Organisational Commitment and Intention to Stay: The Roles of Felt Obligation

Farhana Hanim Mohsin[1]*, Hatijah Mohamed Salleh[1], Khairunnisa Ishak[1], Norhayati Md Isa[1]

[1] Faculty Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Kampar, Perak, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: farhanam@utar.edu.my

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Abstract: *The labour market remains severely disrupted as we press on to almost a year of the Covid-19 outbreak. It is challenging to quit a job at the moment, particularly with all the ambiguity during Covid-19 pandemic. Previously, employees were seen to depart from their companies and move to another business almost immediately as there were plenty of job opportunities available on the market. Since recruiting is stalled and competition for vacancies is intense, the retention rate of employees would be influenced in particular by their intention to stay. Intention to stay is determined by various employee behaviours, including, in particular, organisational commitment and felt obligation, as a vital determinant for actual turnover actions. On that note, this study provides an insight into intention to stay by reviewing relevant literature, theoretical foundation and analysis of empirical studies in order to further our understanding on the nomological net between intention to stay, organisational commitment and felt obligation, particularly in the context of during the pandemic. Building on the review, we will develop a potential research agenda that will present on opportunities for theoretical advancement and empirical findings in intention to stay studies.*

Keywords: organisational commitment, felt obligation, intention to stay
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1. Introduction

More recent attention has focused on the intention to stay among employees in any industry worldwide due to Covid-19. Hospitality, travel companies and tourism industry have been vulnerable to the impact, showing a significant decline in business demand and employment as it has shown a dramatic decline in the number of employees and increased unpaid leaves (Chang et al., 2020). Even before the pandemic happened, the employment environment has faced significant uncertainties, making it unable to guarantee employees' steady employment (Etehadi and Karatepe, 2019). With uncertainty in the employment environment nowadays, it is seen that people who are still employed during the pandemic, job insecurities and financial issues are associated with their intention to remain in the organisation. It is doubtful that the current pandemic will be solved soon. Short-term remedies such as using unpaid leave can no longer be considered meaningful alternatives; therefore, it would be essential for businesses to incorporate a more sequential intervention rather than opting for reducing the employees' size. Cooperation between employees and management will be needed to secure employment and ensure employee retention (Jung et al., 2021).

To date, it is also essential to examine the relationship associated with the intention to stay because it provides the benefits for managers to establish the necessary implementation that enables the intent to stay in the organisation and preclude the cost of turnover among the

employees. The managers/ supervisors need to know how organisational commitment affects employees' intention to stay (Noor, Zainuddin, Panigrahi, & Rahim, 2020). The role of felt obligation is also often associated with organisational commitment as it utilises the mechanism to explain the exchange relationship between organisation and employees (Malholtra, Ashill, Lages & Homayounfard, 2020).

Concerns have arisen to the employer to remain the valuable employees since they are the most valuable asset for the organisation (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000; AbuAlRub & Nasrallah, 2017) and the turnover cost is very high (George, 2015; Griffeth & Hom, 2001). The main issues when employees leave is related to the recruitment of the new employees, orientation and relevant training. In other perspectives, the valuable knowledge gained during employment is gone. It is crucial for the organisation to give attention to retain competent employees (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008).

This paper will be based on the assumption that organisational commitment will lead to intention to stay, particularly when different levels of felt obligation influence the relationship. Therefore, this study intends to verify that organisational commitment, significantly affects employees' intention to stay and the mediating and moderating role of felt obligation in the relationship (Figure 1).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Intention to Stay
Uraon (2018) defined intention to stay as employees' high enthusiasm to remain in their workplace based on their experience. This perception was developed through their positive or negative understanding of organisational situation and process, hence, influencing them to remain or quit from the workplace (Bellamkonda, Santhanam & Pattusamy, 2020).

Numerous studies have attempted to explain that employees' intention to stay has been a significant discussion in the management field. It involved the importance of talented employees to remain in an organisation. Woon, Tan, and Nasurdin (2017) enlighten that different types of predictors influence intention to stay; individual-related, work-related, organisation-related, or it could be exterior environment-related. In a similar vein, Uraon (2018) noted that intention to stay occurs when it reflects employees' commitment to their job and organisation for a long-term basis.

It was a literature trend over a decade to focus on staying and its associated factors instead of turnover (Holtom et al., 2008). Most research on intention has been carried out by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) and explain intention as a pre-determined motivation for the actual behaviour. Shanker (2014) argued that intention itself is the primary determinant for the actual behaviour such as to quit or stay, to perform or not perform. It refers to employees' attitude of being attached to the organisation (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001), their interest and keen to keep working (Shaw, Gupta, & Delery, 2005).

Dalessio, Silverman, and Schuck (1986) pointed out that more concern should be given on intention to stay rather than turnover, as whenever an employee has resigned, the organisation has to incur the cost of recruiting and maintaining another employee. Mustapha, Ahmad, Uli, and Idris (2011) also supported the idea that the organisation would face unfavourable

consequences, particularly in human resources-related courses, if the employees leave the organisation.

2.2 Organisational Commitment

Employees' organisational commitment can be considered an employee's desire to remain in the organisation (Mayer & Natalie, 1997; Soenanta, Akbar & Sariwulan, 2020). This desire can be illustrated by the employee committing themselves to the organisation and complying with the organisational goals and values (Mayer & Allen, 1997; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Soenanta et al., 2020). It also includes an emotional bond that the employee has towards his association or organisation. Besides, an employee also has an objective to be in the organisation and feeling motivated to work harder to gain profit for their organisation (Sani, 2013), hence, required them to participate in the organisation actively (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Pham & Pham, 2016). Malik (2020) also emphasised that an employee's organisational commitment is triggered by the employees' affinity or sense of belonging to their organisation and concern about the organisation's future.

Suppose an employee has a high commitment to his organisation, he will strive to meet the organisation's goals and values, be willing to work beyond his duties and responsibilities and often do his best for the organisation. In contrast, if an employee does not positively commit to his organisation, he will not actively participate or contribute to the organisation but at the same time insist on remain staying in the organisation (Nguyen, 2020).

Organisational commitment can be classified into three "mindset" or "core themes" namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Noor, Zainuddin, Panigrahi & Taju Rahim, 2020). Furthermore, Meyer et al. (2002) and Soenanta et al. (2020) explained affective commitment as employees' emotional attachment with their participation in the organisations and feeling themselves part of their organisation. Thus, they will stay in the organisation because they like it (Nguyen, 2020). In contrast, normative commitment refers to the employees' sense of responsibility to stay in the organisation (Meyer et al. (2002); Soenanta et al. (2020); Nguyen, 2020). Nguyen (2020) further explained that the employee feels that it is their obligation and ethic standard to stay in the organisation regardless of the amount of payment or reward. Lastly, continuance commitment is an awareness or perceived losses or benefit of the employees for leaving the organisation (Meyer et al. (2002); Soenanta et al. (2020; Nguyen, 2020). In short, it can be concluded that organisational commitment can be measured through three components: commitment in emotion, commitment in behaviour and commitment in attitude (Cohen, 2007).

A research was done by Hussain, Khan and Hussain (2020) on academic staff in seven public universities in Pakistan showed that if academicians are attached or bound with their respective university in term of psychology, emotion and moral, they will have less intention to quit those universities. Noor et al. (2020) also mentioned that if the employees have a high commitment towards their organisation, they will also have a high intention to remain there. Thus, to raise the employees' intention to stay in the organisation, it is necessary for the administrator to raise the employees' level of commitment and improve their satisfaction level to work in the organisation (Pham & Pham, 2016).

2.3 Felt Obligation

Besides the feeling of emotionally attached to the organisation, another aspect that has a strong relationship with an intention to stay is felt obligation. Felt obligation develops whenever organisations provide assistance beyond expectations (Uraon, 2017). Felt obligation is a "prescriptive belief regarding whether one should care about the organisation's well-being and should help the organisation reach its goals" (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Paillé and Valéau (2020) defined felt obligation as an employee's general willingness to react and do anything necessary in achieving organisational goals. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) viewed felt obligation as an individual variable that reflects a broader sense of moral responsibility feeling towards an organisation. Eisenberger et al. (2001) mentioned that employee withdrawal behaviour, for instance, lateness and non-attendance, could be reduced through felt obligation in caring and supporting the organisation. Caitlin (2017) also suggested that employers promote better felt obligation amongst employees by providing distinct facilities so that employees would feel they owe the organisation for the extra profits and must respond to it.

Based on the developed theory of organisational support, felt obligation contributes to the relationship between POS (perceived organisational support) with affective commitment and job performance. Supportive organisations render employees' loyalty, thereby felt obligation would nurture affective commitment (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Paillé and Valéau (2020) also opined that felt obligation was the developed condition for the occurrence of the social exchange process between parties seeking to engage in a long-term relationship. However, it was argued to constitute a social responsibility with a broader scope of application.

While conducted a study on relationships between POS, felt obligation, affective organisational commitment and turnover intention of academicians in private sectors, Liew (2009) found that POS has an indirect influence on the affective commitment through the mediating variable of felt obligation. He further suggested that organisational commitment may also derive from the sense of felt obligation, although it plays only a partial role.

Further analysis on felt obligation was also studied by Maynard-Patrick and Baugh (2019) in a mentor and protégé relationship. A generalised felt obligation would be developed from those who had participated as protégé in a mentorship role. The mentor would be motivated via felt obligation to provide their protégé with excellence, acceptable and suitable mentoring functions to the protégé as to gain better result and outcome. The willingness to deliver protégé's preferrable mentoring practice would be affected by a felt obligation. Mentor with more sense of undischarged obligation would be encouraged to respond to protégé's preference of range, quality and function.

The function of felt obligation in justice outcome link was studied by Caitlin (2017), which examined the relationship between procedural justice, organisational politics, and the outcomes of job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Felt obligation was tested as a mediator. The result revealed a mediating effect of felt obligation on the relationship between procedural justice and job satisfaction, and the relationship between procedural justice and turnover intentions. Nonetheless, procedural justice remains significant predictor for the two relationships while felt obligation conveyed only partial mediations. The results confirm the concept that advantages outcome was supported by justice through the mechanism of felt behaviour.

Roch, Shannon, Martin, Swiderski, Agosta and Shanock (2019) studied the correlation of felt obligation and justice outcome relationship with Justice World Hypothesis (JWH) as moderator. They further opined that those who believe that the world is unfair and do not get

what they deserve would be less obligated to respond on just and unjust treatment. It resulted in a weak correlation between justice perception and felt obligation. They also proposed for justice perceptions to have impacted on OCB and task performance through felt behaviour. Roch et al. (2019) revealed felt obligation moderated justice perceptions to affect OCB and task performance. They also established endorsement of JWH as significant in justice research, particularly when the felt obligation is assumed to be depended by the organisation to establish a relationship between justice perceptions and its outcome.

2.4 Social Exchange Theory

The theory of social exchange (SET) is among the most influential theoretical paradigms for explaining behaviour in the workplace. The theory was broadened to management by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), where it seeks to explain individual behaviour in the process of resources exchange. The theory is based on the notion that the principle of individual behaviour is to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Yan et al., 2016). This means that individuals are likely to assess the gain and cost before engaging in a relationship. The theory also observes exchange as a social behaviour that can lead to both tangible and intangible results (Liu et al., 2016). The reciprocity principle lies in this theory states that one party's favourable treatment compelled him to return favourable treatment in exchange (Huang et al., 2016). Simply put, the recipient party is obliged to respond in kind when one party receives a benefit. Employees would reciprocate through continued participation in the organisation (Allen et al., 2003) and affect their decision on how long they would stay with the organisation.

In this study, we used social exchange theory to examine how intention to stay is affected by organisational commitment and felt obligation. Based on the tenet of this theory that assumes when individuals are satisfied with the exchange relationship, they will feel obligated and result to motivation to stay with the organisation. That is, when employees perceive that the organisation recognizes their contributions and concern about their well-being are fulfilled, employees will improve their efforts and their intention to stay will rise (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). When employees exhibit commitment to their organisation, they will reciprocate by willingness to remain in the organisation.

2.5 Theory of Planned Behaviour

Ajzen (1991) proposed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model and explained that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control would influence a person's behaviour intention. The primary assumption of TPB is people engage in the behaviour under their control and rational. More attention has focused on the provision of behavioural intention that is under the person's actual behaviour decision.

The TPB is consist of three factors that jointly embody a person's actual control over the behaviour namely attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Ajzen (1991) explains attitude as a person's form of positive or negative evaluation of a specific behaviour. In the same vein, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined attitudes as psychological emotion; either positive or negative assessment occurred when an individual is involved in a particular behaviour. Generally, individuals with a positive attitude will demonstrate more positive action in his/her behavioural intention and vice versa (Chen & Tung, 2014; Taylor & Todd, 1995).

Subjective norms relate to the person who felt social pressure concerning the behaviour. Social pressure occurred when they perceived opinion from the close/important individual and influence her/his direction to make decisions. It also indicates an individual's feeling of social pressure from people or groups in the surroundings (Ajzen, 1991). Most past studies reported

that subjective norms positively affect behavioural intention when exploring the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention (Alam & Sayuti, 2011; Nimri, Patiar, Kensbock, & Jin, 2020). Similarly, the more individuals have optimistic subjective expectations, the greater their choice to act.

Perceived behavioural regulation refers to understanding a person of potential difficulties in carrying out a specific action (Ajzen, 1991). Factor such as time, money, and opportunity may not be under the control of individuals. Hence, the more people can monitor the possibilities and resources for a specific activity, the more likely it is that such behaviour would be involved. In the TPB model, the three factors mentioned above (e.g., attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control) have been used to predict an individual's behavioural intentions.

Overall, there seems to be some evidence to indicate that uncontrollable variables (affective, normative and continuance commitment) would interfere in our ability to do what we intend to do. Intention becomes a less predictive behaviour indicator when this interruption arises. Together, these studies outline that in TPB, it is recognized that attitude towards behaviour and subjective norms about participation in behaviour affect the intention to stay in the organisation and perceived behaviour control (felt obligation) over engaging in the behaviour as a factor influencing intention to stay (Alam & Sayuti, 2011; Chen & Tung, 2014).

3. Hypothesis Development

3.1 Organisational Commitment and Intention to Stay
Chaisuriyathavikun and Punnakitikashem (2015) study concerned on four factors influencing organisational commitment (remuneration and rewards, co-workers support, job satisfaction, and supervisor support) and intention to stay amongst non-family employees in gold merchant. The study revealed a positive connection between organisational commitment and intention to stay. They further discovered 62% of adjusted R square, which explain the model's variance for the relationship between organisational commitment factors and intention to stay. They also found the interval level of 95%, which indicated an intention to stay would increase with organisational commitment.

A recent study conducted by Bell and Sheridan (2020) over general nurses during this Covid-19 pandemic shows that organisational commitment was the strongest predictor of nurses staying in nursing. The results also show that the nurses' commitment to their organisation is more significant than their specific feelings or satisfaction with their work. This result has led the respondents to have faith in the organisation's goals and values and intend to continue or remain working.

Uraon (2017) has established a positive and significant relationship between affective and normative commitment with the intention to stay at the significance level of .01. Between these two, normative commitment was found to have a stronger relationship. However, there is an insignificant and unrelated relationship between continuance commitment, and the intention to stay as the impact was almost 0 (ß = –.00, t = 0.09, p = .95). Based on the result, the study further argued that continuance commitment may not always be the significant predictor of turnover intention, although there might be a conflict of findings in other research.

The research of Pham and Pham (2016) revealed two findings; (i) minimum positive impact of job satisfaction on organisational commitment, and (ii) significant positive impact of organisational commitment to intention to stay. To clarify, job satisfaction indirectly influences

the universities and colleges lecturers working in Bac Lieu City, Bac Lieu province's intention to remain. Whereby organisational commitment directly influences or impact their intention to stay.

A survey was conducted on registered general nurses employed in the Republic of Ireland on how organisational commitment and burnout may clarify nurses' reasons to stay in nursing. While having a moderate positive correlation with the intention to stay, organisational commitment had a stronger correlation with job satisfaction (Bell & Sheridan, 2020). Redditt, Gregory and Ro (2017) conducted a study testing the three dimensions of organisational commitments in the timeshare industry, and their results showed all the dimensions positively linked to the intention to stay. An affective commitment was found to have the strongest correlation, followed by normative commitment and continuance commitment.

A study conducted by Noor et al. (2020) to the executives/managers of ICT companies in Malaysia showed that organisational commitment influences an employee's intention in an organisation. However, only normative commitment significantly influences the intention to stay, while the affective commitment and continuance commitment are not significant. Meanwhile, a study conducted on front-line employees of the deluxe international chain hotels in Greater Cairo, Egypt, showed a different result as organisational commitment was used as the mediator between leadership and intention to stay. Findings revealed that affective commitment and normative commitment are significantly contributed to the intention to stay. Thus, if an employee's affective commitment increased, the intention to stay also increased. Some of the employees also have a strong feeling about their needs and obligations to stay with the hotel. In contrast, the relationship between continuance commitment and intention to stay is proven not significant. This is because the employees feel that there is no alternative employment, hence, requiring them to stay (Sobaih, Hasanein, Aliedan, & Abdallah, 2020).

Shanker (2013) conducted a study in numerous IT and Pharmaceutical companies in Western Region of India, found that affective commitment has a positive correlation with the intention to stay. On the other hand, there is a negative correlation between continuance commitment and intention to stay.

Based on the above discussion, there are mixed findings on the relationship between organisational commitment and intention to stay/turnover intention. As such, this study will test all the dimensions in organisational commitment to further confirm their relationship with intention to stay. Based on this, it is hypothesised as follow:

Hypothesis 1: The organisational commitment (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment) positively related to the intention to stay.

3.2 Felt Obligation as a Mediator

Felt obligation can be experienced as something that employees should do or want to do (Berg et al. (2001). According to Wiener (1982), when employees feel ought to do so, this organisational commitment is regarded as moral obligation since the employees experienced internal pressure arising from reciprocal obligation. In light of organisational support theory, POS has shown a favourable influence on employees' behaviour, primarily because it gives the person a sense of obligation to pay the organisation (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Since POS provides with a large number of tangible and immaterial resources, the reciprocity will establish a felt obligation to remain in the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 2004). Employees react to the organisation's favourable treatment by feeling obligated to care

for their organisation's welfare and act on behalf of the organisation, thus improving positive attitudes and behaviour. Emerging from POS, felt obligation had been subsequently correlated with affective commitment (Yew, 2011). Employees who display a high sense of obligation also concern themselves with the intent to devote themselves, and they experience a strong attachment to it (Wikhamn & Selart, 2019). A possible reason for this was that employees must feel attached in the sense of social exchange before they would feel obliged to the organisation (Pradesa, Dawud & Affandi, 2019).

In addition, organisational commitment should be further explored as to determine whether the employees stay with their organisation solely because of the benefits that they are entitled to in the form of individual investment within that organisation or due to the high perceived costs of quitting the job, particularly in the economic turmoil (Ahmad, 2018). To analyse the degree to which reciprocity characterises the relationship between organisational commitment and intention to stay, we evaluate the extent to which organisational commitment strengthens the employees' felt obligation, which in turn affects employees' intention to stay. As such, the following is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 2: Felt obligation mediates the relationship between organisational commitment and intention to stay

3.3 Felt Obligation as a Moderator

Felt obligation can be regarded as an essential aspect for social exchange between two parties who aim to develop and maintain a favourable reciprocal relationship progressively with time. (Paille & Valeau, 2020). This social exchange induces feelings of obligation to the individual to return the favourable treatment given by showing an attitude that will be advantageous for the organisation (Blau, 1964). It has been proposed that felt obligation is also the presumption that a person should act towards another individual to fulfil particular objectives (Greenfield, 2009).

Accordingly, we speculate whether felt obligation has the capacity to strengthen the relationship between organisational commitment and intention to stay. Leaving a favourable social exchange relationship may result in a loss to employees as it makes a withdrawal from the organisation personally costly (Mossholder et al., 2005). As such, committed employees instil felt obligation to return the favour with desirable work attitudes and behaviours. We suggest that employees with a high level of organisational commitment are more likely to raise their intention to stay because of their sense of obligation. In contrast, those with a low level of organisational commitment appear to have a low intention to stay because they feel little obligation. Accordingly, we put this moderating impact of the felt obligation between the organisational commitment and the intention to stay. To sum up, there is a dearth of study into whether employees feel obligated to stay in the sense of their commitment to their organisation. Based on the rationale set out above, we hypothesise the following:

Hypothesis 3: The direct relationship between organisational commitment and intention to stay is conditioned by felt obligation, such that this direct relationship is stronger at high levels of felt obligation.
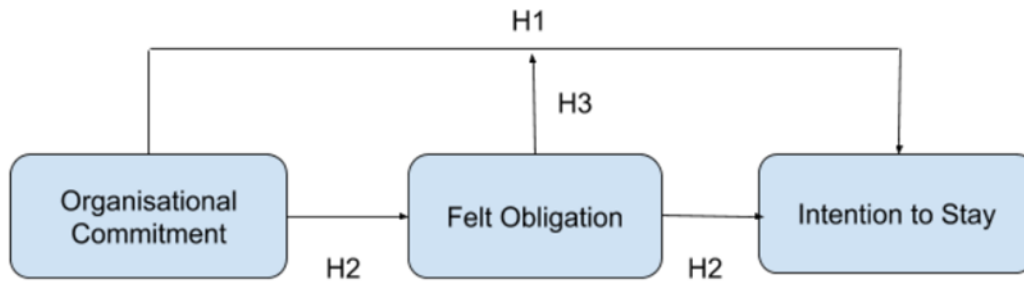
Figure 1: Research Model

4. Measurement of variables and instruments

Based on the literature review, Figure 1 explain the research framework for investigating the relationship between organisational commitment and intention to stay and the role of felt obligation as mediating and moderating to this relationship. Within this framework, the independent variable is organisation commitment (affective, normative and continuance commitment); intention to stay is a dependent variable; felt obligation is mediating and moderating.

To measure the three dimensions of organisational commitment: affective, normative and continuance commitment, the organisational commitment scale of Allen and Mayer (1990) will be used in this study. The 18-items scale in the organisation commitment (shortened version with six items per dimension) of the questionnaire included items such as "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organisation" (affective commitment). For continuance commitment scale items such as "It would be very hard for me to leave my job at this organisation right now even if I wanted to" and 6 item scale in normative commitment included items such as "I would not leave my organisation right now because of my sense of obligation to it."

The 7-item scale in the felt obligation section of the survey included items such as "I feel a personal obligation to do whatever I can help the organisation achieve its goal" and was adapted from Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, and Rhoades (2001). The 6-item scale in the intention to stay was adapted from the authors Coombs (2009) & Starssen & Ursel (2009). "I have the desire and intend to remain working at this organisation" was adapted from Coombs (2009), however for Starssen & Ursel (2009) the 3-items such as "I expect to work at my present organisation for as long as possible". All the measurement for each scale were based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The current pandemic of Covid-19 has seriously impacted Malaysian economic (Saad, 2020), leading to insecurity at work whereby as of April 2020, 14.93 million of employment volume has dropped (Kawi, 2020). Hence, this study should be reviewed to provide assistance and light for the management in facing the current changing working situation. The conceptual model presented in this paper is still at conceptual level and has not been tested yet through empirical study. However, this paper suggests organisational commitment as deserving much more research and analysis to link with intention to stay. It recommends the determination of three dimension of work commitment namely continuance, affective and normative towards employees' intention to stay due to its inconsistent findings previously (Redditt et al., 2017;

Noor et al., 2020; Sobaih et al., 2020; Shanker, 2013). In addition, the paper provides guidelines on how felt obligation might have a moderating and mediating impact on organisational commitment as to significantly affect intention to stay. This paper may provide insights on felt obligation and organisational commitment on intention to stay in various affected industries during the pandemic such as retail, tourism, manufacturing industries. For example, it was reported that the retail industry shrank by more than 11 per cent in the first quarter of the year 2020 in its worst performance since the 1987 global recession (Zahid, 2020). In addition, RM100 billion losses were suffered by the Malaysian local tourism sector for the year 2020 due to the pandemic (Daim, 2020). Therefore, the conceptual model proposed herewith is worth testing on those affected industries. We suggest establishing a broader examination of intention to stay among employees particularly during Covid-19 pandemic for the upcoming study, so that the analysis generated is comprehensive, stronger and more concrete. Moreover, in practice, it will assist business organisations in adapting careful consideration of the issues in question and fostering organisational commitment and intention to stay among employees.

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