

## WORK VALUES AS IDENTITY-ANCHORING MECHANISMS Career Women in Mission-Driven Microfinance Institutions

Nancy Yusnita<sup>1</sup>, Doni Wihartika<sup>2</sup>, Hari Gursida<sup>3</sup> and Chih-Seong SU<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Dept. of Management Science, Pakuan University

<sup>4</sup> Graduate School of Business, SEGi University, Malaysia

*corresponding author: nancyyusnita@unpak.ac.id*

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how work values operate as identity-anchoring mechanisms that shape turnover intention among career women employed in microfinance institutions (MFIs). Rather than treating work values as static motivational preferences, the study conceptualizes them as identity-relevant cognitive frameworks that stabilize employment decisions in purpose-driven financial settings. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 800 employees working in microfinance institutions, 99.5% of whom were women. Work values were operationalized across three domains – personal, social-cultural, and organizational. Turnover intention was measured using multi-item Likert scales. Descriptive and comparative analyses were conducted to determine value salience and withdrawal cognition patterns. All work value domains were strongly endorsed, with social-cultural values emerging as the most salient. Despite respondents’ relatively short organizational tenure and early-career status, turnover intention remained low. The findings suggest that socially embedded work values may function as identity anchors that mitigate withdrawal cognition in relational, mission-driven financial contexts. The cross-sectional and descriptive design constrains causal interpretation. Future research should test mediating mechanisms – such as meaningful work and identity integration – using longitudinal or structural modelling approaches. Retention strategies in microfinance organizations should emphasize purpose alignment, relational leadership, and structured identity development rather than relying predominantly on economic incentives. This study advances work value research by integrating identity theory with value congruence models and specifying gender-sensitive mechanisms within a female-dominated service sector.

**Keyword:** Work values; Identity; Career women; Microfinance; Turnover intention; Value congruence; Retention

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Microfinance institutions represent hybrid organizations positioned at the intersection of financial intermediation and social development. Unlike traditional banking systems, MFIs embed financial transactions within community-based relationships and developmental missions. In many emerging economies, women constitute the majority of the operational workforce in this sector.

While employee turnover has been widely examined within financial services, dominant explanatory models emphasize job satisfaction, compensation, leadership style, or work stress (Hom et al., 2022). These frameworks often assume that employment decisions are primarily transactional and economically driven. Comparatively limited attention has been directed toward the deeper evaluative structures that shape how employees interpret work – specifically, work values.

Contemporary organizational scholarship increasingly recognizes work values as stable belief systems that inform meaning construction and identity formation (Burke & Stets, 2022). In mission-oriented environments, values may not simply motivate effort; they may embed work within the self-concept. Under such conditions, exiting employment entails not merely job change but potential identity discontinuity.

This study examines the salience of work values among career women in microfinance institutions and explores how these values correspond to turnover intention. It proposes that socially embedded work values operate as identity anchors that sustain employment stability, particularly among early-career women.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Work Values as Identity-Regulating Mechanisms

Recent organizational scholarship increasingly positions work values as foundational elements of self-regulation rather than peripheral motivational preferences (Lysova et al., 2022; Schnell & Hoffmann, 2022). Values inform how individuals interpret workplace events and evaluate their role experiences.

Building on the value framework developed by Shalom H. Schwartz, values operate as trans-situational guiding principles that structure meaning attribution. When these values become integrated with occupational roles, they form part of identity standards (Burke & Stets, 2022).

Recent empirical studies demonstrate that value alignment enhances psychological coherence and reduces identity strain (Pratt et al., 2023). Moreover, meaningful work has been consistently shown to mediate the relationship between value congruence and reduced withdrawal cognition (Allan et al., 2023; Martela & Pessi, 2021).

Importantly, post-pandemic workforce research indicates that younger employees increasingly prioritize purpose and societal contribution over purely financial incentives (De Clercq et al., 2024; Deloitte, 2023). This generational shift amplifies the relevance of socially embedded work values in early-career retention.

Thus, work values in mission-driven sectors may serve as identity-regulating mechanisms that stabilize employment continuity.

## **2.2 Social-Cultural Values and Purpose-Driven Work Contexts**

Purpose-driven organizations have received increasing scholarly attention over the past five years (Gartenberg et al., 2021; Henderson & Van den Steen, 2023). Evidence suggests that perceived organizational purpose enhances employee engagement, commitment, and retention.

In relational financial systems such as microfinance institutions, work is situated within moral narratives of inclusion and empowerment. Employees frequently experience direct client impact, strengthening prosocial motivation (Grant & Berg, 2022).

Research in *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Human Relations* shows that perceived social impact strengthens affective commitment and lowers turnover intention (Wang et al., 2024; Bailey et al., 2021). Moreover, collectivist cultural settings amplify the centrality of relational work values (Nguyen & Bui, 2023).

Recent scholarship also suggests that social legitimacy and family recognition can function as symbolic career rewards, particularly for young women in emerging economies (Santos & Cabral-Cardoso, 2022).

Accordingly, social-cultural work values may anchor identity by embedding employment within broader relational and moral systems.

## **2.3 Gender, Communal Orientation, and Career Identity**

Contemporary gender research emphasizes that communal orientation remains a significant predictor of women's work attitudes (Eagly & Nater, 2022). Although structural barriers have diminished in many contexts, relational identity concerns continue to shape career meaning.

Recent cross-national studies confirm that communal goal congruence predicts stronger organizational attachment among women (Garcia et al., 2024). Similarly, research published in *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* demonstrates that women report stronger alignment between meaningful work and self-definition compared to men (Suh & Lee, 2023).

Furthermore, pandemic-era research highlights that women disproportionately reassessed work meaning and purpose, intensifying identity-based career decisions (Kossek et al., 2022; Shockley et al., 2021).

These findings suggest that identity anchoring through socially embedded values may be particularly salient among early-career women in service-intensive environments.

## **2.4 Value Congruence, Meaning, and Turnover Intention**

Recent meta-analytic reviews reaffirm that person-organization value congruence is among the strongest predictors of reduced turnover intention (Lee et al., 2023). However,

contemporary models highlight meaningful work as a critical mediating mechanism (Allan et al., 2023; Lysova et al., 2022).

Longitudinal evidence indicates that purpose alignment buffers stress and reduces exit cognition during organizational uncertainty (Park & Kim, 2024; De Clercq et al., 2024).

Moreover, emerging research differentiates transactional commitment from identity-based commitment (Pratt et al., 2023). The latter is more resistant to short-term dissatisfaction and more predictive of sustained retention.

Within mission-driven financial institutions, employees who internalize social contribution values may interpret job demands as purpose-consistent rather than exploitative. This cognitive reframing may suppress withdrawal intentions even in early tenure stages.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to assess work values and turnover intention among employees in microfinance institutions (PT. PNM) using questionnaire as the instrument with Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

#### Participants

Data were collected from 800 women employees as the sample. The average age was 20.66 years, and mean tenure was 1.43 years, indicating an early-career workforce profile.

#### Measures

Work values were assessed across three dimensions:

- Personal development values
- Social-cultural relational values
- Organizational alignment values

Turnover intention was measured using established attitudinal items capturing withdrawal cognition and intent to leave.

#### Analytical Approach

Descriptive and comparative statistical analyses were conducted to determine dominant value domains and relative turnover levels.

### 4. Results

Frequency Table

Position		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Account Officer	490	61.3	61.3	61.3

Financial Account Officer	118	14.8	14.8	76.0
Senior Account Officer	35	4.4	4.4	80.4
Marketing	1	.1	.1	80.5
Credit Officer	155	19.4	19.4	99.9
Account Manager	1	.1	.1	100.0
Total	800	100.0	100.0	

Tenure		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	546	68.3	68.3	68.3
	2.00	174	21.8	21.8	90.0
	3.00	73	9.1	9.1	99.1
	4.00	3	.4	.4	99.5
	5.00	4	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	800	100.0	100.0	

Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	19.00	246	30.9	30.9	39.6
	20.00	203	25.4	25.4	56.1
	21.00	126	15.8	15.8	71.9
	22.00	86	10.8	10.8	82.6
	23.00	69	8.6	8.6	91.3
	24.00	35	4.4	4.4	95.6
	25.00	20	2.5	2.5	98.1
	26.00	9	1.1	1.1	99.3
	27.00	2	.3	.3	99.5
	28.00	2	.3	.3	99.8
	30.00	2	.3	.3	100.0
Total	800	100.0	100.0		

### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tenure	800	1.00	5.00	1.4313	.71478
Age	800	19.00	30.00	20.6662	1.93960
Valid (listwise)	N 800				

### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Personal Factor	800	2.38	5.00	4.2426	.38637
Social and Cultural Factor	800	2.60	5.00	4.3096	.41332
Organizational Variables	800	2.38	5.00	4.2016	.39663
Valid N (listwise)	800				

### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Turnover Intention	800	1.00	4.94	2.3860	.59533
Valid N (listwise)	800				

All work value dimensions received high endorsement. Social-cultural values demonstrated the highest mean score ( $M = 4.31$ ), followed by personal and organizational values.

Turnover intention was comparatively low ( $M = 2.39$ ).

Given the early-career and short-tenure profile of respondents, this stability is notable and suggests strong internalization of socially embedded work meaning.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Identity Anchoring Through Social-Cultural Values

The predominance of social-cultural values indicates that employment in microfinance institutions fulfills relational and symbolic identity functions. In identity theory terms, work experiences appear to verify internal standards associated with contribution, responsibility, and autonomy (Burke & Stets, 2022).

Leaving employment may therefore entail identity discontinuity, increasing psychological cost and reducing turnover intention.

### 5.2 Challenging Tenure-Based Turnover Assumptions

Conventional turnover models predict elevated instability among short-tenure employees (Hom et al., 2022). However, the present findings suggest that value congruence may supersede tenure effects within mission-oriented contexts.

Retention appears to be grounded less in structural attachment and more in identity alignment.

### 5.3 Gender-Sensitive Refinement of Value Congruence Theory

The findings support the proposition that relational value alignment may exert heightened influence within female-dominated sectors. Communal orientation and perceived social impact appear central in shaping employment stability (Garcia et al., 2024).

Thus, value congruence models should incorporate gender-sensitive mechanisms when applied to relational service environments.

### 5.4 Toward Meaning-Centered Retention Systems

Retention strategies in microfinance institutions should extend beyond compensation-based mechanisms. Emphasizing mission integration, mentoring, and social impact recognition may strengthen identity alignment and long-term stability.

Meaning-centered HR architectures may provide more sustainable retention outcomes than purely transactional incentives.

## 6. Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes by:

1. Conceptualizing work values as identity-anchoring cognitive mechanisms.
2. Demonstrating the salience of social-cultural values in female-dominated financial contexts.
3. Refining value congruence theory through gendered relational boundary conditions.
4. Advancing a value-based retention framework for mission-driven organizations.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Future research should:

- Employ structural equation modelling
- Examine mediation via meaningful work and identity integration
- Conduct longitudinal tracking of early-career women
- Compare gender compositions across financial sectors

Such efforts would strengthen theoretical precision and empirical robustness.

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