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Research Paper

Unraveling the Factors Contributing to Turnover Intentions Among Knowledge Workers: A Systematic Literature Review

Muksidah Pratiwi[1*], Zahrotur Rusyda Hinduan[2], Fitriani Yustikasari Lubis[3]
[1, 2, 3] Padjajaran University, Indonesia

Abstract

Knowledge workers turnover can negatively impact not only on work efficiency, organizational performance, work productivity. Turnover intention is a core antecedent of turnover. The aim of this research is to conduct a systematic review of the current literature, determine the factors that contribute to knowledge workers' turnover intention, and identify research gaps in order to suggest future directions and priorities for study. A systematic literature review was guided by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). 38 articles that meet the inclusion criteria were found after an electronic search for English research studies published between 2014 and April 2023 using Scopus, ScieneDirect, Emerald, and Wiley was carried out. The literature search and screening process resulted in thirty-eight studies that met the inclusion criteria and revealed knowledge workers' turnover intentions. Through a systematic review, 53 related factors contributing to workers' turnover intentions were identified and classified into 2 two categories (internal and external). Among the various factors mentioned above, this study found that internal factors (age, job satisfaction, motivation) and external factors (organizational commitment, leadership styles, and workload) were the most influential factors in knowledge workers' turnover intentions.

Keywords: *Turnover intention, intention to leave, knowledge worker, contributing factors, systematic review*

INTRODUCTION

Drucker (1992) characterizes knowledge workers as highly skilled individuals using formal education's theoretical and analytical knowledge to drive innovation, creating novel products or services and playing a pivotal role in organizational progress and development. The retention of knowledge workers is a critical concern for contemporary organizations, given their pivotal role in driving innovation and maintaining competitive advantage. The unique nature of retaining knowledge workers, distinct from managing traditional workers, poses challenges, given projections of a global shortage of 60 million knowledge workers by 2020 (Pobst, 2014).

Despite the significance of knowledge workers, organizations grapple with effective measures to address turnover (Onyeaku, 2020a). The turnover intention among knowledge workers is influenced by a many factors, including individual, organizational, and external factors. Employee turnover, a complex process, challenges organizations globally, necessitating effective human resource management, change implementation, and the maintenance of competitive advantage (Saoula *et al.*, 2019). When key and valuable employees leave an organization, it not only decreases not only impacts productivity, morale, and service quality but also imposes direct and indirect costs on the organization, including replacement costs, recruitment, training, and stress on remaining employees (Dess and Shaw, 2001).

Employee turnover presents a significant global challenge, particularly concerning knowledge workers. According to Onyeaku (2020b), organizations have long struggled to

implement workable strategies to lower knowledge worker turnover. However, the specific factors driving turnover intention in knowledge workers remain unclear. It is crucial, both theoretically and practically, to investigate these factors. Theoretical exploration, as suggested by Cascio (1984), deepens our understanding of how businesses manage human capital and underscores the importance of knowledgeable employees in organizational success.

From a practical standpoint, identifying these factors, as highlighted by Allen and Meyer (1990), is vital for developing effective retention strategies. Organizations can tailor initiatives to improve workplace culture, support career advancement, and enhance job satisfaction, thus reducing turnover intention among knowledge workers. Additionally, proactive talent management strategies, as demonstrated by Griffeth (2000) and Kogut and Zander (1992) not only lower recruitment costs but also foster innovation, stability, and knowledge sharing, ultimately enhancing an organization's long-term competitiveness. This systematic literature review aims to identify these factors to assist organizations and HR practitioners in mitigating turnover intention among knowledge workers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Turnover intention is the last step in a person's decision-making before leaving a job (Hom et. al, 1984). It means someone purposefully wants to quit their job in the company. According by Saridakis and Cooper (2016), before expressing turnover intention, employees go through steps like checking their current job, how happy they are with the company and the job, thinking about what might happen if they leave, looking at other options, and finally deciding. Hom et al. (2012) posit turnover intention as an individual's willful wish to formally resign. In essence, turnover intention signifies a conscious, deliberate desire to conclude one's current employment, serving as the ultimate decision in the cognitive disengagement process (Bothma and Roodt, 2012).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study follows a systematic review approach, employing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method. Unlike simple literature reviews, systematic reviews meticulously organize and evaluate existing evidence-based material through defined stages. We established eligibility criteria, selected information sources, identified relevant studies, collected data, and specified data items, adhering to these guidelines as depicted in Figure 1, outlining our systematic review process. This systematic literature review, focusing on turnover intention among knowledge workers, included studies published from 2014 to 2023. We utilized electronic databases (Scopus, ScienceDirect, Emerald, Wiley) and English-language search strings encompassing terms like "turnover intention," "intention to leave," "knowledge worker," and "gold-collar worker."

To ensure eligibility, we followed a structured four-step procedure involving identification, filtering, eligibility verification, and final inclusion. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established based on research topics, and after applying these criteria, we assessed the titles and abstracts of the remaining studies. Selected studies adhered to specific criteria: focusing on turnover intention as a dependent variable, assessing factors related to knowledge workers' turnover, being written in English, and having retrievable full text. Exclusions included studies lacking explanations of turnover antecedents and systematic literature reviews without relevant content on knowledge workers.

We conducted a thorough review of articles, commencing with thematic analysis to understand each article's objectives. We then assessed titles and abstracts against inclusion criteria, followed by a detailed examination of full-text articles. Data extraction was performed independently by researchers, encompassing author information, publication years, country of

origin, and potential predictors of turnover intention categorized into internal and external factors. Our screening process identified 38 relevant studies, and data from these were organized into a structured table (Table 1), including author details, publication year, country, research design, and factors contributing to knowledge workers' turnover intention.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 4,362 articles were initially identified from the database search (ScienceDirect = 844, Scopus = 438, Wiley = 2,455, Emerald = 625). After removing duplicate records, 3,820 articles underwent full-text review. Among the excluded 4,362 articles, 542 were screened based on title, abstract, and keywords, resulting in the elimination of 448 articles. Another 56 articles were excluded due to a lack of specific focus on knowledge workers. Ultimately, 38 studies were included in this research. No additional studies were identified after checking the references of the retrieved 38 articles. The study selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.
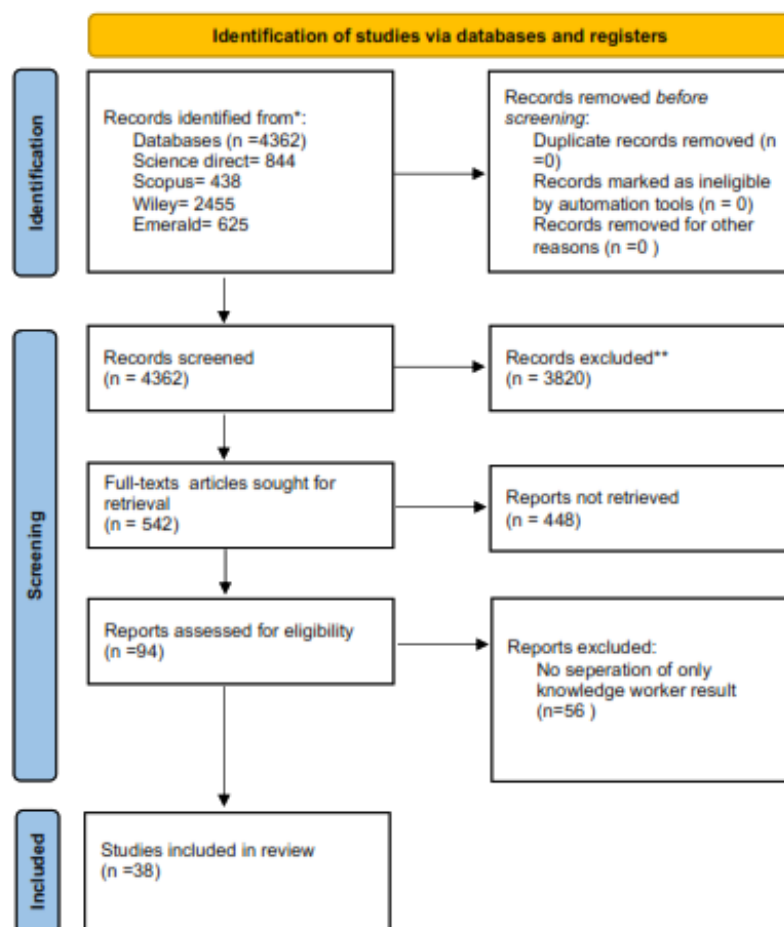

Figure 1. The study selection process

Turnover intention factors are classified into internal (demographic, personal, job-related) and external (working conditions, interpersonal relationships, organizational dynamics). This categorization is based on variable definitions and characteristics (Alshammari *et al.*, 2016; Kim and Kim, 2021).

Table 1. *Result of Systematic Literature Review*

Author, Year	Country	Method	Factors Contributing	
			Internal	**External**
Abid, Zahra and Ahmed (2016)	Pakistan	Quantitative	• Demographic (Age; Education; Gender; Organizational Tenure)	• Heedful Relating • Perceived Organizational Support
Abid, Zahra and Ahmed (2016)	Pakistan	Quantitative	• Demographic (Age; Education; Gender; Organizational Tenure)	• Heedful Relating • Perceived Organizational Support
Back et al. (2020)	South Korean	Quantitative	• Emotional Labor	
Cho and Lam (2021)	Hongkong	Quantitative	• Motivation (Intrisic motivation; Introjected regulation; External regulation)	
Dåderman and Basinska (2016)	Poland	Quantitative	• Perceived Job Demands (Quantitative Workload, Interpersonal Conflict at Work) • Engagement	
Degen et al. (2014)	Germany	Quantitative		• Working Condition • Training Conditions
Dill et al. (2016)	USA	Quantitative	• Age • Motivation	
Du et al. (2019)	Taiwan	Quantitative Cross-sectional study	-	• Perceived Investment Employee Development
Abd-Ellatif et al. (2021)	Egypt	Quantitative	• Fear of COVID-19 • Job Satisfaction	
Gaan and Shin (2022)	India	Quantitative	• Demographic (Age; Gender; Position Tenure)	• Resonant Leadership
Ghosh et al. (2019)	India	Quantitative		• Perceived Supervisor Support
Heritage, Gilbert and Roberts (2016)	Australia	Quantitative		• Job Embeddeness

Herman, Dearth-Wesley and Whitaker (2023)	United States	Quantitative Cross-sectional Study		• Work as a Calling
Holm, Jönsson and Muhonen (2023)	Sweden	Quantitative, Longidutinal Survey		• Witnessing Bullying • Bystander Role
Hong, Petsangsri and Cui (2021)	China	Quantitative	• Work Engagement • Positive Affect	
Ali Jadoo et al. (2015)	Iraq	Quantitative Cross-sectional Survey	• Demographic (Age; Gender; Marital Status) • Job Satisfaction	
Jena and Swain (2021)	India	Quantitative		• Workplace Incivility
Kaihlanen et al. (2020)	Finland	Quantitative	• Final Clinical Practicum Experience	
Klein et al. (2023)	United States	Quantitative	• Demographic (Gender;Age; Tenure Status) • Job Satisfaction	• Burnout
Kmieciak (2022)	Poland	Quantitative cross sectional study	• Affective Commitment	
Larkin (2015)	United State	Mixed Method (Quantitative and Qualitative Focus Group Interviews)	• Tenure • Job Satisfaction	• Organizational Commitment
Lo et al. (2023)	Taiwan	Quantitative	• Demographic (Age;gender; education;tenure; division, level) • Job satisfaction	• Emotional Blackmail
Mittal, Gupta and Mottiani (2022)	India	Quantitative		• Employee Brand Love
Nasurdin, Tan and Khan (2018)	Malaysia	Quantitative	• Organizational Tenure	• Organizational Commitment
Olckers and Enslin (2016)	South Africa	Quantitative		• Psychological Ownership
Räsänen et al. (2020)	Finland	Quantitative Longitudinal Survey	• Demographic (Gender; Tenure)	• Challenges of Interaction • Workload • School System • Lack of Commitment

Rasouli, Rashidi and Hamidi (2014)	Iran	Quantitative		• Trust in Management • Organizational Commitment
Salin and Notelaers (2017)	Finland	Quantitative	• Tenure	• Exposure to Bullying
Serenko et al. (2022)	Japan	Quantitative	• Job Satisfaction	
Shah and Jumani (2015)	Islamabad	Quantitative	• Job Satisfaction	
Silverman et al. (2022)	United States	Quantitative cross-sectional survey	• Moral Distress	• Ethical Climate
Uğural (2020)	Turkey	Quantitative	• Individual Self	• Relational Self
Wang et al. (2023)	China	Quantitative	• Surface Acting • Emotional Exhaustion	
Xiong, Wu and Sui (2023)	China		• Demographic (Age;Gender)	• Transformational Leadership • Individual-organization matching
Yamaguchi et al. (2016)	Japan	Quantitative, Cross-Sectional Survey		• Job Control • Work family Culture • Family Stress • Work-Family Conflict
Yang, Han and Li (2021)	China	Quantitative	• Demographic (Age; Tenure; Education) • Self-occupation stereotypes	
Yücel (2021)	Turkey	Quantitative	• Demographic (Age; Gender; Marital Status; Tenure)	• Transformational Leadership • Employee Performance
Zagladi et al. (2015)	Indonesia	Quantitative		• Organizational Justice
Zaheer et al. (2022)	Pakistan	Quantitative	• Demographic (Gender) • Perceived Work Stress • Work Satisfaction	

Based on an analysis of 38 papers, turnover intention among knowledge workers is influenced by a combination of 20 internal factors and 33 external factors. Internal factors encompass organizational tenure, age, gender, education level, marital status, job satisfaction, and

motivation. External factors include organizational commitment, workload, transformational leadership, and resonant leadership. Demographic factors, particularly age, have a significant association with turnover intention. Steinmetz et al.,(2014) noted younger employees tend to leave for career growth when opportunities are limited. In contrast, Yeh et al., (2010) found older employees, having faced challenges, show lower turnover intentions.

Job satisfaction emerges as a central internal factor impacting knowledge workers' turnover intention. According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction is a positive emotional state reflecting an affective response to the work situation. Unsatisfied employees leave, taking valuable knowledge. Failure to meet new hires' needs creates operational instability and a cycle of turnover (Alkahtani, 2015). Motivation is another internal factor significantly contributing to turnover intention. Intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and values, correlates with lower turnover intentions (Vallerand, 1992). Employees with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are likely to experience reduced turnover intention.

External factors, such as organizational commitment, leadership styles, and workload, also play crucial roles. Statistically, organizational commitment demonstrates a negative correlation with turnover intentions. This aligns with Guzeller and Celiker (2020) meta-analysis, affirming that emotionally committed individuals exhibit lower turnover intentions in their institutions. Workload, as an external factor, significantly contributes to turnover intention. According to Van Droogenbroeck and Spruyt (2016) research, a high workload serves as a significant stress factor, depleting emotional resources and posing challenges for employees to sustain their careers until retirement.

Leadership styles also correlate with turnover intention. Leadership style, as highlighted by Brohi et al. (2018), influences employee job satisfaction, impacting turnover intention. Choosing the right kind of leadership is crucial for building and sustaining a stable and effective workforce. Leaders use their skills to work with people, aiming to achieve the best results for the organization with minimal resources (Brohi et al., 2018).

In summary, age, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, workload, and leadership styles are recurrently associated with turnover intention among knowledge workers. Factors like job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation, and work engagement contribute to reducing turnover intention, while workload tends to increase it. While we have conducted a thorough review of the literature on knowledge worker turnover intentions, we note that with the increasing number of studies on this topic, we cannot guarantee to include all references in this area. Furthermore, only papers written in English were considered. Thus, papers in other languages were not included in this systematic review, which is one of the limitations of this study.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This comprehensive review synthesized findings from 38 studies on knowledge workers' turnover. It revealed a complex interplay of internal and external factors influencing turnover intentions. Noteworthy contributors include demographics, job satisfaction, motivation, organizational commitment, leadership styles, and workload. These insights can aid organizations in formulating strategies to mitigate turnover intentions among knowledge workers. The results of this study may be useful for companies or organizations that want to reduce the turnover of knowledge workers. Also, this literature review can be a reference for future empirical research interested in the topic of turnover conducted systematically and supporting theory development.

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