

# STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND ACADEMIC STAFF RETENTION: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Vu, Hieu Minh<sup>1</sup>, Chijioke Nwachukwu<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Business Administration, Van Lang University, Vietnam  
Email: vuminhhieu@vanlanguni.edu.vn

<sup>2</sup>Department of international Business Administration,  
Universidad de Las Americas Puebla, Mexico.  
Corresponding author email: cesogwa@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

Universities are involved in building capacity needed for the social economic and technological advancement of any country. They serve as storehouses of knowledge and research. Academic staff play crucial role in achieving the goals of a university. We employed systematic literature review process to select the articles used in this study. This study develops a conceptual framework and propositions for future studies. Our conceptual model provides direction for researchers to empirically assess the links between strategic human resource management practices, organizational culture and academic staff retention. Empirical testing of the model could enrich our understanding of the SHRM practice(s) that better predict academic staff retention and how organizational culture foster retention.

## **Keywords:**

strategic human resource management, organisational culture, employee retention, academic staff.

**JEL Classification:** M10, L10

## **Introduction**

The evolving competition in the global education environment due to the increasing number of new universities has called for strategic human resource management practices that would allow these universities to retain competent academic staff. A significant trend today is for university managers to adopt a strategic approach to recognize important connections between human resource management practices, organisational culture and academic staff retention. Strategic human resource management (SHRM) suggests a growing change in the HRM function from prescriptive, reactive and administrative to descriptive, proactive and executive (Fahim, 2018). Indeed, to remain competitive in a knowledge-based economy, organisations need to attract and recruit skilled people (Tung, 2008). Nowadays, there is an increased emphasis on strategic HRM in universities. Shah (2013) asserts that strategic planning is vital to all higher education institutions, considering reduced public funding and dynamic external operating environment. Nonetheless, there is a growing interest by universities to attract and retain highly qualified academics. There had been constant mobility of knowledgeable lecturers and researchers from one university to another and from one country to another as a result of globalization and shifting demographics profiles (Maina and Waianjo, 2014). Consequently, retaining academic staff has become a serious challenge for universities because talented academics have a luxury of choice. These trends have called for a strategic approach to human resource management across the higher education sector (Wilkin and Nwoke, 2011). The importance of having qualified academic staff cannot be overemphasized. Hence, the need to develop a conceptual model that focuses on examining the

relationship between strategic human resource management practices, organisational culture and retention of academics in the university. In both developed and most developing countries, there have been several studies on human resource management (e.g. Allui and Sahni, 2016; Emeagwal and Ogbonmwan, 2018; Francis, 2014) of which very few have been done on strategic HRM practices and retention of academic staff in universities. The few earlier works on the subject were conducted in the last five years (Korantwi-Barimah, 2017; Siekkinen, Pekkola and Kivistö, 2016; Kuoppala et al., 2015) and examined recruitment, selection and training. Extant literature has indicated a lack of adequate research about the relationship between SHRM practices and employee retention (Fahim, 2018), especially academics. The big question here maybe which SHRM practices are more likely to contribute to staff retention (Mbugua et al., 2015). However, few scholars had argued that there is no connection between some of SHRM practices dimensions and retention (e.g. Haider et al., 2015; Francis, 2014). The literature shows mixed results regarding the impact of SHRM indicators on employee retention in organisations, suggesting that the relationship is unclear and inconsistent. Nonetheless, studies on how strategic HRM practices affect academic staff retention is scanty and still lacking. Besides, the effect of these HRM practices on academic staff retention may be contingent on organizational characteristics such as culture. In this study organizational culture is the moderator variable and is explained as the values, beliefs, ideologies, customs, norms, traditions, knowledge, and skills shared by the members of an organisation (Detert, et al., 2000). Studies have found that organizational culture affects the behaviours of individuals and groups (Hartnell et al., 2011) and correlate with a longer length of employment (Madaus et al., 2008). Studies on organizational culture, voluntary labour turnover and employee retention are scanty. To the best of our knowledge, no study has examined the moderating role of organizational structure in the relationship between SHRM and academic staff retention. Without qualified and committed academic staff, no academic institution can ensure sustainability and quality over the long term. Therefore, it is critically important to retain this cadre of staff and prevent constant mobility. This study focuses on strategic recruitment, strategic training and career development, strategic compensation practices, work-life balance and strategic performance management. The objectives of this study are two folds;

- Propose SHRM-OC-ER link model.
- Suggest propositions for validation of the proposed model.

### ***Theoretical framework***

People tend to get into relationships that give them maximum reward with the least amount of efforts. (see Emerson, 1976; Ekeh, 1974). According to social exchange theory, as individuals interact over time, they experience the need to reciprocate the support and assistance of the other person, called the norm of reciprocity (Blau, 1983). The norm of reciprocity fosters trust and loyal relationship (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). If employees perceive their organisation as supportive, they feel an obligation to return this support (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). They return this support in the form of attitudes and behaviours that enhance organisational effectiveness. In light of social exchange theory, robust organizational culture will enhance the relationship between SHRM practices and academic staff retention. Universities that implement strong organisational culture can use SHRM practices to retain skilled academic staff. Herzberg two-factor theory suggests that employees are motivated by internal values rather than values that are external to the work. Motivation to work is internally generated and is driven by variables that are intrinsic to the work which includes responsibility, achievement, recognition, the work itself, advancement, and growth. Conversely, certain factors lead to dissatisfying experiences to employees and these factors emanate from non-job-related variables called extrinsic variables. These are salary, work environment, company policies, co-worker relationships and supervisory or management styles (Armstrong, 2009). This theory is appropriate for this study because it recognises that employees have two categories of needs that operate in them and that both should be addressed

by implementing strategic HRM practices in other to retain skilled academic staff. Past studies used Herzberg theory to establish factors influencing job satisfaction of academics in Uganda (Ssesanga et al., 2005), motivational variables influencing staff retention in private and public organisations in South Africa (Michael, 2008), factor influencing retention of sales consultant in South Africa (Radivoev, 2005). These theories serve as a guide to explore the relationship between strategic HRM practices, culture and academic staff retention in universities.

## *Literature review*

### ***The Concept of Strategic Human Resource Management***

SHRM suggests that human resource is a strategic asset that contributes to achieving organisations success and mission (Armstrong, 2006). Boxall and Purcell (2003) opined that SHRM aligns HRM with strategic content of the firm and the HR strategy. Allui and Sahni (2016) assert that SHRM focuses on creating and implementing HR policies/practices that ensure that people contribute to organisational objectives. Strategic human resource management (SHRM) suggest a paradigm shift of HRM function from prescriptive, reactive and administrative to descriptive, proactive and executive (Armstrong, 2006). According to Sahoo et al. (2011), SHRM connects HRM activities to a firm business strategy. Arguably, the goal of SHRM is to achieve strategic fit by aligning human resource to business strategy to achieve a competitive edge. Strategic alignment of HRM ensures that HRM is a strategic partner in developing and executing the company's strategies through HR activities. Several studies (e.g., Sanjeevkumar, 2012; Subramaniam et al., 2011; De Cieri and Kramar, 2008) have examined HR practices/activities, such as job security, information sharing, work-life balance, training and development, career development, compensation and benefits, and performance appraisal. According to Hvizdová and Máchal (2019) HRM practices and policies foster employee's experiences of work, employment relationship and organisational success. Based on the literature, the SHRM function may involve a variety of practices and activities which include;

**Recruitment.** The goal of recruitment is to attract at minimum cost the right number and quality of employees required to satisfy the strategic needs of the organization.

**Training and career development.** They are activities undertaken by the organisation to enable employees get the knowledge, skills, abilities and experience required to carry out current or future jobs. Career development focuses on career planning and career management.

**Performance management.** Focuses on establishing individual expectations aligned to organizational goals, by providing coaching and feedback that assist employees to perform better as well as evaluate employee performance to inform talent decision.

**Compensation practices.** They are the total monetary and non-monetary rewards employees get for their efforts.

**Work-life balance.** Is the relationship between the work and other activities such as family, community, leisure and personal development.

### ***Organisational Culture as a Contingent factor***

Considering the importance of culture in various organizational contexts; be it employees, communication, or performance of the organisation, it is, therefore, important to understand how it fosters strategic human resource practices and academic retention. Hamadamin and Atan (2019) submitted that culture fosters university competitiveness in Iraq. Needle (2004) assert that organisational culture accounts for the collective values, beliefs and principles of organisational members. Organisational culture includes the company's vision, values, norms, systems, symbols,

language, assumptions, beliefs, and habits. Values connote the core set of beliefs and principles that is acceptable by groups of individuals (Kalemci et al., 2019). HRM practices within an organization cannot be divorced from social culture (Cuéllar-Molina, et al., 2019). Sabiu, Mei and Joarder (2016) note that culture connects individuals in organisations regardless of their position in the organization. Brenyah and Tetteh (2016) reported that organisational culture directly impacts academic staff retention in Ghana. Recently, Vanhala and Ritala (2016), found that lack of trust culture partially mediates the effect of HRM practices on organisational innovativeness. Allui and Sahni (2016) submitted that organisation culture fosters top management communication with the employees. Extant literature suggests that little is known about the moderating effect of organisational culture on the effectiveness of strategic human resource management practices in terms of its impact on academic retention. Haider et al., (2015) opines that the organisational environment is influenced by organisational culture. Understanding organisational culture could provide insights into the fundamental characteristics of an organization. We argue that the effectiveness of strategic human resource management practices in terms of its impact on academic staff retention will depend on organisational culture.

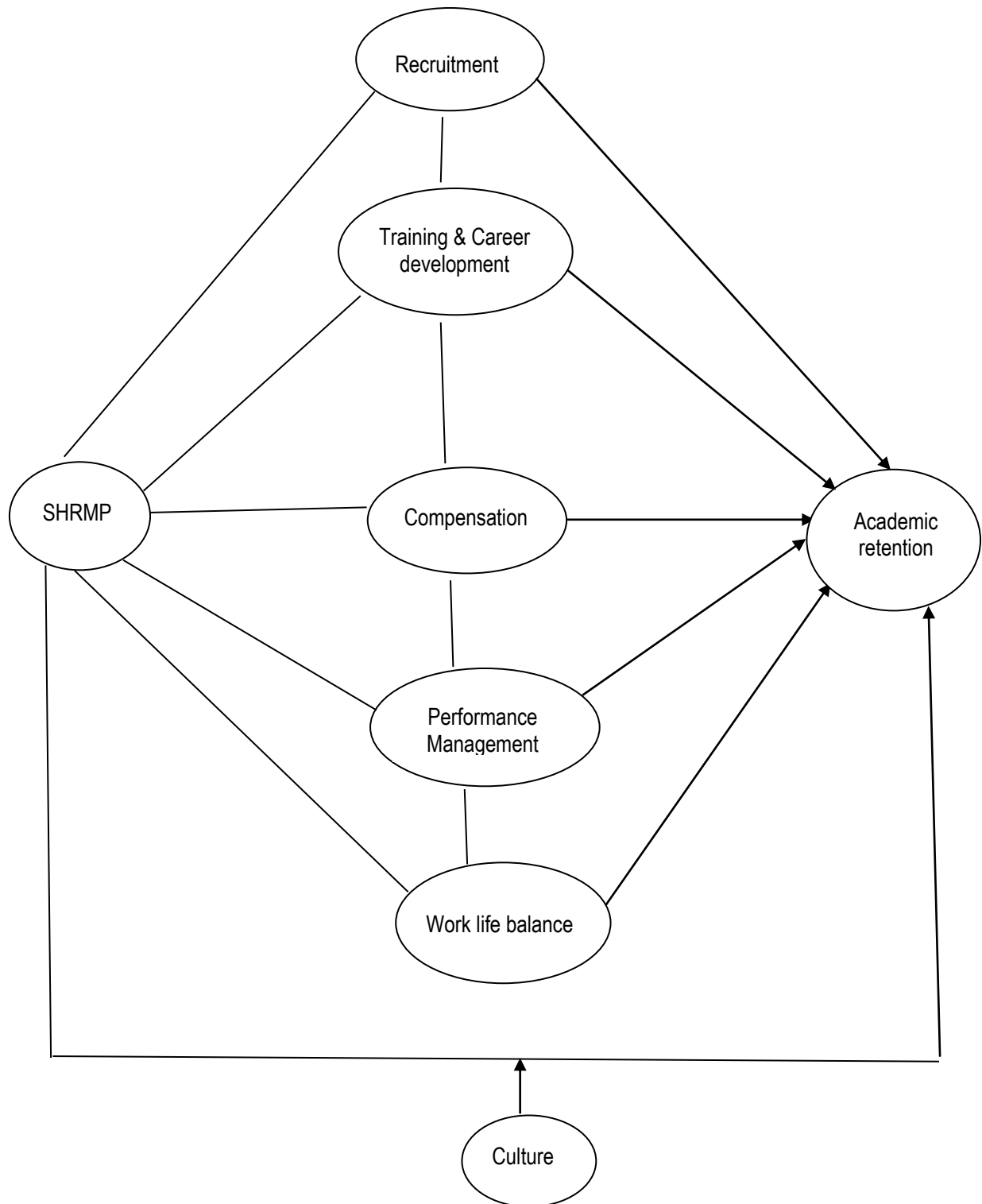
### ***The Concept of Employee Retention***

Employee retention involves using various policies and practices to keep employees in an organization for a longer period (Amaeshi, 2014). Bushe (2012) assert that institutions can retain competent staff by creating a motivating climate and implementing best practices in human resource and talent management. Employee turnover is a gradual reduction in the number of employees due to retirement, resignation, or death. Employee turnover is a critical problem among institutions of higher learning. Muir and Li (2014) opine that retention shows the behaviour of an employee to continue to work for an organisation. Indeed, an organisation need to understand what motivate people to be loyal and productive (Emuhira, 2011). Indispensable skills, knowledge and business relationships are lost when talented employees leave the organisation (Latha, 2017). More so, high rates of attrition of competent employees can disrupt an organisation's performance. Extant literature suggests that hiring practices, managerial style, lack of competitive compensation, lack of recognition and toxic workplace are some of the causes of employee turnover. Samuel and Chipunza (2009) note that managers often fail to link retention strategies to distinctive cultures and systems of their companies. Retention tools are categorised into human resource factors such as person–organisation fit, training and career development, challenging job opportunities reward and recognition (Hemalatha and Savarimuthu, 2013; Emuhira, 2011). Mbugua (2015) note that organisational factors include leadership behaviour, teamwork, communication, company's policies and good work environment.

### ***Links between Strategic Human Resources Management and Employee Retention***

SHRM practices influence employee commitment and voluntary turnover rates of employees (Allui and Sahni, 2016). Previous studies identified SHRM practices that foster retention such as teamwork, work-life balance, job design activities, job analysis methods, participation programs, information sharing, grievance, staffing, training, performance appraisal, and incentive-based compensation (e.g. Luthans and Sommer, 2005). Empirically, Francis (2014) reported that HRM dimensions of training and development, career advancement, compensation and benefits and performance appraisal influence employees' intention to stay. Mbugua (2015) found that strategic recruitment, strategic training and strategic performance management fosters retention. However, some studies failed to substantiate the relationship between some of SHRM practices and retention (e.g. Haider et al., 2015; Francis, 2014) and employee satisfaction (Nwachukwu and Chladková, 2017). Yet, there is little agreement regarding which human resource activities should be included as the appropriate HRM system to optimise universities retention strategy.

**Figure 1. Conceptualization of SHRM-OC-Academic Retention Link Model**



SHRMP represent strategic human resource management practices

### **Methodology**

The study relied on journal articles and other relevant publications obtained from Scopus and Web of Science databases. We conducted a search using the keywords, SHRM, organisational culture and employee retention. The authors employed a systematic literature review method (Tranfield et al., 2003) to reduce bias through a comprehensive literature search. In carrying out our review we focused on both qualitative and quantitative studies from 1980 to 2019. Second, we included studies that focussed on strategic human resource practices, organisational culture and retention related concepts. Based on the abovementioned criteria 54 publications were found relevant and suitable for the present study.

### **Discussion**

Oure study develops and presents a conceptual model and propositions to examine the moderating effect of organisational culture on the relationship between strategic human resource practices and academic retention. Also, to explore the impact of strategic human resource practices indicators on academic staff retention. Based on literature review, we make the following propositions;

- Proposition 1. The positive effect of SHRM practices on academic staff retention will be stronger with robust organisational culture.
- Proposition 2. Strategic recruitment will significantly influence academic staff retention.
- Proposition 3. Strategic training and career development will significantly impact academic staff retention.
- Proposition 4. Strategic compensation practices will significantly influence academic staff retention.
- Proposition 5. Strategic performance management will have a significant impact on academic staff retention.
- Proposition 6. Work-life balance foster academic staff retention

### **Conclusion**

The number, quality and effectiveness of academics make a difference in university education, production function and the wider society (Mwadiani, 2002). Universities strive to achieve and sustain their competitive edge. In this context, SHRM practice and robust organisational culture are required to retain academic staff in universities. Human resource management practices have been widely examined as antecedents to companies' growth, competitive advantage, organisational efficiency and organisational performance. Yet, few studies have examined the role SHRM practices play in academic staff retention. More so, little is known concerning how organisational culture constrains or strengthen the effectiveness of SHRM practices on academics retention. We propose that five variables of the SHRM practices will foster the retention of academic staff in universities. Additionally, the introduction of organisational culture has been theoretically supported. The conceptual model of this study in Figure 1, shows the different measures of strategic human resource management practices, organisational culture and academic staff retention strategies. The model with its associated propositions was developed based on limitations and gaps observed from previous studies. It is aimed at empirically testing the direct effect of SHRM practices as well as the moderating role of organisational culture in the impact of SHRM practices on academic staff retention in universities. Nonetheless, the conceptual model can be adopted or/and adapted in examining similar situations in different contexts and countries. The main theoretical contribution of this study is the inclusion of organisational structure as a moderator in the research model. Indeed, this study enriches existing knowledge in strategic human resource management by proposing a model connecting SHRM practices, organisational culture to academic



staff retention. Validation of this model will provide useful insights into academic staff expectations, the role of culture and SHRM practices that best predict their intention to stay.

### **Future research agenda**

This study only developed a conceptual model and six propositions for empirical testing. Future research will test for the reliability and construct validity of the variables conceptualised in this study. Furthermore, future research will test the goodness of fit and the propositions of the proposed model. We suggest that the measures proposed by (El-Ghalayini, 2017; Allui and Sahni, 2016; Mbugua, 2015; Francis, 2014) should be used to assess SHRM practices and retention. For organisation culture (Hofstede, 2001; Kotey and Sheridan, 2000) should be adapted. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 =strongly agree should be used to collect data from respondents. SmartPLS Structural equation Modelling (SEM) should be used to test the relationship in the proposed research model. Smart PLS software is useful for prediction-oriented and exploratory study (Hair et al., 2016). More so, Smart PLS is suitable for simultaneously addressing multiple dependency associations with higher statistical efficiency (Ringle and Sarstedt, 2016).

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