


## Human Resource Management Practices and Employee Retention in Shipbuilding Industry of Bangladesh

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### INTRODUCTION

The shipbuilding industry in Bangladesh is a labour intensive industry that is employing more than 100,000 skilled and more than 150, 000 semi skilled workers as part of its combined workforce, Global Security: Bangladesh (n.d.). The growth of the industry is a result of the efforts of some innovative businessmen who set up shipping yards in areas such as Chittagong, a coastal city in Bangladesh, and Khulna, another coastal region. The industry has experienced year to

year growth in its value, as well as exports. What started out as a handful of companies and shipyards is today a booming industry with thousands of businesses and shipyards affiliated with this industry. Additionally, all in all, more than 2, 000, 000 people are directly or indirectly involved with the shipbuilding industry in Bangladesh, Shipbuilding industry in Bangladesh [1]. The following table provides a snapshot of the scale of the shipbuilding industry in Bangladesh.

**Table-1: Shipbuilding Industry Statistics in Bangladesh, source: Ethirajan [2] Global Security: Bangladesh (n.d.), BOI (n.d.)**

S/L	Category	Quantity
1	Number of Shipyards	More than 100
2	Number of Shipyards currently making ships of International Quality	10
3	Current Shipbuilding capability	Up to 10,000 DWT
4	Number of Skilled Employees in Industry	More than 100, 000
5	Number of Semi-Skilled Employees in Industry	More than 150, 000
6	Location of Majority of Dockyards	Chittagong and Dhaka
7	Export Locations	Europe, Asia, Africa
8	Government Policy	Shipbuilding Industry already identified by the Bangladesh Government as a 'Thrust Sector.' Additionally, the sector has been given Green Channel Port Clearance System for Import of Raw Materials required for shipbuilding

The Bangladeshi shipbuilders have established themselves as reliable shipbuilders within two short decades, despite challenges such as unreliable power, and limited technology. Lack of advanced in-house design capability is also a major concern for Bangladeshi shipbuilders. However, the market dynamics are in Bangladesh's favour for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is generally recognised that ships manufactured in Bangladesh are normally 10-30 % cheaper than comparable ships manufactured in China or South Korea or India for that matter. Secondly, it is generally understood by industry experts that more than 50% of the current seafaring ships roaming the global seas are more than 20 years old. This means that there is a huge demand in the near future for modernization of the vessels. Thirdly, it is a matter of competencies and economics. Big ship producing countries such as China, Japan and many European countries no longer find it in their interests to produce small ships, meaning ships smaller than 25, 000DWT, Ethirajan [2]. The big shipbuilding countries are busy making larger more sophisticated and more technologically advanced ships for the international markets, as well for their own consumption. As a result, countries such as Bangladesh find themselves in an opportunistic situation, where they can get the market for themselves if they play the cards right.

### Problem Statement

Bangladesh's shipbuilding industry is not a new phenomenon. Even 400 years ago, shipbuilding in Bangladesh was a strong sector. It is common knowledge that ships built in the Bengal, namely Chittagong, were amongst the best in the world. Foreign merchants would buy wooden ships from Bengal. Moreover, foreign governments would also buy ships from Bengal, including countries such as Great Britain and Turkey. However, after the advent of the Industrial Revolution, wooden ships slowly started to be replaced by steel ships. Unfortunately, Bangladeshi shipbuilders could not cope with this change in technology. As a result, shipbuilding in Bengal suffered a devastating setback, until now.

It is generally recognized now that it was the lack of technical knowledge and training that led to Bengal losing its edge in the global shipbuilding industry. In today's world, technology is still the number one factor, as Bangladesh lacks advanced ship designing capabilities. Additionally, expert welders and technicians are also in short supply, as are expert machining and tooling technicians. However, shipyards are slowly attempting to improve these circumstances with training programs and other skill development initiatives. However, these developments are slow at best, and the output is merely not enough to meet demand. Under these circumstances, the human resource that is trained runs the risk of switching to another employer, or worse, to another industry. This

would mean a significant loss of money, knowledge and training effort. Hence, employee retention in the shipbuilding industry has become a major challenge for all shipbuilders and dockyards, because, a trained shipbuilding industry employee is a precious commodity in Bangladesh nowadays. There are reasons, specific and characteristic to every industry, that affect turnover and retention within its companies and organisation. In the Bangladesh shipbuilding industry, Additionally, the poor safety record of the shipbuilding industry, often low pay, and uncertain job security (due to seasonal or annual fluctuations in demand) are factors that often force employees in the industry to change jobs, or worse, to change industries. As a result, retaining trained employees in the shipbuilding industry is of paramount importance.

### Research Objectives

The following are the general and specific research objectives.

#### General Objective

- Validation of HRM practice in the shipbuilding industry in Bangladesh

#### Specific Objective

- Identification of poor HRM practice as a cause of low employee retention
- Identification of turnover of trained skilled and semi-skilled employees in the industry as a significant challenge for the shipbuilders
- Validation of Poor Worker Safety, Low Pay, and low Job Security as driving factors for employee retention in the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry

### Research Hypotheses

**H1:** Retention of trained semi-skilled and skilled employees in shipbuilding industry is a priority for Bangladesh is hipbuilders

**H2:** HRM malpractice may be potential to blame for low retention in the shipbuilding industry

**H3:** Low Pay is a Potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry

**H4:** Poor Safety is a Potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry

**H5:** Low Job Security is a Potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry

**H6:** There are other factors that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry Literature Review

Lamb [3] stated that most US based shipbuilders were not paying attention to organisation theory when they were setting their policies. Rather, most US shipbuilders were running 'mechanistic type' organisations. Lamb [3] concluded that, however, the organisations were not achieving the high efficiency

and tightly controlled operations that most mechanistic organisations were supposed to experience. Naik [4] presented a study on the HRM practices, particularly Talent Management practices, of three top Indian shipbuilders. According to the paper, talent management was originally thought of as a phenomenon that was only concerned with top executives. However, now it has been recognised that talent management is concerned with all levels of the organisation. Additionally, Naik [4] stated that talent management does not necessarily mean promoting employees to higher positions within the organisational hierarchy. Rather, it means ensuring that they are in the right place, where they will be most satisfied and most productive.

According to Mehta *et al.* [5], hiring employees is a relatively easy effort, but retaining them is a very hard prospect. As per their study, there is no fixed successful strategy that organisations may use to reduce employee turnover. According to Mathimaran and Kumar [6], effective employee retention may be defined as the systematic effort by employers to create an environment within the workplace where employees feel that their diverse needs are being met and that in turn urges employees to remain employed with their current employers. The authors stated in their study that employee retention was particularly important as a lost employee meant that the training and investment put towards the employee becomes a loss for the organisation. There is also a loss of knowledge from the organisation. Stating that the retention of key employees is very important for the long-term stability and success of any business, the authors pointed out that there are three very important components for effective employee retention: Respect, Recognition and Reward.

Savarimuthu and Hemalatha [7] stated that the process of effective employee retention could be approached from varying dimensions. However, the authors stated that no matter what the angle employed, all employee retention hinged on one of four basic foundations, namely: Compensation, Working Environment, Job Enrichment and Education. According to the survey carried out by Savarimuthu and Hemalatha [7], only 55 % of employees felt that management's retention strategies were far reaching enough, whilst the rest stated that they felt management wasn't doing enough to retain them. Wells and Thelen [8] stated in their research that organisations that had reasonable/good HRM practices and allowed employees to have more control over their workplace were in a better position to retain their employees. Messmer [9] stated in the study that, for organisations, training and investment in its revenue generating employees is very important. Additionally, the author has stated that the organisation must also show the employee a career path, and not merely a job.

Chamberlain [10] stated in the Harvard Business Review that one easily overlooked factor from

the point of employers when it came to employee retention was allowing employees to stagnate in their job roles for too long a period of time, without any change in title or responsibilities. The author of the report further presented that changing titles of employees wasn't enough though, and insisted that base pay also had to be competitive, along with a positive company culture. Moreover, the report presented by Chamberlain concluded that the quality of company senior leadership and work life balance did not have any major influence on employees when it came to turnover. Hence, the study concluded that this signalled that employees were only making decisions based on their own career progression plan, or their own life goals, and not based on any factor pertaining solely to the company.

Ozola [11] presented a study that attempted to study the impact of HRM practices on employee turnover. The study utilised expert opinion and experience survey, however, stated that there was little research work that had been previously undertaken to correlate HRM practices and employee retention. The paper concluded that the following factors had an impact on employee turnover: job design; recruitment and selection; induction; training and development; succession planning; compensation and reward; performance management; internal communication; involvement; equal opportunities; employment security and prestige.

Hossain [12] presented a study on the impact of best HRM practices on retaining employees. A total of 314 non-managers and managers were surveyed for their inputs. The study utilised ten different HRM practices. Out of these ten practices, it was reported that (1) job analysis, (2) adequacy of information, (3) management-employee relationship and (4) participation in decision making had a "positive but insignificant relationship" with employee retention. However, it was reported that there was a negative relationship of (5) recruitment & selection, (6) job training facilities, (7) performance appraisal, (8) supervisory treatment, (9) career development and (10) compensation and benefit with employee retention.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study has been designed as an empirical hypothesis testing study. The study has utilised a questionnaire based experience survey with a convenience sample of 54 industry managers in the shipping industry to receive the expert opinions of the respondents vis-a-vis employee retention in the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry with respect to low pay, poor safety, and low job security. The survey responses have been aligned against the hypothesis presented above. The validation of said hypothesis has been attempted using 6 sets of Central Tendency Analysis (Ordinal Data, using 95 % confidence

interval). The statistical results from each set of analysis have been used to accept the null hypothesis, or propose the alternative hypothesis, as listed in the Hypothesis section above.

**FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The following table below, Table 2, lists the coding of data sets, presenting values and labels for statistical evaluation of data.

**Table-2: Coding of Responses to Questionnaire**

Value	1	2	3	4	5
Label	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

**Hypothesis 1: Retention of trained semi-skilled and skilled employees in shipbuilding industry is a priority for Bangladeshi shipbuilders**

**Table-3: Frequency of Responses for H1**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	43	79.6	79.6	79.6
	Somewhat Agree	10	18.5	18.5	98.1
	Neutral	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	54	100.0	100.0	

**Table-4: Descriptives of Responses to H1**

		Statistic	Std. Error
Retention of trained semi-skilled and skilled employees in shipbuilding industry is a priority for Bangladeshi shipbuilders	Mean	1.2222	.06293
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	1.0960
		Upper Bound	1.3484
	5% Trimmed Mean	1.1708	
	Median	1.0000	
	Variance	.214	
	Std. Deviation	.46242	

**Test result:** As the 95 % confidence interval for mean lies between 1.09 and 1.34, and also the fact that the Median is 1, the null cannot be accepted. The alternative hypothesis, that is, retention of trained semi-

skilled and skilled employees in shipbuilding industry is a priority for Bangladeshi shipbuilders may be proposed.

**Hypothesis 2: HRM malpractice may be potential to blame for low retention in the shipbuilding industry**

**Table-5: Frequency of Responses for H2**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	36	66.7	66.7	66.7
	Somewhat Agree	11	20.4	20.4	87.0
	Neutral	4	7.4	7.4	94.4
	Disagree	3	5.6	5.6	100.0
	Total	54	100.0	100.0	

**Table-6: Descriptives of Responses for H2**

		Statistic	Std. Error	
HRM malpractice may be potential to blame for low retention in the shipbuilding industry	Mean	1.5185	.11745	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	1.2829	
		Upper Bound	1.7541	
	5% Trimmed Mean	1.4095		
	Median	1.0000		
	Variance	.745		
	Std. Deviation	.86310		

**Test result:** As the 95 % confidence interval for mean lies between 1.52 and 1.28, and also the fact that the Median is 1, the null cannot be accepted. The alternative hypothesis, that is, HRM malpractice may be potential to blame for low retention in the shipbuilding industry may be proposed.

**Comparison of Means for Responses to H3, H4, H5 and H6**

The following table presents a comparison of Means for H3, H4, H5 and H6 from the response results.

**Table-7: Comparison of Means**

	Low Pay	Poor Safety	Low Job Security	Others
<b>Mean</b>	1.6667	1.2963	1.7407	1.8000
<b>N</b>	54	54	54	5
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	.72684	.66246	.87276	.44721

Interpretation of comparison of means: According to data presented above, Low Pay, Poor Safety and Low Job Security all garnered responses hovering between agreement and strong agreement with the hypothesized proposal of the study, namely, that these three HRM malpractice variables had a potential

impact on the retention of employees in the shipbuilding industry. The response to others has been only 5 valid responses, as a result, the null hypothesis may be accepted, namely, there are 'no' other factors that significantly affect employee retention in the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry.

**H3: Low Pay is a Potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry**

**Table-8: Frequency of Responses for H3**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	25	46.3	46.3	46.3
	Somewhat Agree	23	42.6	42.6	88.9
	Neutral	5	9.3	9.3	98.1
	Disagree	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	54	100.0	100.0	

**Table-9: Descriptives of Responses for H3**

		Statistic	Std. Error	
Low Pay is a Potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry	Mean	1.6667	.09891	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	1.4683	
		Upper Bound	1.8651	
	5% Trimmed Mean	1.6091		
	Median	2.0000		
	Variance	.528		
	Std. Deviation	.72684		

**Test result:** As the 95 % confidence interval for mean lies between 1.47 and 1.87, and also the fact that the Median is 2, the null cannot be accepted. The

alternative hypothesis, that is, low pay is a potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry may be proposed.

**H4: Poor Safety is a Potential factor that causes turnover in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry**

**Table-10: Frequency of Responses for H4**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	42	77.8	77.8	77.8
	Somewhat Agree	10	18.5	18.5	96.3
	Disagree	2	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	54	100.0	100.0	

**Table-11: Descriptives of Responses for H4**

			Statistic	Std. Error
Poor Safety is a Potential factor that causes turnover in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry	Mean		1.6667	.09891
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	1.4683	
		Upper Bound	1.8651	
	5% Trimmed Mean		1.6091	
	Median		2.0000	
	Variance		.528	
	Std. Deviation		.72684	

**Test result:** As the 95 % confidence interval for mean lies between 1.49 and 1.89, and also the fact that the Median is 2, the null cannot be accepted. The

alternative hypothesis, that is, poor safety is a potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry may be proposed.

**H5: Low Job Security is a Potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry**

**Table-12: Frequency of Responses for H5**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	26	48.1	48.1	48.1
	Somewhat Agree	19	35.2	35.2	83.3
	Neutral	6	11.1	11.1	94.4
	Disagree	3	5.6	5.6	100.0
	Total	54	100.0	100.0	

**Table-13: Descriptives of Responses for H5**

			Statistic	Std. Error
Low Job Security is a Potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi Shipbuilding Industry	Mean		1.7407	.11877
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	1.5025	
		Upper Bound	1.9790	
	5% Trimmed Mean		1.6564	
	Median		2.0000	
	Variance		.762	
	Std. Deviation		.87276	

**Test result:** As the 95 % confidence interval for mean lies between 1.50 and 1.98, and also the fact that the Median is 2, the null cannot be accepted. The

alternative hypothesis, that is, low job security is a potential factor that reduces retention in the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry may be proposed.

## CONCLUSION

The study has highlighted the importance of low pay, poor safety and low job security as critical factors that have an impact on the retention of trained skilled and semi skilled employees in the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry. The expert opinion has been utilised to present this statistical finding. According to the expert opinion, there is a strong case to make in favour of curbing low employee retention in the shipbuilding industry. There has also been shown statistical evidence to suggest that HRM malpractice is to blame for the problem of trained employee turnover in the shipbuilding industry. Perhaps a note from the literature review about organisational theory vs. mechanistic organisation might be suitable for discussion under this discussion, as it may be proposed that the tightly controlled organisation structure is not a fit for many organisations. Employees may feel suffocated under this system, leading to employees looking for employment opportunities elsewhere, and thus leading to poor retention. Alternatively, a positive organisation culture that encompasses more flexibility might be appropriate for Bangladeshi organisations, as this reflects the working culture of most of the workforce. Flexibility in training, leave, work schedules, etc. may enhance organisational commitment and thus increase retention.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations have been presented based on the discussion and findings of the study.

- **Emphasis on employee safety:** The major issue plaguing the Bangladeshi shipbuilding industry is overwhelmingly employee safety. This is due to the fact that there is little experience in safety measures. There has historically been a lack of expertise in employee safety in the field of Bangladeshi operations management practice for a number of reasons. One primary reason is the cost of safety equipment. However, there is also an employee reluctance to follow safety procedures as well. Additionally, a lack of enforcement from employers also results in a callous attitude to safety all around. This has resulted in Bangladeshi shipbuilding, along with ship breaking, being one of the riskiest professions in the country. Both local and international media have reported on this issue with the consequences being negative publicity for Bangladeshi shipbuilders.

Bangladeshi ship builders must employ a very practical, yet stringent, approach to onsite safety. This system must address costs, as well as employee hesitance to wear safety gear and follow safety procedures. There must be proper communication between employees and top management about why this is necessary, and what the potential consequences of non-compliance might be in terms of accidents, injuries and even loss of life.

- **Reasonable job security:** The shipbuilding industry often faces low job security for a number of reasons. The seasonal or annual fluctuations in demand are the main issue. Additionally, the fluctuation in contracts and tenders also means that shipbuilders might pay off employees during off peak times. This, however, creates low job security for the employees, and as a result, the employees might seek opportunities elsewhere by rotating around shipyards and support industries from time to time. This might cause a loss of skills and knowledge from the organisation. Bangladeshi ship builders must be innovative when it comes to retaining talented technicians and employees. Medium term guaranteed work as well as monetary incentives for staying may help keep turnover low.
- **Greater Training and Pay:** Bangladeshi shipbuilding organisations must allow themselves the foresight to realize that in order to prosper over the next two decades as effective shipbuilders, they must enhance training greatly. Currently, local shipbuilders lack a host of technologies required to compete in the international market. However, as time progresses, there will be even newer technologies to deal with, thus requiring even newer training for their employees. This trend will only grow and continue. The lesson for Bangladeshi shipbuilders is that in order to retain knowledgeable machinists, technicians, welders, engine experts, assembly personnel, painters, electronics experts, etc. it is imperative to raise pay in order to raise job satisfaction. Slightly above competitive pay may be more than enough to retain employees in a dynamic industry. Additionally, it is also critical for organisations to provide some additional perks above base pay, e.g. children's school fees allowance, or an injury/accident medical allowance. Only one perk may increase organisational commitment just enough to increase retention.

### Questionnaires

**(1) Retention of trained semi-skilled and skilled employees in shipbuilding industry is a priority for Bangladeshi shipbuilders**

- Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Neutral    Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

**(2) HRM malpractice may be potential to blame for high turnover in the shipbuilding industry**

- Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Neutral    Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

**(3) Rate the following HRM malpractice as a potential contributor to employee turnover in the shipping industry**

**a. Low Pay**

- Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Neutral    Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

**b. Poor Employee Safety**

- Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Neutral    Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

**c. Low Job Security**

- Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Neutral    Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

**d. There are 'Other' factors that are Not Listed Here**

- Strongly Agree    Somewhat Agree    Neutral    Disagree  
 Strongly Disagree

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