

Understanding Subject Matter Experts' Talent Loss and Enhancing Inclusivity in Workplace Culture: A Holistic Approach to Talent Retention

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Telecommunication organizations are grappling with the hardest reality of today-an ever-increasing and steeply-escalating rate of attrition. This paper presents the results of a study conducted in 5 Telecommunication organizations regarding their talent retention challenges. The study focussed mainly on subject matter experts and how to improve women's initiatives and better the organizational work culture.

Objectives: Identify and list factors that increase employee-attrition in the SME. The research was divided into two phases: Phase-1 identified the major reasons for employee attrition, while Phase-2 concentrated on developing strategies to build an inclusive and supportive work culture.

Methods: A mixed-method approach has been used for this study, which combines qualitative and quantitative information that will help in analysing the findings comprehensively.

Key results: Several problems were identified regarding career prospects, organizational culture, suitability of location, and discrepancies in compensation.

Conclusion: Suggestions ranged from introducing a new women's empowerment initiative, "joshi-ryoku" to many other means through which the telecommunication organizations would be able to increase their retention rate and work culture.

Keywords: Talent retention, attrition, career progression, work culture, women empowerment, retention strategies.

1. Introduction

Employee attrition is one of the most critical challenges with which an organization wrestles, particularly when it loses highly skilled subject matter experts (SMEs). An inclusive culture is defined as a culture respecting the individuality

and diverse perspectives (Bourke & Dillon, 2018). Research-studies have highlighted that employee who feel valued by the organization, are more likely to stay loyal to the organization (Roberson, 2019).

Literature Review

The concept of 'Inclusivity' is grounded in the Social Identity Theory, which propagates that the individuals acquire some part of their self-concept from the group they are part of (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This theory can be understood as an individual's connection to the organization directly decided by the inclusivity he experiences (Shore et al., 2018). 'Inclusivity' can be understood as a multifaceted concept incorporating equal opportunities to all, encompassing a relationship of trust and respect in the workplace (Sabharwal, 2014). The concept also includes appreciating individual's contribution, recognizing his uniqueness and nurturing a feeling of belongingness in the workplace (Scott et al., 2019). If the workplace is inclusive, the employees are more likely to have higher level of job-satisfaction and loyalty. 'Job-satisfaction' and 'loyalty' are the two factors that are critical for retaining employees (Prime & Salib, 2014). Such employees whose job-satisfaction and loyalty both are high, are less likely to look for opportunities that exist in the outside world (Downey et al., 2015). Inclusive hiring, inclusive training and establishing inclusive employee support groups (ESGs) are found quite effective in fostering an inclusive work-culture. In such an environment, all employees feel supported and valued by the organization (Sabharwal, 2014). If employees feel safe in the organization and they feel that they can express themselves freely without any fear; this perception fosters a climate of 'psychological safety' within the organization. Psychological safety leads to 'psychological safety-inclusivity' (Edmondson, 1999). Employees who feel safe in the organization develop loyalty towards the organization, reducing turnover intentions (Prime & Salib, 2014). Inclusivity also supports problem-solving as employees who feel psychologically-safe and empowered try to experiment and give creative solutions (Bourke & Dillon, 2018). Such employees quickly adapt to changes as per the changing environments and markets (Sabharwal, 2014). Better mental health is also proved to be associated with better retention of employees

(Roberson, 2019). Inclusive hiring practices of the organization bring in a diverse workforce in the organization along with passing the message of inclusivity to the outside corporate environment (Sabharwal, 2014). Such unbiased organizations treat all employees equally irrespective of any kind of bias (Scott et al., 2019). Introducing employee support groups, popularly known as ESGs, also give a lot of support to the diverse workforce and its requirements (Prime & Salib, 2014). The leadership also has to be diverse, then only the leadership will be committed to supporting and promoting diversity and inclusion in the organization (Downey et al., 2015). The practice of giving continuous feedback and providing an inclusive-atmosphere passes on a message of use of sustained inclusive practices by the organization and ever-happening improvements (Bourke & Dillon, 2018). Consistent communication, an empathetic attitude and winning their hearts to bring in change and negotiating for the change are some of the successful ways of changing the cultural inertia (Scott et al., 2019). This may pass on the unbothered attitude of the leadership and may end up just being a check-box exercise ((Prime & Salib, 2014) leading to disengagement further. This may slowly land up in high rate of attrition (Sabharwal, 2014)). Tadesse Bogale and Debela (2024) conduct a systematic review to investigate the role of Organizational Culture (OC) in addressing inefficiency and ineffectiveness caused by identity crises within organizations. Thus, the study contributes in terms of offering an in-depth analysis of the relationship between organization culture and organizational effectiveness (Tadesse Bogale & Debela, 2024).

Employee Attrition: Srivastava & Nair (2018) gave a model of predictive analytics for employee attrition. The authors came up with a framework to make predictions about the 'voluntary termination of employees' using statistical methods (data mining and machine learning methodologies). Yang & Islam (2020) conducted a detailed analysis of IBM employees' attrition data to look into the key factors that contribute to employee intended turnover. Setiawan et al.

(2020), utilized logistic regression analysis of the employees' attrition in order to determine what variables are significant in identifying key employee turnover drivers and thus provided insights for organizations to develop better retention strategies. Data analysed from four thousand employees for a year identified eleven variables as significant drivers of the attrition. Brockett et al. (2019) proposed an all-inclusive framework in predicting employee attrition with CLARA. The CLARA approach depends on descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive analytics that identify at-risk employees and provide actions to prevent losses. It was also shown in the meta-analysis conducted by Pandita & Ray (2018) that the influence of talent management impacts employee engagement and thus retains talent. Tlaiss et al. (2017) conducted a case study to investigate talent retention practices within a multinational accounting firm in France. They found that very often, talent retention (TR) is approached on an ad hoc basis, mainly motivated by direct costs of turnover. While incentives are used to encourage retention and affect workplace culture positively; organizational norms were found as playing an even bigger role. Srivastava and Eachempati (2021) discuss factors that influence employee turnover as well as explore predictions modelling using employee records' data. In addition, the research uses regression analysis and a Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) model to verify results based on variable importance and weight calculation. The outcomes may help HR managers create incentives and retention strategies that will work better (Srivastava & Eachempati, 2021).

Career Development: Bihani & Dalal (2014) have reiterated that talent management is more concerned with organizational success. Deery (2008) discussed the interrelationships among talent management, work-life balance, and employee retention strategies within the hospitality and tourism sector. Then, Deery pointed out how an organization could offer initiatives in order to reduce turnover by attaining a better balance between work and family life. Ismail (2003) attempted to explore male and female engineers' subjective career experiences in

the context of one large Malaysian industrial organization. Applications of Process Mining techniques were used by Silva et al. (2017) to analyse career progression in a public organization. May et al. (2002) also explored how knowledge work and organizational-form influence employee commitment, effort, and job satisfaction. Work values, motivational factors, and behavioural patterns of Thai workers and managers in both government and private sectors were examined by Komin (1990). According to Hofstede (1980), human behaviour is guided by mental programs, which are literally programmed in the human mind through culture. The said mental programming-according to Hofstede-collectivist programming-is responsible for the use of sensory inputs and the production of human behavioural responses. Alimova 2024 considers and researches career development and progression major issues. Alimova places emphasis on business acumen, individual capabilities, and favourable environmental conditions toward success (Alimova, 2024)

Women Empowerment: D'Agostino & Levine (2010) researched the factors affecting women's career advancement in state government agencies. In line with some previous research, family-friendly practices were not found to affect women's career advancement, however, they "reduced how long it took women to reach upper-management ranks." Gholipour et al. (2010) assessed various factors influencing women's empowerment in Tehran, Iran. Narayanan & Selvanathan (2017), examined issues females face in seeking empowerment within a private organization in Malaysia. Results showed that the workplace females are discriminated against in promotion, allocation of tasks, job stereotyping, pay scale and rewards. Nayak & Mahanta (2012) discussed the status of women empowerment in India using various indicators. According to Musser (2013), there is a great need to effectively retain diverse employees. While many organizations are well-intentioned and focus on recruitment, they do not focus on retaining their diverse staff. Igbinoba et al. (2022) drew a correlation between employee retention strategies and organizational performance.

Role of integrated learning experiences, effective leadership and HR department's proactive initiation cannot be overlooked for creating inclusivity in the workplace. Wavre, (2024) demonstrated role of integrated learning experience in enhancing inclusivity in the culture. Tejaswini et al. (2025) highlighted that 'effective leadership, inclusive practices and measures adopted for stress-management' go a long way in deciding a welcoming workplace. Ezeafulukwe et al. (2024) emphasized that HR plays a proactive role in fostering inclusivity. Jha et al. (2024) also emphasized that visionary inclusive, leaders provide 'fair-treatment'

Yıldırım and Köroğlu (2024) address the challenges faced by non-profit organizations (NPOs) in monitoring and evaluating the social impact (SI) and performance of women's empowerment (WE) programs, which are critical for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goal of "Gender Equality." The study proposes a multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) model combining Fuzzy TOPSIS (FTOPSIS) and Fuzzy AHP (FAHP) to identify, prioritize, and evaluate performance indicators. A qualitative-study based on Turkish NPOs validated the

classification of the indicators based on their relevance and observed viability. Thus, it contributed by offering a 'structured-framework' to enhance the effectiveness of such programmes (Yıldırım & Köroğlu, 2024).

Methodology: Research Design: A mixed-method approach has been used for this study, which combines qualitative and quantitative information that will help in analysing the findings comprehensively. Participants: Sampling - Snowball sampling and purposive methods of sampling were used. The sample size used in Phase 1 was 150 ex-employees and in Phase 2 it was 80 participants, mostly females, in Phase 2.

Instruments: A mixed-method approach has been used for this study, which combines qualitative and quantitative information.

Data analysis: The research-study was conducted in two phases: Primary Data Collection: The data was collected using 'telephonic-interviews' and 'structured-questionnaires'.

Secondary Data Analysis: Competitor Analysis, Industry Benchmarking: Identifying and Addressing Women-Centric Challenges.

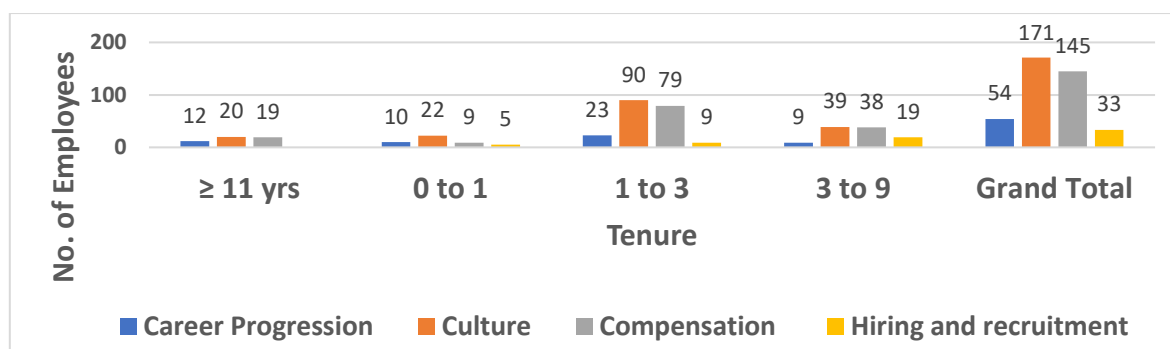
Results: Table 1. Tenure versus variables

Labels	Career Progression	Culture	Compensation	Hiring and recruitment
≥ 11 yrs	12	20	19	
0 to 1	10	22	9	5
1 to 3	23	90	79	9
3 to 9	9	39	38	19
Grand Total	54	171	145	33

Source: researchers' analysis

The table indicates how employee tenure relates to factors such as career growth, culture, compensation, and hiring/recruitment. This

indicates that the longer the employee is in the company, the more he or she has experienced career growth and is happy with the culture and compensation.



Source: researchers' analysis: Figure 1.

Tenure versus variables

Discussion: Following bar chart illustrates the relationships of some variables connecting to employee tenure, career progressions, culture,

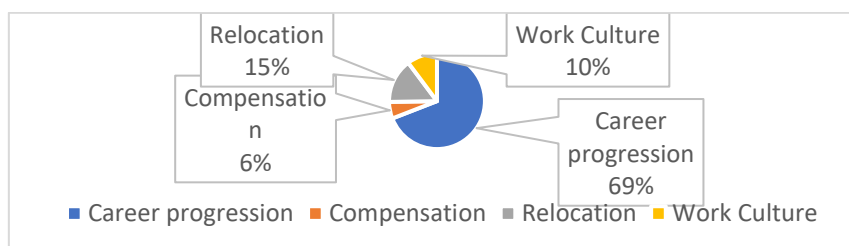
compensation and recruitment: Overall, it can be seen that with longer tenures, the levels of career progression and satisfaction concerning company culture and compensation both increases, while hiring and recruiting practices remain less affected by tenures.

Table 2. Competitor analysis and industrial benchmarking

Reasons	Years of Experience
Career progression	91.9
Compensation	7.5
Relocation	20
Work Culture	13.6

Source: researchers' analysis

Discussion: *It was some competitor analysis and an industry benchmarking with the regard to the importance that various factors carry: Career progression, compensation, relocating, and work culture. The table shows career progression is the most crucial factor in the decision and relocation and work culture of an employee while compensation will be less influential.



Source: researchers' analysis

Figure 2. Competitor analysis and industrial benchmarking

This pie chart illustrates the factors influencing a worker's decision in competitor analysis and industry benchmarking. The chart shows that career development is the most influential factor, followed by relocation and work culture, while compensation has a lesser influencing factor.

Phase 1: Talent Retention Issues: The problem statement in Phase 1 was positioned on the loss to competitors of SMEs, which negatively impacted the productivity of the

department. Initial research used a combination of primary and secondary sources of data to find out where the issues lay in this problem. Key pillars identified were Career Progression, Culture, Compensation, and Hiring & Recruitment. An analysis of the given data retrieved ten possible solutions within one-on-one sessions, communication workshops, hybrid workspace environments, and women's empowerment programs. Two most common

root causes for the retention issue were identified:
bad work culture and lack of career visibility.

Phase 2: Strengthening Women Initiatives and Work Culture Improvement

What do you perceive as the biggest challenges for women in your organization?

80 responses

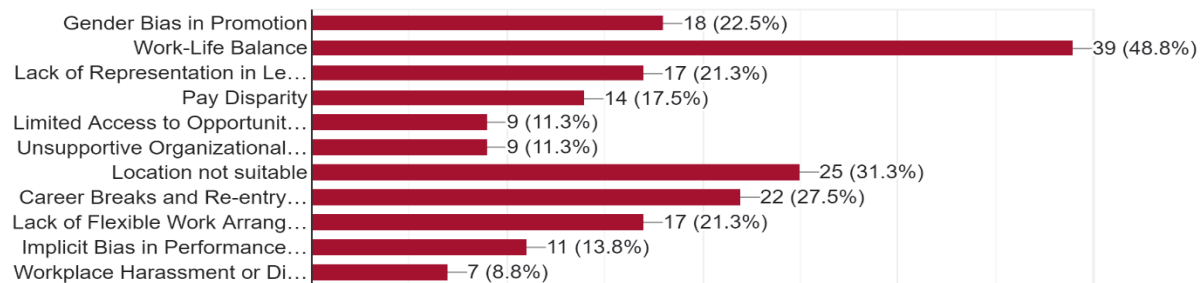


Figure 3. Market Survey responses:

The figure shows the market survey responses, where 90% respondents were female and 10% respondents were male (Source: researchers' analysis). From the chart, it is depicted that females in the organization are highly burdened with work-life balance issues, career breaks, and lack of opportunities. The issues of gender bias and pay disparity are also widely evident. This gave way to Phase 2, which was characterized by the urge to establish a more friendly and accommodative work environment for women. It sought to bring out the exact shortcomings that women experience within the corporate world, and how these could be minimized. The study

indicated that 31% of the issues faced by this workforce were about culture, 26% were about location, 25% were related to career growth, and 18% were related to compensations. Based on this report, recommendations were provided for workplace culture improvements and enhancement of women-oriented policies at Telecommunication organization. It included the introduction of "joshi-ryoku" initiative, which when translated into Japanese means "girl-power", that would henceforth look into addressing issues with career breaks, re-entries, flexible work conditions, etc., for women.

Are there any opportunities or areas for improvement regarding support for women in the workplace?

80 responses

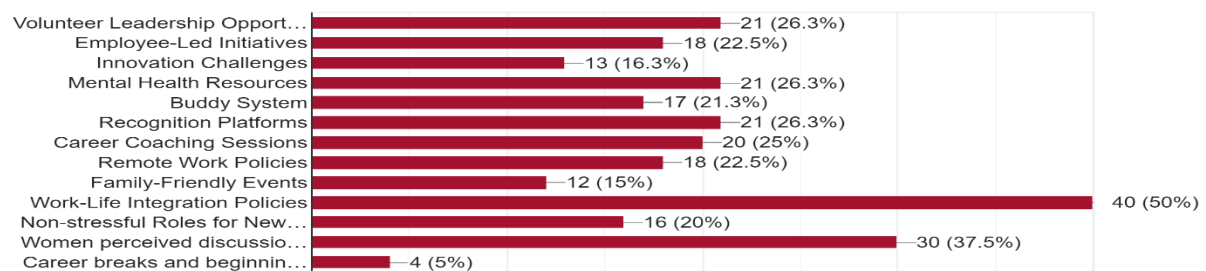


Figure 4. The area of improvement:

Understanding the area of improvement regarding the support for women in the workplace according to the people working in organizations (Source: researchers' analysis). The chart shows that women at work want support in

work-life integration, family-friendly policies, and career development opportunities. It pinpoints these areas as priority concerns in striving to establish a more welcoming workplace culture for women.

Conclusion:

The paper studied the 'factors of talent-retention and challenges faced by women' in telecommunication industry through a comprehensive mixed-method approach. Certain actionable insights in the form of strategic recommendations, were suggested to meet these challenges. Thus, the suggestion-the "joshi-ryoku" initiative-aims to foster an inclusive and

supportive workplace-culture. Telecommunication organization will be able to undertake employee-retention, women's empowerment, and a positive work-culture for all their employees, by addressing the issues dealt with in this study. In conclusion, this research-study provides a clear-cut guideline for addressing attrition and for inculcating an inclusive workplace for all employees, more specifically women.

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