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Engagement as a Retention Mechanism in a State-Owned Electricity Company: Trust in Management, Reward and Recognition, and Intention to Stay

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Abstract: This study examines how trust in management and reward and recognition influence intention to stay among Human Capital employees of PT PLN (Persero), with employee engagement as a mediating mechanism. A quantitative explanatory design was applied using cross-sectional survey data from 395 eligible respondents, which were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling. The measurement model met convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability requirements. The structural model shows that trust in management does not directly affect intention to stay, while reward and recognition and employee engagement have positive significant effects. Trust in management and reward and recognition are positively and significantly associated with employee engagement. Employee engagement fully mediates the relationship between trust in management and intention to stay and partially mediates the relationship between reward and recognition and intention to stay. The findings contribute to retention research by suggesting that employee engagement may explain how managerial trust is associated with intention to stay. Retention policy in state-owned enterprises should integrate trust-building, fair appreciation, and engagement-centered employee experience.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Intention to Stay, Reward and Recognition, State-Owned Enterprise, Trust in Management

INTRODUCTION

Human capital retention has become a strategic concern for large organizations because employee stability, competence continuity, and organizational knowledge are central to long-term transformation. In organizations that manage public infrastructure, retention is not only a staffing issue; it is also linked to service continuity, institutional memory, and the ability to execute strategic change. Social Exchange Theory explains that employees respond to trustworthy, fair, and supportive organizational treatment with positive work attitudes and stronger willingness to maintain the employment relationship (Blau, 1964; Weng et al., 2023). This theoretical view is relevant to employee retention because intention to stay reflects a psychological tendency to remain with an organization before actual turnover occurs.

PT PLN (Persero), Indonesia's state-owned electricity company, provides a compelling setting for examining intention to stay. Based on the PLN Holding employee statistics in May 2026, PLN had 36,780 active employees, while the total number of employees excluding directors, assignment-based employees, and seconded employees reached 37,287. Within this workforce, 574 employees worked in Human Capital units, consisting of 309 men and 265 women. During January-May 2026, 389 employees left PLN and 10 employees resigned voluntarily, while turnover was recorded at 1.04%. Although the turnover rate was relatively low, employee exit still matters for a strategic enterprise because it can reduce accumulated experience, technical competence, organizational knowledge, and leadership continuity (PT PLN Persero, 2026).

The present study focuses on Human Capital employees because this group has a dual position. They implement human capital policies for the wider organization and at the same time experience managerial communication, reward systems, recognition practices, engagement programs, and career policies as employees. Their perceptions offer a specific view of the internal readiness of the Human Capital function to support retention-oriented transformation. In this setting, intention to stay is considered a preventive indicator because it helps the organization understand the psychological inclination to remain before employees make an exit decision (Achmad et al., 2023; Weng et al., 2023).

Trust in management refers to employees' belief that management is competent, consistent, transparent, fair, and concerned with employee welfare. Trust is important because employees often interpret managerial decisions and communication as signals of organizational reliability. Organizational trust research shows that trust can shape employee engagement and positive employee outcomes when management is perceived as credible and supportive (Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998; Wang & Hsieh, 2013). Bellamkonda et al. (2020) found that trust in management was related to work engagement and intention to stay, with engagement becoming the mediating mechanism that explains the retention pathway.

Reward and recognition also represent organizational treatment that may strengthen employee attachment. Reward refers to financial or nonfinancial appreciation provided in return for contribution, while recognition refers to acknowledgement, appreciation, and social affirmation that employees are valued. Employee recognition has been associated with engagement and retention because employees who feel appreciated are more likely to perceive their work as meaningful and worth sustaining (Abualrub & Al-Zaru, 2008; Enyioko, 2025; Jo & Shin, 2025). Sadilla and Wahyuningtyas (2023) found that reward and recognition significantly improved employee engagement, while Adhanissa and Saragih (2024) reported that recognition and employee engagement influenced intention to stay among Indonesian workers.

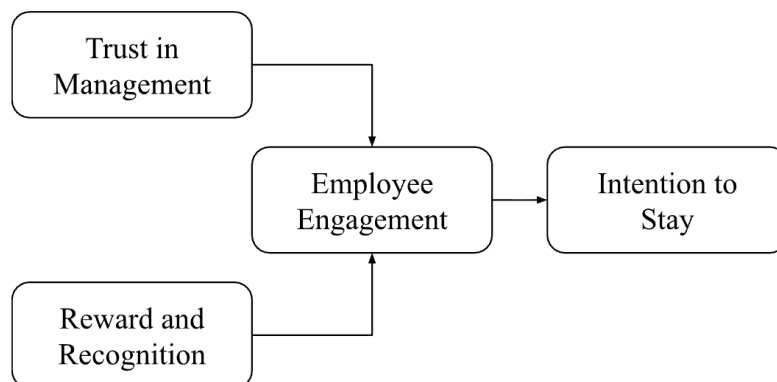
Employee engagement is positioned as the mediating variable in this study. Engagement represents a positive work-related psychological state characterized by energy, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli et al., 2006). The Job Demands-Resources Theory explains that job resources, such as trust, fairness, appreciation, and managerial support, stimulate engagement and favorable employee outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli, 2017). For Human Capital employees, trust in management and reward and recognition can be understood as resources that provide psychological safety, perceived value, and meaning at work. These resources may then increase the willingness to stay through stronger engagement.

Prior studies have examined trust, recognition, reward, engagement, and intention to stay, yet three gaps remain. First, findings on the direct and mediated pathways to intention to stay are not fully consistent. Bellamkonda et al. (2020) showed full mediation through work engagement, while Adhanissa and Saragih (2024) found that recognition influenced intention to stay directly but its indirect effect through engagement was not confirmed. Second, few studies integrate trust in management and reward and recognition as simultaneous antecedents

of employee engagement and intention to stay. Third, existing evidence is often drawn from IT/ITES, hospitality, manufacturing, healthcare, higher education, or broad cross-industry samples, rather than Human Capital employees in a state-owned electricity enterprise (Dalal & Akdere, 2021; Elkhwesky et al., 2026; Shayrine & Venugopal, 2024).

The theoretical novelty of this study is not limited to the organizational setting. This study integrates Social Exchange Theory and Job Demands-Resources Theory by distinguishing between organizational resources associated with retention and the psychological state of employee engagement that may link these resources to intention to stay. Trust in management and reward and recognition are treated as organizational resources, while the model tests whether employee engagement mediates their relationships with intention to stay. This clarification extends prior retention literature by showing that the same organizational treatment may have different theoretical pathways: trust may require engagement to influence intention to stay, while reward and recognition may operate both directly and through engagement.

This study aims to examine the effect of trust in management and reward and recognition on intention to stay, both directly and indirectly through employee engagement, among Human Capital employees of PT PLN (Persero). The research questions are whether trust in management, reward and recognition, and employee engagement influence intention to stay; whether trust in management and reward and recognition influence employee engagement; and whether employee engagement mediates the relationships between the two antecedents and intention to stay. The proposed hypotheses are that trust in management positively affects intention to stay, reward and recognition positively affect intention to stay, employee engagement positively affects intention to stay, trust in management positively affects employee engagement, reward and recognition positively affect employee engagement, and employee engagement mediates the two antecedent relationships with intention to stay.



Source: Research model (2026)

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHOD

This study used a quantitative explanatory design because the objective was to test the relationships among latent variables through numerical respondent data. The study was cross-sectional because the data were collected at one period of time. The unit of analysis was individual employees working in the Human Capital function of PT PLN (Persero). The population consisted of 574 Human Capital employees of PLN Holding in May 2026. The initial minimum sample size was estimated using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a minimum requirement of 236 respondents. The actual survey produced 400 responses, and after screening for eligibility, completeness, and employment status, 395 responses were retained for analysis.

The respondents were selected from Human Capital work units, including the LHC Directorate, HCBP Area 1 to Area 12, HCBP Head Office, Human Capital Services Division, Talent Development Division, and Human Capital Strategy Division. A structured

questionnaire was used to measure four reflective constructs: trust in management, reward and recognition, employee engagement, and intention to stay. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Trust in management was measured through management competence, integrity, consistency, communication openness, concern for employees, and confidence in policy direction. Reward and recognition was measured through reward fit, reward fairness, achievement recognition, leader appreciation, meaningful nonfinancial reward, and consistency of recognition. Employee engagement was measured through vigor, dedication, and absorption, while intention to stay was measured through the desire to remain, career continuation plan, long-term willingness to stay, low tendency to search for another job, and commitment to remain part of the organization.

The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling with SmartPLS 4. This method was selected because it can test latent variable relationships, mediation effects, measurement quality, and predictive relevance in the same model (Hair et al., 2022; Ringle et al., 2024). The analysis involved respondent profiling, descriptive statistics, measurement model evaluation, structural model evaluation, and mediation testing. Convergent validity was assessed through outer loading and average variance extracted. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015). The structural model was evaluated through inner VIF, R-square, f-square, Q-square predict, path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values obtained from bootstrapping. Respondents were informed about the study purpose, data confidentiality, voluntary participation, and aggregated reporting.

Because the study used a cross-sectional self-reported questionnaire, the potential influence of common method bias was addressed procedurally and diagnostically. Procedurally, respondents were assured of confidentiality, participation was voluntary, items were written in clear non-evaluative language, and the constructs were arranged to reduce direct response patterning. As a post-hoc diagnostic, the collinearity-based assessment showed VIF values ranging from 2.983 to 3.298, which were below the 3.3 threshold often used to indicate severe common method bias in PLS-SEM (Kock, 2015). Nevertheless, this diagnostic does not completely eliminate common method concerns; therefore, the limitation is acknowledged and future studies are encouraged to use time-lagged or multi-source data (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Spector, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the screening process, 395 responses were considered valid for analysis. The respondent profile shows that the sample was dominated by male employees, employees aged 31-35 years, bachelor's degree graduates, employees with 6-10 years of tenure, and officer/senior officer level positions. This profile indicates that the sample predominantly represented mid-career and experienced employees within PLN's Human Capital function.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Profile	Dominant Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	234	59.24%
Age	31-35 years	165	41.77%
Education	Bachelor's degree	236	59.75%
Tenure	6-10 years	171	43.29%
Human Capital unit	HCBP Area 2	32	8.10%
Job level	Officer/Senior Officer	215	54.43%
Employment status	Permanent employee	395	100.00%

Source: SmartPLS and survey data processing, 2026.

The descriptive results show that the respondents generally assessed all variables positively. Trust in management had a mean of 4.001, reward and recognition had a mean of 3.974, employee engagement had a mean of 4.248, and intention to stay had a mean of 4.420. These results indicate a high level of perceived managerial trust and organizational appreciation, accompanied by very high engagement and intention to stay. Among the indicators, the strongest trust in management indicator was management concern for employee interests and welfare, while the weakest was consistency between managerial statements and actions. In reward and recognition, the strongest indicator was the fit between reward and contribution, while the weakest was fairness in the reward system. These descriptive patterns suggest that the Human Capital retention agenda should not only preserve the existing positive climate but also improve managerial consistency and perceived reward fairness.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Model Quality

Construct	Mean	Category	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Trust in Management	4.001	High	0.756	0.935	0.949
Reward and Recognition	3.974	High	0.766	0.939	0.951
Employee Engagement	4.248	Very high	0.757	0.935	0.949
Intention to Stay	4.420	Very high	0.750	0.915	0.937

Source: SmartPLS and survey data processing, 2026.

The measurement model met the expected quality criteria. All constructs had AVE values above 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were above 0.90 for all constructs, confirming high internal consistency. The outer loading results also showed that all indicators were valid, while the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT values supported discriminant validity. Inner VIF values ranged from 2.983 to 3.298, indicating that the structural model did not suffer from serious collinearity. The R-square value of employee engagement was 0.475 and the R-square value of intention to stay was 0.504. These values suggest that trust in management and reward and recognition explain a moderate proportion of employee engagement, while the full model explains a moderate proportion of intention to stay. The positive Q-square predict values for the endogenous indicators provide evidence of predictive relevance within the assessed model.

Table 3. Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Original Sample	T-statistics	P-values	Decision
H1	TIM -> ITS	0.064	0.909	0.363	Rejected
H2	RAR -> ITS	0.147	2.333	0.020	Accepted
H3	EE -> ITS	0.556	9.997	<0.001	Accepted
H4	TIM -> EE	0.406	5.691	<0.001	Accepted
H5	RAR -> EE	0.317	4.499	<0.001	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS bootstrapping output, 2026.

The direct effect results show that four of the five direct hypotheses were supported. Trust in management did not significantly influence intention to stay directly. The coefficient was positive but weak, and the p-value was above the 5% significance threshold. This result means that stronger trust in management does not automatically produce stronger intention to stay among Human Capital employees when engagement is considered in the model. The result is consistent with Bellamkonda et al. (2020), who demonstrated that the relationship between trust

in management and intention to stay operates through work engagement. In the PLN Human Capital setting, managerial trust appears to function as a psychological resource that must first be translated into work energy, dedication, and absorption before it can influence retention intention.

A deeper theoretical interpretation is that trust in management is a necessary but insufficient condition for retention intention. Trust reduces uncertainty, legitimizes managerial decisions, and gives employees confidence that the organization is managed properly, but it does not necessarily create the energy, pride, and absorption required to remain. In a state-owned enterprise with relatively stable employment arrangements, managerial trust may become a baseline expectation rather than an immediate retention trigger. For Human Capital employees, the findings suggest that the relationship between managerial trust and intention to stay may operate primarily through employee engagement. Employee engagement performs this activation role by converting trust into vigor, dedication, and absorption. This finding extends Social Exchange Theory by showing that reciprocal employee responses are not always direct; they may depend on an intervening psychological state that translates organizational treatment into retention-related intention.

Reward and recognition had a positive and significant direct effect on intention to stay. This finding indicates that Human Capital employees who perceive rewards as appropriate and recognition as meaningful are more likely to maintain a plan to stay with the organization. This result supports the view that appreciation practices provide employees with a sense of value and social affirmation. It is also aligned with Adhanissa and Saragih (2024), who found that recognition influenced intention to stay, and with studies that link recognition to retention strategies (Enyioko, 2025; Shayrine & Venugopal, 2024). For PLN, the implication is that retention cannot rely solely on employment stability; employees still need fair, meaningful, and consistent appreciation for their contribution.

Employee engagement had the strongest direct effect on intention to stay. The coefficient of 0.556 indicates that engagement is the most influential predictor of retention intention in the tested model. This result confirms the central role of engagement as a psychological state that connects employees to their work and organization. Kahn (1990) framed engagement as the expression of the self in work roles, while Schaufeli et al. (2002) conceptualized work engagement through vigor, dedication, and absorption. The present finding supports the idea that employees with higher energy, pride, and concentration in their work tend to have a stronger willingness to remain with the organization. This result is also consistent with Weng et al. (2023), who found that work engagement strengthened intention to stay.

Trust in management had a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. This finding means that employees who believe management is competent, consistent, transparent, and concerned about employees are more likely to be engaged in their work. Trust reduces uncertainty and strengthens employees' willingness to invest psychological energy in their roles. The result is consistent with Wang and Hsieh (2013), Alshaabani and Rudnák (2023), and Baquero (2023), who associated trust or trustworthy leadership with engagement-related outcomes. For Human Capital employees, trust in management is especially important because they are expected to translate organizational policies into employee-facing practices while also experiencing those policies themselves.

Reward and recognition also had a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. This finding confirms that employees who feel rewarded fairly and recognized meaningfully tend to show stronger vigor, dedication, and absorption. The result supports Sadilla and Wahyuningtyas (2023), who found that reward and recognition improved employee engagement, and Jo and Shin (2025), who reported that recognition significantly strengthened engagement in a large-scale employee analysis. This result shows that recognition is not merely a symbolic human resource activity; it is a work resource that can encourage employees to bring greater effort and emotional connection into their work.

Table 4. Specific Indirect Effects and Mediation Type

Hypothesis	Mediation Path	Original Sample	T-statistics	P-values	Mediation Type	Decision
H6	TIM -> EE -> ITS	0.226	4.932	<0.001	Full mediation	Accepted
H7	RAR -> EE -> ITS	0.176	4.063	<0.001	Partial mediation	Accepted

Source: SmartPLS bootstrapping output, 2026.

The mediation results show that employee engagement significantly mediated both antecedent pathways. Employee engagement showed a significant indirect effect in the relationship between trust in management and intention to stay, while the direct effect was not statistically significant. This means that trust in management affects retention intention when it succeeds in creating engagement. The VAF value for this path was 77.93%, while the direct path was not significant. This finding strengthens the explanatory logic of Job Demands-Resources Theory because trust in management operates as a job resource that stimulates engagement before producing retention-related outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli, 2017). For PLN, building trust through transparent communication, consistent policy execution, and managerial concern is necessary but not sufficient; such trust must be converted into meaningful work experience and stronger engagement.

Employee engagement partially mediated the effect of reward and recognition on intention to stay. The indirect effect was significant, and the direct effect was also significant. This means that reward and recognition influence intention to stay through two mechanisms. First, employees may directly develop stronger retention intention when they perceive reward and recognition as fair and meaningful. Second, appreciation may also strengthen employee engagement, which then increases retention intention. This pattern differs from Adhanissa and Saragih (2024), who found that the mediation pathway from recognition to intention to stay through engagement was not confirmed. The difference suggests that organizational setting, employee group, and the combined measurement of reward and recognition may shape the strength of the mediation effect.

The combined results show that six hypotheses were accepted and one was rejected. Trust in management was not a direct predictor of intention to stay, but it was an important antecedent of employee engagement and had a significant indirect effect on intention to stay. Reward and recognition influenced intention to stay directly and indirectly. Employee engagement became the dominant mechanism in the model, both as the strongest direct predictor of intention to stay and as the mediator that explains how organizational resources affect retention intention. These results support Social Exchange Theory because employees responded to managerial trust and organizational appreciation through engagement and willingness to remain with the organization.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the integrated model that combines trust in management and reward and recognition as antecedents, employee engagement as a mediator, and intention to stay as the outcome. The study extends prior evidence by clarifying that trust in management and reward and recognition are not identical retention resources. Trust becomes retention-relevant through engagement, whereas reward and recognition influence intention to stay both directly and indirectly. This distinction contributes to strategic human resource management theory by explaining why some organizational resources require psychological activation before they influence retention intention.

The external validity of the findings should be interpreted within the boundaries of the sampling approach. The sample was adequate for PLS-SEM and represented Human Capital employees at PT PLN (Persero), but it came from one function within one state-owned electricity enterprise. Therefore, the findings may provide relevant insights for similar Human Capital functions and large state-owned enterprises, but their applicability to other organizational contexts requires further empirical examination. Future comparative studies across state-owned enterprises, business units, and employee functions are needed to test whether the same mechanism applies across broader organizational settings.

The practical contribution is the finding that retention strategy should not focus only on actual turnover statistics. PLN can use intention to stay as an early indicator and strengthen it by developing engagement-centered practices. More specifically, Human Capital policy should focus on managerial consistency, transparent communication, fair rewards, consistent recognition, and employee experience programs that transform trust and appreciation into daily work engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the intention to stay of Human Capital employees at PT PLN (Persero) through trust in management, reward and recognition, and employee engagement. The findings show that trust in management does not directly affect intention to stay, but it significantly increases employee engagement and indirectly affects intention to stay through employee engagement. Reward and recognition have a positive direct effect on intention to stay and also an indirect effect through employee engagement. Employee engagement has the strongest direct effect on intention to stay and functions as the central psychological mechanism in the model. These results indicate that employee retention in the Human Capital function is strengthened when employees experience not only trustworthy management and meaningful appreciation but also stronger vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. The study contributes to strategic human resource management by showing that trust and appreciation do not operate through a single retention pathway. Trust requires engagement to become retention-relevant, while reward and recognition influence intention to stay directly and through engagement. The findings should be interpreted carefully because the study used cross-sectional self-reported data from Human Capital employees in one state-owned enterprise. Future research can use longitudinal, multi-source, or comparative designs and expand the model by including leadership style, work-life balance, job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, and psychological safety.

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