



**Moderation of psychological meaningfulness on the relationships between human resource management practices and turnover intention in health sector:
A proposed framework**

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Abstract

Organizations invest a lot on employees from recruitment & selection to compensation, training & development, career development and maintaining adequate work-life balance with a view to retain them so as to provide their best to the organization. No organization wish to record high turnover of skilful and experience employees. This paper being a proposed framework analysed the results of previous studies on human resource management (HRM) practices (recruitment & selection, compensation, training and development, career development, and work-life balance) on employees' turnover intention in health sector. On the basis of this, it hypothesized the possible moderation effect of psychological meaningfulness on the relationship between the HRM practices under study and turnover intention among healthcare workers. The theoretical framework adopted in the paper is social exchange theory. Arising from the review of the previous studies and theoretical supports, a conceptual framework is proposed. The study concludes that improvement and effective utilization of HRM practice can minimize employees' turnover in the health sector.

Key words: Conceptual Framework, Health Sector, Human Resource Management Practices, Psychological Meaningfulness, Turnover Intention

1. Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) is a philosophy, policy, system and practices that can affect the behavior, attitudes and performance of employees (Noe, 2007). Activities of HRM include recruitment & selection, compensation, training & development, career development and work-life balance aimed at keeping well motivated and high performing employees as well as reducing employee turnover intention (the desire to leave an organization) to barest minimum level. The ongoing intensification of globalization in the 21st century is not only characterized by liberalization of trade, services, investment and capital but also by cross border movements of human resource (employees) in search for employment opportunities and better life

around the world. Thus, globalization had generated an unprecedented fierce competition for human resource globally and had planted a pipeline for the draining of professionals of different human endeavors especially the healthcare professionals (medical doctors, nurses and so on) from African countries, Nigeria inclusive to the developed countries in America, Europe and Asia.

Turnover intention is an employee's consideration, desire, or wish to leave an organization. The intention of any employee to discontinue his service with an organization is an important issue which deserves a considerable attention due to its cost and effect on the organizations (Buerhaus et al., 2007). Turnover intention is a challenging issue in various industries.



This is especially true for the healthcare sector. Healthcare professional's shortages and turnover are perceived as global issues affecting the efficacy of healthcare organizations worldwide. World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) reports that the world does not have sufficient healthcare personnel, stating that the global shortage of healthcare worker reached 4.3 million in 2016 and it is expected to increase by 20% in next two decades. The number of health workers per one thousand populations in 2016 was estimated at 2.9/1000 in Africa; 5.8/1000 in Southeast Asia; 14.9/1000 in the USA and 40.3/1000 in Europe (WHO, 2016). This indicated that, the availability of health personnel in Africa is considerably worse than other regions of the world and it is one of the major stumbling blocks to the delivery of efficient healthcare services in African countries. Among the major health global challenges in health sector is the retention of healthcare workers at the disposal of countries not only in poor countries like those of Africa but practically everywhere in the world. Turnover intention is the major antecedent of turnover behaviour (quitting behaviour). It is an employee's willingness, desire and plan to quit from an organization. Turnover intention starts when an employee is thinking about leaving an organization by finding an alternative organization and finally having a turnover intention (Carmeli & Weisberg, 2006). When an employee has a turnover intention but an alternative employer is not available, the employee may involuntarily remain in his current organization. Meanwhile, he is likely to exhibit negative changes in attitudes and commitment to the organization which will consequently result in decline of the employee's performance and productivity.

Nigeria's health sector like in most African countries faces a variety of human resource management problems, ranging from retaining the inadequate healthcare professionals to the inability to adequately

compensate those that remains, ensuring their career development up to the inability to maintain their work-life balance. Furthermore, those personnel who remain are inequitably distributed between urban and rural areas. The exodus of healthcare professionals in Nigeria is threatening the very existence of the country's health system. Since 2009, the country has been losing an average of 700 medical doctors annually to Europe, America, Australia and South Africa (Yusuf et. al, 2023). Doctors are not the only healthcare professionals leaving their jobs in Nigeria, nurses and midwives among others are also leaving the country in droves, with turnover peaking at over 5,000 departures annually between the years 2002 and 2005, when Nigeria lost more nurses than it produced within the timeframe (WHO, 2006).

While UK and the US are the top two destinations for Nigerian health workers seeking job opportunities abroad, many are also migrating to Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman etc A 2017 survey by the Nigerian Polling organization (NOIPolls) in partnership with Nigeria Health Watch, revealed that about 88 percent of medical doctors in Nigeria were seeking work opportunities abroad at the time. Similarly, in 2018, the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) said at least twelve (12) of their colleagues leave Nigeria every week to practice overseas. A 2022 UK immigration report also showed that 13,609 Nigerian health workers (including doctors) were granted working visa in the past year, making the country second only to the 42,966 from India. According to the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA, 2022) over six thousand, (6000) Nigerian medical doctors have migrated to the United Kingdom (UK) in eight years as presented in Table 1.1 below:



Table 1.1 Movement of Nigerian Medical Doctors to UK 2015 – 2022

S/N	Years	Number of Medical Doctors that Move to UK
1	2015	233
2	2016	279
3	2017	475
4	2018	852
5	2019	1,347
6	2020	833
7	2021	932
8	2022	1,422
9	Total	6,373

Source: development Research and Project Centre (dRPC, 2023)

Similarly, between 2019 and mid-2022, at least 4,460 nurses migrated from Nigeria to the United Kingdom (dRPC, 2022). In its statistics, the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM), has lamented that there were only about 125,000 registered nurses servicing the health needs of the country’s over 200 million population which means that the country needs at least 800,000 nurses and midwives to meet its healthcare needs (NANNM, 2022). It is obvious from the foregoing that each year substantial numbers of healthcare professionals in Nigeria quit the health labour force, either temporarily or permanently. Their turnover certainly creates a vacuum that further worsen the shortage of healthcare personnel and compromise the delivery of quality healthcare services to Nigerians. However, one may wonder and ask, why some health professionals remain committed to serve in Nigeria, in spite of all the human resource management (HRM) challenges among others that are pushing health workers in the country to leave for overseas in search for a greener pasture? Many factors may be adduced as to why some health workers wishes to remained in Nigeria. One of these factors is psychological meaningfulness. Psychological meaningfulness refers to the experience of positive emotion at work and the feeling of self-worth accompanied by self-fulfilment and experiencing

contentment in what one does (Morrison, Burke & Greene, 2007). Put differently, psychological meaningfulness is the significance a person attaches to something, in the context of employees in work setting, it is related to work engagement. In an organisation, people are most likely to experience psychological meaningfulness when they feel they are useful, valuable and worthwhile (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004) When an employee experience psychological meaning in their work, they tend to feel more valuable and fulfilled by the values and purposes at work (Morrison et al., 2007; Pattakos, 2004; Lee, 2015). Thus, psychological meaning spells out why work is important to employees in relation to how they feel, thrive and still remain intact with authenticity and commitment to their work. It could therefore be argued that employees who find their work meaningful, will rather opt to stay than have intent to leave (turnover intention) or leave their work (turnover). It is against the above background that this paper relying on the existing body of literature, seeks to examine the moderation of psychological meaningfulness on human resource management practices (recruitment & selection, compensation, training & development, career development and work-life balance) and turnover intention in the health sector with a view to proposed a conceptual framework.



2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

This section of the paper presents a conceptual review on turnover intention and turnover as well as empirical review on the relationship between HRM practices (recruitment & selection, compensation, training & development, career development and work-life balance) and employees' turnover intention as moderated by psychological meaningfulness.

2.1 Turnover Intention and Turnover

Belete (2018) conceptualized turnover intention as the likelihood of an employee to leave their current organization. Similarly, Grandey (2000) defined turnover intention as the likelihood of an employee leaving an organization. According to Abassi and Hollman (2000) employee turnover intention is an employees' mental decision regarding a job whether to continue working or quit that job. They further explained that employee turnover intention is the workers intention to rotate between the state of employment and unemployment, occupations and jobs around organizations and labour market. On the other hand, turnover is the actual quitting of an employee from his organization. Therefore, turnover intention in the gateway to and prerequisite of employees' turnover. In most of the cases, turnover can take place either voluntarily where the employee decides to willingly quit the organization or involuntarily replacing the employee from his job position without the employee's willingness (Schyns, Torka & Gössling, 2007).

In a bid to develop a comprehensive model for turnover Mobley, (1977) pioneered a comprehensive explanation for the psychological process underlying employee turnover. According to his withdrawal (turnover) decision process, dissatisfaction leads to thoughts about quitting. There are a number of possible mediating steps between dissatisfaction

and actual quitting (turnover). First, one of the consequences of dissatisfaction is to inspire thoughts of leaving. These thoughts, in turn, stimulate consideration of the expected utility of a job search and the costs of quitting. The next step would be the behavioural intention to search for an alternative. The intention to search is followed by an actual search. If alternatives are available, an evaluation of these alternatives is initiated. The evaluation of alternatives is followed by a comparison of the present job to the alternatives. If the comparison favours the alternatives, it will inspire a behavioural intention to quit, followed by actual withdrawal (turnover).

2.2 HRM Practices and Turnover Intention

This section presents a synthesized review of empirical studies on the relationship between HRM practices under study and turnover intention in the health sector.

2.2.1 Recruitment & Selection and Turnover Intention

The recruitment & selection process is one of the most important HRM functions as it is the point of entry into most organizations and in addition where most organizations recruit talents that drive their goals and interest. It also reflects the requirements and philosophy of the organization as reflected in the calibre of people chosen for the job (Tabiu & Nura, 2013). Similarly, according to Costello (2006), recruitment is described as the processes used to receive a suitable talent willing to offer services to an organization at the right time and at the right place so that it benefits both the people and the organization. Thus, when the right people are recruited into an organization, their probability of remaining in the organization is higher than the employees that are not the best for job. Put differently, in line with social exchange theory, when employees are recruited and selected based on merit, they will feel that their skills and expertise are being recognised and respected as such they are likely to reciprocate through loyalty,



commitment and willingness to remain in the organization.

Empirical review indicated that several studies on recruitment & selection and turnover intention revealed that there is significant negative relationship between recruitment & selection and turnover (Jackofsky, 1984; Griffeth et al., 1997; Noah and Yong-Pin, 2002; Chankov, 2006; Mudhune, 2009). For instance, the study of Mudhune (2009) revealed that if nurses are recruited based on merit due to their passion and expertise in the job, they feel attached to the work and remain to give their best. Similarly, Jackofsky (1984) found that around 60% of unwanted turnover is due to bad employing decisions (improper recruitment & selection) on the part of the employer.

On the contrary, the study of Maliman (2002) revealed no significant relationship between recruitment & selection and turnover intention. The study indicated that recruitment & selection is immaterial in determining employees' turnover intention.

Based on the findings from previous empirical studies reviewed and theoretical support, this paper hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Recruitment & selection will negatively and significantly relate to employees' turnover intention in health sector.

2.2.2 Compensation and Turnover Intention

Murphy & Olsen (2008), defined the term compensation as all cash incentives and the fringe benefits mix that an employee receives from an organization. Compensation is also defined as the cumulative financial and non-financial rewards payable to employees in return for their services (Mondy & Noe 2005).

Relying on social exchange theory which assumed that when employees are adequately compensated, they reciprocate the gesture by remaining in the service of their organization, several empirical studies on compensation and turnover

reported negative relationship between compensation and turnover intention in the health sector (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Abassi & Hollman, 2000; Grace & Khalsa, 2003; Frye, 2004; Kao et. al., 2018; Abubakar et. al. 2015; Iyabo, 2021). For example, Abubakar et. al. (2015) found compensation practices to be the antecedents of organisational trust, which in turn mediates the relationships with employee's turnover intention. Also, the study of Iyabo (2021) indicated that a fair and competitive compensation practice discourages medical practitioners from quitting their employment. This suggests that a well-paid medical practitioner may stay longer than those who are not satisfied with their level of pay.

However, other researchers revealed opposite results i.e compensation has no significant influence on employees' turnover in the health sector (Smart, 1990; Ehrenberg et al., 1991; Deery, 1997; Bigliardi et al., 2005; Ngure & Waiganjo, 2017). For instance, Ngure & Waiganjo (2017) in their study revealed that remuneration for the health workers did influence their retention. Put differently the study concluded that turnover intention among health workers in Kenyatta National Hospital is not significantly affected by compensation. Similarly, Bigliardi et al. (2005) revealed that payment is not statistically an important cause for employee turnover. Consequent upon the preceding empirical review and social exchange theoretical backing, this study hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: Compensation will negatively and significantly relate to employees' turnover intention in health sector.

2.2.3 Training & Development and Turnover Intention

Aguinis & Kraiger, (2019) defined training & development as a systematic way of developing, enriching and increasing employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform his or her duty diligently with



the aim of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. Training allows employees to initiate the development of new skills and behaviors coupled with the motivation to apply those skills and behaviors in their task and contextual activities at work (Sels, 2002). Consistent with social exchange theory that postulates that every act of good gesture from an employer such as training & development of employees attract positive attitudes from the employees such as loyalty, commitment and desire to remain in the organization to give their best. Several empirical studies proved that providing training assist in developing employees' positive attitudes towards the organization among workers, in addition to a satisfactory impact on their satisfaction, commitment and performance which reduces the probability of the employees' turnover (Smith & Hayton, 1999; Abassi & Hollman, 2000; Green et al., 2001; Sieben, 2005; Jehanzbeb, et al., 2013; Gosh, Yoon & Fustos, 2013). For example, Jehanzbeb, et al., (2013), revealed that training is positively correlated with organizational commitment, and the organizational commitment was also found to be negatively correlated with employees' turnover intentions in Saudi Arabia health sector. Moreover, the study of Iyabo (2021) revealed that employee training is negatively related to turnover intentions in Nigerian public hospitals.

Contrary to the above, in their empirical studies (Hom and Griffeth, 1991; Lynch, 1991; Tett and Meyer, 1993; Mitchell et al., 2001; Campbell and Campbell, 2003; Lee and Bruvold 2003; Herrbach, et al., 2004; Haines et al., 2010), revealed opposite relationship between the training & development and the turnover intention. For example, the study of Lynch, (1991) indicated that training and development may actually increase employee turnover. This is because training made employees more attractive to other organizations which in turn would result in them leaving

their current workplaces. Consistent with this, another research by Zia Ur Rehman et al. (2020) found that training & development has no significant effect upon nurses' turnover intention in the public healthcare setting in Pakistan.

Consequently, depending on the above empirical literature reviewed and theoretical support this research hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: Training & development will negatively and significantly relate to employees' turnover intention in health sector.

2.2.4 Career Development and Turnover Intention

Career development in an organization is viewed as a dynamic process that attempts to meet the needs of managers, subordinates and the organization. It is the responsibility of managers to encourage employees to take responsibility for their own careers, offering continuous assistance in the form of feedback or individual performance and making available information from the company about the organization, career opportunities, positions and vacancies that might be of interest to the employees (Zandy et al., 1986). Going by social exchange theory that serves as the theoretical framework of this paper, employees career development opportunities will attract employee's retention and negate turnover intention.

A number of empirical studies in the extant literature showed that career development opportunities negatively correlate with employees' turnover intention in the health sector (Shader et al., 2001; Tser et al., 2004; Anna, 2008; Snow et al., 2011; Zia Ur Rehman et al., 2020). For instance, Shader et al., (2001) revealed that job satisfaction derived from an established career development program and putting people in the right job and responsibility actually reduce stress because of better cohesion and work schedule management. The study found that, this in turn has

significant relation to staff retention and negatively relates to turnover intentions.

In opposition to the above empirical studies, the study of Zia Ur Rehman et. al (2020) revealed that promotion opportunity has a significant impact on new and middle career nurses' turnover intention and the study revealed no significant relationship between career development and turnover intention among high-ranking nurses in Pakistan.

Leveraging on the foregoing empirical review of literature and the support provided by social exchange theory, this paper hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4: Career development will negatively and significantly relate to employees' turnover intention in health sector.

2.2.5 Work-life Balance and Turnover Intention

Work-life balance policies are practices which usually refers to an organization giving support for dependent care, flexible working hours and permitting individuals for family or personal lives (Estes & Michael, 2005). Work-life balance policies are one of the factors that affect employee's job satisfaction as well as organizational loyalty and productivity. When an organization provides a workplace where all employees have the opportunities to maintain their work-life balance, in exchange the employees are likely to remain in the service of the organization as assumed by social exchange theory (Cappelli, 2000).

Many empirical studies indicated that career development negatively and significantly relate to employees' turnover intention (Almaliki et. al. 2012; Mensah, 2014; Roy et. al., 2017; Lu, et. al. 2023; Stefanie, 2015). The study of Roy et. al. (2017) found that work-life balance is negatively related to turnover intention in both private and public healthcare facilities in Bangladesh. Consistent with this finding, recently, the study of Lu, et. al. (2023) showed that work-family conflict

of physicians in Guangdong Province, China directly affected turnover intention and also indirectly influenced turnover intention through work stress and job satisfaction. Arising from the above empirical review and theoretical support, this study hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 5: Work-life balance will negatively and significantly relate to employees' turnover intention in health sector.

2.2.6 Psychological Meaningfulness as a Moderator

Psychological meaningfulness is the degree of emotional attachment and importance that an employee attached to his work that serve as an intrinsic motivation for employee loyalty and retention. Despite the fact that not enough attention has been given in the extant literature on the relationship between psychological meaningfulness and turnover intention, there are still a couple research that looked into this link in a way. Most of the studies suggest that if an employee considers his work meaningful, then he is less likely to leave the organization (Schneider, 1987; Swann 1990; Shamir, 1991; Leiter, et. al. 1998; May et al., 2004; Prouse, 2010; Suadicani et. al. 2013; Aguinis and Glavas, 2019; Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2020). The study of Leiter et. al. (1998) for instance, revealed that nurses who lacked psychological meaningfulness of work, were more likely to burnout and, thus, leave their job. Similarly, Suadicani et. al. (2013) in their study proved that low psychological meaningfulness of work leads to high intention to leave among health workers. Based on the empirical studies above, this paper hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 6: Psychological meaningfulness will negatively and significantly relate to employees' turnover intention in health sector.

Moreover, considering the inconsistencies in findings from the empirical studies reviewed in this paper on the relationship



between HRM practices (recruitment & selection, compensation, training & development, career development and work-life balance) and turnover intention in health sector, this paper considered the possible moderation of psychological meaningfulness i.e the degree of emotional attachment and importance that an employee attached to his work in moderating the relationship between the HRM practices under study and turnover intention in health sector. Put differently, the paper considered that, the higher the employees' psychological meaningfulness, the lower their turnover intention in health sector and vice versa. Based on this, the paper hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 7: Psychological meaningfulness will moderate the relationship between recruitment & selection and turnover intention in Kano State, North Western, Nigeria, such that the relationship will be stronger (more negative) for healthcare professionals with higher psychological meaningfulness than those with low psychological meaningfulness.

Hypothesis 8: Psychological meaningfulness will moderate the relationship between training & development and turnover intention in Kano State, North Western, Nigeria, such that the relationship will be stronger (more negative) for healthcare professionals with higher psychological meaningfulness than those with low psychological meaningfulness.

Hypothesis 9: Psychological meaningfulness will moderate the relationship between compensation and turnover intention in Kano State, North Western, Nigeria, such that the relationship will be stronger (more negative) for healthcare professionals with higher psychological meaningfulness than those with low psychological meaningfulness.

Hypothesis 10: Psychological meaningfulness will moderate the

relationship between career development and turnover intention in Kano State, North Western, Nigeria, such that the relationship will be stronger (more negative) for healthcare professionals with higher psychological meaningfulness than those with low psychological meaningfulness.

Hypothesis 11: Psychological meaningfulness will moderate the relationship between work-life balance and turnover intention in Kano State, North Western, Nigeria, such that the relationship will be stronger (more negative) for healthcare professionals with higher psychological meaningfulness than those with low psychological meaningfulness.

3. Theoretical Framework

In explaining the relationship between human resource practices and employees' turnover intention in health sector as moderated by psychological meaningfulness, this study relies on the Social Exchange Theory (SET) as its theoretical framework. This theory was developed by Blau (1964). The theory holds that human connections are shaped by the use of subjective cost-benefit analysis, which is rooted in three vital areas: economics, psychology and sociology (Blau, 1964). The theory defines social exchange as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties in which both parties involved in the exchange take responsibility for one another and strongly depend on each other. In addition, the interactions between parties are usually seen as mutually dependent and contingent on the actions made by the other persons (Blau, 1964). Cropanzano & Mitchell (2007) discovered that social exchange relationship in a typical work setting determines the continuous retention or termination of contract from either party. Employees are likely to continue the relationship with their employer when they perceive that the relationship is worthwhile for them, and terminate the relationship

when the perceived costs are more than the rewards that they gain from the relationship.

Research over the years have progressively adopted the social exchange theory as the theoretical underpinning for employee-employer relations (Bambacas & Kulik, 2013; Tanova & Holtom 2008). The social exchange theory states that, employees who enjoy favourable benefits and treatments in their organizations tend to feel obliged to repay these favours through loyalty and commitment (Širca, Babnik & Breznik, 2012). It is in this sense that this paper adopted the social exchange theory as the researcher assumed that perceived favourable HRM practices such as recruitment & selection based on merit, adequate compensation, training & development opportunities, career development chances and work-life balance provisions will have a great effect on healthcare workers motivation and job satisfaction leading them to repaying in exchange of their loyalty, commitment and remaining in their organizations. On the other hand, employee rebel against unfair HRM practices such as poor compensation, absence of training & development opportunities, poor career development chances and work-life conflict which they invariably reciprocate through negative behaviours that is manifested in

undesirable work attitudes such as lateness, absence from work, preparing to leave the organization and eventual turnover of the employees. However, in the event of poor HRM practices such as poor compensation, absence of training & development opportunities, poor career development chances and work-life conflict, this paper consequent upon empirical review of literature on the relationship between psychological meaningfulness and turnover intention hypothesized that, the rate at which an employee will likely quit his job is moderated by psychological meaningfulness i.e the degree of emotional attachment and importance that the employee has for the job.

4. Proposed Framework

Based on the empirical literature reviewed and social exchange theoretical explanation supports, the paper proposed a conceptual framework with three variables namely the independent, moderating and dependent variables. The independent variables are the five human resource management practices under study. These are: recruitment & selection, training & development, compensation, career development and work-life balance. The moderating variable is psychological meaningfulness while the dependent variable is turnover intention as shown in Fig. 1 below

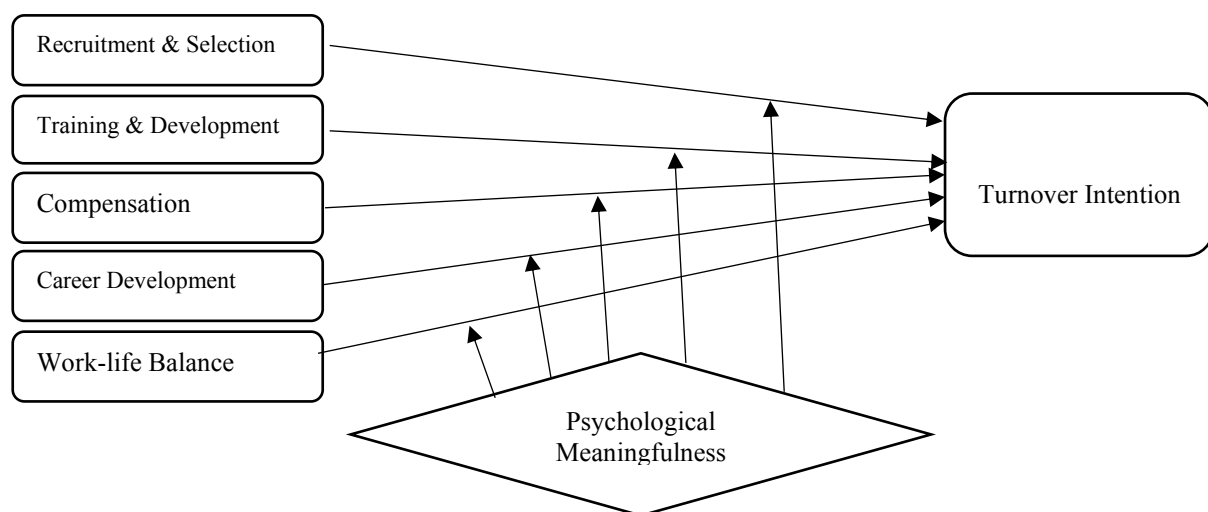


Figure 1: Proposed Framework

Source: Design by the researcher, 2023



5. Conclusion

This paper is a proposed framework that analysed the possible moderation effect of psychological meaningfulness on human resource management practices and turnover intention in health sector. If empirically validated, this study will provide empirical evidence on the possible moderation of psychological meaningfulness on HRM practices and turnover intention in health sector. The study will also provide an additional empirical support for the influence of social exchange theory in explaining the relationship between HRM practices and turnover in health sector as moderated by psychological meaningfulness. The study concludes that, improvement and effective utilization of HRM practice can minimize employees' turnover intention in the health sector.

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