THE ANTECEDENTS OF EMPLOYEE TURNOVER INTENTIONS IN THE POLICE FORCE IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Reducing the turnover of police personnel, whose purpose is to maintain citizens' sense of security, could make a significant contribution to a police force's effectiveness. The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework on the basis of a literature review through which to understand and predict factors affecting the turnover intention (TI) of police personnel in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A comprehensive review of the literature on turnover intention was carried out to propose a conceptual framework demonstrating the linkages between leader–member exchange (LMX), perceived organisational support (POS), and psychological stress (PS), which in turn, affect the TI of police personnel. The proposed framework is appropriate for usage in the UAE police force, but could also be correlated to police forces across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and employed in other public and private sector organisations as well. The adoption of such a conceptual model would help practitioners to better understand the influence of the proposed factors on police force TI and focus on minimising TI and retaining talented officers, for the benefit of the police force. Further empirical study should be undertaken using a structural equation modelling (SEM) approach to validate the effect of the proposed framework and hypotheses.

Keywords: Leader-Member Exchange (LMX); Perceived Organisational Support (POS); Psychological Stress (PS); Turnover Intention (TI); Police Organisation; United Arab Emirates (UAE).

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is currently focused on becoming an economic, touristic, and commercial capital for more than 2 billion people, and improving the country's business environment by increasing its attractiveness to foreign investors (The Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2016). Therefore, today more than ever, retaining valuable and loyal employees is a major issue for the increasingly competitive organisations and labour market, making employees an organisation's most important assets and resources that support sustainability in such a dynamic environment (Chovwen,

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Balogun & Olowokere, 2014; Yun, Hwang & Lynch, 2015). Thus, the mobility of talented professionals is considered a major challenge faced by both private and public organisations in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries in general and in the UAE in particular (Suliman & Al Obaidli, 2011). However, there is evidence that employee turnover is an ongoing problem for all organisations in the UAE (Ahmad & Omar, 2010). It is one of the most broadly studied business phenomena in both academics and organisations (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011; Schyns, Torka & Gössling, 2007), and employees' intention to leave is a serious issue for human resource management, regardless of an organisation's location, size, business, or strategy (Long, Thean, Ismail & Jusoh, 2012).

Most scholars agree that growing turnover rates will remain a key issue for both employees and organisations over the next few years. Furthermore, organisations regularly spend a lot of money on recruiting, training, and socialising their employees and as a result, turnover can result in big losses for companies (Phuong, 2016). For many organisations, both the direct (through recruitment, selection, training, etc.) and indirect (in the form of reduced productivity and lost knowledge) costs of employee turnover have been found to be particularly high (Abu Elanain, 2014; Biron & Boon, 2013; Tuzun & Kalemci, 2012).

A study by Harhara, Singh and Hussain (2015) found that organisations must bear the responsibility for both the direct and indirect expenditures associated with turnover. Similarly, Vuorensyrjä (2014) reported that as the turnover rate begins to rise within an organisation, it loses its employees' accumulated experience. In the UAE, turnover costs organisations roughly AED 9.9 billion annually (Suliman and Al Obaidli, 2011). Furthermore, even before an employee officially leaves their position, turnover intention (TI) can already begin to affect that employee's performance (Biron & Boon, 2013), and, accordingly, the organisation's. For instance, employees with high TI are expected to display little or no organisational citizenship behaviour (Van Breukelen, Van der Vlist & Steensma, 2004), and frequently deliver poor service to customers, which can in turn undermine customer retention (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003). This is not surprising, given that TI has been consistently associated with negative employee attitudes such as reduced commitment and satisfaction, which are known to diminish organisational success (Biron & Boon, 2013).

In previous studies, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has been mainly applied in Western settings (Vatanen, 2003), and few studies have looked at LMX theory in non-Western cultures (Hui, Law & Chen, 1999; Pillai, Scandura & Williams, 1999). Therefore, examining the LMX framework in the UAE context would contribute to increasing the external validity of the framework and enable its expansion (Vatanen, 2003). Although psychological stress (PS) has been the focus of many studies in Western countries (Kara, Sunger & Kapti, 2015; Kaur, Chodagiri & Reddi, 2013; Lee, Yun & Lee, 2015), much less research attention has been devoted to stressors and the consequences of stress within an Arab cultural context, such as in the UAE.

Numerous studies have found an interesting relationship between LMX and turnover intention (Abu Elanain, 2014; Jha & Kumar, 2015), as well as between psychological stress (PS), perceived organisational support (POS), and TI (Gächter, Savage & Torgler, 2011; Rosen, Chang, Djurdjevic & Eatough, 2010) in the Western context. However, despite the depth of research in this area, the nature of the relationship between PS, LMX, POS, and turnover has proven to be elusive and is still poorly understood, especially with regard to police forces. In order to shed light on the antecedents of employee TI, this study has focused attention on these antecedents, with the expectation that understanding the influential factors and changes in these factors will lead to corresponding changes in TI, as well as actual turnover rates.

Of the numerous organisations within the UAE, this study utilises the example of the police force because it is considered one of the most critical sectors in the UAE, in that it maintains public security, influences public attitudes, and affects citizens' quality of life. As reported by Abdel Hamid (2015), the number of police personnel totals 17,291, constituting 30.5% of those employed by federal agencies. Over the past few decades, the role of police officers has expanded as their responsibilities have increased, most noticeably in maintaining security and tackling crime (Wilson, 2012). Consequently, an analysis by the UAE's Federal Authority for Government Human Resources (2014) reported that military jobs in the UAE (comprising 2.1% of the UAE workforce) ranked second among the top 20 high-stress roles, with the highest percentage of voluntary resignations (63.1%) among the overall turnover in the UAE, which came to 5%. This is an alarming figure in terms of employee recruitment and retention in the UAE, even though 5% is still a relatively low number.

Thus, this study will propose a research conceptual framework to be used by researchers to fill the gaps between the literature and contemporary managerial practices, especially in the UAE context, as well as establishing a framework for further research on TI and the mediating impact of PS in a police organisation located in an important region of the world – the Middle East. This study has the following structure: Section 2 will contain a literature review and the theoretical foundation, after which there will be a proposition formulation and a discussion of the framework. The study ends with a conclusion, an outline of the implications, and suggestions for further research.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND PROPOSITION FORMULATION

Studying turnover is one of the most challenging variables for the researchers (Bakan and Buyukbese, 2013) and police force managers. Police personnel who voluntarily leave without being fired or laid off from are the best people to study concerning the antecedents of turnover but if they have already resigned, there will necessarily be data collection problems due to the difficulty and impracticality of locating them (Fournier et al., 2010; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012). In this study, to address this dilemma, TI has been substituted for turnover, which seems closely interrelated with actual turnover. The linkage between TI and turnover has been confirmed by numerous studies (Jones, Kantak, Futrell & Johnston, 1996; Lucas Jr, Parasuraman, Davis & Enis, 1987). Furthermore, meta-analytic studies have demonstrated that TI is significantly associated with turnover (Öcel, 2012; Dotun, Abasilim & Agboola, 2013; Iqbal et al., 2014). Accordingly, the proposed framework considers the factors influencing TI, rather than actual turnover. This study takes the initial step in the call for research predicating different antecedents that influence police officers' TI, and will focus on the key predictors of LMX, POS, and PS because these variables significantly affect TI (Tse, Lam, Lawrence & Huang, 2013; Allen & Shanock, 2013; Tromp, van Rheede & Blomme, 2010). The relationships between these constructs are set out in Section 3. The underpinning hypotheses, as suggested by the literature on TI, which lead to the development of the proposed framework are discussed in the following sections.

2.1. Turnover intention

A study by Pawar and Chakravarthy (2014) found that usually, employees leave their organisations for financial reasons, personal problems with their managers, professional advancement, issues with co-workers, role ambiguity, or a lack of information on job description, among other reasons. A study conducted by Abu Elanain (2014) revealed that high staff turnover in the UAE has both nonmonetary and monetary costs and consequences. Organisations in the UAE continue to experience high rates of employee turnover, costing them US$2.7 billion annually (Gulf News, 2008). Because of the

significant practical implications of turnover, much research has been devoted to detecting the correlates of employees' intention to leave an organisation (Öcel, 2012; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012), and avoid undesirable employee behaviours that could affect other employees and reduce the costs of actual turnover, which have economic costs for organisations (Hughes, Avey & Nixon, 2010). Furthermore, the findings of an empirical study conducted by Bakan and Buyukbese (2013) suggest that organisations need to investigate the factors affecting job satisfaction and control absenteeism, turnover, and intention to quit, being correlates of dissatisfaction. In addition, recent research has indicated that turnover studies conducted in Western countries cannot be generalised to other global regions (Chang, 2010; Uzoka, Mgaya, Shemi, Kitindi & Akinnuwesi, 2011), which constitutes another reason why this topic was selected.

2.2. *Psychological stress*

Stress is an aversive or unpleasant emotional and physiological state resulting from adverse work experiences, and particularly experiences that are uncertain or outside the affected employee's control (Judge & Colquitt, 2004). Several studies have reported that stressors include interpersonal conflicts related to relationships with colleagues; inadequate support from supervisors (Shane, 2010); an improper workload (e.g., shift work, excessive or irregular working hours); and a heavy workload or constant interactions with the public that lead to exposure to traumatic events (Gächter et al., 2011), violence and physical danger, or ongoing exposure to misery and death (Alexopoulos, Palatsidi, Tigani & Darviri, 2014; Collins & Gibbs, 2003; Lipp, 2009; Shane, 2010). Studies by Rosen et al. (2010) and Irniza et al. (2014) distinguished eight major categories of stressors in employees' work settings: shift work, work role, workload, situational constraints, lack of control or autonomy, career-related anxieties, poor social relations, acute events, and job conditions. Police organisations themselves are another stressor, emphasising the fact that the policing profession is inherently stressful work that can differ significantly even within one shift, and can certainly vary between police officers in different countries (Hall, Dollard, Tuckey, Winefield & Thompson, 2010; Kara et al., 2015; Keyes, Barnes & Bates, 2011; Irniza, Emilia, Saliluddin & Isha, 2014; Shane, 2010). The UAE government has promoted a vision for 2021 in its national agenda, which aims to reinforce its citizens' sense of security and achieve a leading position in the areas of security, emergency preparedness, reliability of police services, and road safety (The Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2016). This will increase the police's workload, and in turn increase psychological strain and lead to more employees intending to leave the force (Tromp, van Rheede & Blomme, 2010).

2.3. *Leader-member exchange*

LMX theory is based on the concept of social exchange and focuses on the exchange relationship between leaders and their followers (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Furthermore, it suggests that employees' work-related attitudes and behaviours are influenced by how their leaders treat them (Buch, Thompson & Kuvaas, 2016). The quality of the exchange relationship between leaders and their subordinates is grounded on the degree of resources exchanged among the two parties (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In addition, LMX theory (Liden, Wayne & Stilwell, 1993; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001) describes the factors that play a role in defining the quality of supervisor-follower relations in the form of a framework that assists in understanding how supervisory behaviours can affect followers' TI (Morrow, Suzuki, Crum, Ruben & Pautsch, 2005). This means that LMX focuses on interactive work relationships between individuals and leaders, instead of individuals' perceptions of the organisation. Tse, Lam, Lawrence and Huang (2013) argued, based on the norm of reciprocity drawn from social exchange theory, that *in-group members* benefiting from high LMX quality may have a higher level of loyalty, more work engagement, and lower TI, which are beneficial to

organisations. On the other hand, in a low-quality LMX environment, *out-group members* who do not obtain the same benefits as *in-group members* may have more negative feelings toward their leaders and organisation, which can lead to increased TI.

2.4. *Perceived Organisational Support (POS)*

POS mainly entails recognition by the organisation of an individual's socio-emotional desires, needs, commitment, efforts, and loyalty (Jain, Giga & Cooper, 2013). Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) formulated organisational support theory based on a social exchange perspective to understand employee-employer relationships. When employees perceive that they have support from their organisations, they feel more accomplished and therefore follow the organisational rules (Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell & Allen, 2007; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Appropriate training, equitable compensation (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009), monetary assistance (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004), and full opportunities for progression and development (Yew, 2011) provided by the organisation are considered forms of support, ensuring that employees feel highly appreciated and fairly treated (Khan, Mahmood, Kanwal & Latif, 2015). This eventually increases organisational commitment (DeConinck & Johnson, 2009), lowers workplace deviance (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011), and leads to reduced absenteeism and TI (Allen & Shanock, 2013; Asgari, Silong, Ahmad & Samah, 2008). Furthermore, individuals who perceive that their organisation supports them are more likely to stay with that organisation and are less likely to seek alternative employment (Madden, Mathias & Madden, 2015). Likewise, one recent study found that POS was positively related to organisational trust, which in turn predicts constructive deviance in a positive direction (Kura, Shamsudin & Chauhan, 2016). Overall, these findings highlight the benefits that positive relationships can provide to an organisation and justify the necessity of investigating their effects (Ferris et al., 2009) on organisational performance in terms of TI.

3.   PROPOSITION FORMULATION

Turnover intention has received widespread attention in various organisation of different sizes. Undesirable turnover results from organisational factors such as poor support, role conflict, and the absence of administration that lead to the voluntarily departure of competent, talented employees from an organisation (Gyamfi, 2014). Based on the review of the relevant literature, this study suggests three factors that can influence or predict police personnel's TI. The following subsections discuss the influencing factors, which are police-specific components that are considered to be serious stressors, leading to negatively affects employee's productivity and organisation success (Gershon et al., 2009; Shane, 2010; Webster, 2014).

3.1. *Correlates of employee turnover intention*

a)   *Psychological stress as a potential mediator*

Several studies in industries other than the police force indicate a positive relation between psychological strain and employee turnover (Hochwarter, Perrewé & Kent, 1994; Grandley & Cropanzano, 1999). Most theories and established models propose that stress has a negative impact and leads to worsening employee behaviour (Golparvar, Kamkar & Javadian, 2012). Prior empirical studies have also revealed that employees with psychological stress are more likely to leave (Machin, Fogarty, Albion & Machin, 2004). The presence of significant psychological distress is a concern in and of itself, and stress is also associated with negative consequences for both the employee and the

employer, such as decreased job engagement, productivity, and organisational commitment (Rodwell, Noblet & Allisey, 2011), along with intention to leave the workplace (Mosadeghrad, 2013). Several studies on law enforcement have indicated that the effect of individual-level stress and burnout carries the possibility of generating negative organisational effects in the form of low morale, chronic absenteeism, and high turnover rates (Ivie & Garland, 2011; Tsimekles, 2006).

While there have been numerous studies in different industries that investigate the relationship between burnout and health symptoms (Birdir, Tepeci, Saldamli & Kusluvan, 2003), to the best of our knowledge, there are a few studies that have addressed the relationship between psychological strain and turnover (Lee & Shin, 2005; Karatepe & Uludag, 2007). These studies, conducted among frontline employees and managers, show similar results, but they do not touch on the role of LMX and POS. On the basis of the above review of previous research studies, this study postulated the following proposition:

P1. There will be a significant relationship between psychological stress and the TI of employees in the police force.

b)   *Leader-member exchange and turnover intention*

While LMX has been examined in relation to PS, there is little extant research on the relationship between LMX and TI, with some researchers pointing out that high LMX relationships and the consequences associated with this type of relationship can produce stress (Furunes, Mykletun, Einarsen & Glasø, 2015; Malik, Wan, Ahmad, Naseem & ur Rehman, 2015). Furthermore, Harris and Kacmar (2006) stated that there is a curvilinear relationship between LMX relationship quality and stress; individuals reported an increase in experienced stress level as the quality of LMX decreased. In addition, Brouer and Harris (2007) reported that having a low quality LMX relationship gives people with low emotional stability greater tension and workplace-related stress.

Researchers have also found that both LMX and POS exchange relations are grounded in the norm of reciprocity, in which individuals have positive exchange relations with their leaders, supervisors, and organisations (Ahmed et al., 2012; Ahmed et al., 2013; Chen & Eldridge, 2011; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch and Rhoades (2001) have shown that LMX affects POS because for employees, their leader or supervisor is a formal representative of the organisation. Similarly, Wayne et al. (2002) found that employees who are well-supported by an organisation are likely to desire high-quality relationships with their leaders. Most researchers agree that LMX and POS are positively related (Credo et al., 2010; Masterson et al., 2000; Wayne et al., 2002). Although the concepts of POS and LMX have been extensively researched in both Western and non-Western contexts (Liu, 2009; Tan, Qin & Pan, 2007), they have not been explored in the GCC in general or the UAE in particular. Moreover, various scholars (Ahmed et al., 2013; Zagenczyk et al., 2010) have directed future researchers to investigate exchange relations and their mutual, independent, and interdependent effects on employee outcomes at work. Considering the literature and future recommendations, LMX is expected to have an influence on employee POS in police organisations.

Several studies have been carried out to explore LMX and its impact on TI (Abu Elanain, 2014; Harris, Harris & Brouer, 2009; Harris, Wheeler & Kacmar, 2011; Jordan & Troth, 2011). Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner (2000) claimed that LMX is determinant of actual voluntary turnover. Conversely, other scholars have found that the relationship between LMX and turnover is statistically weak and unstable (Schyns et al., 2007). According to Duffield et al. (2011), the role of leadership and its

characteristics, such as "visibility, accessibility, consultation, recognition and support" (p. 23), when displayed by those with direct responsibility, have a significant and desired effect on both specific role satisfaction and TI. Based on the above arguments, the following is proposed:

P2. LMX will have a significant relationship with the PS of employees of the police force.
P3. LMX will have a significant relationship with the POS of employees of the police force.
P4. LMX will have a significant relationship with the TI of employees of the police force.

c)   Perceived organisational support and turnover intention

Several studies have found POS to be negatively related to many workplace stressors and strains (Stamper & Johlke, 2003). For example, Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) meta-analysis indicated that job insecurity, role ambiguity, mood at work, and general psychological strain were negatively associated with POS. Likewise, the behavioural outcomes of POS can include reducing stress and in-role and extra-role performance and TI behaviours such as absenteeism and turnover (Richardson et al., 2008). Furthermore, Jain, Giga and Cooper (2013) reported that POS is likely to minimise adverse physical, psychological, and behavioural responses to stressors through financial and emotional support.

Prior research by Rhoades et al. (2001) has sought to demonstrate that the POS relationship is indirect, in that an individual's affective commitment is an outcome of POS and is considered an antecedent to the intention to leave. Similarly, Zeytinoglu, Denton and Plenderleith (2011) reported that sensitivity to employment insecurity is heightened by a lack of organisational support, which reinforces employees' desire to leave. This means that an employee who perceives that she has better support is less likely to leave the organisation voluntarily. In support of such an assertion, numerous studies have investigated the significant negative relationships between POS, TI (Allen, Shore & Griffeth, 2003), and employee turnover (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 2001). Of these, Eder and Eisenberger (2008) suggest that employees with high POS are expected not to show high levels of TI. Furthermore, Stamper and Johlke (2003), who studied a sample of salespeople, verified the role of POS as a moderator between job stressors (e.g., job ambiguity and role conflict) and employees' satisfaction with their jobs, in addition to their intention to remain with their current company. Based on the above, the following is asserted:

P5. POS will have a significant relationship with the PS of employees of the police force.
P6. POS will have a significant relationship with the TI of employees of the police force.

Although the above propositions are grounded in the literature, further empirical testing is required to validate them to establish that the model is appropriate in terms of the two sets of factors that impact the TI of the employees of the police force in the UAE.

4.   PROPOSED FRAMEWORK OF EMPLOYEE TURNOVER INTENTION

Based on the literature reviewed, a conceptual model built upon theoretical data is proposed, linking LMX and POS, along with the attributes influencing PS, with TI, especially for employees of the police force in the UAE. Figure 1 presents the model; TI is the dependent variable, PS is the mediator, and the independent variables are LMX and perceived organisational support. The paths demonstrated in this model indicate direct relationships between PS and TI (represented by *P1*), LMX

and PS (*P2*), and LMX and POS (*P3*), as well as LMX and TI (*P4*), POS and PS (*P5*), and POS and TI (*P6*).

Figure 1: Proposed model
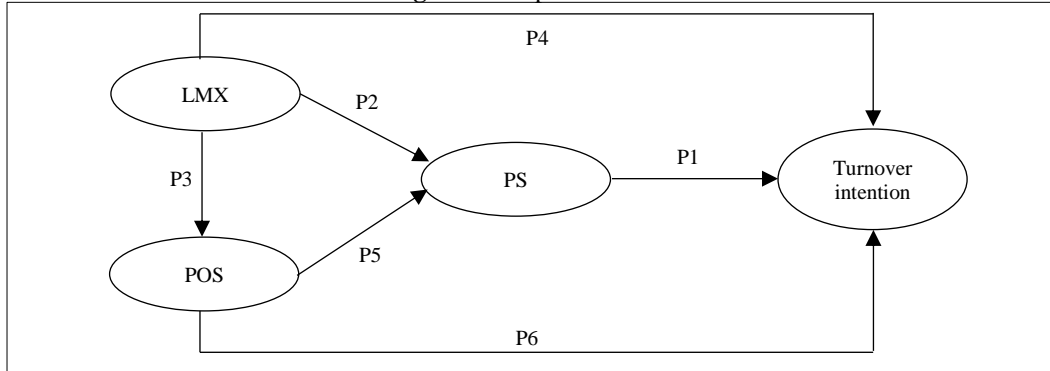
5.   CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The police force in the UAE is a critical sector and will continue to play a major role in the country's future, as will the attempts by the government to achieve the vision for 2021 outlined in its national agenda to maintain security and become among the safest places in the world. The police force in the UAE is currently seeking to reinforce its citizens' sense of security and achieve leading positions in the areas of security, reliability of police services, and road safety (The Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2016). Although researchers have proposed a number of models to predict the turnover of employees through analyses of a variety of factors, no specific model exists for police officers working in rural areas to explore the influence of PS as a mediator between LMX and POS on employee turnover. This conceptual paper attempts to develop and propose a model applicable to the unique conditions of employees working in such areas. It also attempts to develop and propose a model that primarily focuses on the impact of PS, LMX, and POS on TI. This study is intended to improve the body of knowledge in the field of TI by looking at the growing body of literature concerning PS, LMX, and POS and their impact.

In terms of practical implications, developing such a conceptual framework would be extremely beneficial to practitioners in this area because it could help to influence decision-makers as they establish public policy to introduce changes to leadership behaviour concerning employees and reduce the job stresses connected with working in such conditions. The findings of the study will have an impact upon society by supporting the retention of talented employees for the benefit of the police force in the UAE, which would lead to the provision of better services for the public, increased performance in maintaining security, enhanced quality of life, and more generally, the achievement of broader public satisfaction. This conceptual framework will also be of interest to human resource managers in the UAE police force and could be further correlated to police forces and other public and private industries across the GCC region. However, the expected implications are based on the literature reviewed, and the framework should be further confirmed by both academics and practitioners in order for its implications to be successfully applied in the police force, as in other industries.

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