



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXECUTIVE RETENTION IN A MALAYSIAN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

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Executives are the backbone in a research and development organization in carrying out research activities. In depth interviews are carried out in a Malaysian research and development organization to explore the executives experience on their decision to stay with the organization. The human resource development practices are identified and studied from their point of views. Their experience is explored in order to find out how the human resource development practices contribute to their decision to stay in the organization. Result shows how training and development practices, career development practices and organizational development practices, the three human resource development areas have contributed to their retention in the organization. The training and development practices are individual training (analytical skill, soft skill and management skill) and organizational training (soft skill, leadership skill and academic programme), career development practices are individual effort and organizational effort and organizational development practices are working environment, mentoring and coaching, interpersonal relationship. These human resource development practices are found to have contributed to the executive's decision to stay. However, some remain in the organization because they are just happy working in the organization and passion of being researchers.

KEYWORDS

Executives, Human Resource Development Practices, Retention

1. INTRODUCTION

Executives are research officers in a research and development organization. They are talents who has acquired specific skill and knowledge in their areas from upstream, midstream and downstream. Since it takes years for them to become an expertise, it is very important to retain them from leaving the organization and stay in the organization until they reach their retirement age. It is very important to keep the highly talented employee who possess unique skills to ensure all research and development activities are not interrupted [1]. The purpose of this study is to explore why the executives stay in the organization through job embeddedness [2]. By identifying the human resource development practices that has contributed to their retention, the management can find ways on how to encourage them to stay.

2. METHODS

An in-depth interviewing is used to understand the lived experience of people and the meaning they make of that experience [3]. The researcher's task is to get the participant to tell as much as possible about his experience that influenced him to retain in the organization. A pilot interview has been carried out prior to the actual interviews. The interview protocols have been discussed and peer checked by the supervisory committee members. The interview questions were tested

on a participant and it was found that some questions of the questions need to be revised according to experience gained from the pilot interview. Lesson learned, do not ask concept questions which caused difficulty in answering. The researcher needs to make the questions straight and simple which allow the executives to express their experience.

Phenomenology is used as the methodological framework for this study. Phenomenology is one of the qualitative methods in understanding the lived experienced of a concept or a phenomenon [4]. The main research question of this study is "How do human resource development practices contribute to the retention of executive in a research and development organization?". The following specific research questions are "How do training and development practices contribute to the executive retention?", "How do career development practices contribute to the executive retention" and lastly "How do career development practices contribute to the executive retention".

2.1 Participants

The researcher conducted interviews using face-to-face, audio taped and used an open-ended interviewing technique. The participants chosen are permanent employees from the professional group level of grade 41 to grade 54 according to the Malaysian government salary skill, possess a

bachelor's degree and above with at least ten years working experience to ensure that the participant understand the organization culture. The researcher invited the participants through text messages to get their approval to participate in the interview. The interview questions are either sent through email or private messages to the participants before the interview is carried out. This is to get them to have ideas on what are going to be asked and be more prepared to give answers relevant to the questions. Before the interview start, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and that the findings will be used for scholar purposes only. They were assured of the confidentiality and that their identities will be kept anonymous. They were given a consent form for them to sign before the interview began.

2.2 Data collection

An interview protocol consisting of a series of open-ended questions was prepared in English. The interview began with the researcher asking the interview questions to the participants. Even though the interview was conducted in English, the researcher did not expect that the participant was more comfortable to answer in Bahasa Malaysia. The pilot interview went well but for future interviews, another set of questions in Bahasa Malaysia version was prepared, questions on concepts are eliminated and confusing questions are revised and replaced. The pilot interview lasted about one and half hour. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim. Field notes and memo were written through the interview's session. The interview took place in the researcher's office however after listening back to the recording, it is found that the sound of ringing phones from office outside the room was quite disturbing the transcription process. For the future interviews the researcher had to choose a better setting to ensure the quality of the recording is good.

2.3 Data analysis

After the data collection, the researcher listened to the recorded interview and transcribed simultaneously. It was played a few times to ensure the data is transcribed as accurate as possible. From the interview transcripts, codes were assigned using deducting and inductive approaches and grouped into categories or families based on same characteristics [5]. It was revised from time to time to reduce overlapping or redundancy. A code book consists of set of codes was developed as a guide to help analyse interview data [6]. In vivo coding is employed to analyse and to generate themes. ATLAS.ti software is used to help in data analysis by using codes, categories, themes and network figure in making it easier to make interpretation of data analysis. The process of developing a code book was very challenging and tedious. The researcher found difficulties in doing the coding because of lacking experience and to get the right language to understand meanings of the human experience code.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are sectioned based on research questions to provide links to the data found.

3.1 Training and development practices

From the excerpts of the transcripts it is found that two categories are identified that are individual training and organizational training. The participant has described training and development practices that links them or create connection to the organization. For industrial training it consists basic training like lab work, research work, communications and writing. The other one is organizational training practices that involves international activities such as seminar, congress and workshop. These has caused links and fit between the participants and the organization that make them to stay longer in the organization. For the purpose of professional development, customization of an individual requirements such as in training programs can motivate them thus continue to grow in the organization [7].

3.2 Career development practices

Career and development have a direct link and fit or compatibility of the respondent towards the organization that encourage them to stay and grow in the organization. It is found that individual initiative (further study and coach trainee student) and organizational initiative (scholarship, sponsorship) contribute to the executive retention in the organization. Personal traits also contribute to the executive retention in the organization. Openness and conscientiousness are examples of personal traits of professional's attitude towards academic achievement and performance [8].

3.3 Organizational development practices and executive retention

The organizational development practices identified from the interviews which contribute to the executive retention are mentoring, coaching, leadership and friendship. Job satisfaction, working conditions, job security, motivation and autonomy are factors that give positive effect to mental outlook because it affects their attitude towards their job [9]. The greater the sacrifice of leaving one organization the more difficult the decision to leave will be [10]. That show the degree of job embeddedness that caused them to remain in the organization.

Other findings are working environment, medical benefits and salary increment which will also be sacrificed if they leave the organization. Personal attributes such as passion and feeling happy with their job also contribute to their decision to stay. When they feel happy and satisfied, they will stay longer in the organization.

The summary findings of this study are illustrated in Figure 1. The result shows how the human resource development practices have created connection or link to the job and the outcome of these result is the executive retention in the organization.

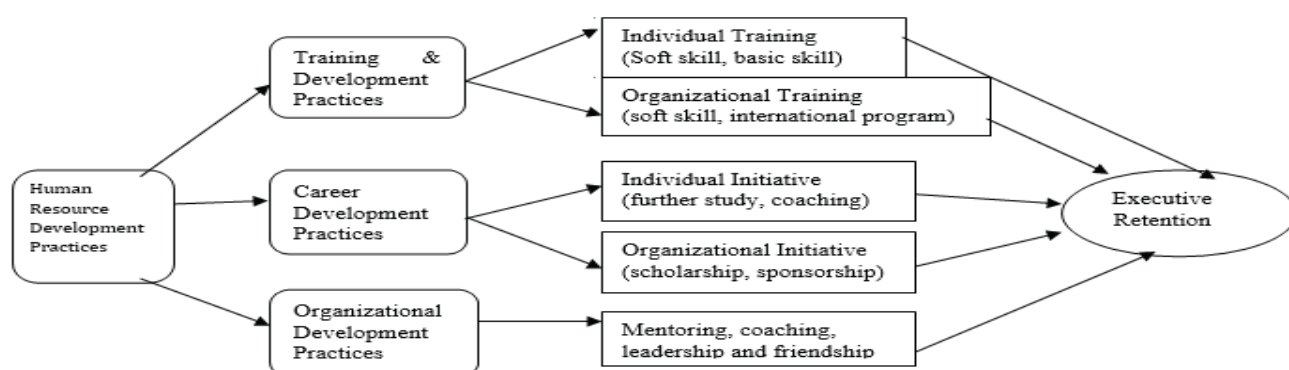


Figure 1: An illustrated network of human resource development practices and executive retention

4. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to explore the experience of executives on the human resource development practices that contribute to their decision to stay in the research and development organization. The human resource development practices that are found to be the factors that contribute to the executive retention in the organization are individual training and organizational training, initiative from both individual and organizational effort and working environment, medical and salary benefits. The findings shows that the executive retains in the organization because they have good 'links' and 'fits' well in the organization and its community and what they may have to sacrifice if they were to leave the organization from the human resource and development practices lens.

This study gives a better understanding on the experience of the current executives on why they stay in the organization. In summary, this study reveals the human resource development practices that contribute to their retention. The study has gone some way towards enhancing the understanding of why executives remain in a research and development organization. It also adds to the current literature in executive retention.

More information on the human resource development practices that contribute to the executive retention will help to establish greater understanding on the phenomenon. More interviews will provide more information on the phenomenon. Further investigation using other participants from the management or human resource officers' lens may add to more in-depth findings.

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