

Factors Influencing Turnover Intention Among Generation Z Employees in the Public Higher Education Sector in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The allocation of government funds towards education has shown a notable rise, ascending from 16.7% in 2026 to over 20% in 2020. The rapid growth of academic institutions in Malaysia has resulted in a higher demand for lecturers. This phenomenon has resulted in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEI) consistently needing more lecturers due to high turnover rates. This study examines the determinants that contribute to the inclination of early career academicians towards leaving their positions. The preliminary investigation has brought attention to the factors of ostracism, career adaptability, and motivation in relation to the intention to leave. This study utilises a quantitative, cross-sectional approach to examine the correlation between all listed factors. The findings suggest a significant relationship between career adaptability, motivation, and turnover intention.

In contrast, the impact of ostracism on turnover intention is less significant. Based on the empirical evidence, it is advisable to prioritise career adaptability as a critical factor in the management of public institutions to enhance lecturer retention within public universities. Likewise, intrinsic motivation is a significant aspect that ensures lecturers' willingness to stay committed to their work.

Keywords: Higher Education Institution, Career Adaptability, Motivation, Ostracism, Turnover Intention

INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness and achievements of any educational system greatly depend on the quality of its academic faculty. (Maryam et al., 2020). Academics have a crucial role as the operational backbone of higher education institutions. Consequently, universities must assume a significant role in retaining this demographic in light of the evolving dynamics within higher education. The task of attracting and maintaining highly talented young educators has become increasingly challenging as a result of evolving social, economic, demographic, and psychological patterns. Based on the findings of the Employee Engagement and Retention 2021 research, it is observed that approximately 52% of employees worldwide express their intention to seek alternative employment opportunities actively. In the United Kingdom, the average attrition rate is approximately 15%. The national turnover rates in Australia and the United States are approximately 18% and 20.1%, respectively. This concerning figure reflects the widespread occurrence of turnover on a global scale. The average annual turnover rate in the education sector in Malaysia was recorded at 13.1% in the year 2013. However, the percentage mentioned above experienced an increase to 20% in the year 2017, highlighting the profoundly concerning nature of the turnover problem within the education sector, according to the study conducted by Falahat et al. (2019). Therefore, personnel retention

has emerged as a significant concern today.

Generation Z is the most recent cohort of individuals progressively joining the workforce in increasing quantities annually. According to a recent study conducted by PWC in 2022, it was found that roughly 27% of individuals belonging to Generation Z exhibit a propensity to change employers and depart from their respective organisations. In comparison, the study also revealed that 23% of Generation Y and 15% of individuals from Generation X are similarly inclined to leave their current employment. Besides, the oldest members of Generation Z are entering the workforce now. The next generation is Generation Z, born sometime in the very late 1990s to 2015 (Climek, 2022). According to McCrindle (2019), by 2025, Gen Z will comprise approximately one-third of the labor market and to benefit from the talents and skills of this generational cohort, organizations cannot afford to overlook their needs, values, and beliefs. The observed high turnover rate attributed to age differences is a cause for concern. The impending departure of the earlier generation (comprising Gen X and early Gen Y) from the labour market presents a significant challenge for academia. This cohort possesses valuable decision-making skills, experience, and networks (Climek et al., 2022), which, if not adequately addressed, will result in a growing skills gap among junior academicians. Conversely, personal resources empower individuals to discern opportunities amidst unforeseen shifts, exploit these possibilities, and recover from unanticipated outcomes

In order to successfully retain junior lecturers between their many challenges and work-related demands, an organisation must possess a comprehensive understanding of its own characteristics and organisational behaviour. Malaysia aspires to be the region's centre of excellence in higher education. The academic faculty plays a significant role in the functioning and success of any educational system. Any educational institution's administration is concerned with retaining competent and qualified academics to compete with other educational institutions. Hence, retaining talented faculty members and staff within Public Higher Education institutions is vital, as outlined in the action plan report of Higher Education Institutions: Education as an Industry (2020-2025). The allocation of governmental funds to education has exhibited a significant increase, climbing from 16.7% in 2026 to exceeding 20% in 2020. The swift expansion of academic institutions in Malaysia has led to an increased requirement for lecturers. This trend has consequently led to a consistent demand for more lecturers within Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEI) due to elevated turnover rates. Thus, it is imperative to retain junior lecturers due to the increased demand of young lecturers in Public Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia.

Hence, the primary objective of this study is to examine the association between career flexibility, motivation, and ostracism with turnover intention among junior lecturers in Malaysian Public Higher Education.

Conservation of Resource (COR) Theory

This theory states that people aspire to acquire, sustain, and protect their existing resources that are valued (conservation) from being depleted. These valuable resources can be divided into four categories: valuable physical objects (house, car); conditions (marriage, employment, relationship, work status); personal resources (self-efficacy, self-esteem, and energies (effort, time, and money) (Hobfoll et al., 2018). They found that social support mechanisms for professional growth, including supervisors, colleagues, groups, spousal, clients, and others, such as conscientiousness, emotional health, and resilience (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016), are reflected as resources in various studies. The theory further contends that employees work to preserve their resources while establishing and acquiring new ones, such as emotional, cognitive, or personal objects that employees utilise to confront stressful life events or achieve any professional and personal objectives. (Hobfoll, 2018). The theory posits that when employees are exposed to a stressful work environment, it results in withdrawal behaviour of turnover intention, hence depleting their resources. COR theory has been widely used in prior research on careers, examining adaptability, training behaviour, and disruptions. (Boziones et al., 2020). According to COR theory, employees intend to leave the workplace

when they do not have adequate resources to sustain their appropriate behaviour. (Jung et al., 2021; Lee & Jang, 2020). This study context determines the resources of career adaptability, intrinsic motivation and ostracism in the COR theory, and turnover intention. In the present study, career adaptability, intrinsic motivation and ostracism would represent critical resource replenishments at the workplace. Owing to critical resources, career adaptability is imperative for employees to cope with the changing job demands and adjust their careers. (Chan and Mai, 2015). Accordingly, when employees undergo a threat to resources, they are more likely to have their resources substantially drained. Therefore, the employees detach themselves from the company to minimise further loss. The feeling of loss may be compensated by the resources of work engagement and thus alter the severe influence of loss of resources on employee turnover intention. Likewise, employees with a high level of career adaptability and intrinsic motivation have more sufficient resources and are more likely to engage at work and minimise the intention to leave the company.

Turnover Intention

Turnover intention has long been recognised as a prevalent issue among managers and administrators, posing a significant threat to organisations in the modern day (Belete, 2018). Turnover intention is considered a reliable indicator of actual turnover and offers valuable insights that can aid management in effectively managing employee avoidance behaviours. Therefore, the present study emphasises the intention to leave a job instead of the actual act of leaving. According to Mobley et al. (1979), intention can be understood as a manifestation of explicit behaviour of particular significance. In their study, Allen et al. (2003) provided evidence for turnover intention as an individual's subjective evaluation and perception of several employment alternatives. Similarly, within the scope of this study, turnover intention is defined as the subjective perception or intention of an individual to depart from the employing organisation voluntarily.

Career Adaptability

The phrase "career adaptability" was initially coined by Super and Knasel (1981) as the "preparedness to navigate a dynamic and evolving professional landscape effectively." Professional adaptability is the term used to describe an employer's capacity to effectively navigate and control their professional progression (Savickas, 2012). In essence, it signifies the capacity of individuals to adapt their behaviour in response to evolving demands. The construct of career flexibility has been conceived as comprising four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). According to the Conservation of Resource Theory, individuals allocate their resources and promptly adapt to their surroundings in times of stress to mitigate potential adverse consequences. Similarly, individuals who exhibit a high level of career adaptability may experience a greater alignment with the work environment, as they are able to establish appropriate goals, identify more favourable chances, and acquire the necessary personal resources to navigate career challenges. Career adaptability has emerged as a crucial determinant of career success within the context of a rapidly changing and unpredictable professional landscape.

Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation has been approached from various angles (Van Broeck et al., 2021). As the old saying goes, find a job you enjoy, and you will never have to work again. "A Day in Your Life" promotes the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to achieve distinct results (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Van Broeck et al., 2021). Pinder (2008) described motivation as the driving force that leads to the direction, intensity, and persistence of employee behavior. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing the task for enjoyment and excitement purposes. Park (2022) further demonstrated that intrinsic motivation will minimize job search behavior. Grant and Berry (2011) also posit that when employees are intrinsically motivated, they will be engaged in their work and persistently manage their complex tasks instead of involving with withdrawal behavior in their job. Similarly, Individuals with intrinsic motivation derive satisfaction from task completion, and their enjoyment is characterized by voluntariness, self-determination, and autonomy, and hence reduce their

intention to leave the organisation.

As an illustration, faculty members who exhibit a strong intrinsic motivation are inclined to invest additional effort in their teaching responsibilities, deriving pleasure from the act of delivering lectures. Numerous previous studies have observed an adverse correlation between intrinsic satisfaction and the inclination to leave one's position. (Dysik, 2008; Houkes et al.2001)

Ostracism

Ostracism is the elimination of constructive attention, and it is conceptually dissimilar from active practices of incivility, such as bullying, harassment, or abuse (Balliet& Ferris, 2013; Robinson et al., 2013). Ostracism significantly undermines one's need to belong, and such constant psychological need depletion might cause weakness and dejection (Williams & Nida, 2011).). Workplace ostracism defines an employee's perception of being excluded or ignored by others (Ferris et al., 2008). There are numerous signs of ostracism in the workplace, including but not limited to giving ostracised employees silent treatment, avoiding eye contact, ignoring the ostracised greetings, and isolation from social contact (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013; Zhu et al., 2017). It is, in fact, a component of a more prominent family of interpersonal mistreatments that includes bullying, abuse, undermining, and incivility, and it reflects the "darker" spectrum of organisational behaviour and social contact. (Bedi, 2019; Lyu et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2013). Workplace ostracism is the least visible and overt form of mistreatment on this darker spectrum, making management's job more challenging. This behaviour could result in junior faculty receiving less information about resources, tenure and promotion expectations, career advancement opportunities, and field developments. Findings by Lyu and Zu (2019) revealed that those who have been ostracised are less engaged in their jobs, which has exacerbated their desire to leave. This finding is further supported by Turkoglu and Dalgic (2019) as they assert that employees' feelings of integration into the organisation were affected by workplace ostracism, which prompted them to want to leave.

Following the above, several proposed hypotheses were developed as follows:

H1 –Career adaptability significantly affects turnover intention among junior lecturers in Malaysian Public Higher Education.

H2 –Intrinsic motivation significantly affects turnover intention among junior lecturers in Malaysian Public Higher Education

H3 – Ostracism significantly affects turnover intention among junior lecturers in Malaysian Public Higher Education.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, it is postulated that poor career adaptability, poor intrinsic motivation and ostracised employees intend to leave the organisation when resources (quality of life, well-being, social life, and health) are depleted. A stressful working environment can deplete employees' resources and lead to withdrawal behavior in an organisation. In other words, the depletion of resources causes the employee to withdraw from their work and disengage in their work role. In contrast, employees with solid career adaptability and intrinsic motivation can avoid potential resource loss and seem valued. Career adaptability, intrinsic motivation and ostracism is an independent variable, and turnover intention is modeled as the dependent variable in this study context. The framework is depicted in Figure 1.

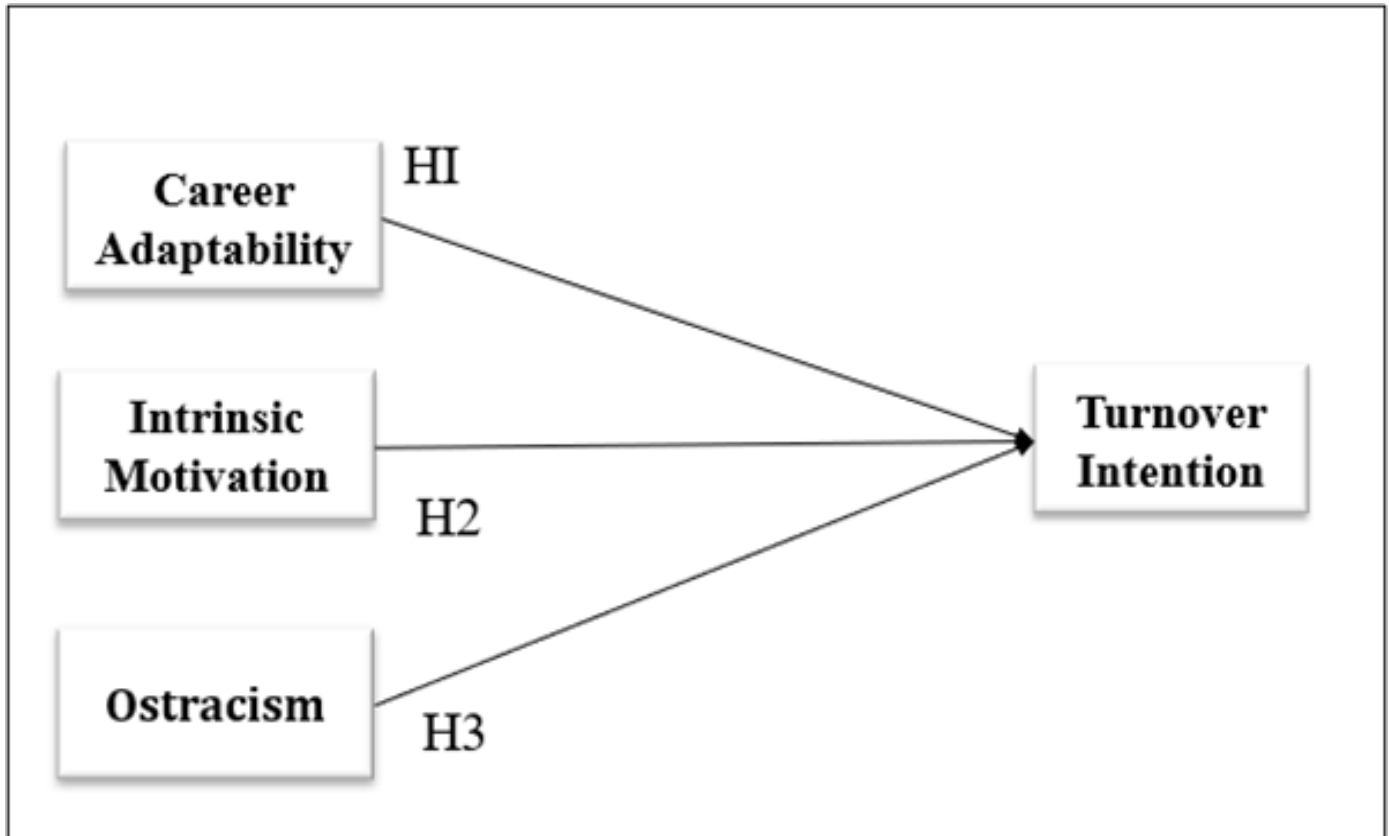


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The study employs a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design. The targeted population consisted of junior full-time faculty members employed in Malaysian public universities with five years and below of working experience in academia. One hundred self-report questionnaires were distributed to faculty members via Google Forms using snowball technique. Their email addresses were obtained from the respective universities' directories. Every respondent received an email with a cover letter explaining the study's purpose, providing instructions, and extending an invitation to participate in the survey. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary, and their answers were treated as confidential and anonymous. The participants were provided with a duration of two weeks to complete the survey. After completing the questionnaire, the data was analysed, and the hypotheses were tested using statistical software. The study employed the partial least squares (PLS) approach, a modeling technique meant to estimate latent variables and their interrelationships. The Smart PLS 3 program (Hair et al., 2021) was utilized for this purpose. In present study, PLS-SEM was employed to evaluate the data instead of the CB-SEM model, due to the following reasons; The PLS-SEM model can handle data that is not normally distributed, while the CB SEM model although less robust than the PLS-SEM model can provide accurate estimates when dealing with normally distributed data. Likewise, the PLS-SEM model offers flexibility in data normality. Besides, PLS-SEM allows testing a small sample size, with 30-100 cases as a minimum range, in comparison to CB-SEM which requires a larger sample size. (Hair et al. 2013).

Measures

Turnover Intention was assessed using five items developed by Bozeman and Perrewé (2001): On a five-

point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5), the respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement such as “I am thinking about quitting my job at present”, “I intend to quit my job soon,” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.90$)

Career adaptability was measured using items used from previous research Career Adaptability Scale developed by Savickas and Porfeli, (2012). Sample items included “I am aware of the educational and career choices that I must make for the future, I am concerned about my career”. (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.94$.)

Intrinsic motivation was evaluated using nine items gathered from previous research, Ryan and Deci. (1994). The junior lecturers indicated their agreement with the sample of the following statement “I put efforts into my current job because putting efforts in this job has personal significance to me and I put efforts into my current job because the work I do is interesting”. (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$) on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5)

Ostracism was measured using ten items developed by Ferris et al., (2008). The participants must indicate the level of agreement or disagreement using the Likert scale. Sample items included “I perceive my office mate ignored me at work, I perceive my greetings have gone unanswered at work, I perceive my office mate avoided me at work”. (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$)

RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 100 surveys were issued, and 36 questionnaires were returned after being completed. Among the total of 36 questionnaires that were distributed, it was found that 4 of them needed to be utilised due to incomplete responses. Consequently, the response rate for the survey was calculated to be 36%. According to Ali et al. (2020), the utilisation of online surveys disseminated via email yielded a mean response rate of 30.39%. Email distribution drew the lowest response rate compared to face-to-face (70.19%) and mail distribution (42.8%), as further emphasised by Ali et. al. (2020). Hence, a response rate of 36% is deemed appropriate for the current study.

The gender distribution of the participants revealed that a significant proportion (75%) identified as female, while the remaining respondents (25%) identified as male. The age cohort from 24 to 34 exhibited the highest prevalence, constituting 66% of the overall population. A substantial percentage of the participants (56%) have doctoral degrees. All the participants have a work experience of at least five years at a public institution. Approximately 72% of individuals possess prior job experience inside the organisation, ranging from 1 to 3 years.

The Cronbach Alpha coefficient evaluates the degree of internal consistency within a given test or scale, measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 1. Following the findings of Gliem and Gliem (2003), numerical values exceeding 0.9 are indicative of an excellent level, while values of 0.8 represent a reasonable level, values of 0.7 signify an acceptable level, values of 0.6 denote a questionable level, values of 0.5 reflect a poor level, and values below 0.5 are deemed as unsatisfactory. The results also report a high Cronbach Alpha value between the range of 0.90 to 0.97 for all the indicators, namely Career Adaptability, Intrinsic Motivation, Ostracism, and Turnover intention as shown in Table1, which is considered adequate for a research instrument. According to Hair et al. (2010), internal latent variables’ R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are high, moderate, and weak, respectively. This value is widely recognised and relevant in social research. The R^2 value for turnover intention is 0.442, indicating moderate results. When an external construct is removed from the model, the change in R^2 value can measure F^2 effect size (T, 2018); Cohen (1988) defines effect size guidelines as 0.020 for minor effects, 0.150 for medium effects, and 0.350 for significant effects. All values meet the requirements because they indicate a small to medium effect.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

Indicator	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability
Career Adaptability	0.970	0.967
Intrinsic Motivation	0.936	0.954
Ostracism	0.902	0.822
Turnover Intention	0.937	0.949

In a two-tailed test, achieving significance in the relationship requires the p-value at a 0.05 significance level to fall below 0.05, accompanied by a t-value surpassing 1.96. As per the insights from Hair et al. (2012), the presence of statistically significant path values indicates empirical support for the hypothesized direction

The path coefficient for all objectives in Table 2 shows a positive relationship between all variables; however, it is noted that career adaptability and intrinsic motivation variables are statistically significant to turnover intention. However, it is shown that ostracism is not significant towards turnover intention.

Table 2: Path Coefficient

Relationship	Path Coefficient
Career Adaptability → Turnover Intention	0.044
Intrinsic motivation → Turnover Intention	0.015
Ostracism → Turnover Intention	0.416

DISCUSSION

A positive association has been observed between turnover intention and the interrelated characteristics of career adaptability, intrinsic motivation, and ostracism. The findings of this study indicate a notable association between career adaptability and its influence on turnover intention, with a correlation coefficient of 0.044. The findings indicate that the capacity to adapt to one's profession is highly significant for early career educators in deciding whether to remain in their current role or choose a different path. Similar conclusions were drawn by Chan and Mai (2015) and Savickas and Porfeli (2012).

Subsequently, empirical result support shows a favourable correlation between intrinsic motivation and turnover with a correlation coefficient of 0.015. This value suggests a favourable association between intrinsic motivation and turnover intention. The finding presented is substantiated by previous research conducted by Ryan and Deci (2017) and Van Broeck et al. (2021), who identified a favorable association between intrinsic motivation and reduced turnover intention. This is supported by the previous findings by Dysik(2008) and Houkes et al (2001) as intrinsically motivated individuals have less declination to leave the organization. Houkes et al (2001) also demonstrated faculty members that are driven by high intrinsic motivation often exert additional effort in their teaching roles, finding gratification in the act of delivering lectures and thus can minimize the turnover intent to quit the organization. This finding is in line with a similar study by Ryan and Deci (2017) that posits when individuals internalize the sentiments associated with extrinsic motivation, there is a greater likelihood that they will not manifest an intention to leave the organization

The results of this study provide evidence of a statistically significant correlation between ostracism and its impact on employees' propensity to leave from the organizations they work for voluntarily. The findings

provide a coefficient of 0.211, suggesting a modest positive correlation between the variables, as illustrated in Table 1. The present findings exhibit congruence with the research conducted by Lyu and Zu (2019), Ferris et al. (2008), Robinson et al. (2013), and Zhu et al. (2017). In line with the previous study by Randey and Cropanzano (1999) demonstrated that distress leads to unfavorable consequences, including deteriorating physical health, heightened stress, and an increased likelihood of employee turnover. Ostracism similarly induces feelings of unhappiness among employees, attributed to a diminished sense of control and a weakened sense of belonging. According to COR theory, when personal resources are drained, the employees show resourcefulness and act and persevere in a variety of situations, the harmful effect of ostracism might exhibit the intention to quit. However, the magnitude of the correlation seems to be relatively low.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The “Great Resignation” is a post-pandemic phenomenon observed across multiple industries and countries. The current wave of transformation is attributed to the progress of technologies and the widespread integration of digital tools in educational instruction and learning processes. This demand presents a challenge to young individuals pursuing a career in academia. Advancements in technology have ushered in a substantial change in the landscape of teaching and learning. The demands placed on students are currently undergoing a process of evolution. Consequently, new educators should receive substantial support from their college or university, administrators, and colleagues. The instructional delivery method has transformed, allowing students to access a wide range of knowledge. Moreover, the increasing prevalence of hybrid work arrangements has decreased engagement, restricting the interaction between senior and junior academicians. This scenario resulted in the individual’s intention to leave. Hence, discovering a positive correlation between career adaptability, intrinsic motivation, and turnover intention holds significant implications for higher education institutions aiming to foster job security among young academics. Several strategies should be developed to enhance engagement. Administrators of public universities need to evaluate strategies for improving the onboarding process and implementing formal procedures to integrate early career educators into the university’s culture.

Furthermore, additional research is required to solidify further the understanding of the elements that impact the intention of academicians in public universities to remain in their positions. This situation is attributed to the fact that individuals are more inclined to remain in their positions as a result of the favorable pension benefits, which outweigh the challenges and adverse treatment they may encounter from their senior colleagues. Therefore, it is imperative to reduce and mitigate the occurrence of ostracism against individuals. Besides, alternative methodologies and sampling frameworks can be employed to gain deeper insights into employees’ perspectives towards actual turnover within academia. Interpretative research has the potential to unveil detailed information about employees’ intrinsic motivations, career adaptability, ostracism and turnover intention in the role.

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