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EXPLORING JOB-HOPPING INTENTION AMONG FRONTLINE SERVICE EMPLOYEES IN MALAYSIA: A DUAL PATHWAY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Muhamad Nasrullah Zamri[1]*, Muhammad Ridhwan Mat Zaki[2], Mohamad Alif Azmiezal Mohd Azmi[3], Megat Muzzamir Megat Abu Bazar[4], Nor Tasnim Syahera Rasak[5]

[1]Department of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Malaysia
mdnasrullah@uitm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3463-8194
[2]Department of Business and Management, Kolej Poly-Tech MARA Alor Setar, Malaysia
ridhwan@kptm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6096-202X
[3]Department of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Malaysia
azmiezal@uitm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3301-8645
[4]Department of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Malaysia
megatmuzzamir@uitm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9406-1027
[5]Department of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Malaysia
tasnimsyahera@uitm.edu.my https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5570-4486
*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This conceptual paper examines job-hopping intention among frontline service employees in Malaysia by distinguishing job-hopping intention from conventional turnover intention. While turnover intention primarily reflects an employee's intention to leave the current organisation, job-hopping intention represents a broader orientation towards repeated organisational mobility. The paper addresses this conceptual gap by proposing a dual pathway framework that integrates internal organisational experiences and external labour market conditions. Drawing on Job Demands Resources theory, Social Exchange Theory, and career mobility perspectives, the framework proposes two distinct pathways. The internal organisational pathway suggests that emotional exhaustion, organisational justice, perceived supervisor support, and career growth opportunities influence job-hopping intention through affective organisational commitment. The external labour market pathway proposes that perceived external employability has a direct relationship with job-hopping intention. This conceptual paper adopts a literature synthesis approach to develop the proposed relationships and framework. No primary data were collected

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or analysed. PLS SEM is proposed for future empirical research to assess the hypothesised relationships and validate the framework among frontline service employees in Malaysia. The proposed framework contributes to the literature by integrating internal organisational conditions and external labour market opportunities within a single explanation of job-hopping intention. It provides a basis for understanding job-hopping as a distinct form of organisational mobility and offers a foundation for future empirical investigation in the Malaysian service sector.

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Keyword:

Job-Hopping Intention, Frontline Employees, Affective Organisational Commitment, External Employability, Organisational Mobility, Service Sector

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Introduction

Employee mobility has become increasingly important as contemporary careers are characterised by greater organisational movement and changing employment expectations. Employees may change organisations in response to career opportunities, compensation, working conditions, and career development prospects. These factors are particularly relevant in-service sector employment, where frontline employees frequently face demanding work environments and direct customer interactions.

Frontline service employees may be particularly exposed to conditions that influence organisational mobility, including emotional demands, demanding workloads, repetitive customer interactions, and limited career development opportunities. In Malaysia's service sector, such mobility may challenge organisations in retaining experienced employees and maintaining workforce stability.

Although turnover intention has been extensively examined in the employee withdrawal literature, it does not fully capture the broader mobility orientation associated with job-hopping. Turnover intention primarily concerns an employee's intention to leave the current organisation. In contrast, job-hopping refers to frequent voluntary movement between jobs and may reflect different motives, including escaping an undesirable work environment or pursuing career advancement (Hom et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2018). Therefore, conventional turnover intention perspectives may not adequately explain job-hopping intention because they primarily focus on withdrawal from the current organisation rather than repeated organisational mobility and career-related motives.

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Existing research also tends to examine internal organisational conditions and external labour market opportunities separately. This creates a conceptual gap in explaining how employees' experiences within their current organisation and their perceptions of opportunities outside the organisation may jointly influence job-hopping intention.

Hence, this conceptual paper proposes a dual pathway framework to explain job-hopping intention among frontline service employees in Malaysia. The internal organisational pathway proposes that emotional exhaustion, organisational justice, perceived supervisor support, and career growth opportunities influence job-hopping intention through affective organisational commitment. The external labour market pathway proposes that perceived external employability has a direct relationship with job-hopping intention. By integrating these two pathways, the framework provides a broader conceptual explanation of job-hopping intention beyond conventional turnover intention.

Literature Review

Job-hopping intention, emotional exhaustion, organisational justice, perceived supervisor support, career growth opportunities, perceived external employability, and affective organisational commitment are discussed in this section.

Job-Hopping Intention

Job-hopping refers to the frequent and voluntary movement between organisations within an individual's career. Job-hopping intention therefore represents an individual's inclination towards repeated organisational movement rather than a single decision to leave a current employer. In contrast, turnover intention primarily refers to an employee's intention to leave their current organisation and represents a withdrawal decision directed towards the present employer (Hom et al., 2017). Thus, turnover intention focuses on leaving the current organisation, whereas job-hopping intention captures a broader orientation towards moving between organisations over time.

Job-hopping should also be distinguished from the broader concept of career mobility. Career mobility refers to movement across jobs, organisations, occupations, or career contexts and may occur for various career-related reasons. Job-hopping represents a more specific form of organisational mobility characterised by frequent voluntary job changes. Lake et al. (2018) further identified escape and advancement motives underlying job-hopping, indicating that employees may change jobs either to leave undesirable work environments or to pursue better career opportunities. Therefore, job-hopping intention captures both withdrawal-related and career advancement considerations, making it conceptually distinct from conventional turnover intention and broader career mobility.

Moreover, frontline service employees may be particularly exposed to conditions that encourage organisational mobility, including demanding work environments, emotional demands, and limited opportunities for career development. Previous research on job-hopping in the Malaysian service sector has highlighted the importance of factors such as person-organisation fit, career attitudes, and learning opportunities in understanding employees' decisions to change organisations (Siew et al., 2023). Such mobility may create challenges for organisations, particularly in terms of retaining experienced employees and maintaining workforce stability. Therefore, understanding the antecedents of job-hopping intention is

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important, particularly in service sector settings where employees' mobility may have implications for organisational continuity and employee retention.

Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is a central component of burnout, defined as experiencing emotional depletion due to excessive job demands and constant workplace stress (Maslach et al., 1996). Frontline service employees may be particularly vulnerable to emotional exhaustion because they need to regulate their emotions, perform positive customer interactions, and cope with heavy workloads. The job demands–resources (JD-R) theory suggests that high job demands consume employees' psychological and emotional resources, which leads to stress, disengagement, and withdrawal behaviours (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Emotional exhaustion adversely affects employees' psychological attachment to their organization and their tendency to disengage.

Previous research has found that employees who suffer from emotional exhaustion are more likely to experience reduced work engagement, lower organisational commitment, and stronger intention to leave their jobs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Maslach et al., 1996). Emotional exhaustion can be a factor in job-hopping in service organisations, as employees with long-term emotional fatigue may view changing jobs as an escape from stressful work conditions. As a result, emotionally exhausted employees are more likely to look for alternative job opportunities with better working conditions and less psychological distress (Hom et al., 2017; Huo, 2021).

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness in organizational procedures, decision-making processes, interpersonal treatment, and distributions of outcomes (Colquitt, 2001). Organizational justice is commonly conceptualised in terms of distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice (Colquitt, 2001). Employees who perceive fairness in the organization tend to develop trust, positive attitudes, and stronger emotional attachment to the organization (Colquitt, 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Previous empirical studies have consistently highlighted the importance of organizational justice in affecting employees' attitudes and organizational outcomes. Studies have indicated that organizational justice has a positive effect on organizational commitment, work engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviour, while reducing turnover intention and withdrawal behaviour (Colquitt et al., 2013; Hom et al., 2017).

Fairness perceptions are particularly salient in frontline service settings in which employees frequently evaluate managerial decisions, reward systems, workload distribution and interpersonal treatment. Job-hopping intentions may increase when employees perceive organizational injustice, leading to dissatisfaction, distrust and psychological withdrawal. Conversely, fair organizational practices can increase employees' emotional attachment and encourage long-term organizational commitment (Huo, 2021; Meyer et al., 2002).

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Perceived Supervisor Support

Perceived supervisor support is defined as the perception of the employees that supervisors value their contributions, care about their well-being, and are willing to provide important help and guidance (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Supervisors play a key role in employees' work-life as they affect daily interactions, workload, recognition, and emotional support. Employees tend to react positively to supportive treatment in attitudes and behaviours, in line with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964).

Supportive supervisors develop positive relationships in the workplace, which increases employees' trust, commitment, and attachment to the organization. Employees who perceive that they have a supportive supervisor tend to be more motivated, engaged, and emotionally attached to their organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Meyer et al., 2002). Supportive supervisors in service industries can enable frontline employees to better cope with emotional demands and work stress. Hence, employees with a higher level of perceived supervisor support are less prone to develop withdrawal tendencies or to have job change intentions. On the other hand, without the support of supervision, employees may feel dissatisfied, emotionally exhausted, and more likely to move to another organization (Huo, 2021; Hom et al., 2017).

Career Growth Opportunities

Career growth opportunities are defined as the employees' perception of opportunities for promotion, professional development, skill development, and future development in the organization (Weng & Hu, 2009). Employees want organizations with clear career pathways, learning opportunities, and development support that aligns with their career goals.

Recent research shows that opportunities for career development have a large effect on employee retention, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. For instance, Huo (2021) reported that these opportunities have a positive impact on employees' engagement and attachment to their organizations, particularly in the hospitality industry. Employees who feel they have few opportunities to advance in their career are more likely to seek alternative employment options with better developmental prospects (Weng & Hu, 2009; Hom et al., 2017).

Employees in frontline service jobs that lack career advancement opportunities are more likely to job-hop, as they tend to see moving around organizations as a faster route to career growth and salary increases. Therefore, lack of sufficient career development opportunities can lead to the unintended consequence of high employee turnover (Arifin et al., 2024; Gajda, 2024).

Perceived External Employability

Perceived external employability is defined as employees' beliefs about their ability to find job opportunities outside their current organization (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Employees with a high perception of employability are more likely to be confident about their competitiveness in the labour market, the transferability of their skills, and their career prospects outside their current job.

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Flexibility, adaptability, and transferable competencies are becoming increasingly important in today's labour markets. Therefore, employees with high external employability awareness may consider organizational mobility an important career development strategy. Studies have indicated that perceived employability has a positive effect on career mobility behaviour and turnover intentions. Employees' perception of the availability of alternative employment opportunities is more likely to make them consider leaving the organization (De Cuyper et al., 2011; Hom et al., 2017).

External employability perception, in contrast to internal organizational factors, is an external labour market factor that directly influences intention to switch jobs. Employees with a high perception of employability are likely to be more proactive in seeking external opportunities and are more likely to change jobs to improve career progression and salary growth (Arifin et al., 2024; Gajda, 2024).

Affective Organizational Commitment

Affective organizational commitment refers to the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement of employees with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Those employees with a strong affective commitment stay with the organization because they want to stay and they are emotionally connected to the organization's values and goals.

Affective organizational commitment has consistently been associated with employee retention and reduced withdrawal intentions. Meyer et al. (2002) have shown that affective commitment has a negative influence on withdrawal behaviour and turnover intention. Affective commitment has also been supported as an important factor affecting positive employee attitudes and organizational outcomes in more recent studies (Hom et al., 2017; Huo, 2021).

The current study proposes affective organizational commitment as a mediating mechanism connecting internal organizational experience and job-hopping intention. Employees in a positive work environment, with fair treatment, reasonable job demands, and opportunities to develop their careers, are more likely to develop stronger emotional attachment to the organization and therefore reduce their intention to engage in repeated organizational mobility (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Meyer et al., 2002).

Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework consists of two distinct pathways that explain job-hopping intention among frontline service employees in Malaysia. The first pathway represents the internal organisational pathway, in which emotional exhaustion, organisational justice, perceived supervisor support, and career growth opportunities are proposed to influence affective organisational commitment. Affective organisational commitment then serves as the mechanism linking these internal organisational experiences to job-hopping intention.

The second pathway represents the external labour market pathway, in which perceived external employability is proposed to have a direct relationship with job-hopping intention. Employees who perceive that their skills and experience are valuable in the external labour market may have greater confidence in obtaining alternative employment opportunities and may therefore be more willing to consider organisational mobility (De Cuyper et al., 2011).

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Accordingly, the framework distinguishes between internal organisational experiences that influence job-hopping intention through affective organisational commitment and external employment perceptions that are proposed to influence job-hopping intention directly. This distinction forms the basis of the proposed dual-pathway framework and the hypotheses developed in the following section. The conceptual framework of this research is provided in Figure 1.

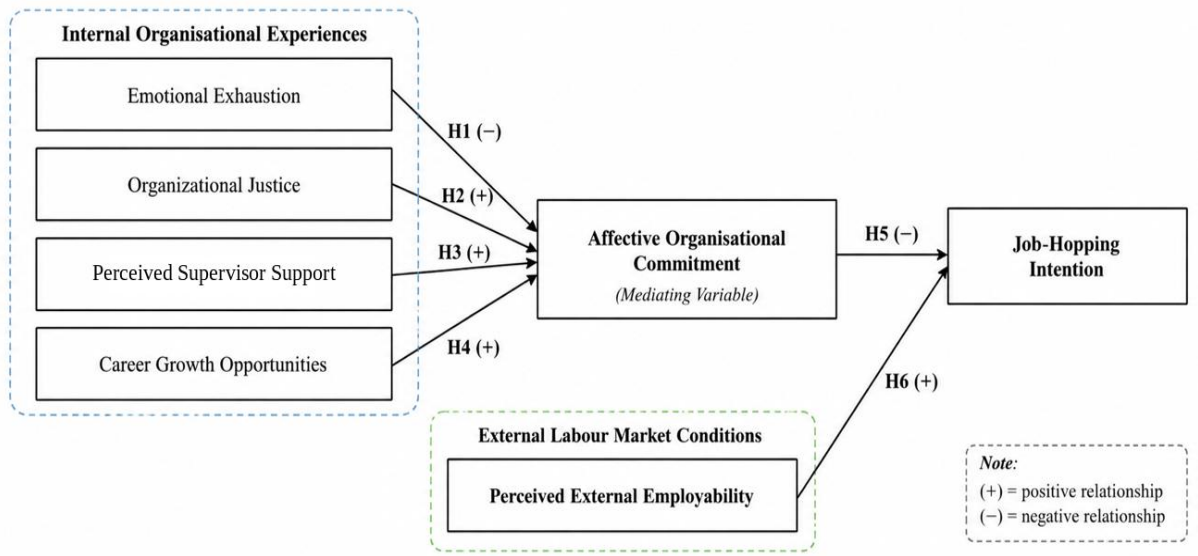


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Hypotheses Development

Internal Organisational Pathway

H1: Emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with affective organisational commitment.
H2: Organisational justice is positively associated with affective organisational commitment.
H3: Perceived supervisor support is positively associated with affective organisational commitment.
H4: Career growth opportunities are positively associated with affective organisational commitment.
H5: Affective organisational commitment is negatively associated with job-hopping intention.

External Labour Market Pathway

H6: Perceived external employability is positively associated with job-hopping intention.

Methodology

This conceptual paper adopts a literature synthesis approach to integrate existing theoretical and empirical literature on organisational experiences, affective organisational commitment, perceived external employability, and job-hopping intention. The literature was used to identify relevant constructs, establish the theoretical relationships among the variables, and develop the

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proposed dual pathway conceptual framework. No primary data were collected or analysed in the present study.

PLS SEM is proposed for future empirical research to test the hypothesised relationships and assess the proposed framework. PLS SEM is considered appropriate for the proposed model because it can be applied to models involving multiple latent constructs and mediation relationships, particularly when prediction is an important objective of the analysis (Hair et al., 2021). Recent methodological literature also highlights the usefulness of PLS SEM for complex models and prediction-oriented research.

For future empirical validation, the proposed target population would consist of frontline service employees in Malaysia, including employees in retail, hospitality, food and beverage, customer service, and telecommunications organisations. Purposive sampling would be appropriate because participants would need to meet specific criteria, particularly having direct interaction with customers as part of their work. A future empirical study may determine its required sample size based on appropriate statistical power considerations and the complexity of the proposed model rather than relying solely on a fixed sample size.

Data for future empirical research could be collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The proposed constructs may subsequently be assessed through measurement model evaluation and structural model analysis using PLS SEM. These analyses may include assessment of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, path coefficients, bootstrapping, coefficient of determination, and predictive assessment where appropriate.

Table 1: Proposed Instruments

Construct	Measurement Items	Sources
Emotional Exhaustion	1. I feel emotionally drained from my work. 2. By the end of the workday, I am just exhausted. 3. My job leaves me emotionally worn out. 4. Because of my job, I feel burned out. 5. Most days, I feel mentally tired when I perform my duties.	Adapted from Maslach et al. (1996)
Organizational Justice	1. Decisions in my organization are made fairly. 2. Organizational procedures are applied consistently. 3. Employees are treated respectfully. 4. Rewards are distributed fairly. 5. Management communicates decisions transparently.	Adapted from Colquitt (2001)
Perceived Supervisor Support	1. My supervisor genuinely values my contributions.	Adapted from Eisenberger et al. (2002)

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	2. My supervisor also genuinely cares about my well-being. 3. My supervisor supports me when things get hard 4. My supervisor appreciates my efforts without making a big deal of it. 5. My supervisor gives guidance when it is needed, and it helps.	
Career Growth Opportunities	1. I have opportunities for career advancement within my organisation. 2. My organisation supports my skill development. 3. I have opportunities to grow professionally in my organisation. 4. My job helps me achieve my career objectives. 5. I am encouraged to develop my professional skills and capabilities.	Adapted from Weng and Hu (2009)
Perceived External Employability	1. I can find another job easily if I leave. 2. My skills are very valuable in the labour market. 3. I feel confident about my external job opportunities 4. Other organisations would hire me based on my experience. 5. I have strong employment prospects outside of this organization	Adapted from Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006)
Affective Organizational Commitment	1. I find myself emotionally attached to this organization 2. I really do feel a strong sense of belonging 3. I am really proud to work here 4. This organization means a lot to me personally 5. I feel like being a part of the family in this organization.	Adapted from Meyer and Allen (1991)
Job-Hopping Intention	1. I often find myself thinking about switching organisations. 2. I am planning to move to a different organisation soon. 3. I am actively looking for alternative employment opportunities. 4. I regularly explore job opportunities in other organisations. 5. I am open to moving to another organisation for better career prospects.	Items were proposed and adapted based on the conceptualisation of job hopping in previous literature, particularly Lake et al. (2018), and contextualised for frontline service employees.

Source: (Author's Compilation)

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Expected Findings and Discussion

The proposed framework suggests that emotional exhaustion may negatively influence affective organisational commitment among frontline service employees. Employees experiencing high levels of emotional exhaustion may have reduced psychological attachment to their organisation, which may subsequently increase their intention to consider alternative employment opportunities. This relationship is consistent with the job demands perspective; whereby persistent job demands can deplete employees' psychological resources and contribute to disengagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Organisational justice and perceived supervisor support are expected to have positive relationships with affective organisational commitment. Employees who perceive fair organisational practices and supportive treatment from supervisors may develop stronger trust and emotional attachment towards their organisation (Colquitt, 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002). These positive organisational experiences may therefore reduce employees' inclination towards organisational mobility.

Career growth opportunities are also expected to positively influence affective organisational commitment. When employees perceive opportunities for career development, skill development, and advancement within their organisation, they may be more likely to view the organisation as supportive of their longer-term career goals (Weng & Hu, 2009; Huo, 2021). In contrast, limited opportunities for career development may encourage employees to consider alternative organisations that offer more favourable career prospects.

Perceived external employability is expected to have a positive relationship with job-hopping intention. Employees who perceive that their skills and experience are valuable in the external labour market may have greater confidence in their ability to secure alternative employment. Consequently, they may be more willing to consider organisational mobility when attractive opportunities become available (De Cuyper et al., 2011).

Overall, the proposed framework suggests that job-hopping intention may arise through two distinct pathways. The internal organisational pathway operates through affective organisational commitment, whereby organisational experiences influence employees' attachment to their current organisation. The external labour market pathway operates through perceived external employability, which is proposed to have a direct relationship with job-hopping intention. This distinction provides a clearer explanation of how both internal organisational conditions and external employment opportunities may contribute to employees' mobility intentions.

Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual paper contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it distinguishes job-hopping intention from conventional turnover intention by conceptualising job-hopping as a broader orientation towards repeated organisational mobility. While turnover intention primarily concerns an employee's intention to leave the current organisation, job-hopping intention reflects an orientation towards movement across organisations over time (Hom et al., 2017; Lake et al., 2018).

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Second, the proposed framework integrates internal organisational conditions and external labour market conditions within a single explanatory model. The internal organisational pathway incorporates emotional exhaustion, organisational justice, perceived supervisor support, and career growth opportunities as factors associated with affective organisational commitment. The external labour market pathway incorporates perceived external employability as a direct factor associated with job-hopping intention. This integration provides a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the factors underlying job-hopping intention among frontline service employees.

Third, the framework positions affective organisational commitment as the mechanism linking internal organisational experiences with job-hopping intention. This conceptualisation explains how employees' workplace experiences may influence their intention towards organisational mobility through their emotional attachment to the organisation.

Fourth, the framework integrates Job Demands Resources theory, Social Exchange Theory, and career mobility perspectives to explain job-hopping intention from complementary theoretical perspectives. Job Demands Resources theory explains the role of job demands and organisational resources, Social Exchange Theory explains how workplace treatment and support may influence employees' organisational attachment, while career mobility perspectives explain how external employment opportunities may shape decisions regarding organisational movement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Blau, 1964; Forrier et al., 2009). Forrier et al. (2009) specifically conceptualised career mobility as being shaped by factors that determine and constrain career transitions.

The distinctive contribution of the proposed framework lies in its integration of two mechanisms that are often examined separately. The first is an internal organisational pathway in which emotional exhaustion, organisational justice, perceived supervisor support, and career growth opportunities are linked to job-hopping intention through affective organisational commitment. The second is an external labour market pathway in which perceived external employability is proposed to have a direct relationship with job-hopping intention. By bringing these two pathways together in a single framework, the study conceptualises job-hopping intention as the outcome of both employees' experiences within their current organisation and their perceived opportunities beyond it. This dual-pathway perspective is specifically applied to frontline service employees in Malaysia, providing a contextually relevant framework for understanding organisational mobility in the service sector.

Practical Implications

The proposed framework provides several practical implications for organisations in the Malaysian service sector, particularly those employing frontline service employees. The internal organisational pathway suggests that organisations should pay attention to workplace conditions that may influence employees' affective organisational commitment. Managing excessive job demands, promoting fair organisational practices, strengthening supervisor support, and providing opportunities for career development may contribute to stronger organisational attachment among frontline employees.

Organisations may also consider improving organisational justice through transparent decision-making, fair reward practices, consistent procedures, and respectful treatment. Similarly, supervisor support can be strengthened through effective communication, recognition of

employee contributions, and appropriate guidance. Providing opportunities for training, skill development, career advancement, and promotion may further strengthen employees' perceptions that their organisation supports their longer-term career development.

The external labour market pathway highlights the importance of perceived external employability in understanding job-hopping intention. Organisations should therefore recognise that employees' perceptions of their skills, experience, and opportunities outside the organisation may influence their mobility intentions. Retention strategies should not focus solely on reducing dissatisfaction within the organisation but should also consider how employees perceive their career opportunities within and beyond the organisation.

Overall, the proposed framework suggests that employee retention in the service sector requires attention to both internal organisational experiences and external labour market conditions. However, these practical implications remain conceptual because the proposed relationships have not yet been empirically tested. Future empirical research is therefore necessary to determine whether the proposed factors are significantly associated with job-hopping intention among frontline service employees in Malaysia.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper proposes a dual pathway framework to explain job-hopping intention among frontline service employees in Malaysia. The framework integrates Job Demands Resources theory, Social Exchange Theory, and career mobility perspectives to provide a broader explanation of organisational mobility beyond conventional turnover intention.

The proposed framework consists of two distinct pathways. The internal organisational pathway suggests that emotional exhaustion, organisational justice, perceived supervisor support, and career growth opportunities influence job-hopping intention through affective organisational commitment. The external labour market pathway proposes that perceived external employability has a direct relationship with job-hopping intention. This distinction highlights that employees' intention towards organisational mobility may be shaped by both their experiences within the current organisation and their perceptions of employment opportunities outside the organisation.

The framework contributes conceptually by distinguishing job-hopping intention from conventional turnover intention and by integrating internal organisational conditions with external labour market conditions within a single model. It also positions affective organisational commitment as the mechanism through which internal organisational experiences may influence job-hopping intention. The proposed framework therefore provides a basis for understanding job-hopping intention as a broader form of organisational mobility among frontline service employees.

As this study is conceptual in nature, the proposed relationships have not yet been empirically tested. Future research may validate the framework using quantitative methods such as PLS SEM among frontline service employees in Malaysia. Empirical testing may provide further evidence regarding the proposed relationships and the relative contribution of internal organisational experiences and external employability to job-hopping intention.

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Author Contribution Statement: Nasrullah participated in the ideation, the literature analysis, the framework construction, and the composition of the document. Ridhwan assisted with the creation of the approach as well as the theoretical aspects. Alif contributed to the literary analysis and assisted in preparing the text pages. Megat played a role in enhancing the conceptual framework and conducted a thorough evaluation. Tasnim assisted with the editing, proofreading, and overall enhancement of the paper. Ultimately, all authors reviewed, consented to, and sanctioned the final iteration.

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