



Factors of Talent Retention in Malaysian Construction Industry: Employee's Perspective

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Abstract: Engaging and retaining high-quality employees is critical to achieving an organization's objectives. Employee turnover can cause a shortage of skilled manpower, ultimately leading to reduced innovation, lower labour productivity, etc. In the construction industry, employee turnover will cause project delays, project quality defects, client dissatisfaction, and profitability challenges. As the construction industry is critical to Malaysia's development, organizations must ensure smooth operations by retaining their talents. This paper reports on the significant factors of talent retention in the Malaysian construction industry. The methodology adopted was literature review and quantitative method via a questionnaire survey. 12 predefined factors identified from literature review were presented to the respondents in the questionnaire. The target respondents for this study were construction professionals from G7 contractor, and a total of 77 responses were obtained. The significance of the factors was assessed and ranked using their average mean scores. The top five factors influencing talent retention are: 1) management and social support; 2) compensation and benefits; 3) work environment; 4) organizational commitment (employee loyalty); 5) nature of work (meaningfulness). This study would serve as a reference for employers to take necessary proactive action to retain employees and ensure the efficiency and survival of the industry.

Keywords: Talent retention, factor, construction, human resource

1. Introduction

Every country's economic progress is heavily reliant on the influence of the construction industry. The construction industry offers the community with employment or career options, and construction employees play a significant part in the completion of construction projects (Manap et al., 2017). Engaging and retaining excellent employees of good quality have long been seen as a critical aspect that has a significant influence on an organization's performance since the company's internal potential is deeply impacted by the abilities and dedication of its people (Rozsa et al., 2019). However, according to Aon Hewitt's Total Compensation Measurement (TCM) 2015 survey, Malaysia has the second highest involuntary turnover rate in Southeast Asia, at 6.0%, and the third highest voluntary turnover rate, at 9.5% (HRSC, 2015). In the context of the construction industry, according to the ADP Workforce Vitality Index 2017, excessive staff turnover is one of the major yet ignored issues affecting construction organizations as well as contractors.

When construction companies fail to maintain key roles, companies will be expected to offer delayed timelines for critical projects, thus reducing the level of industrial growth even further (Yusoff et al., 2021). Employees who quit their positions in the construction business may cause a shortage of skilled manpower, which eventually leads to a decline in the capacity to innovate, which will also contribute to lower labour productivity (Safian et al., 2021; Bilau et

al., 2015). Employee turnover in the construction sector will cause project delays, project quality defects, client dissatisfaction as well as profitability challenges (Ilmi et al., 2019). Furthermore, when there is a significant level of staff turnover, the organization may have to advertise to hire qualified recruits, and this may incur certain expenses in terms of employee replacement, staffing as well as training (Ilmi et al., 2019; Bilau et al., 2015).

As the construction sector is critical to Malaysia's economic growth and given that staff turnover has an unfavourable effect that reduces the possibility for employees' potential to be strategically cultivated inside the company, organizations need to guarantee smooth operations to avoid delaying long-term evolution by retaining their talents. Since every profession has its own uniqueness and the nature of work varies based on different industries, this research is essential for organizations to learn more about the elements that impact talent retention from the employee's perspective, particularly in the Malaysian construction industry. This research uncovers characteristics that may affect talent retention in the construction industry that are valuable to those working in similar fields and serves as a guide for improving their retention rates. Thus, this research was conducted to determine the significance of the factors in retaining talents in the Malaysian construction industry.

This paper is organized as follows: First, it begins with a literature review regarding talent retention, reasons of employee turnover, and factors of talent retention. Next, the methodology used in this study i.e., questionnaire survey is explained, followed by the results and discussion of the results. The final part of the paper is the conclusion.

2. Definition of Talent Retention

According to Cambridge Dictionary online (n.d.), the term "talent" in the context of human resources is interpreted as "a person or people with a natural skill or ability", whereas "retention" in the context of the workplace refers to "a company's ability to keep its employees and stop them from going to work somewhere else". Talent is critical and is frequently regarded as a vital measure for sustaining an edge over its competitors (Khandelwal & Shekhawat, 2018), in addition for the firm to endure and prosper persistently (Ott et al., 2018). Talent retention is all about making individuals pleased so that they will remain and serve the company to their highest ability (Nguyen, 2020).

2.1 Reasons of Employee Turnover

Human resources are one of the most important inputs a business needs to attain its goals, as every business in the world today desires to be competent and profitable in the marketplace, along with the rapid changes in technology and operational processes (Addis, 2021). Organizations barely deliver project outcomes, fulfil organization objectives or satisfy the financial targets of the companies without employees (Francis, 2014). However, referring to Alias et al. (2019), many organizations today fail to notice that their intent to endure continuously in the universal competitive market had raised the amount of stress, especially in the workplace, thereby becoming a burden on their employees and triggering businesses to deal with the problem of employee turnover.

There are two forms of turnover, specifically voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover. Voluntary turnover is determined by the employee (Singh, 2019). Consequently, the organization in this case has lost a worthy individual, and his or her qualities and talent must be substituted (Azeez, 2017). On the other hand, involuntary turnover is determined by the employer (Singh, 2019). Involuntary turnover is due to many motives including a decrease in the firm's revenue; retirement; resizing; restructuring; and many others (Azeez, 2017). According to Mamun & Hasan (2017), employee turnover is mainly due to individual dissatisfaction with work in the workplace, but dissatisfaction with one's job is not the sole cause for the employee to quit an organization. Moreover, Frye et al. (2020) mentioned that employees may not necessarily quit even though they are unhappy with their current positions, as some may end up leaving for family reasons or because the kind of job they seek is not attainable at their present workplace. There are a variety of reasons for employee turnover, which can be grouped into three main aspects and discussed in the following section.

2.1.1 Psychological Aspects

Problems like job dissatisfaction, stress, and work-overload faced by an employee are among the reasons causing employee turnover. Employment satisfaction is the expression of sentiments about how satisfied an employee is with his or her current job, and Gebremichael (2019) mentioned that stressful or unpleasant job accomplishments and workload may influence an employee's performance that eventually causes turnover. Severe job stress may drive people to become dissatisfied with their jobs, causing them to leave their current firm (Fauzi et al., 2013). According to Ayodele et al. (2020), due to burnout or occupational stress, a shortage of proficiency and experience in a particular field may induce the desire to leave a position. This can be related to the construction industry where the employees in this sector are often challenged by stressful workloads such as tight completion dates during transfers of duties, rising demands from clients, etc. (Molen & Hoonakker, 2014). In addition, it is normal for one person working in the construction industry to handle two to three projects at once (Ilmi et al., 2019). According to Molen & Hoonakker (2014), the process of decision-making in the construction sector will be slowed when the project is large and usually involves numerous parties in the profession. Consequently, this situation causes more stress on employees to deal with complex tasks in less time. This mental exhaustion further leads to turnover among the employees.

2.1.2 Personal Aspects

Individual factors are causing employees to quit their current job positions. According to Ilmi et al. (2019), certain individuals may work hard to achieve their professional goals, but this does not apply to everyone. Some employees prefer more demanding jobs that allow them to contribute meaningfully to the company. For example, certain employees are confident in their capacity to obtain work elsewhere based on their capabilities and relevant skills. When they are offered limited opportunities to apply and improve their abilities, they are more inclined to leave (Ott et al., 2018). On top of that, if the employees discover that they dislike their recent career and they are repeating their work life at the same speed every day, it is believed that these employees are more inclined to hunt for new employment (Ilmi et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, particular employees may also leave their job if they are confronted with new obstacles but are unable to deal with and cope with tasks. Rubel et al. (2017) mentioned that employees who want to escape such a difficult task may look for something else or resign from their current job. For instance, Ilmi et al. (2019) discovered that in the construction industry, senior quantity surveyors have difficulty understanding and utilizing measurement software, which leads to them willingly changing careers or positions where the software program is not required in their day-to-day activities. Moreover, some employees may leave their position due to the individual's family or household circumstances, such as devoting themselves to their marital status, going along with their spouse to another location, or problems such as taking care of an ill family member (Ilmi et al., 2019; Rubel et al., 2017).

2.1.3 Job Aspects

Reasons of employee turnover can also be categorized as job-related aspects, including employee development opportunities, compensation and benefits offered, relationships with managers and co-workers, working environment, and so on. Career development is designed to prepare employees in an organization for advanced development by providing various programs (Gebremichael, 2019). Low investment in training can hinder professional progress and learning skills, resulting in employee discontent and potential turnover. Conversely, offering employees training programs can enhance employee skills and raise employees' worth to the organization (Ayodele et al., 2020).

Moreover, individuals gain physical rewards for performing in the form of wages, bonuses, and benefits. Employees often mention higher compensation or perks as the motive to change jobs, and pay is an important factor in meeting economic necessities for today's employees (Addis, 2021; Gebremichael, 2019). Employees are more likely to transfer to a higher-compensated job owing to economic considerations and financial worth if the work scope is similar (Ilmi et al., 2019). An individual's commuting from home to work sites increases the likelihood of resignation if no travel incentives are provided (Ayodele et al., 2020). The failure of an organization to offer equal remuneration can lead to the formation of a nasty mindset among employees toward the organization, which forces employees to leave (Hee & Ann, 2019).

Besides, relationships with managers and co-workers can also affect employee turnover. According to Mamun & Hasan (2017), a bad boss produces an unfavorable working atmosphere, which causes people to leave the company. Ayodele et al. (2020) added that poor working relationships between managers and employees are a factor in workforce turnover. According to Othman et al. (2019), since the nature of the construction profession is dynamic and combative, employees require constant interaction with new partners in a changing environment. Hence, it is believed that having good relationships is crucial to boosting employee engagement with the organization.

Lastly, employees will not be ready to put up with the inconvenience for a long time if the work atmosphere or the setting of the working conditions are bad and undesirable (Addis, 2021; Gebremichael, 2019). Workers are more inclined to remain at their current organization when the work environment provided is reliable, and vice versa (Addis, 2021). According to Ayodele et al. (2020), as construction sites are considered dangerous places, poor working conditions can contribute to employee turnover compared to a convenient, hygienic, and secure environment.

2.2 Factors Influencing Talent Retention

According to Ahmad Fahmid (2016), individuals nowadays are keen to leave a firm if they are dissatisfied with the company. As a result, the employers or the managers may go above and beyond to ensure that their workers feel enthusiastic about their job and the firm. The lesser the turnover among employees, particularly among experienced and professional personnel, tends to save on hiring and replacement costs while also increasing productivity and consistency in work (Safian et al., 2021; Yusoff et al., 2021; Ahmad Fahmid, 2016). Therefore, considering the desires and requirements of employees is likely to keep workers in the company for a longer period.

Talent retention is affected by several factors, including organizational-related factors (management, environment, social support, development) and job-related factors (autonomy, compensation, workload, work-life balance) (George, 2015). Besides, salary and benefits, nature of work, training and promotion opportunities, recognition by organization, relationship with superiors and colleagues, working environment as well as personal loyalty are also the factors known for prolonged stay of the employees in the organization (Nguyen, 2020). Lam et al. (2015) emphasize that establishing a safe, comfortable, and protective workplace can make workers more productive and more likely to keep working.

Previous research has shown that individuals are more satisfied and inspired to perform their duties efficiently when there is a good work ambiance (Fauzi et al., 2013).

In Malaysia, a lot of research has focused on various industries other than construction, including the paddy and rice industry, higher education institutions, manufacturing industry, nursing sector, ICT industry, etc. (Alias et al., 2019; Ahmad Fahmid, 2016; Foong et al., 2015; Lam et al., 2015; Fauzi et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2012). Some of the notable and repeatedly mentioned factors impacting employee retention by Malaysian researchers are compensation, work environment, training and development, and supervisory relationships. In short, the factors that affect the preservation of an organization's most valuable asset - employees are not determined by a single issue, but comprehensive factors.

Previous studies have found numerous aspects that have an impact on fostering employee retention in an organization to better retain their talents. Employees remain on the job for a variety of reasons, but many commonalities existed and some of the factors influencing talent retention were frequently cited in different sectors or industries, in developed and developing countries. This research has identified 12 determinants of talent retention that are frequently associated across various industries based on the findings of past research, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Factors influencing talent retention and related literature sources

No.	Factors	Sources
1	Compensation and Benefits	(Chol et al., 2021), (Magaisa & Musundire, 2021), (Frye et al., 2020), (Nguyen, 2020), (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019), (Kakar et al., 2017), (Ahmad Fahmid, 2016), (Foong et al., 2015), (George, 2015), (Haider et al., 2015), (Imna & Hassan, 2015), (Lam et al., 2015), (Francis, 2014), and (Ng et al., 2012)
2	Career Development, Promotions, and Recognitions	(Chol et al., 2021), (Magaisa & Musundire, 2021), (Nguyen, 2020), (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019), (Ahmad Fahmid, 2016), and (Imna & Hassan, 2015)
3	Performance Appraisal	(Kakar et al., 2017) and (Ng et al., 2012)
4	Organizational Culture	(Chol et al., 2021), (Magaisa & Musundire, 2021), and (Haider et al., 2015)
5	Training and Development	(Chol et al., 2021), (Magaisa & Musundire, 2021), (Nguyen, 2020), (Kakar et al., 2017), (Foong et al., 2015), (George, 2015), (Lam et al., 2015), (Fauzi et al., 2013), and (Ng et al., 2012)
6	Working Environment	(Chol et al., 2021), (Frye et al., 2020), (Nguyen, 2020), (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019), (Foong et al., 2015), (George, 2015), (Imna & Hassan, 2015), (Lam et al., 2015) and (Fauzi et al., 2013)
7	Management and Social support	(Magaisa & Musundire, 2021), (Yusliza et al., 2021), (Frye et al., 2020), (Nguyen, 2020), (Alias et al., 2019), (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019), and (George, 2015)
8	Autonomy and Empowerment	(Frye et al., 2020), (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019), (Kakar et al., 2017) and (George, 2015)
9	Nature of Work (Meaningfulness)	(Magaisa & Musundire, 2021), (Nguyen, 2020), and (George, 2015)
10	Organizational Commitment (Employee Loyalty)	(Chol et al., 2021), (Nguyen, 2020), (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019), and (Lam et al., 2015)
11	Flexibility and Work-life Balance	(Chol et al., 2021), (Magaisa & Musundire, 2021), (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019), (Ahmad Fahmid, 2016), (Foong et al., 2015), and (George, 2015)
12	Length of Commute	(Mahadi et al., 2020), and (Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019)

3. Methodology

To achieve the research's goals and objectives, a quantitative research method was used, as it was ideal for conducting comprehensive research among a large demographic population. Probability sampling was applied as it was hard to research an entire population in Malaysia. Simple random sampling was used to ensure that individuals in the sampled population have a fair probability of being selected as respondents for this study, as well as to reduce the incidence of human bias during sample selection.

The primary intention of this research was to discover the significance of the factors influencing talent retention in Malaysia's construction industry. Therefore, the construction professionals working for G7 contractor companies in Malaysia's Northern Region were sampled. According to the Centralized Information Management System (CIMS), there are 1069 contractor companies within Malaysia's Northern Region as of January 2022 registered with CIDB. The table for estimating sample size from a given population developed by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) was used to calculate the sample size from a population in this research. Referring to Krejcie & Morgan (1970), the sample size for this present study is around 278 to 285 people.

The questionnaire for this study was divided into two sections, as indicated below:

Section A: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondents' demographic information, including their age, state location of work, job position, and years of working experience in the construction industry were collected to better understand their background. These details were critical in ensuring that respondents were qualified to complete the questionnaire and accurate data was acquired.

Section B: Factors Influencing Talent Retention in the Malaysian Construction Industry

To fulfill the research objective, the variables were addressed on a 5-point Likert scale, and the respondents were asked to rate their opinions and thoughts on a scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The scale, adopted from previous research (Yusliza et al., 2021; Frye et al., 2020; Ahmad Fahmid, 2016; Foong et al., 2015; Lam et al., 2015; Francis, 2014; Fauzi et al., 2013) was designed to assess respondents' levels of agreement. A higher score indicated that respondents agreed with the statements more. Finally, the respondents were offered an optional open-ended question about additional factors that may impact talent retention among construction professionals.

The questionnaire (Google Form) was sent to respondents by way of email, social media, and instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp. Respondents can access it by clicking the link on their desktop, laptop, smartphone, tablet, or other appropriate devices. The data was autosaved in the Google Form database to ease the researcher's evaluation and interpretation of the data subsequently. This type of data collection approach was handy as well as flexible, and it was beneficial in reducing physical contact, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak nowadays. A total of 498 questionnaires were sent and 77 responses were successfully collected, which is equivalent to 27% of the response rate (based on the sample size). Some respondents declined to answer the questionnaire due to their lack of eligibility to answer it, while others may have overlooked the questionnaire due to busy schedules. Eventually, failure to respond to the questionnaire resulted in an imbalance between the number of questionnaires received and the number of questionnaires distributed.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion of the Results

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, i.e., mean. The mean score of 3.0 was used as the standard for indicating agreement. A mean score of more than 3.0 indicated positive agreement, whereas a score of less than that indicated negative agreement. Based on the analysis, all 12 factors achieved positive agreement and they are ranked based on their significance using the average mean values, as presented in Table 2. The top five factors are: 1) management and social support; 2) compensation and benefits; 3) work environment; 4) organizational commitment (employee loyalty); 5) nature of work (meaningfulness).

Table 2 - Overall ranking of the significance of the factors in retaining talents in the Malaysian construction industry

Factors of Talent Retention	Average Mean	Ranking of the Significance of the Factors
Management and Social Support	4.30	1
Compensation and Benefits	4.26	2
Work Environment	4.25	3
Organizational Commitment (Employee Loyalty)	4.21	4
Nature of Work (Meaningfulness)	4.20	5
Flexibility and Work-life Balance	4.19	6
Organizational Culture	4.15	7
Career Development, Promotions, and Recognitions	4.03	8

Performance Appraisal	4.03	8
Length of Commute	3.97	10
Autonomy and Empowerment	3.95	11
Training and Development	3.94	12

Management and social support is selected as the most important factors in retaining talents in the Malaysian construction industry. Respondents from this survey said their superiors and colleagues were always caring and supportive. The findings are comparable to Alias et al. (2019), who revealed that ICT professionals prefer reliable connections with their superiors to help them improve their overall well-being at work, e.g., by aiding them in solving issues or obtaining resources to accomplish tasks. This survey's results also discovered that open communication and networking events among workers may be used to build a positive relationship between workers, and the respondents in this survey have the same opinion as the previous literature (Nguyen, 2020; Mohd Amar & Ariffin, 2019). Respondents also agreed that transparent, fair, and supportive relationships between managers and colleagues improve their job satisfaction, and management style and leadership do have a significant impact on their commitment to the company. The findings showed that management and social support are truly necessary to put into practice in the construction industry, which is said to be consistent with the past findings (Magaisa & Musundire, 2021; Frye et al., 2020; George, 2015).

Compensation and benefits factors achieved second in the ranking of the 12 factors. The results of this study diverge from the literature by Chol et al. (2021), which revealed that employee welfare and income are the least influential factors in retaining construction workers in South Korea. This is because workers in South Korea are well protected by government law and minimum wages have been established; as a result, they will measure other aspects even more when the sum of income is substantial for their basic necessities. Respondents agreed that reasonable compensation and benefits motivate them to do more than is necessary. This survey's responses and findings are similar to research by Kakar et al. (2017), in which when employees are motivated by compensation, they perform better and have a high tendency to stay with the company. Moreover, the workers may feel appreciated whenever the company pays reasonable compensation and benefits, thus inspiring them to do more than what is expected (Ahmad Fahmid, 2016).

Third in the ranking is work environment factor. The construction sector is seen as risky and hazardous to workers' well-being and physical condition; hence, a good working environment is very important. Nevertheless, health and safety policies are fundamental in many industries, not only the construction sector. According to Imna & Hassan (2015), providing a healthy and secure work environment has a strong impact on employee retention in the Maldives retailing industry. Similarly, employees are more motivated and determined to stay at work when they feel secure, comfortable, and protected (Lam et al., 2015). In addition, the respondents agreed that they feel motivated at work when their company's overall physical working atmosphere is good. The respondents felt productive when their workplace was equipped with the necessary tools, facilities, or machinery that were in good condition. This is not a surprising outcome as it is in line with past research (Nguyen, 2020; Foong et al., 2015).

Organizational commitment (employee loyalty) ranked fourth out of the 12 factors. The findings indicated a high level of loyalty and professionalism among construction personnel, similar to the past research of Mohd Amar & Ariffin (2019), employees in the architectural design consultant firm are unlikely to leave their jobs due to their commitments to execute the tasks assigned by their managers and subordinates. Respondents in this study also agreed that loyalty is a human characteristic of humankind. Similarly, Nguyen (2020) has observed that when loyalty is embedded in a person and that person strives to nurture loyalty, he or she is devoted to the current employment. Furthermore, respondents from this survey stated that they are faithful and proud to work for their company, which is coherent with Lam et al. (2015), who explained that organizational commitment is a mental state in which an individual feels attached to the organization. The respondents also agreed that their personality and values are a good fit for the company. The findings strengthen the study of Chol et al. (2021), who concluded that employees desire their personalities to be a good fit for their profession to attain self-actualization.

The last in the top five factors is the nature of work (meaningfulness). Respondents agreed that the opportunity to manage tasks that fit their capacity, interest, and style leads to job satisfaction. This survey's responses are consistent with the assertion of George (2015), who stated that one of the main retention characteristics is the nature of work in the workplace, such as assigning a task that is matched to the person's resources and capabilities. Besides, according to Magaisa & Musundire (2021), technology has become ever more important in today's industry. Individuals, particularly Generation Y (born between 1980 and 2000) are becoming more intelligent and tend to incorporate their technical expertise into their jobs. In this study, 71.43%, equivalent to 55 respondents, are under the age of 40. Not surprisingly, 83.64%, equivalent to 46 respondents in this age group, agreed that their careers allow them to apply their expertise, creativity, and innovation, which is consistent with the literature (Magaisa & Musundire, 2021). The results of this study also revealed that when employees find their jobs meaningful and enjoyable, they are more inclined to stay with the company, which is said to be consistent with the findings of Nguyen (2020).

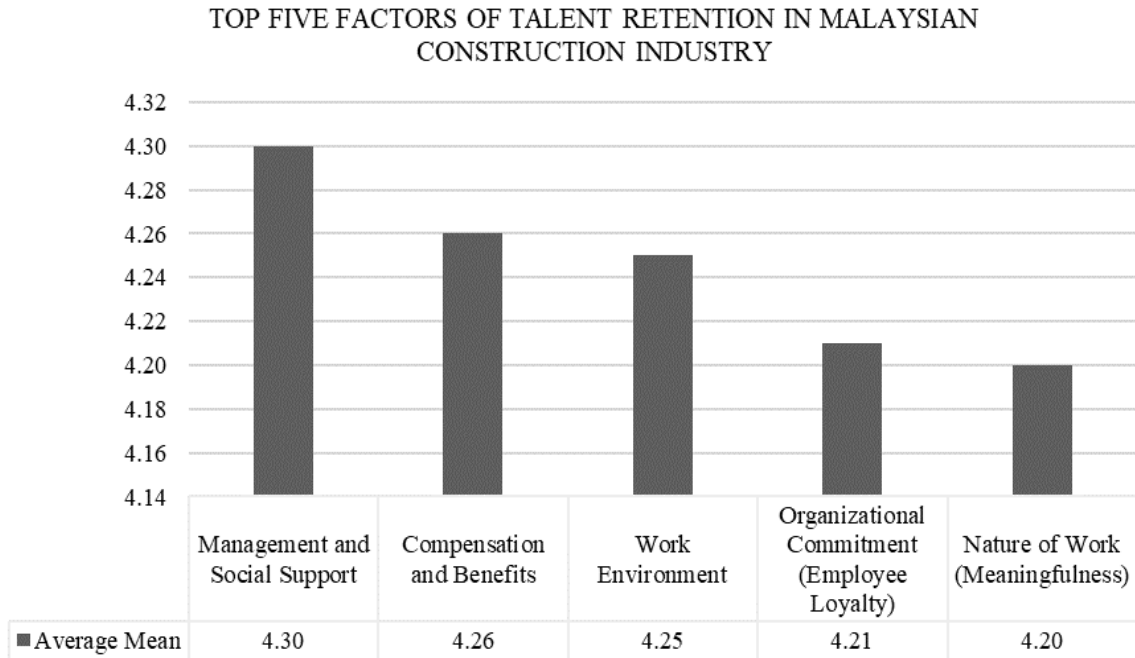


Fig. 1 - Top five factors of talent retention in Malaysian construction industry

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the factors that influence talent retention among employees in the Malaysian construction industry. The findings illustrate that respondents in this study agreed on all 12 factors influencing talent retention in the Malaysian construction industry. Besides, the significance of the factors is determined and ranked using their respective average mean values. The top five factors influencing talent retention in the Malaysian construction industry are (refer Figure 1): 1) management and social support; 2) compensation and benefits; 3) work environment; 4) organizational commitment (employee loyalty); 5) nature of work (meaningfulness). By understanding the desires of the construction professionals along with the benefits of retaining top employees, this research will further assist employers in better recognizing the factors influencing talent retention and provide a variety of options for retaining employees. Furthermore, this research will provide a useful reference for researchers and others interested in the topic and can serve as a basis for future research in the similar research areas.

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