

# Employee Turnover and Organizational Performance

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## Abstract

One major issue influencing organizational success in all sectors of the world is high staff turnover. The intricate connections between organizational outcomes, turnover causes, and successful retention tactics remain largely unexplored in the literature, despite extensive research. To identify the leading causes of employee turnover, investigate their impact on organizational performance, and assess evidence-based retention tactics, this systematic literature review synthesizes the existing body of research. Using systematic search tactics across various databases, a comprehensive assessment of peer-reviewed literature published between 2000 and 2024 was conducted. To identify trends in turnover-related causes, effects, and interventions, the studies were subjected to a theme analysis. According to the report, the primary causes of turnover include insufficient opportunities for professional growth, ineffective management techniques, and an unbalanced work-life balance. Through a reduction in service quality, higher recruiting expenses, and lower productivity, high turnover dramatically impairs organizational performance. Career development initiatives, competitive pay, and a great company culture are all examples of effective retention tactics. By implementing systematic retention strategies that target identified primary causes, organizations may lower turnover. The results provide HR professionals with a foundation for developing retention strategies that are grounded in research.

## Keywords

Employee Turnover, Organizational Performance, Retention Strategies, Human Resource Management, Job Satisfaction

## 1. Introduction

In many industries, employee turnover rates exceed 15% annually, making it one of the most significant challenges facing modern firms (U.S. Department of Labor,

2017). Both management-decided compulsory terminations and employee-initiated voluntary departures are included in the phenomena, and each has unique effects on the functioning of the business.

The relationship between employee turnover and organizational effectiveness is complex and multifaceted. While some turnover can benefit organizations by introducing new talent and ideas, excessive turnover typically impairs performance through disrupted operations, increased costs, and a loss of institutional knowledge (Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013). The challenge for organizations lies in maintaining optimal turnover levels that strike a balance between renewal and stability.

The current literature on employee turnover spans multiple theoretical perspectives and empirical contexts, yet remains fragmented in its approach to understanding the relationship between turnover and performance. This fragmentation limits practitioners' ability to develop comprehensive retention strategies based on robust evidence.

#### **Research Objectives:**

- 1) Synthesize existing literature to identify primary drivers of employee turnover.
- 2) Examine the relationship between turnover and organizational performance outcomes.
- 3) Evaluate the effectiveness of retention strategies reported in the literature.
- 4) Develop an integrated framework for understanding turnover dynamics.

This review addresses a critical gap by providing a systematic synthesis of turnover research, offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance for organizational leaders.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Search Protocol and Strategy**

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework criteria, a widely-accepted standard in systematic literature reviews (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021), were rigorously applied in this review. Five central academic databases were scoured: Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO, Business Source Complete, and Google Scholar. The search was conducted between June and September 2024.

For every database, the exact Boolean search string was used: AND (“employee turnover” OR “staff turnover” OR “workforce turnover” OR “employee retention” OR “voluntary turnover”) AND (“organizational performance” OR “firm performance” OR “organizational outcomes” OR “productivity”) AND (“retention strategies” OR “retention interventions” OR “human resource management”). To ensure the review's coverage of the most current research, date restrictions were defined to include papers published between January 2000 and August 2024.

### **2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

#### **Inclusion criteria:**

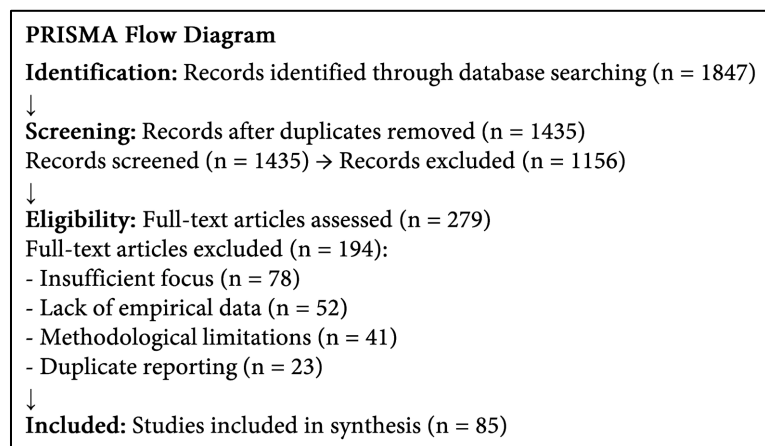
- Conference proceedings and peer-reviewed journal papers released between 2000 and 2024.
- Research on employee turnover, including its causes, effects, and retention strategies.
- Theoretical articles that offer conceptual frameworks and empirical studies using mixed, quantitative, or qualitative methodologies.
- Research carried out in corporate environments across a range of areas and industries.
- Publications in the English language.

**Exclusion criteria:**

- Sources that are not subjected to peer review, such as books, dissertations, and grey literature.
- Research that examines labor market dynamics or unemployment without doing an organizational-level analysis.
- Publications not available in English.
- Studies with insufficient methodological detail to assess quality.
- Duplicate publications or earlier versions of updated studies.

### 2.3. Study Selection Process

Across all databases, the methodical search produced 1847 initial records. Titles and abstracts were used to filter 1435 unique items after eliminating 412 duplicates. One thousand one hundred fifty-six records that obviously did not fit the inclusion criteria were eliminated during this first screening. After retrieval, the remaining 279 full-text articles were evaluated for eligibility based on preset standards. Of these, 194 articles were excluded for the following reasons: insufficient focus on turnover-performance relationships ( $n = 78$ ), lack of empirical data or theoretical contribution ( $n = 52$ ), methodological limitations precluding quality assessment ( $n = 41$ ), and duplicate reporting of the same data ( $n = 23$ ). The final synthesis included 85 studies that met all inclusion criteria and demonstrated adequate methodological quality (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** PRISMA flow diagram of study selection process.

## 2.4. Characteristics of Included Studies

The 85 included studies spanned publication years from 2000 to 2024, with a notable concentration in recent years (2015-2024: 58 studies, 68.2%). Studies were conducted across diverse sectors, including healthcare (n = 23, 27.1%), technology and information services (n = 18, 21.2%), manufacturing (n = 15, 17.6%), retail and hospitality (n = 12, 14.1%), financial services (n = 9, 10.6%), and public sector organizations (n = 8, 9.4%). Geographically, the majority of studies originated from North America (n = 42, 49.4%) and Europe (n = 28, 32.9%), with a growing representation from Asia (n = 12, 14.1%) and other regions (n = 3, 3.6%).

Methodologically, the included studies employed quantitative approaches (n = 51, 60.0%), qualitative methods (n = 19, 22.4%), mixed methods (n = 12, 14.1%), and theoretical/conceptual frameworks (n = 3, 3.5%). Sample sizes ranged from small-scale case studies of single organizations (n < 100) to large-scale surveys and meta-analyses incorporating thousands of participants. Longitudinal designs were employed in 23 studies (27.1%), while the remainder utilized cross-sectional approaches.

## 2.5. Quality Assessment

Study quality was systematically assessed using adapted criteria from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) for both quantitative and qualitative studies, as well as the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tools for systematic reviews and theoretical papers. Each study was independently assessed by the author on the following dimensions: clarity of research aims, appropriateness of methodology, rigor of data collection and analysis, transparency of findings, and consideration of ethical issues. Studies were rated as high quality (meeting 80-100% of criteria), moderate quality (meeting 60% - 79% of criteria), or low quality (meeting < 60% of criteria).

Of the 85 included studies, 62 (72.9%) were rated as high quality, 21 (24.7%) as moderate quality, and 2 (2.4%) as acceptable but lower quality. The two lower-quality studies were retained because they provided unique insights into underrepresented contexts, but their findings were interpreted with appropriate caution. Quality ratings influenced the synthesis by giving greater weight to high-quality evidence when drawing conclusions and noting where findings from lower-quality studies required further validation. Studies with stronger methodological rigor, larger sample sizes, and longitudinal designs were prioritized when identifying the primary drivers of turnover and assessing the effectiveness of interventions.

## 2.6. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Each study's key data, such as the author's information, the year of publication, the study setting and sector, the research design and methods, the sample characteristics, the theoretical frameworks used, the turnover antecedents identified, the organizational performance outcomes measured, the retention interventions eval-

uated, and the main findings, were recorded using a structured data extraction form. Following the methodology developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), a systematic thematic analysis was conducted. This process involved familiarizing oneself with the data, creating preliminary codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining those themes, and ultimately defining the final themes. The main goals of the review turnover reasons, performance implications, and the efficacy of retention strategies formed the framework for the themes.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1. Human Capital Theory**

Human capital theory posits that employees represent valuable assets whose departure can result in significant organizational losses (Ployhart et al., 2014). When experienced workers leave, organizations lose accumulated skills, knowledge, and capabilities that required substantial investment to develop. This perspective emphasizes the negative impact of turnover through the erosion of human capital stocks.

#### **3.2. Social Capital Theory**

Social capital theory extends beyond individual capabilities to examine relationship networks within organizations (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). High turnover disrupts established social networks, thereby reducing the effectiveness of collaboration and hindering the transfer of institutional knowledge. The theory suggests that stable employment relationships enhance organizational performance through stronger internal networks.

#### **3.3. Social Exchange Theory**

Social exchange theory views the employment relationship as a reciprocal exchange between employees and organizations (Blau, 1964). When organizations fail to provide adequate benefits, recognition, or development opportunities, employees reciprocate by reducing commitment and eventually leaving. This framework explains turnover as a response to perceived imbalances in the exchange relationship.

#### **3.4. Job Embeddedness Theory**

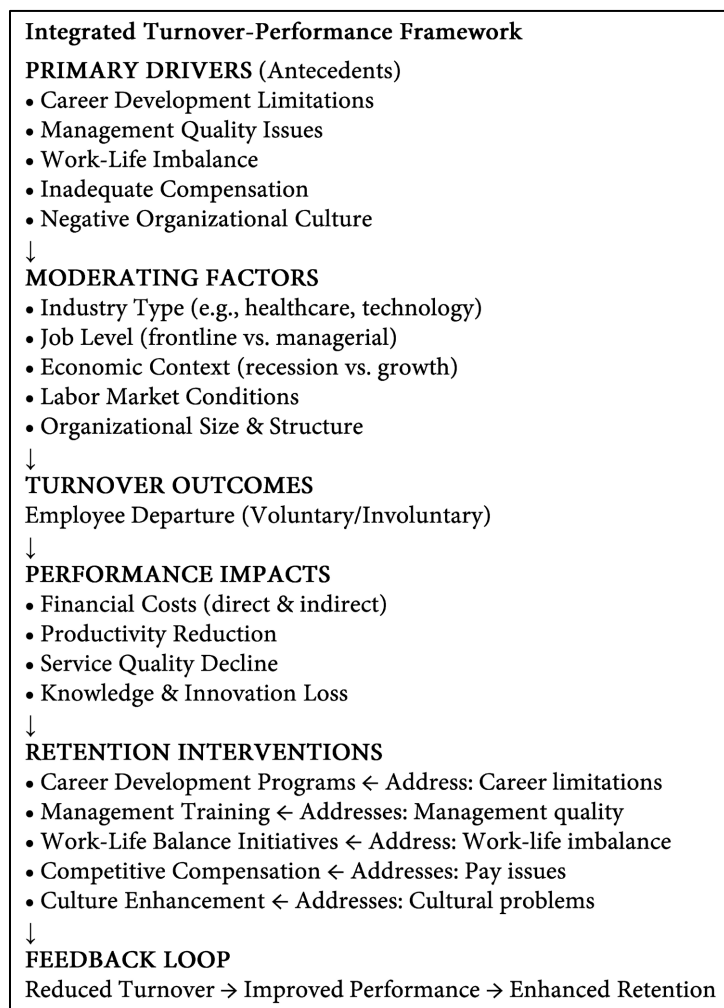
Mitchell et al. (2001) developed the job embeddedness theory to explain why employees remain with organizations beyond simply being satisfied with their jobs. The theory identifies three key factors: organizational and community links, perceived fit with job and environment, and sacrifices associated with leaving. Higher embeddedness reduces turnover likelihood.

#### **3.5. Integrated Theoretical Framework**

These theoretical perspectives complement each other rather than compete. An integrated framework suggests that turnover decisions result from multiple sim-

ultaneous processes: economic calculations (human capital), relationship quality (social capital and exchange), and psychological attachment (embeddedness). This multi-theoretical approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of turnover dynamics.

The integrated framework developed from this review synthesizes insights across all examined studies to create a unified model of turnover dynamics. Three analytical phases were engaged in the construction of this framework. After mapping the turnover drivers identified in various research studies to their underlying theoretical mechanisms, it became clear that different theories frequently provided diverse explanations for the same empirical findings. Second, the relationships between drivers, moderating factors, and organizational outcomes were traced through the evidence to establish directional pathways. Third, the theoretical mechanisms addressed by retention interventions were examined, showing that successful techniques typically address multiple theoretical dimensions simultaneously rather than focusing on a single explanatory framework (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 2.** Integrated framework linking turnover drivers, moderators, outcomes, and retention tactics.

According to this theory, turnover is a complex system with dynamic interactions between antecedents, moderators, and consequences rather than a straightforward linear process. Therefore, effective retention strategies must be customized for the organizational environment, taking into consideration moderating factors such as industry features and economic conditions, while addressing unique employee motivations. The feedback loop highlights that effective retention initiatives create self-reinforcing cycles, where lower staff turnover improves performance, which in turn enhances retention through improved organizational circumstances.

## 4. Literature Review and Analysis

### 4.1. Primary Drivers of Employee Turnover

#### **Career Development Limitations**

The most frequently cited driver of turnover across studies is the limited availability of career advancement opportunities. Research consistently shows that employees leave when they perceive minimal prospects for professional growth (Trevor, 2004; Martinelli, 2017). Organizations failing to provide clear career paths, skill development programs, or promotion opportunities experience significantly higher turnover rates.

#### **Management Quality**

Poor management practices emerge as the second most significant predictor of turnover. Ineffective supervision, a lack of feedback, micromanagement, and failure to recognize employee contributions all contribute to voluntary departures (Armstrong, 2003). The relationship between management quality and employee retention is powerful among high-performing employees.

#### **Work-Life Balance**

Contemporary research increasingly identifies work-life imbalance as a critical factor in employee turnover (Mas-Machuca et al., 2016). Excessive workloads, inflexible schedules, and organizational cultures that prioritize work over personal life contribute to employee dissatisfaction and eventual departure. These concerns were significantly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as remote work arrangements substantially altered employee expectations for work-life balance (Kniffin et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2022). Research conducted after 2020 shows that companies that do not provide flexible work schedules have significantly higher turnover rates, especially among knowledge workers and caregivers who valued work-life balance both during and after the pandemic (Galanti et al., 2021).

#### **Compensation and Benefits**

While not always the primary factor, inadequate compensation relative to market standards and competitor offerings significantly influences turnover decisions. This effect is most pronounced in roles where skills are transferable and alternative employment is readily available (Griffeth & Hom, 2004).

#### **Organizational Culture**

Negative workplace cultures, characterized by poor communication, a lack of

trust, and limited employee autonomy, consistently predict higher turnover rates. Conversely, positive cultures emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and employee empowerment enhance retention.

#### **Analytics-Driven Turnover Prediction**

People analytics and machine learning algorithms are becoming increasingly important in accurately forecasting employee turnover, according to recent studies (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Rombaut & Guerry, 2021). Organizations are using predictive models to identify flight risks before employees voluntarily depart. These models incorporate a range of data sources, including performance measurements, engagement survey responses, communication patterns, and external labor market indicators. Recent studies indicate that sophisticated predictive algorithms can achieve accuracy rates exceeding 85% when forecasting turnover within 6 - 12 month windows (Fallucchi et al., 2022). These analytics-driven approaches enable proactive retention interventions targeted at high-risk employees, representing a significant advancement beyond traditional reactive retention strategies. However, ethical concerns regarding employee privacy, algorithmic transparency, and potential bias in predictive models require careful consideration (Tambe et al., 2023).

## **4.2. Organizational Performance Impacts**

#### **Financial Consequences**

Turnover generates both direct and indirect financial costs. Direct costs include separation payments, recruitment expenses, and training investments for replacements. Studies estimate these direct costs at 50-200% of the departing employee's annual salary (Markovich, 2019). Indirect costs, including lost productivity, reduced service quality, and disrupted operations, often exceed direct expenses.

#### **Productivity Effects**

High turnover reduces organizational productivity through multiple mechanisms. Departing employees take institutional knowledge with them, while remaining employees face increased workloads during replacement periods. New hires require time to reach full productivity, creating temporary performance gaps.

#### **Service Quality Impact**

Customer-facing organizations experience particular challenges when turnover disrupts service relationships. The loss of experienced staff can lead to a reduction in service quality, decreased customer satisfaction, and ultimately impact revenue generation.

#### **Innovation and Knowledge Loss**

Organizations lose accumulated expertise and innovative potential when experienced employees depart. This knowledge loss is particularly damaging in technical fields, where expertise can take years to develop.

## **4.3. Retention Strategy Effectiveness**

#### **Career Development Programs**

Organizations implementing comprehensive career development programs report significantly lower turnover rates. Effective programs include mentoring, training opportunities, clear advancement paths, and regular career discussions between employees and supervisors.

#### **Management Development**

Investing in management training and development consistently yields improvements in employee retention. Programs that focus on leadership skills, communication, and employee engagement foster stronger supervisor-subordinate relationships.

#### **Compensation Strategy**

While competitive compensation alone does not guarantee retention, offering below-market pay significantly increases the risk of turnover. Total reward strategies, which incorporate base pay, benefits, and non-monetary recognition, are proven to be most effective.

#### **Organizational Culture Initiatives**

Culture change programs emphasizing employee engagement, open communication, and work-life balance demonstrate positive retention effects. However, these initiatives require sustained commitment and typically show results only over extended periods.

#### **Remote Work and Flexible Arrangements**

Flexible work arrangements are a crucial retention strategy in modern firms, according to post-pandemic studies (Choudhury et al., 2022). Research indicates that workers who have the option to work remotely or in a hybrid environment are significantly less likely to plan to leave their jobs than those who must work exclusively on-site (Barrero et al., 2021). High-performing workers and those in knowledge-intensive positions are especially affected. Compared to companies that continue to use traditional office-centric models, organizations that successfully adopted permanent flexible work policies between 2020 and 2024 reported turnover reductions of 15% - 35% (Bloom et al., 2024). Effectiveness, however, hinges on the conscious handling of the difficulties associated with remote work, such as performance management, team cohesiveness, and communication. Companies that viewed remote work as merely an operational change rather than a strategic personnel strategy experienced reduced retention advantages (De Fraja et al., 2021).

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Key Patterns in the Literature**

The literature reveals several consistent patterns across different industries and contexts. Career development emerges as the most critical retention factor, suggesting that employees prioritize growth opportunities over other job characteristics. Management quality appears as a close second, indicating that immediate supervisor relationships have a significant influence on retention decisions.

Interestingly, compensation, while important, rarely appears as the primary

driver of turnover in isolation. This finding challenges common assumptions about employee motivation and suggests that organizations overemphasizing financial incentives may miss more fundamental retention factors.

## 5.2. Theoretical Implications

The evidence supports an integrated theoretical approach rather than reliance on single theoretical frameworks. Human capital theory explains the organizational costs associated with turnover, while social exchange theory illuminates the reasons why employees make decisions to depart. Job embeddedness theory adds psychological dimensions often missing from economic explanations.

## 5.3. Practical Implications

Organizations seeking to reduce turnover should prioritize:

- 1) Systematic career development programs with clear advancement pathways.
- 2) Management training focused on employee engagement and development.
- 3) Regular assessment and improvement of organizational culture.
- 4) Competitive but balanced total reward strategies.
- 5) Work-life balance initiatives tailored to employee needs.

## 5.4. Moderating Factors in the Turnover-Performance Relationship

The relationship between employee turnover and organizational performance is not uniform across contexts but is significantly influenced by multiple moderating factors that alter the strength and direction of this relationship.

**Industry Type:** The impact of turnover varies substantially across sectors. The healthcare and technology industries exhibit a powerful negative relationship between turnover and performance, primarily due to the lengthy training periods and specialized knowledge requirements (Call et al., 2015). In contrast, the retail and hospitality sectors, which traditionally exhibit higher baseline turnover rates, show weaker correlations between turnover and performance metrics; however, quality-of-service measures remain sensitive to staff stability (Harrison & Gordon, 2014). Professional services firms experience particularly severe knowledge loss due to turnover, given the client-relationship-dependent nature of their business models.

**Job Level and Role Criticality:** Turnover effects differ markedly by organizational level. The departure of senior managers and specialized technical professionals has a disproportionately large negative impact on organizational performance compared to frontline employee turnover (Trevor, 2001). This differential impact stems from the concentration of institutional knowledge, decision-making authority, and external relationship management in higher-level roles. Organizations can often absorb frontline turnover more readily through standardized processes and shorter replacement cycles, whereas leadership turnover creates extended periods of disruption and uncertainty.

**Economic Context:** Broader economic conditions substantially moderate turnover dynamics and their organizational consequences. During economic recessions or periods of high unemployment, turnover rates naturally decline as external employment opportunities contract (Saridakis & Cooper, 2016). Organizations may experience less performance degradation from turnover during downturns because replacement talent is more readily available and potentially higher quality. Conversely, during periods of economic growth and tight labor markets, turnover increases become more costly due to extended vacancy periods, increased competition for talent, and salary inflation necessary to attract replacements. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent “Great Resignation” period exemplified how sudden labor market shifts can dramatically alter the relationship between turnover and performance (Sull et al., 2022).

**Labor Market Conditions:** Regional and occupational labor market characteristics moderate both turnover rates and organizational capacity to mitigate performance impacts. Organizations operating in geographic areas with abundant qualified talent pools can more readily replace departing employees, reducing turnover-related performance disruptions. Conversely, firms in rural areas or those requiring highly specialized skills face prolonged vacancy periods and greater performance degradation. The rise of remote work has partially disrupted these geographic constraints, enabling organizations to access broader talent markets but also increasing employee exposure to external opportunities (Ozimek, 2021).

**Organizational Size and Structure:** Larger organizations often possess greater resilience to individual turnover events due to the redundancy of capabilities and more developed succession planning processes. Smaller organizations experience more acute disruption from each departure due to the concentration of responsibilities and limited backup capacity. However, smaller organizations may also demonstrate greater agility in retention interventions and maintain stronger personal relationships that enhance retention (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011).

These moderating factors underscore the necessity of context-specific retention strategies rather than universal best practices. Organizations must assess their unique combination of industry characteristics, workforce composition, economic environment, and structural features when designing retention interventions and evaluating the performance implications of turnover.

## 5.5. Research Gaps

Despite extensive research, several gaps remain. Limited longitudinal studies track turnover patterns over extended periods. Cross-cultural research remains insufficient, particularly in non-Western contexts. The relationship between turnover and innovation requires further investigation.

## 6. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that employee turnover has a significant impact on organizational performance through multiple pathways. The evidence

clearly indicates that career development, management quality, and work-life balance are primary drivers of turnover across diverse organizational contexts.

Organizations can effectively reduce turnover by implementing evidence-based retention strategies that emphasize employee development, effective management, and fostering a positive culture. However, successful retention requires systematic, sustained efforts rather than isolated interventions. The integrated theoretical framework developed in this review provides a foundation for future research and practical applications. By understanding turnover through multiple theoretical lenses, organizations can develop more comprehensive and effective retention strategies.

### Limitations

This review focuses primarily on Western organizational contexts and may not fully represent global turnover dynamics. The systematic search was restricted to English-language publications, potentially excluding relevant research published in other languages and introducing geographic and cultural bias toward Anglo-American contexts. Another drawback is publication bias, which may inflate the apparent strength of correlations in the literature, as studies showing a strong correlation between turnover and performance outcomes are more likely to be published than those with null results. Additionally, the quality assessment, although systematic, was conducted by a single reviewer, which introduced potential subjectivity despite the use of standardized appraisal tools. Future research should expand cross-cultural examinations and longitudinal studies.

### Future Research Directions

Priority areas include longitudinal studies on turnover, cross-cultural investigations, the impact of technology on employee retention, and the relationship between turnover and organizational innovation. The long-term sustainability of remote and hybrid work models on retention outcomes, the efficacy and ethical implications of AI-driven turnover prediction systems, the generational differences in turnover antecedents as more members of Generation Z join the workforce, and the relationship between employee well-being initiatives and retention effectiveness in post-pandemic organizational environments should all be examined as emerging research priorities (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Additionally, research is needed on turnover dynamics in the gig economy and among contingent workers, whose employment relationships differ fundamentally from traditional permanent employment models.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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