables that influence employee retention; many later studies have been developed using this framework (Price and Mueller, 1981; Nitardy, 2008). Porter and Steer's framework has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. The framework contains financial and non-financial independent variables. This study seeks to explore non-financial, sustainable variables of employee retention. An analysis of financial variables is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, adaptations have been made to the framework. Porter and Steer's (1973) framework has been used as a guide in developing the research framework for this study.

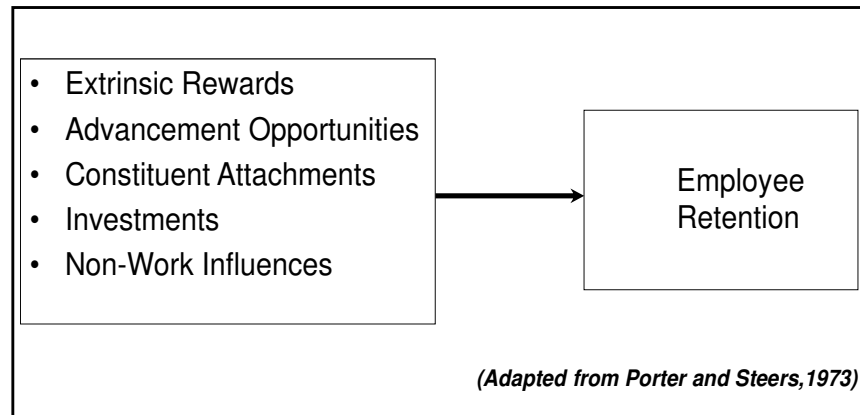


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to investigate variables that are sustainable, non-monetary mechanisms of employee retention. Five non-monetary variables namely supervisory support (SS), internal promotion (IP), career development (CD), personal values (PV) and employee commitment (EC) have been selected for further investigation to determine whether they significantly contribute to employee retention (ER) within exploration and production companies in the energy industry in Malaysia.

Good and able supervisors are extremely important in training and developing subordinates to execute work tasks. Employees blessed with good supervisory support are able to perform well and rise within the organisation (Rhoades et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002). The lack of good supervisory support is one of the major reasons for attrition (Maertz and Griffeth, 2004; Maertz et al, 2007). Often, subordinates cite supervisor-conflict or supervisor-problems as one of the main reasons for leaving an organisation (Lee, 2004; Abdullah, 2001). As such, this variable has been selected for further research on employee retention.

Promotion signifies that the organisation appreciates an employee's performance (Wayne et al, 1997). Internal promotion is a strong measure that fortifies organisational commitment for both employer and employees (Allen et al, 2003; Chang, 2005). Therefore, this variable has been selected for further research about employee retention.

Career development refers to career related development opportunities offered by the organisation to its employees. Statistical data indicates that career development and talent management may be used to achieve higher rates of retention (Oliver, 2001). Having a clear plan for development gives all employees the opportunity to advance their careers and realize their potential. Findings clearly show growth and development opportunities as a primary driver of retention (Bernthal and Wellins, 2006). Jamrog (2002) states that career development increases the chances of retention. In his research, he reveals that high pay may not keep them. Ultimately, they stay because they like their co-workers and are engaged and challenged by work that makes them better at what they do. Career development may significantly influence employee retention. This study seeks to examine career development on the subject of employee retention. Therefore, this variable has been selected for further research about employee retention.

The personal values of an employee have a significant impact on performance, productivity and decision-making with reference to continuity of employment. Values can be defined as desirable goals that guide people's lives. An employee's personal values reflect his perception towards the organisation and the likelihood of retention. The personal values of an employee should be carefully woven into the organisational fabric so as to inculcate positive work behaviour and retention. Personal values, specifically 'personal motivation' to remain in the organisation may be significantly related to employee retention.

Employee commitment is an important variable in the study of employee retention. Employee commitment is defined as "an individual attitude that reflects one's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation" (Steers, 1977). It explains the level of attachment an employee has towards the workplace. According to Meyer and Allen (1997), a committed employee is an employee who remains with the organisation through good and bad times, attends work regularly, protects company assets and shares organisational goals. Previous studies have shown that employees who are committed to the organisation are more willing to improve on performance (Porter, Crampton & Smith, 1976; Koch & Steers, 1978; Price & Mueller, 1981; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Benkhoff, 1997; Ngo and Tsang, 1998). Employee commitment influences positive work behaviour, higher attendance at work and encourages a better relationship between superiors and subordinates. This produces positive contribution to the overall development of the organisation (Fiorito et al, 2007). This has given rise to an imperative need to study whether employee commitment will have a significant relationship with employee retention in the energy industry in Malaysia.

Based on the review of literature, this study seeks to test the following hypotheses:

- H1: There is no significant relationship between supervisory support and employee retention.
- H2: There is no significant relationship between internal promotion and employee retention.
- H3: There is no significant relationship between career development and employee retention.
- H4: There is no significant relationship between personal values and employee retention.
- H5: There is no significant relationship between employee commitment and employee retention.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This is a quantitative study that analyses the nature of relationship that exists between supervisory support, internal promotion, career development, personal values, employee commitment and employee retention. The variables tested have been depicted in the research framework.

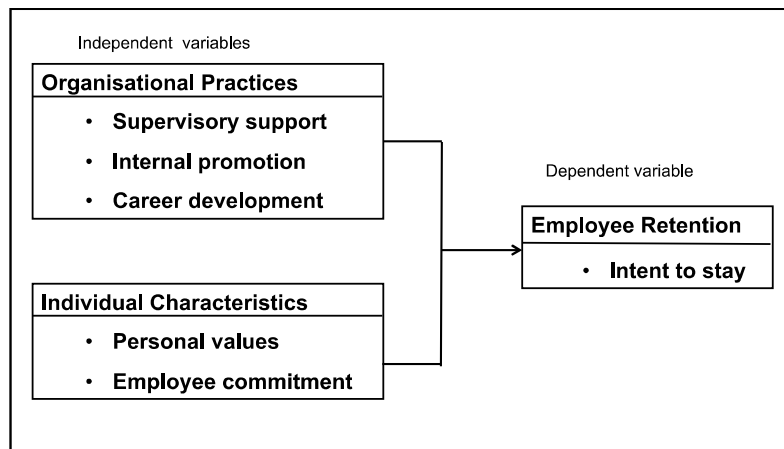


Figure 3: Research Framework

This research framework is derived from the Porter and Steers theoretical framework (1973). It has been adapted to include variables relevant to the energy industry in Malaysia, current economic times and technical employees involved in the study (knowledge intensive and capital intensive).

Data for this study was collected from operator companies engaged in upstream exploration and production work in the Klang valley. The target population for this study is 565 employees. A sample representative of this population was derived using the sampling technique by Cochran (1977). This resulted in a total of 400 respondents from exploration and production companies in the energy industry being selected as samples for this study. All the respondents of this study are technical employees from operator companies involved in upstream exploration and production work activities in the oil and gas industry in Malaysia. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique. This method was chosen because "... it assures that each element in the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample" (Zikmund, pp.384, 2003). It also assures a more accurate accumulation of respondents whose responses can be used to generalise the results to the population. In order to ensure homogeneity of sample, the sample was selected on the basis of similar work activity.

The sampling technique by Cochran (1977) is applied because this study uses continuous data so that parametric tests can be done. The data in this study is normally distributed. Therefore, parametric statistics can be used. Parametric tests are more powerful because they use more information from data collected. They are suitable for statistical analysis using tests centred around the mean such as Pearson correlation, independent t-test, one-way anova and multiple regression. Cochran's formula is suitable "...because sample sizes for continuous data are typically much smaller than sample sizes for categorical data" (Bartlett, Kotrlik and Higgins, pp. 48, 2001).

The research instrument comprises of a questionnaire and library research. The study uses self-administered questionnaire that were delivered to the prospective participants through a drop and pick up method. The questionnaires were delivered and later collected by the researcher. A total of 256 valid responses were collected representing a 64% rate of return. The questionnaire in this study used a 7 - point scale (1-7) and some open-ended questions. Items in the questionnaire have been adapted from the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weiss et al, 1967), Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979) and other relevant studies by Wayne, Shore and Liden (1997), Marimuthu (1998), Friedman and Greenhaus (2000), Lazarova (2004), Rethinam (2004) and Siron (2005).

Data gathered were initially analysed using exploratory data analysis. Exploratory data analysis (EDA) was carried out to gain a deeper understanding of data gathered. The purpose of EDA is to facilitate examining data for normality, linearity, extreme scores and outliers before further statistical analysis are performed.

This was followed by the use of SPSS for analysing descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression were used to analyse the results. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient (r) is calculated to analyse the relationship between dependent and independent variables. This correlation seeks to explain the relationship among variables in terms of direction, strength and magnitude. It addresses the first objective of the study which investigates the

nature of relationship between supervisory support, internal promotion, career development, personal values, and employee commitment and employee retention. It seeks to test the hypotheses presented (H1, H2, H3, H4, H5).

Multiple regression assesses the effect of several independent variables (also called predictor or explanatory variables) upon the dependent variable (hereby referred to as criterion variable). An analysis examining the relationship between the explanatory variables and the criterion variable is necessary to find out how much the former contributes to the existence of the latter and discover how the explanatory variables combined relate to the criterion variable.

This study seeks to analyse whether organisational practices (supervisory support, internal promotion, career development) and individual characteristics (personal values, employee commitment) have a significant impact on employee retention. The level of contribution that each individual explanatory variable has upon the criterion variable and the combined explanatory variable contribution towards the criterion variable can be determined by a multiple regression equation (R^2).

4. Findings and Discussion

The nature and strength of correlation between each independent variable and the dependent variable was analysed. This relates to the first objective of the study which is to determine the nature of relationship between supervisory support, internal promotion, career development, personal values, employee commitment and employee retention. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was calculated for this purpose. Cohen's (1988) guidelines on interpreting the strength of the relationship will be adopted.

There are five hypotheses in this study pertaining to the correlation between each independent variable and the dependent variable. The results indicate that the variable employee commitment ($r = .668$, $n=256$ and $p = .000$) has a very strong positive correlation towards employee retention. This is followed by internal promotion ($r = .586$, and $p = .000$) and employee retention that also have a strong positive correlation. The other variables supervisory support ($r = .525$, and $p = .000$), career development ($r = .570$, and $p = .000$.) and personal values ($r = .532$, and $p = .000$) have a moderate positive relationship with employee retention.

The second research objective aims to determine the contribution of the independent variables towards employee retention. Results from multiple regression indicate that employee commitment and internal promotion have significant contribution towards employee retention. The Adjusted R^2 value of 45% is adopted. Therefore it can be concluded that independent variables (supervisory support, internal promotion, career development, personal values, employee commitment) in this study explain 45% of variance in employee retention.

Model Summary ^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.679 ^a	.461	.450	6.462
a. Predictors: (Constant), Total EC, Total SS, Total PV, Total IP, Total CD				
b. Dependent Variable: Total ER				

Table 1: Multiple Regression Model Summary

The contributions of supervisory support, internal promotion, career development, personal values and employee commitment account for 45% of employee retention. Of these variables, employee commitment ($\beta=0.544$, $p=0.000$) and internal promotion ($\beta=0.214$, $p=0.033$) are significant contributors to employee retention. The variables supervisory support ($\beta=0.005$, $p=0.958$), career development ($\beta= -0.122$, $p=0.296$) and personal values ($\beta=0.073$, $p=0.318$) do not make any significant contribution towards employee retention because the p value is greater than 0.05. The results indicate that employee commitment is the strongest contributor in leading to employee retention. This is followed by internal promotion which is the second strongest contributor in leading to employee retention.

Further statistical analysis to investigate whether there are differences between organisational practices and individual characteristics towards employee retention provides the answer to the third objective of this study. For purposes of this analysis, the variables supervisory support, internal promotion and career development were grouped under organisational practices (OP). These variables are provided largely by the organisation to the technical employees. The variables personal values and employee commitment were grouped under individual characteristics (IC). These variables represent traits largely possessed by the technical employees. The independent variables have been grouped in this manner for two reasons. The researcher intended to find out whether there are differences between organisational practices and individual characteristics towards employee retention and if so the extent of differences. This discovery is crucial to develop proactive measures to enhance employee retention (steps to be developed at a later stage). If OP variables significantly influence employee retention, the organisation can develop and fortify these variables to attain higher levels of influence. The organisation has greater direct control over these variables. If IC variables significantly influence employee retention, then steps undertaken to improve employee retention have to focus on developing a suitable human capital and talent management framework. The organisation has to analyse matters in competency profiling, psychometric tests, improving recruitment and selection methods, enhancing employee work engagement and related areas when developing suitable retention measures. IC variables largely pertain to individual traits and the organisation has less direct control over these variables. Actions on the part of the organisation contribute to a lesser extent towards employee retention.

Model Summary^b				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.657 ^a	.432	.427	6.592
a. Predictors: (Constant), Total IC(Total PV+Total EC), Total OP(Total SS+Total IP+Total CD)				
b. Dependent Variable: Total ER				

Table 2: Multiple Regression Model Summary for the Components of Organisational Practices and Individual Characteristics

Variables	b	Beta	t	p
Total OP	0.141	0.162	1.878	0.062
Total IC	0.550	0.517	5.982	0.000
Constant	0.924		3.526	0.001

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results for the Components of Organisational Practices and Individual Characteristics

According to the results in Table 3, $R = 0.657$. $R^2 = 0.432$. The adjusted R^2 value is 0.427 or 42.7%. Hence 42.7% of the variance in employee retention can be explained by a combination of OP and IC. The multiple regression results for each component are presented in Table 2. A comparison of *Beta* and *p* values for each component reveals that IC makes a statistically significant contribution to employee retention. Variables within IC are better predictors of employee retention. The *p* value of OP is slightly above 0.05. The variables in OP contribute to a much lesser extent towards employee retention. It can be inferred from the analysis that though all variables in OP and IC have a strong positive relationship with employee retention, higher level analysis indicates that there are differences between OP and IC towards employee retention.

In answering the third research objective, individual characteristics (IC) as a whole, which represent traits largely possessed by the technical employees comprising personal values and employee commitment, are stronger contributors towards employee retention. Individually, personal values do not make any statistically significant contribution to employee retention. However, when grouped together with employee commitment as IC, this component holistically provides very significant contribution to employee retention. In order to enhance employee retention, IC ought to be studied in depth and improved. Actions on the part of the organisation (OP) contribute to a lesser extent towards employee retention.

5. Conclusion

Inferences drawn from this study clearly reveal that non-monetary aspects of organisational practices and individual characteristics can significantly contribute to employee retention within exploration and production companies in the energy industry in Malaysia. The results of this study confirm that organisational practices comprising the variables supervisory support, internal promotion, career development and individual characteristics encompassing personal values and employee commitment are positively correlated to employee retention. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of previous researchers on the subject of employee retention (Nitardy, 2008) in other countries. This provides strong ground for the results of this study to be generalised to the population.

Empirical evidence from this study suggests that employee commitment and internal promotion are strong contributors towards employee retention. Organisations wishing to enhance retention of employees should develop appropriate internal promotion policies and encourage greater employee commitment.

The success of steps taken by the organisation to achieve greater employee retention can only be possible if individual characteristics of employees are supportive. Individual characteristics have a stronger contribution towards employee retention (when compared to organisational practices). The technical employee has to feel he or she is equitably treated and valued by the employer in order to remain working for the long term.

The findings of this study are immensely useful to industry and society. The study demonstrates that monetary measures and financial payouts need not be regarded as the best methods of attaining employee retention in the long term. This study has identified non-monetary, sustainable methods of employee retention that can be utilized by human resource departments in exploration and production companies for human capital planning, training and development, career progression planning and ultimately employee retention for the long term. The findings are instrumental in developing strategies to restrict brain drain from national development. The Malaysian government has focused its efforts to reduce brain drain by offering attractive monetary measures. The findings of this study clearly provide an alternate non-monetary mechanism of employee retention in this country. The operational implementation of the findings reflects a more effective and efficient method of restricting brain drain.

Subsequently, this study serves as a guide to the Human Resources Ministry and other government bodies in creating a work environment that encourages employees to work for long term. It is recommended that government policy makers consider the findings of this study when formulating policies to restrict brain drain and achieve higher levels of employee retention (and talent management) in industry.

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