

## Research Reports

# How Does Mentoring Contribute to Gen Y Employees' Intention to Stay? An Indian Perspective

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## Abstract

The present study is aimed at investigating the impact of mentoring on intention to stay of Gen Y employees working in Indian IT industry. Also, the mediating roles of perceived organization support and affective commitment are examined. Primary data were collected from a sample of 314 Gen Y employees (born between 1980-2000) from IT industry in Delhi, NCR India. Data analysis was carried out using AMOS and SPSS to test sequential mediation. Findings reveal that mentoring has a direct influence on intention to stay of Gen Y employees and perceived organization support and affective commitment sequentially mediate the relationship between the two. This study contributes to the literature on mentoring, perceived organization support, affective commitment, and intention to stay.

*Keywords:* Gen Y, mentoring, perceived organization support, affective commitment, intention to stay, retention

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There has been a plethora of research done in the area of employee retention. For the last few decades, it has become the focal point of attention for scholars and practitioners alike. More so, in the present hyper-competitive business landscape, characterized by high talent mobility and diverse workforce, employee retention presents a serious challenge. The entry of Gen Y employees has added to the multi-generational nature of workforce. As a result, three different generations of employees namely Baby boomers (1946-1960), Gen X (1961-1980) and Gen Y (1981-2000) are working together.

However, each generation exhibits a different set of work values, preferences, and characteristics (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). In particular, Gen Y is the most different and harbors high expectations from the employer. Research demonstrates that Gen Y employees are viewed as 'High maintenance generation' as they seek inclusive style of management, participative decision-making, innovation support, and challenging work (Martin, 2005). They harbor a sense of immediacy and entitlement, manifested as a desire for quick promotion and immediate performance feedback (Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008).

The rationale for focusing on Gen Y employees is marked by their ever increasing representation in the workforce and the imminent retirement of Baby boomers. India is one of the youngest countries of the world,

propelled by its Gen Y cohort standing at 425 million, which is roughly one-third of India's entire workforce, and estimated to rise to 45-50 per cent by 2020 (Rajendram, 2013). Further, Gen Y employees are identified as job-hoppers, who frequently change jobs to satisfy their self-esteem and self-actualization needs. Recent research indicates that among a third of companies surveyed, roughly 15 per cent Gen Y employees have left their employers within one year (Schawbel, 2013). In particular, IT professionals have been found to exhibit a strong tendency to leave the organizations (Korunka, Hoonakker, & Carayon, 2008). This has resulted in an immediate need to design effective retention strategy, keeping in mind Gen Y employees' needs and preferences.

Gen Y employees are new to workplace and lack work-experience. Hence, they display high growth need, learning-orientation, and a desire to acquire work-related knowledge and competencies. Consequently, they crave continuous learning and prefer organizations that provide a nurturing environment to support their continuous development (Holt, Marques, & Way, 2012; Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007). This is primarily to upgrade their skills to excel in their professional career and stay employable in volatile talent market. Therefore, recognizing the developmental needs of Gen Y is critical to effectively manage this generation (Hutchinson, Brown, & Longworth, 2012; Lub, Nije Bijvank, Matthijs Bal, Blomme, & Schalk, 2012). However, among the various developmental interventions such as formal training sessions, workshops, webinars, job rotation, tuition reimbursements; mentoring is the most cost-effective intervention with significant benefits.

Importantly, mentoring as a developmental intervention appeals highly to Gen Y employees, as they continuously seek learning, feedback, and informational and emotional support. Therefore, mentoring is used as a holistic HR intervention to facilitate personal and professional development, which by and large, is a top concern for Gen Y (Rhodes, 2009). Moreover, the extant literature supports that mentoring is effective for employees that display personality attributes of higher need for achievement and developmental-orientation (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003).

With this objective, this empirical article investigates the impact of mentoring on intention to stay of Gen Y employees. In accordance with idiosyncratic work-related values and preferences and grounded on psychological-contract theory and social exchange perspective, we incorporated mentoring to foster Gen Y employees' perceived organizational support levels, leading to affective commitment and finally, resulting in an intention to stay forth. Importantly, this paper addresses the calls for empirical research to test the relevance of mentoring as a best practice to develop Gen Y (Hutchinson et al., 2012; Stahno & Yang, 2014).

The major contribution of this paper is that we contribute to the theoretical underpinning of mentoring research from a generational perspective. In addition, this is one of the first Indian studies to explore mentoring in context of retention of working Gen Y population. Further, there have been claims to explore the underlying mechanism that explains the influence of mentoring on employee behavioral outcomes (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007). In this view, this is the first study to theoretically propose and empirically investigate a holistic model that links mentoring theory with perceived organizational support and affective commitment for the retention of Gen Y employees. This paper is structured as follows: the next section highlights literature on mentoring and then hypotheses development. It is followed by research methodology section, then discussion of the results and major implications. Thereafter, the article concludes with the limitations and conclusion sections.

## Theory and Hypotheses Development

### Mentoring

Mentoring has its roots in Greek mythology, wherein the poem, *The Odyssey* firstly reported the term 'mentor'. However, Kram (1985) pioneered the notion of mentoring in scholarly literature. She defined it as "...a relationship between a young adult and an older, more experienced adult that helps the younger individual learn to navigate in the adult world and the world of work" (pp. 2). Mentoring is a process where a more experienced member of the organization called mentor, takes responsibility for and actively participates in the systematic development of the skills and abilities of a less experienced member of the organization called mentee (Eby et al., 2013). While, a mentor is someone who guides and supports mentee (who is lesser-experienced) achieve personal and professional learning (Johnson & Ridley, 2015).

Kram (1985) pioneered the two-dimensional conceptualization of mentoring, including vocational (career function) and psychosocial (social support function). The career function encompasses providing challenging assignments, protection, exposure, and visibility; while the psychosocial function offers counseling, acceptance, confirmation, and friendship. In essence the primary objective of mentoring is to assist in personal and professional development of the mentee by sharing critical business knowledge, experience, and organizational perspectives (Berezuik, 2010; Eby et al., 2013). As such, mentoring facilitates career development by helping the mentee in setting career goals, providing clarity on different aspects such as job expectations, importance of one's role in the achievement of larger organizational goals, and offer guidance on how to achieve career advancement within the organization (Eller, Lev, & Feurer, 2014). Also, mentoring promotes socio-emotional and cognitive development by providing satisfying relationships, inculcating a perception of self-efficacy, and self-awareness (Salami, 2010; St-Jean & Audet, 2012).

Over the years mentoring has been associated with numerous benefits encompassing mentee-related benefits, mentor-related benefits, and organizational benefits. The mentee-related benefits include increased productivity and promotions, career development, higher career satisfaction, commitment, and socialization and lower turnover intentions (DeCastro, Griffith, Ubel, Stewart, & Jagsi, 2014; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Payne & Huffman, 2005). The mentor-related benefits are greater sense of personal satisfaction and mental stimulation achieved through guiding the development of young mentees. The organizational benefits include reduced withdrawal behavior and a positive link with justice perceptions and performance (Eller, Lev, & Feurer, 2014; Kim, Im, & Hwang, 2015; Lankau & Scandura, 2002). However, till date research is scarce on empirical examination of the impact of mentoring on employees' intention to stay. Against this backdrop, the main objective of this research is therefore to investigate the influence of mentoring on Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

### Relationship Between Mentoring and Gen Y Employees' Intention to Stay

Mentoring is a learning intervention comprising of an experienced mentor and a novice mentee. It promotes personal and professional development of mentees by building their knowledge, attitude, skills, and competencies. This is achieved by sharing of organizational insights, expanding mentee networks, assisting in goal setting, and providing developmental feedback (Berezuik, 2010; Eller et al., 2014; Johnson & Ridley, 2015). In addition, mentors provide sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure, counseling, friendship, and appraisal to facilitate competency development in mentees (Kram, 1985; Naim & Lenka, 2017a). Importantly, Indian Gen Y wants to grow, therefore seeks developmental intervention such as mentoring at workplace. As per a recent study, 65% Indian Gen Y consider training and growth opportunities to be most important retention

factor; while 89.6% believed training acts as a reason to stay with the organization (Behrens, 2014; Tjinsite, 2012).

Another study points out that talent and leadership development avenues offered by organizations have a positive link with employee' intention to stay and affective commitment mediates this relationship (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013). Certainly, mentoring is the ideal intervention to address career and psychological needs of Gen Y employees, as it improves personal and professional development of mentees, thereby creating a positive work experience (Fishman, 2016). This is consistent with affective events theory, which states that affective work events result in affective reactions, which in turn, shape employees' work attitudes and behaviors. In this vein, development resulted from mentoring is also an affective experience, which generate affective reactions in the form of affective commitment and then intention to stay forth with the current organization (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

In addition, one of the main characteristics of Gen Y members is relationship ethic i.e. they strongly value relationships with supervisors and peers. They have a preference for strong social support system via peers and supervisor, and desire a flat hierarchy where they have access to senior leadership. They tend to favor an inclusive style of management; and prefer supportive leaders who offer emotional support, creative freedom, individualized attention, flexibility, and feedback (Fishman, 2016; Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008; Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2017; Twenge et al., 2012). This is perhaps the product of their pampered upbringing where they are brought up with an empowered parenting style and received continuous guidance and direction at home and school.

Further, this is in accordance with a growing body of mentoring literature (e.g. Fleig-Palmer & Rathert, 2015; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Pop, Swanepoel, & Barkhuizen, 2013) that indicated a positive effect of mentoring on employee retention. In particular, mentoring relationship with immediate supervisor has been linked to lower turnover intentions as supervisory mentors reduce stress, workload, and provide emotional and social support (Firth, Mellor, Moore, & Loquet, 2004; Kim et al., 2015). Likewise, a longitudinal study involving 1000 army professionals revealed that mentoring has a negative effect on turnover intentions, mediated by affective commitment (Payne & Huffman, 2005). Therefore, we assume that mentoring has a positive relationship with Gen Y employees' intention to stay. Thus, we hypothesize that-

**H1:** Mentoring is positively related to Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

### **Relationship Between Mentoring and Perceived Organizational Support**

Mentors provide access to social networks resulting in relationship building with coworkers and superiors, and access to internal experts, which otherwise may not be possible. Unsurprisingly, mentoring provides an outlet for mentees to express their opinions and freely discuss their problems with mentors and receive expert advice. In the process, it creates a psychologically safe environment of dialogue, feedback, and support. Importantly, mentoring offers role-modeling function that enables mentees to learn the best ways to perform work.

This is consistent with social learning theory, which posits that people learn by observing the behavior of others (particularly role-models) in a process called observational or vicarious learning (Bandura, 1978). All this satisfies social, relational, and psychological needs of new hires, thereby facilitating their socialization. Therefore, mentoring influences employees' development as well as satisfies their higher order psychological

needs of socialization and self-actualization. Importantly, Gen Y employees are new entrants to workplace and hence their socialization is of paramount importance.

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of Social exchange theory (SET), perceived organizational support (POS) is the key mechanism that evokes employee positive outcome including intention to stay. POS indicates a general perception that one's organization offers care and concern towards his/her development and well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). According to SET social relationships are emerged, maintained, or terminated on the basis of the perceived cost-benefit analysis. Employees follow the norm of reciprocity by exhibiting positive behavior of staying forth, as a response to the positive treatment received from their organization (Emerson, 1976). In this view, higher order need satisfaction achieved through developmental and socialization support contributes to POS. Stated differently, through its career, psychosocial, and role-modeling functions, mentoring facilitates professional and personal developmental and fuels relationship building and socialization. This in turn, satisfies developmental and self-actualization needs of Gen Y employees, and engenders a sense of realization that organization values them and is concerned for their development, which ultimately contributes to POS. Thus, we hypothesize that-

**H2:** Mentoring is positively related to perceived organizational support (POS)

### **Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support**

Perceived organizational support (POS) represents employees' belief concerning the degree to which an organization values their contribution and care for development (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Capitalizing on SET, employees reciprocate the perceived support, by improving their performances and commitment towards the organization. In this view, the perception of organizational support predicts employees' perceptions of the quality of exchange relationships with their organizations, which in turn, influence employees' work attitudes and behaviors. Precisely, the higher levels of POS are found to be associated with higher motivation, job satisfaction, discretionary efforts, performance, and strong emotional attachment and sense of belonging with the organization (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Islam, Ahmad, Ali, Ahmed, & Bowra, 2013; Park et al., 2016).

There is a growing body of literature, which reveals that higher level of POS is positively related to employees' intention to stay forth with the current organization (Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2014; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Liu, Yang, Yang, & Liu, 2015; Nasyira, Othman, & Ghazali, 2014) Likewise, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) in their meta-analysis have shown that increase in POS is significantly linked with higher likelihood to stay in the organization. From Gen Y employees' perspective, who are relatively inexperienced and need socialization to acclimatize in the organization, it is logical to assume that the available organizational support (in the form of mentoring relationships) would have a positive effect on social exchanges with the employing organization. This perception of organizational support increases their affective attachment to the organization, and hence there is a higher likelihood of strong urge to stay forth with the current organization. In other words, mentees with an access to mentoring perceive higher level of organizational support and feel more emotionally attached and exhibit a greater urge to stay forth than to those without an access to mentoring relationship. Therefore, we hypothesize that-

**H3:** Perceived organizational support (POS) is positively related to Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

**H4:** Perceived organizational support (POS) has a mediating effect on the relationship between mentoring and Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

## Relationship Between Mentoring and Affective Commitment

One of the primary goals of any mentoring program is to achieve mentee personal and professional development (Kram & Isabella, 1985). By consistent sharing of insights, experiences, effective practices, and information on mishaps or failures; mentors foster social, functional, and personal competency development (Naim & Lenka, 2017a). In particular, social interactions between mentor and mentee involve dialogue and inquiry, and knowledge interflow resulting in informal learning opportunities for Gen Y to expand their competencies such as leadership, emotional self-control, internal locus of control, self-efficacy, self-confidence, achievement motivation, personal goals, decision making, risk-taking, networking, negotiation, persuasion, technical know-how, opportunity identification, initiative taking and collaborative potential.

Further, knowledge transfer occurring in mentoring facilitates competency development as Gen Y mentees learn and acquire new knowledge (Naim & Lenka, 2017a). In this view, mentoring focuses on social exchanges between mentor and mentee, and offer coaching, feedback, challenging assignments, exposure, and visibility to create opportunities for organization-wide learning. The extant research establishes a positive link of mentoring with organizational learning and knowledge sharing (Scandura et al., 1996; Singh, Bains, & Vinnicombe, 2002).

Past literature reveals that organizational development initiatives signal an organization's commitment towards employees hence positively impact employee satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Joarder, Sharif, & Ahmed, 2011). Organizations offering developmental interventions including mentoring enhance employees' competencies and earn a sense of emotional bonding manifested as affective commitment (Samuel & Chipunza, 2009). Likewise, skill development of employees is found to be positively related to affective commitment (Hay, 2002). This factor is most relevant to Gen Y employees who harbor an ambition to succeed and have learning goal orientation; hence they are more likely to participate in developmental initiatives (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003).

Unsurprisingly, literature provides empirical and theoretical support on the positive relationship between mentoring and employee outcomes of increased job involvement, affective commitment, job satisfaction, and citizenship behavior (Payne & Huffman, 2005). Similar evidence is also found in an IT-industry specific study (Reid, Allen, Riemenschneider, & Armstrong, 2008). Therefore, in the present context, it is rational to assume a positive relationship between mentoring and affective commitment. Thus we hypothesize that-

**H5:** Mentoring is positively related to affective commitment.

## Mediating Role of Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is defined as "an affective or emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in, the organization" (Allen & Meyer, 1990, pp. 2). It acts as a binding force and affectively committed employees want to remain employed with the same organization (Meyer et al., 2012). It is one of the widely studied constructs in positive organizational psychology. The significance of affective commitment in the present context has theoretical underpinnings of organizational support theory, which asserts that employees evaluate the care, concern, and favorable treatment offered by the organization and then accordingly base their decisions on how to respond (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In this vein, decision to stay employed or leave is largely determined by the treatment received from the organization.

As per theory of reasoned action (TRA), intentions are the best predictors of actual human behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Various scholars have studied the determinants of such intentions (e.g. Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Suliman & Al-Junaibi, 2010). It includes perceived stress, management support, commitment, job satisfaction, job characteristics, justice, and organization culture (Firth et al., 2004; George, George, Wallio, & Wallio, 2017; Meyer & Allen, 1997). However, most literature is focused on intention to quit as compared to intention to stay, which has gained academic attention rather recently (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008). Importantly, to date, there has been little research done in the context of Indian Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

Intention to stay is the tendency of employees to remain employed with their current organization (Currivan, 1999). It is a psychological process of attachment with the organization (Hunjra, Ali, Chani, Khan, & Rehman, 2010). However, in context of Gen Y employees, intention to stay is generated, when they perceive personal and professional development. In other words, when the organization offers developmental opportunities to enhance their personal, social and professional competencies, it demonstrates its commitment towards them and nurtures a sense of emotional attachment; leading to development of affective commitment. This affective commitment ultimately translates to intention to stay (Thompson, 2011). For this study, we argue that mentoring is one of the interventions to be adopted by organization to induce Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

There is compelling evidence that suggests a strong positive influence of commitment on intention to stay i.e. when employees feel committed to their organization; they have a higher likelihood to stay (Griffeth et al., 2000; Guchait & Cho, 2010; Suliman & Al-Junaibi, 2010). In particular, affective commitment is shown to be a strong determinant of intention to stay as emotionally attached employees are more likely to be motivated to stay forth (Craig, Allen, Reid, Riemenschneider, & Armstrong, 2013). In this vein, literature suggests a mediating role of affective commitment on generation of intention to stay (Griffeth et al., 2000; Guchait & Cho 2010; Suliman & Al-Junaibi, 2010). Further, research reveals that POS is positively related to intention to stay (Cao et al., 2014; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Nasyira et al., 2014). There is compelling evidence that AC mediates the relationship between mentoring and employee outcomes including OCB, turnover intentions, and intention to stay (Craig et al., 2013; Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Thus, we hypothesize that-

**H6:** Affective commitment is positively related to Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

**H7:** Affective commitment has a mediating effect on the relationship between mentoring and Gen Y employees' intention to stay.

### **Sequential Mediating Effects of Perceived Organizational Support and Affective Commitment**

Based on above-noted theoretical and empirical evidence, we hypothesize that mentoring relationship with intention to stay is achieved through POS and then affective commitment. In this vein, we integrate the two models with mediation through POS and with mediation through affective commitment, in turn, generating a sequential-mediation model, depicted in Figure 1 (Hayes, 2009). Thus, we hypothesize that-

**H8:** The relationship between mentoring and intention to stay is sequentially mediated by POS and affective commitment.

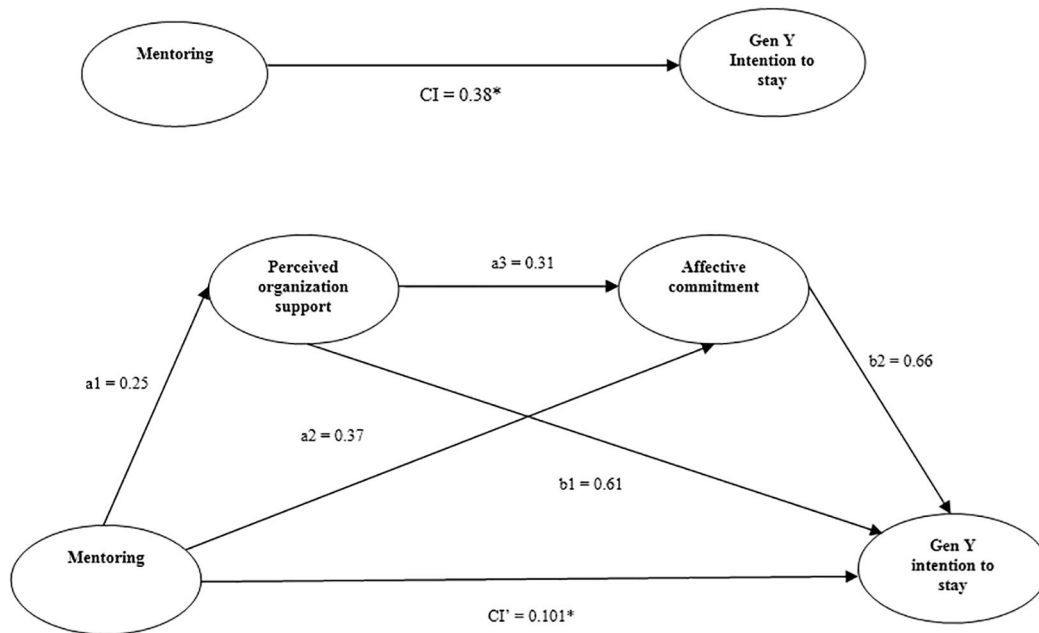


Figure 1. Research model and hypotheses.

Note.  $N = 314$ .

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

A cross-sectional survey design is used to gather primary data. Gen Y employees working in IT industry in Indian Bangalore region are selected as respondents. Bangalore is viewed as the 'Silicon Valley' of India, being home to numerous domestic and global top-notch IT organizations. The sample comprises of IT professionals born between 1981- 2000 and possesses minimum working experience of one year. The top 50 Indian software companies were chosen from the list generated by NASSCOM (the Indian technology watchdog) and invited to participate in this research work. We contacted HR Managers to take their consent to participate in this research and to identify Gen Y employees based on their birth years. Respondents were selected randomly from the given list of software developers that fall under Gen Y category.

In total 27 organizations agreed to participate and hence we administered 450 questionnaires from June 2015 to October 2015 to survey Gen Y employees. In all, 314 completely filled questionnaires were collected with a response rate of 69.77%. Out of this sample 77% are males and 23% are females; with an age group of 20-24 represented by 29% respondents, 25-29 by 55% and 29-34 by 16%. In terms of education, 24% were diploma-holders, 54% were graduate, and 22% were post-graduate. In terms of experience, 22% have 0-2 years of experience, 40% have 2-4, 28% have 4-6 years, and 10% have more than 6 years of experience.

### Measures

Questionnaire items were adapted from pre-existing validated scales. The five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) was used as the measurement method. The questionnaire consists of three



sections namely; the first section is the brief introduction and instructions along with the purpose of research and assurance of establishing the anonymity of responses. The second section includes the statements dealing with basic information of the respondents namely age group, gender, education, and years of experience; the third section includes the statements on mentoring, perceived organizational support, affective commitment, and intention to stay.

### Mentoring

It is measured by 9-item scale designed by [Castro and Scandura \(2004\)](#). A sample item was: “My mentor takes a personal interest in my career”. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.94 and mean value is 3.98 ( $SD = .68$ ).

### POS

It is measured by 8-item scale adapted from [Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch's \(1997\)](#). An example item is “My organization cares about my opinions”. Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.82 and mean value is 4.14 ( $SD = .59$ ).

### Affective Commitment

It is measured by 6-item scale taken from [Meyer and Allen \(1997\)](#). An example is “I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own”. Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.74 and mean value is 3.33 ( $SD = .84$ ).

### Intention to Stay

It is measured by 7-item scale adapted from [Mayfield and Mayfield \(2007\)](#). A sample item is. “I expect to be working for my current employer one year from now”. Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.76 and mean value is 3.46 ( $SD = .57$ ).

### Control Variables

To avoid potentially misleading relationships between study variables and to enhance the validity of the study, the effect of age-group, gender, education, and experience were controlled ([Foote & Li-Ping Tang, 2008](#)). The coding schemata for the control variables are shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 314)*

| Variable                   | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1     | 2       | 3       | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8      |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1. Age-group <sup>a</sup>  | 2.5861   | .5436     | -     |         |         |        |        |        |        |        |
| 2. Gender <sup>b</sup>     | 1.2301   | .4263     | -.012 | -       |         |        |        |        |        |        |
| 3. Education <sup>c</sup>  | 2.2210   | .6779     | .044  | -.14    | -       |        |        |        |        |        |
| 4. Experience <sup>d</sup> | 3.2814   | .7712     | -.097 | -.426** | .218    | -      |        |        |        |        |
| 5. Mentoring               | 3.9883   | .6827     | .212  | .136*   | .773**  | -.773* | (.944) |        |        |        |
| 6. POS                     | 4.1488   | .5860     | .085  | .107**  | -.526** | .511** | .535*  | (.882) |        |        |
| 7. AC                      | 3.3398   | .8459     | .098  | 1.83*   | .210*   | .210*  | .540*  | .320** | (.731) |        |
| 8. Intention to stay       | 3.4615   | .5718     | .219  | .127**  | .537**  | .537*  | .383*  | .210** | .402*  | (.756) |

*Note.* Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alphas) are in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup>In years: 1 = 20-24 (29%), 2 = 25-29 (55%), 3 = 29-34 (16%). <sup>b</sup>1 = Male (77%), 2 = Female (23%). <sup>c</sup>1 = Diploma (24%), 2 = Graduate (54%), 3 = Post Graduate (22%). <sup>d</sup>In years: 1 = 0-2 (22%), 2 = 2-4 (40%), 3 = 4-6 (28%), 4 = > 6 (10%).

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

## Analysis and Results

Data analysis for the present study was done using SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 21.0 statistical packages. Hypotheses testing were carried out through correlation analysis and regression technique. While, to investigate the sequential mediation effect, an analytic approach of Preacher and Hayes (2004) was utilized (see Table 3). Reliability estimates, correlations, and descriptive statistics including standard deviations for all the variables under study are depicted in Table 1. Before proceeding for hypotheses testing, firstly the measurement model was examined for dimensionality, convergent, and discriminant validity through Confirmatory factor analysis. As depicted in Table 3, the proposed four-factor model of mentoring (Model 1), POS, affective commitment, and intention to stay is found to exhibit acceptable fit indices (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

## Test of Hypotheses

To examine the discriminant validity of the four-factor model, it was compared with four alternate models, described in detail in Table 2. First, it was compared against the three-factor model (all the items of mentoring and affective commitment loaded on a single factor, and POS and intention to stay). Findings reveal that the three-factor model was a comparatively poor fit (see Model 2 in Table 2, Model 2 – Model 1:  $\Delta\chi^2 = 2,266.58$ ,  $df = 55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Then the proposed model is tested against two factor model (all items related to mentoring, POS, and affective commitment loaded on a single factor), which was proved to be a poorer fit than the proposed measurement model (see Model 3 in Table 2, Model 3 – Model 1:  $\Delta\chi^2 = 2,609.93$ ,  $df = 67$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 2

*The Fit Indices for Alternative Measurement Models*

| Model   | $\chi^2$    | df    | $\chi^2/df$ | CFI | GFI | TLI | RMSEA |
|---------|-------------|-------|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Model 1 | 2,627.74*** | 1,732 | 1.517       | .95 | .96 | .93 | 0.038 |
| Model 2 | 4,894.32*** | 1,787 | 2.738       | .63 | .69 | .64 | 0.067 |
| Model 3 | 5,237.67*** | 1,799 | 2.911       | .60 | .62 | .58 | 0.081 |

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Thereafter, the discriminant validity of the four-factor model was estimated. Furthermore, the result reveals a 35% explained variance, which was well within the prescribed limit of 50%, the minimum threshold in accordance with Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012), thereby indicating that common method variance has been death with effectively.

Results show that mentoring and intention to stay were positively related ( $r = .38$ ,  $p < .01$ ), thus providing support for Hypothesis 1. Likewise, mentoring was found to be positively related to perceived organizational support (POS) ( $r = .53$ ,  $p < .01$ ) providing support for Hypothesis 2. Also, the association of mentoring and affective commitment was shown to be significantly positive ( $r = .54$ ,  $p < .01$ ) providing support for Hypothesis 5. Affective commitment and intention to stay was found to be positively related ( $r = .40$ ,  $p < .01$ ) providing support for Hypothesis 6. POS was also found to be positively related to Gen Y employees' intention to stay ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ) providing support for Hypothesis 3.

## Sequential Multiple Mediation Analyses for POS and AC

To analyze the structural model of present study, path coefficients are estimated after controlling the age group, gender, education, and experience. For testing of the sequential mediating effects, we followed Preacher and Hayes' (2004) analytical approach. The rationale of utilizing this technique is that it enables to assess the indirect effects of both mediators i.e. POS (Hypothesis 4) and AC (Hypothesis 7) in a serial manner (Taylor, MacKinnon, & Tein, 2008). This technique equips us to examine the indirect effect between the predictor and the criterion variables through the mediator via a bootstrapping method (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). Thereby, Table 3, reports the estimates of the indirect effects, and the path estimates at symmetric 95% confidence intervals.

Table 3

*Path Coefficients and Indirect Effects for Mediation Models*

| Model        | Path coefficients to |             |              | Estimates  | Indirect effects                  |                                   |
|--------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|              | Intention to stay    | POS         | AC           |            | Symmetric 95% Confidence Interval | Bootstrap 95% Confidence Interval |
| Mentoring    | 0.20* (.13)          | 0.25* (.05) | 0.37* (.17)  |            |                                   |                                   |
| POS          | 0.61* (.23)          |             | 0.31** (.40) |            |                                   |                                   |
| AC           | 0.66* (.05)          |             |              |            |                                   |                                   |
| Total        |                      |             |              | .24 (.05)  | -.06, .24                         | -.07, .27                         |
| M→POS→ITS    |                      |             |              | -.07 (.05) | .15, .03                          | -.18, .02                         |
| M→AC→ITS     |                      |             |              | .14 (.05)  | .35, .21                          | -.36, .20                         |
| M→POS→AC→ITS |                      |             |              | .08 (.04)  | .03, .19                          | .03, .21                          |

Note.  $N = 314$ . Bootstrap confidence intervals were constructed using 2000 resamples. Total effect (M → ITS) = 0.38 (.08). Standard error in parentheses.

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .05$ .

As against the stated Hypothesis 4, POS did not significantly mediate the path from mentoring to intention to stay, thus Hypothesis 4 was not supported. However, results provide empirical evidence that POS mediated the path between mentoring and AC. The evidence was also found that AC mediates the path from mentoring to intention to stay, thus Hypothesis 7 was supported. Finally, we tested Hypothesis 8, which has stated that POS and AC sequentially mediate the relationship between mentoring and intention to stay. Based on the analysis of other hypotheses, it is revealed that POS mediated the relationship between mentoring and AC, and AC in turn mediated the relationship between mentoring and intention to stay. To sum, all hypotheses but Hypothesis 4 were supported.

## Discussion

The study is aimed at addressing the retention of Gen Y employees in Indian IT industry, a recent challenge faced by many industries across the globe. In this vein, the impact of mentoring on Gen Y employees' intention to stay is investigated. The extant literature has focused on the influence of mentoring on employee outcomes including turnover intentions (e.g. Craig et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2015). However, there is a dearth of scholarly literature on impact of mentoring on intention to stay in Indian context. More importantly, retaining the younger generation employees is another critical issue faced by Indian organizations, particularly IT organizations (Naim

& Lenka, 2017b). At the same time, there is limited literature on how mentoring influences employees' intention to stay. Hence, this empirical study attempted to fill this gap by providing insights on how mentoring influences Gen Y employees' intention to stay forth. In so doing, this study is based on the underlying principle of social exchange theory to explore the role of mentoring in retaining Gen Y employees.

In the present turbulent environment, talent retention has become a significant challenge for organizations. In particular, Gen Y employees, by their inherent nature are more prone to job-switching. One of the catalysts behind this is the changing nature of psychological contract wherein job-security and life-time employment are replaced by multitasking, flexibility and employability. Therefore, grounded on psychological contract theory, organizations should fulfill psychological contract as promised to Gen Y employees by incorporating developmental interventions such as mentoring. This is in agreement with past empirical evidence that desire to develop competencies are critical to realize psychological contracts of Gen Y employees (D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008; Festing & Schäfer, 2014).

We extended prior research on mentoring and Gen Y retention to provide empirical and theoretical support to existing findings on mentoring outcomes in Indian IT context. Based on social exchange approach (Emerson, 1976), organization support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1978), we provided a theoretical justification for the research model. The total direct relationship between mentoring and Gen Y employees' intention to stay suggests that mentors' strongly influence Gen Y employees' decision to stay. This is probably due to continuous emotional support, guidance, counseling, visibility, protection, personal and professional development opportunities offered by mentors, which evoke an intention to stay forth. Hence, it can be assumed that employees with an access to mentoring at workplace have a higher likelihood of staying as compared to non-mentored employees. This is in accordance with past studies, which noted that learning and development opportunities predict employees' decision to stay or leave (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013; Frey & Steckstor, 2007).

Moreover, this study addresses the call for future research by Hezlett and Gibson (2007) on unraveling the underlying mechanisms governing the relationship between mentoring and employee outcomes. In this regard, this article extends the literature by providing a detailed account of the underlying mechanisms (i.e. POS and AC) that explain the influence of mentoring on intention to stay. In doing so, mentoring fosters Gen Y employees' personal and professional development and socialization; thereby satisfying their higher order self-esteem and self-actualization needs. This leads to feeling of POS that contributes to affective commitment, which, in turn, results in an intention to stay. Stated differently, there are two pathways that govern the influence of mentoring on Gen Y employees' intention to stay i.e. AC and POS.

The findings of the study are consistent with the findings of Pop and Barkhuizen (2010). Also, Craig et al. (2013) noted similar empirical findings from 109 American IT employees, suggesting a positive impact of psychosocial mentoring on affective commitment, leading to reduced intention to leave. These findings have significant implications for organizations operating in dynamic environments. Organizations should embrace workplace mentoring to evoke employee positive outcomes including commitment, engagement, and job satisfaction.

Further, results indicate that affective reactions in the form of affective commitment in response to mentoring strongly predict Gen Y employees' intention to stay. However, POS was not found to be a significant mediator between these relationships. The results suggest that participation in mentoring is perceived as a positive work

experience by Gen Y employees and results in feeling emotionally attached with the organization, leading to continue working with the organization. Importantly, Indian culture emphasizes on the importance of emotional bonding to nurture any relationship. Consequently, from perspective of Indian employees, evoking an emotional attachment with the organization plays a key role in deciding to stay with the employer.

However, level of POS did not have a significant mediating effect on relationship between mentoring and Gen Y employees' intention to stay. It might be due to following two reasons: First, apart from developmental interventions like mentoring, Indian Gen Y employees also seek other measures such as coworker support, supervisory support, access to technologies like social media, and top leadership support to facilitate flexibility and innovative culture to encourage intrapreneurship (Naim, 2014; Srinivasan, 2012). Gen Y employees' positive perception of such factors may lead to desired levels of POS that can have a significant effect on their intention to stay. Second, due to predominant collectivistic value system of Indian culture, Gen Y employees seek collaboration and support from myriad sources, similar to what they have received during their upbringing from parents, elder siblings, and seniors at school or college level. They hold similar set of expectations at workplace and view their supervisors, peers, and leaders as role-models to imitate their behaviors for attaining career success (Gupta, Suri, Javidan, & Chhokar, 2002; Srinivasan, 2012).

However, Indian culture is also characterized by a high power-distance, which renders immediate superiors to maintain distance from their subordinates. Consequently, the very people, whom Gen Y considers as role-models, do not offer enough support. In this case, due to lack of support such relationship does not lead to desired levels of POS that can influence intention to stay. Finally, this study assessed the sequential mediating effect of POS and AC on the relationship between mentoring and Gen Y employees' intention to stay. Results revealed a significant indirect relationship between mentoring and Gen Y employees' intention to stay through both POS and AC. This could be attributed to three possible reasons:

Firstly, as Gen Y employees expect mentoring at workplace, therefore participation in mentoring is perceived as a positive work experience, which in turn, contributes to the feeling of emotional attachment. This proposition is also supported by the findings of Lankau and Scandura (2002) who reported that mentoring leads to personal skill development, that in turn influence various employee outcomes. Secondly, top leaders should nurture a culture supportive to continuous dialogue and inquiry, open communication, social interactions, fair execution of HR policies (compensation, performance management, recognition), and knowledge sharing to enhance POS and generate employees' affective commitment with the organization. This is in alignment with the findings of Hu, Wang, Yang, and Wu (2014) and Baranik, Roling, and Eby, (2010), which demonstrated a positive effect of mentoring functions on mentee' POS. Thirdly, AC achieved through higher level of POS further influences employees' decision to stay with the organization that provides developmental measures such as mentoring. However, the influence of socio-economic factors such as gender, income, hierarchical position, and tenure in the organization might also exert a great deal of impact on affective commitment with the organization. For instance, recent recruits might be more inclined towards receiving mentoring support than the experienced Gen Y members, who have already acclimatized with the culture of the organization.

## Theoretical Implications

The present study offers significant theoretical contributions. Firstly, it provides an empirical justification of a conceptual model that extended mentoring research in the context of Gen Y employees' outcomes. In this case, it is empirically established that mentoring has a significant relationship with intention to stay of Gen Y

employees. This is an extension of SET, whereby Gen Y employees reciprocate by exhibiting emotional attachment and intention to remain with the organization in response to the positive work experience of mentoring that contributes to POS. Importantly, it also bridges the gap in literature, as there is a lack of existing frameworks for Gen Y retention.

Secondly, we believe that no empirical study till date has examined the factors that influence intention to stay of Indian Gen Y employees from IT industry. Hence, this study is one of the first of its kind to investigate the influence of mentoring on intention to stay of Indian Gen Y. In this vein, we evaluated the sequential mediating role of POS and AC on relationship between mentoring and intention to stay. Also, this is significant because existing literature only suggests a positive effect of the two variables on employee outcomes, but no research has studied their combined effect on employee retention.

Thirdly, the study contributes to the literature on mentoring, affective commitment, perceived organizational support, and intention to stay, through external validation of the concepts developed in a western world context. It is worthwhile to mention here that there is a limited empirical literature on Gen Y retention and mentoring in Indian context. Finally, the findings provide an empirical evidence for the underlying process by which mentoring influences Gen Y retention. It has explored mentoring to evoke perceived organizational support and affective commitment of young generation employees, resulting in an intention to stay forth. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to explore the relationship between mentoring, affective commitment, and intention to stay in Gen Y employees' context.

## Practical Implications

The present study holds important insights for HR managers who seek to strengthen the retention rates of young generation employees i.e. Gen Y. The findings assist practitioners in gaining a deeper understanding of how mentoring influences Gen Y employees' retention. In Indian IT industry context, organizations strive to retain Gen Y employees who also happen to be their future leaders.

Firstly, to enhance affective commitment of Gen Y employees, IT organizations should integrate mentoring into their talent management strategy. Mentoring as a developmental intervention will invigorate the employer brand of organizations by adding a dimension of employee development that will attract and retain ambitious Gen Y employees. In this vein, IT organizations should harness their technological capabilities such as using social media platforms (internal networking tools) to identify and connect mentor and mentee working in different departments or at a different location. This is important because most Indian IT organizations operate globally with their subsidiaries located in different countries; therefore, it is prudent to use technological solutions to foster mentoring relationships. Also, the positive influence of mentoring on Gen Y affective commitment and retention encourages top leadership to explore other enablers such as social media, continuous learning climate, knowledge sharing, and internal communication to evoke positive employee attitudinal outcomes.

Secondly, evoking positive employee attitudes of affective commitment is a predictor of intention to stay (Naim & Lenka, 2016). This has valuable implications in contemporary knowledge economy, wherein organizations are vying to retain their high potential employees, as employees' knowledge assets drive the organizational performance and sustainability. Employee turnover has become a grave challenge for HR professionals across the industries. However, the situation is worse in emerging markets, where the turnover rates of young employees are alarmingly high in service sectors (Vaiman & Collings, 2015).

Thirdly, Indian IT industry operates in an environment of global competition marked by high talent mobility. As per recent reports, IT industry has experienced roughly 21.9 per cent attrition rates in the last one year (Deloitte, 2015). Likewise, another study points that India leads the list of countries, with an expected employee turnover rate of 26.9% (Biswas 2013). Therefore, a significant implication of this study from the perspective of IT industry is a strategy to improve retention rate as a valuable means to achieve competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 2005). Fourthly, as IT industry experiences fast-paced changes in client requirements, therefore they need their workforce to continuously enrich their skill-sets to meet changing market demands. This has far-reaching implications on IT organizations' sustainability in a competitive business environment. Therefore, mentoring is a vital resource for IT organizations to mould their young generation workforce in accordance with its business requirements. In addition, as Gen Y are relatively new to workplace, therefore role-modelling function of mentoring enable them to learn the best practices of the industry and assimilate tricks-of-the-trade by observing their experienced mentors. Consequently, this article seeks to recommend IT organizations to embrace mentoring and create organizational culture supportive to talent development.

Finally, from an economic vantage point, retention saves fair amount of financial cost that otherwise would incur due to employee turnover. To an estimate, turnover cost may reach 2.5 times the annual remuneration package of departing employee. This includes direct cost (recruitment, selection, induction) and indirect costs (training, loss of productivity, time to acclimatize) (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004). More importantly, a departing employee takes away the crucial business knowledge and skills, and more often end up joining the competitor of parent organization.

## Limitations

The present research has certain limitations that open up new avenues for future investigation. The first limitation lies in its relatively small sample size and cross-sectional research design. Hence, further research is needed to confirm our suggested relationships, as self-reported surveys are poor to establish cause-effect relationships. Therefore, it is recommended to replicate the research using longitudinal design to establish better causal-effect relationships. As this study was carried out in IT industry of India, empirical findings of the study could be more applicable in Asian countries as compared to Western ones.

It is better to replicate this study in public sector organizations or in manufacturing sector, may be in a different country as suggested results may not be generalized. As quantitative research design has its obvious limitations so future studies should employ qualitative methods like focus interviews to further examine the results of this study. Also, as self-reported data were collected from a single-source, there is a potential common method bias. However, Harman's single factor test was conducted to deal with this potential problem. Further, it may not be a complete investigation as management perspective is not examined. Therefore, future research should interview both HR Managers and Gen Y employees to validate the study results. The actual retention or turnover rates rather than intention to stay can be examined to extend this research.

Also, one could explore variables such as organizational culture and self-esteem as mediating variables in context of mentoring influence on employee outcomes. This study has excluded to examine the impact of socio-economic variables such as gender, income, marital status, and tenure in the organization on intention to stay forth. Hence, future researchers should examine their effects. Other potential line of research could be to assess the impact of mentoring on employer brand perceptions of the organization and in this regard, other developmental initiatives such as job rotation and secondments can also be incorporated.

## Conclusion

This study was embarked upon investigating the impact of mentoring on Gen Y employees' intention to stay via the mediating effects of perceived organizational support and affective commitment. Findings reveal that both perceived organizational support and affective commitment sequentially mediated the mentoring and intention to stay relationship. This study has highlighted the underlying mechanism of how mentoring can influence an employees' intention to stay, especially of young employees. Importantly, this research provides organizations with guidelines on how practicing mentoring can influence employees' positive work-related behaviors.

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## Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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