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## The Effect of Career Development and Workload on Turnover Intention: The Mediating Role of Leader Empathy a Literature Review

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**Abstract:** This systematic literature review investigates the complex structural relationships among career development, workload, leader empathy, and employee turnover intention. Utilizing thirteen selected scientific articles spanning diverse organizational contexts, the study examines how professional growth opportunities and job demands influence retention outcomes. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Support Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources Model, the analysis demonstrates that career development significantly reduces turnover intentions, whereas excessive workload acts as a primary catalyst for employee burnout and resignation. Furthermore, the findings establish that leader empathy serves as a crucial mediating mechanism and a vital psychological buffer, neutralizing workplace stress and amplifying the retention benefits of career initiatives. The study highlights that organizational success in retaining talent is profoundly contingent upon integrating formal human resource policies with humanistic, empathy-driven leadership. Methodological recommendations for future research include broadening sample scopes and employing advanced analytical techniques such as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to validate these insights further.

**Keywords:** Career Development, Workload, Turnover, Leader Empathy.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive and dynamic business environment, retaining talented employees has become a primary challenge for organizations across various sectors. Turnover intention, operationally defined as an employee's conscious and deliberate willingness to evaluate other job opportunities and leave their current organization, significantly disrupts operational stability and incurs substantial financial costs (J. Smith & Johnson, 2023). High turnover rates not only affect organizational productivity but also diminish overall team morale and structural knowledge. Therefore, understanding the underlying factors that drive employees to contemplate leaving is crucial for effective human resource management and long-term organizational sustainability (D. Pratama et al., 2024).

Among the various antecedents of turnover intention, career development and workload have consistently emerged as critical determinants. Career development, which encompasses the structured opportunities and pathways provided by an organization for employee professional growth and advancement, plays a vital role in fostering organizational loyalty; a lack of clear career progression often leads to frustration and a heightened desire to quit (Chen & Lee, 2022). Simultaneously, workload defined as the amount of physical and mental effort required to complete assigned tasks within a specific timeframe can severely impact employee well-being. Excessive workload induces stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, which are primary triggers for employees seeking alternative, less demanding employment opportunities (S. Wibowo, 2024).

Despite extensive empirical research on the direct impacts of career development and workload on turnover intention, existing literature often presents fragmented views. Previous studies have primarily focused on structural factors, compensation, and physical work environments, often neglecting the crucial psychological and emotional dynamics between employees and their direct supervisors (Kusuma & Sari, 2024). This indicates a significant research gap regarding the socio-emotional mechanisms that can buffer negative workplace stressors. Recently, leader empathy the cognitive and affective ability of a leader to understand, share, and actively address the emotional states and professional needs of their subordinates has been identified as a vital psychological resource (Rahmawati & Susanto, 2025). However, there is a scarcity of comprehensive literature reviews synthesizing how leader empathy specifically acts as a mediating mechanism that mitigates the adverse effects of high workload and amplifies the positive effects of career development on turnover intention (Anderson et al., 2025).

This research provides a novel contribution to the existing body of knowledge, establishing its state of the art by integrating leader empathy as a central mediating variable within the workload-career development-turnover paradigm. By shifting the focus toward humanistic leadership approaches, this literature review offers a more holistic psychological perspective on employee retention strategies. Therefore, the objectives of this article are to systematically review the literature to answer the following research questions: (1) How do career development and workload independently influence employee turnover intention? (2) How does leader empathy mediate the relationship between career development and turnover intention? and (3) How does leader empathy mediate the relationship between workload and turnover intention? The answers to these questions will be critically explored in the discussion section and conclusively answered in the conclusion.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review method to comprehensively analyze the mediating role of leader empathy in the relationship between career development, workload, and turnover intention. The primary object of this research is the conceptual and empirical linkages among these specific organizational behavior variables. As a literature review, this research does not involve a specific physical location or field observation; rather, it was conducted as desk research during the first quarter of 2026. The research focuses on synthesizing secondary data gathered from published academic literature to build a robust theoretical framework and identify current trends in human resource management studies management studies.

The population for this study comprises all scholarly articles discussing turnover intention, career development, workload, and empathetic leadership published in academic journals. From this broad population, a purposive sampling technique was utilized to select a highly specific sample of thirteen peer-reviewed journal articles. To ensure a balance of local context and global empirical rigor, the sample selection strictly consisted of ten national journals accredited by the Science and Technology Index (SINTA) and three international

journals indexed by Scopus. The literature search was systematically executed using major academic databases, specifically Scopus, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar, utilizing Boolean operators and combining keywords relevant to the research title to extract the most pertinent studies.

In this qualitative review, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, supported by a structured data extraction protocol to evaluate, filter, and synthesize the selected articles objectively. The analytical tools employed are qualitative content analysis and thematic synthesis. This involves systematically coding the literature, identifying recurring themes, comparing research contexts, and drawing logical connections between the variables examined. The research procedure follows standard qualitative data analysis steps encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to ensure that the synthesis of the literature is both rigorous and credible, which aligns with standard qualitative management research procedures (Sugiyono, 2022).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature search and selection process identified 13 scientific journal articles that met the inclusion criteria for further analysis. These articles represent a diverse range of organizational contexts, including public service institutions, healthcare facilities, logistics companies, and the technology sector. Despite originating from different industrial sectors, all thirteen selected studies share a common focus on evaluating the causal effects of career development and workload on employee turnover intention, alongside the central role of leader empathy as a mediating mechanism. The majority of the reviewed articles were published between 2023 and 2026, confirming that employee retention challenges arising from job demands and career expectations remain a strategic discourse in contemporary human resource management literature. The combination of ten SINTA-accredited national journal articles and three reputable Scopus-indexed international journal articles provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation, integrating local empirical realities with global trends.

1. The Effect of Career Development on Turnover Intention: (A. Pratama & Kusuma, 2024) found that the absence of adequate career development programs significantly contributes to high employee turnover intentions. Career development provides certainty regarding future promotion opportunities and competency enhancement. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory, employees who are facilitated to grow feel valued by their organization, which subsequently triggers loyalty and cancels their cognitive intention to leave the company.
2. Career Mapping and Employee Retention: (Agrasadya & Putra, 2023) demonstrated that optimizing competency-based career mapping has a strong impact on reducing staff turnover rates, particularly within technology startup companies. The provision of clearly defined career paths fosters a long-term oriented work climate. Employees who can visualize transparent career trajectories tend to choose to stay because they feel their professional future is secure within the institution.
3. Career Stagnation as a Trigger for Turnover Intentions: (Nasution & Hakim, 2025) proved that career stagnation is a primary antecedent of turnover intention. Without continuous training curricula and structured promotional directions, employees often feel trapped in monotonous administrative routines. Clear functional hierarchies supported by objective performance evaluations have been proven to restore intrinsic motivation and effectively suppress employees' urges to explore the external labor market.
4. Career Development in a Global Context: (Nguyen & Fernandez, 2025) asserted that career development and retention challenges constitute a global phenomenon. Employees across various countries demand integration between professional growth and organizational goals. Organizations that fail to align skill development training with future career

- projections will experience rapid talent loss, as contemporary workers heavily prioritize sustainable career portfolios over mere financial compensation.
5. The Impact of Workload on Emotional Exhaustion: (C. Wibowo & Maryam, 2025) explained that excessive quantitative and qualitative workloads share a very strong positive correlation with turnover intention. Operational demands that exceed individual capacities create a stressful working environment and trigger emotional exhaustion. Based on the Job Demands-Resources Model, high workloads unbuffered by adequate resources drain employees' psychological energy, culminating in a pragmatic decision to resign.
  6. Task Complexity and Turnover Intention: (Hidayat & Rahmawati, 2024) discovered that beyond job volume, qualitative workloads in the form of task complexity mismatched with expertise also directly trigger turnover intentions. When employees are constantly required to solve complex problems outside their technical capacity without system support, deep frustration arises. Employees will instinctively attempt to protect their mental well-being by planning an exit path from the institution.
  7. Workload and Compensation Imbalance: (Supriadi & Lestari, 2025) showed that perceived injustice regarding workload distribution accelerates the emergence of turnover intentions. Organizations that unevenly distribute tasks will trigger professional jealousy within internal teams. Employees who feel they shoulder much heavier operational responsibilities without equivalent recognition or compensation tend to rationalize resignation as a form of restoring justice.
  8. Quantitative Workload and Psychological Well-being: (Siregar & Pujiyanto, 2024) clarified that organizations enforcing production targets without workforce ratio adjustments directly damage workers' psychological well-being. Cumulative operational pressure forces employees to seek alternative work environments offering healthier work-life balance, thereby exponentially increasing turnover rates.
  9. Empathetic Leadership as a Retention Strategy: (Wijaya & Sari, 2023) Empathetic Leadership as a Retention Strategy: concluded that leader empathy functions as a crucial mediator in the relationship between workplace environmental conditions and employees' intentions to stay. Empathetic leaders do not merely focus on task delegation but actively respond to their team's emotional states. High-quality interactions grounded in care create psychological safety, which substantially lowers employees' desires to leave even when the company faces difficult situations.
  10. The Mediating Role of Empathy in Job Stress: (Setiawan & Haryanto, 2026) emphasized that the effectiveness of human resource policies heavily relies on empathetic support from direct supervisors. When leaders demonstrate empathy by helping subordinates manage work stress and facilitate fair promotion opportunities, employees perceive such organizational support tangibly. This affective intervention acts as a stress buffer that reinforces institutional commitment.
  11. Supervisory Support Reduces Burnout: (Ramadhan & Putri, 2026) proved that emotional support from superiors mediates the negative effect of administrative burdens on burnout. When operational burdens peak, empathetic managers offer schedule flexibility or redistribute work priorities. This emotional validation and instrumental support sever the causal chain between excessive work and cognitive decisions to leave the company.
  12. Leader Affective Presence in the Workplace: (Kim & Patel, 2024) found that leader affective presence transforms high-pressure work environments into collaborative ecosystems. High workloads can trigger massive employee turnover if handled autocratically. However, humanistic leadership grounded in emotional intelligence is capable of reducing turnover intentions because employees feel integrated into a robust support system in the workplace.
  13. Empathy as a Buffer against Global Workload: (J. A. Smith & Zhao, 2023) concluded that on an international scale, empathy in leadership is the central mechanism binding career

dynamics and workload with talent retention. The fulfillment of needs for emotional understanding and social connection allows employees to tolerate high workload levels. These findings confirm that structural retention strategies will always be suboptimal without the genuine application of managerial empathy.

As a synthesis of all findings, the novelty of this study lies in the conceptual repositioning of leader empathy from a merely recommended interpersonal trait to a strategic mediating mechanism within a structural retention framework. This literature review confirms that the impact of career development and workload on turnover intention is fundamentally governed by the psychological climate created by immediate supervisors. Human resource policy interventions must be operationalized through empathetic leadership to achieve maximum retention effectiveness.

### **Hypothesis Development**

Based on the theoretical foundations of Social Exchange Theory, Organizational Support Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory, alongside robust empirical findings reported in the literature published during the preceding five years, the following hypotheses are formulated for this study:

1. H1: Career development has a significant negative effect on turnover intention.
2. H2: Workload has a significant positive effect on turnover intention.
3. H3: Leader empathy has a significant negative effect on turnover intention.
4. H4: Career development has a significant positive effect on perceived leader empathy.
5. H5: Workload has a significant negative effect on perceived leader empathy.
6. H6: Leader empathy significantly mediates the effect of career development on turnover intention.
7. H7: Leader empathy significantly mediates the effect of workload on turnover intention.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The proposed conceptual framework for this study establishes career development (X1) and workload (X2) as independent variables, leader empathy (Z) as the mediating variable, and turnover intention (Y) as the dependent variable.

This framework postulates that effective career development directly diminishes turnover intention while also indirectly reducing it by reinforcing employees' positive perceptions of empathetic leadership. Conversely, an excessive workload directly elevates turnover intention and indirectly exacerbates it by negatively impacting how employees perceive their leader's empathy and support.

Leader empathy occupies a central and strategic position within this model. Empathetic leaders possess the capacity to amplify the positive psychological effects of career development while simultaneously buffering and mitigating the adverse consequences associated with excessive workloads. By demonstrating genuine understanding, providing instrumental and emotional support, and responding appropriately to the professional needs of their subordinates, empathetic leaders can significantly suppress employees' intentions to leave the organization.

Ultimately, this model elucidates that organizational success in minimizing turnover intention is not solely determined by the structural effectiveness of career development programs or administrative workload management. It is profoundly contingent upon the leaders' capacity to operationalize empathy toward their subordinates. Therefore, organizational systems and humanistic leadership factors must complement one another to comprehensively influence and secure employees' decisions to remain committed to their organizations.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic literature review confirms that employee retention is fundamentally driven by the interplay between career development, workload, and empathetic leadership. Addressing the primary research objectives, the findings establish that effective career development directly diminishes employees' intentions to leave the organization, whereas excessive workload significantly amplifies such intentions. More importantly, this study highlights that leader empathy serves as a crucial mediating mechanism and a vital psychological buffer. Empathetic leadership not only neutralizes the emotional exhaustion caused by heavy workloads but also maximizes the retention benefits derived from structured career pathways. This research contributes to the advancement of human resource management science by providing a novel conceptual integration that shifts the theoretical focus from purely administrative retention strategies toward humanistic, empathy-driven leadership models, thereby offering a more holistic approach to modern organizational behavior.

### Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted based on a specific set of selected literature and during a particular publication period, so the findings cannot yet be universally generalized to all industrial sectors or diverse geographical regions. Second, the study used a limited set of variables specifically career development, workload, leader empathy, and turnover intention while other external or internal factors may also affect the dependent variable. Third, the qualitative literature review approach did not fully capture real-time, long-term organizational changes. The findings should therefore be interpreted strictly within the scope and context of this study.

### Recommendations

Future studies should broaden the scope of research objects, increase the sample size through primary data collection, use a longer observation period, and include other relevant variables to develop a more comprehensive research model. Different analytical methods, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) particularly variance-based approaches like Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) using software such as SmartPLS System Dynamics, Artificial Intelligence, or a longitudinal approach, may also provide a deeper, statistically validated understanding of the phenomenon under study.

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