Job Characteristics and Employee Retention in Higher Education Institutes of Thailand: The Mediating Role of Organisational Commitment

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The study aims to examine the impact of job characteristics on the retention of the employees in the higher education sector of Thailand. Following the literature, the study examines the mediating role of employee commitment towards the organisation as a mediator. The objective of this study is to examine the impact of different job designs, including enlargement, rotation and enrichment, on employee retention. The mediation of employee commitment is predicted to lead an organisation towards the retention of an employee. The study has employed the SEM-PLS to analyse data collected from employees of higher education institutes in Thailand. A structural equation model was adopted with the purpose of analysing the structural association between the observed and the latent variables, as well as to estimate the structural model. Estimating the appropriate sample size is one of the important aspects of SEM-PLS. The findings of the study support the proposed hypotheses, and can therefore assist policymakers, researchers and academics in understanding issues related to the retention of higher education employees in Thailand.

Key words: *Job Characteristics, Employee Retention, Job Design, Commitment, Higher Education Institute.*

Introduction

Employee retention is critical in higher education institutes. In universities, employees are considered as key assets who play critical roles in providing a competitive edge to their institution (Erasmus, Grobler, & Van Niekerk, 2015; Jermsittiparsert & Sommanawat, 2019). In contrast to other employees, faculty members teaching in universities are deemed more important, an ideal upheld throughout universities in Thailand. The last few years have seen major changes in the Thai higher education sector, the basic purpose of which were to meet global requirements. Higher education institutes have redefined the roles of certain jobs and have expanded a variety of occupations (Asavisanu & Mhunpiew, 2014). Despite these reforms, there remains a lack of skilled employees and subsequent need for manpower. Finding and hiring a competent employee is one of the biggest challenges for employers in Thailand. The growth in this sector is very limited due to the shortage of skilled labour available in Thailand. Around 33% of Thai universities do not have skilled employees working in their faculties. Due to the importance of competent faculty members in the education sector, there is high demand for the hiring of such individuals (Yilmaz, 2010).

Among the most effective tools to optimise employee performance is job design (JD). JD is defined as the changing processes and content of an occupation so the employee's productivity, motivation and satisfaction can be enhanced. The involvement of an employee in his or her assignments and tasks is the measure of a job's effectiveness. A number of scholars have analysed the relationship between employee and JD, and found that this process leads to the retention of an employee. Approaches capable of constructing JD are JENL, JE and JR. All of these constructs can be used to involve, encourage and engage employees towards their jobs (Knapp & Mujtaba, 2011). Among the factors considered as the vertical expansion of the job is JE, which is related to an occupation's analysis. Past studies have revealed that job analysis is a process conducted by an organisation to determine the responsibilities, obligations and tasks of a certain job by which information will be produced to determine the job satisfaction and description. JE can therefore be viewed as the application of job analysis. The description of the occupation will be changed and subsequently enriched as a result of this process (Salau, Adeniji, & Oyewunmi, 2014).

Organisations are competing at a global level, with their main focus being cost control in order to remain competitive in the market. It has been suggested that organisations should cease hiring new employees, though the demand for work is growing continuously due to rapid organisational development. Organisations are enlarging the roles of current employees by increasing their work burden, a situation known as horizontal expansion of job duties. Scholars have mentioned that employees can be motivated due to JENL. In today's competitive market, JENL is used by organisations so they can enhance the workload and scope of the employee. JENL can also increase employees' skills and can even be required by

the industry. Companies can also use job enlargement to mitigate turnover chances. It has been reported that JENL can be further used to fulfil the needs of the lower level jobs, thus developing job satisfaction (Raza & Nawaz, 2011).

JR is an effective instrument in modern labour markets, and is one of the most successful measures to achieve the objectives of an organisation and to satisfy demands arising from business challenges. In order to increase employment, JR is proven to have been the best means over the last three decades. Moreover, JR plays a significant role to enhance the professional skills of employees. The concepts of JR are considered to be the best practice models. Job rotation is the special kind of merging further training for unemployed persons and employees of an organisation. Workplaces that are vacated are then filled by substitutes in the form of unemployed individuals during a longer period of time. JR can further be viewed as an innovation merger of employment policies and structures corresponding to the strategies of transitional labour markets. In the form of structural policy measures, the skills of employees are increased, improving the deficit of qualified employees in an organisation. Placement chances, qualification and training for employees are also increased (Adjei, 2012).

It is important for an organisation to retain its employees so they can be successful on a long-term basis. On a larger scale, the increase in an organisation's sales, improvement in its performance, customer satisfaction, effective succession planning, reporting staff and employee satisfaction can all be achieved by an organisation to retain its employees. Institutions have reportedly attempted to retain employees for a few decades, taking care of their workers long-term due to the difficulties in finding new skilled employees. Scholars have reported that retaining and managing employees is important to develop and sustain competitive advantage against the other organisations. Previous studies have also reported that the focus of human resource in today's competition is to retain a dedicated and dynamic workforce. A vital factor for organisations is to therefore retain talented and skilled human resources rather than to simply attempt to hire new skilled manpower (Das & Baruah, 2013).

Prior literature shows a wealth of research regarding OC. The management literature acknowledges the positive impact of OC on a number of employees. Previous research has also identified commitment as an important variable to understand the behaviour of employees regarding their work. Scholars have reported that commitment has a positive impact on a number of job-related attributes, including the intention to stay in a particular role. The cost associated with turnover can be saved by encouraging commitment among employees. Additionally, the work motivation and job performance of committed employees are higher than those who are not committed (Rusliza Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). The objective of this study is to examine the roles of different JD, including enlargement, rotation and enrichment on ER with the mediation of employee commitment.

Literature review
Job design (JD)

Job design (JD) refers to the specified methods and content of a job in way that various requirements of the job holder can be effectively satisfied (Belias & Sklikas, 2013). Scholars have mentioned JD as a task and work design and in relation to job, methods and content. They are important to fulfil the personal and social needs of an employee. The basic principle of JD is geared towards the nature of a job that impacts the employee's behaviour and attitude at work, and includes important characteristics like autonomy and skill variety. The basic aims of JD are to minimise problems for an employee, and to improve work quality and satisfaction (Belias & Sklikas, 2013). Understanding JD is beneficial in determining the process and important elements of JD. The key job elements include a reward system, resource allocation, motivation and the task. The reward system further includes salary raise, bonuses and compensation (Bartlett, 2007).

Job enrichment (JE)

Job enrichment (JE) is the management concept in which the redesigning of jobs allow employees to perceive less repetition and more challenging tasks at work. Vertical extension of jobs rather than horizontal is defined in various studies as JE, meaning that instead of merely increasing the amount of work carried out, work of different level is added to make a job more satisfying. These variations could include undertaking tasks of greater complexity or assigning further responsibilities such as quality control, material ordering, maintenance or production planning. To include the responsibilities at a higher level of JE is the vertical expansion of a job (Bennett, 2015). Some decision-making power is also given to an employee in this scenario, and the employee can schedule his or her own work plan. Scholars suggest that JE is important in achieving employee satisfaction, and allows workers to utilise their opportunities and abilities to improve performance and productivity, thus eventually improving the organisation's overall performance. Job depth and meaning is therefore increased by JE, and this process further allows for control over the degree to which employees are directly involved in their jobs (Belias & Sklikas, 2013).

Job enlargement (JENL)

Horizontal expansion of an occupation is known as JENL, a process which increases the variety of tasks and number of associated sub-tasks. Opportunity is provided to the employee to perform a wider range of tasks at the same level when JENL is carried out in an organisation. Adding connected duties to a job and a combination of different tasks can be defined as JENL. The inspiration of this tactic is derived from the different motivational model designs of jobs constructed in psychology. Job related attributes such as task

significance, autonomy and variety are discussed by these models, and different tasks performed by the employee broadens the scope of his or her job (Zareen, Razzaq, & Mujtaba, 2013).

Job rotation (JR)

Many similarities exist between JR and JENL, though job rotation involves the switching of tasks with other workers at regular intervals rather than assigning more work. Rotation can be defined as working for set periods of time in different positions or at different tasks using lateral transfers. These transfers are constructed to allow employees insight into a different range of skills, competencies and knowledge. The purpose is to effectively motivate the employee and to purposefully hone job training techniques. Large firms widely use these kinds of approaches for the betterment of their organisation and to achieve various organisational goals (Padula, Comper, Sparer, & Dennerlein, 2017).

Studies have identified JR in firms as a learning method, as employees are provided opportunities to change roles and accomplishing various tasks otherwise not available in their own job description. JR can therefore also be defined as a learning applied approach with aggrandised job-related tasks. JR is planned in the phase of job training to provide assistance for employees in order to increase their knowledge and learning by transferring from one job to another. Employee performance and subsequent efficiency are therefore positively impacted (Ali-Mohammadi & Ramezani, 2017).

Employee retention (ER)

An employee's intention to stay loyal to a current workplace is generally known as ER, or employee retention. ER is followed when employees are encouraged to stay until the completion of an organisational project or to remain in the organisation for an extended period. The dependency of organisational survival largely depends upon human assets. Subsequently, for the better growth and survival of an organisation, it is a mandatory requirement for organisations to retain those valuable human assets. This literature review therefore focuses on recognising the factors affecting ER (Senevirathna, 2017).

Studies have shown that a large number of factors can influence employee retention. In accordance with previous literature, ER and job satisfaction are key elements to ensure an organisation's success. Physical, social and mental are three broad dimensions by which the retention factor is divided (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017). The mental dimension of retention consists of work characteristics like flexible tasks, which are often preferred by employees. Implementing flexibility within work duties allows employees to see results and to use their knowledge and efforts, which subsequently assists in retaining valuable resources. The social

dimension consists of both internal and external employee contact and communication with other people (Das & Baruah, 2013).

Organisational commitment (OC)

The concept of organisational commitment is discussed in literature as the factor of stability within an organisation. Three approaches to study commitment are mentioned by the researchers, including motivational, attitudinal and behavioural perspectives. In this study context, the attitude and mindset of an individual towards their organisation relates directly to their OC (Dockel, Basson, & Coetzee, 2006).

Employee commitment has been examined in a number of past studies as it can determine the behaviour of the employee which subsequently impacts on performance. The factor by which the employer is linked to an employee is commitment, which therefore plays a critical role in the performance and advancement of an organisation. It has been reported that commitment is linked positively to organisational outcomes like employee satisfaction and achieving company goals. The feeling of acceptance among employees is also induced due to this sense of commitment (R Yahaya, Chek, Samsudin & Jizat, 2014).

OC and ER

Retention is an employee's motivation to stay with an organisation. To retain employees, the relationship between employee and employer is very important, as is the rapport between co-workers. These relationships are at the base of all strategies used to keep employees engaged in an organisation, meaning that weak relationships between all stakeholders could negatively impact an organisation. These connections must therefore be carefully considered while developing such strategies related to personnel relations. Commitment to working relationships is one of the most critical parts of a positive and efficient workplace. In the process of retention, OC is an important factor as employees and employers must feel motivated and connected while establishing working relationships (Beudean, 2009).

Scholars have also reported that factors like identification, commitment and trust play critical roles in retaining employees within an organisation. Prior research suggests that work autonomy is essential for prolonged employee retention, within which are six important factors: work and life balance; career development; supervisor support; training and development, and compensation. All of these factors lead to the commitment and subsequent improved retention of employees (Ahsan, Fie, Foong, & Alam, 2013). From this prior research, the following hypothesis is stated for this study

H1: OC plays a significant impact on ER.

JE: OC, ER

Scholars have mentioned that there exists lower commitment in employees whose jobs are enriched. The enrichment of a job and its related plans must be devised in a way that allows for employee participation. This sense of empowerment must be given to employees so they can evaluate their own performances and better achieve organisational goals. This can increase employee commitment and thus improve employee and overall organisational performance (Dost, Ur-Rehman, & Saleem, 2012).

The variety of work is increased as a result of JE which motivates employees so they can remain committed to their organisation. As the globally competitive environment increases, employees must manage multiple tasks at a time. Employers therefore prefer workers who are multiskilled as this allows organisational tasks to be more efficiently completed. A number of opportunities can be provided by JE related to personnel development, meaning that employees who have JE will be more committed to their employees and can thus negatively impact the rate of turnover (Choudhary, 2016). It is therefore hypothesised that:

H2: JE has a significant impact on ER.

JENL: OC, ER

Scholars mention that an employee's tendency to work in an organisation for a prolonged period of time is decreasing due to rapidly growing global competition. If an employee leaves an organisation, their employer must face extra responsibilities and costs to hire and train a new employee. Transformation of work activity related to employees at the workplace is very common because work pressure is rapidly increasing. The overall cost of employers therefore decreases and the work performance of employees is subsequently enhanced. As job is enlarged, employees in turn remain committed to their employees, meaning that JENL and commitment are positively inter-related. (Dost et al., 2012).

JENL involves various activities which can be in addition to an existing job or a combination of a number of work tasks at the same level. Employee motivation is the objective of JENL through increasing the exposure and efforts of job-related activities. As mentioned in past studies, JENL directly impacts employee performance, commitment and satisfaction level. There exist five traits of the job, namely giving feedback related to work, independence, the importance of work, identity and skills. All of these factors correlate with employee turnover and absenteeism. JENL therefore plays a critical role in increasing retention and subsequently

reducing unwanted employee turnover (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). This allows for the following hypothesis to be made:

H4: JENL has significant impact on OC.

JR: OC, ER

Organisations design JR programs by considering the career aspiration of their employees. The objective is to satisfy employees in terms of their career so they can remain committed to the organisation. The employee is encouraged by the rotation policy to be more content and committed, thus providing competitive advantage for an organisation (Mohsan, Nawaz & Khan, 2012). Employers will also look for workers who demonstrate valuable knowledge and skill sets to get a competitive advantage over other organisations. Such employers attract employees who are bored with jobs in other organisations. Workers who get rotation in their jobs experience personal and professional growth, and the chance of switching their job is reduced. Employee morale is also improved as a result of JR, and an organisation can subsequently save the large costs involved in turnover (Al-Nashmi & Almoayad, 2013). The following hypotheses can therefore be made:

H6: JR has a significant impact on OC.
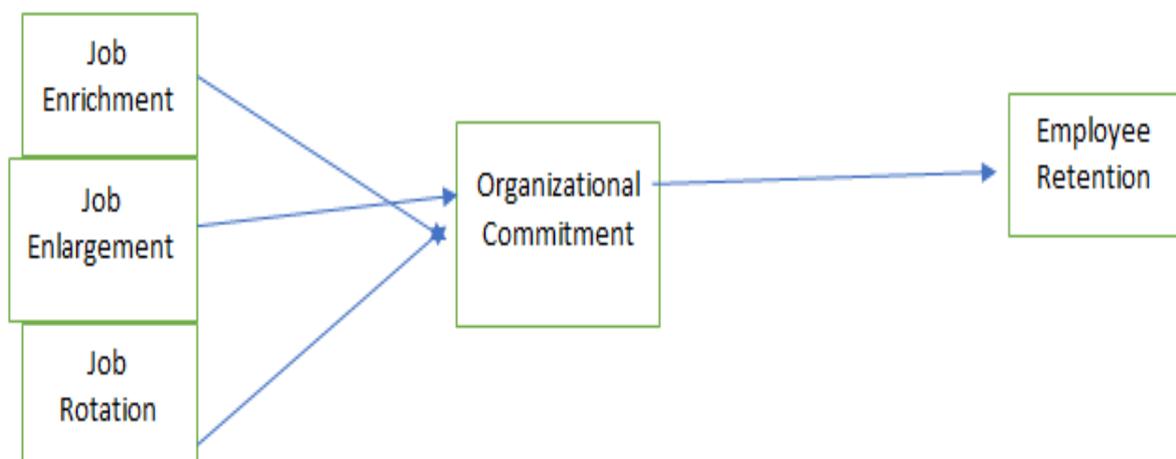**H7:** OC has a significant impact on ER
H8: OC mediates the relationship between JR and ER commitment.
H9: OC mediates the relationship between JENL and ER commitment.
H10: OC mediates the relationship between JE and ER commitment.

Research Framework

The above literature supports the framework below:

Methodology

The present study is correlational in nature, meaning that it was conducted at a certain period of time and that data was collected using a primary research method. For this purpose, a questionnaire was developed to generalise responses to a certain situation. The questionnaires were sent via email to the targeted respondents, a method chosen due to cost effectiveness, time saving and the ability to collect responses from far geographical boundaries. For data collection, the cluster sampling technique was employed. These collected responses were then used to conduct statistical testing of the proposed set of hypotheses. The statistical technique adopted in this study is the PLS-SEM which is the most frequently and widely used data analysis method (Ringle, Sarstedt et al., 2018). This study adopted a structural equation model with the purpose of analysing the structural association between the observed and the latent variables, as well as to estimate the structural model. Estimating the appropriate sample size is one of the important aspects of SEM-PLS. The sample size for this study was selected to be 322 based on the total population size, following the table for sample size determination by Morgan & Krejcie (1970). To avoid data abnormality and response bias, however, the sample size was later increased to 600. The study received 420 properly filled questionnaires, with a 70% response rate. Keeping in view the capabilities and objectives of the research, SEM-PLS was employed to achieve the research goals and objectives.

Items for the questionnaire are adopted from several studies. Items for ER, OC, JE, JENL and JR were adopted from Sharma and Singh (2017), Saks (2006), Yang and Lee (2009), Williams and Anderson (1991), Ho, Chang, Shih, and Liang (2009) respectively.

Results

PLS-SEM is an expression of composite structural equation modelling which has gained much attention by academics and researchers in various disciplines. It is a multivariate technique with the ability to combine different aspects of factor and regression analysis, thus allowing the simultaneous examination of measurement and structural theory, i.e. determining the connection between measured variables and their latent constructs as well as between these constructs. Previously, CB-SEM was the most widely used covariance-based method which was suggested by Jöreskog (1973) and captured the attentions of several empirical researchers in the field of social science. Due to the predominance of other techniques such as AMOS, LISREL, and EQS, PLS-SEM has been somehow neglected despite it being a powerful and suitable alternative to the CB-SEM approach. PLS-SEM is better than CB-SEM in many ways and is a more suitable approach in many social science situations, such as during model complexity involving several indicators, in analysing small sample sizes, and when several model relationships are involved in a study. However, PLS-SEM is equally stringent in having a complementary modelling approach with the structural

equation modelling. In different studies, this method can can prove to be a silver bullet if applied correctly. PLS-path modelling also has a unique suitability to predictive analytics as it goes beyond the linear estimation of association between the latent and manifest variables (Joseph F Hair, Risher, Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). As PLS-SEM estimates the model parameters grounded in causal and well-developed explanations, it also bridges the division between prediction and explanation (Joseph F Hair et al., 2019).

Figure 1. Measurement model
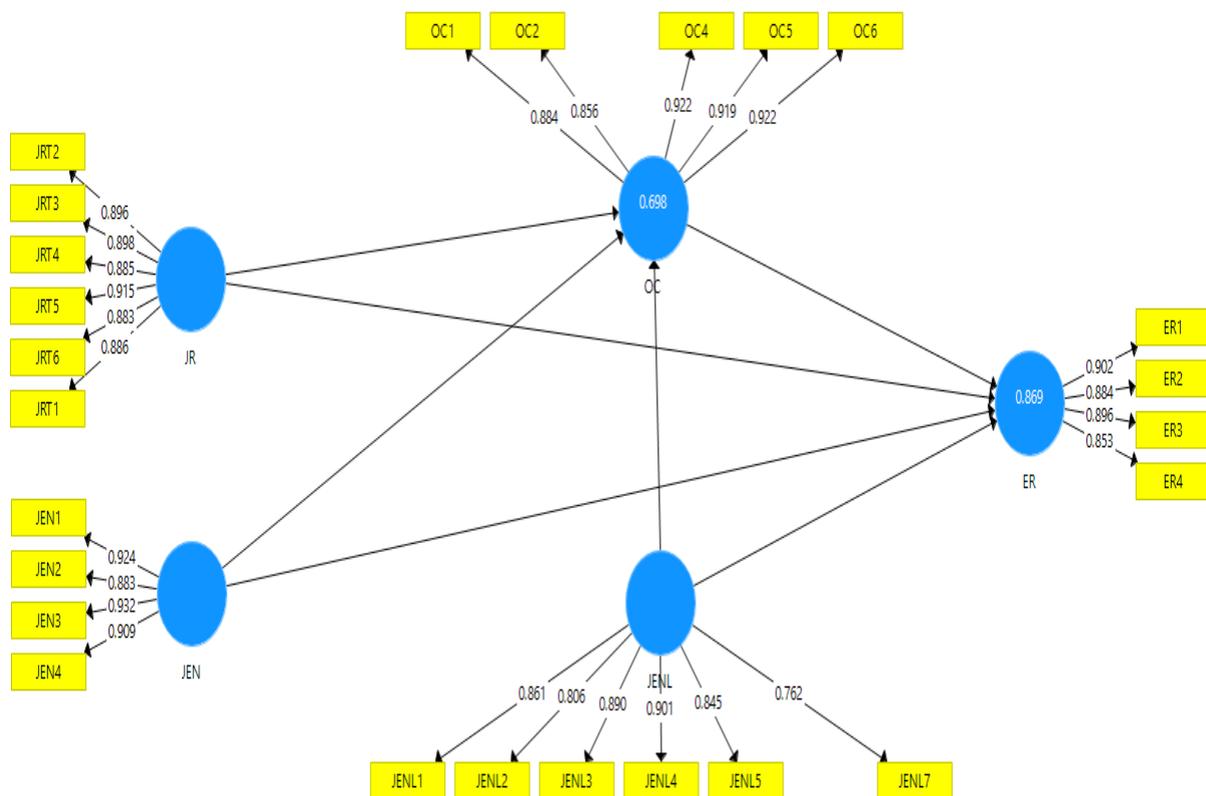
Following the selection of methodology and data gathering, the instrument validity was tested using confirmatory factor analysis. The CFA values must exhibit 0.70 or higher to confirm instrument validity. In addition, factor loadings were also observed for each item which all exhibited values greater than 0.70. A data normality test was then performed to determine any abnormalities in the data, which can usually be avoided by using a large sample size. The recommended range for a sample size is 30-150, as suggested by past research. However, the increase in sample size enhances the data normality, meaning that a greater sample size reduces chances of data abnormality. The data normality test for this study found that chosen sample size to be suitable for statistical modelling. The model items were omitted as they exhibited lower factor loadings.

Table 1: Outer loadings

	ER	JEN	JENL	JR	OC
ER1	0.902				
ER2	0.884				
ER3	0.896				
ER4	0.853				
JEN1		0.924			
JEN2		0.883			
JEN3		0.932			
JEN4		0.909			
JENL1			0.861		
JENL2			0.806		
JENL3			0.890		
JENL4			0.901		
JENL5			0.845		
JENL7			0.762		
JRT2				0.896	
JRT3				0.898	
JRT4				0.885	
JRT5				0.915	
JRT6				0.883	
OC1					0.884
OC2					0.856
OC4					0.922
OC5					0.919
OC6					0.922
JRT1				0.886	

The software program Smart PLS was employed to examine the path modelling in this study (Joe F Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2011). The composite reliability test was performed to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the latent variables (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The recommended value for CR acceptability is above 0.70, which is consistent with the recommended level. To check the latent variables' internal reliability, the Cronbach alpha test was used as a standard procedure and needed to exhibit α value greater than 0.70. All alpha values for each construct showed consistent results of alpha values greater than 0.50. Convergent validity for the measurement model was then established through AVE. For this study the reported range for convergent validity is 0.511-0.725, which satisfies the threshold level of 0.5 or above (Joe F Hair et al., 2011; Bruce and A.G. Susan, 2017).

Table 2: Reliability

|	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	(AVE)
ER	0.906	0.908	0.934	0.781
JEN	0.933	0.937	0.952	0.832
JENL	0.920	0.928	0.937	0.715
JR	0.950	0.951	0.960	0.799
OC	0.942	0.943	0.956	0.812

The uniqueness of any construct must be examined by measuring its discriminant validity (DV) (Henseler et al., 2015). In DV the square root of AVE's must be greater than the correlations between the latent variables. The square root values for AVE are presented as follows:

Table 3: Validity matrix

	ER	JEN	JENL	JR	OC
ER	0.984				
JEN	0.646	0.912			
JENL	0.800	0.892	0.946		
JR	0.688	0.890	0.911	0.894	
OC	0.927	0.672	0.819	0.684	0.901

As this study aims to analyse the nature of the association between latent constructs, the structural model or inner model was estimated with first order construct. Furthermore, path coefficients were also observed to assess the association among the constructs and in testing the hypotheses. The model's fit was then examined, followed by the transformation of the measurement model into the structural model in order to investigate the relationship existing between the endogenous and exogenous variables. Tables 4 and 5 show the resultant acceptance of all direct hypotheses due to the significant t and p values.

Figure 3: Structural model
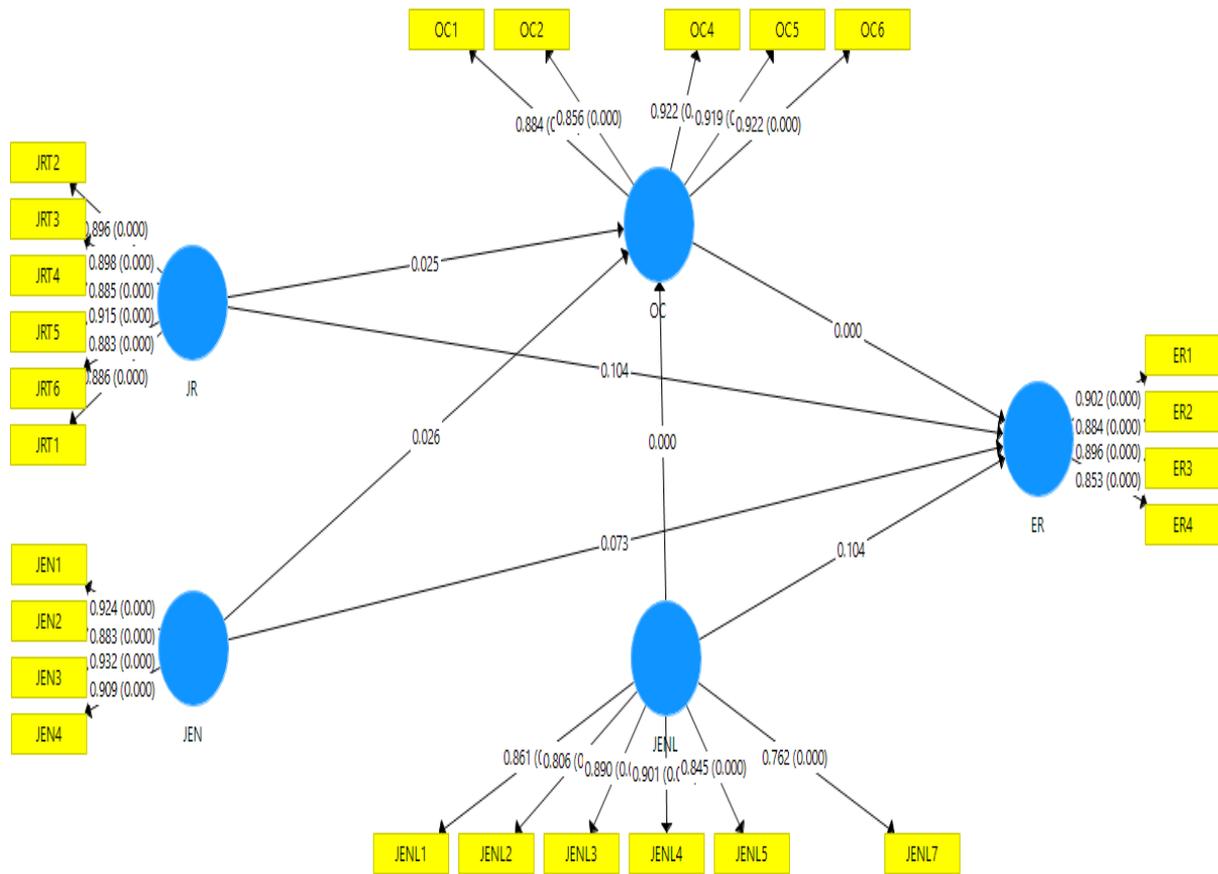
The structural model in Figure 3 above involves the estimation and significance checking of path coefficients, mediating effects, R^2 square values, predictive relevance and effect size (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). Following Henseler et al. (2009), a bootstrapping procedure was therefore conducted to determine the path coefficients' significance. For this purpose, 5000 samples were incorporated with around 420 cases.

Table 4: Direct relationship

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	(|O/STDEV|)	P Values
JEN -> ER	1.291	1.289	0.114	2.556	**0.011**
JEN -> OC	1.185	1.175	0.095	2.950	**0.000**
JENL -> ER	1.153	1.156	0.163	3.080	**0.000**
JENL -> OC	1.233	1.228	0.150	3.230	**0.000**
JR -> ER	1.103	1.104	0.169	3.608	**0.000**
JR -> OC	1.274	1.274	0.143	3.919	**0.000**
OC -> ER	1.825	1.817	0.062	3.227	**0.000**

Table 5: Mediation

	(O)	(M)	(STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values
JEN -> OC -> ER	1.233	1.228	0.150	3.230	**0.000**
JENL -> OC -> ER	1.103	1.104	0.169	3.608	**0.000**
JR -> OC -> ER	1.274	1.274	0.143	3.919	**0.000**

Subsequently, the variance in endogenous variables was determined by observing the coefficient of determination, or R^2. This shows the degree or variance proportion in endogenous variables that can be estimated from one or more exogenous variables or predictors (Hair et al., 2011).

Table 6: R-square

	R Square
ER	0.869
OC	0.698

Conclusion

The study aimed to examine the impact of job characteristics on the retention of the employees working in the higher education sector of Thailand. Following the literature, the study examined the mediating role of employee commitment towards the organisation as a mediator. The objective of this study was to examine the role of different job designs, including enlargement, rotation and enrichment, on employee retention with the mediation of employee commitment. The study employed the SEM-PLS to analyse data collected from the employees of higher education institutes in Thailand. This study adopted structural equation modelling to analyse the structural association between the observed and the latent variables, as well as to estimate the structural model. Estimating the appropriate sample size is one of the important aspects of SEM-PLS, a method which is equally stringent in having a complementary modelling approach with the structural equation modelling. PLS-path modelling has a unique suitability to predictive analytics as it transcends the linear estimation the correlation between latent and manifest variables (Joseph F Hair et al., 2019). The findings of the study have shown agreement with the proposed hypotheses, and can therefore benefit policymakers, researchers and academics in understanding the issues surrounding occupation roles and employee retention in the Thai higher education industry. The study argues that employees of such institutes must be allowed to evaluate their own performances in order to increase commitment and heighten performance. Findings also confirmed that the working relationships among employees and employers form the basis of all strategies used to keep workers engaged in an organisation. Finally, employee commitment was found to play a critical role in the success of an organisation. Commitment has been positively linked to organisational outcomes like employee satisfaction and accomplishing

organisational goals. Employee commitment can thus be confirmed as a mediator in the issue of job characteristics and employee retention in Thailand higher education institutes.

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