



# Employee Retention in the Modern Workplace: The Role of Organizational Culture, Leadership, and Career Growth Beyond Compensation

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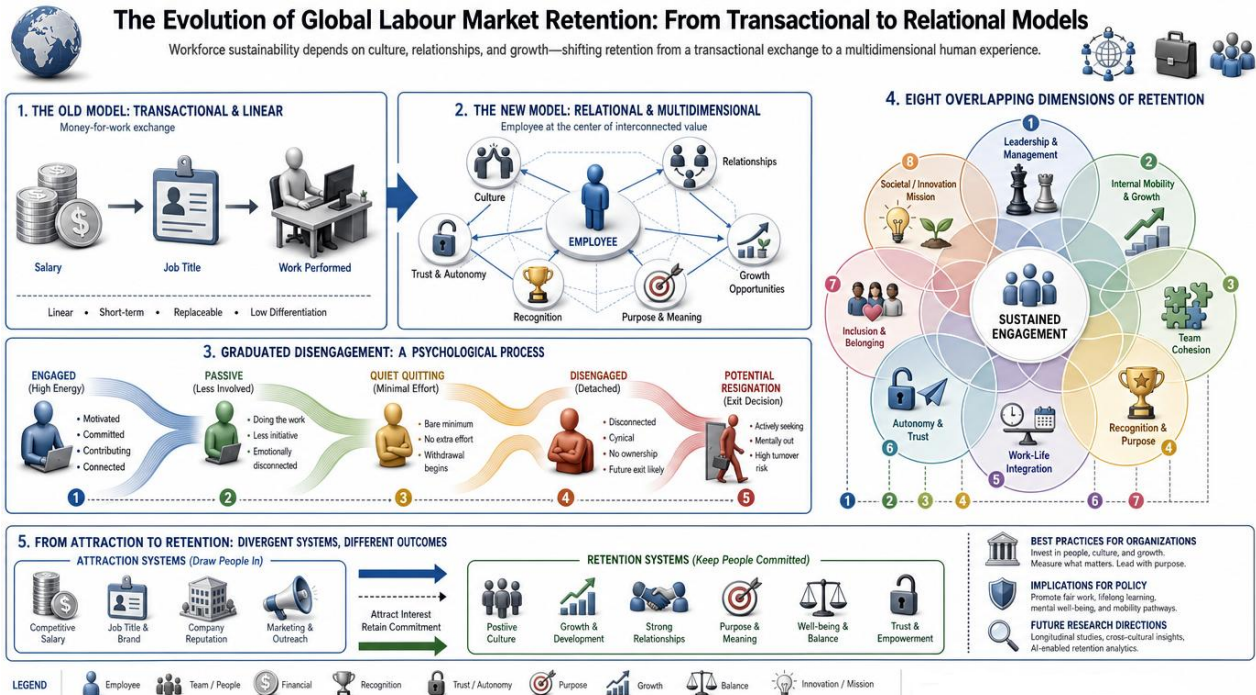
**Abstract** – The belief that monetary factors are the major influences on employee retention has been widely challenged by the empirical evidence that shows that the most important factors are non-monetary. This article looks at the idea that although a job may be a good one with a high pay, it's the culture, relationships and the development that will keep them at the job. Building on theory from organizational behavior, human resource management and industrial-organizational psychology, the manuscript draws on cross-national studies, and the manuscript theorizes about the psychological and structural mechanisms that underlie voluntary turnover. The analysis reveals a phenomenon here called graduated disengagement, where workers slowly disengage emotionally, cognitively and physically prior to their official exit and their bosses likely never realize it. Eight dimensions of innovation are explored cultural architecture, psychological safety, leadership quality, growth ecosystems, recognition systems, well-being infrastructure, communication transparency and meaning-making. The article discusses a need for paradigm change from transaction to relationship human capital management for the contemporary retention strategies. Practical applications and relevance to the public-sector, policy implications, and directions for future research are discussed. The results have implications for the sustainability of organisations, productivity of employees as well as the welfare of societies in a globalised labour market with increased labour mobility and changing employee expectations.

**Keywords:** Employee retention, Organizational culture, Psychological safety, Leadership, Talent management, Voluntary turnover, Workplace well-being, Human capital strategy, Employee engagement, Graduated disengagement.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modern-day global labour market is being reshaped and the old linear model of labour market functioning, based on the exchange of money for work, is no longer adequate to describe how work is behaviour. In all types of economies, ranging from the richest industrial ones to emerging markets, organizations are experiencing increasing voluntary turnover, job mobility and losing qualified staff even with competitive salaries. The post-pandemic Great Resignation, the emergence of quiet quitting, and the reconfiguration of work across the world, all point to a phenomenon whereby employees are looking at their companies and assessing everything beyond just the money.

At the heart of this article is the belief that salary and job title are great attractors, but poor retainers. Beyond these basic compensation levels, the factors that drive long-term employee engagement become intangible organizational culture, workplace relationships and the validity of growth opportunities. This switch in motivation priorities is in line with the old theory of Herzberg two factor theory but the new applications of this theory need to be studied again. Today, work is increasingly seen as a field of identity, development, and welfare by young and old workers alike.



**Fig -1:** Reframing Employee Retention in the Modern Global Market

While a lot of research literature has been dedicated to engagement and turnover, there is a critical gap in the literature. Existing studies often view retention as a dichotomous outcome variable, rather than a psychological process which can be understood as a gradual decline in the employee–employer relationship, and which may not result in an actual resignation from the company. This article fills that void by purposefully describing a theoretical structure of graduated disengagement, and by identifying and reviewing each of the eight overlapping dimensions that help frame culture, people and opportunities as they affect retention.

The purposes of the manuscript are fourfold:

- (1) to synthesize and critically review the literature on factors that account for the retention of employees
- (2) to develop a coherent conceptual framework to distinguish attraction-based from retention-based motivational systems
- (3) to analyze, using eight innovation-focused dimensions, the practical and societal mechanisms through which culture and human relationships affect the stability of the workforce and
- (4) to draw implications for organizational practice, public policy, and future research.

The article makes a contribution to the literature by shifting the focus from a transactional to a relational cultural understanding of what retention is and by offering a lens for globally understanding and analyzing what has been traditionally viewed as challenges in workforce sustainability.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW



Employee retention literature can be divided into different stages, each of which embodied the assumptions about the nature of work and the worker. Views of the early industrial era, which were based on the scientific management and economic rationality, saw employees as agents that maximize their utility, which could be achieved by giving them pay, job security and a well-drawn hierarchy. In this paradigm, turnover was used as a dependent variable and differences in wages was the key independent variable, and retention policy efforts were mostly in the form of monetary incentives. The Hawthorne studies ushered in a fundamental reorientation, which became known as the human relations movement, and which showed that social and psychological factors had a large impact on productivity and commitment. The following decades saw the rise of motivational theories, most notably those of who all called into question the reductionist perspective of workplace motivation. Of particular relevance is Herzberg's theory on hygiene factors e.g., salary, working conditions, policy and motivators e.g., achievement, recognition, growth that predates the current empirical research that this indicates that while compensation helps to prevent dissatisfaction it does not lead to sustained engagement.

Foundational theories of organizational commitment, particularly the tripartite model affective, continuance and normative, have helped explain the reasons for employees to stay in organizations, and affective commitment has been found to be the most powerful predictor of retention. The seminal work on personal engagement brought personal engagement to the forefront by creating the concept of psychological availability, and influential work on psychological safety concluded that interpersonal trust at the team level is a prerequisite for learning, innovation, and continued membership. There is extensive empirical research that has investigated the leadership contribution to retention. It has been consistently reported in studies on transformational leadership, servant leadership, and authentic leadership that leadership quality is one of the best predictors of voluntary turnover. Although the saying employees don't quit companies they quit managers has become a staple for practitioners, it has strong empirical evidence bad managers are consistently cited as the reason for leaving a company regardless of cultural differences.

Important research on organizational culture by Schein, Edmondson, and others has shown that there are three levels of culture artifacts, espoused values and basic underlying assumptions, and that when these are misaligned, it results in cynicism and disengagement, which in turn leads to turnover. Research by Glassdoor, Gallup, Deloitte, and McKinsey all indicate that fit with the company culture and the quality of the manager is a more critical factor in retaining employees, especially knowledge workers and Millennials and Gen-Z. These conclusions are confirmed by the literature on talent development. Research on career growth opportunities, perceived organizational support and learning culture shows that workers assess organizations, not only in terms of what is happening now, but in terms of what they perceive might be the future trajectory. Of course, people can leave because of psychological contract violation when growth doesn't materialise as promised during recruitment. However, there are a number of limitations that need to be recognized in this rich literature. First, a lot of research is still confined to individual constructs that are only discussed in isolation from each other engagement, leadership, culture and growth. Second, of course, is the temporal dimension of disengagement is under-explored, most research on disengagement is modelled as a binary phenomenon, and thus does not explore the staged psychological disengagement that can precede turnover. Third is a question of cross-cultural generalizability there is a lot of underlying research that has been done in Western individualist cultures. This article aims to fill these voids by putting together the various strands of literature in a single framework that may be applicable to the global arena.

### 3. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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In this article, the theory is based on three interwoven propositions that collectively provide a rationale for the theory of salary attracts but culture retains.

**Proposition 1:** Attraction Retention Asymmetry. This proposition is based on two-factor theory and expands upon it using current motivational science, which states that the factors that influence entry to the organization are different from the factors that influence exit from the organization. These include compensation, brand prestige, job title and benefits they are necessary but not sufficient conditions for membership. Once they are met, their contribution to retention drops off precipitously and retention factors such as culture, relationships, autonomy, growth, and meaning come to the fore. This asymmetry is a key to the empirical puzzles of workers quitting high-paying jobs for lower-paying but more humane workplaces.

**Proposition 2:** Graduated Disengagement. This article expands on the construct of graduated disengagement by exploring the temporal pathway of employee disengagement from their organizations. This model, which is not a sudden departure, suggests that there are three stages of the process: (a) emotional withdrawal, during which the employee psychologically stops investing in the organization's mission and relationships (b) cognitive disengagement, in which the employee's discretionary effort, creative contribution and intellectual investment decrease and (c) behavioral exit, characterized first by reduced participation, absenteeism or quiet quitting, and finally by the formal resignation. Importantly, the direction of this motion is not obvious to the leadership, and as such, it's almost always too late to intervene by the time it's detected. The construct combines the theories of exit-voice-loyalty and psychological contract breach.

**Proposition 3:** The Cultural Substrate. Organizational culture is the substance on which other retention factors come into play. Leadership, growth and recognition are amplified or neutralized by the quality of the culture, or even turned into negative forces. This proposition is based on a layered model of culture and expands it to claim that culture is not an environmental variable but one that is generative and can produce or inhibit daily experiences that are shaping retention.

The three are combined in a conceptual model that posits attraction factors as boundary conditions, retention factors as causal drivers and culture as the moderating substrate that is essential to see if retention factors lead to sustained commitment. It is a framework that will be used to analyze the following discussion.

#### 4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This is a manuscript that utilizes an integrative theoretical synthesis methodology which consists of systematic narrative review of the literature and conceptual analysis. The method seems suitable with regard to the article's goals of theory development and not hypothesis testing. Peer-reviewed journals in the fields of management, organizational behavior, industrial-organizational psychology, and human resource management from 1960 through 2025 were utilized as sources, along with classic works as foundational sources and authoritative practitioner reports from well-known and internationally recognized research institutions. The criteria for selection were the extent of theoretical depth and empirical robustness and cross-cultural relevance. The analytical process consisted out of three phases. First, the basic and modern works were juxtaposed with the main thesis in order to find commonalities and discrepancies. Second, to build the graduated disengagement framework, cross disciplines input was utilized. Thirdly, the framework was used analytically for eight thematic aspects of current workplace experiences to obtain practical and policy relevant insights. The methodology is clear, of a theoretical nature and best interpreted as a scholarly contribution towards conceptualization instead of testing of empirical hypotheses.

### 5. MAIN ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION EIGHT INNOVATION-FOCUSED DIMENSIONS OF RETENTION

Eight interrelated dimensions are discussed here that impact retention outcomes through culture, people and opportunities. Each dimension is an arena in which organizational practice can literally be thought differently to fit the relational logic of the work place today.



Fig -2: Employee Retention

#### 5.1 Cultural Architecture Designing the Daily Experience of Work

In practice, too often organizational culture is mistakenly identified as a collection of privileges, slogans or branded objects. Conceptions like this trivialize culture and blind one to its working. Correctly understood, culture is the recurring pattern of how people interact, decide and behave on a day-to-day basis that shapes their employee experience. This is reflected in the way disagreements are resolved, mistakes are dealt with, decisions are taken and power is shared. Cultural architecture is an intentional structuring and behavioural intervention to create these patterns. Exemplary retention organizations view culture not as an add-on to HR but as a strategic design element like creating a product or a financial plan and manage it accordingly. This involves making specific statements of cultural values, reconciling stated and practiced values, and using qualitative and quantitative tools to constantly assess cultural wellness.

#### 5.2 Psychological Safety and the Architecture of Trust

The concept of psychological safety, shared belief in the team's safety for interpersonal risk taking, has become one of the strongest predictors of team performance and retention. When there is not psychological safety, employees don't raise issues, cover up mistakes, and don't contribute creatively. Gradually this suppression creates the emotional disengagement that begins the graduated disengagement pathway. Creating psychological safety is not simply about saying it is about doing it and that means that leaders must practise behavioral discipline, like displaying vulnerability, destigmatizing failure and protecting dissent



institutionally. The most innovative organizations put psychological safety into practice by having specific practices for blameless post-mortems, asking minorities to speak up, and explicitly stating norms for disagreeing.

### **5.3 Leadership Quality and the Manager-Effect**

One thing that has been consistently discovered by decades of research is that the key factor in an employee's experience of an organization is his or her immediate manager. In the day-to-day operations of workload, recognition, conflict and development, managers are responsible for bringing these abstract cultural values into reality. Even the very best-designed organizations will suffer a quick psychological withdrawal as a result of toxic supervision, which is the overbearing of micromanaging, credit-stealing, publically criticizing, or changing the rules at the last minute. However, supportive supervision can help keep people engaged in difficult situations. Leadership development needs to be rethought, therefore, not as a nice to have investment in individual careers but as a retention investment in the infrastructure. This includes thorough hiring practices for managers based on their relational capabilities and ongoing professional growth in coaching and feedback, as well as performance measurement systems including team wellbeing.

### **5.4 Ecosystems and the Authenticity of Opportunity**

Job seekers are more likely to consider a company based on the momentum it is moving in not necessarily the job it's currently offering. Often growth opportunities are promised at the time of hiring and not evenly matched after that. This is especially harmful type of non-fulfillment of psychological contract. A growth ecosystem goes beyond one-off training to providing meaningful stretch, clear career ladders, pairing opportunities, internal mobility processes and time for growth. Authenticity of growth opportunities a true or actual presence of growth opportunities rather than a rhetorical one is a strong retention variable. Those that consistently turn growth pledges into growth experiences create compounding loyalty impacts that can't be replicated by compensation alone.

### **5.5 Recognition Systems and the Economy of Acknowledgment**

Recognition is a unique motivational form of payment that can't be replaced by monetary payment. Studies have long shown that people who don't feel their work is appreciated will do whatever they can to leave, no matter how much they get paid. The key features of a good recognition system are specificity, timeliness, proportionality and authenticity. They are not only outcome based but also learning based and effort based as well as behaviour based, which aligns with values of the organization. Important Recognition needs to be part of everyday practice of management and not limited to annual events. When developed properly, the economy of acknowledgment fosters a virtuous circle of employees feeling appreciated, finding meaning in their jobs and demonstrating a deeper commitment.

### **5.6 Well-Being Infrastructure and the Boundaries of Productivity**

Burnout has become a commonplace in today's workplace and is a retention problem as well as an ethical issue. Overwork, the lack of demarcation between work and personal life and the 'always on' mentality lead to a depletion of cognitive and emotional capacity needed for sustained performance. Well-being infrastructure is the system of structures that organizations use to safeguard employee capacity workload calibration, meaningful flexibility, support for mental health, recovery time, and legitimization of rest. Organisations that invest in well-being know that productivity is finite and needs to be regenerated, they seek to invest in well-being not as a luxury, but as a business imperative. But the cultural acceptance of burnout promotes disengagement and, ultimately, decreases the productivity it purports to boost.

### **5.7 Communication Transparency and the Information Compact**

The way people communicate in an organisation is a good indicator of the health of an organisation culture. The cognitive friction and emotional fatigue that lead to disengagement is caused by toxic communication situations, such as passive aggression, information hoarding, opaque decision making or chronic ambiguity. Transparent communication gets to the point, however, and assumes that employees are adults who can deal with complexity. This includes effective communication of vision, candid dialogue about problems, understandable communication of decisions and bi-directional lines of communication for employee to voice concerns without repercussions. The exchange of information between organization and employee is the bedrock of trust and one of the quickest routes to attrition is when it is broken.

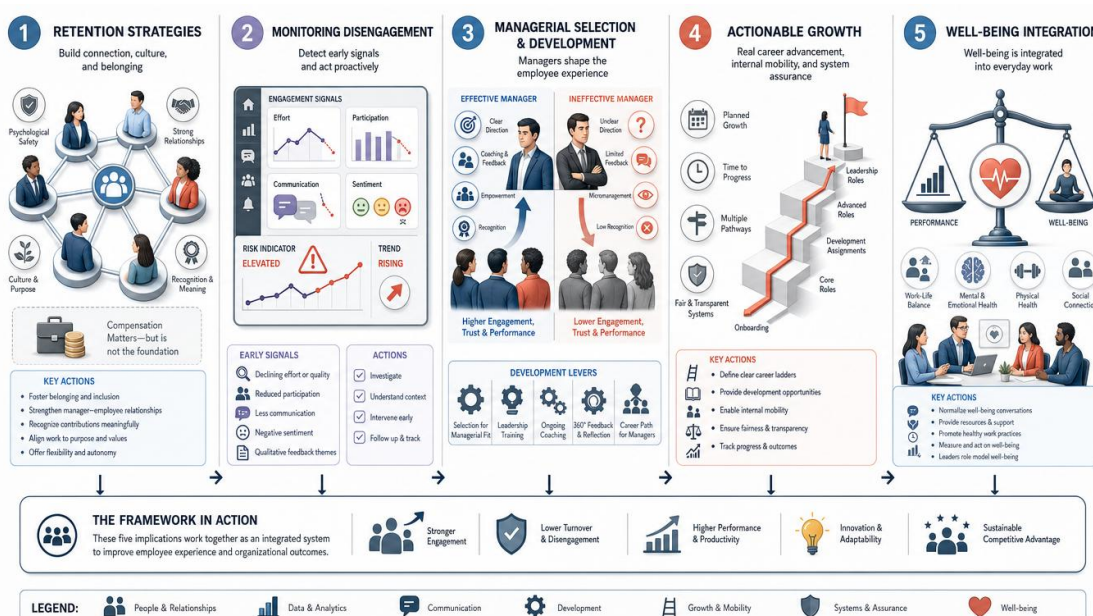
## 5.8 Meaning-Making and the Purpose Imperative

Not to mention all instrumental factors, today's workers are more likely to want to engage in work that makes sense in terms of a greater mission. The literature on meaningful work indicates that perceived purpose leads to increased commitment, resilience and discretionary effort. Mission-driven organizations don't have a monopoly on meaning-making it can be developed in any setting by making intentional links between individual work and organizational impact, making clear outputs' function in relation to customers or society, and by valuing contribution as important. By being elusive, organizations that don't try to connect on a meaningful level bring employment down to a transaction, and ultimately that is where retention is decided.

## 6. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

It has significant implications for organizational practice that the framework developed in this article has.

First, retention strategies need to be thought of as a cultural and relational approach, and not a compensation adjustment. Although the payment should be competitive, it is important to understand that it is a tool to get into the appropriate labour market and not the main tool to stay in the labour market.



**Fig -3:** Practical Applications for Organizational Practice

Second, organizations should establish regular monitoring of disengagement indicators that are relevant to the school. These changes can be identified by analysing changes in discretionary effort, participation

patterns, frequency of communication and qualitative signals within stay interviews and pulse surveys. Earlier detection means intervention before it's too late for behavior to get out of hand.

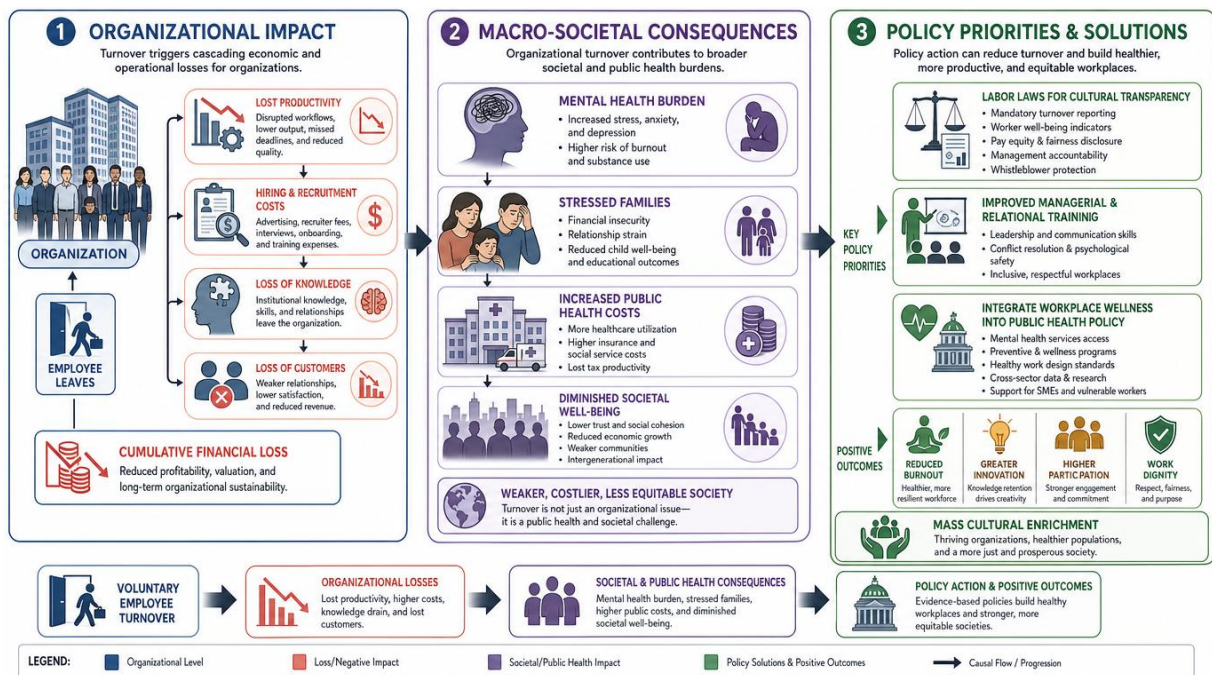
Third, managerial selection and development needs to be a priority in the strategy. Since the immediate manager is a huge contributor to the employee experience, companies that invest diligently in manager effectiveness reap cumulative retention benefits. This means the courage to get rid of someone in a management position if he or she is not relationally efficient, even if he or she is technically fantastic.

Fourth, growth needs to be made action not rhetoric. This means clear career structures, time for development, internal mobility processes and systems and measures to make sure of opportunities actually take place.

Lastly, there needs to be an infusion of wellbeing at the heart of operational design, not just as an add-on wellness program. Workload calibration, meeting hygiene, recovery norms and boundary-setting should be a part of the structure of work.

### 7. SOCIETAL, PUBLIC, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this analysis have implications beyond just an organization to society as a whole. Voluntary turnover can cost a company a significant economic loss due to lost productivity, hiring and recruitment expenses, loss of knowledge and loss of customers. On a macro-economic level, poor working conditions are a factor adding to the burden on mental health among the population, burdening public health systems and decreasing well-being in society.



**Fig -4:** Organizational Analysis

Culture and relational quality is even more important in the public sector where compensation is often further restricted by financial boundaries. Establishing a strong culture of the government agency, meaningful work,



and developmental opportunities can enable it to be a successful player in attracting talents as against the private sector employers who offer higher remuneration. In contrast, public sector organisations that do not focus on these dimensions end up with disproportionately high attrition rates and capacity erosion rates with the ripple effects for the quality of public services.

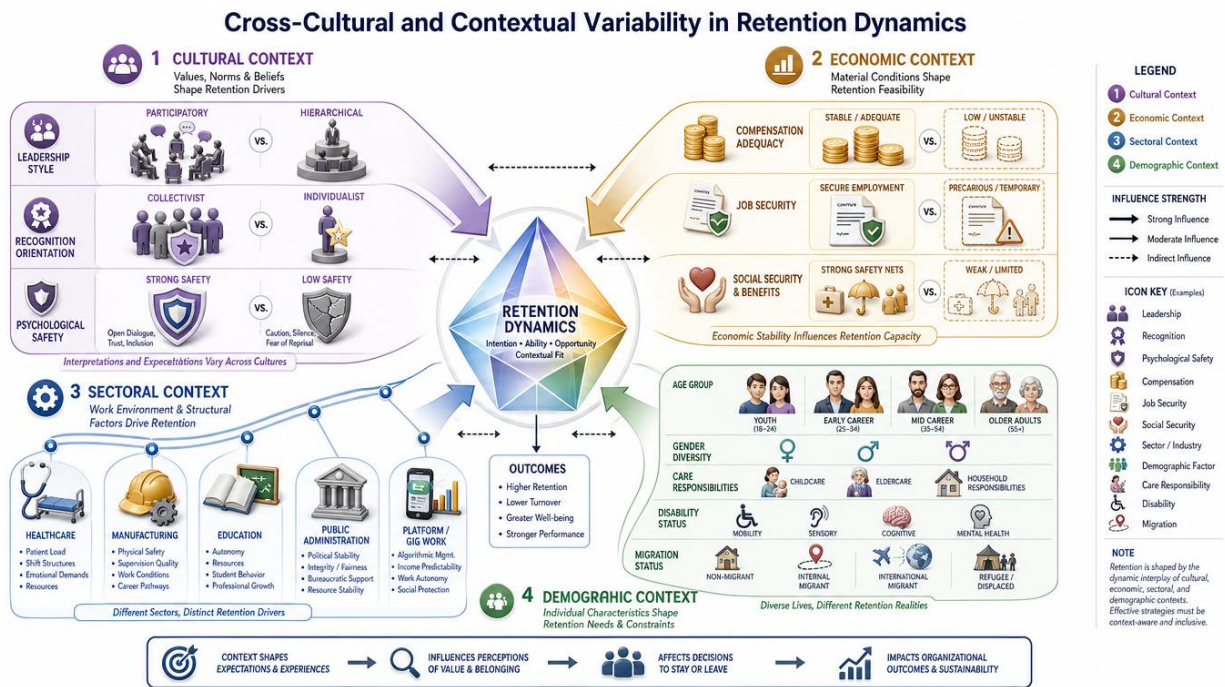
The analysis provides a number of policy priorities for policymakers. Labour laws need to be developed and improved to promote cultural transparency, such as the introduction of turnover statistics, indicators on workers' well-being, and mechanisms of accountability for management. Workforce instability is caused by a lack of managerial skills, which can be addressed by incorporating relational and managerial skills in the curriculum of business and professional education. Public health policy needs to recognise the workplace culture as one of the factors affecting population mental health and to include workplace wellness into the wider health policy. The potential of mass cultural enrichment is significant for society less work-related illness due to burnout, more effective participation in society, more effective innovation capacity and greater equality in dignity at work. In contrast, the social impacts of the pervasive and widespread workplace dysfunctions of lower trust, family stress and public health costs make the issue a legitimate public concern.

## 8. CROSS-CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL VARIABILITY IN RETENTION DYNAMICS

Although the framework developed in the previous sections is applicable globally, it should be qualified with the knowledge that how these dynamics work for retention is not culturally the same. The relative importance of compensation, culture, leadership, growth, etc., depends on the national context, sectoral structure, labor market and the demographic composition. These are a source of variability which needs to be explicitly addressed in a truly global treatment of retention.

The cultural dimensions theory can serve as a good starting point. Participatory leadership styles that are often considered as best practice in retention literature in the West may be interpreted in a high power distance culture as a sign of weak leadership. On the other hand, in low power distance culture, hierarchical style of communication which is often found in many Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American organizations may be perceived as oppressive. Psychological safety, central to the framework developed here, can take a variety of forms in different cultures in collectivist cultures it may mainly take place at the level of the in-group, and what may be expressions of individual dissent and safety in the West can be seen as signs of disrespect in other cultures. In the same way, an individualist culture might find recognition practices based on individual achievement motivating and comfortable, while a collectivist culture might find such practices uncomfortable or even counter-normative, as it is expected that the group will be recognised.

An additional layer of variability is added to the economic context. Where there is high unemployment, a weak sense of job security, and poor social security, the value of compensation and employment security is very important, compared to cultural and developmental issues. Although it is analytically convenient to differentiate between hygiene factors and motivators, the concept assumes that the former are assured and that is not the case for many in the world of work. In emerging economies, culture and growth might not be factors in retention, but stability, access to health care and family-supporting wages are. The framework should not be therefore applied in contexts with different underlying conditions of employment, i.e. in situations where the employment of knowledge workers is not comparable to employment in advanced economies.



**Fig -5:** Cross-Cultural and Contextual Variability in Retention Dynamics

It is also significant that the proportion of the workforce employed in each sector changes. Retention depends on patient load healthcare, moral injury healthcare, shift structures healthcare, physical safety manufacturing, supervisory practices manufacturing, autonomy education, adequacy of resources education, political stability public administration, and procedural integrity public administration, as well as on algorithmic management platform and gig work and income predictability platform and gig work. A "one size fits all" approach to retention in these various settings could be more confusing than informative. The eight dimensional model should therefore be calibrated in the future for sectors, as the relative importance of cultural architecture, psychological safety, growth ecosystems will differ depending on the structural conditions of work.

It is not to be neglected that there is a demographic variation too. Based on the empirical evidence, younger generations might value purpose, flexibility, and rapid development while older generations may value stability, being recognized for their expertise, and slow transition options. What it means for an employee to have a supportive workplace is also being influenced by factors such as gender, caring responsibilities, disability status and migration history. If the retention strategy doesn't take these overlapping identities into account, it could end up keeping dominant groups around and driving underrepresented groups away, which would be detrimental to the diversity, equity and capabilities of the organization.

Last, methodology implications for scholarship are related to the aspect of "contextual variability". The transfer of western instruments to non-western contexts in cross cultural retention studies should be discontinued and indigenous constructs and measures should be developed. A truly global science of retention requires comparative longitudinal designs that help to identify culturally specific meanings of "good work" through qualitative studies, but also take national and sectoral effects into consideration in the analysis through multilevel modeling approaches. Overall, the relational paradigm of retention presented in this article



is not a panacea, but a prismatic lens to be flexibly used to analyze retention. While the size of these dimensions is relevant in a general sense, how they are operationalized, weighted and interpreted should be adjusted for cultural, economic, sectoral, and demographic conditions. Scholarship that does so will make a more consistent and useful impact on the practice and policy of the organisation in the varied contexts in which global workers operate.

## 9. LIMITATIONS

A number of weaknesses of this analysis are important to make note of. Firstly, the article is an integrative, theoretical synthesis and is not designed to produce primary empirical data thus not to be directly tested against the propositions put forward. Future study is needed to validate the constructs, especially the graduated disengagement construct, empirically. Second, the framework is formulated at a sufficiently high level of abstraction to be applicable at a global level, which can potentially hide industry and country differences, cultural differences, and differences in the size of the companies or in the labor market. Thirdly, the literature on which the analysis is based still mainly stems from an individualist, Western context and the cross-cultural generalizability of some constructs such as psychological safety and meaning-making needs to be explored further in collectivist, emerging-market contexts. Fourth, the article highlights knowledge-intensive and professional fields, and contingent, gig or low-paying labor markets where the article is applicable needs to be treated theoretically. Fifth, the framework gives agency to the organization, and macro-structural factors such as labour market conditions, economic precarity, demographic change can be underweighted constraints upon individual organizational behaviours. Such restrictions set opportunities for refinement, but do not pose fundamental challenges to the middle line.

## 10. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Based on this analysis there are several directions for future research. Longitudinal studies with mixed methods would be able to test the graduated disengagement framework by providing observable signs of each of the phases and validate early-warning systems. Secondly, comparative studies across cultures are required to investigate the relative importance of the factors for attraction and retention in various national, industrial and demographic contexts. Third, there is a need for ongoing research on the combination of AI, remote work and cultural transmission, especially in the context of changing relational systems of culture in the increasingly digital world of work. Finally, studies on the economics of culture in the sense of quantifying the financial returns to cultural investment may be able to provide a better business argument for the relational paradigm put forward here. Fifth, research on the role of culture to non-traditional forms of employment, such as gig and platform work would expand the framework to people who have been underrepresented in retention studies. Sixth, intervention research on evaluating specific cultural and managerial practices using rigorous experimental designs would bring theory to practice. Finally, scholarship that focuses on the intersection of organizational culture and public health and society could help shed light on the larger implications of workplace design and help shape multi-disciplinary policy.

## 11. CONCLUSION

There is a basic truth about today's workforce that organizations are missing salary and position attract people, but culture, people and opportunities keep them. In this article, it has been stated that retention is not an outcome to be bought, but actually an achievement to be cultivated, a relational one. Compensation sets



up the conditions of entry, culture, leadership and growth set up the conditions of commitment. The concept of graduated disengagement offered here presents a model of retention as a gradual psychological process, rather than as an event, and focuses on the gradual and frequently unseen disengagement that occurs before formal disengagement. The eight dimensions of the relational infrastructure that enable retention or surrender of the same cultural architecture, psychological safety, leadership quality, growth ecosystems, recognition systems, well-being infrastructure, communication transparency, and meaning making together are the eight dimensions of innovations.

The impact doesn't just impact the organization's performance, but also the society's welfare. One of the most significant institutions of modern life is the workplace, which affects not only the economy, but a person's mental health, civic involvement and dignity. The creation of workplaces in which people can develop, then, is an organizational imperative and a public good. For scholars, the challenge is to bring together the various strands of research and put them in a single place that can explain the multifaceted nature of employment today. The message to practitioners is to give up the illusion of the possibility of compensation as a substitute for culture. The message for policy makers is that they should treat workplace quality as an issue that is of public concern. The organizations that will continue to prosper over coming decades will be those that grasp one thing that seems so simple, but so true: people join an organization for what it does, but remain there for what it is.

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