RETENTION OF ACADEMIC STAFF: A CASE STUDY AT UNIVERSITI SELANGOR (UNISEL)

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Abstract
Retaining talented employees who are willing to commit themselves into organizational citizenship behaviors for the achievement of organizational goals is a key challenge to all organizations. In view of this, this study focused on the relationships among communication satisfaction, procedural justice, organizational citizenship behaviors, and employee retention in the context of a private institution of higher learning in Malaysia. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect primary data from 195 academic staff serving seven different faculties of the university. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, independent t-test, and ANOVA were utilized to analyze the data. The results revealed that the academic staff have a moderate level of communication satisfaction; possess neutral perceptions about procedural justice; sometimes display organizational citizenship behaviors; and are moderately willing to retain their service with the university. The study also found significant positive correlations among communication satisfaction, procedural justice, organizational citizenship behaviors, and employee retention. Information about employee benefits and pay (a factor in communication satisfaction); provision of accurate information about employees’ job performance (a factor in procedural justice); and employees’ sense of pride when representing the university in public (a factor in organizational citizenship behaviors) were found to be the main factors contributing to employee retention. In addition, a significant difference in the mean of organizational citizenship behaviors was found between two age groups. Furthermore, different faculties have significant differences in the means of communication satisfaction, procedural justice and employee retention.

Keywords: communication satisfaction, procedural justice, organizational citizenship behaviours, employee retention.

1 INTRODUCTION

Most organizations recognize the importance of human resources as the key to organizational effectiveness. However, not all of them were successful in retaining their valuable human capital. According to 2014 Global Workforce Study, the employee retention rates in Malaysia have shrunk. In 2012, 29 percent of the employees said that they are likely to leave the organization within two years. In 2014, the rate rose to 36%. This trend clearly shows that employee retention is still a major challenge in Malaysia, especially when its economy is currently facing severe strain. As such, more initiatives should be taken by organizations to preserve their talented workforce in meeting organizational goals.

Many previous research studies focused on the impact of communication satisfaction on employee turnover; the influence of organizational justice on employee turnover; and how organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) predict employee turnover. However, few studies on such topics were conducted in a South-east Asian context, especially in the education industry.

This study tried to fill this research gap and contribute to existing research by investigating the correlations between communication satisfaction, procedural justice, OCBs, and employee retention. It also attempted to explore the main factors (in communication satisfaction, procedural justice and OCBs) which give the most contribution to employee retention.

2 COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

Communication satisfaction is defined as a summing total of an individual’s satisfaction with information flow and relationship variables within an organization. Communication satisfaction is a multidimensional construct instead of a one-dimensional concept. It is a person’s satisfaction with various aspects of communication in an organization (Downs & Hazen, 1977). As indicated by Downs and Adrian (2004), communication satisfaction refers to an employee’s personal satisfaction that is built-in by successfully communicating to someone or being successfully communicated by others in an organization.

Many previous studies showed that communication satisfaction is positively and
significantly correlated with OCBs. Multiple regression analysis also concluded that communication satisfaction is a significant predictor of OCBs (Fournier, 2008; Kandlousi, Ali & Abdollahi, 2010; Blanchard, 2012; Henderson, 2013).

3 PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Thibaut and Walker (1975) first introduced the concept of procedural justice and the concept was mainly focusing on the legal process. Leventhal, Karuza and Fry (1980) then extended the concept of procedural justice into other contexts such as organizational settings (Colquitt et al., 2001). Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of procedures used to allocate resources (Colquitt et al., 2005). A more specific definition according to Moorman (1991) viewed procedural justice as “the extent to which employees perceived that the outcome allocation decisions have been fairly made in relation to the organization’s formal procedures and treatment given in enacting those procedures”.

Numerous researches indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between procedural justice and OCBs. It means if employees perceived the process of decision making in their organizations as fair, they will be more likely to perform OCBs (Song et al., 2012; Chou & Lopez-Rodriguez, 2013; Lee, Kim & Kim, 2013; Ismail, 2014; Allameh & Rostami, 2014).

4 ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIORS (OCBs)

According to Organ (1988), OCBs are traditionally viewed as employees’ extra efforts which are not officially required by the organization, not required as part of job specification, and not enforceable. These extra-role behaviors were label as “good soldier syndrome”. In 1997 Organ redefined OCBs as “performance that supports the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place”. In-role behavior was added by Organ into the traditional definition of OCBs which originally contained only extra-role behaviors.

Williams and Anderson (1991) categorized OCBs into two separate classifications: OCBI and OCBO. OCBI refers to citizenship behavior directed towards other individuals in the organization and such behavior benefits peers and co-workers. OCBO refers to citizenship behavior intended for the organization as a whole and such behavior enhances organizational effectiveness.

According to Podsakoff et al. (2009), employees with higher-level OCBs have less intention to leave the organization and fewer of them actually leave the organization. It was also found that there is a negative correlation between OCBOs and intention to leave (Strydom, 2014). Meanwhile, overall OCBI was negatively related to intention to leave the employer (Paillé, Raineri & Valeau, 2015).

5 EMPLOYEE RETENTION

According to Chaminade (2007), employee retention “is a voluntary move by the company to create an environment which engages employees for the long term. This attachment relationship is durable and constant and links the employee to their company, by common values and by the way in which the company responds to the needs of the employee”. However, this study defined employee retention from the perspective of employees instead of organizations’. In the present study, employee retention refers to an employee’s level of willingness to retain his/her service within an organization.

Research studies on communication satisfaction and turnover intention concluded that communication satisfaction is negatively correlated with turnover intention. In short, it was predicted that as communication satisfaction rises, turnover intention will fall (Tobin, 2011; Madi, 2012; Naz & Gul; 2014).

Previous research studies reported that procedural justice is significantly and positively correlated with turnover intention (Alan et al., 2010; Abu Elanain, 2010; Flint, Haley & McNally, 2013; Al Afari & Abu Elanain, 2014). Some others demonstrated that procedural justice is significantly and negatively correlated with withdrawal attitudes (Malinen, Wright & Cammock; 2013).

6 HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Communication satisfaction is positively related to employee retention.

H2: Procedural justice is positively related to employee retention.

H3: OCBs are positively related to employee retention.

H4: Communication satisfaction is positively related to procedural justice.

H5: Procedural justice is positively related to OCBs.

H6: OCBOs are positively related to communication satisfaction.

H7: There are significant differences in the mean of communication satisfaction, procedural justice,
OCBs, and employee retention across demographic groups.

7 METHODOLOGY

7.1 Sample and Procedure

This study is descriptive and quantitative in nature. A sample of 230 academic staff was randomly selected from a total of 461 academic staff of Universiti Selangor. However, only 195 questionnaires were found to be usable. Primary data was collected from seven faculties of both the university’s main campus and city campus using self-administered questionnaire survey.

7.2 Measure

Communication satisfaction was measured by evaluating the overall degree of academic staff’s satisfaction with the communication practices in decision making process at the university (8 Items). The measure was in five-point Likert scale format (1=very dissatisfied to 5=very satisfied).

Procedural justice was quantified by measuring academic staff’s perception about the fairness of the procedures used by their supervisors in making decisions (8 Items). The measure was in five-point Likert scale format (1=never to 5=always).

OCBs were assessed by evaluating academic staff’s exhibition of behaviors that are voluntary and go beyond their job descriptions (8 Items). The measure was in five-point Likert scale format (1=never to 5=always).

Employee retention was measured by quantifying academic staff’s intention to retain their services with the university (8 Items). The measure was in five-point Likert scale format (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

The questionnaire was adapted from the studies done by Podsakoff et al. (2009); Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Organ (2006); Ramirez (2010); Lockwood (2007); Carriere and Bourque (2009); Folger and Konovsky (1989); Greenberg (2005); Yusof and Shamsuri (2006); Malatesta and Tetrick (1996); Eisenberger et al. (2001); Wayne et al. (2002); Goris (2007); Blanchard (2012); Singh and Singh (2013); and other related studies.

All the four sets of items mentioned above were highly consistent with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.856 to 0.929. One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the data has a normal distribution (p-value ranging from 0.148 to 0.518).

8 FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics indicated that majority of the respondents (65.6%) have a moderate level of communication satisfaction. They possess neutral perceptions about the procedural justice they experienced at the university (60%). They sometimes display OCBs (60%) and have a moderate level of intention to retain their service with the university (48.7%).

The results show that the respondents are dissatisfied with how employee benefits and pay are communicated to them (52.8%) and how conflicts were handled through proper communication channels (46.1%). However, they are satisfied with information about university policies and goals (49.3%) and information about changes in the university (38.4%).

In term of procedural justice, around one-third of the respondents stated that they never/rarely feel that the procedures were fair/consistent/just when their supervisors discuss plans or objectives to improve their performance at work (35.4%) and they never/rarely feel that their supervisors use fair/consistent/just procedures in asking for subordinates’ ideas to improve organization performance (30.3%). Nevertheless, 48.3% of the respondents claimed that their often/always feel fair/consistent/just in obtaining accurate information about their performance from their supervisors and almost half of them (47.7%) also agreed that the university uses consistent standards in evaluating their performance.

With respect to OCBs, majority of the respondents often/always feel proud when they represent UNISEL in the public (56.9%) and they often/always tell their friends about the good aspects of UNISEL’s products or services (55.9%). On the other hand, 21% of them never/rarely attend career-related courses which are not required by their job and another 17.4% of them indicated that they rarely take the initiative to orient new employees as it is not part of their job.

The results of correlation tests showed that significant positive correlations exist among the four variables. Communication satisfaction is positively related to employee retention ($r = .391, p < .000$); procedural justice is positively related to employee retention ($r = .348, p < .000$); OCBs are positively related to employee retention ($r = .698, p < .000$); communication satisfaction is positively related to procedural justice ($r = .385, p < .000$); procedural justice is positively related to OCBs ($r = .351, p < .000$); OCBs are positively related to communication satisfaction ($r = .256, p < .000$).

In term of OCBs, ANOVA found a significant difference ($p = .038$) between respondents with different years of service at the university. Academic staff with 6-10 years of service have the lowest mean score in OCBs.
In the mean time, significant differences were also observed in terms of communication satisfaction, procedural justice and employee retention among respondents from different faculties. Among the faculties, the engineering faculty has the highest mean for communication satisfaction (mean= 3.13); the Centre for Foundation and General Studies has the highest mean for procedural justice and employee retention (mean= 3.84 and 3.83 respectively).

ANOVA and t-test also revealed that there was no significant difference (p> .05) in the mean of communication satisfaction, procedural justice, OCBs, and employee retention among respondents’ gender, age, marital status, basic salary, level of education, position, and working experience.

9 DISCUSSION

The study confirmed that the academic staff have a moderate level of communication satisfaction; hold a neutral perception about the procedural justice they experienced; claimed that they occasionally (sometimes) display OCBs; and have a moderate level of intention to retain their service with the university. These findings contradicted the study of Fournier (2008) through which he found that majority of the Ohio University’s staff participated in OCBs. However, the findings of the present study were consistent with Fournier’s study as he indicated that his respondents are “indifferent to” the communication practices at Ohio University. At the same time, the findings of this research were also opposed to that of Elamin and Tlaiss (2015) and Alan et al. (2010). Elamin and Tlaiss concluded that Saudi Arabian managers have relatively high levels of OCBs. Alan et al. pointed out that Malaysian hotel managers possess relatively high levels of procedural justice perception and relatively low levels of turnover intention.

The present study found a significant positive correlation between communication satisfaction and employee retention. This finding supported majority of the past literature on communication satisfaction facets in relation to turnover intention, through which a significant negative relationship was found in between communication satisfaction and employees’ turnover intention (Naz & Gul, 2014; Mustamil et al., 2014; Madi, 2012; Tobin, 2011). However, it was against the findings of Kandelousi and Neoh (2011) who reported that only the interpersonal dimension of communication satisfaction was positively related to the retention of insurance agents in Malaysia.

This research discovered that procedural justice was significantly and positively correlated with employee retention. Such finding confirmed with past research which found out that procedural justice and turnover intention move in opposite directions (Al Afari & Abu Elanain, 2014; Malinen, Wright & Cammock, 2013; Flint, Haley & McNally, 2013; Esop, 2012; Alan et al., 2010; Abu Elanain, 2010).

The current study concluded that OCBs and employee retention were positively and significantly related to each other. This conclusion is inline with past literature which indicated that employees with higher-level OCBs have less intention to leave the organization (Paillé, Raineri & Valeau, 2015; Strydom; 2014; Podsakoff et al., 2009; Tsai & Wu, 2008). Nevertheless, it was inconsistent with the findings of Esop (2012) and Benjamin (2012) as they found that turnover intention is not significantly correlated with OCBs.

This study only managed to find significant mean differences among academic staff with different years of service and from different faculties. There were no significant differences in the mean scores of communication satisfaction, procedural justice, OCBs, and employee retention among respondents across gender, age, marital status, basic salary, level of education, position, and total work experience. These findings supported those of Elamin and Tlaiss (2015) (i.e. age had no significant impact on OCBs but organizational tenure did); those of Naz and Gul (2014) (i.e. turnover intention was significantly reduced when work tenure rose); and those of Esop (2012) (i.e. there was a significant negative correlation between turnover intention and organizational tenure). On the other hand, the findings of the present study were not aligned with the conclusions of Tsai and Wu (2008) (where educational levels and positions significantly influence OCBs); Esop (2012) (where significant negative correlations were found between turnover intention and age and gender); Malinen, Wright and Cammock (2013) (where age was a significant predictor of withdrawal attitude); Alan et al. (2010) (where gender and organizational tenure were significantly associated with turnover intention).

10 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the present study has several limitations that will be discussed in the next section, it is able to provide several managerial implications and recommendations to higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Firstly, university management should check the satisfaction levels (in terms of communication practices and organizational justice) of its employees on fixed intervals. Employees’ willingness to display OCBs (and why they do not display OCBs) and their retention intention must also be identified on a regular basis. These inspections will aid the university management in adopting appropriate policies to increase the retention rates of its valuable human resources.

In order to enhance employees’ communication satisfaction, university management should cultivate an
organizational environment which encourages transparent upward, downward, horizontal, and diagonal/network communication. Special attention must be placed on communicating information about benefits and pays as they are one of the most important determinants of employee job satisfaction. Furthermore, communication channels used by the university to resolve conflicts should also be openly communicated to all employees to build positive perception among them about the university’s communication practices. Besides, university management has to find ways to effectively communicate university goals to its employees at all levels. Employees will only support the goals if they agree with them. Transparent and speedy communication about changes in policies is also vital to create satisfaction among employees and finally make them stay with the university.

As a means of improving procedural justice, supervisors/managers at all organizational levels must be strongly encouraged to uphold overall organizational justice. Training should be provided to them to achieve this objective. Simultaneously, a protective mechanism must be provided to subordinates who wish to report any unjust/bias/discrimination issues. Besides, university management has to be exceptionally careful with procedures about employee performance evaluation. Such procedures should be regularly revised to ensure fairness and consistency. Subsequent to performance evaluation, discussion between supervisors/managers and subordinates should be regularly held (at least once a year) to formulate plans which can help to improve employee work performance. Last but not least, suggestions from employees should be cautiously studied to enhance the level of organizational performance and justice which will eventually increase employee retention rates.

Past research proved that communication satisfaction is an antecedent of OCBs (Cai, 2014; Blanchard, 2012); Henderson, 2013; Ayatse & Ikyanyon, 2012; Chen, 2011; Kandlousi, Ali & Abdollahi, 2010; Fournier, 2008) and procedural justice is positively correlated with OCBs (Ismail, 2014; Allameh & Rostami, 2014; Lee, Kim & Kim, 2013; Chou & Lopez-Rodriguez, 2013; Song et al., 2012; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2011). Therefore, if university management wishes to encourage the display of OCBs, it must firstly enhance communication satisfaction and improve perception about procedural justice among its employees. Besides that, university management should set common values that will establish a sense of belonging and pride among its employees. Employees’ needs should be ALSO effectively identified and quickly responded to. At the same time, employees who display OCBs must be openly recognized as a means of encouraging the rest to follow. Employees should also be actively involved in the decision making processes of the university. This will boost employees’ job satisfaction and they will then reciprocate to the university by engaging themselves in OCBs. Ultimately, a win-win situation will be created and bring merits to both university management and staff.

11 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present study discovered some interesting findings and made meaningful contributions to literature in terms of the relationships among communication satisfaction, procedural justice, OCBs, and employee retention. Yet, it encountered some limitations and thus has certain shortcomings. Firstly, as the sample size was limited to only 195 out of 461 academic staff; comprised only 33.3% of male respondents; and did not include academic staff from the Faculty of Art and Design, the results of this research may not be generalized unto UNISEL staff as a whole. It is suggested that future researches should use a much larger sample size; collect data which fairly represent both genders; and involve employees (both academic and non-academic) from all departments and faculties to enhance the validity of findings.

Secondly, this study was conducted when UNISEL has just had its new Vice Chancellor/President and is experiencing transformations. As a result of the transformations, some faculties were merged; some employees were transferred from one department to another; some academic staff were required to teach new courses which they are not familiar with; etc. On top of that, employees have not received yearly bonus and annual salary increment for a couple of years. These phenomena may influence the answers provided in the questionnaires by those respondents as this study might be viewed as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction to the university management. It is therefore recommended that similar research can be conducted again to compare and contrast employees’ level of communication satisfaction, perception of procedural justice, display of OCBs, and intention to retain their service with the university before and after the transformations.

This research studied the correlation between procedural justice and employee retention. It did not include another two dimensions of organizational justice (i.e. distributive justice and interactional justice) into the scope of study. It was conducted at a private tertiary education institution. At the same time, it is not longitudinal in nature. Future researchers are suggested to replicate this study by including distributive justice and interactional justice into the model; by extending the study to other institutions of higher learning (both private and public) in Malaysia; and by collecting data from respondents at different points of time. Longitudinal researches which include more tertiary institutions can further investigate in greater depth the relationships between organizational justice and
employee retention over time. This will produce more convincing findings to facilitate the understanding of the determinants of employee retention in a South-east Asian context.

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