



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXAMINING THE MODERATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANINGFULNESS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPENSATION AND TURNOVER INTENTION AMONG HEALTHCARE EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

The exodus of healthcare employees across public healthcare facilities in Kano State in particular and Nigeria in general in spite of the shortage of the healthcare employees signifies the needs for more studies on the influence of human resource management practices on healthcare employee's turnover intention (TI). In response to this, the paper examined the moderation effects of psychological meaningfulness (PM) on the relationship between compensation (COM) and turnover intention among healthcare employees. A structured survey questionnaire was used to obtain data from 391 healthcare workers in Kano State, Northwestern region of Nigeria. The data collected was analyzed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation modeling via SmartPLS3. Findings revealed that both compensations and psychological meaningfulness had significant negative influence on healthcare employee's turnover intention. Furthermore, the results showed that psychological meaningfulness moderates the relationship between compensation and turnover intention among healthcare workers such that **the** negative influence of COM on TI is stronger (i.e. more negative) when psychological meaningfulness is high. The study therefore concluded that financial rewards only are not adequate for health workforce retention instead healthcare workers perception of their work as worthwhile and meaningful plays an important role in enhancing their retention, loyalty and commitment to serve. Government can therefore discourage turnover intention among healthcare employees through equitable compensation and promotion of high psychological meaningfulness.

Keywords: Compensation, psychological meaningfulness, turnover intention, healthcare employees, moderation effect.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Turnover intention (TI) is an imminent antecedent of turnover behavior (quitting/resignation behavior). It is an employee's willingness, desire, and plans to quit from an organization. Turnover intention begins when an employee is pondering on resigning from an organization by finding an alternative organization to transfer his services to or contemplating to stay out of job. Healthcare is one of the sectors highly affected by turnover especially from Africa Nigeria inclusive to the developed countries probably as a result of poor compensation package of healthcare employees among other human resource management practices factors.

High turnover rates in public healthcare facilities in Nigeria coupled with the shortage of the healthcare employees remain one of the most daunting challenges facing the countries health sector in the face of the rapidly growing population of the country, thereby compromising effective health service delivery for citizenry. In line with the logic of social exchange theory, poor compensation (inadequate salary) has been traditionally perceived to be the primary push factor driving the turnover intention of healthcare employee from Nigerian while better and equitable compensation (COM) is commonly seen as the major pull factor attracting Nigeria's healthcare employees to the developed countries in Europe, America and Asia.

However, one may ponder and ask why some healthcare employees remain committed to serve in Nigeria, in spite of the perceived poor compensation package pushing health workers in the country to leave for overseas in search of a greener pasture? Many factors may be adduced as to why some health workers wish to remain in Nigeria despite poor compensation. One of these factors may be psychological meaningfulness (PM). Psychological meaningfulness refers to the experience of positive emotion at work and the feeling of self-worth accompanied by self-fulfillment and experiencing contentment in what one does (Morrison, Burke & Greene, 2007).

Put differently, psychological meaningfulness is the significance a person attaches to something in the context of employees in work setting; it is related to work engagement. In a work setting, employees are most likely to experience psychological meaningfulness when they feel they are useful, valuable and worthwhile (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004) When an employee experience psychological meaning in their work, they tend to feel more valuable and fulfilled by the values and purposes at work (Morrison et al., 2007; Lee, 2015; Huang et al., 2023). Thus, psychological meaningfulness spells out why work is important to employees in relation to how they feel, thrive and still remain intact with authenticity and commitment to their work. It could therefore be argued that employees, who find their work meaningful, will rather opt to stay than have intent to leave (turnover intention) or leave their work (turnover).

Despite research availability on the relationship between compensation and turnover intention, some of the results disagree as they report inconsistent findings. For example, while some studies (Gong, Chang and Cheung 2010; Mensah 2014; Ekabu 2019), found significant negative direct relationship between compensation and employees' turnover intention. On the other hand, other empirical studies (Kim 2005; Chew and Chan 2008) revealed no significant negative direct relationship between compensation and employees' turnover intention. Hence, more empirical studies are needed to clarify the actual link between COM and TI by introducing a mediator or moderator into the relationship as



recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) whenever there is are mixed and inconclusive findings in the test of direct relationship between variables. In response to this, the present study considered psychological meaningfulness as a prospective moderator. Therefore, this study intends to examine the moderation effect of psychological meaningfulness on the relationship between compensation and employee's turnover intention within the context of healthcare sector in Kano State, Northwest Nigeria.

To achieve the objective of this empirical study, the study is organized in five interrelated sections comprising this introduction upon which the study is situated, the second section reviewed literature on the variables of the study leading to the development of hypotheses. In the third section, the method deployed in conducting the study is described. In the fourth section, results are presented followed by discussion of findings. Finally, the fifth section presents limitations of the study and directions for future research as well as concluding remarks and recommendations.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This section presents a brief literature review focusing first on the direct relationship between compensation (COM) and turnover intention (TI). Secondly, literature on the influence of psychological meaningfulness (PM) on employee's turnover intention was explored alongside the literature on the possible moderation of PM on the relationship between COM and TI. Sequel to the review and various theoretical supports, the hypotheses of the study were developed.

2.1. Influence of Compensation (COM) on Turnover Intention (TI)

According to Snell and Bohlander (2010) compensation consists of different kinds of payment and benefits that employee get after performance of their jobs. Employee compensation can either be direct or indirect. Salaries, commission and bonuses represent direct compensation while various fringe benefits and non-financial compensation such as medical insurance, meals, overtime and pension plans which employee receives constitutes the indirect compensation. Therefore, when both types of compensation are provided to the employees it represents total reward (Armstrong & Stephen, 2014). An equitable compensation accompanied by effective disbursement system can be used to retain employees and at the same time inculcate positive employees' engagement behavior (Khan, 2010).

Theoretically, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), holds that human connections are shaped by the use of subjective cost-benefit analysis, which is rooted in three vital areas: economics, psychology and sociology (Blau, 1964). The theory defines social exchange as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties in which both parties involved in the exchange take responsibility for one another and strongly depend on each other. In addition, the interactions between parties are usually seen as mutually dependent and contingent on the actions made by the other persons (Blau, 1964). Specifically, an economic exchange relationship involves the exchange of economic benefits i.e. rewards and incentives in return for employees' efforts. Consequently, insufficient and unfair rewards by an organization are more likely to result in decreased levels of employees' retention (Meyer & Smith 2009).



Empirically, studies revealed inconsistencies on the link between compensation and turnover intention whereby some studies like (Gong, Chang and Cheung 2010; Mensah 2014; Ekabu 2019), found significant negative (indirect) relationship between COM and TI. However, other empirical studies (Kim 2005; Chew and Chan 2008) indicated contrary results i.e. that there is no significant negative direct relationship between COM and TI. Health sector in Nigeria characterized by its shortage of healthcare employees resulting in over stretching of the existing workforce and job stress, fair compensation stands to be a critical retention mechanism. Even though, the compensation may not reduce turnover intention at the same rate, suggesting that psychological factors such as psychological meaningfulness of the healthcare service delivery may condition its influence on health workers turnover intention more negatively. Based on foregoing theoretical and empirical discourse, this study proposes:

H₁: Compensation is negatively and significantly associated with turnover intention among healthcare employees.

2.2. The Moderation Role of Psychological Meaningfulness (PM)

Psychological meaningfulness is the degree of emotional attachment, importance and feeling of worthwhile that an employee attached to his work that serves as an intrinsic motivation for employee loyalty and retention. Despite the fact that not enough attention has been given in the extant literature on the relationship between psychological meaningfulness and turnover intention, there are still number research that looked into this link in a way. Most of the studies suggest that if an employee considers his work meaningful, then he is likely to experience organizational commitment (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004; Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Mostafa & El-Motalib, 2020).

It has been found that people who do not experience psychological meaningfulness are expected not to fit in the organization. Subsequently, people who feel that they are not fit for the organization will quit their job. Moreover, employees in order to fit into the organization have to experience psychological meaningfulness for their workplace. Thus, if employee does not consider himself fitting for the job, he will not see work as meaningful and hence likely to quit the job (Schneider, 1987; Shamir, 1991). More recently, Nuhu & Tabiu (2024) in their study on the moderation of psychological meaningfulness on the relationships between human resource management practices and turnover intention in the health sector: A proposed framework. Suggests that psychological meaningfulness could moderate relationship between compensation and employee's turnover intention in the health sector

Both, Schneider's (1987) Attraction Selection-Attrition Model and Swann's (1990) Self-Verification Theory prove that psychological meaningfulness of work has a stronger relationship with turnover intention than with such constructs as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Attraction Selection-Attrition Model assumes that employees and their attributes, but not the external environment, structure or technology, determine the behavior of organization (Schneider, 1987). Similarly, Self-Verification Theory supposes that people desire others to understand and know them as they view themselves, through self-concepts and self-esteem (Swann, 1990). These theories established a strong relationship between psychological meaningfulness and turnover intention.

Empirical evidence substantiates the inverse relationship of psychological meaningfulness of work and employee turnover intention across different sectors. For instance, Prouse (2010) found that psychological meaningfulness of work lowers turnover intentions of pilots and cabin crew in a New Zealand based airline organization. Similarly, the study on hospital employees in England proved that low psychological meaningfulness of work leads to high intention to leave among health workers (Suadicani, Bonde, Olesen & Gyntelberg, 2013). Government employees in the US who sense their job meaningful missed less days at work indicating poor organizational commitment which can be a prelude to employees' turnover (Clegg, 1983).

Furthermore, nurses in Canada, who lacked psychological meaningfulness of work, were more likely to burnout and, thus, leaves their job (Leiter, Harvie & Frizzell, 1998). Drawing on the above theoretical postulations and the previous empirical studies on psychological meaningfulness of work discussed above, this study expects that psychological meaningfulness will be negatively and significantly related to turnover intention of healthcare employees and can also buffer (moderate) the influence of COM on TI among healthcare employees. Based on this projection, the second and third hypothesis of the study was developed.

H₂: Psychological meaningfulness is negatively and significantly associated with turnover intention among healthcare employees.

H₃: Psychological meaningfulness will moderate the relationship between compensation and turnover intention of among healthcare employees such that the relationship will be stronger (more negative) for employees with higher psychological meaningfulness than those with low psychological meaningfulness.

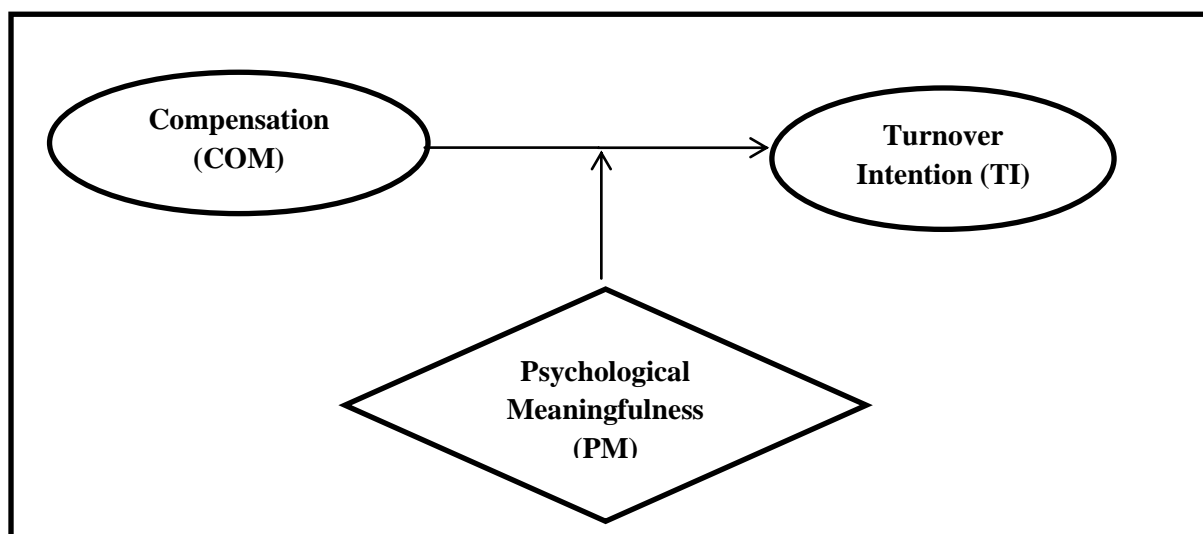


Figure 1: Research Model

Source: Developed by the Researchers (2025)



3.0. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative research approach considering the quantitative measurability of the variables under study. Primary data was obtained through cross sectional survey and analyzed using Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS- SEM) because the application has a very friendly interface design and can accurately run the analysis simultaneously (Gorondutse, Hilman, Salimon, Alajmi, Shdaifat & Kumaran, 2019).

The participants are three hundred and ninety-one (391) healthcare public sector employees drawn from secondary and tertiary health institution in Kano metropolis. In an attempt to reach out the participants a letter seeking for permission from the management of the healthcare institutions involved before contacting the participant was sent. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and also informed that participation is open and voluntary to all staff. Because English is the official language in Nigeria, the questionnaire was written in English language.

The dependent variable (turnover intention), independent variable (compensation) and the moderating variable (psychological meaningfulness) were all measured using items that were previously found to be reliable and validated by other researchers. Turnover intention was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Mobley et al. (1978). Mobley et al. (1978) reported Cronbach's alpha value of this scale was 0.9. All the items were rated on five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

For compensation, it was measured with a 5-item scale adapted from Demo et al. (2012). They obtained the value of a reliability statistic for compensation with the Cronbach's Alpha .81 for the 5 items. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. On the other hand, psychological meaningfulness was measured using a six-item scale adapted from May et al. (2004). They obtained the value of a reliability statistic for psychological meaningfulness with the Cronbach's Alpha .78 for the 6 items. A five-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

4.0. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In order to estimate the model and evaluate the results accurately, this study used SmartPLS version 3.0 to compute the path model. Guidelines of evaluating and reporting Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model PLS-SEM was followed, whereby, measurement model was assessed then followed by the structural model (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, and Kuppelwieser 2014)

4.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

In assessing the measurement model, the item's reliability and validity were all ascertained. As suggested by scholars (Hair et al., 2011; Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, and Kuppelwieser 2014), the reliability of individual items was ascertained by looking at the outer loadings of constructs using a rule of thumb of .70. Based on the rule items with low loading such as COM001 and PM004 were deleted as recommended.



Table 1: Measurement Model Showing Loadings, Composite Reliability and AVE

Latent Constructs	Items	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Compensation	COM002	0.875	0.921	0.744
	COM003	0.861		
	COM004	0.825		
	COM005	0.887		
Psychological Meaningfulness	PM001	0.853	0.935	0.742
	PM002	0.883		
	PM003	0.859		
	PM005	0.859		
	PM006	0.851		
Turnover Intention	TI001	0.943	0.941	0.841
	TI002	0.930		
	TI003	0.876		

Source: Smart PLS Computed Output (2026).

Composite reliability was used in ascertaining the internal consistency of all the three latent constructs. In this regard, Hair et al. (2014) suggested .70 be the minimum value for composite reliability coefficient. Based on this rule of thumb, all the three constructs had recorded a good composite reliability coefficient above the minimum yardstick (see Table 1 above). Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) results on the Table 1 above showed that compensation (0.744), psychological meaningfulness (0.742) and turnover intention (0.841) values were all higher than the minimum threshold of .50. Thus, indicating sufficient degree of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2011).

In addition, discriminant validity was tested by comparing the correlation among the construct and the values of variance average extracted (AVE) as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Results as shown in Table 2 below suggested that the squared roots of all the latent constructs (bolded and italics) are greater than the correlations among the variables, thus indicating adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2: Discriminants Validity Using Fornell and Larcker Criterion

Model	COM	PM	TI
COM	0.862		
PM	0.467	0.861	
TI	-0.659	-0.494	0.917

Source: Smart PLS Computed Output (2026).

4.2. Structural Model Results

As suggested by scholars (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012), in the assessment of both structural model 1 (main model) and model 2 (interaction model) bootstrapping procedure was followed using 5000 bootstrap samples and 391 cases. The result of direct relationship (main effects) as presented in Table 3 below Model 1 revealed that compensation exerted significant negative relationship on turnover intention among healthcare employees ($\beta = -0.547$; $t = 12.344$; $p = 0.000$).

Thus, hypothesis 1 was substantiated. Similarly, psychological meaningfulness also exerted strong significant negative relationship on turnover intention among healthcare employees ($\beta = -0.239$; $t = 5.302$; $p = 0.000$). Hence hypothesis 2 was also substantiated.

Table 3: Structural Model Results with Path-Coefficient

Relationship	Model 1 (Main Effects)	Model 2 (Interaction Effects)	Decision
COM -> TI	-0.547	-0.524	Supported
PM-> TI	-0.239	-0.352	Supported
COM*PM->TI		-0.215	Supported
R ²	0.478	0.510	
Q ²	0.472	0.500	

Source: Smart PLS Computed Output (2026).

Sequel to the assessment of the significance of path coefficient of the main model, the values of R-square (R²), predictive relevance Q² and effect size was also examined. Results as presented in Table 3 above indicated that the main model explained about 47.8% of the total variance in turnover intention of healthcare employees while the remaining 52.2% is explained by the others constructs that this study does not cover. For the predictive relevance (Q²), the result in Table 3 shows that 0.472 was the value obtained which is greater than zero indicating the presence of path model predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2014).

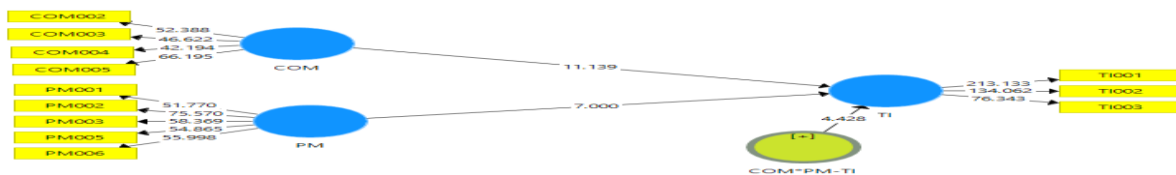


Figure 2: Results of the Structural Model with Interaction

Source: Smart PLS Computed Output, 2026.

4.3. Testing the Moderating Effect of Psychological Meaningfulness

Product-indicator approach using PLS SEM was used in testing the moderating effect of psychological meaningfulness in this study. Firstly, the direct relationship was examined where psychological meaningfulness was incorporated as an independent variable. Secondly, interaction term was created by multiplying the products of each indicator of moderating variable and exogenous latent construct. Thirdly, estimation of the standardized path coefficient was examined to ascertain the significance of the interaction effect (see Table 3 Model 2). Finally, the strength of the moderating effect was ascertained using Cohen's (1988) formula.

The hypothesis 3 of this study predicted that psychological meaningfulness would moderate the negative relationship between compensation and turnover intention of healthcare employees such that the negative relationship between compensation and turnover intention is stronger (i.e more negative) when psychological meaningfulness is high. Accordingly, the result of the interaction effect in Model



2 as shown in Table 3 above revealed a significant interaction effect between compensation and psychological meaningfulness in predicting turnover intention of healthcare employees ($\beta = -0.215$; $t = 4.428$; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was also substantiated. Moreover, Figure 2 above

shows that the pattern of interaction between compensation and psychological meaningfulness in predicting turnover intention of healthcare employees as seen in the Figure 2 depicts that the effect of compensation on turnover intention of healthcare employees is stronger (i.e more negative) when psychological meaningfulness is high than when it is low. With regards to the strength of the moderating effect, the interaction between compensation and psychological meaningfulness produced a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.065$), indicating that psychological meaningfulness explains an additional 6.5% of variance in turnover intention beyond the main effects. Although modest in magnitude, the effect is practically meaningful given the complexity of turnover behavior in healthcare settings.

4.4. Discussion of the Findings

The main objective of the study was to examine the moderation effect of psychological meaningfulness on the relationship between compensation and turnover intention of healthcare employees. Consistent with the first hypothesis, the result found a significant negative association between compensation and healthcare employee's turnover intention. This finding implied that fair and equitable compensation decreases turnover intention of healthcare employees and vice versa. The result is consistent with the previous studies of (Gong, Chang and Cheung 2010; Mensah 2014; Ekabu 2019) that found significant negative direct relationship between COM and TI. This finding also aligns with Blau (1964) Social Exchange Theory which suggests that fair and adequate compensation strengthens reciprocal organizational commitment and reduces turnover intention. On the other hand, the present result contradicted other empirical studies (Kim 2005; Chew and Chan 2008) that indicated no significant negative direct relationship between COM and TI.

The second hypothesis (H2) proposes that psychological meaningfulness is negatively and significantly related to healthcare employee's turnover intention. As expected by the study, significant negative relationship between psychological meaningfulness and employee's turnover intention was found in the present study. The result is also consistent with previous empirical findings (Prouse 2010; Suadicani, Bonde, Olesen & Gyntelberg, 2013; Huang et al., 2023). This also suggested that perception of high meaningfulness of work enhances healthcare employee's retention and organizational commitment.

Finally, the study hypothesized (H3) that psychological meaningfulness will moderate the relationship between compensation and healthcare employee's turnover intention such that the relationship will be stronger (i.e more negative) when psychological meaningfulness is higher than when it is low. Thus, result of the interaction (moderating) effect between COM and TI is empirically substantiated by the study. The finding implied that PM buffer the negative relationship between COM and TI meaning that healthcare employees with high psychological meaningfulness of work are more likely stay in their organizations than their counterparts with low psychological meaningfulness.



The overall implication of the study suggests that healthcare employee's turnover intention is conditioned by both financial rewards and psychological perception of work meaningfulness. The findings therefore underscore the importance of integrating financial reward systems with strategies that enhance employees' sense of purpose in developing healthcare employee's retention mechanisms.

4.6. Limitations of the Study and Direction for Future Research

In spite of its modest contribution, this study has several limitations that may guide future research. First the data use for the study was collected from healthcare employees from Kano State, Nigeria. Thus, the findings may not be generalized to other public sector organizations. Secondly, the study uses cross sectional survey design which makes it unable to make causal conclusions. Thus, future studies using longitudinal approach will allow for clear understanding of the direction of causality. Thirdly, the use of self-reported questionnaires for data collection may raise concern for single source issues although measures were taken to avoid common method bias therefore future studies may rely on multiple sources of data to enhance validity and reliability. Lastly, the 6.5% moderation effect found by the study is small indicating that other psychological and organizational variables may further explain healthcare employee's turnover intention, calling for future studies to examine additional potential mediators and moderators for a more robust and comprehensive healthcare employee's retention framework.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This empirical study examined the effect of compensation on healthcare employee's turnover intention and the moderation effect of psychological meaningfulness on the relationship between COM and TI. Arising from the findings that equitable compensation among healthcare employees and psychological meaningfulness separately and directly reduces turnover intention and that psychological meaningfulness buffers the direct relationship between COM and TI, the study concludes that extrinsic (i.e. financial) and intrinsic (i.e. psychological) factors complement one another in reducing healthcare employee's turnover intention. Hence the study recommends that:

1. Government should provide adequate funding to the health sector to allow for adequate and equitable compensation for healthcare employees commensurate to what is obtainable in global best practice of healthcare workers pay.
2. Healthcare organizations should endeavor to provide a working environment conducive for healthcare employees to find meaning, value and purpose in their work so as to enhance their feeling of psychological meaningfulness as a precursor for decreased turnover intention.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in this manuscript.

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