



Original Article

Does Leadership Reduce Employee Turnover Intentions and Retain Employees? An Investigation into NGO Sector of Peshawar

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is way different in NGOs when compared to for profit organizations as leaders are required to keep employees motivated toward work under unfavorable conditions and constrained circumstances. In an unstable and terrorism-stricken region such as Peshawar, employees always have greater turnover intentions. It is imperative and critical for NGOs to retain skilled and competent staff to achieve their social and developmental goals. Previous researches show that inclusiveness and integrity are two pivotal components of leadership that might help improve employee satisfaction and lead to employee retention. This study, with an emphasis on integrity and inclusiveness, analyzed leadership qualities in NGOs in Peshawar. Through survey using questionnaires, primary data was collected from 150 respondents in NGO sector of Peshawar and analyzed with the help of statistical tools. This study concludes that two major components of leadership i.e. integrity and inclusiveness play a significant role in employee satisfaction; the same two factors also influence employees to stay longer in challenging and threatening situations in NGO sector of Peshawar.

Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) aim to improve social and environmental aspects of society. NGOs have a rich history, originating from communities that supported one another, religious groups, educational institutions, and individuals working for the greater good. Most of these activities were based on volunteerism, which remains the core spirit of NGOs. They are often referred to as charities, not-for-profit organizations, civil society groups, or voluntary organizations due to the nature of their work. The essence of NGOs is to serve the public voluntarily and remain community-based (Frandsen & Lawry, 2009). NGOs work in various social domains, including but not limited to gender equality, education, child protection, health, human rights, environmental protection, religious freedom, and animal rights (Cramer & Loeber, 2004).

The nature of leadership in NGOs differs from the corporate sector, as NGOs do not focus on profit maximization but rather on social causes such as poverty eradication, free health services, and other community assistance programs (Ebrahim, 2003; Hardy, 2007). However, NGOs and corporations share a similar life cycle, progressing through stages of birth, growth, decline, and either termination or revival. Recognizing this, some NGOs have adopted corporate management best practices to enhance their operations. Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering trust, ethics, and integrity, which are essential for effective NGO management (Flumer, 2004). Leaders serve as role models, and their integrity is closely observed by employees. A lack of trust in leadership can lead to disengagement and high turnover rates (Shigley, 2009). On the contrary, leaders who demonstrate integrity foster employee willingness and commitment to organizational goals (Catano, Pond, & Kelloway, 2001). Satisfied workers tend to be more productive and stay longer with NGOs (Van Vianen et al., 2008).

Recent research supports the argument that leadership significantly affects employee retention in NGOs. Studies indicate that leadership empathy is positively correlated with employee retention in health sector NGOs (Kamenwa-Waweru et al., 2024). Additionally, ethical leadership has been found to reduce turnover intentions by fostering a supportive and trusting environment (Athanasidou, Chatzoudes, & Theriou, 2023). Moreover, transformational leadership has a strong negative correlation with turnover intentions, as it enhances job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Wei, Wongvanichtawee, & Tang, 2024).

Job satisfaction also plays a vital role in employee retention. Research has demonstrated that satisfied employees are more likely to stay in NGOs, as seen in studies on NGO workers in Pakistan (Khan & Shahzadi, 2022). Similarly, organizational culture and HRM practices significantly impact employee turnover intentions in the NGO sector (Hakro, Abbasi, & Mahesar, 2021).

In contrast to the corporate sector, NGO leadership is more challenging due to the nature of the work. Employees often operate in high-risk environments, requiring greater dedication and resilience, which can lead to stress and high turnover rates. This makes leadership in NGOs particularly complex, as motivating employees under such conditions is difficult. Nonetheless, NGOs rely on skilled and competent employees for their success, making retention critical. Leadership attributes such as inclusiveness and integrity can enhance employee morale, foster a sense of social responsibility, and promote volunteerism, ultimately increasing retention (Dohroo, Duggal, & Ansari, 2022).

Employees working in NGOs in Peshawar and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) face constant threats and hostility, leading to higher turnover rates than in other cities. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate whether leadership styles can mitigate turnover intentions and enhance employee retention in NGOs operating in Peshawar.

Literature Review

Leadership is a complex yet one of the most studied phenomenon. It can be considered as social influence (Jaskaran & Sri-Guru, 2014). Jones & George, (2004) and Cole (2005) think of leadership as a process of motivation, inspiration and influence that tries to direct the efforts, skills, behavior and activities of others toward achieving organizational goals. Eze (2010) considers leadership rather a skill of manipulating others for organizational success. Scholars

such as Iheriohanma (2009) is of the opinion that leadership is a learnable ability of subduing group of people under certain condition by utilizing knowledge, skills, influencing tactics, dedication, commitment, honesty, courage and other behavioral qualities. Leadership position requires an individual to mobilize his full potential in organizational and social situations in order to direct the efforts of the followers in a defined and specific direction (Reber, 1995). Fry (2003) argues that leadership not just does the job of motivation but also helps followers in improving their skills and potential for the greater benefits of the organization they are associated with. Leadership in its essence works like a catalyst in all social situations or like a light in the darkness, a reason for goal attainment, a guide and hope for his followers (Nwokorie, 2014). According to Namusonge (2012) leadership is a tool that helps an individual play a pivotal role in effecting the behaviors of others in a way that maximizes organizational performance. Northouse (2004) in his book writes that leadership is a process of influencing others' behavior toward common organizational goals. Yukl (2002) who is considered an authority on the subject of leadership also considers it to be a process that not just facilitates common goal achievement but also synchronizes the activities and efforts of followers.

The concept of leadership in NGOs is unique and way different than the leadership in corporates due to the challenges, sensitivity and hardships associated with social development. This makes retention of skilled and competent employees a very difficult job which is necessary not only for the survival of the NGO but also for the progress and development of social work. Different aspects of leadership may contribute in the achievement of increase satisfaction, increase tenure and reduced turnover intentions.

In the past, employee retention had not been a serious issue but the concept got attention of researchers in early 80s after (Bloom & Chatterji, 2009). The rise of labor versatility and volunteer turnover of workers encouraged scholars and researchers to devise a counter strategy; for example, employee retention management tool.

Retention is a deliberate step of an organization with the purpose of influencing employees to stay and work with the organization for a longer period of time (Strigas, 2005). Stevenson & Johnston & Twynam (1998) and Wei-Skillern (2006) believe that retention is a strategy of organizations to engage their skillful employees in the organization for a desired and long tenure and reduce voluntary turnover. The main purpose of retention strategy is to retain competent, efficient, committed, experienced and valuable workforce which not affects the overall performance and productivity of organization but also costs financial losses.

Employee retention can be defined as the total amount of tenure that employees spend at NGOs and voluntarily provide their services, knowledge, abilities, dedication and skills for the same organization keeping constant all other internal and external factors constant (Johnston & Twynam, 1998). They also argue that employees would willingly provide their services for a longer period subject to their extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction. Employees, regardless of their all backgrounds such as gender, education, age, culture etc, would cease to work with an organization if they are not satisfied and value (Finkelstein, 2008).

Adeyemo and Afolabi (2007) claim that satisfied employees seldom quit organizations. They did not find any adverse relation between satisfaction and turnover intentions during their research study. Blacksbur (2005) study on turnover intention came to the same conclusion. According to Blacksbur (2005), employees that suffer higher level of stress are more prone to

leave NGOs and move toward a more secure and less stressed organization. On the other hand, those who are more satisfied with the nature of their job and commitment of their leaders are likely to stay for longer periods in their respective organizations.

Laschinger (2012) found a significant relationship between trust, integrity, learning and growth opportunities and inclusiveness and job satisfaction that resulted in the longer tenure of the employees with their respective organizations. The absence of these factors in workplace adversely affects and there is high probability that employees will quit the organization. Employees' organizational expectations and what they actually experience in organizations act as a mediating factor that influences employees' turnover intentions (Healy & Sullivan, 2012). According to Laschinger (2012), organizational injustice, unrealistic and unachievable goals, job stress, emotional fatigue and weak social support strongly affects employees' turnover intentions as these factors lead to higher level of dissatisfaction and dissatisfied employees leave organizations more often than satisfied ones.

Wymer (2011) found in his study that women are more caring and sympathetic by nature and that is why they are more inclined toward service industry such as schools, NGOs and other social services. Therefore, women despite of dissatisfaction are more likely to remain with NGOs for longer time than their male counterparts. However, their turnover intentions are highly affected by their responsibilities with family which may influence their decisions to quit the organization they working with which includes NGOs too.

According to social emotional theory, youngsters are more future focused than older age group that is why it is observed that older age groups join social services more frequently than the other age groups (Carstensten, 1995). Despite of all these, it can be deduced that regardless of any differences such as different age groups, religion, ethnicity and gender, social inclusiveness and integrity of the leaders within organizations highly influence employees' job satisfaction and ultimately retention and turnover intentions (Mayr & Nesselroade, 2000)

Hypotheses of the study

After going through literature and previous studies, the researcher has developed the following hypotheses for the study:

H1: *Transformational leadership improves employee retention in Peshawar based NGOs.*

H2: *Transactional leadership improves employee retention in Peshawar based NGOs.*

H3: *Transformational leadership reduces turnover intentions of employees in Peshawar based NGOs.*

H4: *Transactional leadership reduces turnover intentions of employees in Peshawar based NGOs.*

H5: *Transformational and Transactional leadership increase employee job satisfaction in Peshawar based NGOs.*

H6: *Employee job satisfaction improves employee retention and decreases turnover intentions of employees in Peshawar based NGOs.*

Methodology

The study has opted for a systematic data collection and analysis techniques. Based on previous literature and studies, this research using cross sectional time horizon surveyed employees of NGOs at different levels. It is a non-experimental study that used quantitative data for analysis which was collected through adapted questionnaire. The units of this study are NGO employees at different levels working in Peshawar.

Population of the study

There are almost 71 national and international registered NGOs operating in Peshawar for the uplift of society. These NGOs have projects in different areas such as health, education, animal rights, poverty eradication, freedom of speech, child protection, human rights, women protection, girls' education, social justice etc. These NGOs have their head offices in Peshawar City and the researcher considered them as the population of the study.

Sampling of the study

The study has chosen NGOs of Peshawar i.e. those that have their main offices in Peshawar and excluded NGOs that have operations in Peshawar but are based elsewhere as part of the sample. This is so because NGOs having based in other cities do not have their leadership based in Peshawar and were difficult to approach for the survey the study. This resulted in total of 21 registered and well established NGOs. The study further used convenient sampling technique and opted for five registered, accessible, well established, well reputed and well-structured NGOs having good reputation among the masses and establishment in Peshawar. Following is the list of NGOs:

1. Khwendo Kor (KK)
2. Kher Khegarra Tanzim (KKT)
3. Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP)
4. De Lass Gul (DLG)
5. Tribal Women Welfare Association (TWWA)

A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents of these five NGOs using convenient sampling technique out of which 150 responses were collected.

Data collection

The study has benefited from both primary and secondary data. The researcher used secondary data i.e. previous literature such as journal articles, papers, books etc. to understand the constructs, theory, identification of gap and variables, theoretical framework, building assumptions, explanation and comparison. The primary data was collected from NGOs of Peshawar to explain how leadership affects employees' turnover intentions and retention in NGOs. Data was collected though survey strategy and adapted questionnaire.

Instrument of the study

The study has adapted questionnaire as an instrument for data collection which has mainly five different sections. The items on the instrument are closed end and are ranked on five likert scale. The value ranges from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Items for

transformational leadership are in part one of the instrument while part two consists of the items for transactional leadership style, part three for employee satisfaction, fourth for employee turnover and retention in the fifth part respectively.

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability check of the instrument used for data collection is necessary in order to ensure that collected data represents closest reality for the study. There are numerous methods of ensuring the reliability of the instrument used; one such is Cronbach’s alpha. The researcher has adapted the instrument; therefore, the study relies on its previous validity and reliability. In order to check the reality of instrument used for data collection should be less or equal to 0.7 and table given below shows the reliability of each construct on the instrument:

Table 1: Data Reliability Estimates

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha
Transactional Leadership Styles	.670
Transformational Leadership Style	.692
Job Satisfaction	.611
Employee Retention	.692
Employee Turnover Intention	.680

As the value of Cronbach’s alpha is less than 0.7 for every construct on the instrument, this would be considered as reliable.

Data Analysis

The researcher has used descriptive and inferential statistical analysis tools for data analysis of this study.

Results and Discussion

Primary data using survey technique was collected using questionnaire of the study from 150 respondents of the study sample. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of dependent and explanatory variables for the sample. In the table it is presented that there are five variables in the analysis with 150 observations for each variable. The minimum values for leadership inclusiveness, integrity of leadership and job satisfaction is 3 while for employee turnover intentions and employee retention the minimum score is 2. In the third column of the table maximum score for each variable is 5. The mean value for leadership inclusiveness is 4 for integrity it is 3.8 and 3.9 for job satisfaction. The mean value for employee turnover intentions and employee retention is 4.1 and 4.2 respectively. The last column shows the job satisfaction has a higher standard deviation in its score as compared to other variables.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Leadership Inclusiveness	150	3.00	5.00	4.0000	.08027
Integrity of Leadership	150	3.00	5.00	3.8400	.06421
Job satisfaction	150	3.00	5.00	3.9200	.08000
Employee Turnover Intentions	150	2.00	5.00	4.1600	.07748
Employee Retention	150	2.00	5.00	4.2600	.06515
Valid N (list-wise)	150				

Correlation between the variables is analyzed to know the correlation coefficient for relationship among the explanatory variables. It is evident in the table that correlation coefficient for the relation between leadership inclusiveness and leadership integrity is .104; however, the correlation coefficient for the relationship of these variables is insignificant. This implies that the explanatory variables do not have any significant correlation therefore it is implied that these explanatory variable are independent of each other and the association would not influence their relationship with the dependent variable of the study.

Table 3 : Correlation Matrix

		Leadership Inclusiveness	Integrity of Leadership
Leadership Inclusiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.205
	N	150	150
Integrity of Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.104	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.205	
	N	150	150

Table 4 presents that employee retentions has significantly positive relation with all the three explanatory variables of the study. Results also implies that employee job satisfaction play a mediating role in the relationship of employee turnover intentions, employee retentions and quality of leadership. This signifies the last hypothesis of the study that employee job satisfaction plays a mediating role in the relationship. Leadership integrity and inclusiveness increases the job satisfaction of the employees which in turn enhances the employee retention for the organization and decreases the employee turnover intentions.

Table 4: Regression Table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	2.141	.384		5.581	.000
	Job satisfaction	.190	.065	.233	2.900	.004
	Leadership Inclusiveness	.152	.062	.187	2.450	.015
	Integrity of Leadership	.199	.080	.196	2.485	.014

Dependent Variable: Employee Retention
F : 10.951
R : .429
R Square : .184

Results presented above propose that integrity and inclusiveness of leadership are important to the satisfaction of employees working in NGOs in Pakistan. This result is consistent with the findings of Van Vianen et al. (2008). According to Van Vianen et al. (2008), integrity and inclusiveness of leaders tend to improve employee satisfaction in NGO employees and improve their stay with the organization. McLennan et al. (2008) are of the view that employee work satisfaction leads to employee retention in all types of organization including for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. According to Johnston & Twynam (1998), if employees are valued based on their expectations and needs, they tend to stay longer voluntarily and offer their skills, capabilities, knowledge and dedication willingly despite of difficulties associated with the nature of their work. The study presents that leadership integrity and inclusiveness strongly affects employee satisfaction in NGOs and improves employee retention while significantly reducing turnover intentions.

Conclusion

NGOs are Non for profit and non-government organization that exist for alleviation of social and environmental problems faced by communities in different parts of the world. NGOs emerged from civil society organizations, communities, religious organizations, individual initiatives or other community development initiatives NGOs often termed as volunteer or grassroots or charity organization often stem from small volunteer social welfare activities which are community oriented and has public service mission. Leadership is an art, skill, ability and a process of influencing others in a way that it motivates followers, inspires them, brings energy in them and moves them to a specific direction to achieve organizational goals. The leadership that is practiced in NGOs is not similar to the leadership that is practiced in other sectors such as corporate and education. This is so because NGOs function in unfavorable security situations which makes it difficult for the organization retain talented and skillful employees. This poses challenge for NGOs to reduce employee turnover intentions and improve employee retention. Two main components of leadership i.e. inclusiveness and integrity can play a pivotal role in meeting this challenge and help NGOs improve their performances through volunteer employee

retention. The study investigated if this is true with NGOs in Peshawar and if leadership qualities i.e. inclusiveness and integrity improve job satisfaction, employee retention and employee turnover intentions as NGOs in Peshawar are constantly going through risky conditions from different elements including terrorism, societal and family pressure etc. Data was collected through survey strategy and adapted questionnaire backed up by previous researches and literature. Primary data was collected and the variables were analyzed using statistical tools and SPSS. The analysis of the data showed that leadership qualities, inclusiveness and integrity, have profound impact of employee satisfaction, improving employee retention and reducing turnover intentions in NGOs of Peshawar.

Recommendations

The leadership integrity and inclusiveness play a substantial part in employee retention and can reduce their turnover intentions. Few recommendations based on the results of the study are as follow:

- Integrity leads to improve employees' feeling of commitment, improves motivation in completion of organizational tasks and more satisfied in the given circumstances Therefore integrity of the leader can serve an important role in the satisfaction of employee working in NGOs.
- Organizational Leaders are role models for employees and they look up to the leader in achieving organizational goals, employees follow their leaders' footsteps and try to mold their personalities in accordance to the leaders' personalities. However, if the employees feel the absence of integrity in the leaders, the trust among them may shatter resulting in dissatisfaction, higher turnover and decrease commitment. So in order to minimize the level of turnover intentions of the employee it is necessary for the leadership to maintain their integrity
- Inclusiveness is the outcome of respect and feeling of being valued in organization i.e. employees are considered an integral part of the organization and that they are making a difference and they are important. Such a strategy of the leader leads to employee commitment to the organization and organizational cause. The inclusiveness also will result in satisfaction of the employee that will have significant impacts on satisfaction of the employee and will lead to low level of turnover intentions of the employees and higher retention ratio.

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