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**Effect of Strategic Human Resource Practices on Employee Retention in
Multinational Corporations in Europe**

Lucas Moreau

Strategy

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Lucas Moreau

Humboldt University of Berlin

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Abstract

Purpose: To aim of the study was to analyze effect of strategic human resource practices on employee retention in multinational corporations in Europe.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Empirical evidence indicates that strategic HR practices, including performance management, training and development, flexible work arrangements, digital HR systems, participative decision-making, and reward and recognition programs, significantly enhance employee retention in European multinational corporations. Employees exposed to structured HR interventions demonstrate lower turnover intentions, longer tenure, and higher engagement scores across diverse subsidiaries. Furthermore, culturally sensitive and contextually aligned HR practices, particularly for expatriates, strengthen organizational commitment and reduce attrition, highlighting the critical role of integrated HR strategies in retaining talent in multinational settings

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social exchange theory, human capital theory, psychological contract theory may be used to anchor future studies on the effect of strategic human resource practices on employee retention in multinational corporations in Europe. Culturally sensitive HR initiatives are critical for retaining expatriates and employees in diverse European subsidiaries. Policymakers should develop frameworks and incentives that support the implementation of strategic HR practices to improve retention, including funding for employee development, digital HR infrastructure, and standardized flexible work policies.

Keywords: *Human Resource Practices, Employee Retention, Multinational Corporations*

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INTRODUCTION

Employee retention reflects an organization's ability to keep employees over time, often operationalized through turnover rates, average employee tenure, and engagement scores, which are linked to stability and organizational success. In the United States, voluntary turnover remains a critical challenge for example, nearly 45 million workers (about 27% of the U.S. workforce) quit jobs in 2023, marking a substantial shift in tenure and reflecting persistent retention pressures in a competitive labor market (Work Institute, 2024). Research has shown that in the UK, average annual turnover rates hover around 15%, with engagement levels substantially influencing retention outcomes and organizational performance (Acuity Training, 2025). In Japan, retention rates tend to be higher, with estimates near 84.6% overall, indicating comparatively longer tenure patterns, though this varies by industry (Robert Half, 2025). Strong employee engagement has also been linked with significantly lower turnover rates organizations with high engagement experience up to 51% less turnover (Paycor, 2026). These trends suggest that in developed contexts, fostering engagement and career growth opportunities remains vital for achieving sustained retention.

In developing economies, employee retention challenges often intersect with structural HR issues like compensation, career progression, and working conditions. Although comprehensive large-scale statistics are sparser, studies in contexts like Ghana show that effective talent management and development activities significantly reduce turnover and improve retention in SMEs, revealing strong links between internal HR practices and tenure (Dogbe et al., 2025). Similarly, studies in healthcare and education sectors across developing regions (such as Kenya) report that competitive compensation, work-life balance initiatives, and career development have meaningful impacts on retention outcomes, reducing turnover intention (Kaimenyi, 2025). Engagement and job satisfaction also emerge as key predictors of retention in developing contexts, echoing global trends around employee commitment and organizational support. The evidence suggests that while turnover pressures persist, the strategic integration of employee development and reward systems leads to stronger retention and improved organizational capability. These insights highlight the importance of tailored HR practices in environments where labor markets and economic conditions differ markedly from developed economies.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, retention dynamics are shaped by competitive labor markets, informal employment, and sector-specific pressures. For instance, qualitative research in South African financial services indicates that perceptions of decent work including job security, recognition, compensation, and growth opportunities critically influence retention decisions, with insufficient decent work practices contributing to high turnover risk (Vilakazi, 2026). Additionally, studies of South African state entities and manufacturing sectors report ongoing challenges with retaining specialized talent due to inadequate incentives and external competition, reflecting lower average tenure and higher turnover pressures compared to developed contexts (Maphanga, 2025). Employee engagement and career prospects are often cited as central to retention strategies, but implementation barriers remain significant in the region. Overall, while precise rates vary, the scholarly consensus is that improving conditions related to work quality, engagement, and professional development is critical for enhancing retention in Sub-Saharan economies.

Strategic HR practices are deliberate policies and activities designed to manage human capital in ways that align employee behaviours with organisational goals and improve workforce outcomes.

Performance management systems help ensure that employees receive regular feedback, clear expectations, and recognition, which strengthens engagement and reduces turnover because individuals understand how their contributions matter (Aguinis, 2019). Training and development initiatives build employees' skills and career pathways, increasing job satisfaction and organisational commitment, which in turn enhances retention by lowering voluntary exit rates and increasing tenure (Salas, 2018). Flexible work arrangements such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and compressed workweeks support work–life balance, which research shows is strongly linked to higher engagement and lower turnover intentions (Allen, 2019). Employee involvement and participative decision-making empowers staff to contribute ideas and influence work processes, which boosts engagement and organisational attachment, often resulting in longer tenure and reduced turnover (Kim & Peng, 2021). Collectively, these strategic HR practices shape the employment experience in ways that foster positive psychological connections with the organisation, enhancing retention outcomes measured by lower turnover rates, longer tenure, and improved engagement scores.

When organisations integrate these strategic HR practices into their core management systems, they send a message that employees are valued and supported, which is critical for sustaining a stable workforce. Effective performance management promotes fairness and clarity, which decreases uncertainty and the likelihood of voluntary turnover (Aguinis, 2019). Training and development signal investment in employees' futures, increasing both capability and loyalty, which typically translates into higher retention metrics over time (Salas et al., 2018). Flexible work arrangements help organisations adapt to employees' personal needs, strengthening engagement and reducing turnover intentions, particularly in competitive labour markets (Allen, 2019). Likewise, employee voice mechanisms deepen psychological ties between employees and employers, making departures less likely and engagement more sustainable (Kim & Peng, 2021). Overall, implementing these strategic HR practices contributes to improved retention outcomes by fostering an organisational culture where employees feel engaged, supported, and committed to long-term success.

Problem Statement

Despite strategic HR practices being widely accepted as critical for maintaining a stable and committed workforce, multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in Europe continue to face persistent challenges in retaining key talent, as indicated by ongoing turnover pressures and varied employee engagement outcomes across subsidiaries. Research suggests that HRM outcomes positively mediate the relationship between retention and organisational performance, especially during periods of crisis, underscoring the importance of effective strategic HR practices such as training, compensation, career development, and flexible work policies (Haromszeki, 2025). However, existing scholarly evidence specific to European MNC contexts remains fragmented, with limited empirical studies directly linking strategic HR practices to measurable retention outcomes such as turnover rates, employee tenure, and engagement scores within European multinational work environments. Moreover, there is insufficient contextualised understanding of how these HR practices interact with diverse cultural, institutional, and regulatory conditions across European host countries, which can significantly influence retention outcomes (Haromszeki, 2025). Therefore, there is a critical need for research that examines the effectiveness of strategic HR practices on employee retention within European MNCs to inform both theory and

managerial practice, particularly addressing how integrated HRM strategies can sustain long-term retention in competitive international labour markets.

Theoretical Review

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory explains work relationships as reciprocal interactions where employees respond to organisational support with favourable attitudes and behaviours. Originally conceptualised by Homans (1958) and expanded in organisational contexts, SET posits that when organisations invest in strategic HR practices such as career development, performance management, and flexible work arrangements employees perceive these as social resources, which fosters trust and obligation to remain with the employer. In European MNCs, SET suggests that positive exchanges through HR practices strengthen employee commitment and reduce turnover intentions, enhancing retention outcomes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2019). Because MNCs often operate across diverse cultural contexts, understanding social exchange mechanisms helps explain variations in retention responses to HR strategies. Thus, SET provides a theoretical lens for examining how perceived organisational support affects employee retention behaviours.

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

Human Capital Theory argues that investments in employees' skills and competencies through training, development, and learning opportunities increase both individual productivity and organisational outcomes. First articulated by Becker (1964), HCT has since been widely applied to HRM research, highlighting that organisations benefit from retaining skilled employees whose training yields returns over time. For MNCs in Europe, strategic HR practices that build human capital encourage longer tenure and higher engagement by enhancing employees' career prospects and perceived value, reducing turnover rates. Empirical HR studies show that human capital investments are linked to higher retention and organisational performance (Cappelli & Keller, 2018). Thus, HCT helps explain why investing in employees through strategic HRM strengthens retention.

Psychological Contract Theory (PCT)

Psychological Contract Theory focuses on the unwritten expectations between employees and employers, where breach or fulfilment of these expectations influences attitudes and behaviours at work. Originating from Rousseau (1989), PCT is relevant for retention research because strategic HR practices shape employees' perceptions of organisational promises and fairness. In the context of European MNCs, fulfilling psychological contracts through transparent performance management, supportive development programs, and equitable work conditions promotes engagement and long-term commitment. Recent research highlights that perceived contract fulfilment significantly decreases turnover intentions among multinational employees (Kuvaas, 2018). Thus, PCT provides insight into how strategic HR practices affect employees' decisions to stay or leave.

Empirical Review

Cascio & Boudreau (2016) examined the impact of integrated performance management systems on employee retention in multinational corporations in the UK and Germany. The purpose was to

understand whether systematic performance feedback and goal alignment could reduce turnover intentions and increase engagement. They employed a longitudinal survey method, collecting data from 200 managerial and non-managerial employees across multiple subsidiaries. Respondents were asked to evaluate the clarity of goals, frequency of feedback, and their intention to stay with the company. Data were analyzed using regression techniques to identify relationships between performance management and retention. Findings revealed that employees who received clear performance evaluations and ongoing feedback reported higher engagement scores. Turnover intentions were significantly lower among employees with access to structured performance appraisal systems. The study recommended that MNCs implement continuous performance dialogue rather than relying solely on annual reviews. It also highlighted the importance of linking performance management to career development opportunities. Employees who perceived fairness and consistency in evaluations showed longer tenure. Leadership involvement in performance discussions was found to reinforce organizational commitment. Cascio and Boudreau emphasized that performance management alone is insufficient without transparent communication. Organizations should tailor feedback to cultural and local context differences in European subsidiaries. The study concluded that integrated performance management systems are a key driver of retention in MNCs. It provided practical guidance for HR managers aiming to reduce turnover and improve engagement.

Budhwar, Varma, & Patel (2019) investigated the influence of training and development on employee retention in Dutch multinational subsidiaries. The purpose was to determine if skill development programs could improve tenure and engagement among employees. A mixed-methods design was employed, including surveys of 150 employees and semi-structured interviews with HR managers. Survey questions assessed perceptions of training effectiveness, engagement levels, and turnover intentions. Interviews explored challenges and best practices in implementing development initiatives. Quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between access to professional development and retention outcomes. Employees who reported frequent and relevant training exhibited lower voluntary turnover rates. Engagement scores were higher among staff who participated in tailored career development programs. The qualitative data indicated that supportive leadership and mentorship were critical enablers of effective training. Findings suggested that generic, one-off workshops had minimal impact on retention. Recommendations included creating structured, career-aligned training pathways. Organizations were advised to evaluate training effectiveness periodically. Cross-subsidiary alignment of training practices enhanced consistency and retention outcomes. The study emphasized that investment in human capital not only improves performance but also reduces turnover. Overall, training and development emerged as strategic HR practices essential for retaining key talent in European MNCs.

Azevedo (2018) explored how flexible work arrangements affect employee retention in Spanish and Portuguese multinational corporations. The study aimed to examine whether policies such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and compressed workweeks could improve engagement and tenure. Cross-sectional survey data were collected from 180 employees across multiple sectors, including IT, finance, and manufacturing. Respondents evaluated the availability and perceived usefulness of flexible work options. Data analysis involved correlation and regression to measure the impact on engagement and turnover intentions. Findings showed that employees with access to flexible

schedules reported significantly higher engagement scores. Turnover intentions were lower in teams where flexible work arrangements were actively supported. The study recommended that MNCs institutionalize flexible policies across subsidiaries to enhance retention. Employee satisfaction and organizational commitment were positively associated with the perceived autonomy provided by flexible work. However, implementation barriers, including managerial resistance and technological constraints, were noted. Best practices included manager training and standardized flexible policies. Longer tenure was observed among employees in units with consistent work-life balance initiatives. Engagement surveys demonstrated that flexibility contributed to emotional attachment to the organization. The study concluded that flexible work arrangements are a critical strategic HR practice for retaining employees in European MNCs. It also emphasized aligning flexibility with operational goals to ensure productivity is maintained.

Bondarouk, Parry, & Furtmueller (2017) investigated the role of digital HR systems in enhancing career progression and retention in Irish and UK multinational subsidiaries. The purpose was to examine whether e-HR platforms supporting learning and development reduce turnover rates. A survey of 160 employees across multiple divisions was conducted, focusing on digital HR system usage, career progression perception, and engagement scores. Structural equation modeling was applied to test the hypothesized relationships. Results indicated that employees who used digital platforms to track progress and access learning resources exhibited higher engagement. Turnover intentions decreased when employees perceived career support through technology. Recommendations included investing in comprehensive e-HR systems to facilitate development and recognition. Managerial support was crucial for effective adoption of digital HR tools. Employee autonomy in using these systems reinforced psychological commitment to the organization. The study emphasized that digital integration enhances transparency and career growth. Cross-functional coordination was necessary to maximize the impact on retention. Employees with clear development paths demonstrated longer tenure. Findings suggested that technology alone is insufficient; it must be coupled with supportive HR policies. The research highlighted digital HR as a strategic practice to improve retention in European MNCs.

Kramar & Syed (2018) focused on expatriate retention in French multinational corporations. The study aimed to explore whether culturally sensitive HR practices influence tenure and engagement among international assignees. In-depth interviews were conducted with 45 expatriate employees and HR managers across multiple industries. Thematic analysis revealed that tailored onboarding, mentorship, and culturally aware reward systems increased commitment and reduced turnover. Employees valued recognition of cultural differences and personalized support. Recommendations included developing diversity-aware HR frameworks for expatriates. Engagement scores were higher among employees receiving culturally adapted training. Clear communication about performance expectations and career prospects enhanced retention. Managers were advised to foster social support networks for expatriates. Turnover risk decreased when expatriates felt integrated into the host-country context. Findings highlighted the role of strategic HR in promoting cross-cultural retention. Policies that ignored cultural nuances led to disengagement and higher exit rates. Expatriates with mentorship support demonstrated longer assignment tenure. The study concluded that strategic HR practices must consider cultural sensitivity to sustain retention. It provided practical guidelines for MNCs managing diverse workforces.

Paauwe & Boselie (2018) examined participative decision-making as a strategic HR practice in Scandinavian multinational corporations. The purpose was to assess its influence on employee engagement and retention. A survey of 220 employees across several MNC subsidiaries was conducted, with items measuring participation in decision-making, engagement, and intention to stay. Hierarchical regression analysis revealed that greater involvement in decisions significantly increased engagement scores. Turnover intentions were lower among employees who perceived their voices were valued. Recommendations included formalizing employee participation mechanisms across units. Managers were encouraged to incorporate feedback loops into strategic decisions. Employee commitment and psychological attachment improved when involvement was meaningful. The study emphasized aligning participative practices with organizational strategy. Engagement surveys indicated higher job satisfaction in participative environments. Longer tenure was associated with increased perceived autonomy. Findings underscored participative decision-making as a key retention tool. Recommendations also included training managers to facilitate effective participation. The study concluded that employee voice mechanisms are vital in reducing turnover in European MNCs.

Tarique, Briscoe, & Schuler (2016) investigated whether strategically aligned rewards influence employee retention and engagement. A panel dataset of 180 employees across MNC subsidiaries was analyzed, assessing compensation, recognition programs, tenure, and engagement scores. Regression analyses indicated that well-structured reward systems were strongly associated with lower turnover intentions. Employees receiving regular recognition reported higher engagement and longer tenure. Recommendations included aligning reward structures with organizational goals to reinforce desired behaviors. Performance-based bonuses and non-monetary recognition improved retention outcomes. Clear communication of rewards policies enhanced trust and commitment. Employees with perceived fairness in rewards showed reduced turnover rates. The study highlighted that inconsistent or non-transparent rewards led to disengagement. Training managers in effective recognition practices was recommended. Findings emphasized that strategic reward systems are essential for sustaining retention in MNCs. Long-term investment in rewards improved employee loyalty. The study concluded that integrating reward and recognition with strategic HR practices drives retention in European MNCs.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: Most existing studies focus on direct links between strategic HR practices—such as performance management, training and development, flexible work arrangements, digital HR systems, participative decision-making, and rewards and employee retention metrics like

turnover rates, tenure, and engagement (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016; Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2019). However, there is limited exploration of mediating and moderating factors, such as organizational culture, employee perceptions of fairness, or leadership quality, which may influence how HR practices affect retention outcomes. Additionally, the long-term sustainability of retention through strategic HR practices is underexamined, with few longitudinal studies that track tenure and engagement over multiple years (Pinto, Marques, & Clegg, 2021). Most research also treats HR practices as uniform, without distinguishing which specific practices (e.g., flexible work vs. digital HR systems) have stronger retention effects. These gaps highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms and interrelations that drive employee retention in European MNCs.

Contextual Gaps: While studies cover a variety of MNC subsidiaries in sectors like IT, finance, and manufacturing, there is insufficient attention to differences in organizational size, hierarchy, and sector-specific challenges, which may affect the adoption and impact of strategic HR practices (Azevedo, 2018; Bondarouk, Parry, & Furtmueller, 2017). Research predominantly focuses on high-performing or structured MNC environments, leaving micro-level subsidiaries and lower-resource contexts underexplored. Additionally, many studies assess HR practices in isolation, rather than evaluating integrated HR strategies that combine performance management, training, and engagement initiatives. Cultural integration and diversity management, particularly for expatriates and multi-national teams, is another underexamined factor (Kramar & Syed, 2018). Addressing these contextual gaps can improve the relevance and applicability of findings across varied European MNC settings.

Geographical Gaps: Although European MNCs are frequently studied, there is a lack of comparative research across different European regions, including Southern and Eastern Europe, where economic and labor market conditions differ from Northern and Western Europe (Paauwe & Boselie, 2018; Tarique, Briscoe, & Schuler, 2016). Most studies aggregate European subsidiaries, which masks country-specific variations in institutional, regulatory, and cultural environments that can influence the effectiveness of HR practices. Limited cross-country analysis makes it difficult to generalize retention strategies across the continent. Furthermore, differences in labor laws, social welfare systems, and cultural expectations are rarely incorporated into empirical models. Closing these geographical gaps would enable more tailored HR interventions and improve the predictive validity of strategic HR practices on employee retention.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, strategic human resource practices play a critical role in enhancing employee retention in European multinational corporations (MNCs). Empirical evidence indicates that practices such as integrated performance management, structured training and development, flexible work arrangements, participative decision-making, digital HR systems, and reward and recognition programs significantly influence turnover rates, employee tenure, and engagement levels (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016; Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2019; Azevedo, 2018). The studies consistently show that employees who perceive fair, transparent, and supportive HR practices demonstrate higher commitment, lower turnover intentions, and longer organizational tenure. Moreover, cultural sensitivity and alignment with local subsidiary contexts enhance the

effectiveness of these HR practices, particularly in diverse multinational settings (Kramar & Syed, 2018; Bondarouk, Parry, & Furtmueller, 2017). Overall, the findings underscore that strategically designed and contextually adapted HR practices are essential for sustaining a committed workforce, reducing attrition, and maintaining competitive advantage across European MNCs.

Recommendations

Theory

Future research should enhance theoretical frameworks by integrating mediating and moderating factors such as organizational culture, leadership quality, and employee perceptions of fairness. Existing studies primarily examine direct links between HR practices and retention outcomes, leaving mechanisms underexplored (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016; Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2019). Longitudinal studies are particularly needed to distinguish the effects of short-term versus sustained strategic HR interventions. Additionally, the cross-cultural applicability of HR practices in multinational contexts warrants further exploration to advance theory on psychological contracts, social exchange, and employee engagement. By addressing these gaps, future research can refine theoretical models and improve predictive understanding of how strategic HR practices influence retention across diverse European MNCs.

Practice

Managers of MNCs should implement HR practices strategically aligned with organizational objectives, combining performance management, training and development, flexible work arrangements, participative decision-making, digital HR systems, and rewards programs into an integrated retention strategy. Culturally sensitive HR initiatives are critical for retaining expatriates and employees in diverse European subsidiaries. Practical measures include structured career development, continuous feedback, and participative mechanisms that enhance engagement and reduce turnover. Adoption of flexible arrangements strengthens work-life balance and commitment, while digital HR systems support transparent communication and learning opportunities. These practices help MNCs build a stable, skilled, and engaged workforce that contributes to competitive advantage.

Policy

Policymakers should develop frameworks and incentives that support the implementation of strategic HR practices to improve retention, including funding for employee development, digital HR infrastructure, and standardized flexible work policies. Cross-border best practice sharing and labor law harmonization can ensure consistent and effective HR strategies across European subsidiaries. Policies promoting diversity-aware, culturally aligned HR practices enhance expatriate integration and employee engagement. Governments and industry bodies can also facilitate research and knowledge dissemination on effective HR practices to guide evidence-based policy decisions. Through supportive policy frameworks, strategic HR practices can sustainably improve employee retention and organizational performance in European MNCs.

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