

# International Journal of Research in Human Resource Management



E-ISSN: 2663-3361  
P-ISSN: 2663-3213  
IJRHRM 2022; 4(2): 01-06  
Received: 03-04-2022  
Accepted: 04-05-2022

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## Turnover & organizational commitment in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine whether organizational commitment plays a major role in the high turnover rates of employees in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. For this research, 120 employees from the oil and gas industry were randomly sampled. They were then issued with questionnaire which they were supposed to fill within a period of two weeks. The analysis of the collected data revealed that Out of the 120 employees involved in the research, only 15 employees have been in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia for more than 2 years. The employees that had a low level of commitment were found to be 89 while only 10 of the employees had a high level of commitment in the oil and gas industry. This was an indicator that the industry was at a high risk of high employee turnover. High employee turnover has several downsides such as increased operational costs in hiring and training of new workers, disruptions due to loss of expertise and experience and more importantly, reduced revenues and profits. In order to reduce this high turnover rates, the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia has to improve organizational commitment. This can be achieved by creating a strong team culture, communicating goals and expectations to employees, upholding high ethical values, encouraging creativity and innovation, providing positive criticism, and offering incentives to best performing employees.

**Keywords:** Organizational commitment, affective commitment, normative commitment, Continuance commitment

### Introduction

Saudi Arabia holds 17% of all oil reserves in the world with a crude oil capacity production of around 12 million barrels each day. The oil and gas sector accounts for 50% of the Gross Domestic Product and accounts for 87% of the budget revenues in the country (Nakov & Nuno, 2021) <sup>[21]</sup>. In 2021, the Gross Domestic Product fell by 4% as a result of the reduced demand which was as a result of COVID-19. However, after the end of this period, the production resumed back to the original revenues. Due to over reliance on oil products, Saudi Arabia has come up with the Vision 2030 which aims at the diversification of export and incomes to other alternative forms of income such as entertainment, sports and transport (Shammas, 2000) <sup>[24]</sup>.

The Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi ARAMCO) is the state owned natural oil and gas company that deals with the drilling, supply and exportation of oil in Saudi Arabia. The company was established in 1933 and started the drilling operations in 1938. Due to the importance of crude oil to the Saudi economy, it is considered one of the biggest companies in the world in terms of revenue. It is also the most profitable company in the world eclipsing the likes of Apple and Alphabet. In 2021, it had a revenue of about \$360 billion which was an increase of more than 100% compared to the previous year. Around 66,800 employees work for Aramco and its subsidiaries as at 2021. The range of careers in Aramco include engineers, pipefitters, maintenance workers, logistics, financial advisors, auditors, lawyers and managers (Stevens, 2018) <sup>[25]</sup>.

Over the past decade, the employee turnover rate has been on the increase in the oil and gas sector (Hodur & Bangsund, 2016) <sup>[14]</sup>. Employee turnover is the ratio of workers that have to be replaced over a certain period of time compared to the average number of workers in the company (Dale-Olsen, n.d.) <sup>[9]</sup>. Companies invest a lot in the training of employees and therefore high employee turnover is an unwanted scenario since it affects the overall production, revenues and the overall state of the employee interest (Aziz & Sriyono, 2021) <sup>[5]</sup>. Organizational behavior (OB) is how people interact in an organization so as to achieve goals of the organization.

It is a major determinant in the overall satisfaction of workers and therefore it is crucial factor in employee turnover (Novitasari, 2019) <sup>[22]</sup>. One of the elements of organizational behavior which play a major role in the satisfaction of employees is organizational commitment. Organizational commitment (OC) is the emotional connection that employees have with their organization which eventually determines how contented they feel in the organization (Kinicki & Fugate, 2016) <sup>[17]</sup>. This research will therefore focus on the role organizational commitment plays in the high employee turnover rate in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia.

### Literature review

High employee turnover is a serious issue across all companies in the world. According to Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) <sup>[2]</sup>, nearly half of 49% Malaysian companies recorded employee turnover in 2015. 7% of the companies had a turnover rate of less than 10% while 11% of the companies recorded an employee turnover of more than 50%. In the whole of Southeast Asia, Malaysia recorded the second highest voluntary turnover rate at 6%. Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) <sup>[2]</sup> found that the most common reason for high employee turnover was that there were discrepancies between the job and the person. This was brought about by the feeling that the workplace did not fit the employee's expectations. The second major reason for employees leaving companies was that there was little training and feedback which brought about limited opportunities for growth and career advancement. The third major reason that Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) <sup>[2]</sup> found to be causing high employee turnover was the lack of recognition and trust by the top management of the company which led to the employees feeling devalued by the companies.

The effects of employee turnover in companies were found to include high operating costs which led to lower revenue and profits. This is because vital resources such as time and money have to be diverted towards recruitment and training of new workers. The efficiency of the companies were also found to significantly dwindle due to the disruption which are brought by employee turnover. As employees leave the companies, they take with them the experience and expertise which might take time and resources to restore (Al-Moneef, 2002) <sup>[1]</sup>. Carter (2006) <sup>[7]</sup> suggests that in order to reduce the turnover rates, companies should increase employee involvement in order to make them feel valued and part of the company. This can be done through involving the employees in decision making and in problem solving. The other way that can be used to reduce the turnover rates is through employee training, constant motivation at the workplace, empowerment, promotion and bonus programs (Kwon & Ok, 2021) <sup>[18]</sup>.

According to Hodur & Bangsund (2016) <sup>[14]</sup>, workforce turnover is one of the main challenges facing the oil and gas industry in North Dakota. Retaining workers remains a great challenge since workers tend to move to higher paying jobs in the industry. Employers in this industry also have the tendency to poach workers from other employers in the service sector. In order to attract some of the best talents in the industry, some companies offer higher salaries to employees (Peart, 2006) <sup>[23]</sup>. This leads to a vicious cycle as employees leave one company for another hence destabilizing the whole oil and natural gas industry. This tendency has seen some companies lose as much as 30% of

their annual revenues which is negative news in the industry (Dwanti & Syahlani, 2020) <sup>[10]</sup>. Job hopping is also a constant threat as workers hop from one employer to the other and stay long enough just to secure the signing bonus (Blahna, 2015) <sup>[6]</sup>. The signing bonus is usually a cash incentive offered to prospective employees so as to lure them to sign with the company (Hannan et al., n.d.) <sup>[12]</sup>. This turnover as a result of the signing bonus is not limited only to the skilled workers but also the semi-skilled labor force. Some firms that dealt mainly with logistics in the oil and gas sector in North Dakota reported a 75% annual turnover rate which is quite a high rate compared to other employers in the state despite the significance of the oil and gas industry in the state (Hodur & Bangsund, 2016) <sup>[14]</sup>.

A study was made in the Bahraini Oil and Gas Industry to investigate the impact of organizational commitment on the employee turnover (Ayari & AlHamaqi, 2021) <sup>[3]</sup>. The study found that BAPCO, which is the distributor of oil and gas in Bahrain, has been experiencing high levels of employee turnover in the recent years due to the fact that employees are being poached overseas by other companies. The problem was worsened by the fact that the government is offering its residents opportunities for early retirement. Organizational commitment plays a major role in the employee turnover in BAPCO (Ayari & AlHamaqi, 2021) <sup>[3]</sup>. Meyer & Allen (1991) <sup>[19]</sup> suggested that organizational commitment is made up of affective commitment (AC) which is the extent of attachment to the organization, continuance commitment (CC), which is the recognition of the cost of an employee leaving and organization and Normative Commitment (NC) which is the moral conscience of an employee to remain in the organization. The study by Ayari & AlHamaqi (2021) <sup>[3]</sup> found that affective commitment among employees in BAPCO is low. The employees do not have an emotional sense of connection and this is increasingly leading to lack of reduced sense of belonging to the company which negatively affects commitment (Waller, 2021) <sup>[27]</sup>. As a result, this disunity is leading to many employees to leave the company for rival companies in neighboring counties. This has in many instances disrupted the drilling, distillation and supply of oil and gas which is has led to reduced revenue for BAPCO (Waller, 2021) <sup>[27]</sup>.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), high employee turnover is also a major issue. High employee turnover rates cost the country around \$2.7 billion every year (Harhara et al., 2015) <sup>[13]</sup>. Employee turnover can be categorized as either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary employee turnover is when the employees decide to leave the company themselves while involuntary employee turnover is when the employees are dismissed by organizations. Several factors that determine the rate of employee turnover include organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Karsh et al., 2005) <sup>[16]</sup>. This study focused on how organizational commitment affects the employee turnover in the oil and gas industry especially in the remote areas of the UAE. The research results showed that many of the employees in the oil and gas sector were leaving their job roles due to perception of lack or organization commitment by their employers. Therefore, the study concludes that high levels of organizational commitment can lead to increased cohesiveness which brings about job satisfaction and can consequently lead to a low employee turnover (Wang et al., 2011) <sup>[28]</sup>.

A study done by Awan, A.G. (2015) [4] shows the issue of high employee turnover in the Oil Refinery Industry of Pakistan. The study was done so as to establish the costs of high employee turnover. The oil refinery industry in Pakistan is made up of several companies such as Dhodak Refinery of OGDCL, National Refinery Limited (NRL), Pakistan Refinery Limited (PRL), Oil Refinery Limited (ARL), Pak Arab Refinery Ltd. (PARCO), Attock and Byco Refinery. The study found that the costs associated with high employee turnover in the oil and gas industry in Pakistan can be classified into 4 major classes which are exit costs, absence costs, recruitment costs and onboarding costs. Exit costs include the time and money used to process resignation and also stop payroll and other operations, the loss of customers and contacts associated with the leaving employees and the apparent overworking of the remaining staff. Absence costs include the direct loss of productivity such as in product quality and quantity, loss of knowledge and disruptions to the company. Recruitment costs were found to include advertisement costs for the vacancies, interviewing costs, and the screening costs associated with recruitment. The onboarding costs include the costs associated with familiarization of the new employees such as producing user badges, IT information and also training expenses. As a result, Awan, A.G. (2015) [4] states that in order to avoid these costs associated with high employee turnover, organizational policies should be reviewed to ensure that they favor the employees. Employees should also be rewarded and recognized in order to increase their commitment in the company. Additionally, employees

should also be given equal chance for career advancement in order to increase their sense of belonging to the company.

**Research Questions**

**The research question in this study is:**

Does organizational commitment a major factor in the high turnover in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia?

**Hypotheses**

**Null hypothesis; Ho:** Organizational commitment does not affect the turnover rates in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia.

**Alternative hypothesis, H1:** Organizational commitment affects the turnover rates in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia.

**Research methodology**

**Participants**

The participants in this study were randomly sampled from the Saudi Arabia’s oil and gas industry. The consent to participate in the study was first sought from the sampled workers who were then required to sign a consent form as a proof that they have agreed to be involved in the study. In general, 120 workers in this department were involved in the study. The youngest workers involved in this research were 20 years and the oldest was 55 years old. The age breakdown of the sample involved in the study can be best represented as shown in the table below.

**Table 1:** Age Breakdown of Workers

| Age   | Number of workers | Percentage |
|-------|-------------------|------------|
| 20-30 | 57                | 47.5%      |
| 30-40 | 33                | 27.5%      |
| 40-50 | 23                | 19.17%     |
| 50-60 | 7                 | 5.83%      |
| Total | 120               | 100%       |

In terms of gender, 115 of the participants were male while 5 were female. The male participants were mostly involved in the manual tasks while the female employees were tasked most with managerial and supervisory roles. Out of the 120 participants, 80 were full time employees while 40 were part-time workers who had been contracted for a certain period of time. 100 employees in the sample group had university/college/specialized education while the remaining 20 did not have any form of higher education.

**Research Instruments**

The sampled workers were issued with a questionnaire to fill within a period of two weeks. Despite the workers initially signing a consent form to be involved in the research, the questionnaire also had a copy of this consent form at the top for formality purposes. The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections. The first section had demographic questions such as the age, gender, educational level, and type of employment (Fulltime or part-time). The names of the employees were not included in the demographic section so as to ensure that their responses are confidential. The second section of the questionnaire involved gauging the length of stay of the employees in their previous jobs, their current level of commitment to their job roles, the number of their colleagues that have left work, and whether they are contemplating to quit their job

roles in the near future. The third section of the questionnaire involved determining what the employees considered to be important to reduce the rate of employee turnover

**Findings/results**

After the data was obtained from the questionnaire, its analysis was performed using IBM’s Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 1.0.0.1406. The types of data analysis that were performed in this SPSS analysis were Pearson Correlation test and Chi square test. These were used to test whether a correlation existed between the organizational commitment and the employee turnover rates in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia.

**Table 2:** The results obtained from the chi square tests are as shown in the table below

| Chi-Square Tests   |                     |    |                                   |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
|                    | Value               | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 44.167 <sup>a</sup> | 99 | .010                              |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 19.784              | 99 | .740                              |
| N of Valid Cases   | 120                 |    |                                   |

a. 118 cells (95.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .05.

**Table 3:** Length of Stay in Oil and Gas Industry

| Length of Stay in Oil and Gas Industry | Number of Workers |
|--|-------------------|
| 0-6 months                             | 42                |
| 6-12 months                            | 32                |
| 12-18 months                           | 16                |
| 18-24 months                           | 15                |
| 24 months-36 months                    | 10                |
| More than 36 months                    | 5                 |

**Table 4:** Level of Commitment to Oil and Gas Industry

| Level of Commitment to Oil and Gas Industry | Number of Workers |
|---|-------------------|
| 1 (Lowest)                                  | 55                |
| 2   | 34                |
| 3   | 21                |
| 4   | 7                 |
| 5 (Highest)                                 | 3                 |

### Discussion

Based on the results obtained from the chi square table, the asymptotic difference is 0.010. This difference is less than 0.05 which means that there is a strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis that organizational commitment does not affect the turnover rates in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. This means that the alternative hypothesis that organizational commitment affects the turnover rates in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia should be accepted.

Out of the 120 employees involved in the research, only 15 employees have been in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia for more than 2 years. This means that 87.5% of the employees in the industry only joined the company less than 2 years ago to replace workers who had left the company. Around 95% of the participants in this research reported staying for a period of less than 2 years in their previous jobs before joining the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. This shows that there is a high turnover of employees in the oil and gas industry across many of the oil producing regions. In terms of commitment, 89 of the employees had the lowest level of commitment (Level 1 and 2) while only 10 of the employees had the highest level of commitment in the industry (level 4 and 5). This was an indicator that the employees were most likely to leave the industry in the near future in search of newer opportunities.

The oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia compensates its employees quite handsomely compared to other employers in the country. This research found that higher salaries were not one of the causal factors for the high employee turnover. One of the major reasons that the employees stated for wanting to leave the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia was the lack of self-belonging due to lack of organizational commitment. The oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia lacks strong organizational culture and commitment which can enable employees in different departments to link with one another and create meaningful relationships. The employees felt that there was the lack of strong teamwork culture in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia which made it quite complicated to communicate goals and expectations to the employees. This impeded cohesiveness of the team which made it harder to achieve organizational goals. Although there is strong work ethics in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia, the lack of a devolved work structure makes it impossible to facilitate creativity and innovation. This lack of creativity and innovation leads to monotony in the employees who eventually leave the industry in search for

more challenges and opportunities in other companies. This act of employees leaving the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia regularly means that the industry is incurring extra costs in recruitment and training of new workers. The industry also faces significant losses due to the loss of vital labor force which might impede activities in the industry.

### Research implications

This research shows that if the oil and gas industry has to deal with the issue of high employee turnover, clear techniques to increase organizational commitment have to be developed. Organizational commitment can be well explained using the Three-Component Model (TCM). The components of the TCM are affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Jackson et al., 2009) <sup>[15]</sup>. Affective commitment is the emotional attachment that an employee has towards the organization they are working for. Affective commitment is based on the notion that if an employee has a high level; of active commitment, then the chances of the employee staying in that company for long are very high. Continuance commitment is when an employee feels that leaving the organization they are working for is costly because they have already invested time and energy in the organization. Normative commitment is when the employees feel that they have the right to stay in an organization since it is the right thing to do (Jackson et al., 2009) <sup>[15]</sup>.

Apart from reducing the rates of employee turnover, organizational commitment also has numerous other benefits. Chief among these advantages is that committed employees are highly productive. This is because committed employees believe in the company's goals, vision and strategies and they are therefore willingly to put an extra effort towards realizing these goals. Absenteeism is also minimized through organizational commitment. Committed employees always look forward to reporting to their place of work, completing their assigned roles and helping out in other company projects. Committed employees are also strong advocates for the company and hold the company in high regard. Therefore, the employees are less likely to leave a company which they hold in high regard and which they strongly advocate for (Colquitt et al., 2021) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Affective, continuance and normative organizational commitment in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia can be improved through several ways. These include:

1. Creation of a strong team culture. This can be achieved by enabling a health working environment whereby the employees have the opportunity to work as teams and get involved in team building. This will in turn lead to increased motivation which will improve the commitment of workers hence reduce the turnover rates (Miroshnik, 2013) <sup>[20]</sup>.
2. Communication of goals and expectations to the employees. In order for the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia to reduce the rate of employees leaving their jobs, there is the need to ensure that the employees are well informed of their job roles and directed on how they can achieve excellence at their place of work. Having clear communication shows that the employees are part of the future of the company and this creates a sense of belonging which boosts commitment levels and makes it harder for employees to leave the company Aziz, T., & Sriyono, S. (2021) <sup>[5]</sup>.
3. Upholding high ethical values in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. When there are high ethical



standards such as having fair practices and showing corporate responsibility, the employees are likely to be motivated and be respectful of the companies. When the organization is consistently associated with good ethical standards, workers will also like to be part of the company (Gao-Urhahn et al., 2016)<sup>[11]</sup>.

4. Encouraging creativity and innovation at the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. Innovation has been proven to be one of the most effective ways of enhancing employee commitment in companies. When workers have new ideas or ways of completing tasks, they should not be reprimanded or taken through series of bureaucracies. They should instead be encouraged so as to show the company's commitment towards enhancing creativity (Aziz & Sriyono, 2021)<sup>[5]</sup>.
5. Providing positive feedback and not criticism. Employees in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia should be informed when they go wrong and provided with guidance on how to correct their mistakes. As a result, the mistakes will serve as a learning avenue which will improve their workers and ensure that they do not repeat the mistakes in the future. Similarly, when employees perform exceptionally well, they should also be appreciated (Gao-Urhahn et al., 2016)<sup>[11]</sup>.
6. Offering incentives to the best performing employees in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. Although the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia handsomely pays its employees, there is a need to offer some rewards and incentives for the best performing and outstanding employees. This will push the employees to work harder and smarter and also show that the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia recognizes their efforts at the workplace. This will in turn create commitment among the employees and reduce the rates of employee turnover (Gao-Urhahn et al., 2016)<sup>[11]</sup>.

### Limitations

There were several limitations in this research which might have impeded its effectiveness. The first limitation is that the selected samples was not representative of the whole employee population in the industry. The second limitation is that the sample size might also have been small and insufficient for the research due to time constraints. Having a large sample size would have significantly increased the accuracy of the research. There was also the lack of sufficient previous data on how organizational commitment relates with the employee turnover in oil and gas companies. Most of the existing data is unique due to the differences in the structure of the companies dealing with oil and natural gas in different countries. The fact that only the employees were involved in this research and the position of the top management in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia was not taken also highlights the limitations of this study. This is because the filling of the questionnaires was prone to incorrect information and biasness since it was a one sided study. For future research, it might be crucial to expand the scope of the study to encompass both the management and the employee workforce in order to better understand the issues surrounding high employee turnover in companies.

### Practical implications

The practical implications of this research are that the data will provide a better insight to the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia on the issue of high employee turnover. The

industry has been losing important revenue due to employees leaving and this will be a good opportunity for the company to implement changes that will prevent employees from leaving. The oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia can incorporate the various ways mentioned in the research implications to improve the affective, continuance and normative organizational commitment. By creating a strong team culture, communicating goals and expectations to employees, upholding high ethical values, encouraging creativity and innovation, providing positive criticism, and offering incentives to best performing employees, the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia is likely to satisfy most of the employees and make them committed to the industry. When the employee turnover is reduced, the company will experience and increase in revenues since they will have eliminated some of the costs that are associated with retraining workers and they will also eliminate the disruptions that come with the loss of workers.

### Conclusion

Employee turnover is one of the major issues facing most companies in the world. The oil and gas industry across the world is experiencing high employee turnover which has been a major source of concern. This has been brought about by lack of communication, support and commitment of the companies towards the achievement of their goals. This research focused on 120 employees who were randomly sampled from the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. It was established that only 15 employees have been in this department for more than 2 years. This meant that 87.5% of the employees have been employed in the last 2 years which shows the then high rate of employee turnover in the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. In terms of commitment, 89 of the employees had the lowest level of commitment (Level 1 and 2) while only 10 of the employees had the highest level of commitment in the company (level 4 and 5). This was an indicator that the employees were most likely to leave the company in the near future in search of newer opportunities. This trend of employees leaving the company can be attributed to the fact many of the employees feel lack of organizational commitment in the company. This can be solved by creating a strong team culture, communicating goals and expectations to employees, upholding high ethical values, encouraging creativity and innovation, providing positive criticism, and offering incentives to best performing employees. The implications of this research are that it can be widely applied not only to the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia but also to companies in other sectors in order to reduce the high rates of turnover among the employees.

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