Exploring How Work-Life Balance and Meaningful Work Predict Employee Retention

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to investigate the predictive roles of work-life balance and meaningful work in explaining employee retention among Malaysian employees. The research utilized a correlational descriptive design to examine the relationships between the variables. A total of 415 full-time employees from various organizations across Malaysia participated in the study. The sample size was determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size table and selected through simple random sampling. Standardized tools were employed to assess employee retention, work-life balance, and meaningful work. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27, applying descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients to examine bivariate relationships, and multiple linear regression analysis to determine the predictive value of the independent variables. Descriptive statistics showed favorable perceptions across all three variables, with mean scores of 4.02 (employee retention), 3.88 (work-life balance), and 4.15 (meaningful work). Pearson correlation results indicated significant positive relationships between employee retention and both work-life balance ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) and meaningful work ($r = .61$, $p < .01$). The multiple regression model was significant, $F(2, 412) = 163.82$, $p < .001$, accounting for 44% of the variance in employee retention ($R^2 = .44$). Both predictors were significant, with meaningful work ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$) emerging as a stronger predictor than work-life balance ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). The findings underscore the critical role of both meaningful work and work-life balance in fostering employee retention, with meaningful work demonstrating greater predictive strength. Organizations aiming to reduce turnover should prioritize creating purpose-driven work environments alongside supportive work-life practices.
Keywords: Employee retention, meaningful work, work-life balance, organizational commitment.

1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of human resource management, employee retention has emerged as a strategic priority for organizations worldwide. Retaining valuable employees is no longer merely a function of competitive salaries or job security but is increasingly linked to deeper psychological and organizational factors such as meaningful work and work-life balance. In the context of Malaysia's rapidly modernizing economy, where talent mobility and professional burnout are growing concerns, understanding these variables is essential for sustainable workforce development and organizational success. Scholars and practitioners alike are increasingly turning their attention toward intrinsic motivational factors and lifestyle compatibility as key predictors of whether employees stay or leave their jobs (Zehra, 2025).

Meaningful work has become one of the central constructs in explaining employee motivation, satisfaction, and long-term organizational commitment. Employees are increasingly seeking roles that provide not only economic benefits but also a sense of purpose, identity, and value (Westover, 2025a). Westover (Westover, 2025b) further asserts that the depth of meaning derived from work can surpass even monetary rewards in shaping retention behavior. This reflects a broader shift in employment paradigms where personal fulfillment and existential engagement are integrated into career planning. In today's dynamic labor markets, employees evaluate their professional worth not solely in terms of outputs but through the meaningfulness of their contributions, which affects both psychological well-being and turnover intentions (Zanabazar et al., 2024).

The relationship between meaningful work and employee retention is well-documented. Meaningful work contributes to a positive self-concept, reinforces intrinsic motivation, and supports the development of long-term career identity. When employees find personal significance in their daily responsibilities, they are more likely to remain committed to their organization despite external job opportunities (Mosquera et al., 2024). Research in diverse sectors, from education to healthcare, has consistently highlighted meaningful work as a buffer against organizational cynicism and disengagement (Janssen et al., 2022). In the banking sector, for instance, meaningful work has been shown to enhance performance through heightened work engagement, thereby indirectly influencing retention (Hasan et al., 2022). Similarly, findings from Amodia and Visitacion (Amodia & Visitacion, 2025) emphasized the mediating role of organizational citizenship behavior in the connection between meaningful work and employee retention.

In line with these trends, various studies suggest that ethical leadership, job crafting, and corporate social responsibility initiatives play an instrumental role in fostering perceptions of meaningful work (Janssen et al., 2022; Malik & Malik, 2023; Mosquera et al., 2024). These organizational practices enable employees to derive a sense of larger purpose from their tasks, contributing to increased levels of engagement and reduced turnover. The integration of personal values with professional roles is particularly critical in collectivist cultures such as Malaysia's, where the meaning of work is often intertwined with social identity and community contribution (Kuancintami & Heryjanto, 2023).

While meaningful work addresses the cognitive and emotional dimensions of employee experience, work-life balance captures the pragmatic challenges faced by contemporary professionals in managing personal and professional roles. The boundary between work and home life has become increasingly blurred due to technological advancements and organizational demands. As a result, work-life balance has emerged as a critical determinant of employee satisfaction, stress levels, and overall well-being (Rinawati et al., 2024). A growing body of literature suggests that when employees perceive they have sufficient time and energy for both their personal and professional lives, their commitment to the organization strengthens and their likelihood of leaving diminishes (Suprapto et al., 2024).

The strategic importance of work-life balance is evident across a range of industries. Organizations that implement flexible scheduling, telecommuting options, and employee wellness programs have reported significant improvements in both employee morale and retention (Siregar et al., 2022). In the port industry of Indonesia, for example, work-life balance was found to significantly reduce turnover intentions, particularly when coupled with safe working conditions and manageable workloads (Suprapto et al., 2024). Similarly, Siregar et al. (Siregar et al., 2022) demonstrated that balanced work-life integration directly enhances employee engagement, which in turn fosters loyalty and longevity within the organization.

From a theoretical standpoint, the link between work-life balance and employee retention can be explained through the lens of social exchange theory. When organizations demonstrate support for employees' non-work roles, employees tend to reciprocate through increased loyalty and reduced intention to leave. This reciprocal relationship is

especially potent in environments where familial and communal responsibilities are deeply valued, such as in Malaysia (Shah, 2024). Moreover, empirical evidence shows that work-life balance is not merely a personal benefit but a strategic asset that contributes to organizational resilience and adaptability in times of change (Heath et al., 2022).

Recent scholarship has also emphasized the interactive effects of meaningful work and work-life balance in shaping employee retention outcomes. Kuancintami and Heryjanto (Kuancintami & Heryjanto, 2023) found that the combined impact of these two variables significantly reduced turnover intentions, suggesting that the alignment of personal purpose and lifestyle needs creates a reinforcing loop that anchors employees to their organizations. This is echoed in the work of Boikanyo and Naidoo (Boikanyo & Naidoo, 2023), who highlighted the joint influence of psychological safety, meaningfulness, and organizational support in fostering employee engagement, a critical antecedent of retention.

In Malaysia, where workforce demographics are becoming increasingly diverse and expectations of younger employees are evolving, these factors gain even more significance. Millennials and Gen Z professionals, who now make up a large portion of the workforce, are known to prioritize meaning and flexibility over traditional job benefits. Pratiwi and Hariani (Pratiwi & Hariani, 2023) observed that among service industry workers, work motivation and a conducive work environment played a vital role in enhancing retention. Likewise, Widya et al. (Widya et al., 2023) revealed that job insecurity could be mitigated through satisfaction with meaningful roles and supportive organizational culture, leading to higher loyalty among educators.

The retention of skilled employees is not merely a matter of organizational survival but also a cornerstone of strategic growth and innovation. High turnover rates are associated with increased training costs, loss of institutional knowledge, and disruptions in workflow. As such, identifying the predictors of retention is a priority for both scholars and practitioners. A study by Lutfia et al. (Lutfia et al., 2024) demonstrated how career development and human resource planning, when mediated by work motivation, positively influenced performance and decreased turnover. Similarly, Zehra (Zehra, 2025) emphasized that comprehensive employee benefits, while necessary, are not sufficient unless integrated with psychosocial supports that enhance retention through deeper engagement.

Despite the growing literature on employee retention, there remains a need for more empirical studies focusing on the synergistic effects of meaningful work and work-life balance, especially in Southeast Asian contexts. The Malaysian workplace presents a unique environment characterized by multicultural dynamics, rapid economic transformation, and evolving workforce expectations. Yet, research tailored to this context remains limited. Addressing this gap, the current study aims to investigate how work-life balance and meaningful work predict employee retention among Malaysian employees

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a correlational descriptive research design to examine the relationship between work-life balance, meaningful work, and employee retention. The target population consisted of employed individuals from various organizations across Malaysia. A total of 415 participants were selected using a simple random sampling method, with the sample size determined based on Morgan and Krejcie's sample size table to ensure statistical adequacy and generalizability. Participants were required to be full-time employees with a minimum of one year of work experience to ensure familiarity with their organizational environment. All participants provided informed consent before taking part in the study.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Employee Retention

To measure employee retention, the study employed the Employee Retention Scale developed by Kyndt, Dochy, Michielsen, and Moeyaert in 2009. This scale consists of 11 items and is designed to assess an employee's intention to stay with their organization, their affective attachment to the workplace, and their long-term commitment. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger retention intention. The scale has been widely used in organizational and human resource research and has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80 in various studies. Its construct validity has also been supported by confirmatory factor analysis in multiple empirical investigations across different work settings (Amodia & Visitacion, 2025; Durairaj, 2024; Suprapto et al., 2024).

2.2.2. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance was assessed using the Work-Life Balance Scale developed by Brough et al. in 2014. This scale includes 4 items and focuses on the employee's perception of how well their work and personal life roles are managed and integrated. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting greater perceived work-life balance. Although concise, the scale captures core aspects of balance between occupational and personal domains. The scale has been validated in various professional populations and has shown strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically reported above 0.85. Its convergent and discriminant validity have been confirmed through correlations with job satisfaction, stress, and organizational commitment in several studies (Marnoto et al., 2024; Rinawati et al., 2024; Suprapto et al., 2024).

2.2.3. Meaningful Work

Meaningful work was measured using the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI), developed by Steger, Dik, and Duffy in 2012. This widely used instrument consists of 10 items divided into three subscales: Positive Meaning (4 items), Meaning-Making through Work (3 items), and Greater Good Motivations (3 items). Respondents indicate their agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 5 (absolutely true). Higher scores reflect a stronger sense of meaningful work. The WAMI has been validated across diverse occupational groups and has demonstrated robust psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients for subscales and the total scale typically exceeding 0.80. The tool's construct validity has been confirmed through its correlations with job satisfaction, engagement, and well-being in numerous empirical studies (Kuancintami & Heryjanto, 2023; Mosquera et al., 2024; Zanabazar et al., 2024).

2.3. Data Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS version 27 was used to perform both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. First, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the bivariate relationships between the dependent variable (employee retention) and each of the independent variables (work-life balance and meaningful work). Subsequently, a linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive power of work-life balance and meaningful work on employee retention. The assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were checked and met before conducting the regression analysis. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ for all tests.

3. Findings and Results

The sample consisted of 415 employees from various organizations across Malaysia. Of the total participants, 218 (52.5%) were female and 197 (47.5%) were male. In terms of age distribution, 104 participants (25.1%) were between 20–29 years old, 159 participants (38.3%) were between 30–39 years, 98 participants (23.6%) were aged 40–49, and 54 participants (13.0%) were 50 years or older. Regarding educational background, 167 participants (40.2%) held a bachelor's degree, 134 (32.3%) had a master's degree, 69 (16.6%) had a diploma, and 45 (10.8%) reported having a doctoral degree or other advanced qualifications. Additionally, most participants (n = 271; 65.3%) reported working in the private sector, while 144 (34.7%) were employed in public organizations.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Employee Retention	4.02	0.64
Work-Life Balance	3.88	0.59
Meaningful Work	4.15	0.67

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that the participants reported relatively high levels of employee retention (M = 4.02, SD = 0.64), meaningful work (M = 4.15, SD = 0.67), and work-life balance (M = 3.88, SD = 0.59). The mean scores indicate favorable perceptions across all three constructs, suggesting that employees generally feel committed to their organizations, perceive their work as meaningful, and experience a reasonable degree of balance between personal and professional life.

Prior to conducting the linear regression analysis, the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were examined and confirmed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality yielded non-significant results for employee retention ($p = .082$), work-life balance ($p = .091$), and meaningful work ($p = .074$), indicating that the data were approximately normally distributed. Scatterplots and partial regression plots confirmed linear relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values for work-life balance (VIF = 1.34) and meaningful work (VIF = 1.34) were below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.98, suggesting no significant autocorrelation in the residuals. The plot of standardized residuals versus predicted values showed no clear pattern, supporting the assumption of homoscedasticity.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Employee Retention	—		
2. Work-Life Balance	.52** (p < .01)	—	
3. Meaningful Work	.61** (p < .01)	.48** (p < .01)	—

As shown in Table 2, employee retention was positively and significantly correlated with both work-life balance ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) and meaningful work ($r = .61$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, work-life balance and meaningful work were also positively correlated ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that higher levels of work-life balance and meaningful work are associated with stronger employee retention intentions.

Table 3

Summary of Regression Model for Predicting Employee Retention

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	p
Regression	39.74	2	19.87	.66	.44	.43	163.82	< .001
Residual	50.04	412	0.12					
Total	89.78	414						

The results in Table 3 indicate that the overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 412) = 163.82$, $p < .001$. The model accounted for approximately 44% of the variance in employee retention ($R^2 = .44$, Adjusted $R^2 = .43$). These findings suggest that work-life balance and meaningful work together significantly predict employee retention among Malaysian employees.

Table 4

Multivariate Regression Coefficients Predicting Employee Retention

Predictor	B	Standard Error	β	t	p
Constant	1.32	0.14	—	9.43	< .001
Work-Life Balance	0.37	0.06	.31	6.34	< .001
Meaningful Work	0.44	0.05	.46	8.79	< .001

As presented in Table 4, both work-life balance (B = 0.37, $\beta = .31$, $t = 6.34$, $p < .001$) and meaningful work (B = 0.44, $\beta = .46$, $t = 8.79$, $p < .001$) were statistically significant predictors of employee retention. Among the two predictors, meaningful work had a stronger standardized beta coefficient, indicating that it is a more powerful predictor of employee retention in the sample. The constant value (B = 1.32, $p < .001$) also reached statistical significance, indicating the baseline level of retention when both predictors are held constant.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined how work-life balance and meaningful work predict employee retention among a sample of 415 Malaysian employees using Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses. The results revealed that both independent variables—work-life balance and meaningful work—were positively and significantly correlated with employee retention. Furthermore, the regression model indicated that both variables significantly predicted employee retention, with meaningful work demonstrating a slightly stronger predictive value compared to work-life balance.

These findings underscore the growing importance of psychological and lifestyle factors in shaping employees' decisions to remain in their organizations. The significant correlation between meaningful work and employee retention supports the growing body of literature that positions purpose-driven employment as a key determinant of long-term commitment. As highlighted by Westover, employees are increasingly prioritizing roles that align with their values and contribute to a greater purpose, often over material rewards (Westover, 2025b). This reflects a broader shift toward existential fulfillment in the workplace, where employees seek roles that affirm their identity and provide a sense of impact (Westover, 2025a). In this study, participants who reported higher levels of meaningful work were also more likely to express stronger intentions to stay within their current organizations.

The relationship between meaningful work and employee retention has been consistently validated across various cultural and organizational settings. For example, Amodia and Visitacion found that meaningful work, when supported by organizational citizenship behavior and high-quality leader-member exchanges, significantly enhances retention in business management contexts (Amodia & Visitacion, 2025). Similarly, Hasan et al. demonstrated that meaningful work positively affects employee performance in the banking sector, which in turn contributes to long-term commitment (Hasan et al., 2022). The present study's results align with these findings, reinforcing the notion that employees who derive meaning from their tasks are more emotionally invested in their roles and less likely to seek employment elsewhere.

Moreover, this study's results affirm the insights offered by Malik and Malik, who identified job crafting and perceived job meaningfulness as central to employees' decisions to stay or move on (Malik & Malik, 2023).

Employees who actively reshape their roles to align with their personal values and strengths are more likely to perceive their work as meaningful, thus reinforcing retention. Additionally, Mosquera et al. argued that ethical leadership can unlock perceptions of meaningful work by creating psychologically safe and morally consistent work environments, ultimately strengthening employee attachment (Mosquera et al., 2024). These mechanisms appear particularly relevant in the Malaysian context, where cultural values emphasize community contribution and moral alignment in professional roles.

The strong predictive value of meaningful work found in this study is further corroborated by the work of Janssen et al., who explored how corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices foster perceptions of meaningful work in the healthcare industry (Janssen et al., 2022). Their findings revealed that employees who perceive their organizations as ethically responsible and socially engaged are more likely to feel that their work is meaningful. This suggests that organizational initiatives beyond job design—such as CSR, ethical leadership, and employee involvement—may be instrumental in nurturing retention through enhanced work meaning.

In parallel, the study found that work-life balance also plays a significant role in predicting employee retention. The positive association between these two constructs is consistent with previous research highlighting how perceived balance between work and personal life promotes organizational loyalty and reduces turnover intentions. According to Suprapto et al., work-life balance is a critical determinant of retention in demanding industries such as logistics and transportation, where employees face high levels of stress and time constraints (Suprapto et al., 2024). The present study adds to this evidence by showing that even in a diverse sample across industries, work-life balance remains a relevant and statistically significant predictor of retention.

In Malaysian workplaces, where family obligations and collective values hold cultural significance, the importance of work-life balance becomes even more pronounced. Rinawati et al. found that innovative human resource practices that support employee well-being and work-life integration significantly improved talent retention in Indonesian organizations, a context culturally similar to Malaysia (Rinawati et al., 2024). Similarly, Siregar et al. demonstrated that when employees experience adequate balance between work and life domains, their engagement

increases, which directly contributes to reduced turnover intentions (Siregar et al., 2022).

The findings also align with O'Callaghan's work on procedural justice, which suggests that employees are more likely to remain in their roles when they perceive fairness not only in evaluations and promotions but also in how their work schedules and personal time are managed (O'Callaghan, 2024). Furthermore, Kuancintami and Heryjanto showed that the combination of work-life balance and meaningful work has a compounded effect on reducing turnover intention, indicating a synergistic interaction that may be at play in this study's results as well (Kuancintami & Heryjanto, 2023).

Interestingly, the regression analysis in this study revealed that meaningful work had a slightly stronger predictive effect on employee retention than work-life balance. This echoes the argument by Heath et al., who found that during periods of organizational disruption—such as the COVID-19 pandemic—meaningful work served as a psychological buffer that reduced turnover, even when work-life balance was compromised (Heath et al., 2022). These findings suggest that while work-life balance is important for managing stress and personal commitments, meaningful work may be more central to an employee's professional identity and long-term engagement with the organization.

Support for this distinction is also evident in the work of Zehra, who emphasized that while employee benefits and flexible policies can attract talent, retaining employees over time requires deeper engagement strategies rooted in purpose and personal relevance (Zehra, 2025). Employees who view their work as aligned with their core values and societal contributions are less likely to be swayed by external job offers or minor organizational frustrations. This insight is also echoed by Widya et al., who demonstrated that job insecurity can be counterbalanced by strong perceptions of work meaning and satisfaction, particularly in educational institutions (Widya et al., 2023).

This study's findings are also reinforced by research conducted in various service sectors. For example, Pratiwi and Hariani found that work environment and motivation significantly influenced employee retention in Indonesia's service industry, with both meaningfulness and work-life compatibility emerging as central components of motivation (Pratiwi & Hariani, 2023). Likewise, Shah's investigation into Nepalese commercial banks found that psychological empowerment—rooted in autonomy, meaning, and competence—was closely tied to job satisfaction and, subsequently, retention (Shah, 2024).

Finally, the results of this study also reflect broader international patterns. Boikanyo and Naidoo, for example, reported that meaningfulness, psychological safety, and organizational support were critical for fostering engagement and reducing attrition in a South African petrochemical firm (Boikanyo & Naidoo, 2023). Meanwhile, Basher et al. emphasized that meaningfulness, when aligned with person-organization and person-job fit, enhances retention by creating a sense of belonging and professional coherence (Basher et al., 2024).

While the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the predictors of employee retention in Malaysia, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce response bias, particularly social desirability bias, which can affect the accuracy of the responses. Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, meaning that while significant relationships were identified, the study cannot determine directionality or long-term effects. Third, the sample, although diverse, was confined to Malaysian employees, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or regional contexts. Lastly, the study did not account for potential moderating variables such as organizational culture, job type, or leadership style, which may influence the observed relationships.

Future research should consider using longitudinal designs to assess how changes in perceptions of work-life balance and meaningful work over time influence employee retention. Additionally, qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could be used to gain deeper insights into how employees interpret and experience meaningful work and work-life balance within different organizational cultures. Researchers may also explore moderating or mediating variables—such as leadership behavior, organizational justice, or psychological capital—that could refine our understanding of the mechanisms through which these factors influence retention. Cross-cultural comparative studies would also be beneficial in determining whether the observed relationships hold in different socio-economic and cultural settings.

Organizations should prioritize the integration of work-life balance initiatives with strategies that enhance the meaningfulness of employees' roles. This could include offering flexible work arrangements, promoting ethical leadership, aligning individual tasks with broader organizational goals, and encouraging employee

involvement in decision-making. Human resource departments should also invest in training programs that help managers recognize and support individual purpose and values within the workplace. Ultimately, fostering an environment where employees feel both personally fulfilled and supported in their work-life integration will be key to enhancing long-term retention and organizational sustainability.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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