

Employee Retention in the Restaurant Industry: Perspectives from Organizational and Coworker Support

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between organizational support (OS), coworker support (CS), and turnover intention (TI) within the restaurant industry. Utilizing a sample survey of 78 restaurant employees from online communities, linear regression analysis revealed an inverse correlation between OS and CS with TI. Practical implications for improving retention include tailored strategies based on demographic findings. Organizations can offer extended maternity leave accommodations, transparent career advancement pathways, cross-training opportunities, and cultivate coworker relationships through collaborative shift assignments and digital group chats. These strategies promote a supportive work environment and reduce turnover intentions. Overall, this study underscores the importance of OS and CS in fostering employee engagement and loyalty for organizational growth.

Introduction

In the current economy, the challenge of employee retention is a critical concern in many competitive industries (Lepak & Snell, 1999). In particular, the restaurant industry is notorious for its rapid employee turnover rates that pose unique challenges to operational stability and success (Meyer & Herscovitch 2001). For this reason, exploring factors that influence employee retention in the restaurant industry is essential in setting strategic and financial goals for a business.

The concept of organizational and coworker support (OS, CS) is a lens that can be used to examine the factors influencing employee retention. The relationship between these two forms of support can play a pivotal role in creating an engaged and motivated workforce (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The commitment of employees, their sense of belonging, and their desire to stay with an organization are closely linked to the feeling of being valued and supported, both by the organization itself and by their colleagues.

In the specific context of the restaurant industry, the relationship between organizational and coworker support is an interesting area for investigation. This complex relationship could yield valuable insights into the challenges of employee retention. The current study aims to understand the connections more deeply between perceived support from the organization, the relationships fostered among coworkers, and their impact on turnover intention within the conditions of the restaurant sector.

The significance of these questions is further emphasized by the challenges restaurants face in their competitive industry. Beyond the operational considerations, the stability and commitment of employees impact every aspect of the dining experience, influencing customer satisfaction and service standards. A comprehensive understanding of employee retention through the lenses of organizational and coworker support can provide restaurant owners and stakeholders with invaluable insights that could lead to strategies aimed at increasing employee commitment and a restaurant's overall success (Butler & Skipper 1983).

Literature Review

The concept of employee turnover and its consequences have been extensively explored within the broader context of organizational behavior. Previous research has emphasized the complex nature of turnover and its implications for workforce stability, operational efficiency, and financial performance (Lepak & Snell, 1999). The restaurant industry, notable for its fast-paced and demanding environment, is notable for its high turnover rates compared to other industries (Butler & Skipper, 1983). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the factors that influence employees' decisions to stay with or leave an organization.

Organizational support is a crucial factor influencing turnover intention. Research by Allen and Meyer (2003) introduced the concept of perceived organizational support, which highlights employees' beliefs about how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. This concept includes various forms of support, such as work assistance, emotional support, and informational guidance, which employees perceive from their organization. Studies have consistently shown that higher levels of perceived organizational support are associated with lower turnover intention (Cartwright & Baron 2002; Wong & Ko 2009). Employees who feel supported by their organization are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and commitment, making them less likely to leave (Allen & Meyer 2003). Specifically, when employees perceive that their organization cares about their personal well-being and values their contributions, they are less likely to seek employment elsewhere (Meyer & Allen 1991).

In addition, coworker support is another significant factor that influences employee retention. Colleagues provide a sense of camaraderie, social belonging, and practical assistance that can reduce the burdens of a demanding work environment (Dyne & Pierce, 2004). The supportive interactions and relationships among coworkers can contribute to job satisfaction and overall well-being, affecting an employee's intention to remain within the organization.

While these studies underscore the impact of organizational support and coworker support on turnover intention, there remains a research gap within the context of the restaurant industry. Limited attention has been directed toward examining how the influence of perceived organizational and coworker support can reduce turnover intentions within this sector. The restaurant industry has its own unique operational and managerial factors that affect the behavior of organizations and employees. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationship between support mechanisms and their influence on employee retention within the restaurant industry.

Methods

A sample survey was applied to evaluate the relationship of OS and CS with employee TI. The sampling strategy involved targeting restaurant employees who actively participate in online restaurant worker forums, communities, and chat groups. This sampling approach was adopted to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. A total of 78 participants responded to the questionnaire, representing a mix of roles within the industry.

The questionnaire, conducted via Google Forms, was composed of four sections, each examining a unique aspect of the participant and his/her perspective on the organization: OS, CS, TI, and demographics. The sections related to turnover intention and organizational and coworker support included a series of statements to which participants could respond on a multiple-choice scale, indicating whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, strongly disagreed, or felt neutral with the statement. The demographics section gathered information about participants' age, gender, tenure, job role, and prior experience in the restaurant industry.

Via an informational paragraph preceding the survey, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they were informed about the purpose of the study and the strict confidentiality of their responses. The survey link was shared on various online platforms, including Reddit and Discord groups meant for restaurant workers, with the aim of reaching a diverse range of participants. The survey remained open for two weeks to allow participants ample time to complete it.

The collected data were analyzed using linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between OS, CS, and TI. Exploratory data analysis was also employed to identify patterns and trends in the correlations between sections. Microsoft Excel was utilized for linear regression, while SPSS software facilitated other statistical analyses such as means comparison. Ethical considerations were considered throughout the research process, including ensuring the anonymity of participants and protecting their privacy by securely storing the collected data within the Google Forms database.

Results

Following the two-week data collection period, data from all 78 responses were transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Each question and answer were assigned numerical values for statistical analysis. Linear regression analysis was employed to investigate the relationships between OS, CS, and TI. The results of the regression analysis are summarized in Table 1.

The linear regression equation derived from the coefficient values is “ $TI = 6.239 - 0.568OS - 0.317CS$.” This equation highlights an inverse correlation between OS and CS with TI - as OS and CS increase, employee TI decreases. The R Square value shows that 36.325% of variances in TI are explained by OS and CS. Notably, the low p-values of OSMean (0.00126) and CSMean (0.0290) indicate that the relationship between OS and CS with TI is statistically significant, and the trends drawn from the data are unlikely to have occurred by chance.

By comparing the mean TI value of each respondent, 1 being the lowest TI and 5 being the highest TI, with his/her response to each demographic question, trends related to TI are revealed among demographic groups regarding each quality examined.

Table 1. Linear regression statistics imported from Excel.

Regression Statistics					
Multiple R		0.602698355			
R Square		0.363245307			
Adjusted R Square		0.346265182			
Standard Error		1.048099382			
Observations		78			

ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F

Regression	2	46.99958794	23.49979397	21.392381	4.45611E-08
Residual	75	82.3884236	1.098512315		
Total	77	129.3880115			

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
Intercept	6.238517829	0.501444302	12.44109825	6.48024E-20
OSMean	-0.56841979	0.169559519	-3.35233192	0.001258069
CSMean	-0.317433983	0.142540816	-2.22696903	0.028950216

Table 2. SPSS Means Comparison of Gender Relation to TI Mean.

Gender	TI Mean	N
Male	2.8687	33
Female	3.1313	33
Other	3.3333	12

Table 2 shows that males report the lowest TI levels, followed by women with notably higher TI levels. Non-binary identifying individuals reported the highest TI levels.

Table 3. SPSS Means Comparison of Age Relation to TI Mean.

Age Group	TI Mean	N
Under 15	1.5000	2
16-18	3.0385	26
19-21	3.1358	27
22-30	2.9091	11
31-50	3.2778	12

In Table 3, the relationship between age and TI demonstrates that employees under the age of 15 reports drastically lower levels of TI. From there, TI shows a gradual increase with age with an exception in the 22-30 age group, where TI dips.

Table 4. SPSS Means Comparison of Job Position Relation to TI Mean

Job Position	TI Mean	N
Front/Host/Hostess	2.9855	23
Waiter/Waitress	3.1667	2
Dishwasher	2.6667	1
Cook	3.4359	13
Management/Supervisor	3.0278	24
Other	2.8667	15

From Table 4, we can find that dishwashers and other positions report the lowest TI whereas front, hosts, hostesses, and management positions are generally neutral regarding TI. Additionally, waiters, waitresses, and cooks report the highest levels of TI.

Table 5. SPSS Means Comparison of Tenure Relation to TI Mean.

Tenure	TI Mean	N
Less than 3 months	2.1111	6
3 months — 6 months	3	14
6 months — 1 year	3.2222	18
1 year — 3 years	3.0641	26
Over 3 years	3.2619	14

Table 5 shows that employees with less than 3 months of experience with an organization report significantly low TI whereas employees with 3-6 months and 1-3 years of experience with an organization report relatively neutral levels of TI. Employees with 6 months to 1 year and over 3 years of experience with an organization report increased levels of TI.

Table 6. SPSS Means Comparison of Tenure Relation to TI Mean.

Employee Has Prior Industry Experience	TI Mean	N
Yes	3.1926	45
No	2.8586	33

From Table 6, we can see that employees with prior experience in the restaurant industry report significantly higher levels of TI compared with those with no prior industry experience.

Discussion/Conclusion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between OS, CS, and employee TI within the context of the restaurant industry. The results of the linear regression analysis suggest a significant inverse correlation between OS and CS with TI, indicating that increased support from both the organization and coworkers corresponds to decreased turnover intentions among employees.

The findings of this study hold several practical implications that organizations operating in the restaurant industry can use to increase employee retention. Tailored strategies addressing demographic-specific findings can be employed to create a supportive work environment and contribute to organizational success. For instance, to foster a greater sense of organizational support within employees, organizations can consider offering extended and flexible maternity leave accommodations for female employees, showcasing a commitment to their well-being and work-life balance (Allen, 2001). Transparent pathways for career advancement can empower employees of all age groups and tenures to envision long-term growth within the organization (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Cross-training opportunities, especially between employees with varying levels of job experience and tenure, can enhance skill sets and promote intergenerational knowledge exchange (Kohnen, 2002), fostering a sense of inclusivity.

In addition to OS-oriented implications, strategies to increase employees' sense of coworker support (CS) can play a pivotal role in retention efforts as well. Collaborative shift assignments, grouping employees based on age, gender, and experience levels, can facilitate a sense of community and camaraderie among employees (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). Encouraging digital group chats allows employees to connect and share experiences, thereby strengthening coworker relationships (Chauhan, 2023). This approach can create a sense of belonging and mutual support within an organization. Furthermore, organizations can see great benefits in the cultivation of a supportive work environment among employees. Organizations can actively promote cross-functional teamwork and interdepartmental communication, fostering a sense of unity among diverse employees (Chatman, et al., 1998). Encouraging managers to facilitate constructive feedback sessions and recognize exemplary coworker support can contribute to a positive work culture (Edmondson, 1999). These initiatives collectively nurture employee engagement and loyalty, ultimately reducing turnover intentions.

While these practical implications offer actionable steps to enhance employee retention, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The small sample size and the data collection method might restrict the generalizability of findings. For instance, employees actively joining internet groups to converse with coworkers from their restaurant are likely to view their organization in a positive light or feel satisfied with their job (Chauhan 2023). Additionally, the internet groups in which the survey link was available were globally public. Certain nations with strict regulations on the restaurant industry or labor may have influenced participants' responses. Future research could incorporate alternative means of data collection and explore the impact of location-specific interventions on employee retention.

In conclusion, this study provides insights into the relationship between support dimensions and turnover intention within the restaurant industry. By utilizing tailored strategies for employee retention, organizations can create an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute positively to the organization's growth.

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