



ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYEE SWITCHING INTENTIONS IN *MULTI-LEVEL MARKETING* (MLM) COMPANIES: RELATING TO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

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**Abstract**

This study discusses the factors that can reduce employee turnover intention through Ethical Leadership. The focus of this research is to find out the factors that cause partners to have the turnover intention to another company or not to cooperate with the company they have participated in. This research was conducted using a qualitative method, namely a review of the level of understanding of the Multi Level Marketing business people. In this study using observations in the area of Surabaya and Sidoarjo. This is done with several considerations, namely: First, the research location is close to the reach of the researcher. Second, several leaders and business headquarters are located in Surabaya and Sidoarjo. The sample was taken using purposive sampling because the researcher needed informants who had sufficient experience and knowledge in the business environment. From the results of the interview, it is known that the role of the upline as a leader in the business has a major influence on the development of the network. In addition, it turns out that motivational factors also have an influence on downline decisions on turnover intention. In addition, what is needed is not only a supportive leader in providing training but also an ethical attitude.

**Keywords:** Ethical Leadership; Turnover Intention; Multi Level Marketing

**PENDAHULUAN**

The transfer of employees as part of human resources is an important thing that must be considered by the company or manager. Overcoming employee turnover is important because high friction can widely affect the company (Skelton, Nattress, and Dwyer, 2020) , directly and indirectly. Especially if the company is based on direct sales where the human resource factor is the main thing. Company turnover is determined by the performance of existing human resources or marketing personnel. Human Resources must be maintained properly, especially since each individual has different motivations, work ethic, and abilities. Network marketing personnel must be controlled for their movement in achieving goals and evaluating the results on an ongoing basis. In addition, the company will lose more if highly

competent human resources leave the company. This is a concern for the company because high employee turnover can disrupt its activities and productivity (Nurdin and Rohaeni, 2020).

As has happened in several cases of *Multi Level Marketing* (MLM) companies in the Sidoarjo areas. It is not uncommon for HR who have been nurtured and have market forces with the capacity to become flexible, sociable, and communicative marketers but in the middle of the journey they choose to move to other places (Alhamra Salqaura, Sipayung, and Salqaura, 2021) . From this case it can be concluded that the company requires good handling and evaluation as a form of follow-up from the company in dealing with employee *turnover rates*. One that can help reduce employee turnover is by improving internal factors, one of which is ethical leadership



(Mediasi et al, 2021) . Raad Abdulkareem Shareef and Tarik Atan conducted in 2019 with the title *The influence of ethical leadership on academic employees' organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention Mediating role of intrinsic motivation* conducted a quantitative study and found the results that ethical leadership can reduce the desire to switch.

In addition, there are many articles that research on the topic of leadership, but there is still little research that discusses ethical leadership, especially in the MLM business. Based on the search results for the researcher's titles, it was determined that keywords and abstracts containing the words *Ethical leadership* or leadership and MLM in several scientific article publishers, such as Google Scholar and Scopus.com from the time range between 2006 to 2022, 2 studies containing the words the key to *ethical leadership* or leadership and MLM (Multi Level Marketing (Shu-Chuen and Lee 2018, Tye and A Troy 2018) .

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Multi Level-Marketing

In running an MLM business, there are different marketing systems, such as:

#### 1. Binary Plan System

This system prioritizes network development with only two legs and prioritizes network balance. The more balanced the MLM company's network and business turnover, the greater the bonus received. MLM companies with this system are relatively faster in development (Bäckman and Hanspal, 2022) . Partners will get big bonuses faster. To make it seem easier to get money, company partners will apply the rules of getting money as a bonus from recruiting partners they invite (Selamet et al, 2022) . This system usually provides a large bonus at the beginning of a career as a lure, but in fact the beneficiaries

are partners who join at the beginning (Makales and Fark, 2019) .

#### 2. Matrix System

This system uses the concept of network development with only three frontlines and so on. This type of system appears to outsmart the binary system which is considered a money game (Ratulangi, 2018) .

#### 3. Break Away System

In this system, the network development prioritizes width. The more frontlines, the bigger the bonus received. However, the downside is that an agent has to take care of everything himself. This system allows downlines to exceed their uplines. The bonuses that partners get are usually small at the start, but large at the top. This is because the member bonuses at the beginning of their careers are small, so usually these nightly companies rely on the lure of recruiting bonuses (Pasya, 2021) .

In running an MLM business there is an arrangement in moving members. For members who are at the top and recruit several members, they are called uplines who have the task of being a leader in the group. Upline serves to direct its members to do marketing and how to recruit according to the system that has been created. This system has been practiced by the upline which is then duplicated to its members. Uplines usually get this knowledge from uplines above them. However, there is also an upline who is a pioneer in the company where he is the owner of the first account in the network (Wu et al, 2021) .

Meanwhile, members who are successfully recruited are called downlines. Downlines follow upline directions in doing marketing. Downlines practice knowledge from uplines to be put into practice in the field and recruit further members who eventually add to the network position under them (Bosley, Greenman, and Snyder, 2020) . Downlines are equipped with uplines with various knowledge



and abilities in recruiting new members to become reliable.

In transmitting knowledge from upline to downline can be through various media such as seminars. Training, field practice and many others. Upline does this with the aim that its network is able to grow so that in the future it can expand its business market (Ricaurte and Vilorio 2020)

But sometimes what often happens in the field is downlines who have been given the provision to choose the turnover intention and even decide to move. One of the reasons for this change is the influence of the dissimilarity of vision and mission between downlines and uplines. From this, it can lead to divisions or disorganization of thoughts in groups or networks (Aristana, Junipisa, and Dwitrayani, 2021).

### **Ethical Leadership**

In both public and private sector organisations, integrity, fairness, and honesty have been seen as the essential components of effective leadership. Since the last 10 years, increased emphasis has been placed on the adaptation of systematic methodologies to clarify and probe the implications of ethical leadership (Fehr et al. 2015; Hassan et al. 2014). The pattern of leaders in ethical leadership is described as a leader who spreads kindness as a form of role model but remains professional so that it brings the influence of togetherness and obedience. (Karim, Mardhotillah, dan Samadi 2019). In a study it was also said that ethical leadership has a negative influence on stress levels, so it can be understood if employees feel comfortable at work when the leader has a good attitude and integrity, because leaders who apply ethical leadership will make a decision or judge a mistake fairly not because it's just personal perception (Schwepker dan Dimitriou 2021).

In addition, the leadership factor is an external factor that plays a role in encouraging employees to develop their abilities, adapt to

cope with change. This is discussed in more detail in the journal (Fahmi Irsyad dan Susi Hendriani, 2022) Shows that the contribution of organizational culture, leadership and work life balance variables is 48.1% while the remaining 51.9% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

From some of these statements, it can be said that the understanding of ethical leadership is a character of a leader who is honest, caring and has principles so that he is able to make fair and balanced decisions. Ethical leadership also includes the frequency of good communication with followers so as to get a good relationship. The approach taken is directive and proactive so that it becomes an example.

### **Turnover Intention**

The intention to move an employee usually arises because the employee feels less efficient in the job, it can be in terms of lack of opportunity to have an opinion and low productive opportunities in the organization (Kim *et al.* 2020). Lack of opportunities for employees to be involved in expressing opinions or work proposals makes employees try to find a new environment or organization. Companies with employees who are often involved in productivity, profitability and customer satisfaction have a low employee turnover rate (Jaharuddin dan Zainol 2019).

The decision to move employees of course has a positive or negative impact on the company where this employee transfer also has a relationship with job satisfaction obtained from the clarity of tasks, satisfaction with career development, level of supervision or guidance and appropriate compensation. (Alam dan Asim 2019).

In addition, there is research that also suggests that the intention to switch employees is also influenced by emotional intelligence. An employee who has good emotional intelligence has a not too big intention to move, this is because employees have the ability to manage emotions, temperament and are able to properly



manage fatigue at work (Yang, Pu, dan Guan 2019).

The existence of a conflict also affects the intention to move. So that social support can have short-term or long-term effects depending on support when conflict occurs (Li, Guo, dan Zhou 2021). The research results from Li, Guo, and Zhou will be used as a reference indicator.

In conclusion, turnover intention is defined as the strength of intention employees to leave the organization and look for opportunities in other jobs. This intention is not explicit and will result in actual turnover where employees will actually leave the organization.

## METHODS

This research was conducted using a qualitative method, namely a review of the level of understanding of MLM business people. According to Erickson, qualitative research is research in which the form of the report is written in a narrative of the reasons for doing the research and the resulting impact after the research. In this study using a case study approach (Erickson et al, 2021)

In the tradition of qualitative research, The term "case study" is often used as a type of research. Case studies are a type of research method that can be used to find specific cases. There is another interpretation to this story, namely the result of a study of a particular case. If the first definition refers more to research strategies, then the second definition refers more to research results (Pranadita et al, 2020). This study used observations on MLM in the area of Sidoarjo, that is OURCITRUS. It done with several considerations, namely: First, the location of the study is close to the reach of the researcher, making it easier for researchers to analyze the subject directly through primary data collection. Second, several *leaders* and MLM business headquarters are located in Sidoarjo.

## Research Questions

### Problem Formulation :

1. What are the factors that influence HR to move from an MLM company?
2. How is the leadership system in the workplace for employees who have the intention to move?

### Research Objectives :

1. Knowing the factors that influence HR to move from MLM companies
2. Knowing the leadership system in the workplace of employees who have the intention to move

This research was conducted in 1 month starting from the beginning of May to the end of May 2022. The details of the time are as follows:

**Table 1. Details of Research Time**

No.	Time	Agenda
1.	1st week	To deepen the location of the research object
2.	2nd week	Primary data collection by interviewing informants Primary data collection by interviewing informants
3.	3rd week	Screening <i>primary</i> data from informants
4.	4th week	Strengthen primary data by collecting secondary data

Table Source : Primary Data (2022)

This study takes subjects from MLM business people who have experienced the process of moving from one MLM company to another MLM company. Samples were taken using purposive sampling to serve as informants in this study regarding ethical leadership and turnover intention (Esomar and Christianty, 2021). The reason for using this purposive sampling technique is because researchers need informants who have sufficient experience and knowledge in the



MLM business environment, so researchers apply the requirements for informants to have at least one year of active membership in MLM. The following is a list of informants and information about their experience in running an MLM business, In this research there are 10 informants :

**Table 2. Source Data**

No	Informant	Information
1	Informant 1	Running an MLM business since 2019 and has changed MLM Companies 3 times
2	Informant 2	Running MLM business since 2018 and has moved 4 times MLM company
3	Informant 3	Running an MLM business since 2020 and has changed MLM Companies 2 times
4	Informant 4	Running an MLM business since 2019 and has never changed MLM Companies
5	Informant 5	Running an MLM business since 2017 and has never changed MLM Companies
6	Informant 6	Running an MLM business since 2017 and has never changed MLM Companies
7	Informant 7	Running an MLM business since 2018 and has never changed MLM Companies

8	Informant 8	Running an MLM business since 2017 and has changed MLM Companies 1 time
9	Informant 9	Running MLM business since 2018 and has moved 2 times MLM company
10	Informant 10	Running an MLM business since 2020 and has never changed MLM Companies

Table Source : Primary Data (2022)

This study uses two data sources :

a. Primary Source

The definition of primary data sources is data obtained directly from research sources. According to some experts, primary data is also interpreted as a first-hand data source or in other words it has not been processed. Primary data sources can be obtained through interviews with informants (Munawaroh, Nuraina, and Astuti 2021) .

The primary data in this study include interviews with five sources from each MLM company in the Sidoarjo areas regarding the factors that influence employee turnover intentions and the leadership system in the employee's workplace.

b. Secondary Source

Understanding of secondary data sources, namely data that is used as reinforcement that comes from literacy sources. According to some experts, secondary data is defined as data collected and processed from some existing information (Munawaroh, Nuraina, and Astuti 2021) . This data is usually used as company publications, industry documentation, publications in mass media, *websites* and so on.





Secondary data needed in the form of a staffing system that is written SOPs, company websites and other required documents.

Method of collecting data

- a. Interview, which is a question and answer process conducted between the author and the informant and several related parties.
- b. Documentation, namely, in the form of reports showing the leadership system, employee document data and other things needed
- c. Observation, namely, by observing the workers in the company

The disaggregated data will be analyzed qualitatively and described in the form of a narrative. Then the data is compared between primary data with secondary data and additional data triangulation. Then it is strengthened by a literacy study so that the research results will be more accurate. So in the end for the needs needed.

In this study using data triangulation. Triangulation of data sources is the process of exploring the truth of certain information by using a variety of data sources, such as documents, archives, interviews, observations, or by interviewing more than one person who may have a different perspective. Of course, each of these methods will produce different evidence or data (Erickson et al, 2021) .

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are many types of business ventures, one of which is the MLM or Multi Level Marketing business. This MLM business is not new, so many companies use the MLM business system. The reason is of course because it is considered profitable for the company. MLM is a sales system in the form of a pyramid, so there is a term in MLM, namely upline members or downline members.

Ourcitrus is an MLM based in Sidoarjo. The company is quite fast in its development through evidence of the company's being listed in the fastest network growth award given and

its membership in APLI (Indonesian Direct Selling Association) already registered. Several distribution and marketing offices in the MLM field are located in this area. Currently OURCITRUS already has 42 products consisting of cosmetics and nutrition.

In running its business, members who are at the top and recruit several members are called uplines who have the task of being a leader in the group. Upline functions to direct its members to do marketing and how to recruit according to the system that has been made. This system has been practiced by the upline which is then duplicated by the members. Upline usually get this knowledge from the upline above it. However, there is also an upline who is a pioneer in a company where he is the owner of the first account on the network (Wu et al, 2021) .

Meanwhile, members who are successfully recruited are called downlines. Downlines follow upline directions in doing marketing. Downlines practice knowledge from uplines to be put into practice in the field and recruit further members who eventually add to the network position under them (Bosley, Greenman, and Snyder, 2020) . Downlines are equipped with uplines with various knowledge and abilities in recruiting new members to become reliable.

Regarding registration to become a member at OURCITRUS, buyers do not need to pay for member registration. Simply by buying any product, you will get access to register (pin). This access is used to build a network and is placed right under the sponsor's inviting position. Someone who acts as a sponsor can be a direct leader of the network or can also be an upline chosen by the leader.

In transmitting knowledge from upline to downline can be through various media such as seminars. Training, field practice and many others. Upline does this with the aim that its network is able to grow so that in the future it can expand its business market (Ricaurte and Vilorio 2020) Leaders in this industry can be



classified into two types: (1) direct selling company management team i.e. management team from PT Gemilang Citrus Berjaya and (2) independent sales force team i.e. one leader currently occupying the rank position of “Saphire Director”.

But sometimes what often happens in the field is downlines who have been given the provision to choose the turnover intention and even decide to move. One of the reasons for this change is the influence of the dissimilarity of vision and mission between downlines and uplines. From this, it can lead to divisions or disorganization of thoughts in groups or networks (Aristana, Junipisa, and Dwitrayani, 2021) . In particular S Zhang and J Zhang (2020) have raised concerns over the extent to which various part-time work engagement focuses, given these workers' weak relationships with their organizations or even with their jobs.

From the interview information in the field, data regarding the intention to the decision to move is obtained as follows:

The first informant stated that he was interested in joining the OURCITRUS MLM business because he saw the opportunities that existed to become an entrepreneur. In addition, in terms of the products sold are also in accordance with market interest. The first time you join, all you want is to get guidance from your upline in terms of marketing the products you sell. However, over time it turned out that what was taught was not as expected, so they had the intention to move. So far, he has moved MLM locations three times to find uplines that meet expectations.

The second informant also stated the same thing and had almost the same statement as the first informant. The first informant also looked for uplines that matched his interests. Besides that, it also looks at whether the products being sold are in accordance with market interest or in other words these products can be purchased continuously or not. From 2018 to 2022 the number of moves is about 4 times that of MLM

ventures. According to him, motivation also influences turnover intention. Because if the upline has a good approach, motivation will grow, but if not, it will be less motivated to run the program. From this move, in the end the informant felt that OURCITRUS was as expected.

The third informant has started an MLM business since 2020. So far the informant has moved twice. The intention of the first turnover is because the upline is not transparent in informing him of the bonuses he gets. In addition, for learning and debriefing, it is still felt that income is not optimal and makes motivation decrease. From this, it was finally decided to move to another company that could provide better training in providing guidance. From this move, the informant considered OURCITRUS to be transparent and clear in the distribution of bonuses.

The fourth informant has started the MLM business since 2019. Until now he has never experienced a turnover intention because he feels the MLM he is participating in is as expected. Upline provides appropriate training so that income and ranking continue to be obtained. This keeps the informants motivated to run a business at the MLM site. This was also experienced by the fifth and sixth informants who had joined OURCITRUS since 2017 and had never moved. This includes the tenth informant who has joined OURCITRUS since 2020 and has never moved.

From these data, analysis can be carried out , namely:

1. Ethical Leadership

From the understanding of ethical leadership stated by Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) , it is a character of a leader who is honest, caring and has principles so that he is able to make fair and balanced decisions. Ethical leadership also includes the frequency of good communication with followers so as to get a good relationship.



Based on the informants, it was known that six out of ten informants stated that they had experience of feeling incompatible or did not agree with the vision and mission of the upline as business leaders. Things that cause dissatisfaction with informants are usually because the upline is not wise in making business decisions or providing material. In addition, the benefits or bonuses obtained are also not transparent. In addition, there appears to be a fair distribution of positions within the network, with some downlines feeling the advantage while others are at a disadvantage.

Then the informant also stated that at OURCITRUS they felt they were appropriate and satisfied with what was directed by their upline. Upline provides maximum supply to downline. Regarding bonuses, they are also given transparently by the executive leader so that there is honesty in this business. In addition, regarding the division of network positions, the uplines also share it equally.

From this it is very appropriate that is in the field conditions. This is what uplines should really pay attention to in developing their network. Uplines must be able to act as leaders who are honest, caring and principled so that they are able to make appropriate and fair decisions for the entire network.

## 2. Turnover Intention

*The turnover intention of an employee is the strength of their intention to leave their job and look for opportunities in other jobs. This intention is not explicit and will result in actual turnover where the employee will actually leave the organization. This definition is in accordance with the indicators developed*

*by Mobley (1987) in (Lee, Hung, and Chen, 2012).*

From this definition it can be interpreted that if an employee or an organization already has the turnover intention, it will result in actually moving. From the informants interviewed, four out of five informants stated that if they had an intention, they actually moved because motivation had decreased in the business.

While one in five people who follow the MLM business stated that they did not have the intention of moving, which in the end was still in the MLM company. So from this it can be understood that if the turnover intention has appeared, it will be realized by the act of moving.

In addition, researchers get new insights related to factors that can reduce employee turnover intentions, namely through motivation. The following is an explanation related to the motivation obtained from the interview:

## 3. Motivation

There are indicators in the research of Mokhtar et al. (2020) states that the motivation indicators are as follows: 1) *Engagement*, 2) *Commitment*, 3) *Satisfaction* and 4) *Turnover*. *This motivation has a big influence on the relationship between downline and upline*

*From interviews, it was found that four out of five MLM business actors experienced a decrease in motivation when uplines were unable to meet the required indicators such as a sense of good relationship between uplines and downlines, strength of commitment, sense of satisfaction and turnover obtained. The lower the turnover, the lower the downline motivation in running the business.*

*Then one in five MLM actors stated that they had a good turnover in their business so that they could increase their sense of commitment and satisfaction in*





running a business. The bond between uplines and downlines also goes well so that motivation continues to be intertwined with each other.

Regarding turnover, this is supported by data on proof of bonus transfers owned by informants. Where informants who have the desire and decision to move usually have a small amount of turnover or do not match the target. From this, they finally decided to move.

In addition, the following is a description of the answers to research questions in this study:

1. From the results of the interview, it is known that the role of the upline as a leader in the business has a major influence on the development of the network and the success of the downline. Because with good support, the results will be good too. This also applies the other way around. In addition, it turns out that motivational factors also have an influence on downline decisions on turnover intention.
2. In terms of ethical leadership, what is expected is a leader who is honest, caring and has principles so that he is able to make fair and balanced decisions. Ethical leadership also includes the frequency of good communication with followers so as to get a good relationship. But in fact there are leaders who have attitudes that are not in accordance with these indicators, namely the existence of injustice, non-transparency and other fraud. These factors resulted in the turnover intention to the downline. This answer reinforces the statement that it is not only leaders who are supportive in providing training but also must behave ethically.

### Conclusion

From the discussion, it can be concluded that The influence of ethical leadership can be seen in the way that it leads to better decisions and better outcomes. really influences the turnover intention. When the informant feels that the leader is not as expected

because he does not carry out the values applied by the ethical leadership indicators, the turnover intention will appear. In addition, there are other factors that can also affect the intention to change employees, namely motivation. With the motivation, the turnover intention will not be thought of by members of the organization or employees. So the suggestion from this study is the need to build the character and ethical attitude of leaders in MLM, because this can be the key to motivating members to stay in membership.

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