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**Exploring HR Strategies To Reduce Voluntary  
Turnover In SMEs: A Study of Dubai, UAE**

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## **Abstract**

### **Purpose**

The study analyzes the factors contributing to voluntary employee turnover in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Dubai, UAE, and develops strategic intervention measures to address voluntary employee turnover. The mixed-methods design has been used, which combines both quantitative research methodology and the mixed research approach to data collection and analysis.

### **Design/Method/Approach**

The mixed-methods design has been used, which combines both quantitative research methodology and the mixed research approach to data collection and analysis. Purposive sampling was used to gather and record the responses of 378 SME workers (responding to an online questionnaire); five key informants were selected, namely owners, managers, and older employees (from 11 different SMEs), to attend semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were measured with the help of SPSS version 26; data in the form of qualitative interviews were coded and analyzed with NVivo version 14 Premium.

### **Findings**

The findings named a range of internal strategic factors, such as performance appraisal ( $B = 0.114$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ), career growth ( $B = 0.123$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ), and fair recruitment ( $B = 0.142$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), to play a significant role in the voluntary turnover. Health and social conditions ( $B = -0.193$ ,  $p = -0.000$ ), employment alternatives ( $B = -0.125$ ,  $p = -0.013$ ), and economic conditions ( $B = -0.169$ ,  $p = -0.001$ ) were also positively associated with turnover. The research has also found that internal strategies and organizational culture do not affect turnover unless they are strengthened by external strategies, except in health and social aspects ( $p = 0.027$ ).

### **Practical Implications**

Overall, this research highlights the importance of implementing strategic human resource practices in accordance with external environmental problems to reduce voluntary turnover in small and medium-sized firms, while also identifying the moderating role of organizational culture.

*Keywords:* Career growth, Cultural Diversity, Economic Aspects, Employment Options, Fair Recruitment, Health and Social, Organizational Culture, Performance Appraisal, Remuneration, Small and Medium Enterprises, Training and Development, United Arab Emirates

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Employee turnover is a significant business issue worldwide, as it compromises the performance, productivity, and sustainability of organizations (Kwon and Chiho, 2021, pp. 3-30). An increasing number of Dubai owners from the smallest and medium-sized companies (SME) recognize the strategic role that their workforce plays in the success of organizations, as well as employee role in that success (Umair and Dilanchiev, 2022, p. 683). Voluntary turnover happens when an employee decides to end employment; the most common reasons why people leave include the urge to pursue a job opportunity or because of dissatisfaction with where he is, or personal factors. This kind of such voluntary moves has negative effects on organizational processes, investment in employee recruitment, and training, and low productivity (Al-Darmaki, 2023, p. 22). In Dubai's competitive environment, understanding the causes of voluntary turnover is essential for SMEs seeking to retain talent and remain resilient (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021, pp. 1–10). Some of the SMEs within Dubai have reduced employee turnover through nurturing congenial working environments, offering work-life balance, and respecting normal working hours (Roopnah and Sanmukhiya, 2018). Successful hiring, systematic skill training, fair pay and career advancements are also seen to be key retention drivers. The practices will help the SMEs better adjust to the changing situation of the city concerning business. Also, employee recognition, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and engagement strategies are essential elements in creating and maintaining the stability of employees (Bagaskara et. al., 2021, p. 82). Work employee engagement within organizations does not rely on material rewards but cultivates an environment that penetrates the extent of commitment to both their tasks and the overall organizational aim, thus curbing the turnover level (Abraham et al., 2023, p. 2). Feedback, mentorship, skills development (provided on a regular basis with the help of staff) further facilitate employee retention (Bernard, 2017, p. 38). Interestingly enough, the turnover rate in the UAE warrants above-average ratings currently, with 74 percent of the employees considering a job change because of the lack of benefits (Maceda, 2022, p. 1). This tendency causes significant financial problems to SMEs, which is why it is quite expensive to replace the talent, and it is imperative to implement effective retention practices (DTarar, 2021, p. 1).

### 1.1 Research Objectives:

The current research aims not only at exploring the multicausal and multifactorial factors that drive employee turnover in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), but also at defining the possible strategic interventions aimed to reduce the rate and the effects of turnover on the organizational environment. The main tasks of the research are explained as it follows.

#### Objective One

To investigate the effect of internal strategies, i.e., performance appraisal, remuneration, training and development, career growth, fair recruitment, and cultural diversity, on reducing the voluntary employee turnover rate in SMEs in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE.

#### Objective Two

To identify the effect of external strategies, i.e., health and social, employment options, and economic aspects, on reducing the voluntary employee turnover rate in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE.

#### Objective Three

To assess the ranking order of internal and external strategies for reducing the voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE.

#### Objective Four

To analyze the moderating effect of organizational cultural practices on the relationship between internal variables (performance appraisal, remuneration, training and development, career growth, fair recruitment, and cultural diversity) and voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE.

#### Objective Five

To analyze the moderating effect of organizational cultural practices on the relationship between external variables (health and social, employment options, economic aspects), and voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE.

#### Objective Six

To investigate the effect of employee age group on voluntary employee turnover rate in SMEs in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE.

#### Objective Seven

To investigate the effect of employee work tenure on voluntary employee turnover rate in SMEs in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE.

### **1.2 Research Questions:**

Research questions are essential unit that guides the research process, and it correlates with the general goals of the research (Bouchrika, 2023). The current study will focus on voluntary staff turnover in small or medium sized enterprises (SMEs) located in the Emirate of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Based on this the following research questions have been formulated to guide and inform the empirical investigation:

#### Question One

How do internal strategies such as performance appraisal, remuneration, training and development, career growth and promotion, fair recruitment, and cultural diversity reduce voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai?

#### Question Two

How do external strategies, such as health and social, employment options, and economic aspects, reduce voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE?

#### Question Three

How do internal and external strategies for reducing voluntary employee turnover rank in importance, especially in Dubai, UAE SMEs?

#### Question Four

To what extent do organizational cultural practices moderate the relationship between the internal variables (performance appraisal, remuneration, training and development, career growth, fair recruitment, cultural diversity) and voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in the Emirate of Dubai, UAE?

#### Question Five

To what extent do organizational cultural practices moderate the relationship between external variables (health and social, employment options, economic aspects) and voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE?

#### Question Six

Does employee age group impact voluntary employee turnover rates in SMEs in the Emirate of Dubai?

#### Question Seven

Does employee tenure impact on voluntary employee turnover rates in SMEs in the Emirate of Dubai?

The research questions act as a foundational framework, facilitating the analysis of strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover. Specifically, they enable an assessment of the methods employed by SMEs in Dubai to mitigate turnover challenges. Such a structured approach helps in mitigating the negative implications of voluntary turnover within SMEs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the relevant theoretical tools related to employee motivation and retention, with special consideration to those factors that curtail volunteer turnover in organizational cultures. By relying on available academic sources, the current investigation emphasizes the contributory role of both internal and external motivators in achieving decreased turnover.

### 2.1 Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory highlights the significance of employee development, skills, and knowledge in reducing turnover (Kryscynski et al., 2020). Becker (1964) argues that investment in training benefits both employees and organizations (Mahmud, 2022). However, retention depends not only on training but also on complementary strategies like career development. Research confirms that employees who perceive investment in their growth show higher commitment and satisfaction (Nguyen, 2020). In Dubai's SMEs, personalized training aligned with individual goals encourage loyalty (Valk, 2023), though findings may be context specific. Tailored learning programs enhance competencies and reduce turnover by decreasing the appeal of external opportunities (Tian, 2020; Baka, 2023).

### 2.2 Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory explains how employees are motivated when they believe their efforts lead to desired outcomes (Vroom, 1964; Daouk-Oyry et al., 2023). In SMEs, particularly in Dubai, a clear link between performance and rewards is crucial (Song et al., 2020). Empirical studies show that aligning performance with incentives increases retention (Ali and Anwar, 2021; Kargwell, 2012). Linking rewards and promotions to achievement stimulate fairness and commitment (Jufrizen and Kandhita, 2021). Defining career paths and fair compensation enhances motivation and reduces turnover in competitive markets like Dubai (Marcela-Sefora and Dan-Cristian, 2021; Mumtaz, 2020).

### 2.3 Job Embeddedness Theory

Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) focuses on how employee retention is influenced by connections (links), job fit, and the perceived cost of leaving. Strong workplace and community ties reduce turnover (Ampofo and Karatepe, 2022; Schaack, 2020). Aligning employee strengths with roles enhances satisfaction and embeddedness (Shen, 2019). In Dubai's diverse labor market, encouraging a sense of community and job-person fit discourages exits and strengthens retention (Yu, 2020; Al-Shami, 2019).

## **2.4 Psychological Contract Theory**

Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1989) centers on the implicit expectations between employees and employers. Breaches of these expectations increase turnover intentions (Sandeepanie, 2023). Fulfilled psychological contracts promote satisfaction and loyalty (Noble-Nkrumah et al., 2022; Saeed, 2020). In Dubai's competitive environment, transparent communication, fairness, and trust are essential for maintaining positive psychological contracts (Herrera and Heras-Rosas, 2021; Chagadama and Luamba, 2022).

## **2.5 Social Exchange Theory**

Social Exchange Theory suggests that employees reciprocate fair treatment and support with loyalty and reduced turnover (Ng, 2020). Creating a culture of mutual respect and appreciation increases employee commitment (Fauchil, 2020; Presslee and Richins, 2023). Perceived organizational support is linked to higher retention (Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019). In Dubai, SMEs can reduce turnover by recognizing contributions and promoting a supportive environment (Dutt and Harvey, 2022).

## **2.6 Job Characteristics Model**

The Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) proposes that five job traits—skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—enhance motivation and satisfaction. These factors are linked to lower turnover (Singh and Khan, 2016; Omar, 2022). In Dubai SMEs, job designs that offer autonomy, purpose, and growth opportunities improve retention (Saragih and Margaretha, 2021; Yadav, 2023). Aligning job roles with employee strengths supports UAE's knowledge-based development goals and reduces turnover (Memon, 2021; Colombo and Boffelli, 2023).

## **2.7 Cultural and Contextual Theories**

Cultural and contextual theories offer insight into employee behavior in Dubai's unique socio-cultural and legal environment (Bray, 2022). Frameworks such as Hofstede's and Trompenaars' cultural dimensions explain how local values shape workplace expectations (Ylikortes, 2020). Retention strategies that align with Emirati and multicultural norms—such as family-oriented policies—enhance loyalty and reduce turnover (Belkharchiche, 2021; Triguero-Sánchez, 2022). SMEs that adapt to local customs and workforce diversity are better positioned to retain talent.

## **2.8 Organizational Support Theory (OST)**

Organizational Support Theory (OST) asserts that employees who feel valued and supported are more committed and less likely to leave (Imran, 2020). Material and emotional support—such as fair treatment, work-life balance, and development opportunities—enhance satisfaction and reduce turnover (Uddin, 2021). In Dubai’s competitive labor market, perceived organizational support encourages discretionary effort and long-term retention (Jehanzeb, 2020; Anthony, 2023). OST aligns with national goals promoting worker well-being and development (Jawali, 2021), offering SMEs a clear framework to build loyalty and reduce voluntary turnover through supportive, equitable workplace practices.

### **Global Internal Strategies to Reduce Voluntary Employee Turnover in SMEs**

Globally, SMEs apply a range of internal measures to reduce turnover. In China, internal CSR—fair treatment, ethical practices, and work-life balance—significantly lowers turnover intentions, consistent with Social Identity and Social Exchange Theories (Zhang, 2021, pp. 1–3). Leadership also proves critical. Research in Pakistan shows that open communication, supportive environments, rewards, and development opportunities enhance retention (Tarar, 2021). U.S. staffing firms emphasize employee appreciation, professional growth, and communication (Johnson, 2023), echoing findings that recognition strengthens commitment (Yildiz et al., 2020). Core determinants include remuneration, training, performance appraisal, cultural diversity, career growth, and fair recruitment (Sorn et al., 2023; Na-Nan and Sanamthong, 2020; Asiaei and Jusoh, 2022; Lee et al., 2020; Haryono et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2023). Together, these factors build stability and reduce turnover.

#### **Remuneration and Incentives:**

Competitive pay and performance-based rewards remain central to retention, reflecting Herzberg’s hygiene factors and Equity Theory (Hajiali et al., 2022; Wahjoedi, 2021; Fulmer et al., 2023). While financial incentives enhance satisfaction, their effectiveness varies. For example, U.S. and Hungarian SMEs highlight engagement and flexible work arrangements alongside financial rewards (Bell, 2022; Berke et al., 2023; Braganza, 2021).

#### **Training and Development:**

Research underscores the critical role of training and development in enhancing employee performance and reducing turnover. Workplace training equips managers to guide employees effectively and boosts overall organizational productivity (Na-Nan and Sanamthong, 2020; Haralayya, 2021). Training programs and workshops improve skills, strengthen morale, and support retention (Engler et al., 2023),

with newly hired staff benefiting from job-specific training and lower-performing employees from targeted interventions. In manufacturing and technology-driven contexts, training also promotes technological competence and digital awareness, which proved especially crucial during crises such as the pandemic (Margherita and Bua, 2021; Federica, 2018). Training contributes most effectively to retention when implemented fairly, with equal access to learning opportunities reinforcing trust and commitment through organizational justice (Nzonzo and Plessis, 2020; Khan et al., 2020). However, training can also increase employees' marketability, potentially encouraging external mobility in competitive labor markets (Jannat, 2021). While both training and career development reduce turnover, evidence suggests that performance-based rewards often have a stronger impact, and insufficient training or limited promotion prospects can heighten dissatisfaction and turnover risk (Gautam, 2016).

### **Performance Appraisal:**

Performance-based appraisal motivates employees, raises efficiency, and reduces turnover. Incentives, recognition, and financial benefits directly improve satisfaction and retention (Kadir et al., 2023; Dommett and Gardner, 2020). For SMEs, appraisals are crucial motivators, particularly during crises when turnover is high (Asiaei and Jusoh, 2022). Appraisal systems must be transparent, as timely evaluations and feedback influence employees' decisions to stay or leave (Lee and Jimenez, 2011; Lemma, 2019).

### **Cultural Diversity:**

Promoting diversity improves productivity and reduces turnover by promoting collaboration and innovation (Lee and Kim, 2020; Pessacha and Singer, 2020; Hai et al., 2020). Diverse teams enhance knowledge sharing and problem-solving, aligning operations with strategic goals. However, diversity may also reduce job satisfaction and commitment if poorly managed, leading to higher turnover (Choi, 2008; Rukumba, 2016). Effective diversity management, grounded in fairness and equality, is therefore critical to retention.

### **Career Growth:**

Career advancement opportunities are key to motivation and retention. Fair and transparent promotion systems align employee expectations with organizational goals, reduce dissatisfaction, and encourage loyalty (Haryono et al., 2020; Davidescu and Apostu, 2020). Job security and promotion—supported by classic motivational theories—are strong predictors of reduced turnover (Bhardwaj et al., 2020). Career management, including clear pathways and mentorship, strengthens employees'

psychological attachment to the organization, lowering their intention to leave (Armour and Sako, 2020; Nawa, 2016). Overall, training, appraisal, diversity, and career growth reinforce employee commitment when implemented fairly and transparently. Yet, these strategies must be integrated with organizational culture and leadership to ensure sustainable retention.

#### **Fair Recruitment Procedures:**

Ethical and transparent recruitment is vital for attracting skilled candidates, promoting diversity, and reducing turnover. Providing equal opportunities for locals and expatriates enhances competitiveness, productivity, and cultural inclusion (Chen et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2022), while fair hiring promotes job satisfaction, teamwork, and lower conflict (Moore, 2020; Park et al., 2017). Recruiting based on skills and expertise secures motivated, career-oriented employees, and combining this with clear job descriptions, unbiased advertisements, mentorship programs, and equality-based policies further strengthens engagement and knowledge transfer (Bisht et al., 2023; Oginni et al., 2023; Hookmani et al., 2021; Bhargava et al., 2023). However, recruitment alone cannot guarantee retention; workplace climate, management style, and career development often have a greater impact on long-term commitment (Schlachter et al., 2019). Poor recruitment, by contrast, increases costs, dissatisfaction, and disputes (Martins et al., 2023; Samson et al., 2023). Considering employee expectations, such as flexible schedules and promotion opportunities, is therefore essential, particularly for contractual staff (McDonnell et al., 2021). In sum, fair recruitment builds a competent workforce and improves performance when supported by growth opportunities and a positive work environment.

#### **Global External Strategies to Reduce Employee Turnover Intention:**

External factors—health, social support, employment alternatives, and economic conditions—strongly influence voluntary turnover. Employee well-being, compensation, workload, and work-life balance are decisive in retention (Kurian et al., 2021). Social support and emotional intelligence also reduce turnover by improving job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Balogun and Olowodunoye, 2012; Skelton et al., 2020). Proper socialization strengthens employee integration, while poor physical or mental health increases turnover risk (Kurniawaty et al., 2019). Thus, global strategies must prioritize employee health, social inclusion, and supportive work cultures alongside competitive employment practices. By addressing these external factors, organizations can significantly lower turnover intentions and sustain a committed, high-performing workforce.

### **Employment Options:**

Employment options extend beyond working hours and tasks to include preferences for flexible arrangements (Bielenski and Wagner, 2003). Factors such as childcare facilities, tax laws, social security, long hours, and work-life balance significantly influence employment rates. Parents with young children, especially single mothers, often struggle to balance childcare and work, forcing many to leave jobs (Qiany and Fuller, 2020). During COVID-19, unemployment rose sharply as parents—mainly mothers—left work to manage childcare and homeschooling (Petts et al., 2020). Thus, limited employment options increase turnover, though cultural differences exist. For example, Western societies offered more remote work opportunities, enabling parents to maintain employment while balancing family life.

### **Economic Aspects:**

Job dissatisfaction arises not only from lack of firm-specific capital but also from economic, psychological, and social pressures (Winne et al., 2019). Shifts in global labor markets, particularly due to technological change, alter turnover patterns and working methods (Nguyen et al., 2020). These trends highlight the need to study how evolving economic and social norms influence turnover and labor productivity.

### **Organizational Culture as a Moderating Variable:**

Organizational culture shapes the relationship between employee performance and outcomes such as compensation, commitment, and turnover (Nabella et al., 2023). Strong learning cultures, supported by training and collaboration, lower turnover by improving skills and engagement (Dewi et al., 2022; Lin and Huang). Societal cultural practices also influence appraisal systems, absenteeism, and turnover across regions (Peretz et al., 2012). Demographics—such as age, tenure, and job position—interact with culture to affect organizational commitment and retention (Chen, 2000). Collectivist cultures are linked to stronger employee satisfaction and commitment, reducing turnover (Triguero-Sánchez et al.). Cultures that support work-life balance and provide career opportunities also reduce exit risks associated with low pay or poor management (Guzeller et al.). HRM practices, particularly fair recruitment, further enhance cultural alignment and minimize turnover (Basnyat et al., 2020).

### **Age and Tenure as Control Variables:**

Age and tenure, though controlled in analysis, can still influence turnover outcomes (Zeiler, 2022). Research shows mixed effects: while some studies find no significant impact of demographic characteristics such as age or marital status on turnover (Belete, 2018), others indicate variation. *Age*.

Older employees often report higher dissatisfaction compared to younger staff at early career stages, who tend to be highly motivated and eager to learn (Hashiguchi, 2020). *Tenure*. Longer tenure is associated with satisfaction and retention, while limited benefits and poor policies lower both tenure and commitment (Pullen et al., 2023; Yan and Khan, 2023). Firms that offer supportive environments, sustainable opportunities, and fair benefits improve tenure rates and reduce voluntary turnover.

#### **Gap in the Literature Review:**

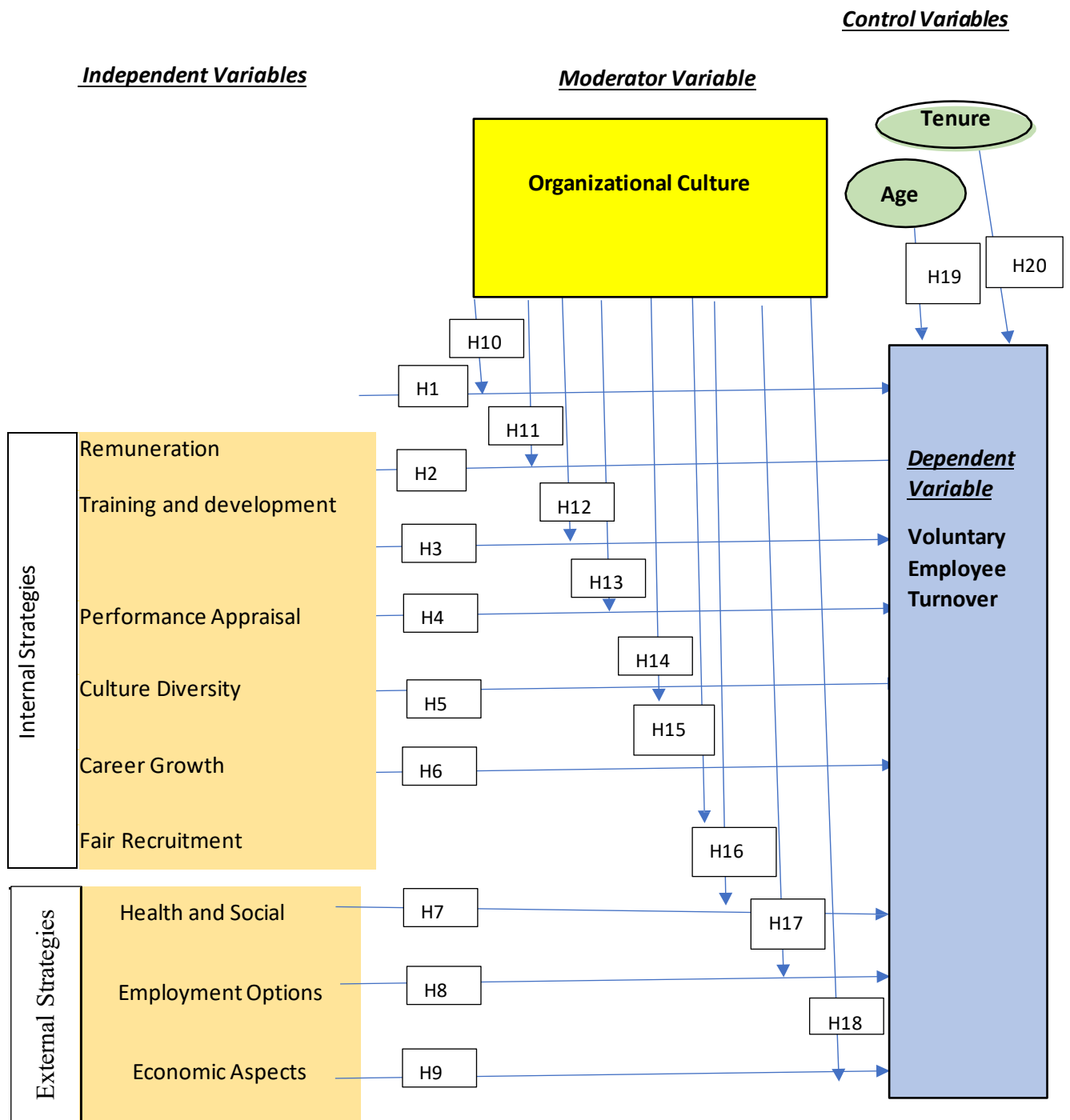
The review synthesizes global and UAE-based studies on strategies to reduce voluntary turnover in SMEs, identifying a lack of integrated frameworks that consider both internal HR practices and external environmental factors, highlighting the need for context-specific research in Dubai's SME sector. However, based on the limitations and improvements required within their findings, a literature gap has been identified and included in the section on literature gap identification, which highlights areas for future researchers to concentrate on when conducting a study on a similar topic.

#### **Conceptual Framework:**

By constructing a conceptual framework, a researcher can communicate the nature of the relationship they have sought to explore while investigating a particular topic. With a diagrammatic framework, readers know the variables between which researchers search to determine the relationship (Pham et al., 2022, p. 162). This dissertation examines the impact of various strategies aimed at reducing employee turnover rates in SMEs in the UAE. Based on the understanding and topic to examine, the following is a diagrammatic structure that represents the conceptual framework in the dissertation

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework developed by the Author*



**Source : Author**

The framework outlines how independent variables influence the dependent variable, employee turnover. Hypotheses are developed to test these relationships; while moderating and control variables are included to capture their effects. Moderating variables alter the strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Pramesti et al., 2021). Control variables, such as age and tenure, are held constant, as they are not expected to influence other variables in the study directly.

### **Hypothesis**

- H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant relationship between remuneration/incentives and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no significant relationship between training/development and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>3: There is no significant relationship between performance appraisal and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>4: There is no significant relationship between cultural diversity and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>5: There is no significant relationship between career growth and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>6: There is no significant relationship between fair recruitment procedures and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>7: There is no significant relationship between health and social factors and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>8: There is no significant relationship between employment options and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>9: There is no significant relationship between the economic aspect of political structure and employee turnover in Dubai's SMEs.
- H<sub>0</sub>10: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between remuneration and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>11: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between training /development and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE.
- H<sub>0</sub>12: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between performance appraisal and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE

- H<sub>0</sub>13: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between cultural diversity and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>14: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between growth and promotional opportunities and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>15: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between fair recruitment procedure and employee turnover in SMEs of Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>16: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between health and social factors and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>17: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between employment options and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>18: Organizational culture does not moderate the relationship between economic aspects and employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>19: The age of the employee does not significantly impact the rate of employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE
- H<sub>0</sub>20: Tenure of the employee does not significantly impact the rate of employee turnover in SMEs in Dubai, UAE

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

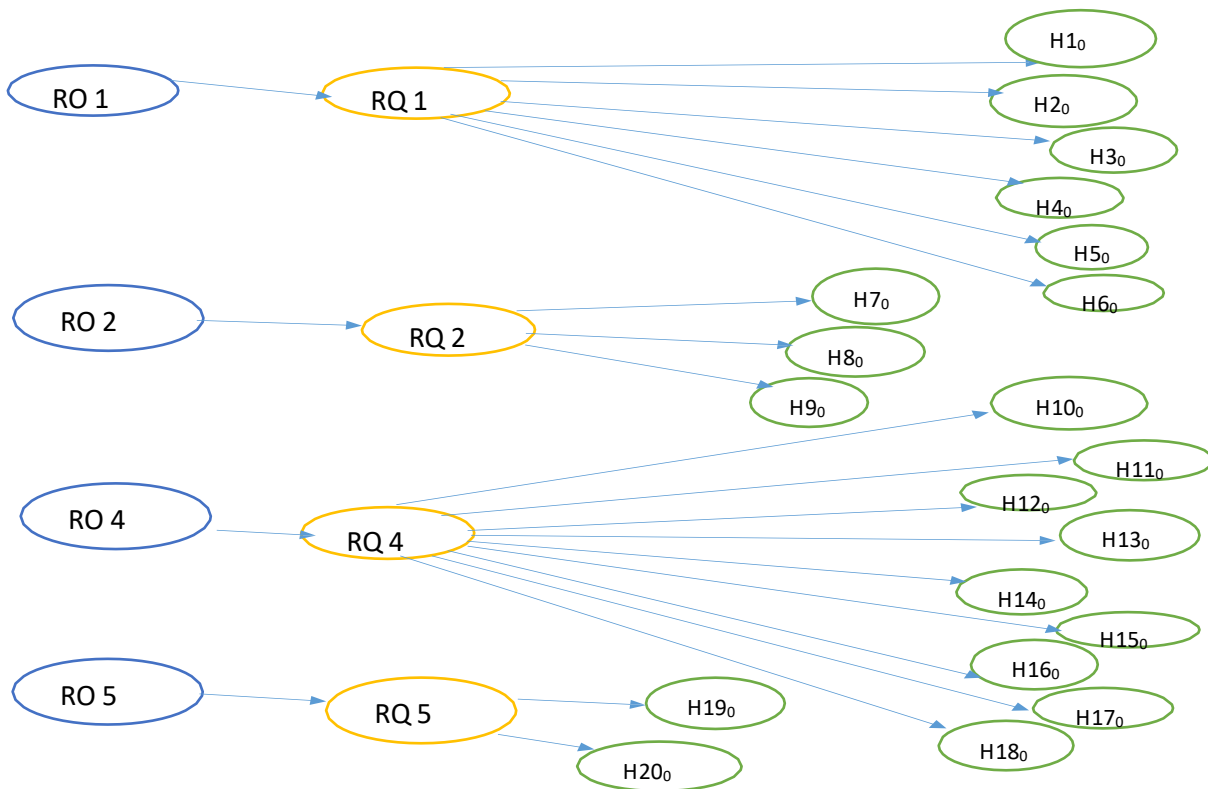
This section identifies the most suitable methodology for addressing the research questions, as emphasized by Patel and Nitin (2019). The study primarily investigates strategies to reduce voluntary employee turnover in SMEs in the UAE (p. 49). The chosen methodology determines how data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted in line with research objectives. Research methods are typically quantitative, qualitative, or mixed. Quantitative research relies on numerical data to test hypotheses, measure relationships, and generalize findings from large samples using tools such as surveys, experiments, or secondary data analysis (Mazhar, 2021). In contrast, qualitative research explores complex phenomena through smaller samples, using methods such as interviews, focus groups, or case studies. Mixed-methods research combines both, offering a more comprehensive understanding through designs such as exploratory, explanatory, convergent, or embedded (Fazlıoğulları, 2012). This study adopts a mixed-method approach under the pragmatism philosophy, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. While survey-based quantitative analysis serves as the primary method, the research also incorporates qualitative insights to strengthen interpretation and compare results with existing literature. The quantitative process involved defining key variables, designing a structured questionnaire, conducting pilot tests, distributing surveys, and validating the dataset. The qualitative element complements this by offering deeper contextual understanding and addressing contradictions in findings.

#### 3.1 Research Approach:

The research approach depends on the study's questions, framework, data type, and underlying philosophy (Sakyi et al., 2020). Approaches include deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning tests existing theories but may lead to flawed conclusions if concepts are unclear (Browne et al., 2019). Inductive reasoning builds theories from observations but lacks verification. Abductive reasoning combines both, generating explanations when data is limited (Abutabenjeh and Jaradat, 2018; Haydam and Steenkamp, 2020). This research uses an abductive approach, integrating theory and data to understand voluntary turnover in SMEs. The conceptual framework is grounded in theories of human capital, expectancy, job embeddedness, psychological contract, and social exchange. Hypotheses were developed from these foundations, with findings evaluated through both quantitative and qualitative evidence to refine understanding and provide practical strategies for employee retention.

**Figure 2**

*Mapping Research Questions, Objectives, and Hypotheses by the Author*



Source : Author

### **3.2 Data Collection Procedure**

#### **3.2.1 Research Instruments**

To collect data, the study employed two instruments: a self-formulated survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews based on multiple case studies.

#### **3.2.2 Survey Questionnaire:**

The structured questionnaire comprised three parts: (1) demographic information and intention to leave, (2) organizational commitment, and (3) perceptions of external employment opportunities. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. Anonymous responses were gathered from randomly selected SME employees in Dubai via SurveyMonkey.

### **3.2.3 Interviews:**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative insights. Open-ended questions guided participants in sharing perspectives on factors influencing voluntary turnover, allowing for richer contextual understanding.

### **3.2.4 Questionnaire Items:**

The survey items were adapted from validated studies with modifications to fit the study's context. Items on remuneration, employee turnover, and employment options were adapted from Lekartiwa et al. (2020); training and development from Malek et al. (2018); performance appraisal and organizational culture from Memon et al. (2020); and career growth, fair recruitment, health and social, economic aspects, organizational culture, and demographics from Amah and Oyetuunde (2020), Kumar (2022), Laroche et al. (2020), Pharm et al. (2022), and Idiegbeyan-Ose et al. (2018). Adaptation ensured clarity, consistency, and sector relevance.

### **3.3.5 Semi-Structured Interviews:**

A qualitative multiple-case study approach was used to gather insights on reducing employee turnover. Fifteen participants, including managers, business owners, and experienced workers, were purposively selected. Semi-structured interviews employed open-ended questions within a predefined framework to capture diverse perspectives. Participant details are presented in Chapter 5.2.

### **3.3.6 Validity Test:**

Validity ensures that a research instrument accurately measures what it is intended to, preventing systematic measurement errors and ensuring the credibility of research findings (Murphy et al., 1998; Muneer et al., 2022). It is commonly assessed through content validity, construct validity, and predictive or concurrent validity. Content validity evaluates whether the measured variables represent the intended constructs. Construct validity assesses how well items reflect theoretical concepts, while predictive validity examines whether the instrument can accurately forecast outcomes. External validity, or generalizability, considers whether findings apply under different conditions. For this study, face and content validity were employed. Face validity evaluates whether the instrument appears to measure the intended construct, while content validity examines the comprehensiveness and relevance of the study content. Expert opinions were used to establish both validity types.

**Face Validity:** Two experts from different sectors—the CEO of a UAE motorsports company and the HR Head of a UAE FMCG company—reviewed the questionnaire. They confirmed that the survey questions aligned with the research objectives, were comprehensible, and measured employee turnover intentions accurately. Their feedback affirmed the instrument’s relevance and clarity.

**Content Validity:** Content validity was assessed using the criteria proposed by McDaniel and Gates (1996), including defining what is measured, reviewing literature, expert evaluation, and pre -testing. The CEO and HR Head evaluated the questionnaire for clarity, relevance, and applicability to the target population. Item-Content Validity Index (I-CVI) and Scale-Content Validity Index (S-CVI) were calculated, with a minimum acceptable CVI of 0.80. Items ES2, OC2, OC3, and OC4 fell below this threshold and were revised accordingly, ensuring overall validity.

### **3.2.7 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire’s construct validity and refine its structure. Thirty-five participants from UAE private sector companies completed the survey, with feedback on clarity, comprehensiveness, and completion time. After screening for eligibility, 21 valid responses were used. The average completion time was 14 minutes. Feedback informed improvements to question wording, format, and survey flow, enhancing validity and reliability. Reliability assesses the consistency of measurements over time. Cronbach’s alpha was used to evaluate internal consistency, with values ranging from 0.00 (no consistency) to 1.00 (perfect consistency). A threshold of 0.70 was considered acceptable, with higher values indicating greater reliability (Fricker, 2001; Ross, 2006; Surucu and Maslakci, 2020). SPSS v26 was used to analyze the pilot data, calculate alpha coefficients, and assess the impact of item removal on reliability, confirming the survey’s consistency.

### **3.2.8 Sampling and Population**

A research sample is a subset of the population, selected to conclude the whole population (Sharma et al., 2019). Sampling can be probability-based (random selection) or non-probability-based (non-random selection). Probability sampling includes simple random, cluster, stratified, and systematic sampling, aiming to minimize sampling errors. Non-probability sampling includes convenience, purposive, snowball, and quota sampling, where selection depends on availability or specific characteristics (Khan, 2020; Rahman et al., 2022). This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique, selecting participants with relevant industry experience to ensure diverse representation. Using Cochran’s formula

for a finite population with a 95% confidence level ( $z = 1.96$ ), a 5% margin of error ( $e = 0.05$ ), and an estimated population proportion of 0.5, the required sample size was calculated as 384. Given that the Dubai SME sector employed 1.41 million workers in 2019, the final sample size of 384 respondents met statistical requirements for reliability and accuracy.

### **3.2.9 Survey Questionnaire Distribution**

A structured online questionnaire was developed and shared via SurveyMonkey, chosen for its user-friendly interface and analytical tools. The survey targeted SME owners, managers, and experienced employees in Dubai. Conducted in English to maximize responses, the questionnaire drew from prior validated studies and was designed to collect large volumes of data efficiently and cost-effectively.

### **3.2.10 Data Analysis Methods**

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, analyzing quantitative data using SPSS version 26. Data preparation included removing incomplete responses, assessing reliability via Cronbach's Alpha, and validating constructs through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Descriptive statistics explored respondent and company profiles, while bivariate (Pearson) correlation assessed relationships between variables. Regression analysis examined the effects of independent variables (internal and external strategies) on the dependent variable (voluntary employee turnover). Moderation analysis using Hayes Process Macro tested the impact of organizational culture, while ANOVA analyzed the influence of control variables (age and tenure) on turnover rates.

### **3.2.11 Research Ethics:**

The study followed strict ethical protocols (Dooly et al., 2017). Approval was obtained from the university, and participants were informed of the research purpose, data usage, and consent procedures. Data from SMEs were collected with permission and securely stored on password-protected servers, accessible only to the researcher. This chapter outlined the research methodology to investigate strategies for reducing voluntary turnover in UAE SMEs. The study employed a pragmatism philosophy, an abductive approach, and mixed methods. Data were collected via an online survey from 384 SME respondents and analyzed using SPSS v26.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1.1 Internal Strategies

Internal measures that were tested during the examination included performance appraisal, remuneration, training and development, career progression, fair recruitment and cultural diversity. The outcomes showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between remuneration, training, or cultural diversity on the one hand and employee turnover on the other, which was inconsistent to other previous studies based on Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and Job Embeddedness Theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). On the other hand, the performance appraisal, career progression, and equitable recruitment had a strong positive impact on reducing turnovers. These quantitative results were backed up with qualitative case studies and they highlighted the essentiality of career development, management practice, recognition, performance review, and fair recruitment process in employee retention. These results are in harmony with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), and Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau, 1995).

### 1.2 External Strategies

Statistically significant shown to correlate with turnover of employees, external strategies included environmental influences, health and social ( $B = 0.193$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), employment opportunities ( $B = 0.125$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), and financial giants ( $B = 0.169$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Case studies have also highlighted employee well-being, work-life, and employment law as very important factors of retention. Such results are in alignment with the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and past empirical evidence that demonstrated that the macroeconomic situation and whether other employment opportunities are available to the individual determine attrition rates. It was determined that internal plans were more successful than external plans to minimize turnover, presumably since small and medium enterprises have more control over internal factors in terms of career development, performance appraisal, as well as, fair recruitment process. HR strategies like remuneration and social inducements are not as easily controlled. Such observation is in line with the Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), which states that there are evident correlations between effort and outcome in improving motivation to eventual retention.

### 4.3 Moderating Effect of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture in the moderating role determines how a relationship exists between the internal strategies (fair recruitment, training, and development) and employee turnover. A conducive learning environment positively impacts training effects on retention of workers, which is in tandem with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) as well as the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964). Organizational culture also mediates how any strategy outside the organization, such as health and social aspects and economic factors, can affect turnover. The cultural practices are supporting even against the unfavorable external environments since supportive cultural practices enhance well-being, job satisfaction, and retention. The moderating effect in employment options, on the other hand, was relatively dimmed.

#### **4.4 Effect of Demographic Factors (Age and Tenure)**

The results provided by the analysis of variance showed that the factors of age and tenure have strong impacts on employee turnover, thus contradicting the previous findings presented by Belete (2018). Moreover, younger ones exhibit a high level of focus on diversity, autonomy, and career clarity, which is consistent with the theoretical fundamentals of the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham 1976) and the Expectancy Theory (Vroom 1964).

#### **4.5 Implications**

##### **4.5.1 Practical Implications:**

SME owners and managers play a critical role in retaining employees because they consider internal factors such as job design, training, performance appraisal, remuneration, and career progression, and promote human-resource initiatives and engagement. At the same time, policymakers and governmental bodies can reinforce retention among SMEs, which are major drivers of the GDP and human employment in the United Arab Emirates, through the promotion of upskilling and flexible working conditions, equal labor relations, and the growth of mental-health and wellness programs. By introducing health-related programs like the Healthy SME Certification, the occupation-related health training, and the coverage of mental health insurance, the authorities of the population can then further enhance this goal to ensure a whole set of measures aimed at the stability of workers and their good health are achieved.

##### **4.5.2 Theoretical Implications:**

This paper will combine various theoretical standpoints, which will bring insights into the practices of human resource management in small and medium-sized enterprises. To improve retention, the

Human Capital Theory supports the necessity of investing in the development of employees. In the Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow was keen on recognizing and treating the needs of employees that were not satisfied in an effort to bring about better satisfaction. Expectancy Theory highlights the need to associate employees' effort with results in the form of rewards, career growth in the process of performance management. Job Characteristics Model emphasizes the contribution of the design of meaningful, autonomous tasks in order to enhance engagement levels. Facilitating a supportive work environment that is marked by open feedback and communication is the support theory that participants would advocate in the organization. The Social Exchange Theory lays emphasis on the development of interdependent relations by way of appreciation, work flexibility, and valuable contributions, all of which make significant input each towards a holistically based theoretical concept acceptable retention strategies.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The project provides an in-depth analysis of the measures to be implemented to minimize the voluntary turnover within the Dubai SMEs, including the use of qualitative and quantitative methods. The results indicate that the performance of an organization through the developed internal business methods, like performance appraisal, career growth, and fair recruitment, identify as a critical element of retaining employees, even though the external factors, such as health and social, their employment choices, and economic status; play significant roles in the rate of turnover but they are too uncontrollable. Additionally, the culture was also detected to leave probation of the efficacy of the inner and outer strategies, and further, the incidences of demographic factors within the team, including age and job experience, also influence the turnover patterns, with younger people attaching a greater priority to independence and professional growth. Together, these lessons present managers of SMEs, policymakers, and practitioners in the HR field with practical ideas on how to implement specific retention programs, as well as enhance research on HRM and the psychology of the organization.

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