



## FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE LOYALTY OF ORGANIZATIONS IN VIETNAM

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### Abstract

The retention of the employees implies the preservation of the domain knowledge and the potential development of a company. Studies have stated that employee loyalty directly affects the retention of employees and has vital influences on the benefits of a company. Earlier studies on employee loyalty had tended to concentrate on this issue in developed countries. This paper, in contrast, tries to find out the impact of significant factors on employee loyalty and establish the relationships between them in a developing mid-income country, Vietnam. Subjects are from the metropolitan area of Ho Chi Minh City and quantitative methods are utilized. The results showed that co-workers' support has the strongest effect on employee loyalty. Surprisingly, the salary/income ranked the least significant factor on employee loyalty.

Keywords: employee loyalty, intra-organizational factors, developing country

### Introduction

With the dramatic changes in the business environment, companies are facing more diverse situations. To cope up with these challenges, companies need more experienced employees since those employees have skills and adaptability. This advantage, however, could disappear with the leave of the employees. Hence, how to retain employees, especially those with unique capabilities, has become a critical issue to the success of a business. This concept reflects what Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915) said a hundred years ago, "An ounce of loyalty is worthy of a pound of cleverness." The main reason why people continue to be

interested in employee loyalty involves its presumed relationship with the organizational outcome such as engagement, absenteeism, turnover, and job performance (Cohen, 1993; Shore et al., 1995). Since loyal employees are so crucial, creating an appropriate working environment that is conducive to maintaining employees has become the direction of the company policy.

The domestic market has been widely opened to the world since Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was introduced in 2011 and signed nine years later in 2020. RCEP became the

largest free trade economic bloc in the world since then. As one of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), WTO, and RCEP, Vietnam is facing a much more challenging and dynamic business environment where talents are scarce resources to the employers. Moreover, the market of Vietnam is booming in recent years (IMF, 2020) and loyal employee becomes a noteworthy issue than ever before. Retention of employees has become one of the key survival points for a business in Vietnam. Therefore, the business must devote more effort to identify and evaluate the factors of employee loyalty and adjust the company policy to the macro-economic surroundings.

#### Literature Review

Loyalty is a person's devotion and faithfulness to a particular object, which could be a person, a group, a duty, a cause, or ideals. Ewin (1992) puts it, loyalty "is the rawest expression of our social nature," and without it "groups would not be formed and we shall all be isolated asocial atoms." Consequently, loyalty is "an essential ingredient in any civilized and humane system of morals" (Ladd, 1967). In a word, loyalty expresses itself in both thought and action and strives for the identification of the interests of the loyal person with those of the object. Employee loyalty means that employees stay with the firm even if other employers would be more attractive (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). According to Allen and Grisaffe (2001), employee loyalty is a psychological state. It characterizes the relationship of an employee with the organization for which they work and thus has implications for their decision to remain with

the organization. In summary, employee loyalty is a psychological attachment to the organization, and under this atmosphere, the employee believes strongly in organizational goals, values, and development.

Loyal employees provide different benefits for an organization (Reichheld 1996; McCarthy 1997; Harter et al., 2009). Loyal employees would have a higher possibility to defend the organization against criticism, emphasize the positive aspects of the organization, and refrain from complaining about the organization (Moorman and Blakely, 1995), a stronger desire to identification attachment and want to maintain membership of the organization, (Arthur, 1994; Akerlof and Kranton, 2005; Chen et al. 2016), lower rate of mobility and employee turnover (Guthrie, 2001, Antoncic and Antoncic, 2011, Alfes et al., 2012), greater efficiency and productivity (Robinson, 2008, Biron, 2010), better business performance and firm growth (Meyer and Allen, 1997), customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and ultimately firm profitability (Yee et al., 2010). Some other loyal employees' benefits to the company are positive word-of-mouth (Ogbonna and Harris, 2013), greater motivation, and trust (Alkire, 2005; Finnis, 2011, Elegido, 2013).

Although the relationship between employee loyalty and potential factors had been studied widely, there is no single way to describe it comprehensively, especially for different countries, cultures, or organizations. Among the factors, the salary/income is the fundamental one. Salary/income is an essential issue to an employee because it represents living standards and abilities to

some extent. Employees in a developing country like Vietnam are usually retained through competitive salary and bonus systems. In the Job Happiness Index Report conducted by JobStreet.com and jobsDB (2016), over 50,000 respondents in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia were asked to vote for the top factors that would increase their job satisfaction and loyalty. The results indicated that “salary increase” was the factor with the highest votes across the board. A similar result was also found in the earlier study of Xu (2009) where the study showed that the salary distribution and performance evaluation voted the highest and working condition as the second-highest in fourteen possible factors and there is a positive association between salary satisfaction and the loyalty and performance (Acker, 2004).

Employees would like to stay in a workplace full of pleasant relationships with others to perform their tasks and hope to have the opportunities to develop with the organization together. Regarding employee loyalty, the factors like a congruous goal/ development, working conditions, the relationships with co-workers and supervisors are often mentioned. Mahen (1993) used both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze the factors on the loyalty of knowledge employees. His study indicated that the four most important factors are individual development, job autonomy, job achievement, and wealth. Both studies of Drummond and Stoddard (1991) and Williams and Luthans (1992) also mentioned dimensions like payment, job characteristics, working conditions, management policies, relationships with co-workers and su-

perisors, and the nature of the job itself are significant to employee loyalty. The positive relationship between development practices and employee behaviors is not a coincidence. Many studies have found similar relationships between organizational interventions and employee attitudes and behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Their study showed that development opportunities induce positive employee attitudes and behaviors toward the organization. The different generations, however, could think differently about loyalty. Hamori et al. (2015) point out that the young professionals job-hunt routinely and are not averse to job-hopping. The professionals do not see frequent jumps across employers in a negative view. Human resources practices, such as training to help develop employee’s careers and to help them get on in the organization, and personal development plans, are most effective in dissuading employees from looking for other opportunities. As for the case in Vietnam, Khuong et al. (2015) studied the effects of support from supervisors on loyalty in marketing agencies and found that ethical leadership and job promotion have a positive effect on loyalty.

Reward fairness is one of the issues considered a lot in the previous studies. Fair reward exists when the workers were rewarded worthily with the work pressure and the mission completed (Netemeyer et al. 1997). While, inequity occurs when an individual perceives that the ratio of his or her outcomes to inputs is not equal to the ratio of some referent other, such as a colleague (Adams 1965). The unfair reward may cause dissatisfaction and management difficulties to the organization while a fair reward system can create more emotionally at-

tached employees for an organization (Awwad and Agti, 2011). Sharma et al. (2009) investigate the relationship between perceived fairness and the corporate ethical value and indicate that fairness plays a moderating role on the corporate ethical value while Colquitt and Rodell (2015) treat fairness in pay as a mediating role of affective commitment. The employees in different cultures could have different perceptions of fairness. The effects of fairness on the sales personnel in Japan are studied by Dubinsky et al. (1993). Their findings indicate that fairness has an impact on Japanese sales personnel. As to empowerment, the effects on loyalty varies between the studies. Niehoff et al. (2001) investigated the influences of empowerment and job enrichment on loyalty behaviors and found out that empowerment doesn't have a direct effect on loyalty but indirectly. The study from Kuo et al. (2010), however, argued that job characteristics and employee empowerment are critical features to enhance higher employee commitment and loyalty.

Even though the issues of employee loyalty had been studied a lot in the past, the study about employee loyalty in Vietnamese organizations is patchy. Due to the fast-developing pace in Vietnam and the distinctions from other places, the establishment of the relationship between employee loyalty and factors becomes necessary and urgent. In this study, the proposed factors were selected and developed based on the literature, interview, feedback from local workers, and the Vietnamese current economic situations. The factors and their abbreviations are listed as follows: salary/income (SLY), working conditions (CND), congruous development (DVP),

support from supervisors (SSV), support from colleagues (SCL), reward fairness (RWF), empowerment (EMP), and employee loyalty (LTY). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

- H1: Salary/income has a positive relationship with employee loyalty.
- H2: Working conditions have a positive relationship with employee loyalty.
- H3: Congruous development has a positive relationship with employee loyalty.
- H4: Support from supervisors has a positive relationship with employee loyalty.
- H5: Support from colleagues has a positive relationship with employee loyalty.
- H6: Reward fairness has a positive relationship with employee loyalty.
- H7: Empowerment has a positive relationship with employee loyalty.

#### Research Process and Questionnaire Structure

In this study, subjects are those who currently work in the companies and meanwhile study at night at four universities in the metropolitan area of Ho Chi Minh City. The questionnaire was collected using two ways: distributed the paper copy to the students and send the survey to the student's e-mail address. A multi-stage process was undertaken to construct the questionnaire and the analysis. (1) To ensure all the items of the questionnaire are fully understood, a pilot test was utilized to identify the ambiguity, and the correction was made if it

is necessary. In this stage, 23 managers and employees were selected and interviewed. Through a bilateral discussion, the possible requirements and expectations were drawn and transformed as the potential factors in the questionnaire. The data collected in the pilot test are used in the reliability test. According to the Cronbach's Alpha value, observed variables are determined to be kept or removed. (2) After correcting the questionnaire, the authors obtained the official questionnaire and started the survey. (3) The research was conducted using quantitative statistical methods such as factor analysis, correlation analysis, t-test, ANOVA, and regression analysis.

The questionnaire includes two parts: (1) assessment of employees' perception and loyalty, (2) demographic information of the respondents. In the first part, a five-point Likert scale (1: Totally Disagree, and 5: Totally Agree) was used to measure the observed variables. As the Likert scale is a type of interval scale, it can be employed to analyze the collected data to identify the correlation and the regression relationship among independent and dependent variables. A total of twenty-six questions are categorized into seven dimensions with question size in parenthesis, salary/income (3), working conditions (4), congruous development (4), support from supervisors (3), support from colleagues (2), reward fairness (5), and empowerment (5) to find out the effects of the factors on employee loyalty (3). Three questions are used to define employee loyalty in this study. In the second part, the demographic profile was categorized according to gender, age, education level, and job position.

## Results

Six hundred questionnaires were released and 147 of them were discarded due to incomplete information. The final valid respondents are 453. Among them, 62.5% are female and 77.9% are below 30 years old. The subjects aged more than 41 years are only 2.2% and merged with the group aged from 31 to 40. The new group is renamed as "31 or more". The majority, 62.3%, have a bachelor's degree and of university or higher. 69.1% of the respondents serve as staff while 18.5% are professionals and for managers, 12.4% as shown in Table 1.

Factor analysis extracted six factors from 26 observation variables. The factors of "support from colleagues" and "support from supervisors" were combined and renamed as "support from co-workers (SCW)" to preserve the original meaning. In this stage, question 1 in item "empowerment" was removed from the scale due to the low loading factor. The factor analysis was conducted again and the results showed that total variance extracted from the six factors, with eigenvalues greater than 1, is equal to 69.38% as shown in Table 2. The highest contribution to employee loyalty is "reward fairness", explained by 38.068% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 9.517. "Empowerment" is listed as the second-largest contribution which accounts for 8.283% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 2.071, followed by "support from co-workers", "working conditions", "congruous development" and "salary/income".

The co-workers' support explains 8.025 % of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 2.006; the working conditions explain 5.968% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 1.492; the congruous development explains

Table 1. Demographic profile

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	170	37.5
	Female	283	62.5
Age	below 30	353	77.9
	31 and more	100	22.1
Education Level	High school	35	7.7
	2-year college	53	11.7
	3-year college	83	18.3
	4-year University and higher	282	62.3
Job Position	Staff	313	69.1
	Professionals	84	18.5
	Manager	56	12.4

4.671% with an eigenvalue of 1.492 and the salary/income explains 4.365% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 1.091. All the factor loadings range from 0.533 to 0.930 and exceed the requirement of 0.4. Besides, Bartlett's test of sphericity  $\chi^2 = 6680.4$  with a significance level of  $p = 0.000$  and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.909 suggesting the appropriateness of the factor analysis.

A reliability test was conducted to check the validity of the questionnaire scale. The Cronbach's alphas for the factors are 0.928 (reward fairness), 0.835 (empowerment), 0.826 (support from colleagues), 0.821 (working conditions), 0.788 (congruous development), and 0.759 (salary/income). These values indicate that the measurement is compositely reliable and internally consistent.

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Employee's Loyalty

Items	Factor Loadings	Ei- gen-valu es	Variance explained (%)	Cumulative Variance (%)	Cronbach's alpha
Reward Fairness	.930	9.517	38.068	38.068	0.928
	.870				
	.812				
	.775				
Empowerment	.740	2.071	8.283	46.351	0.870
	.903				
	.823				
	.771				
Support From	.653	2.006	8.025	54.376	0.826
	.815				
	.766				
	.678				

Co-workers	.653 .594				
Working Conditions	.863 .812 .729 .533	1.492	5.968	60.344	0.821
Congruous Development	.715 .701 .670 .543	1.168	4.671	65.015	0.788
Salary/Income	.755 .693 .654	1.091	4.365	69.380	0.759

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients ( $r$ ) indicate the relationships among construct factors and employee loyalty and are shown in Table 3. The results show that positive and significant relationships ( $p < 0.01$ ) exist between all six factors and employee loyalty. Among the factors, the “support from co-workers” and “congruous development” have the highest correlation to loyalty with coefficients of  $r = 0.579$  and  $r = 0.572$  respectively, and followed by “fair reward” with  $r = 0.530$ , “empowerment” with  $r = 0.525$ , “working conditions” with  $r = 0.458$ , and “salary” with

$r = 0.404$ . The correlation indicates that an increase in these six factors would lead to an increase in employee loyalty. The correlation indicates that an increase in these six factors would lead to an increase in employee loyalty. The coefficients of correlation are the validity evidence and reliability of measurement scales used in this research. Regarding the average scores in the dimensions, “congruous development” ranks the highest and is followed by “support from co-workers” and “empowerment” while the “salary/income” has the lowest average among these factors.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviation and Correlation Matrix

Construct	Mean	SD	LYT	SLY	CND	DVP	SCW	RWF
LYT	3.58	1.08						
SLY	2.98	1.09	0.404**					
CND	3.49	1.02	0.458**	0.369**				
DVP	3.73	0.89	0.572**	0.362**	0.486**			
SCW	3.59	0.90	0.579**	0.336**	0.425**	0.566**		
RWF	3.27	1.12	0.530**	0.537**	0.395**	0.510**	0.561**	
EMP	3.50	1.08	0.525**	0.289**	0.321**	0.465**	0.509**	0.516**

\*\* :  $p < 0.01$

The influences of age and gender on employee loyalty are not significant according to the t-test. The results of ANOVA, however, show that the educa-

tion level and job position have significant influences on employee loyalty. The employees with a 4-year university degree have the lowest employee loyalty

comparing to other employees. From the multiple comparisons, the employees with a postgraduate degree have the highest loyalty to the organization and are followed by the employees with a 3-year college degree. The employees who worked as managers or professionals have higher loyalty than the staff employees.

All the factors were entered when regression analysis was conducted. The results of multiple regression analysis (Table 4) reveals that the adjusted R<sup>2</sup>= 0.475 with F=69.000 (0.000) indicating 47.5% of the variance of the loyalty is explained by the 6 independent variables. All the factors proposed in this research have a significant influence on employee loyalty as their p-values are all smaller than 0.05. The standardized coefficients of the factors in the regression are as following: income/salary ( $\beta$ =.098), working conditions ( $\beta$ =.127), congruous development ( $\beta$ =.226), support from

colleagues ( $\beta$ =.239), reward fairness ( $\beta$ =.118), and empowerment ( $\beta$ =.115). The results show that a higher salary, more favorable working conditions, a congruous development between company and employee's career plan, a higher level of support from co-workers, empowerment, and a fair reward system a company constructs will result in a higher employee's loyalty. The VIFs of all independent variables show that the collinearity doesn't exist in the regression model. It indicates that the collinearity relationship between the independent variables doesn't have a significant impact on the regression model. Based on the Beta coefficients, the factor of "support from co-workers" has the highest influence on employee loyalty, followed by congruous development and working conditions. The income/salary has the lowest influence level on employee loyalty.

Table 4. Results of Regression Analysis

	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	p-value.	VIF
Constants	-.013	.185		-0.069	.945	
Income/salary	.097	.041	.098	2.373	.018	1.472
Working conditions	.134	.043	.127	3.098	.002	1.437
Congruous development	.272	.055	.226	4.936	.000	1.796
Support from co-workers	.285	.056	.239	5.131	.000	1.861
Reward fairness	.115	.047	.118	2.419	.016	2.049
Empowerment	.119	.044	.115	2.703	.007	1.555
R square				.482		
Adjusted R square				.475		
F(p-value)				69.000 (.000)		

Dependent variable: Employee Loyalty

#### Discussion and Implication

Prior research has not adequately addressed the potential factors on em-

ployee loyalty in a developing country like Vietnam. To address this research void, the current study randomly selected 453 subjects from the big area of

Ho Chi Minh City to develop the factors-loyalty relation. The discussions are as follows.

The results suggest that the relationship between co-workers plays a vital role in employee loyalty. Regardless of whether the support or care comes from, it has a positive influence on employee loyalty. At work, managers provide experiences, technical capabilities, and enthusiasm to support subordinates. Understanding subordinates' difficulties and needs can effectively win their hearts and loyalty. Through this approach, employees have mutual understanding and realize the contributions the individuals provide for the company. The company can devote some efforts to understand employees' lives or families to create a harmonious atmosphere between individuals, families, and the company. Besides, the human resources management department can organize some entertainment activities to commemorate special events, and create a friendly environment to enhance loyalty.

The company has better set clear development goals, take necessary communication and explanations so that employees can understand and cooperate with the company's long-term and short-term goals. This work is of great significance because it helps employees to understand the company's future direction. At this point, the human resource management department not only engages in manpower planning but also facilitates employees to achieve the company's goal.

A concern-free working condition is essential to employees. In particular, a safe environment, such as a clean, pollution-free, pleasant temperature, and

bright, where employees can feel at ease to work. After all, a better working environment has a positive image from first sight. Vietnam is a middle-income developing country. The establishment of working conditions is not thorough yet. The company's spontaneous attention and initiative improvement will be a hot spot in recruiting new employees and persuasive in retaining talented workers. All these activities not only can boost employee morale but also can enable employees to concentrate their attention and talents on the production activities and job effectiveness. Ultimately, the company is also one part of the beneficiaries.

A company should do its best to evaluate the performance fairly. A fair reward system referred to work needs, personal skill level, and effectiveness will make employees feel satisfied. Besides, companies must provide equal opportunities for all the employees. When employees realize that the reward decision is fair or are treated specially for outstanding performance, employee loyalty will be increased.

It is beneficial to have an appropriate empowerment system. Empowerment implies greater training, responsibilities, challenges, and authority at the time of allocating and implementing tasks. When it is available, employees are allowed to decide on their own. In this way, employees will have the opportunity to solve the problem independently and learn how to grow. A company must realize that sometimes making acceptable mistakes is some kind of growth and progress.

Furthermore, companies need to establish a competitive remuneration sys-

tem although this study demonstrates that salary/income ranks the least influence on employee loyalty. In general, employees compare their tasks and incomes with those of others. Hence, it is required to offer a reasonable salary level referring to the company's location, market condition, manpower need, job complexity, and living standards. An unfair salary could cause dissatisfied employees and the plight of declining loyalty. Therefore, it is better for the company to periodically assess the salary of the employees.

The findings bear some managerial implications for companies in Vietnam. The subjects with a 4-year university degree have the lowest loyalty to the organization comparing to other degrees. The possible reason could be that the employees with a 4-year university degree have more opportunities to get a new job and cause lower employee loyalty. To prevent this phenomenon, the company could elevate these employees' empowerment, authority, and honor to fulfill their missions. An unexpected result was that salary/income ranked the least significant on loyalty within the factors. The reason could be that the compensation packages offered by companies are not considerably different from each other or what the employee expected. Therefore, the employee's attention is focused on other issues, such as co-workers' support or career development.

#### Conclusion and Limitations

Talented workers have always been one of the most important issues in the success of a business. To a company's sustainable development, it is worthy to investigate the potential factors on

employee loyalty and further distinguishing the priorities of these factors. This study collected the responses from the metropolitan area of Ho Chi Minh city and used statistical approaches to develop the relationship between the intra-organizational factors and employee loyalty. The findings confirm that all proposed hypotheses and the factors have significant influences on employee loyalty. The study demonstrated that support from co-workers plays the most crucial role in employee loyalty. It is worthy to establishing a friendly internal communication atmosphere where co-workers care and concern about each other.

Since the respondents are those who live in the area of Ho Chi Minh city, the suggestions are suitable to places with similar working environments only. The applications to other places should be used with caution. Some other factors like social image, hygiene, or company regulations are not included in this study. These factors can be considered in future studies.

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