

## Extending the Chain of Relationships between Organizational Trust and Intention to Remain, among Self-initiated Academic Expatriate: A Conceptual Model

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i9/4702>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i9/4702

*Published Date:* 13 October 2018

### Abstract

Research on self-initiated expatriates infrequently pays attention to the potential gap between the trust organisations seeks to establish, and employees' intention to remain. Understanding this situation might help in gaining better perspective on how a university may attempt to boost the intention to remain capabilities for the retention of academic expatriates. A model is proposed for the purpose of identifying the critical antecedents of self-initiated academic expatriates. The model predicts that organizational trust is a predictor of intention to remain. In this paper, it is asserted that the success of the expatriation process depends not only on the self-initiated academic expatriate's competencies and skills, but also on organizational trust during the process of carrying out their assignments. The paper is proposing the Social Exchange Theory as a linkage between trust and intention to remain to explain the reciprocity as a result of exchange relationship between the higher education institutions and self-initiated academic expatriates. Upon model validation, the paper could offer practical interventions for human resource practitioners and the management to assist the recruiting universities towards managing knowledge transfer involving self-initiated academic expatriates in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Organizational Trust, Intention to Remain, International Assignment, Self-Initiated Academic Expatriates, Organizational Expatriate

### Introduction

Academics who seek employment beyond their national borders may face challenges beyond those experienced by academics who never "leave home" for work (Basit & Duygulu, 2018). Yet, in an era of increasing globalisation, particularly in the higher education sector, this is a phenomenon experienced by more and more academics worldwide described in this research as self-initiated academic expatriates (Zeffane & Melhem, 2017).

Expatriates are known as individuals who reside in another country in order to perform an international task or assignment (Srivastava & Panday, 2012; Doherty, Richardson & Thorn, 2013) which falls into two types, organizational expatriations (OEs) assigned by multinational companies (MNC) to work abroad (Sri Ramalu, 2010); and individual-initiated movement to take up international assignments on their own, known as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) (Isakovic & Forseth Whitman, 2013; Doherty et al., 2013). There are approximately 50.5 million of expatriates (both the OEs and SIEs) around the world and the growth of the total number of expatriates is expected to reach 87.5 million by 2021 (Finaccord, 2018).

Most literatures are focusing on organizational expatriation (OEs); those who are ordered and financed by the organization they work with, to foreign post (Sri Ramalu, Che Rose, Uli & Kumar, 2012). However, there are still inadequate studies done on self-initiated expatriation (Abdel-Rahman, Sri Ramalu & Subramaniam, 2017). Self-initiated expatriation represents individual's mobility to move through their own agency (rather than through an organizationally-assigned expatriation) to another country for an undetermined duration (Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). They are equipped with their own competence and proficiency to work in diverse industries and conditions (Al Shammari, 2013). While expatriation is studied commonly among OEs and traditional sectors such as financial services, manufacturing and service sector, the education sector has witnessed rather greater effect of globalization in terms of expatriate employment. Most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the present days contemplating internationalisation as one of their long term objectives. So do the requirements by ranking institutions which include internationalisation as a criteria for ranking universities (Trembath, 2016). The internationalization of education and greater international presence among Higher Education Institutions, further fuelled the demand for self-initiated academic expatriates (Lewis & Altbach, 1996; Altbach & Knight, 2007).

This is to serve as a stimulus for enhancement through interaction, experience and exposure for students from local HEIs into the global sphere (MOHE, 2012) as Malaysia is of no exception in this scenario and has liberalized its higher education system to be more open and internationalized in achieving Mission 2020. Our HEIs aim to achieve 15 percent target for international staff recruitment by 2020, under the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (2007-2020) (MOHE 2011). To serve this competitive yet promising market, the HEIs are aggressively recruiting academic expertise, worldwide; and greater numbers of academic expatriates are recruited outside their home country of origin (Lewis et al., 1996; Tietze & Dick, 2009). The growing number of international mobility of academic expatriation will raise the issue of managing SIEs which becomes more complex and challenging. Due to significance importance of this internationalization, it is necessary for the Higher Education Institutions to retain the self-initiated academic expatriate to continuously serve in the universities (Zeffane et al., 2017). It is believed that strongly trust in organization becomes a vital important factor to motivate ones to remain longer.

Recent development in the realm of organizational sciences reflect on the importance of trust relationships for sustaining intention to remain (Li, Kim & Zhao, 2017). Therefore, the issues of organizational trust have become increasingly central to the study of organizations in the domain of political sciences, policy studies, law, organizational behaviour, organizational psychology and economics. Trust is important because of the strong desire to understand how to create effective co-operation within organizations (Zeffane et al., 2017). Hassan, Toylan, Semercioz & Aksel (2012) discussed the consequences of initiating and preserving trust which resulted in shaping business to business and interpersonal relations. Employee

who do not trust their management and organization are less likely to be committed and effective (Tlaiss & Elamin, 2015).

Several studies have found high indications of intention to leave amongst self-initiated expatriates (Schoepp & Forstenlechner, 2011; Romanowski & Nasser, 2014). Both of these factors have been attributed to different forms of dissatisfaction among expatriates (Leung, Liang & Chan, 2016). The organizational and human costs related to expatriate failure (in terms of both, reduced effectiveness and turnover) have been shown to be enormous (Selmer & Luring, 2011; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014). In a study of the effects of expatriate's intention to remain on organizational trust, Gillespie, Dietz and Lockey (2014) demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between organizational trust and intention to remain. This is why it is critical for universities to reduce high turnover of their expatriate academic workforces.

Research has suggested that such high levels of turnover are potentially avoidable, and that universities can take steps towards mitigation, for example by taking steps that leads to increased organizational citizenship behaviour as well as increased work performance of academic expatriates.

## **Literature Review**

### **Intention to Remain**

Intention to remain is described here as the sentiments, judgements and feelings of employees regarding their willingness to stay in their present organization (Tourangeau et al., 2014). Research carried out by previous scholars has revealed that intention to remain had the prospect to decreasing the amount of cost to be spent on the engagement of new staff. It is said that it is members of staff who display a greater level of intention to remain are the ones who are more successful and are also likely to shoot their careers within their current organization and subsequently, in contributing their overall efforts to their organizations (Harun, Asiah, Shahid, & Othman, 2016). In a study that employed 13,000 Canadian employees, it was revealed that employees who indicate the desire to stay in their current place of work were more satisfied with their work. Research has also revealed that the lack of intention to remain negatively impacts on work confidence and working motivation of employees which can lead to absent-mindedness or leaving. Intention to remain carries the meaning of employee's commitment level and the readiness to stay hired in the organization besides the likelihood of an action to take place regarding desire to stay in the organization (Womack, Leuty, Bullock-Yowell, & Mandracchia, 2018). It is the propensity to leave and acts as vital factor of turnover (Khoele & Daya, 2014). Psychologically, employee will opt to remain in or quit from their employing organization (Schwepker, 2001). However, organization has to bear the cost of new recruitment if little concern is given on intention to remain rather than employee's turnover (Dalessio, Silverman & Shuck, 1986). Nonetheless, most organizations are putting effort to minimize turnover in a manner to retain the key competence (Govaerts, Kyndt, Dochy & Baert, 2011). Dissatisfied individuals will hardly stay longer in the organization which eventually cause them not to remain (Jung & Yoon, 2015).

### **Organizational Trust**

Events in recent years has suggested that trust has transformed to become a very crucial subject among academics and in a variety of social science specializations such as management, sociology, psychology, and economics (Mayer et al., 1995; Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Schoorman, Mayer & Davis, 2007; Colquitt, Scott &

LePine, 2007). Trust as an idea has a lot to do with individual ascriptions regarding other employee's intents and purposes which reveals their behaviour. Unambiguously, trust involves "positive expectations about others." These ascriptions are swayed by broad-spectrum opinions and expectations of individuals about the treatment they will receive from others (Mayer et al., 1995). Numerous studies in the past, revealed that trust is intensely associated with several employee attitudes, including intention to remain (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Brasheara, Manolis & Brooks, 2005; Mulki, Jaramillo & Locander, 2008; McKnight, Phillips & Hardgrave, 2009; DeConinck, 2011; Harhara, Singh & Hussain, 2015). These associations have been discovered to be relevant to both private and public sectors organizations (Balkan, Serin & Soran, 2014; Ertürk, 2014). The reasoning behind these associations is that employees experience high trust when they are more likely to feel safe and comfortable in their job which makes them less inclined to want to leave. At the same time, when distrust is shown to them, the tendency is that they would become worried and uncomfortable in their job and as a result would prefer to quit the job. Dirks et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis study which revealed that trust remains a key factor in determining employee intention to remain. Similarly, a study of trust was conducted on the Australian context; the findings by Ferrer, Connell and Travaglione (2005) showed that workfellow's trust was a significant predictor of intention to remain.

Costigan, Insinga and Berman (2012) conducted a study in four countries and the result showed that employees' trust of their supervisor was a significant predictor of intention to remain. Similarly, in a study conducted by Mulki et al. (2013) among 344 salespeople, trust was discovered to be significant to intention to remain. Several previous reports have established that there is low trust among public sector employees (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; Top, Akdere & Tarcan, 2015). In a comparative study of public and private sector employees in India, it was also discovered that the trust level among employees who work in the private sector turned out to be higher than those of their counterparts in the public sector (Shahnawaz & Goswami, 2011). The revelations from a recently conducted comparative study in Turkey also showed that the trust levels was higher among private sector employees than those of employees from the public sector (Top et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, earlier mentioned considerations do not have much influence on public sector organizations in the Malaysian context. In that context, public employees seem to be relatively more loyal and more trusting of their organization and its management (Al-Ali, 2008). For instance, in the study of knowledge sharing in Malaysia, Sandhu, Jain and Ahmad (2011) found the level of trust to be very high among employee in the public sector.

### **Intention to Remain and Organizational Trust**

Organizational trust is found to be associated with intention to remain (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2016) where the presence of trust in leaders will discourage subordinates intention to leave the organization. Most organizations are focusing on why employee tend to quit. Thirapatsakun, Kuntonbutr & Mechinda (2014) argued that trust and organizational commitment should be increased in order to encourage intention to remain among employees. Regardless of any circumstances which might happen to a country's economy, organizations still have to remain the key competent, in achieving effectiveness (Thirapatsakun et al., 2014). In ensuring a conducive working environment, members in an organization must work together, mutually and effectively by displaying interpersonal trust

as a key determinant factor for the favourable outcomes (Ozturk, Hancer & Wang, 2014). Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) put forward the idea of social exchange between persons to reciprocate over time. In this case, mutual trust between employee and the organization become significant important so that these people will be more concern and highly productive (Goodwin, Groth & Frenkel, 2011), and ultimately remain to serve longer (Yuan, Yu, Lee & Ning, 2014). As suggested by Robinson (1996), breach of trust will cause negative impact on employee's intention to remain in the organization. Ozturk et al. (2014) conducted a survey on hotel employees and found that interpersonal trust (affective and cognitive trust) can boost their intention to remain. Employee who feel trusted will be more committed and work harder, at the end will remain longer working at the current workplace (Mustapha, Ahmad, Uli & Idris, 2010). Soomro, Halepoto & Memon (2015) discovered that high level of trust will affect productivity in a way that it increases the speed of production, boost performance and ultimately lower turnover cost. Khan (2015) proclaimed that when people leave an organization, they actually try to move away from the bosses and not the organization in which they work normally resulting from poor leadership, and at the end trust can't be developed. Consequent upon this, turnover intention becomes a pertinent issue. Drawing from this discussion, a conceptual framework was proposed, as illustrated in figure 1. It shows that organizational trust have a positive and significant relationship with intention to remain and in turn enhances effectiveness.

### Conceptual Framework

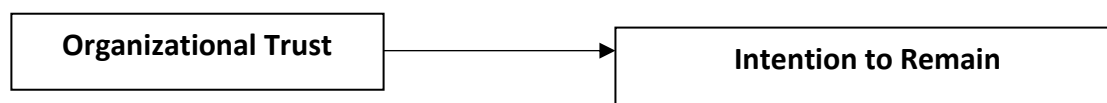


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

**Proposition 1:** Organizational trust is positively related to Intention to remain

**Proposition 2:** Organizational trust is negatively related to Intention to remain

### Methodology

This is a conceptual paper which is carried out based on extensive review of literatures, articles, thesis and books. The total number of the self-initiated academic expatriates in Malaysia is 1595 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2016). However, for the purpose of this intending research, only 246 self-initiated academic expatriates would be chosen as the population for this study. A probability simple random sampling method will be applied and a total of 246 questionnaires will be distributed through a representative appointed at each university campus. The distribution and collection of the survey instruments will take about four months.

### Conclusion

The major contribution of this research is that it is contextualised on the Malaysian setting which also reflects the nobility of the study. The study add to embryonic and developing body of knowledge by refining the scope of its theoretical base by extrapolating the SET which contributes to literature in relation to self-initiated academic expatriates in the Malaysian context. Previously, a review of literature has revealed that organizational trust have been instrumental in enhancing employee intention to remain especially among those who are

ordered and financed by the organization they work with, to foreign post. The proposed research framework further posits that self-initiated academic expatriates are more likely to show intention to remain on their job if they gain sufficient trust of their employer's. We conclude that the research framework proposes that organizational trust is significant and positively related to intention to remain.

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