

## APPLICATION OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify whether the application of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) affects employee retention during the exit interviews. Thus, this study is mainly qualitative in nature where the sample size was 20 machine operators who decided to resign during the period of April to May 2016. In order to collect data, researchers applied convenience-sampling techniques with in-depth semi-structured interviews. As a counselling technique, CBT was applied for eight machine operators at the exit interview and six employees were retained. However, after the counselling sessions, two employees were left the institution. This study proposes to apply Rational Emotional Behavioral Therapy, and modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior as CBT techniques during the exit interview or any appropriate time before the employee leaving in order to retain employees. This study contributes to the knowledge as yet; CBT is not proposed to apply and not tested empirically at the exit interview time in order to retain employees, other than conducting exit interviews to investigate reasons for employee leaving.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Retention of skilled employees has been of serious concern to managers in the face of ever-increasing high rate of employee turnover (Arthur, 1994). It is apparent that employee turnover is a critical issue for the success of any organization. It is identified as an issue when it is in an unaffordable rate. High turnover can be a serious obstacle to productivity, quality, and profitability at firms of all sizes. Exit interview has identified as an effective method to understand factors affecting on employee turnover (Hussain and Ravindra, 2012). Further, they have revealed that, exit interview supports to understand the reasons for voluntary employee turnover and to gather the information that can help to improve individual and organizational performance. Hence, there is high

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accreditation on conducting exit interviews in organization level. As cited by [Mishara \(2014\)](#), [Wert and Gregg \(2004\)](#) in his article of “An evolving view of exit interviews” said that attrition is going to be there and it should there. Furthermore, [Mishara \(2014\)](#) has revealed that the challenge of good management is to ensure that such attrition is acceptable, and that it stays that way.

It is yet to be conducting counselling for employees at the exit interview time to retain them moreover rather collecting reasons for leaving. Previous studies have explained the importance of counselling for existing employees ([Proudfoot et al., 2009](#); [Swarte, 1998](#); [Wachtel, 1997](#)), nevertheless, organizations were not practiced counselling at the exit interview time to retain employees. Therefore, the current study attempts to find the effectiveness of counselling by applying Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) at the exit interview. The present study examines, “Whether Cognitive Behavioral Therapy impacts employee retention at the exit interview?”

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to identify the impact of CBT on employee retention at the exit interviews’. In addition, specific objectives are to construct a conceptual framework to the study and to provide recommendations to reduce turnover in Machine Operator (MO) level.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Employee retention

Long-term health and success of any organization depends upon the retention of key employees. Therefore, organizations apply different strategies to retain their employees. Employee retention is defined as, encouraging employees to remain in the organization for a long period of time ([Das and Baruah, 2013](#)). Further, they have revealed it as a process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organization for the maximum period of time or until the completion of the project. In addition, as cited in [Das and Baruah \(2013\)](#), [Zineldin \(2000\)](#) has viewed employee retention as an obligation to continue to do business or exchange with a particular company on an ongoing basis. Moreover, [Denton \(2000\)](#) has clearly stated that employees who are happy and satisfied with their jobs are more dedicated towards their work and always put their effort to improve their organizational customer’s satisfaction. Therefore, organizations today take great care in retaining its valuable employees. According to [Culter \(2001\)](#) one of the most important demands on management today in any organization is keeping the most vital and dynamic HR motivated and dedicated.

### 2.2. Exit interviews

Exit interviews are critical to any organizations as they provide an opportunity for the employees to express their reasons for exit and, enable the organizations to review and improve upon their employee retention policies ([Mishara, 2014](#)). Further, [Mishara \(2014\)](#) has revealed exit interview provides a unique chance for an organization to understand the perception of departing employees who generally more open about their perception on organizational policies and practices.

### 2.3. Employee counselling

[Orlans \(1992\)](#) has defined the task of counselor as “build the bridge between different worlds” and those two worlds are the world of counselling and the world of organization. Hence, counselor works as a mediator between employer and employee to create cohesive work environment. Counselor’s job is one of the most difficult job hence it deals with ever changing human mind. Organizational counselor is not only a counselor but also trainer, consultant, organizational agent of change, counselling manager, informant, advocate, advice giver, diplomat, and hopefully human ([Carroll, 1995](#)). There are various counselling techniques in the field of counselling which support to conduct productive counselling session. Counselling technique that commonly use are, cognitive therapy, behavioral therapy, existential therapy, psychoanalysis, and humanistic therapy, and holistic therapy ([American Psychology Association, 2016](#)). Even though, there are different counselling techniques, this study selected CBT for the study purpose. In the following discussion, clearly defines CBT, which can be applied in employee counselling.

### 2.3.1. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

To change the behavior of the client therapist must deal with feelings and thoughts in a more direct and central way. Accordingly, psychologist has introduced CBT. Among forms of psychotherapy, CBT has been taken important role, which is highly effective for adult unipolar depression, adolescent unipolar depression, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder with or without agoraphobia, social phobia, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and childhood depressive and anxiety disorders (Andrew and Butler, 2006). CBT focuses on changing both cognitive and behavior to rescue client. Simply CBT is a combination of the basic therapies; CT and BT (Beck, 2011). As pointed out by Andrew and Butler (2006) there is a growing trend of using CBT for mental disorders and problems hence, applying CBT will produce effective results. Distinct feature of CBT is the proposition that symptoms and dysfunctional behaviors often cognitively mediated and hence, improvement can be produced by modifying dysfunctional thinking and beliefs (Pucci, 2006).

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) and Reinforcement introduce as techniques of CBT (David, 2014; Pucci, 2006). Further David (2014) has revealed that REBT uses when people become emotionally distressed due to irrational believes and that the counsellor should convince the client that he /she should replace those believes with rational believes. Reinforcement helps the client counteract negative cognitive biases, and develop more balanced view of herself/himself about the world, and the future, restore activity levels; especially those that give sense of pleasure or achievement and increase active engagement and problem solving (Pucci, 2006). Further, he has described that CBT is a collaborative approach hence client and counsellor both have to involve to get successful outcomes. Accordingly, client plays a role by defining goals, expressing concerns, learning & implementing learning and therapist plays a role by helping to the client for defining goals, listening, teaching, encouraging.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study consists of multiple case studies of the selected context because previous studies on exit interviews have dealt with multiple case studies (Mishara, 2014; Neal, 2010). The present study is a qualitative study. Pilot study was conducted at the exit interview time with the two (02) women machine operators in the one Apparel organization before they submit their resignation letter. Based on the reasons behind the resign of those two employees, researchers interfere to the study as a counselor by conducting counselling for them. The pilot study confirmed interview would require at least one hour (01) including time for conduct counselling for employee. Finally, the pilot study supported to determine realistic prediction of time for conduct the effective interview as well to identify required pattern of counselling and interviewing such selected sample of employees.

The unit of analysis of the study was individual. Convenience sampling technique was used as sample technique, which defined as the most easily accessible members chosen as subjects. Researchers conducted counselling for employees who decided to leave from the organization accordingly, researchers' accessible time for that individual influenced to choose this technique. Employee who is going to leave cannot be predicted, except employees who gave prior notice about their resign. Sample size was 20 MOs.

This study was contrived hence study conducted in the counselling center of the selected Apparel organization. Time scheduled according to the convenience of researchers to do counselling for individuals who are leaving. Each interview extended for about one to one and half hours. It is must to create friendly atmosphere hence, researchers committed to conduct successful counselling sessions. The data for the study were collected within a particular period and according to Sekaran (2009), the study was cross-sectional in nature.

#### 4. DATA COLLECTION

Table 1 is depicted descriptive statistics including Age, Gender, Education Level, and Civil Status of eight (08) respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample**

Demographics	(n=20) Frequency	(%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	17	85%
Male	3	15%
<b>Age</b>		
17-24 years	7	35%
25-34 years	6	30%
35-44 years	3	15%
45-54 years	1	5%
55 and above	3	15%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	9	45%
Married	7	35%
Divorced/Separated	2	10%
Widowed	2	10%
<b>Education Level</b>		
Passes grade 8 or less	1	5%
O/Level	7	35%
A/Level	10	50%
Reading a degree/ diploma	2	10%

Source: Research Data 2016

There is a growing trend of using CBT for counselling. In the following cases explore the use of CBT at the counselling process of eight (08) respondents and precisely discussed the application of CBT techniques including Modifying dysfunctional thinking behavior (Beck, 1995), Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (David, 2014) and Reinforcement (Pucci, 2006).

Respondent A is 30 years old Sinhala Buddhist Unmarried woman working as a MO grade C level in this organization. She is working as a MO for two years excluding working six months as a helper in this organization. She has done her Advanced Level (A/L) and in addition, she is doing a sewing course. As she recounted on why she changed her hometown, *“My father has passed away before three years then I came to mother’s home with my mother and sister.”*

*The reason for leave:* The reason to resign was she needed to care her mother hence; her mother is not being able to walk due to a back pain. She has expressed *“[Crying] I lost my father, I do not want to lose my mother”*.

*Counselling:* The researcher has discussed about the existing issue moreover and replied, *“Who will give money to your family, because all are depending on you, Do you have any idea?”* The employee was become silence. Again, the researcher has tried to show the potential issue of the current decision and she has replied, *“Yes you are correct, but what should I do?”* In the process of counselling the counselor do not take any decision but the client take the decision while the counselor showing the paths (Bugental, 1978). Therefore, the researcher has shown different options such as hire a woman to care mother, or send mother to the Ayurveda hospital until cure. Finally, the researcher has explained the impact of loss of job in this critical situation. At the end, the employee recounted that, *“I think need to think more and I will take the best decision after talking with mother. I will stay here moreover”*. In this session applied CBT techniques was modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior.

Respondent B is a 45 years old Tamil Christian Separated woman working as a MO grade B level in the organization. She is working as a MO for four years excluding one year in this organization as a helper. She does not have any education qualifications unless Ordinary Level qualification. She told me that, *"I was failed Advance Level there after parents arranged my marriage"*. She changed her hometown; she gave me a reason for that. *"After my daughter's father left from us we came my mother's home"*. At present, she is living with her daughter and mother's relations. Her daughter is twenty-one years old and engaged.

*The reason for leave:* The employee expressed the reason for leave *"My daughter is going to marry, she told me to stop this job and stay with her new family"*. However, the issue is only her daughter has guided to this employee as to stay with her not by her daughter's future spouse.

*Counselling:* The researcher guided employee to modify the dysfunctional thinking and behavior hence, she still does not aware about her daughter's new family environment. The researcher has described that until her daughter's spouse is asking to stay with them she can work moreover hence, yet daughter asked to stay with her new family but not by daughter's spouse. Then she has replied, *"That is correct madam. I did not think about it"*. Moreover, the researcher has explained the negative aspect of loss of job. The employee agreed to everything that the researcher demonstrated and she decided to stay until aware about daughter's new family.

Respondent C is 52 years old Sinhala Buddhist Divorced woman working as a MO grade D level in the organization. She is working as a MO for six months. She studied up to grade 6 in school. She changed her hometown and she gave me a reason for that. *"I came here with my son after he got the job as a clerk in a private company. I could not able to live alone because my spouse divorced me. Now I am living with my son"*.

*The reason for leave:* She revealed the reason for leave *"My son always asked to stay at home and no need to do a job. So [because of my son said] I decided to leave"*. The reason that she was expressed is not much critical.

*Counselling:* In this case, researcher used modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior technique. The researcher has shown disadvantages of leaving from the job in this moment such as she can work only until age 55, she will have to stay home lonely, still she has strength to work more, and able to invest her salary. She has replied *"But I think now enough, I am not able to work moreover"*. The researcher has explained, what happened to her today because early she depended on spouse and when he left from her life, she become alone. Then the researcher gave the opportunity to take correct decision by thinking all these aspects. Finally she has replied *"You are correct [at that time I was totally depended on my spouse] I think I need to change my faulty chinking. Till I have strength I work"*

Respondent D is a 26 years old Sinhala Buddhist Married woman working as a MO grade D level in the organization. She is working as a MO for seven months excluding four months as a helper in this organization. Now she is reading GAQ BSc (Administration) Special degree at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Still she is living in her hometown. She does not change her hometown; she gave me a reason for that. *"I married my cousin and we are living at my home"*. She does not have any children yet. Her spouse is a Mason and does not have precise income.

*The reason for leave:* As she revealed the reason to leave was she is pregnant. She said, *"I think I cannot manage work and family after having a baby"*. This is her first child and she does not have any experience how to manage work and family life when having a child in the family.

*Counselling:* In this case, the researcher has conducted counselling session to modify dysfunctional beliefs and behavior of the employee hence; she believes she will not able to balance work and family life when she is having a baby. Researcher asked, *"Do you know anyone who is having*

*children and working here with you". She replied, "Yes I know". After giving that initial awareness, the researcher conducted the session to change her thinking and provide awareness about how to balance her future family life and work life. Then she replied, "Madam [smile] I think I had wrong belief. After my maternity leaves I will come"*

Respondent E is a 51 years old Sinhala Buddhist Widow woman working as a MO grade A level in this organization. She is working for seven years as a MO excluding five months as a helper. She has studied up to O/L qualification. Now she is living with her son's family. She has two sons and one daughter. Her children were married and doing respectable jobs.

*The reason for leave: Initially she has taken time to cry then she has revealed the reason for leave "I like to do my job but my daughter is pregnant now. After having her baby no one there looking after the child. She asked to care her child. I spent for my children from this job after my husband's death. Now I have to leave form this even though I like to stay. I cannot do job moreover because I do not want to create any negative feeling about me on my children's mind. Even though I do not leave today one day I have to do that thereafter, I need their support. So (again cried) I decided to resign now".*

*Counselling: In this case, the researcher showed the option for the current issue "Your daughter can get the servant's support hence your daughter and son in-law, both are doing respectable jobs. They have enough money to spend". Then she replied "No miss in these days no one can trust other than family members to looking after a baby". Further, modify irrational believe and behaviour (used REBT) of employee by explaining about the advantages of working for this organization until reach her age 55 and, in contrast explained advantages of take the leaving decision for looking after the baby. Hence, this technique will support to employee to manage her emotions for take any decision by thinking positive aspect of decisions. Then the researcher gave the authority to the employee take the decision carefully by considering all these things but after two weeks, she resigned.*

Respondent F is a 28 years old Sinhala Buddhist Married woman working as a MO grade C in this organization. She has working for one and half years in this organization excluding five years as MO in another apparel organization. She has completed A/Level qualification. She is having a five years old daughter and a two and half year's old son. They are looking after by her spouse's mother. Her spouse is working for another apparel organization.

*The reason for leave: As she revealed her mother in law could not able to look after her two children since her elder daughter starting to go nursery. In addition, she told, "My husband also said that stay at home and look after children".*

*Counselling: The researcher asked, "Don't you like to send your child to 'this organization's nursery and daycare center' then every evening you can go home with your child". She does not like to send her child and the researcher suggested to hiring a servant. Then she told they did not try to find a servant. This employee lost an ability to manage her emotions on her children hence she took decision to leave without considering available options to solve current issue. In the counselling session, the researcher support to modify irrational believe and behaviour (used REBT) by herself in order to take correct decisions hence, researcher clearly showed advantages and disadvantages of leaving from her job. Finally, she said, "I will discuss moreover about this with my husband and I will take best decision. However, I do not like to send my child to the daycare center and best way is make attempt to find a servant. I am not resigning in this moment".*

Respondent G is 35 years old Sinhala Buddhist Married person working as a MO grade D level in the organization. She is working as a MO for six months. She studied up to A/L qualification. She changed her hometown and she gave me a reason for that. "After my marriage I was settled down in my spouse's home." Her spouse is working in a bookshop. She is having six months old son.

*The reason for leave:* As she said, her mother-in-law does not have ability to care her child and she decided to leave. Further, she said, “I need this job because we do not have good income. My husband is working in a bookshop but we do not have any options other than resigning”.

*Counselling:* In the counselling session, the researcher has guided to employee how to modify irrational believe and behavior (used REBT) since she is distressed due to this issue. In addition, the researcher asked, “Why you did not find a lady to look after you baby?” She replied, “We have to pay, then how we can balance expenses”. Then, the researcher made her aware on even though she resigned she will lost her earnings, hence get the most advantage full decision. Finally, she said, “I think it is better to talk moreover with my husband without resign in this moment, because we can find a servant to look after our baby. It will beneficial than resign”

Respondent H is 20 years old Muslim unmarried person working as a MO grade D level in the organization. She is working as a MO for one month including five months as a helper in this organization. She studied up to A/L qualification. Still she is living there with her parents.

*The reason for leave:* She has replied to the question of why you are going to leave “I am going to marry, my spouse is not allowing for doing the job. It is coming with our religion. Even though I like to work more, I cannot do it. I must respect to my religion”.

*Counselling:* In this issue, counselling is not being effective because this is a religious related reason. Then the researcher end the session by using CBT technique: modify dysfunctional thinking and change future behavior in order to make sense to join with the company again when she needs. Finally, researcher expressed that “If you will decide to work again, come to this organization because you will not able to find a good place to work other than this organization”.

#### 4.1. Framework of the study

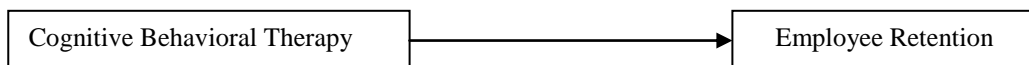


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

### 5. DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

CBT used for eight (08) MOs and different techniques used below CBT; modifying dysfunctional thinking and beliefs (Pucci, 2006), Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), and Reinforcement introduce as techniques of CBT (David, 2014; Pucci, 2006). Among these techniques Modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior, and modifying irrational believe and behaviour (application of REBT) were used excepting Reinforcement.

The literature has claimed that modifying dysfunctional thinking and modifying irrational believe and behaviour (REBT) are reduced employee turnover (Proudfoot et al., 2009). Modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior used for four MOs and except one employee others were retained. It implies that this technique has an impact of employee retention when it uses as a counselling technique at the exit interviews. The employee’s decision who resigned is affected by the culture. Literature indicates that employee’s behaviors impacted by culture (Aoudia, 2016). Hence, it can be concluded that even though counselling impact on employee retention sometime it can be affected by culture. In addition, findings supposed to show that, REBT could be used in counselling sessions to retain employees moreover. Unsuccessful case related with an ethical issue and Aoudia (2016), has been revealed that employees’ behaviors are impacted by culture. Therefore, even REBT impacts employee retention culture impacts to employee’s behavior.



The present study found that there is an impact of application of CBT on employee retention. Next, in detail demonstrates the recommendations for organizations, especially for employee counsellors how they can apply CBT at the exit interview time to change the mind of employees as to retain in the organization. Use modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior, and REBT below CBT. Modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior, and REBT techniques are proposed to use as counselling techniques to change the mind as retain in the organization (Proudfoot *et al.*, 2009). Below CBT, there are many techniques such as modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior, REBT, and reinforcement (Andrew and Butler, 2006; Pucci, 2006), nevertheless the present study suggests to use modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior, and REBT techniques to gain expected outcome as changed the mind of employee to retain in the organization moreover. In addition, in line with the additional findings of employees are leaving due to family related issues, this study recommends to implement practices which are promoting employees' work-life balance such as family day, annual trips with family members, and family counselling.

Exit interview and counselling are strange disciplines because yet, those were not practiced or tested at once in previous studies. However, available literature suggested that counselling can be applied to change the human behavior accordingly the present study intends to test the impact of CBT on employee retention. This is not only filling the available gap but also innovating a concept to the HR management field.

Investigating on whether counselling will make positive response from employees who are resigning from the organization at the time of exit interview is beneficial to the industry in certain ways. Through this study can identify real reasons behind the employee exit and attempt to make them retain moreover. Therefore, the current study beneficial to the industry to confirm that whether this counselling practice at the exit interview continuously follow or not to gain advantages.

### **5.1. Conclusion**

Throughout the study, established objectives were achieved successfully, and developed the conceptual framework by verifying the impact of CBT on employee retention at the exit interview. Findings showed that from the sample of twenty (20) MOs, CBT was applied for eight (08) employees and six (06) were retained in the organization. Accordingly, recommended to apply REBT, and modifying dysfunctional thinking and behavior below CBT. However, the application of therapies is depending on case-by-case or situation by situation. Moreover, study recognized that MOs are decided to leave due to family related issues. Thus, study proposed to implement new practices which are supporting to employees to manage their work and family.

### **5.2. Limitations and implications for future research**

The sample size in qualitative studies typically small, hence study focus on small sample. This research examines the impact of counselling on employee retention at the exit interviews on MOs level only. This is not, of course, the only point of view that can be concerned. This research is not focusing on the other level of employees. All the findings of the study based on the self-reported data of the researcher through interviews and those data will be bias in favor. Counselling skills of the researcher create an impact to the outcomes.

This research provides implications for future research such as, (1) test the impact of counselling on employee retention with other employee categories, hence the present study confined to the operational level (MOs), (2) test the impact of counselling on employee retention in different context, hence this study is limited to the Apparel sector, (3) test the different techniques such as behavioral therapy, existential therapy, psychoanalysis, and humanistic therapy in order to retain employees at the exit interview, and (4) test the impact of CBT on employee absenteeism, motivation, and satisfaction.



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