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## Employee Intention to Leave a Job: A Case of Fast Food Restaurants in Malaysia

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing intention to leave among employees at fast food restaurants. It examines two issues; workplace stress and organizational commitment. A quantitative survey of 132 employees working in the fast food restaurants from three different states was conducted. The reliability statistics of the data was preferable, ranging from .71 to .91 for all variables. Using Pearson correlation analysis, it was found that there was a positive relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave ( $r=.265$ ). Interestingly, the statistic showed that there was a positive relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave ( $r=.294$ ). The results contributed to a contradicting finding in investigating intention to leave among employees, indicating although the commitment was high, the potential to leave the job is considerably high. It might relate to the nature of job of fast food outlets that requires work shift, and the employees might seek towards “nine-to-five” jobs. Retaining employees could be challenging and managers should play an important role to deliver the information about career enhancement in fast food industry with improved levels of salary and employment.

**Keywords:** Intention to Leave, Workplace Stress, Organizational Commitment, Fast Food, Employee.

### Introduction

Fast food restaurants have known to be popular among customers and Goyal and Singh (2007) acknowledged that fast food restaurants are among the fastest emerging food category worldwide. Significantly, it is growing in developing countries (Taspinar & Turkmen, 2019). The rapid growth of fast food industry is due to changing consumption pattern as more people are working and this leads to choose fast food as an option. This indicates significant changes in their regular consumption habits (Gabrow, 2021). The consumption trend of fast food is popular among students and office workers (Ryan et al., 2011) due its convenience, reasonable price, quick service, consistency, and tastiness (Majid et al., 2021). These are among the key factors to fast food restaurants in strengthening their brands in the market.

There are many fast food restaurants, however; popular selection of fast food brands in Malaysia are McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and Burger King. Among these fast food brands, McDonald's and KFC managed to operate many outlets in Malaysia (Xiao et al., 2018) as compared to other brands.

As fast food has become popular choice, it is important to ensure enough employees delivering the products and services. These days, the fast food companies have offered interesting job salary and wages to compete with other industries. This is one of the efforts to attract and retain the employees, providing better career advancement. Those employed in the fast food restaurants are classified as low-skilled, low-paid, and short-term employees (Mohsin & Lengler, 2015). The employees normally are young, comprises of those who just finished secondary school and looking for part time jobs while waiting for university admission or other permanent jobs. Besides that, Yorke and Longden (2008) indicated that younger workers are simply earning money at a temporary stage in their careers such as to help fund their studies. The factor determining turnover might be due to age factor (Ryan et al., 2011) as the employees perceived working in fast food industry as temporary job rather than a career. This is mainly caused by the traditional mindset of Monday to Friday job with 'nine-to-five' working hours. Consequently, those with highly skilled and trained employees leaving the fast food industry, searching for work-life balance.

Over the years, employee turnover rate has become the main challenge in the service industry. To reduce the turnover rate in the hospitality industry, the firm must be sensitive to the intrinsic motivational factors of employees (Kim et al., 2005). Poulston (2008) mentioned that non-managerial employees leave the job more often, hence adding significantly to the replacement costs. In the case of fast food industry, it refers to the crews such as cashiers, cooks, servers, dishwashers, and bussers. Hence, it is important to understand its factors to minimize the negative impact on organization's productivity. Costs of advertising, recruitment, training costs and disruption to flow of work are among the costs associated with employee turnover (Ryan et al., 2011). The productivity and operation of the business would be affected, prior finding replacements for the vacant positions. Eliminating turnover seems impossible as competitors or other industries might provide better offers or inclusion of other factors, however, reducing employee turnover is plausible.

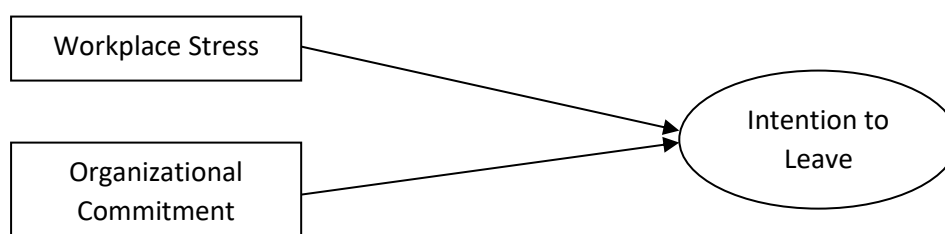
In the workplace, regardless of any industry, there are several reasons for employees' intention to leave and workplace stress and organizational commitment are some of the examples. This study seeks to identify potential determinants (workplace stress and organizational commitment) of the intention to leave a job in the fast food industry. Previous studies have investigated the influence of workplace stress and organizational commitment on employee intention to leave in fast food setting, however, the inconsistent results call for an investigation to provide clear conclusion. Therefore, this study attempted to:

- (1) Examine the relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave among employees at fast food restaurants; and
- (2) Investigate the relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave among employees at fast food restaurants.

It is important to note that the study findings represent opinions of respondents from a specific multinational fast food brand, collected from three different locations in Peninsular Malaysia. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, review of literature and hypotheses development as well as conceptual framework are presented. Section 3 describes the methodology, including study instrumentation and sample. Section 4 reports the data analysis and results. In the last section, discussions and conclusion are justified, as well as future research and limitations are described.

### Literature Review and Proposed Research Hypotheses

Concept of employee intention to leave has become one of the critical topics in organizational studies. The employee turnover is a serious issue in the services industry and is ascribed to several individual and organizational factors (Flint, Haley, & McNally 2013). Without proper strategy to overcome it, the damage could be severe. Mobley (1977) defined intention to leave the job as the process of leaving the current job. It indicates that the employee has the plan of quitting the present job. The reasons could be many, and employee could have either strong motivation to move to another job or have lack of motivation to stay at the current job. The motivation of employee relies on their perceptions on how they have been treated (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Therefore, it is important to identify the key concepts to maintain their motivation at work. Firth, Mellor, Moore, and Loquet (2004) conducted a study to identify how managers could reduce intention of employee to leave the job. They found that the reasons were largely caused by lack of commitment and feeling of stress. This study focuses on workplace stress and organizational commitment as factors influencing employee intention to leave within the context of fast food restaurants. The following research framework illustrates the concept of the study.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study**

Due to the nature of hospitality industry, employers are struggling to attract and keep employees due to low employee morale, low perception of the job and high customer-employee contact (Janta & Ladkin, 2009). Zeytinoglu, Lillevik, Seaton, and Moruz (2004) mentioned that split shifts and unpredictable working hours contribute to stress. Moreover, dealing with difficult customers would add to the high level of workplace stress (Poulston, 2009). The employees are not much satisfied with their jobs due to high stress level caused by episodes of handling customer misbehavior (Choi, Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2014). As this keeps going, it affects employees' performance and consequently, have the intention to leave the job. Evidently, Allen (2017) found that job stress has a positive correlation on employee intention to leave in the quick-service industry. Accordingly, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave.*

Kumar et al (2012), in their study on Malaysian fast food restaurants, they found that there is a significant relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave. The employee motivation, knowledge, and commitment to service are regarded as a key to success of any service organization. It is not harsh to say that motivated employees would produce high commitment employees to the organizations. Mohsin and Lengler (2015) found that organizational commitment was negatively associated with intention of leaving. Hence, it can be assumed that higher organizational commitment would decrease the intention to leave of an employee. Thus, the following hypothesis tests the situation in Malaysian fast food restaurants:

*H2: There is a negative relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave.*

### Research Methodology

The current study is a quantitative research and survey questionnaire was employed. The questionnaire was divided into four sections namely demographic information (Section A), workplace stress (Section B), organizational commitment (Section C), and intention to leave (Section D). The survey was adapted from previous studies (Excluding demographic information, the survey consisted of 15 items (6 items for workplace stress, 6 items for organizational commitment and 3 items for intention to leave). Five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to elicit responses from respondents. A pilot study with 30 respondents was conducted prior to major data collection. Reliability test was performed and the alpha values for Section B, C and D were .849, .906 and .707 respectively. The reliability results are presented in Table 1. It indicates respectable alpha values (DeVellis, 2012), and all items were retained.

**Table 1: Reliability results of pilot study**

Variables	No. of Items	Alpha Value
<b>Section A:</b> Workplace Stress	6	.849
<b>Section B:</b> Organizational Commitment	6	.906
<b>Section C:</b> Intention to Leave	3	.707

The survey was distributed to fast food restaurants from three different areas in Malaysian states which are Shah Alam in Selangor, Raub in Pahang and Muar in Johor. The sample consisted of employees currently employed in the fast food restaurants and the respondents have agreed to participate in the study. Using cross-sectional study, researchers were able to collect 132 usable responses and analyzed the data using SPSS version 26. Pearson correlation was employed to identify the existence of relationship between variables of study.

### Data Analysis and Results

#### Demographic Profiles

The usable responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics that includes gender, age group, marital status, and educational background. Majority of the respondents were female (71.2%), between 22 and 25 years (51.5%), single (78.8%) and had bachelor's degree qualification (49%). The following table outlines the demographic information of the study.



**Table 2: Summary of demographic profiles**

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	38	28.8
	Female	94	71.2
Age Group	18-21 years	17	13.0
	22-25 years	68	51.5
	26-29 years	30	22.7
	30-34 years	11	8.3
	35 years and above	6	4.5
Marital Status	Single	104	78.8
	Married	26	19.7
	Divorced	2	1.5
Educational Background	SPM	22	16.7
	Diploma	36	27.3
	Bachelor's Degree	65	49.2
	Others	9	6.8

*N=132*

### Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was performed to examine the relationship between variables of the study. Research objectives and hypotheses were achieved through this analysis, providing the direction and strength of correlation between variables. Table 3 presents the results from Pearson correlation.

**Table 3: Results from correlation analysis**

Variable	1	2	3
1. Intention to leave	-		
2. Workplace stress	.265**	-	
3. Organizational commitment	.294**	-.140	-

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

All variables were simultaneously analyzed using this analysis and showed that there is a relationship between the variables. The results indicate that workplace stress and organizational commitment were positively related towards intention to leave. Specifically, there was a weak positive relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave ( $r = .27$ ,  $n = 132$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and similarly, a weak positive relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave ( $r = .29$ ,  $n = 132$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indication of the strength is obtained from Cohen's (1988) correlation coefficient guideline for interpreting the size of the correlation.

Furthermore, this analysis was also used to test the hypotheses of the study. Significantly, evidence of positive relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave showed that the first hypothesis was supported. However, the positive relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave was uniquely contradict to the proposed

hypothesis as developed earlier. The summary of the hypotheses testing indicates whether the hypotheses were accepted or rejected.

**Table 4: Summary of the hypotheses testing**

Proposed Hypothesis	Remark
H1: There is a positive relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave.	Accepted
H2: There is a negative relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave.	Rejected

### Discussions, Recommendations and Conclusion

The current study has provided empirical evidence of the relationship between workplace stress, organizational commitment, and intention to leave in Malaysian context. First, the study empirically investigates the relationship between workplace stress and intention to leave. The significant findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between these two variables, which indicated that the workplace stress would lead to employee intention to leave. This implies that the higher the workplace stress, the higher the intention to leave. It supports previous studies in different context that workplace stress was significantly related to intention to leave the job (Hasin, & Omar, 2007). Workplace stress was associated with dealing with difficult customers (Poulston, 2009) as employees working in the fast food restaurants have high contact with customers. Other than that, split shifts and unpredictable working hours of fast food restaurants would also contribute to the higher stress level as indicated by (Zeytinoglu, 2004). The employees would experience stress when they need to work under unpleasant conditions such as when the customers are difficult to handle, they are fatigue during the peak hours or no-shows of their co-workers that requires them to cover their shifts. They would feel unhappy and certainly lead to stress, causing the productivity during the operation hours get disturbed. This study clearly indicates the role played by workplace stress in increasing the turnover intention. Therefore, managers need to play important part to ensure that sufficient employees to work during the shift hours and assure that no changes on the work schedule. Although it seems unrealistic in the context of fast food industry to remove shift works as it the nature of the business, however, the managers could obtain agreement with employees to allocate suitable schedule.

The study also confirms the significant positive relationship between organizational commitment and intention to leave. It presents a contradicting finding as what has been proposed by the study. It implies that although the employees show good commitment at work to the organization, they still have the intention to leave the job. The finding showed that the higher level of commitment does not guarantee the employees would stay in the industry. This unique result opposed the notion of previous studies by Mohsin and Lengler (2015); Kim et al (2005) who stated that employees' positive commitment to the organization may result in a lower probability to leave the organization. Kim et al (2005) suggested that employers must strategically improve the employees' skills and provide justifiable career enhancement to motivate their employees to be more committed to the organization. Although fast food industry is regarded as short-term based, providing attractive career advancement would likely to change the mentality of potential employees to stay in the industry. This would help the employees understand that the employers are putting efforts to retain them and taking care of their career development. Emphasizing on personal

development and build confidence to obtain employee commitment would help to reduce their intention to leave (Mohsin & Lengler, 2015).

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