

The Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support in the Relationship between Post-COVID Work Practices and Talent Retention

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Abstract— The post-pandemic shift toward flexible and employee-centred work practices has reshaped how organizations manage and retain talent. Guided by Social Exchange Theory and Organizational Support Theory, this study investigates how flexible work arrangements, work–life balance, and career development opportunities influence talent retention in the telecom sector and examines whether perceived organizational support strengthens these relationships. This is a quantitative study in which the researchers collected responses from 324 employees. The study's results show that flexible work arrangements and work–life balance positively affect talent retention. On the other hand, career development opportunities were found to be a negative predictor of talent retention. Finally, perceived organizational support is found to be a moderator of these relationships, indicating that the results deepen the literature and provide guidelines for policymakers to retain talent and enhance employee well-being.

Keywords—Flexible work arrangements, Talent retention, Career development, Perceived organizational support, Work–life balance

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 brought about different working dynamics by accelerating several forms of flexible work arrangements (FWA), including remote work, hybrid options, and flexible scheduling, across virtually all sectors. In this way, post-COVID, there has been a sudden surge in FWAs worldwide, shaping employees' expectations and organizational operations. This made employees feel in charge and able to better manage their professional and personal work-life balance [1].

Similarly, work-life balance (WLB) is a primary predictor of employee well-being and retention. The confusion between 'work' and 'home' during the pandemic highlights the growing importance of organizational policies that embrace and support diverse forms of welfare and well-being [2, 3]. Similarly, career development opportunities (CDO) are the strong motivation and detainment factor, where employees' unsettled and rapidly changing, even labor market, seek pronounced paths to growth, skill development, and, indeed, advancement [4, 5]. To set up one's career, remote mentoring, and transparent career communication embody great vitality in leveraging up engagement and preventing turnover, especially in the minds of younger and high-class skills [6, 7].

An important moderating factor within this relationship is the perception of organizational support (POS) when taken from the perspective of the employees, who would basically opine. Thus, establishing the levels of organizational worth considered with a meaningful mission of carting forth from forgiveness into programming for their care.

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The present study seeks to consolidate theories (Organizational Support Theory; [8], Social Exchange Theory [9] that serve as the basis for the present research. The framework of the study is based on predictors such as Flexible Work Arrangements, Work Life Balance and Career Development Opportunities which predict the dependent variable (Talent Retention) through moderation of Perceived organizational Support (see Fig.1). The findings from this study are to be of usable value in designing policies and creating a supportive environment that not just motivates employee dedication but also minimizes the turnover in response to the incessantly changing and uncertain atmosphere of today.

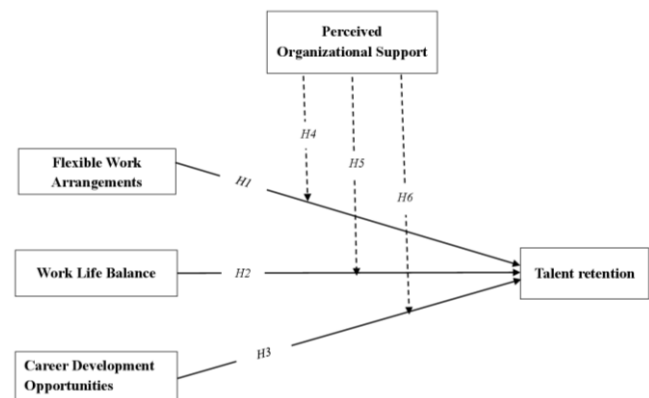


FIG. 1 THEORETICAL MODEL
SOURCE: DEVELOPED BY THE RESEARCHERS

II. METHOD

A. Research design and approach

The study also adopts a cross-sectional quantitative design where FWAs, WLB, and CDOs were thought to predict TR and the moderating effect that POS had on this relationship. The quantitative approach is most appropriate for testing a hypothesis by using statistical models; at the same time, this provides generalizability [10]. A cross-sectional design basically captures how employees currently perceive an ever-changing post-COVID work environment, much less how it changes over time [11].

B. Research context

The context of the research is telecommunications sector (Jazz, Telenor, or PTCL) in Pakistan was quickly accelerating into digitization and hybrid and remote work models in response to the global crisis at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak [12]. This sector is devoting more finances toward developing flexible policies to help recruit talent into the organization and keep them from the stiff competition and possibly high turnover rates that have recently plagued the industry.

C. Population and sampling

The target population will consist of full-time employed individuals in Pakistan's telecom sector. The researchers used a non-probability sampling (i.e., purposive sampling technique), that is a best technique to find the individuals who have active flexible work arrangements for at least 6 months [13].

D. Measurement scales

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) was measured on four items adapted from [1] and [14], for example: "I have the option to work remotely when needed."

Work-Life Balance (WLB) was assessed on four items adopted from [15]. The sample content of the scale is "I am able to balance the demands of my work and personal life well".

Career Development Opportunities (CDO) was measured on five items, which are adopted from [4]. The same content is "My organization provides opportunities for skill development."

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) was assessed on six items from [8]. The format of sample item is "My organization cares about my well-being."

Talent Retention (TR) was evaluated on four items adapted from [16] and [117]. The sample content is "I intend to stay with my organization for the foreseeable future."

E. Data collection procedure

The data were collected online via both Google Forms and email. The cooperation of HR departments of telecom companies were sorted out for internal distribution. This was to be told to the participants in their voluntary participation. Their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, where an informed consent statement would describe the purpose of the study and state ethical safeguards. Before a study could commence, ethical approval was obtained from the ethics review committee of the host institution.

III. FINDINGS

The respondents' profile demonstrates a majority (n=222 or 68.5%) were males, rather than females (n=102 or 31.5%). Regarding respondents' ages, the majority (n=138 or 42.6%) were 20-30 years old, while the fewest (n=18 or 5.6%) were 50+ years old. Regarding education, the majority of respondents (n=165 or 50.9%) were bachelor holders, while only 10.2% (n=33) were M.Phil/PhD holders. The job tenure factor indicates that a majority of respondents (n=135 or 41.7%) had 1-3 years of experience, while only 4.6% (n=15) had more than 10 years of experience. Furthermore, a majority of respondents (n=98 or 30.2%) were from the department of network operations, while only 4.6% (n=15) were from the finance department. Finally, a majority of respondents (n=243 or 75%) were permanent employees, while only 4.3% (n=14) were on an internship/training basis (See details in Table I).

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS (N = 324)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	222	68.5
	Female	102	31.5
Age (years)	20-30	138	42.6
	31-40	121	37.3
	41-50	47	14.5
	Above 50	18	5.6
Education level	Bachelor	165	50.9
	Master	126	38.9
	MPhil/PhD	33	10.2
Job tenure (years)	< 1	68	21.0
	1-3	135	41.7
	4-6	75	23.1
	7-10	31	9.6
Department	> 10	15	4.6
	Network operations	98	30.2
	Customer service	76	23.5
	IT & systems	55	17.0
	HR	42	13.0
	Sales & marketing	38	11.7
Employment type	Finance	15	4.6
	Permanent	243	75.0
	Contract	67	20.7
	Internship/training	14	4.3

Source: Authors' own survey

In the measurement model, the researchers examined factor loadings, with all items loading above the required value of 0.708 (i.e., > 0.708). The composite reliability (CR) values are also above the required threshold (>0.70) and range from 0.864 to 0.961. Moreover, the scores of the average variance extracted (AVE) were above the required threshold (>0.50) and ranged from 0.529 to 0.639. Finally, the internal consistency among all the constructs is assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from 0.813 to 0.873 and are considered fair values (Table II).

TABLE II. ASSESSMENT OF MEASUREMENT MODEL

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE	Alpha
FWA	FWA1	0.962	0.894	0.621	0.814
FWA	FWA2	0.967			
FWA	FWA3	0.947			
FWA	FWA4	0.861			
WLB	WLB1	0.911	0.896	0.596	0.813
WLB	WLB2	0.901			
WLB	WLB3	0.824			
WLB	WLB4	0.862			
CDO	CDO1	0.895	0.961	0.571	0.844
CDO	CDO2	0.812			
CDO	CDO3	0.781			
CDO	CDO4	0.741			
CDO	CDO5	0.754	0.878	0.639	0.873
POS	POS1	0.903			
POS	POS2	0.926			
POS	POS3	0.868			
POS	POS4	0.887	0.864	0.529	0.817
POS	POS5	0.888			
POS	POS6	0.843			
TRE	TRE1	0.955			
TRE	TRE2	0.862	0.878	0.817	0.817
TRE	TRE3	0.878			
TRE	TRE4	0.784			

Source: Calculated by the researchers

Notes: CR=composite reliability; AVE=average variance extracted; AVE= average variance extracted; α =Cronbach's alpha reliability

The path analysis using AMOS, the results suggest a positive effect of flexible work arrangements on talent retention ($H1=\beta=0.203$; $p<0.01$), and a positive impact of work-life balance on talent retention ($H2=\beta=0.233$; $p<0.01$), which supports the $H1-H2$. On the other hand, career development opportunities have an insignificant effect on talent retention ($H3=\beta=0.052$; $p>0.01$), thereby rejecting

H3. Regarding the moderating effects, perceived organizational support was found to be a positive moderator between flexible work arrangements and talent retention ($H4=\beta=0.183$; $p<0.01$), work-life balance and talent retention ($H5=\beta=0.186$; $p<0.01$), and career development opportunities and talent retention ($H6=\beta=0.238$; $p<0.01$). Thus, H4–H6 are accepted (Fig.2).

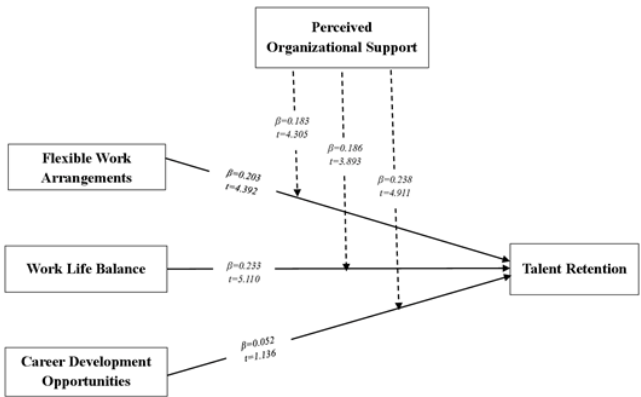


FIG. 2 STRUCTURAL MODEL
SOURCE: CALCULATED BY THE RESEARCHERS

IV. CONCLUSION

To sum it up, the study's overall conclusions demonstrated that flexible work arrangements and work-life balance make a positive, meaningful contribution to talent retention. However, career development opportunities made no substantial or noteworthy contribution to employee talent retention. In the present study, perceived organizational support has an influential role in strengthening the connections between flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, career development opportunities, and talent retention.

The study contributes to a broader understanding of employee retention and helps the human resources department manage talent and reduce turnover. The study provides valuable guidelines and paths for practice, managers, and policymakers seeking to retain skilled employees and maintain a stable, committed workforce. The results reinforce the value and prominence of Social Exchange Theory in the context of telecom sector, helping policymakers implement supportive work practices, such as flexibility and work–life balance. This challenges traditional views in human capital theory, which often assume that development opportunities automatically improve retention.

Regarding limitations, the study employed a cross-sectional design and was limited to a quantitative approach. The study collected data from the telecom sector, which may limit the generalizability of its findings compared to other industries, such as SMEs and education.

In the future, more longitudinal studies using mixed methods approaches, such as qualitative and case studies, must be conducted. The constructs, i.e., commitment, satisfaction, HRM practices, and organizational culture, may be examined using the study's model in the future. Finally, the sample size must be enhanced to get more desirable results.

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