

PERCEPTIONS OF TRAINING ON AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT
AND INTENTION TO STAY

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DEDICATION

For my beloved grandmother.

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ABSTRACT

The inability to retain employees is fast becoming a critical issue for organizations all around the globe. Predictably, this is detrimental for organizations as it incurs high financial expenditure, increases the likelihood of knowledge loss and ultimately, the inability to gain competitive advantage. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to seek ways to retain their employees including engineers within an organization. The objective of this study is to determine the influence of engineers' perceptions of training towards their intention to stay with their organization. To do that, affective commitment is incorporated as the mediator between perceptions of training and intention to stay. The idea is to extend the existing theories on factors that influence intention to stay instead of intention to leave. It is essential to focus on intention to stay as there is an absence of a retention framework which guides research and practice. Particularly, the existing literature on the influence of perceptions of training towards Malaysian engineers' intention to stay was found to be lacking. The study was carried out by investigating specific variables under perceptions of training to fully comprehend the factors which influence engineers' intention to stay. The respondents of this study consist of 304 engineers from the manufacturing sector, which were selected through purposive sampling method. By analysing data using Partial Least Square structural equation modelling, it was revealed that only perceived training comprehensiveness influences an engineer's intention to stay. The results showed that perceived access to training, perceived supervisor support for training, perceived co-worker support for training, and perceived training comprehensiveness have a positive influence on affective commitment. The findings also demonstrated that affective commitment has a positive influence on intention to stay. Conversely, affective commitment mediated the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay for four variables, specifically, perceived access to training, perceived supervisor support for training, perceived co-worker support for training, and perceived training comprehensiveness. Theoretically, this study contributed in several aspects, specifically, explored the influence of training towards engineers' intention to stay with affective commitment as the mediator, identified the specific training dimensions which influences affective commitment and intention to stay as well as investigated the role of affective commitment as the mediator. On the other hand, practical contributions of this study include the realization that training provision does not warrant higher intention to stay and there are various factors which influences employees' retention rate. In conclusion, this study developed a detailed training framework which concerns the intention to stay among Malaysian engineers. It is envisaged that this study would help researchers to comprehend better on specific training factors which affects employees' affective commitment and intention to stay.

ABSTRAK

Kegagalan untuk mengekalkan pekerja kian menjadi satu isu yang kritikal bagi organisasi-organisasi seluruh dunia. Memang dijangkakan bahawa isu genting ini boleh memudaratkan organisasi kerana ianya melibatkan perbelanjaan kewangan yang tinggi, meningkatkan kebarangkalian hilangnya pengetahuan dan seterusnya kegagalan untuk memperolehi kelebihan daya saing. Oleh itu, penting bagi organisasi-organisasi tersebut mencari cara mengekalkan para pekerja termasuk jurutera dalam organisasi mereka. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan pengaruh persepsi latihan oleh para jurutera terhadap niat untuk terus kekal bersama organisasi mereka. Demi mencapai tujuan ini, komitmen afektif telah dimasukkan sebagai pengantara di antara persepsi terhadap kursus latihan dengan niat untuk terus kekal bersama sesebuah organisasi. Idea kajian ini adalah untuk memperluaskan lagi teori sedia ada berkenaan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi niat untuk terus kekal ataupun meninggalkan sesebuah organisasi. Amat mustahak untuk menumpukan perhatian terhadap niat untuk terus kekal memandangkan ketiadaan sesebuah rangka kerja pengekalan yang berfungsi sebagai garis panduan bagi tujuan penyelidikan serta amalan. Kajian sedia ada berkenaan persepsi terhadap kursus latihan mempengaruhi niat untuk terus kekal, didapati kurang terutamanya di kalangan para jurutera di Malaysia. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan menyelidik pemboleh ubah khusus berkaitan dengan persepsi terhadap kursus latihan bagi memastikan pemahaman yang menyeluruh terhadap faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi niat para jurutera untuk terus kekal. Responden kajian ini terdiri daripada 304 orang jurutera daripada sektor perkilangan yang telah dipilih melalui kaedah persampelan bertujuan. Dengan menganalisa data menggunakan kaedah Permodelan Persamaan Struktur Separa Terkecil (PLS-SEM), didapati bahawa hanya kursus latihan yang dianggap sebagai menyeluruh akan mempengaruhi seseorang jurutera untuk terus kekal bersama sesebuah organisasi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa persepsi terhadap akses kepada kursus latihan, sokongan penyelia, sokongan rakan sekerja bagi kursus latihan serta kursus latihan yang menyeluruh boleh memberi impak positif terhadap komitmen afektif. Ianya juga menunjukkan bahawa komitmen afektif mempunyai pengaruh positif terhadap niat untuk terus kekal bersama sesebuah organisasi. Sebaliknya, komitmen afektif merupakan pengantara hubungan di antara persepsi terhadap kursus latihan dengan niat agar terus kekal bagi empat pemboleh ubah, iaitu, persepsi terhadap akses kepada kursus latihan, sokongan penyelia, sokongan rakan sekerja bagi kursus latihan serta kursus latihan yang menyeluruh. Secara teori, kajian ini menyumbang dalam beberapa aspek, khususnya, meneroka pengaruh latihan ke arah niat jurutera untuk kekal dengan komitmen afektif sebagai pengantara, mengenal pasti dimensi latihan khusus yang mempengaruhi komitmen afektif dan niat untuk kekal serta menyelidiki peranan afektif komitmen sebagai pengantara. Sebaliknya, sumbangan praktikal dalam kajian adalah kesedaran bahawa penyediaan latihan tidak menjamin niat lebih tinggi untuk kekal dan terdapat pelbagai faktor yang mempengaruhi kadar pengekalan pekerja. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini telah membangunkan rangka kerja latihan terperinci yang berkaitan dengan niat untuk kekal di kalangan jurutera Malaysia. Diharapkan bahawa hasil kajian ini akan membantu para penyelidik memahami dengan lebih baik mengenai faktor-faktor latihan tertentu yang boleh mempengaruhi komitmen afektif pekerja dan niat untuk kekal.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
HRM	-	Human Resource Management
HRD	-	Human Resource Development
EVLN	-	Exit, Voice, Loyalty, Neglect

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter begins by deliberating the development of Malaysia's economy and how training can influence the outcome of employees' behaviour in the long run. In addition to that, this chapter highlights the differences between intention to stay and intention to leave. Following that, a brief discussion on perceptions of training (perceived access to training, perceived supervisor support for training, perceived co-worker support for training, perceived benefits of training, perceived training comprehensiveness, and motivation to learn), affective commitment and intention to stay. Next, this chapter discusses the gap of the existing literature where researchers are prone to focus on the factors which trigger intention to leave. Also, this chapter presents the research questions and objectives. The significance of this study is also discussed in the significance of study section. Lastly, the scope of study and operational definitions of all variables in this study are explained in this chapter.

1.2 Background of the Study

Since the inception of Vision 2020, the world has been developing at a rapid pace that it is imperative for the Malaysian government to articulate a new national development initiative. Thus, in 2017, Transformasi Nasional 2050 (TN50) was officially unveiled to Malaysians. Essentially, TN50 is an initiative to ensure that Malaysia will be ranked as one of the Top 20 country in the world by 2050. In the pursuit of this initiative, the Malaysian government has been working round the clock to transform Malaysia's resource-focused economy to the knowledge-based economy.

The knowledge-based economy is reliant upon a paradigm which highlights on knowledge as the prime mover (Mustapha and Abdullah, 2004). Relying upon the knowledge-based economy would ensure that Malaysia would be able to boost international competitiveness as well as being able to withstand rapid economic growth. Obliquely, the emergence of a knowledge-based economy calls for more knowledge workers. Knowledge workers are a group of employees with high income, top-level (Reich, 2010), utilize their specialized knowledge, or technical-scientific expertise to high-value-added problem solution processes (Swart, 2007). Also, throughout their employment they would continuously improve their knowledge and skills, hence, augmenting their human capital and indirectly, the value of an organization (Bogdanowicz and Bailey, 2002).

Irrefutably, there is a plethora of key factors which influences knowledge workers intention to stay. In a work by George (2015), the author provided a model which encompasses eight key factors which are pertinent for the retention of professional workers. Furthermore, the author categorized the factors which influence retention into two main categories; specifically, organizational level and job level. George (2015) identified management, environment, social support and development as the factors which influences retention from the organizational level. On the other hand, at the job level, autonomy, compensation, workload, and work-life balance are the influential factors which affect knowledge workers retention.

In parallel to the vision of being a knowledge-based economy and gaining competitive advantage, organizations today are giving more attention to factors influencing retention from the organizational level, particularly, training and development practices (Gangi, 2017, Psarras, 2006). Apart from its role in retaining employees, advancement in technology requires an employee to possess a wide variety of technical and interpersonal skills as well as capabilities to ensure that they would be able to operate advanced technologies as well as to work effectively (Ferguson and Reio, 2010, Combs et al., 2006). Therefore, knowledge workers view training practices as an essential tool for them to keep up with the latest technological development as well as a platform for them to seek new knowledge and skills which in the long run

would influence their likelihood to remain in the organization (Johari et al., 2012b, Rowden and Conine, 2005).

In contrast to the blue-collar workers, knowledge workers are known to have high internal locus of control (Jayasingam and Yong, 2013). High degree of internal locus of control implies that an individual believes that he is in control of the events that happen in his life. With that, knowledge workers understand that they have the authority to determine how much they would want to contribute to the organization; insinuating that they are in full control of their life (Davenport and Prusak, 1998). In addition to that, knowledge workers value discretion and independence in their work atmosphere (Jayasingam and Yong, 2013, Horwitz et al., 2003). Essentially, knowledge workers are a group of resourceful, self-governing and skilful employees who are capable of manipulating and proposing new knowledge, thus, employers render them as the prized possession of an organization. Nonetheless, as they possess valuable resources within their mind, knowledge workers are generally mobile and ceaselessly searching for better job opportunities compared to other employees. As a result, their degree of commitment towards an organization is lower compared to non-professional workers. This entails that the inclination for knowledge workers to leave their job is higher compared to other employees (Jayasingam and Yong, 2013, Bogdanowicz and Bailey, 2002).

In agreement with Chew and Chan (2008) and Storey and Sisson (1993), employees perceive training programs as a representation of their organization's commitment to them. When an organization specifically design a training program with the intention to improve their employees' skills precisely for the organization needs, it is more likely that their productivity would be higher (Chew and Chan, 2008). In most cases, when an organization performs well, they would reward their employees with a higher salary which would boost employees' intention to stay (Frazis et al., 1998). Other than augmenting the probability of higher intention to stay, the productivity and profitability of the organization would be increased as well. Irrefutably, the cost of training practices is significantly higher than academic education. However, it is defensible when the organization manages to gain higher profit and reducing turnover issues (Mustapha and Abdullah, 2004).

It is crucial to note that, employees' intention to stay is dependent upon their degree of commitment towards an organization. Since the introduction of the organizational commitment concept, researchers have been emphasizing the role of commitment among employees (Dixit and Bhati, 2012, Cheng et al., 2003). Studies have shown that largely, highly committed employees are more likely to work harder for the organization (Newman and Sheikh, 2012, Newman et al., 2011, Ahmad and Bakar, 2003). Along with that, committed employees are inclined to voluntarily remain in an organization and are enthusiastic to assist their organization in achieving organizational objectives (Nehmeh, 2009). Of utmost importance, it has been delineated that employees' retention is closely associated with organizational commitment particularly, affective commitment (Nehmeh, 2009, Janet and Christopher, 2008).

In this day and age, due to globalization and rapid advancement in technology, organizations are placing superfluous attention in ensuring that they are able to attract and retain superior employees (Holtom et al., 2008). Various studies in the literature have highlighted the importance of retaining superior employees as they are one of the key factors of organizational success and gaining competitive advantage (Mir and Mufeed, 2016, Belogolovsky and Somech, 2010). Thus, with the intention of retaining good employees, employers are implementing more human resource practices in the attempt to curb voluntary or involuntary turnover (Holtom et al., 2008, Kacmar et al., 2006, Fulmer et al., 2003).

Regardless of the nature and size of an organization, training is the critical platform for organizations to improve employees' knowledge, skills and importantly, their behaviour (Bulut and Culha, 2010). In consonance to the social exchange theory, an employee's perceptions are critical because it influences their behaviour and attitudes (Newman et al., 2011). This implies that it is crucial for studies to investigate an employee's perceptions; however, limited number of studies which investigated the relationship between perceptions of training and work attitude as well as behaviour is available in the literature (Alamri and Al-Duhaim, 2017, Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2008, Santos and Stuart, 2003). Soon after Santos and Stuart (2003) emphasized the limited number of studies, the number of studies which employed employees' perceptions

increased slightly between 2008 until 2012. Nonetheless, to the best of author's knowledge, there are only a few studies conducted utilizing employees' perceptions between 2012 until 2017 (Alamri and Al-Duhaim, 2017, Bashir and Long, 2015). This research gap is also highlighted in a recent study by Alamri and Al-Duhaim (2017).

The existing literature on intention to stay predominantly confuses between the definition between intention to stay and intention to leave (Chinomona and Dhurup, 2015, Islam and Alam, 2014, Nasyira et al., 2014, Ghosh et al., 2013, Johari et al., 2012a). These studies were unable to properly distinguish between intention to stay and intention to leave – assumed that intention to stay is simply the opposite of intention to leave (Fletcher, 2016, Scanlan et al., 2010, Cho et al., 2009, Mills and Millstead, 2002). In a recent publication by Daniels et al. (2017), the author emphasized the need for future studies to investigate intention to stay instead of intention to leave as a theoretical expansion.

As Malaysia progresses into technologically advanced, knowledge-intensive, high-value-added and capital-intensive endeavours, the growth of its economies is heavily dependent on research, development and innovation efforts. In that regard, engineers are widely identified as the pivotal workforce in the current economy (Abdull Rahman, 2012, Muthuveloo and Rose, 2007). In particular, the Malaysian manufacturing sector has consistently contributed generously to the development of the Malaysian economy. In 2016 alone, the manufacturing sector was recognized to be among the top two contributors toward the Malaysian economy – contributed 22.7%. Therefore, Wan (2016) argued that it is indispensable for organizations to focus on the retention of knowledge workers because they are the primary drivers to ensure that the manufacturing sector will be able to persistently contribute towards the economy. In light of the discussions above, this study proposes to investigate the influence of engineers' perceptions of training towards their affective commitment and intention to stay.

1.3 Problem Statement

Ineluctably, every organization holds a common goal – acquire competitive advantage. In the course of achieving this goal, researchers have asserted the importance of knowledge and knowledge management (Jayasingam et al., 2016). This idea was conceptualized based on the knowledge-based view (KBV), which postulated that knowledge holds an imperative role in accelerating the establishment of competitive advantage (Ramona-Diana, 2017, Blomqvist and Kianto, 2007, Grant, 1996). Naturally, knowledge workers come into perspective as they are in possession of this valuable resource. As expounded earlier, knowledge workers are a group of employees who possesses superiority amongst other employees' due to their capability of utilizing their knowledge in resolving intricate matters (Jayasingam et al., 2016). Accordingly, organizations are beginning to realize that for them to gain competitive advantage, it is imperative for them to manage knowledge workers well. Moreover, the continuity management theory asserted that it is equally imperative to curb knowledge loss and to encourage knowledge sharing among employees. This is to ensure that an organization would be able to retain important and relevant knowledge within the organization despite the turnover of precious employees (Presbitero et al., 2016, Somaya and Williamson, 2008, Baskerville and Dulipovici, 2006).

Undoubtedly, knowledge sharing is a clever alternative in curbing knowledge loss. However, knowledge workers are aversive towards this concept as they value discretion and independence (Jayasingam and Yong, 2013, Horwitz et al., 2003). This is also attributable to the fact that they want to increase their value in the organization, thus, resorting to knowledge hoarding (Baskerville and Dulipovici, 2006). Aggravating the issue, knowledge workers are known to be mobile and perpetually searching for better job opportunities. This intensifies the risk of knowledge loss and ultimately, the ineptitude to gain competitive advantage (Fong et al., 2011). Thus, it is imperative for organizations to search for alternatives to retain knowledge workers within the organization (Jayasingam et al., 2016).

The inability to retain employees have always been an interminable issue which affects organizations worldwide. In Asia-Pacific, it has been established that

attracting and retaining talents are the key concerns among organizations (Watson, 2015, PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2012). Largely, this is due to the incurrence of additional financial cost for an organization as they must bear the cost of advertising, recruitment, selection, hiring and training (Anvari and Amin, 2011, Loi et al., 2006). This is a grievous issue because the cost of recruiting and training new employees is costlier compared to the cost of retaining them (Crosser, 2016, Zhu et al., 2016, Li et al., 2016, Allen et al., 2010). Apart from the financial cost, turnover also proliferates the risk of knowledge sharing with competitors. When an employee joins other organization, the employee may reveal crucial information regarding the previous organization, thus, possibly causing lost market share as well as profit (Zhu et al., 2016, Hancock et al., 2013). In addition to that, studies have shown that turnover affects an organization's performance (Han et al., 2016, Rahman and Nas, 2013), competitive advantage, diminishing the morale of other employees (Sanjeevkumar, 2012), degrades work quality as well as productivity (Holtom and Burch, 2016, Juhdi et al., 2013). Notably, past decade witnessed that employers are beginning to comprehend the pertinence of cultivating a potent employee retention strategy, which impacts firm performance and competitive advantage in the long run (Hogan, 2017, Heavey et al., 2013, Ballinger et al., 2011, Bergiel et al., 2009). This realization purports that it is indispensable for organizations to identify the factors which influence employees' intention to stay. In light to these predicaments, organizations today are utilizing various human resource management practices to ensure that valuable employees would remain within their organization (Presbitero et al., 2016). Past studies have identified several prominent HRM practices which have a positive influence towards employees' intention to stay. These practices include of training and development, salary and career advancement opportunities (Chadee and Raman, 2012, Scullion and Collings, 2011, D'Amato and Herzfeldt, 2008, Lam and White, 1998).

It is surprising that albeit being the second highest contributor to the Malaysia Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the manufacturing sector is suffering from low employee retention issue. Despite contributing a total of 23.5% to the nation's GDP (Kok, 2016), manufacturing sector suffers a total of 65% of turnover in the year of 2013 alone (Malaysia, 2013). Regardless of voluntary or involuntary turnover, the figure represents a worrying trend as low retention rate inflicts an organization negatively in terms of their performance and reputation (Johari et al., 2012a).

Considering this, it is imperative for organizations to find the best alternative to boost employee retention, thus, ensuring that the GDP contribution for the nation is not affected.

As Malaysia embarks on the mission to be a knowledge-based economy nation, engineers have been identified as the significant workforce who plays a critical role in assisting this transition (Muthuveloo and Rose, 2007). In the Malaysian context, engineers are categorized as professional workers (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015). The importance of engineers in today's society is irrefutable as they are the backbone towards the nation's socio-economic development as well as enhancing the well-being of a country and the quality of life of Malaysians (Soo, 2004). Engineers fall into the category of knowledge workers who holds an important role in ensuring that modern society would be able to carry on with no hindrances (Foley and Leahy, 2010). As the role of engineers is prominent, organizations are persistently looking for better alternatives to motivate and retain them (Perry et al., 2016). In consonance with the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2015), engineers have been identified as the key workforce in Malaysia with a total of 84,344 engineers being employed in 2014 and it was approximated that 43.7% of registered professionals are engineers. In spite of that, in a publication by the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia (2015), it was reported that there are 28,570 vacancies in professional related occupations. This implies that there is a dire shortage of employees in professional related jobs which comprises of engineers as well. Lack of engineers are attributed by two prime factors namely, inadequate number of skilled employees and due to low intention to stay among engineers (Muthuveloo and Rose, 2007). Hence, it is pertinent to determine the factors which would influence engineers' decision to remain in the organization.

For a long time, researchers have been presuming that intention to stay and intention to leave are merely two sides of the same coin (Chinomona and Dhurup, 2015, Islam and Alam, 2014, Nasyira et al., 2014, Ghosh et al., 2013, Johari et al., 2012b); this assumption rooted from a study by Johnston (1995). However, in recent times, researchers have refuted the assumption – intention to stay is not the obverse of intention to leave (Cardy and Lengnick-Hall, 2011, Reitz and Anderson, 2011, Cho et al., 2009, Holtom et al., 2008, Holtom and Inderrieden, 2006, Lee et al., 2004, Mitchell

and Lee, 2001). These authors realized that employee retention holds an imperative role in assisting organizational effectiveness and efficiency; thus, they emphasized that it is critical to investigate employees' intention to stay rather than intention to leave. As an illustration, they affirmed that factors which influence turnover may be dissimilar to factors which influence retention. Loan-Clarke et al. (2010) mentioned that the number of studies conducted on intention to stay is highly limited due to the excess focus on employees' turnover intention. In addition to that, Cardy and Lengnick-Hall (2011) indicated that the literature is still lacking a retention framework which guides research and practice. Above all, Daniels et al. (2017) highlighted that several published meta-analyses have concluded that the magnitude of the meta-analytic correlations' withdrawal behaviours, particularly turnover, with hypothesized antecedents and correlates is rather small. The author further deliberated that the small effect sizes are partially due to dichotomization of withdrawal behaviours, as well as the relatively low base rate of withdrawal behaviours in organizations. In line with mentioned arguments, Daniels et al. (2017) recommended future studies investigate employees' retention instead of turnover. The reallocation of focus contributes towards theory development – comprehends the fundamental reason why employees choose to continue employment with their organization.

Throughout the literature, researchers hypothesized that high degree of organizational commitment would influence employees' intention to stay positively (Jayasingam et al., 2016, Koslowsky et al., 2012). Despite of the endorsement by Chew and Chan (2008) to investigate the influence of normative and continuance commitment, this study will be focusing only on affective commitment dimension. This move is strongly driven by the following factors. Firstly, in the knowledge-based economy era, organizations are in a constant search for knowledge workers, thus, lowering the need for them to remain with an organization because they need to (continuance commitment) (Jayasingam et al., 2016). Secondly, knowledge workers believe that they are no longer bounded by the fear of losing existing benefits due to the wide array of work opportunities in the market (Jayasingam et al., 2016). As discussed earlier (Section 1.2), knowledge workers are persistently searching for opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills (Bigliardi et al., 2005, James-Gordon and Bal, 2001, Allen and Katz, 1995). Due to this characteristic, knowledge workers are more likely to have lower felt obligation embedded within themselves (normative

commitment) (Jayasingam et al., 2016). Thus, it is arguably difficult to retain knowledge workers through normative and continuance commitment (Jayasingam et al., 2016). Irrefutably, there were researches which employed affective commitment, however, few of them focused on knowledge workers as well as intention to stay. Consequently, this study will be employing affective commitment in the development of a conceptual framework investigating engineers' intention to stay.

Past studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of human resource management (HRM) practices in influencing employees' attitude and behaviour positively which eventually affects employees' intention to continue working in the organization (Jehanzeb et al., 2015, Hewitt, 2015, Bashir and Long, 2015, Shuck et al., 2014, Cheng and Waldenberger, 2013). The positive relationship between HRM practices and employees' attitude and behaviour is attributed to the employees' belief that their contribution is appreciated and that their well-being is prioritized by the organization (Newman et al., 2011). When employees' believe that they are appreciated by their organization, their level of commitment towards the organization will increase which in turn, will influence their intention to stay (Anvari et al., 2010). In studies by Ahmad and Bakar (2003) and Samad (2006), they identified training, career mentoring, career development opportunity, competitive salaries and promotion opportunities as the plausible factors which influence employees' organizational commitment. Moreover, tailored human resources practices are known to boost employees' intention to stay in an organization due to the higher sense of belonging and affection towards their organization (Presbitero et al., 2016). In a nutshell, it can be postulated that employees' intention to stay can be improved through the implementation of selected human resource practices.

Organizational values reflect an organization's inclination to espouse selected set of beliefs or organizational affairs (Hofsteds, 1980). Generally, it is arduous for an organization to duplicate another organization's values because these values are usually impalpable (Presbitero et al., 2016). This observation is concurrent to the person-organization fit theory, where, it was highlighted that an organization's probability to gain positive consequences is higher when the values advocated by the organization are in line with their employees (Presbitero et al., 2016, Watson et al.,

2004). It was identified that a good person-organization fit would augment employees' intention to stay (Jones et al., 2009, Aycan et al., 2007) and lessen employee-organization mismatch and disagreements (Kristof, 1996). Thus, in this work, it is postulated that training programs can serve as a proficient tool to increase employees' intention to stay with their organization.

As specified by Bulut and Culha (2010), it is imperative for organizations to invest in training as it plays an important role in augmenting knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour of employees. Investment in training practices differs from physical and financial investments as training is a platform to further develop organizational performance as well as the intellectual capital of the organization (Bulut and Culha, 2010). Jex and Britt (2014) further added that training is capable of creating a far more beneficial resource compared to other HRM practices, that is, highly committed employees. Of utmost importance, Hutchings et al. (2009) argued that training practices act as a catalyst in augmenting employees' intention to stay. Hutchings' finding was supported by other researchers, for instance, Janet and Christopher (2008), Armstrong-Stassen et al. (2015), Cheong et al. (2015b), Abdull Rahman (2012) and Ghazali et al. (2011). Apropos to this, it can be concluded that training is an essential element of retention-enhancing strategies. Despite of the established importance of training, it has been reported that the number of studies conducted from the Malaysian context is lacking (Bashir and Long, 2015).

Traditionally, "training" dimension is the key dimension utilized in examining employees' attitude and work-related behaviour (Kehoe and Wright, 2013, Ahmad, 2013, Barcus, 2008, Paul and Anantharaman, 2004, Huang, 2001). Nevertheless, tables have turned recently where more studies are beginning to examine the influence of employees' perception instead (Bashir and Long, 2015, Ashar et al., 2013, Newman et al., 2011, Bulut and Culha, 2010). Dysvik and Kuvaas (2008) highlighted that analysing employees' perception is another way of assessing the relationship between training and employees' attitude and work-related behaviour. Also, Guest (2002) articulated that employees' attitudes and behaviours are significantly impelled by employees' perceptions. Following the proposition of this statement, it was observed several studies have been conducted and subsequently substantiated Guest's statement

(Jiang et al., 2017, Alfes et al., 2013, Nishii et al., 2008, Khilji and Wang, 2006). As reported by Aguinis and Kraiger (2009), perceptions of training are linked positively with employees' retention – provision of training consolidates the social exchange relationship between employees and their employer (Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2008). Also, more researchers are becoming more intrigued on the underlying mechanism of this relationship (Fletcher et al., 2016, Koster et al., 2011).

To the best of authors' knowledge, from the Malaysian perspective, there are only two studies conducted by Ahmad and Bakar (2003) as well as by Bashir and Long (2015) which investigated Malaysian employees' perceptions. Evidently, this highlights the dearth of studies from the Malaysian context on this dimension. Thus, in this study, there are seven dimensions of perceptions of training that was employed – perceived access to training, perceived supervisor support for training, perceived co-worker support for training, perceived benefits of training, perceived training comprehensiveness, and motivation to learn.

Perceived access to training is a belief possessed by employees that they have the opportunity to attend training programs with no restriction from their organization (Bulut and Culha, 2010, Bartlett and Kang, 2004, Bartlett, 2001). Due to the belief that they are able to gain knowledge and skills with no constraints, their degree of organizational commitment would be boosted (Newman et al., 2011, Bulut and Culha, 2010, Al-Emadi and Marquardt, 2007, Ahmad and Bakar, 2003). According to Kossek et al. (2011) and Harris et al. (2007), workplace social support originates from two sources specifically, supervisors and co-workers. Perceived benefits of training was defined as employees' belief that they would be able to enlarge their social network, boost job performance and improve their personal development (Al-Emadi and Marquardt, 2007). According to Al-Emadi and Marquardt (2007), Ahmad and Bakar (2003) and Bartlett (2001), a positive relationship exist between perceived benefits of training and organizational commitment. On the other hand, the level of enthusiasm and eagerness to take part in training programs and the ability to employ obtained skills and knowledge is the definition of motivation to learn put forward by Noe (1986) and Jehanzeb et al. (2013). Highly motivated employees recognize training as a platform for them to improve themselves and in the long run, they will develop high

commitment for their organization (Faction et al., 1995, Mathieu et al., 1992). Nonetheless, it is critical to conduct this study employing these dimensions as past studies have been conducted in the Western context. It is important to note that Westerners and Malaysians are known to possess different work attitude and characteristics, with the former practices' individualism and the latter practices collectivism.

Perceived training comprehensiveness is a view by employees on the degree of extensiveness of training programs prepared by their organization (Snell and Dean, 1992). Recent studies established that through comprehensive training, it would lead towards a higher degree of organizational commitment, efficiency, lower turnover and absenteeism within an organization (Srivastava and Dhar, 2015, Ehrhardt et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the literature showed that this dimension is often neglected – thus, Ehrhardt et al. (2011) called for more studies to incorporate this dimension into training framework. The incorporation of this dimension allows organization to gain a better understanding of the employee-employer exchange relationship (Ehrhardt et al., 2011).

On top of that, this study incorporates affective commitment as the mediator in the attempt to understand the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay. A couple of researchers have urged the need to grasp better understanding on the processes where HRM practices might have an impact on work-related behaviours and work attitudes (Eisenberger et al., 1990). In this study, affective commitment is conceptualized as the mediator which mediates the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay. Superior degree of affective commitment is reflected through the enthusiasm to engage in organizational objectives along with the desire to remain in the organization (Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli, 2001). Jayasingam and Yong (2013) suggested that if organizations are able to establish affective commitment among knowledge workers, the probability for them to retain in the organization is higher.

Several past studies have demonstrated that the relationship between perceptions of training and employees' behaviour is mediated by employees' attitudes

(Koster et al., 2011, Dysvik and Kuvaas, 2008). While these studies revealed that perceptions of training are associated with retention, they pinpointed a broad range of attitudes – each of which only partially mediates the relationship. This perhaps explains why until today, there has yet to be any definite explanation on why training has a correlation with intention to stay. Moreover, Fletcher et al. (2016) stressed that the mediation space for the relationship between training and intention to stay has yet to be fully explored. With that in mind, the author incorporated affective commitment as the potential mediator between the relationship between engineers' perceptions of training and their intention to stay. It is anticipated that engineers' perceptions of training would influence affective commitment positively and obliquely, increases an employee's intention to stay. Investment in training practices by organizations would naturally invoke employees' affective commitment which subsequently, acts as a mediator between the relationship of human resource practices and behavioural outcomes (Chami-Malaeb and Garavan, 2013).

It is imperative for organizations to be able to retain their knowledge workers as low retention amongst them are often implicated with the danger of knowledge loss and the inability to gain competitive advantage. In addition to that, retention of knowledge workers are vital as they are of great practical significance for organizations as they would be able to save on additional cost of recruiting, selection, training and hiring (George, 2015, Tymon et al., 2011). In accordance to Osman et al. (2016), the number of studies in the existing literature which focuses on professional employees' intention to stay is inadequate. The author further suggested for future studies to be conducted among other group of knowledge workers, for instance, engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, accountants or lecturers. To the extent of the author's erudition, there are only four studies conducted thus far on the relationship between training and intention to stay among Malaysian engineers (Cheong et al., 2015b, Cheong et al., 2015a, Anvari et al., 2013, Abdull Rahman, 2012). Thus, this study intends to contribute to the literature on the influence of perceptions of training towards Malaysian engineers' intention to stay with affective commitment as the mediator.

The research to date tends to focus on employees' intention to leave rather than their intention to stay. Despite of the proposition by past studies to focus on intention to stay, the number of studies conducted in Malaysia is still dearth. On top of that, this study focuses on employees' perceptions of training because it has been noted that employees' perceptions are a crucial indicator on employees' attitude and behaviour. Lastly, this study integrated affective commitment as the mediator to enhance comprehension on the influence of employees' perceptions of training towards their intention to stay.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the influence of engineers' perceptions of training on affective commitment?
2. What is the influence of engineers' perceptions of training on intention to stay?
3. What is influence of affective commitment towards intention to stay?
4. Does affective commitment mediate the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay?

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To determine the influence of engineers' perceptions of training on affective commitment
2. To determine the influence of engineers' perceptions of training on intention to stay

3. To determine the influence of affective commitment towards intention to stay
4. To determine the role of affective commitment as the mediator in the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay

1.6 Significance of Study

1.6.1 Theoretical Perspective

From the theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the existing literature on the implication of perceptions of training towards intention to stay with affective commitment as the mediator among engineers in Malaysia's manufacturing sector. To the best of authors' knowledge, this is the first study conducted to investigate the influence of perceptions of training towards intention to stay from the social exchange perspective. Apart from that, this study also contributes to the body of knowledge by focusing on intention to stay instead of intention to leave as the former is a stronger retention predictor compared to the latter.

Despite of the low number of retentions among engineers and them being the propeller of the modern world development, the number of studies involving them are still scarce. The intention of this study is to understand how social exchange perspective facilitates the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay. Furthermore, this study employed affective commitment as the mediator to fully understand how the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay works. Undeniably, past studies have employed affective commitment but then again, their studies revolved around intention to leave.

Additionally, this study considered employees' perceptions of training instead of investigating human resource management practices as a whole. When organizations understand their employees' perception, they would be able to make

amendments to their HRM practices to better accommodate their employee needs thus, in the long run boosting their intention to stay.

1.6.2 Practical Perspective

From the practical perspective, this study would contribute towards the managerial implications within an organization. Generally, organizations in Malaysia perceived that training provision is unnecessary and experienced possessed by employees alone are sufficient (Ahmad and Bakar, 2003). The outcome of this study may alter employers' perceptions towards training and help them realize that training is crucial in improving employees and organizations' performance and in the long run, boosts their retention rate.

1.7 Scope of Study

The intention of this study is to investigate the influence of perceptions of training towards Malaysian engineers' intention to stay with affective commitment as the mediator. Most studies have been done in Western countries which practices different cultural beliefs and attitudes compared to Malaysian engineers. In addition to that, the questionnaire of this study was distributed to engineers through the purposive sampling method. Due to the employment of the non-probability sampling method, the data collection period was longer than anticipated – distribution of questionnaire began in early March 2018 and completed in early July 2018. This study managed to obtain 304 responses from all over the states in Peninsular Malaysia; however, because of the nature of this study, most responses were from three states; specifically, Johor Darul Takzim, Melaka Bandar Bersejarah and Selangor Darul Ehsan.

1.8 Conceptual and Operational Definitions

This section presents the conceptual and operational definitions of independent variables that is the perceptions of training – perceived access to training, perceived supervisor support for training, perceived co-worker support for training, perceived benefits of training, perceived training comprehensiveness, and motivation to learn. In addition to that, definitions for affective commitment and intention to stay will be delineated as well.

1.8.1 Perceptions of Training

This section delineates the definitions and source of measurement items for each dimension – perceived access to training, perceived supervisor support for training, perceived co-worker support for training, perceived benefits of training, perceived training comprehensiveness, and motivation to learn.

1.8.1.1 Perceived Access to Training

Several authors in the literature delineated perceived access to training as the belief owned by employees that they can attend available training programs without any constraint imposed by their organization (Yang et al., 2012, Bulut and Culha, 2010, Bartlett and Kang, 2004, Bartlett, 2001).

In this study, perceived access to training denotes employees' perception on the accessibility of training programs provided by their organization. Employees' perceive access to training from several aspects namely degree of accessibility, frequency of training, sufficiency of training programs, autonomy in choosing training practices as well as the sponsorship of training by their organization. This dimension will be measured using the items developed by Yang *et al.* (2012).

1.8.1.2 Perceived Supervisor Support for Training

Newman et al. (2011) delineated perceived supervisor support for training as the belief possessed by employees that their supervisors are supportive in their decision to participate in training programs and they would be able to utilize obtained skills on the job. This dimension is aligned with past definitions proposed by (Bartlett, 2001, Noe and Wilk, 1993).

In this study, perceived supervisor support is represented by the relationship formed between an employee and his supervisor. When employees believe that they have formed a good rapport with their supervisor, they would be able to confide with their supervisor on issues they are facing at work, discuss on their work performance and request for training (when in need). The measurement of this model relied upon items constructed by Noe and Wilk (1993).

1.8.1.3 Perceived Co-worker Support for Training

Perceived co-worker support for training denotes the degree of willingness of co-workers to assist their colleagues' in solving problems or in implementing a new method of working (Bulut and Culha, 2010, Bartlett, 2001, Noe and Wilk, 1993).

In the context of this study, perceived co-worker support refers to the willingness of co-workers to cooperate in solving problems, giving advices as well as in assisting them in developing their skills obtained from training programs. This item will be measured using items developed by Noe and Wilk (1993) and Ducharme and Martin (2000).

1.8.1.4 Perceived Benefits of Training

This study defined perceived benefits of training as the belief that they would be able to expand their social network, boost job performance and cultivate their personal development (Al-Emadi and Marquardt, 2007).

In this study, perceived benefits of training refer to the benefits which employees perceive they would obtain through participation in training for instance, personal development, develop better relationship with supervisor and co-workers, assist them in achieving their career goals, widen their social network and others. To measure this dimension, the scale developed by Noe and Wilk (1993) will be used.

1.8.1.5 Perceived Training Comprehensiveness

Perceived training comprehensiveness is an employees' belief on the degree of extensiveness of training programs provided by an organization (Ehrhardt *et al.*, 2011, Snell and Dean, 1992). In this study, perceived training comprehensiveness refers to employees' perception on the structure of the training programs for instance the hours of training received, type of training provided – formal or informal training programs and variety of training programs provided. The measurement of this dimension will be using items developed by Snell and Dean (1992) and Srivastava and Dhar (2015).

1.8.1.6 Motivation to Learn

Jehanzeb *et al.* (2013) and Noe (1986) defined motivation to learn as the degree of enthusiasm and willingness to learn new knowledge and skills through training practices provided by the organization. In this study, motivation to learn refers to employees' perception on how much they can gain through training programs – will be measured using items developed by Noe (1986).

1.8.2 Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is delineated as emotional affection, recognition, and contribution of an employee towards an organization's objectives (Allen and Meyer, 1990, O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986, Mowday *et al.*, 1979b). In this study, affective commitment is the emotion felt by employees, sense of belonging and personal meaning to them. This dimension will be measured using items developed by Meyer *et al.* (1993).

1.8.3 Intention to Stay

Employees' intention to stay are the representation of an employee's voluntary decision to remain within an organization (Jayasingam et al., 2016, Cho et al., 2009, Tett and Meyer, 1993). In this study, intention to stay is an employee's plan to remain working with an organization indefinitely as well as have the right to quit from an organization anytime throughout their employment period. The measurement of this dimension will be using items developed by Kim et al. (1996).

1.9 Summary

This chapter underlines the importance of studying the implication of employees' perceptions of training towards intention to stay with affective commitment as the mediator. Past studies primarily focused on employees' intention to leave when it is equally important to study factors which contributes to their intention to remain in the organization. Therefore, this chapter promotes the importance of every variable used towards intention to stay as well as the role of affective commitment in the relationship between perceptions of training and intention to stay.

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