

The Relationship between Talent Management and Employee Retention among Architectural Employees in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between talent management (TM) and employee retention (ER) among private architectural design employees in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq. The study's objectives were to identify the prevalence of TM practices and the level of ER within private architectural firms in the city. Primary data were collected from 73 architectural design employees via the distribution of questionnaires using simple random sampling. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and Pearson's Correlation. The results indicated a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between talent management and employee retention. This finding confirms that the effective implementation of TM practices significantly influences the retention levels of valuable architectural employees.

Keywords: Talent Management, Employee Retention, Sulaymaniyah

Introduction

Talent management (TM), as a human resource management process, has evolved significantly since its emergence in the late 1990s, when its primary impetus was described as 'The War for Talent' (Michaels et al., 2001). Today, TM has become an integral and strategic component of Human Resource Management (HRM). TM is formally defined as a comprehensive and interrelated set of organizational tasks, including identifying, selecting,

developing, and retaining the finest employees (Thunnissen et al., 2013). Contemporary TM focuses on retaining valuable employees by providing a well-rounded work environment, emphasizing talent development and attraction through enhanced recruitment, selection, and hiring processes, ultimately serving the core function of improving employee retention (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012).

In the current era of globalization, employees across all industries are acutely aware of their value to organizational success. For instance, research suggests that 80% of employees actively seek a better work environment during job hunting (Guchait & Cho, 2010). Architectural design companies, in particular, rely heavily on the creativity and unique value of their highly skilled employees. As Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, experiences rapid growth in architectural design and real estate, the rising number of firms and the threat of freelancing necessitate the consistent application of TM practices. By utilizing TM processes, such as talent development and attraction, these design firms can retain their highly talented employees as a crucial goal for gaining a competitive advantage within saturated markets and positioning the organization for long-term success (Cascio, 2014).

Further emphasizing retention, Nazia and Begum (2013) highlight the importance of the three R's (reward, recognition, and respect) in improving employee efficiency, reducing absenteeism, and increasing overall earnings. However, many newly founded design companies in the region have yet to establish fully equipped HR departments run by qualified practitioners, which can severely impact retention rates. Therefore, it is posited that integrating employee experience with the organization's environment, technology, and culture through effective TM is essential to producing sustainable employee retention that benefits all stakeholders (Morgan, 2017). This study thus aims to investigate and examine the relationship between talent management and employee retention among employees working within architectural firms in Sulaymaniyah.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold: to identify the level of talent management practices and employee retention, and to examine the relationship between these two variables among private architectural employees in Sulaymaniyah.

Research Objectives

- i. To identify the level of talent management practices among private architectural firms in Sulaymaniyah.
- ii. To identify the level of employee retention among private architectural employees in Sulaymaniyah.
- iii. To examine the relationship between talent management and employee retention among private architectural firms in Sulaymaniyah.

Literature Review

This section reviews the relevant studies and theoretical concepts pertaining to the core variables of the study: talent management and employee retention. The synthesis of theories and empirical findings aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of the problem statement and leads to the conceptual framework presented at the end of this section.

Talent Management (TM)

The concept of talent management originated in the late 1990s, driven by what was termed 'The War for Talent' (Michaels et al., 2001). This dynamic suggested that companies engaged in competitive hiring practices to secure the most qualified employees, often resulting in mutually detrimental turnover rates. Today, global HR practitioners utilize TM not only for strategic decision-making but also as a tactical element for achieving competitive advantage.

TM is defined as a complete and interrelated set of organizational tasks encompassing identifying, selecting, developing, and retaining the finest employees (Thunnisen et al., 2013). Through talent development and talent attraction, employees become engaged, motivated, and skilled, which, in turn, helps the organization achieve its strategic goals. TM is also understood as “a set of sustainable organizational strategies that use human capital to the competitive advantage of the organization...” (Claus, 2013). Consequently, a key trend in TM is retaining valuable employees by providing a supportive work environment that improves employee retention.

The core elements of TM include recruiting, which involves attracting talent, and development, which involves fostering talent (Rabbi et al., 2015; Songa & Oloko, 2016). Talent attraction is a management strategy used to ensure a correct person-job fit (Songa & Oloko, 2016). Talent development is defined as the process of altering a company, its employees, and stakeholders through planned learning to attain and retain competitiveness by improving employees' skills and attitudes (Rabbi et al., 2015).

This study utilizes the Human Capital Theory (HCT), founded by Gary Becker in 1964, to better understand TM. HCT is a framework used to analyze human capital rather than solely a hypothesis about motivation (Becker, 1964). Human capital refers to an employee's economic value derived from their skills and knowledge (Kenton, 2020). The theory emphasizes the significance of employee skills, ability, and knowledge, arguing that human capital is maximized when organizations focus on employee education and training to gain a competitive advantage (Bibi, 2018). As Figure 3.1 illustrates, human capital, an intangible asset, is developed through formal education, specific training, and vocational qualifications, yielding positive effects for both the organization and the individual (Reed & Wolniak, 2005).

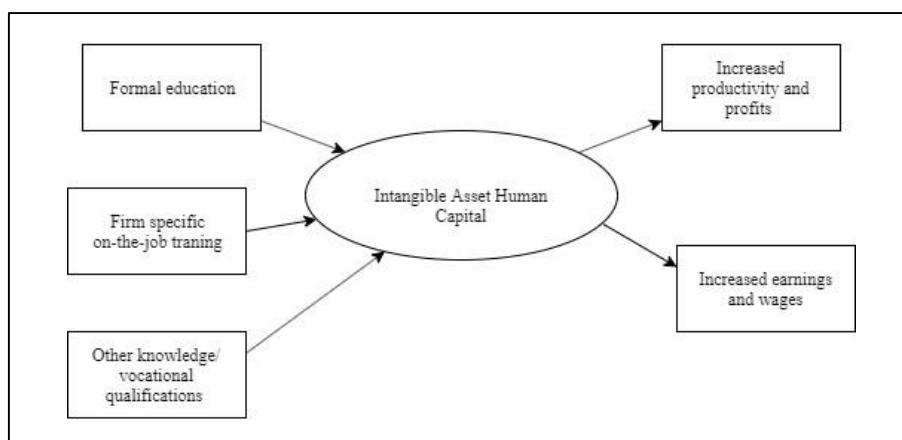


Figure 3.1 Components of Human Capital Theory

Source: Reed and Wolniak, (2005)

Employee Retention (ER)

Employee retention (ER) is defined as the process by which personnel are motivated to remain with an organization for an extended period (Bidisha, 2013). It specifically describes an organization's capacity to prevent voluntary or involuntary employee turnover within a given period.

A significant theoretical framework for ER is the Zinger Model, developed by David Zinger. This model conceptualizes ER as the art and science of involving people in genuine and acknowledged relationships concerning strategy, roles, performance, organization, communication, and customer relations. The model, as referenced by Sultana Nazia & Bushra Begum (2013) (Figure 3.2), shows that ER is aimed at achieving organizational goals and necessitates powerful recognition. According to the model, organizations must avoid excessive workload while promoting results, connections, and engagement, as performance directly reflects the organization's ability to engage its workforce. Furthermore, the model stresses that employees should receive both personal and professional development (courses and learning) throughout their tenure to improve their skills, value, and visibility.

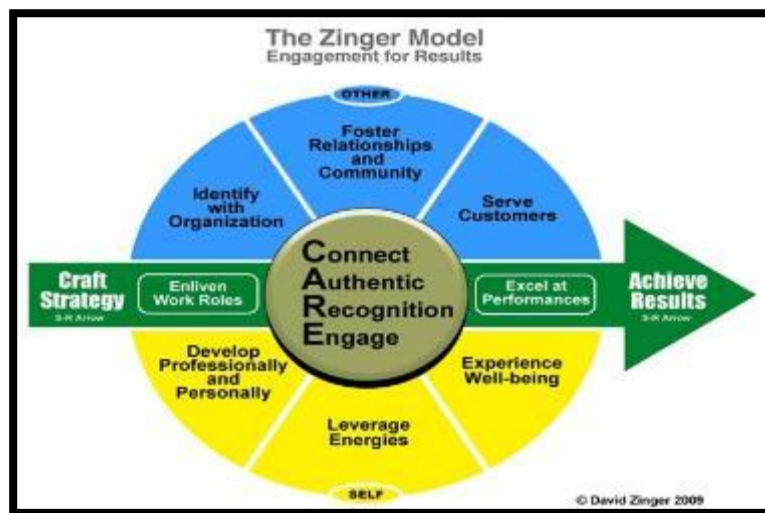


Figure 3.2 Zinger Model

Source: Sultana Nazia & Bushra Begum (2013)

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, founded by Hobfoll (1989), is a stress theory that explains the human drive to obtain and protect resources. COR Theory is particularly relevant to explaining ER; when an employee exits, they take embedded knowledge that is difficult to replace (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012). Hobfoll (1989) posited that individuals feel a basic motivation to obtain and protect personal and social resources—such as time, energy, money, and most importantly, job security—and that stress is experienced when a threat to these resources is perceived. This theory helps explain the motivations that compel an employee to stay within an organization, particularly one that provides a stable environment.

Relationship between TM and Employee Retention

Numerous global studies have explored the relationship between TM and ER. Despite extensive research, the field still warrants further investigation, as findings can be speculative without total control over independent factors (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Research on the

Middle East indicates that effective management of human capital for the long term has historically been challenging, with TM being largely ignored by corporations and governments until recently (Ali, 2011). Organizations have now realized that economic growth alone does not equate to human capital development (Cappelli, 2008). As the demand for qualified employees continues to grow, drawbacks will occur if proper TM and retention strategies are not implemented—a context directly applicable to Iraq.

The relationship between TM and ER is strongly supported empirically. Lalitha (2012) identified ER as one of HR's biggest contemporary challenges. Similarly, Vijay Kumar et al. (2012) investigated the Indian software industry and concluded that the HR department plays a critical role in developing policies and strategies that allow an organization to retain key employees. Furthermore, Strydom, Shultz, and Bezuidenhat (2014) concluded from a study in South Africa that TM practices directly affect retention rates. Employees who perceive their organizations as having successful TM procedures, such as talent attraction through reputation and talent development through courses and training, exhibit greater motivation, engagement, and dedication, increasing their career advancement opportunities and commitment to their current employment.

TM is thus considered a primary management tool for the 21st century, as human capital is now valued more highly than tangible assets like land and capital (Cappelli, 2008). While the value of TM is clear, its practical application remains understudied (Thunnissen, 2016), particularly in cross-country comparisons (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019). The scholarly consensus is that an empirical study on the link between TM and HRM is necessary, given that the field is relatively new and a universal definition for talent and TM remains evolving (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunissen, 2016). Therefore, there is a consequential need to investigate the relationship between TM and retention, which is conceptually framed in Figure 3.3.

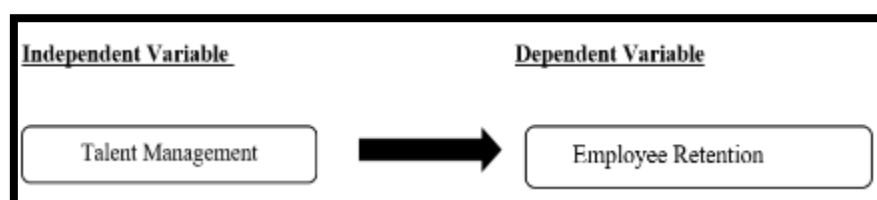


Figure 3.3: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The methodology employed for this study was a quantitative, cross-sectional design aimed at investigating the relationship between talent management and employee retention. The target population was comprised of 122 local private architectural employees in the city of Sulaymaniyah, also referred to as Sulaymaniyah. A sample size of 92 private architectural employees was calculated using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) determination method. Simple random sampling was the technique used to select the participants. Data collection was executed in person through the 'pencil and paper method' of distributing and administering questionnaires. While questionnaires were distributed to 89 architectural design employees, 86 were returned, and ultimately, 73 accepted questionnaires were used for the final analysis, as many had unanswered questions, leading to missing values.

The instruments utilized for both independent and dependent variables were adapted from a study by El Dahshan, Keshk, and Doorgham (2018). The independent variable, Talent Management (TM), measured the extent to which employees perceived they were attracted to their organization and their perception of whether skill development practices were implemented. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items categorized into two dimensions: talent development and talent attraction, with ten items for each. A five-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used for scoring respondents' TM perceptions. The reliability test for TM yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.875, which Sekaran & Bougie (2013) considered a 'very good' level.

The dependent variable, Employee Retention (ER), measured the organizational context of employees choosing to stay within an organization. The retention questionnaire had a total of 11 items and covered four dimensions: salaries and benefits (3 items), employee satisfaction (3 items), workload (3 items), and opportunities to learn (2 items). Respondents rated their level of satisfaction with each statement using a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 5 (highly agree). The reliability test for ER showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.736, which was deemed a 'good' level. Finally, descriptive statistics (mean score) and correlation analysis were conducted to address the research objectives.

Research Findings

The research findings addressed the descriptive statistics of the variables and the correlational relationship that existed between talent management and employee retention.

Level of Talent Management (TM)

The overall level of Talent Management (TM) practices among the architectural firms surveyed in Sulaymaniyah was determined to be high, reporting a mean score of 3.71. This classification was consistent with the high-level criteria established by Zikmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffin (2013). Examination of the individual items within the dimension revealed that the highest mean score was 4.14, corresponding to the statement that questioned whether the organization monitored employee performance and provided advice. Conversely, the lowest mean score was 2.88 (a moderate level), which related to the objective identification of employee training needs.

Level of Employee Retention (ER)

The overall level of Employee Retention (ER) among the architectural employees in Sulaymaniyah was characterized as moderate, with a mean score of 3.54. Analysis of the constituent items showed that the highest mean score was 3.97, corresponding to the item that assessed the level of engagement between workers and their jobs within the organization. The item with the lowest score, 2.93 (a moderate level), pertained to the competitiveness of the organization's salaries and benefits package.

Relationship between Talent Management and Employee Retention

Correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant and positive relationship between talent management and employee retention. The Pearson's correlation coefficient was $r=0.695$, with a significance level of $p<0.001$. As per the guidelines established by Pallant (2013), this coefficient indicated a strong relationship between the implementation of talent

management practices and the resultant rate of employee retention within the architectural firms examined.

Table 5.1

Pearson's Correlation

Talent Management	Employee Retention	
	r	p
	0.695**	<0.001

*Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed): n=73

Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations*Discussion on the Level of Talent Management (TM)*

The primary objective of this research was to identify the prevalence of Talent Management (TM) practices within the surveyed architectural firms in Sulaymaniyah/Sulaymaniyah. The analysis revealed that the overall level of TM practices was high, consistent with the high-level classification established by Zikmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffin (2013). This finding suggested that TM procedures in the architectural sector were maturing, and employees generally held a favourable perception of these practices. This result indicated that TM was an increasingly visible phenomenon in the region, despite the limited extant literature focusing on talent philosophies and their application in private enterprises within emerging economies, such as the Arab Middle East.

Specifically, the high mean score recorded for the item related to performance monitoring and the provision of advisory support suggested that employees valued organizations that actively practiced talent development through performance feedback. This aligns with scholarly assertions that knowledge-based talent development goals must be congruent with a company's strategic direction (Liu, 2021). Furthermore, the data indicated a strong preference among employees to affiliate with organizations that offered career progression opportunities.

Conversely, the study revealed a moderate level of allocation of special budgets for training and development. This finding contrasted with the overall high TM mean and suggested that employees were cognizant that their organizations were not actively setting aside dedicated funds for development. This discrepancy could be attributed to financial constraints, particularly given the economic context of small-scale architectural firms and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the high mean score for organizational reputation as a talent attractor demonstrated the importance of organizational attractiveness in recruitment, as it positively aligned with employee attitudes and behaviour (Gomes & Neves, 2010). The importance employees placed on TM practices for recruitment and selection aligned with the tenets of the Human Capital Theory.

Discussion on the Level of Employee Retention (ER)

The analysis for the second objective concluded that the overall level of Employee Retention (ER) among architectural employees in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, was moderate. This outcome could be explained by a range of internal and external factors. The Zinger Model suggests that providing training and courses assists individuals in improving their abilities and involvement, thereby contributing to retention. The high scores found for items related to providing

learning opportunities supported the literature asserting that employees remain longer and exhibit greater loyalty when the workplace offers career prospects (Mehta, Kurbetti, & Dhankhar, 2014).

Despite the high levels of engagement found between workers and their jobs, the overall retention level remained moderate, suggesting that engagement alone was insufficient to achieve high ER. Similarly, the moderate level of workload was identified as a partial factor. Externally, the moderate retention level was partially attributed to the region's economic context. The World Bank (2022) indicated that job creation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area remained limited, leading to job scarcity. This external pressure suggested that employees could not afford to leave organizations, thus influencing the moderate retention rate. Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resource Theory (COR) provided insight, positing that economic instability acted as an external threat against which employees sought to protect resources like job security. Furthermore, the moderate retention level could also stem from the generational makeup of the field, as Millennials and Generation Y are known to seek significant financial incentives and work-life balance (Thompson, 2011).

Discussion on the Relationship between TM and ER

The third objective was to examine the relationship between TM and employee retention. The findings exhibited a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation ($r=0.695$, $p<0.001$) between the two variables. This demonstrated that ER increased when TM practices were implemented to develop and attract competent employees. The interdependence suggested that changes in these variables could lead to corresponding changes in human resource retention, underscoring the necessity for managerial emphasis on retaining talented personnel (Kohestany & Yaghoubi, 2017). Firms that focused on attracting and retaining the best employees gained a competitive advantage and a reputation as "talent generators" (Al-Debi & Al-waely, 2015). This relationship aligns with the literature suggesting that TM strategies, such as training and mentoring, enhance the retention of talented employees (Glaister et al., 2018).

Limitations and Recommendations

The study faced several methodological limitations. Firstly, the sample size was restricted due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on service industries, which subsequently affected the approval of data collection procedures by some companies. Secondly, the constrained manner in which the data was collected imposed restrictions that limited the ability to conduct a more thorough and complex analysis. Based on these limitations and the core findings, several recommendations were proposed. It was recommended that private architectural firms in Sulaymaniyah enhance existing TM practices to ensure that employees remain for genuine reasons related to career path advancement, rather than as a consequence of regional job scarcity. Furthermore, due to the small sample size and localized data, it was recommended that future research replicate this study across a wider geographic scope in Iraq and with more resources to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Future researchers could also examine the comparisons between the demands and expectations of the different generations within the architectural workplace, given the industry's appeal to Millennials and Generation Z. Finally, since the employee retention questionnaire was brief, it was recommended that future studies expand the range of questions covering employee retention for a more comprehensive assessment of the construct.

Conclusion

The study successfully identified that a high level of TM practices existed concurrently with a moderate level of ER among private architectural firms in Sulaymaniyah. Critically, the data indicated a statistically significant and positive relationship between TM and ER. This confirmed that both talent development and talent attraction were pivotal factors influencing an employee's decision to stay. Given the limited scholarly output concerning TM and ER within the Middle East, the findings underscore the need for further exploration of these variables in Iraq. In conclusion, a positive and significant relationship was established between TM and employee retention among the private architectural employees of Sulaymaniyah.

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