



Employee retention strategies for Clerical staff in Sri Lankan Apparel Sector

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ABSTRACT

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Organizations today face challenges in retaining skilled employees due to the impacts of globalization and digitalization. This led to a growing emphasis on employee retention strategies, particularly through rewards and recognition. This study investigates how reward management practices influence employee retention within the Expectancy Theory (ET) framework. The research examines a sample of 140 clerical-level employees in the apparel manufacturing sector at the Mawathagama BOI Zone in Sri Lanka. Through a structured questionnaire, the study evaluated key variables including career development, promotion opportunities, remuneration, and their impact on employee retention. These variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, and the data were analyzed using statistical methods in SPSS Statistics, Version 26 ensuring the reliability and validity of the instruments used. This study provides new insights into employee retention in Sri Lanka's apparel sector by examining the specific impact of reward management practices through the lenses of Expectancy Theory. The results reveal that career development, promotion, and remuneration significantly influence employee retention, with career development demonstrating the most substantial impact, while remuneration has the least effect. These findings underscore the critical importance of prioritizing career development and promotion within HR policies and organizational strategies. By emphasizing these aspects, organizations can foster a more supportive work environment, which in turn enhances employee retention and satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Employee retention is considered the heart of organizational success. It is "A process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organization for the maximum period or until the completion of the objectives" (Singh & Dixit, 2011, p. 442). Employee retention poses a pervasive global challenge transcending

geographical boundaries, across industries worldwide. This study focuses on the employee retention of clerical-level employees in the apparel industry of Sri Lanka. Clerical-level employees form the operational backbone of apparel manufacturing, handling essential administrative tasks vital for smooth functioning. Their role in streamlining processes, managing documentation, and facilitating communication enhances overall operational efficiency. Clerical-level employees are integral to the apparel sector's operational continuity. This group is responsible for administrative tasks crucial to the sector's regulatory and compliance requirements. Despite their essential role, clerical employees are often regarded as a lower-tier workforce, resulting in inadequate attention to their retention needs. Given the industry's high turnover rates, especially among skilled and skilled positions, clerical employees' retention is vital to maintaining stable operations. This study emphasizes the need for retention strategies specific to this group, addressing the gap in understanding factors that could enhance their job satisfaction and loyalty. Particularly in a highly regulated industry like apparel manufacturing, clerical employees play a crucial role in ensuring regulatory compliance, maintaining accurate records, monitoring deadlines, and assisting with regulatory reporting.

Despite being perceived as a lower-tier category, their support functions are indispensable for the organization's day-to-day operations and long-term sustainability, ensuring that the organization runs smoothly and efficiently. (SLAEA) estimates suggest Sri Lanka's apparel sector might lose 100,000 jobs, around 30% of the industry's workforce. Due to economic and political crises, Sri Lanka's outward labor migration surged by 286% YoY to 105,821 in the first five months of 2024 (SLBFE). Between 2006 and 2008, 75% of new private sector jobs were temporary and the pandemic has left these workers vulnerable to poverty due to a lack of job security and social protection (IPS Study). In 2022, at least half a million people lost their jobs, mainly in industry and services, impacting women. Costs rose by 65% for the poor and 57% for others (Martin Raiser, World Bank). Further Retention refers to the various policies and practices that let the employees stick to an organization for a longer period (Pousa, 2010, cited in Sitati, 2017). According to them, retention is an obligation to continue to do business or exchange with a particular organization on an ongoing basis. Rewarding employees in the workplace of an organization is one of the most important and highlighted methods to retain employees of an organization or else to increase employee retention further they mentioned that the reward and recognition approach is the best way to increase employee retention. (Sheridan, 1992). The variation in employee retention across organizations may be related to organizational reward systems (Sheridan, 1992). The changing trends of financial and non-financial rewards affect employee retention (Khan et al 2011), According to Sajuyigbe et.al (2013), cited in Terera and Ngirande (2014), employees prefer to receive intrinsic rewards in terms of praise and recognition for certain works accomplishments and on the other hand employees are happy with extrinsic reward in terms of salaries, bonus, and incentive offered to employees. Terera and Ngirande (2014), argue that employee rewards lead to employee retention. Their study shows that there is a positive relationship between rewards and employee retention. According to them, the more an employee is rewarded, the more likely they are to remain in that same organization. The study also highlights that many employees remain with the same organization primarily due to the economic benefits they receive. It focuses on employee retention by examining variables related to reward management

practices. The average employee turnover in an apparel factory is nearly about 60 percent per annum and 20 percent skilled persons leaving the industry for migration opportunities in Sri Lanka. Notably, the garment industry has been Sri Lanka's largest exporter since 1986, contributing over 52 percent of the country's total export earnings (Dheerasinghe, R., 2009). In the Sri Lankan context, a notable gap persists in empirical understanding concerning the impact of reward management strategies on the retention of clerical-level employees within the apparel sector. In the changing and dynamic nature of the business environment human workforce is the dynamic source of competitive edge, so reward management practices not only enhance employee capabilities but also it will enhance employees' intention to remain in the organization (Asiya et al, 2012). While extensive research exists on employee retention, much of it centers on managerial or skilled employees in various industries.

However, the specific dynamics influencing the retention of clerical-level employees in the apparel industry are significantly underexplored. Current studies tend to overlook this workforce segment, despite clerical staff's critical role in maintaining operations, compliance, and communication. Addressing this gap is essential for developing targeted retention strategies for a group that supports core operations but often receives less recognition in research and practice. In practice, organizations often apply generalized reward strategies without addressing the unique needs of clerical-level employees, leading to inadequate retention efforts for this group. The apparel industry in Sri Lanka, which has traditionally focused on production efficiencies and skill-based training for high-turnover roles, often overlooks the importance of tailored rewards and career development plans for clerical staff. This study bridges this practice gap by evaluating the effectiveness of reward, career advancement, and promotion opportunities on clerical employee retention, offering apparel companies insights into practical interventions. This study mainly aims to identify the effect of reward management practices on the retention of clerical-level employees within the apparel sector and to identify the effects of career development, promotional opportunities, and remuneration on the retention of employees as sub-objectives. This study aims to evaluate the influence of career development opportunities on the retention of clerical-level employees within the apparel industry, with a particular focus on the role of promotional opportunities in enhancing retention rates. By examining how reward management practices affect retention, the research seeks to uncover the impact that career development initiatives have on clerical employees' intentions to remain with their organizations. Additionally, the study will explore how promotional opportunities contribute to retention among clerical-level employees. Through these inquiries, the research will offer actionable recommendations for leveraging these factors to improve retention rates in the apparel sector, ultimately fostering a more engaged and committed workforce. The research provides valuable insights into the complex aspects of employee retention within the apparel sector, offering a deeper understanding of this widespread issue. This study's primary contribution is its focus on clerical-level employees in the apparel sector demographic often omitted in employee retention studies. By focusing on reward management practices and their direct impact on retention, this research introduces a tailored approach to understanding and addressing retention at an operational level. Additionally, this study is

contextually relevant to Sri Lanka's economic and social environment, providing localized insights that are valuable for policymakers and industry stakeholders aiming to stabilize.

2. Literature Review

Expectancy Theory

Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) posits that employees are motivated when they believe their efforts will lead to desirable outcomes they value. Employees are more likely to stay with a company if they see a clear link between their efforts and rewards like job stability, career progress, and financial incentives. Research supports this, showing that clear career paths, growth opportunities, and competitive salaries enhance retention (Kanfer & Heggstad, 1997; Lum et al., 1998). Applying the Expectancy Theory helps organizations improve retention and performance.

Employee Retention

Employee retention is a complex phenomenon affected by a variety of factors. According to Tett and Meyer (1993), job satisfaction and organizational commitment are significant predictors of employee retention. Career development opportunities have a major impact on employee retention (Allen et al., 2003). In the garment industry, where turnover rates can be high, effective career development programs can increase employee commitment while decreasing turnover. Furthermore, promotion possibilities and fair compensation have been identified as important determinants in keeping clerical-level personnel (Lum et al., 1998). For example, Guthrie (2001) discovered that promotion chances had a favorable correlation with employee retention in the retail sector. Employee retention refers to an organization's capacity to keep people from quitting their positions (Ramlall, 2003). It includes several factors such as work satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Effective retention strategies can reduce turnover costs and ensure a steady workforce, which is critical for corporate performance (Huselid, 1995). In the garment industry, where competition for competent clerical workers is severe, knowing the factors' influencing retention is critical for maintaining a competitive advantage. Organizations can improve employee retention and overall performance by focusing on career development, advancement, and remuneration. Retention refers to the various policies and practices that let the employees stick to an organization for a longer period (Pousa, 2010, cited in Sitati, 2017). According to them, retention is an obligation to continue to do business or exchange with a particular organization on an ongoing basis. Encouraging employees to remain in the organization for a long period can be termed employee retention (Das and Baruah, 2013). Further, they described retention as a process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organization for the maximum period or until the completion of the project and the ability to keep or continue having something. According to Yang (2011), cited in Sitati, (2017), employee retention is the ability of an organization to engage valuable staff for a long period. It is a voluntary process of creating an environment for employees to engage in the organization for a long period. Employee retention is the vital factor leading to organizational growth (Asiya et al, 2012). To retain key employees in the organization every organization has to keep satisfying those key employees. While all the aspects of managing human resources are important, employee retention continues to be an

essential Human Resource Management activity that helps organizations in their quest to achieve their growth (Kwenin et al, 2013). Retention refers to the various policies and practices that let the employees stick to an organization for a longer period (Pousa, 2010, cited in Sitati, 2017).

Career Development

Career development is critical to the retention of clerical personnel in the garment industry. Employees look for opportunities for growth and advancement to achieve their professional goals and improve their abilities. According to Flores et al. (2018) [1], a lack of professional development opportunities is frequently recognized as a major cause of employee turnover. In the garment industry, where job tasks are often repetitive, investing in career development programs can greatly boost employee happiness and retention. Smith and Johnson (2019) [2] underline the necessity of established career paths and training programs for retaining clerical staff. These programs not only offer employees the opportunity to improve their skills, but they also indicate the organization's commitment to their long-term development. Furthermore, a research by Lee and Chen (2020) [3] found that employees who perceive their organizations as supportive of their career development are more likely to stay loyal. According to Wambugu and Ombui (2013), cited in Sitati (2017), career development is a lifelong process of work, learning, transitions, and leisure that move toward a preferred future. Career development is a motivational incentive that promotes employee productivity and retention (Musa et al, 2014). It includes efforts to evaluate employee's competencies, identify possible career advancement for that worker, and plan and implement different training programs for job enlargement and enrichment. Career development matches an employee's career path with challenges experienced by the employee and opportunities within the organization (Slum, 2014). According to him, career development relies on organizational efficiency and as a result a high rate of employee retention and more dedicated personnel to the organization. Career development has an impact on employee expected quality of employee experiences (Sitati, 2017). Taylor (2002), cited in Sitati (2017), argues that employees choose to retain longer where they experience individual growth in the organization. Furthermore, development opportunities are expected to increase the retention of employees as individuals sense that they are rewarded soundly for the work done by them. Among younger candidates' career development has become the desired 15 benefits because they feel that career development is as important as the money they earn (Sitati, 2017). According to Wambugu and Ombui (2013), cited in Sitati (2017), career development is defined as a lifelong process of work, learning, transitions, and leisure that move towards a preferred future.

H1: Career Development Positively Impacts Employee Retention

Job Promotion

Job promotion is critical to improving employee retention in the garment industry's clerical workforce. Smith and Brown (2019) found that promotion chances had a substantial correlation with job satisfaction and dedication, favorably increasing retention rates. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of wants, employees aspire to self-actualization, which involves job advancement and recognition, hence promotions are critical for

meeting these higher-order wants (Maslow, 1943). Furthermore, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory highlights that promotion serves as a motivator, increasing employee satisfaction and retention (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Johnson et al. (2020) discovered that clear promotion tracks promoted a sense of direction and purpose among clerical personnel, resulting in improved workplace engagement and lower turnover intentions. Furthermore, promotions represent recognition of employees' accomplishments, which increases their sense of value and devotion to the firm (Branham, 2012). As a result, the availability of advancement prospects is an important factor in retaining clerical personnel in the apparel industry. Job promotion refers to advancing employees' positions or ranks in a hierarchical structure (Sitati, 2017). That means promotion is a movement to a position in which tasks, duties, and responsibilities are increased. According to Parry and Kelliher (2009), promotion encourages individuals to better abilities to advance. Further, promotion is used as a reward to increase the work efficiency of employees. Employees will work harder if they believe those hard works lead to promotions. Effective promotion systems result in a high level of self-esteem in individuals and greater organizational performance (Armstrong, 2006). According to him the basic aims of promotion are to facilitate management to attain the best workforce available within the company and to grant employees the opportunity to occupy higher positions in their career. Armstrong (2006) argues that promotion encourages employees to do their work better because they know that good performers will be rewarded. Therefore, promotion positively influences the commitment of employees and motivation. The promotion also enables employees to advance themselves professionally and acquire new skills (Sitati, 2017). Further, when promotions reward employees, they become dedicated, diligent, and morally upright employees because they know that their efforts are not in vain. Job promotion refers to advancing employees' position or rank in a hierarchical structure (Sitati, 2017).

H₂: Job Promotion positively impacts Employee Retention

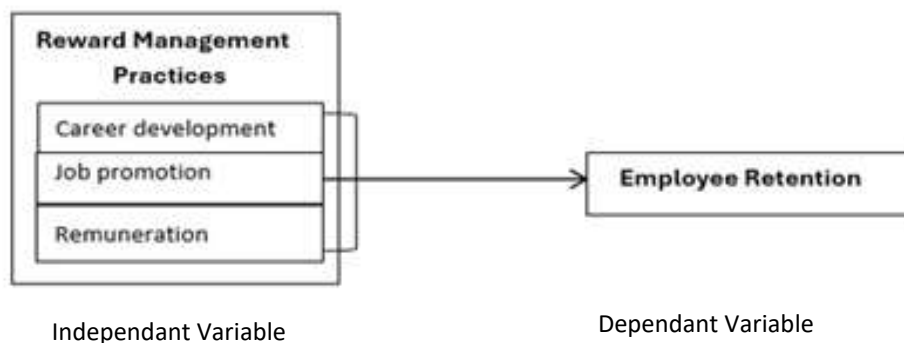
Remuneration

Remuneration is a crucial component in retaining clerical level personnel in the garment industry. Smith et al. (2019) discovered that competitive remuneration corresponds positively with employee retention because it increases work satisfaction while decreasing turnover intentions. Furthermore, Jones (2020) found that equal pay structures greatly increase organizational engagement among clerical staff, boosting loyalty and retention. Hsu and Chen (2018) also stressed the importance of clear remuneration systems in improving perceived fairness and trust, which are critical for employee retention. Pay differences or perceived unfairness, on the other hand, might lead to unhappiness and a desire to leave among clerical personnel. Finally, compensation is critical for keeping clerical level personnel in the apparel industry. Competitive and transparent compensation systems are critical for increasing job satisfaction, organizational engagement, and, eventually, employee retention. Remuneration is a reward that is offered to employees in the form of salary, pay, or wage including allowances, bonuses, benefits, cash incentives, and noncash incentives (Sitati, 2017). Friendly and good remuneration practices fulfill the monetary and material needs of employees. Kreitner (2004), explains that if an organization pays low salaries for the employees, then top performers

leave their jobs. Apart from the salaries and wages, offering benefits such as health plans, insurance, and pension plans to employees sends a powerful message that they are more important to the organization (Sitati, 2017). Suppose the organization doesn't have enough money to give raises or bonuses to everyone, the top performers can be awarded raises or bonuses (Walsh and Taylor, 2007, cited in Sitati, 2017). Offering a raise or bonuses every year helps workers feel that they are moving ahead. Remuneration is defined as a reward offered to employees in the form of salary, pay, or wage including allowances, bonuses, benefits, cash incentives, and noncash incentives (Sitati, 2017).

H1: Remuneration positively impacts Employee Retention

3. Research Methodology



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Developed by the author**

The basic research approach in the study is the quantitative research approach the research population includes clerical-level employees from the Mawathagama BOI Zone in Sri Lanka. This research considers the operational level employees of 3 main selected apparel companies as their sample population within this zone. The sample size has been calculated by using the Krejci- Morgan formula with a 95% confidence level. A stratified sampling method was utilized as the sampling methodology. According to calculations, the sample size for the questionnaire survey is roughly 140. This deductive research study seeks to uncover factors influencing the study's impact on employee retention (Career Development, Job promotion, Remuneration) among clerical-level employees in the apparel industry. Cronbach's Alpha is exactly 0.961, showing a high level of consistency among the four items being examined. This shows that the questionnaire's items are highly connected and effectively represent the same underlying construct. Cronbach's Alpha = 0.961 is an outstanding number, indicating a strong and reliable measure. A standardized questionnaire was used to collect the data. The researcher operationalized the study by categorizing concepts into variables and indicators and measuring them using a five-point Likert scale. Data was collected using a standardized questionnaire established based on past research and study of the operationalization process. Questions were developed based on pertinent ratios from previous studies, ensuring a thorough approach to information gathering. This study collects data through a self-administered survey approach, with multilingual survey

papers sent physically to organizations and shared among employees, as well as mailed to respondents via their individual human resources departments, to obtain comprehensive insights. All collected data is evaluated using descriptive and analytical statistics from SPSS (Statistics Package for Sociologists). These data were further evaluated utilizing correlation and multiple linear regression analysis.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Based on the demographics of the respondents, descriptive statistics show a balanced distribution of replies across the response scale. As a result, neither extreme nor partial data are identified.

Table 1 Cronbach's Alpha variable wise

Variable	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Abusive Supervision (AS)	5	0.953
Work Stress (WS)	5	0.961
Technological Change (TC)	5	0.964
Job Insecurity (JI)	4	0.932

(Source IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

These statistics assess variable reliability in a questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency, yields high values indicating greater reliability. "AS" (5 items) has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.953, "WS" (5 items) 0.961, and "TC" (5 items) 0.964 all demonstrating excellent reliability. "JI" (4 items) has a slightly lower Cronbach's Alpha of 0.932, still indicating good internal consistency. Overall, these statistics affirm the reliability of variables in measuring their respective constructs.

These statistics pertain to diverse variables in a questionnaire, each with Cronbach's Alpha values gauging internal consistency. For the "AS" variable, encompassing Emotional Impact, Workplace Relationship, and Job Security, consistently high Cronbach's Alpha values (above 0.939) indicate robust internal consistency within each dimension. The "WS" variable, addressing Stressors at work and the Emotional Impact of Work stress, also demonstrates reliability with elevated Cronbach's Alpha values. Similarly, "TC" maintains high internal consistency within its dimensions. The "JI" variable, with slightly lower Cronbach's Alpha values, still suggests good reliability in measuring Perceived Job Loss and Emotional Distress.

The model summary provides an in-depth evaluation of the predictive efficacy of a statistical model designed to analyze employee retention (ER), employing Career Development (CD), Job Promotion (JP), and Remuneration (R) as key predictors. With an impressive R-squared value of 0.827, approximately 82.7% of the variance in Employee Retention is effectively elucidated by these variables, underscoring their significant impact. Furthermore, the adjusted R-squared value of 0.827 indicates a robust model fit, while the remarkably low standard error of the estimate (0.31697) bolsters the precision of predictions derived from the model. The Durbin-Watson statistics, standing at 1.848, indicates minimal autocorrelation, thereby corroborating the model's efficacy in elucidating and forecasting employee retention dynamics.

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha item-wise

Variable	Dimension	Indicator	Cronbach's Alpha
AS	Emotional Impact	Stress & Anxiety	0.943
		Fear & Job Loss	0.939
		Lack of Appreciation	0.942
	Workplace	Social Isolation	0.943
	Relationship & Job Security	Collaboration	0.944
WS	Stressors at work	Workload	0.955
		Role Ambiguity	0.95
		Interpersonal conflict	0.953
	Emotional Impact of Work Stress	Anxiety & Worry	0.951
		Fear & Job Loss	0.953
TC	Job Displacement	Job losses	0.957
		Income Inequality	0.955
	Skill Requirement	Job Satisfaction	0.953
		Job Satisfaction	0.954
		Job Satisfaction	0.956
JI	Perceived Job Loss	Anticipated Job Loss	0.921
		Layoff Concern	0.9
	Emotional Distress	Stress & Anxiety	0.917
		Fear & Worry	0.91

(Source IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

Table 3 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.908 ^a	.827	.824	.31697	1.848

(Source IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

The study uses regression analysis to provide quantitative information on the relative importance of each predictor variable. The standardized coefficients indicate the important factors influencing employee retention. Career development is seen as the most influential aspect, followed by job advancement and compensation. This identification helps organizations focus their resources and efforts on activities that are most likely to result in the retention of clerical workers. The substantial t-values for each predictor variable show that their impact on employee retention is not random. This statistical significance provides credence to the findings, implying that the observed associations are strong and replicable.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.203	.108		1.913	.057
	CD	.522	.063	.512	8.054	.000
	P	.253	.078	.249	3.215	.002
	R	.173	.069	.171	2.532	.014

(Source IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

The analysis focuses on the practical consequences of the findings. It emphasizes the crucial relevance of investing in career development opportunities and giving options for job promotion to improve employee retention. Furthermore, it recognizes the additional influence of competitive wage packages, emphasizing the importance of a holistic talent management strategy. This analysis's findings apply to more than just one business. Policymakers can utilize this data to create policies that encourage businesses to prioritize career development and job advancement, resulting in a more favorable climate for employee retention and overall economic growth. Overall, the analysis provides useful insights into strategic decision-making and policy formation focused at boosting employee retention in the garment industry and beyond. The standardized coefficients in the regression model provide valuable insights into the relative importance of each predictor variable in explaining employee retention. Career Development emerges as the most influential factor, with a standardized coefficient of 0.512 and a significant t-value of 8.054 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a substantial positive impact. Job Promotion also exhibits a notable effect, with a coefficient of 0.249 and a significant t-value of 3.215 ($p = 0.002$), suggesting that it contributes significantly to retaining employees. Additionally, Remuneration demonstrates a moderate impact, with a coefficient of 0.171 and a t-value of 2.532 ($p = 0.014$), signifying its role in enhancing retention, albeit to a lesser extent compared to Career Development and Job Promotion. The findings underscore the critical importance of investing in career development opportunities and providing avenues for job advancement to foster higher levels of employee retention, while also acknowledging the supplementary influence of competitive remuneration packages.

The substantial standardized coefficient of 0.512 and the highly significant t-value of 8.054 ($p < 0.001$) associated with Career Development in the regression analysis underscore its pivotal role in influencing employee retention of clerical level employees in the apparel industry. Patton and McMahon (2014) concurred that a person's career development encompasses all aspects of their life, not simply their line of work. Global Business and Management Research: An International Journal Vol. 12, No. 3 (2020) 21 cited Patton and McMahon (2014) as saying that an employee's surroundings, interactions, and change are essential components of career growth. Rather than career progress throughout an employee's whole working life, Weng and McElroy (2012) defined career growth as growth within the employee's current organization. Weng (2010) stated that the four dimensions of career growth were the realization of career goals, development of professional ability, promotion opportunities, and compensation. Career development is a motivational

incentive that promotes employee productivity and retention (Musa et al, 2014). These findings align with existing literature highlighting the importance of career growth opportunities in enhancing organizational commitment and reducing turnover intentions among clerical-level employees in the apparel industry. Career Development initiatives, such as training programs, mentorship opportunities, and advancement pathways, not only contribute to skill enhancement but also foster a sense of purpose and progression within the workforce. Career development matches an employee's career path with challenges experienced by the employee and opportunities within the organization (Slum, 2014). According to him, career development relies on organizational efficiency and as a result, a high rate of employee retention and more dedicated personnel to the organization. Moreover, employees who perceive ample opportunities for professional development are more likely to exhibit higher job satisfaction and engagement levels, thereby strengthening their commitment to the organization. Career development has an impact on employees' expected quality of employee experiences (Sitati, 2017). Taylor (2002), cited in Sitati (2017), argues that employees choose to retain longer where they experience individual growth in the organization. Consequently, the apparel sector seeking to bolster employee retention should prioritize the implementation of robust Career Development strategies tailored to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of their workforce, ultimately fostering a culture of continuous learning and advancement. According to Brown and Brooks (1990), career development is a lifelong process where employees get ready to choose, are choosing, and continue to make choices from among several jobs that are available during their lifetime. Career growth has been referred to as subjective measures of an individual's career during his or her employment across organizations (e.g., Ng, Eby, Sorensen, and Feldman, 2005).

The observed significant effect of Job Promotion on employee retention of clerical level employees in the apparel industry, as indicated by its coefficient (0.249) and the associated t-value (3.215, $p = 0.002$), underscores its crucial role in organizational retention strategies. This finding aligns with existing literature highlighting the motivational impact of career advancement opportunities on employee commitment and engagement. Clerical-level Employees are considered as the long-term investments for the organizations and management should treat them in that way by redesigning their jobs, giving promotions to the hard-working and best performers, recognizing the best performers, creating a sense of belongingness among the employees, etc. Every organization is trying its best to retain its best and most skilled employees but still, there are some reasons which lead to attrition of the employees (Das & Baruah, 2013) Job promotions not only offer tangible rewards and recognition for employees' past performance but also signify the organization's investment in their future growth and development. Promotions are a powerful motivator, increasing an employee's loyalty to their current organization. However, they could also unintentionally boost the employee's confidence in exploring opportunities outside the company (Staff, T. 2023) Consequently, employees are more likely to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment, ultimately reducing turnover intentions. Promotion is used as a reward and an incentive to enhance work efficiency and other institutional standard forms of character. Employees will work harder if they believe this will lead to promotion. They have 26 little motivations if they feel that better jobs are reserved for outsiders (Pearce,

2011; Poulston, 2008) Furthermore, the significance of Job Promotion underscores the need for organizations to prioritize transparent and merit-based promotion processes, fostering a culture of fairness and equity. Middle East region advocates the execution of human resource policies that promote pleasant corporate relationships and employee reliability which result in employee retention (Demir, Çolakoğlu & Güzel, 2007). By providing clear pathways for career progression and acknowledging employees' contributions through promotions, organizations can enhance overall retention rates and cultivate a motivated and engaged workforce. This empirical evidence emphasizes the strategic importance of incorporating job promotion initiatives into broader talent management and retention strategies within organizations. Solnet et al. (2012) suggest that organizations providing benefits like experiential opportunities, clear career paths, promotion options, transport facilities, and favorable working conditions that support work-life balance are more likely to retain their talent. Additionally, evidence from the hotel market in Turkey shows a strong negative relationship between staff turnover and organizational loyalty, indicating that employees with low commitment are more likely to leave the organization (Demir et al., 2007).

Remuneration demonstrates a moderate impact, with a coefficient of 0.171 and a t-value of 2.532 ($p = 0.014$), signifying its role in enhancing retention, to a lesser extent compared to Career Development and Job Promotion. According to expectation theory, people are more motivated when they understand what they need to do to receive a reward, believe they will be able to obtain it and believe the reward is desirable. The concept of expectation was initially contained in the valency. Vroom developed the instrumentality-expectancy (VIE) theory (Vroom 1964). The terms "valency," "instrumentality," and "expectancy" refer to the likelihood that an action or effort will result in a desired outcome. Zingheim et al. (2009) found that competitive salaries and benefits significantly impact employee retention. Remuneration is a key factor in keeping talented employees. In the realm of employee retention, the impact of remuneration, while statistically significant, appears to be somewhat less pronounced compared to other key factors such as career development and job promotion. According to Held (2016), successful remuneration policies should link employee salary to retention. This can be achieved through a combination of attractive employee benefits and appropriate compensation. The system enhances the organization's reputation and competitiveness in the labor market. While this finding may initially seem surprising given the traditional emphasis on financial incentives in retention strategies, it aligns with contemporary insights into the multifaceted nature of employee motivation and commitment. Benefits packages for employees strengthen their loyalty to the company and lessen their propensity to consider other employment options (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez, 2001). Highly competitive pay schemes encourage employee engagement, which attracts and keeps a superior staff, according to several empirical research (Becker & Huselid, 1999; Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998). Because of this, compensation and reward planning are essential components of a successful employee retention strategy. Apparel sector organizations need to be more committed to using rewards as a strategy or method for keeping talent, viewing them as a necessary component. Employees who receive compensation have a degree of stability, autonomy, acknowledgment, and enhanced self-worth. This, in turn, boosts their sense of self-worth and fosters affective commitment. Remuneration, although essential, may

not solely dictate an employee's decision to stay with an organization. Rather, factors such as opportunities for professional growth and the prospect of advancement often carry substantial weight in shaping an individual's perception of their long-term prospects within a company. Moreover, this nuanced understanding underscores the importance of holistic retention strategies that encompass not only financial rewards but also avenues for skill enhancement and career progression. Future research could delve deeper into the interplay between remuneration, career development, and job promotion to refine retention strategies and enhance organizational effectiveness.

Table 5: Hypotheses

	Description	Comment
H1	Career development has a positive influence on Job employee retention	Supported
H2	Job promotion Has Positive Influence on employee retention	Supported
H3	Remuneration has a positive influence on employee retention	Supported

(Source IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26)

The hypotheses H1, H2, and H3, asserting that Career Development, Job Promotion, and Remuneration positively influence Employee Retention, are all supported by the findings. The regression analysis confirms significant positive relationships between these factors and Employee Retention. This suggests that investing in career development opportunities, job promotion prospects, and competitive remuneration packages can effectively enhance employee retention within an organization, aligning with theoretical expectations.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Research in the Apparel Sector frequently concentrates on high-level management roles, ignoring the unique demands and dynamics of clerical workers. Despite the importance of professional development, promotion, and compensation in promoting employee retention, little emphasis has been paid to how these elements interact within the clerical cadre. Existing literature focuses on these variables in isolation or within larger organizational contexts, ignoring their nuanced impact on clerical staff retention. As a result, there is a research deficit in fully understanding how career development opportunities, promotion prospects, and remuneration systems influence retention among clerical-level employees in the apparel industry. By bridging this gap, researchers can get unique insights into the factors that influence turnover intentions and actions in this critical part of the workforce, informing tailored initiatives to improve employee retention and organizational effectiveness.

By aligning this research findings with the principles of Expectancy Theory, organizations in the apparel sector can develop targeted strategies to improve employee retention among clerical staff. Employee motivation hinges on clear expectations, meaningful rewards, and personal value, which can guide managers in fostering supportive work environments. Investing in professional development enhances employees' skills and boosts their confidence, directly aligning with the expectancy component of the theory. Establishing transparent reward systems that outline clear pathways to promotions and compensation helps

clerical workers recognize the connection between their performance and rewards. Additionally, understanding and catering to the individual values of clerical employees can enhance the appeal of rewards, increasing their value. Ultimately, applying Expectancy Theory emphasizes the need to cultivate a motivational environment that promotes retention, leading to improved organizational effectiveness and socio-economic stability within the apparel sector.

Expectancy Theory, which posits that individuals are motivated by the expectation that their efforts will lead to desired outcomes, provides a valuable framework for understanding employee retention in the apparel sector's clerical workforce. To enhance retention, organizations should focus on three key components of the theory: expectancy, by offering targeted training programs that empower clerical employees to improve their skills and performance; instrumentality, by establishing transparent and fair reward systems that clearly link performance to promotions and compensation, thereby fostering trust and motivation; and valence, by conducting regular surveys to understand and align career development opportunities, promotion prospects, and remuneration packages with the personal values and aspirations of clerical staff. By addressing these components, organizations can create a supportive work environment that enhances job satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately reducing turnover and contributing to both organizational effectiveness and socio-economic stability.

Understanding the intricacies of employee retention in clerical positions is critical in today's competitive garment market. This study investigates the complex interaction between career development, promotion opportunities, remuneration packages, and their impact on keeping clerical-level personnel in the garment industry. This discovery has important ramifications for the garment sector. High clerical turnover rates can result in significant expenses for recruitment, training, and lost productivity. By recognizing the elements that influence employee retention, firms may apply focused initiatives to establish a positive work environment, increasing employee loyalty and lowering turnover. Furthermore, the societal repercussions cannot be underestimated. In many emerging economies, the garment industry is an important source of employment. Retaining clerical personnel not only maintains organizational stability but also helps to drive socio-economic growth by giving job security and opportunities for progress. For future academics, this study lays the groundwork for additional investigation into the complexities of employee retention tactics across specific professional levels and industries. It provides opportunities to investigate additional aspects that may influence retention, such as business culture, work-life balance efforts, and employee engagement methods. Finally, this study throws light on the essential relationship between career development, advancement, salary, and employee retention in clerical professions within the garment sector. Understanding and managing these characteristics allows firms to build a workforce that is motivated, engaged, and devoted to long-term success, resulting in a positive influence on both the sector and society. Furthermore, the study's findings can serve as a model for human resource management methods not only in the garment business but also in other industries confronting comparable issues. Organizations can build a supportive and gratifying work environment by recognizing and adjusting retention methods to the specific needs and

aspirations of clerical employees. Understanding the impact of career growth, promotion, and remuneration on employee retention can also help policymakers make more efficient and productive labor market decisions. Policymakers can use these insights to create measures that encourage businesses to engage in employee development and retention, resulting in economic growth and stability. For both scholars and practitioners, this study provides significant insights into the changing dynamics of employee retention in clerical positions in the garment business. It promotes ongoing conversation and investigation into novel approaches to talent management and organizational growth, thereby expanding the body of knowledge in human resource management and organizational behavior.

5. Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into the impact of reward management strategies on employee retention, particularly within the apparel sector in Sri Lanka's Mawathagama BOI Zone. It underscores the critical role of compensation, career advancement, and promotions in retaining clerical-level employees. The research highlights that effective incentive schemes and clear promotion policies are crucial for enhancing retention rates. It suggests that upper management prioritizes these elements to foster a supportive work environment. The study recommends that garment companies in Mawathagama BOI Zone focus on developing structured career advancement programs. Clear eligibility requirements and defined future roles should be outlined to support talent development and long-term alignment with organizational goals. Establishing transparent promotion policies is essential to address discrimination and provide equitable advancement opportunities. Additionally, increased responsibilities and corresponding adjustments in pay and benefits should accompany promotions to ensure fairness and motivation. Given the high cost of living, management must regularly review and adjust compensation plans to maintain competitive and equitable remuneration packages. This approach is fundamental to retaining skilled workers and promoting organizational loyalty. The study highlights that career advancement is a strong predictor of employee retention. Employees who perceive opportunities for professional growth are more likely to remain engaged and committed. Similarly, clear promotion policies that reward hard work enhance employee loyalty and provide further career development opportunities. Compensation also plays a significant role; competitive pay packages are essential for attracting and retaining talented employees. Workers who feel compensated are more likely to stay with their employer, reducing turnover and fostering workforce stability. In summary, the study concludes that investment in career development, transparent promotion procedures, and attractive compensation packages are key to improving employee retention in Mawathagama BOI Zone apparel companies. Although the focus was on clerical-level employees, expanding research to other employee levels and industries could provide a broader understanding of how reward management strategies affect retention across various organizational settings.

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