

The Role of Employee Engagement in Increasing Talent Retention at A Crude Palm Oil Company

Peran Employee Engagement dalam Meningkatkan Talent Retention pada Industri Crude Palm Oil

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History :</i> Received: 25 July 2025 Accepted: 05 August 2025 Published: September 2025	This study examines the effect of employee engagement on talent retention at PT. Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, Dumai, with reward system as a mediating variable. Data were collected from 177 employees through an online questionnaire and analyzed using SEM-PLS with SmartPLS 3.0. Respondents were classified by age, tenure, and educational background. The results show that employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on talent retention. Furthermore, reward system mediates the relationship between employee engagement and talent retention. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering employee engagement and developing effective reward systems to retain critical talent in the crude palm oil industry. The study contributes to the literature by positioning reward system as a mediator, a perspective that has received limited attention in previous research. HR managers should focus on appreciation and clear promotion paths to improve retention. Keywords: Crude Palm Oil Company, Employee Engagement, Reward System, Talent Retention.
<i>DOI Number :</i> 10.33059/jseb.v16i3.12768 <i>How to Cite :</i> Amelia, D., Sukmawati, A., & Syafitri, U. D. (2025). The role of employee engagement in increasing talent retention at a crude palm oil company. <i>Jurnal Samudra Ekonomi dan Bisnis</i>, 16(3), 654-664. DOI: 10.33059/jseb.v16i3.12768.	

Info Artikel	Abstrak
<i>Riwayat Artikel :</i> Diterima: 25 Juli 2025 Disetujui: 05 Agustus 2025 Dipublikasikan: September 2025	<i>Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh employee engagement terhadap talent retention di PT. Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, Dumai, dengan reward system sebagai variabel mediasi. Data diperoleh dari 177 karyawan melalui kuesioner online dan dianalisis menggunakan SEM-PLS dengan bantuan SmartPLS 3.0. Responden diklasifikasikan berdasarkan usia, lama bekerja, dan latar belakang pendidikan. Hasil menunjukkan employee engagement berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap talent retention. Selain itu, reward system memediasi hubungan antara employee engagement dan talent retention. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya membangun keterlibatan karyawan dan mengembangkan sistem penghargaan yang efektif untuk mempertahankan talenta di industri kelapa sawit. Studi ini memperkaya literatur dengan menghadirkan reward system sebagai mediator, yang masih jarang diteliti. Manajer SDM disarankan untuk meningkatkan apresiasi dan kejelasan jalur promosi guna memperkuat retensi.</i> Kata Kunci: Industri Crude Palm Oil, Keterlibatan Karyawan, Retensi Talenta, Sistem Penghargaan.
<i>Nomor DOI :</i> 10.33059/jseb.v16i3.12768 <i>Cara Mensitasi :</i> Amelia, D., Sukmawati, A., & Syafitri, U. D. (2025). The role of employee engagement in increasing talent retention at a crude palm oil company. <i>Jurnal Samudra Ekonomi dan Bisnis</i>, 16(3), 654-664. DOI: 10.33059/jseb.v16i3.12768.	

INTRODUCTION

The current era of globalization makes human resource management one of the most important elements in ensuring long-term success in an organization. One of the important internal factors that a company must have in order to compete competitively is human resources (Rahmawati, 2019). The current tight competition conditions make companies increasingly aware that retaining quality employees is as important as attracting new talent. Dorothea *et al.* (2021) explain that retention is the result of effective talent management where the organization is able to create an attractive work environment for employees to stay. This makes talent retention strategies important for maintaining operational sustainability and efficiency.

An effective reward system can improve employee performance by providing incentives that match work results. However, companies often face challenges in designing a fair and motivating reward system. According to Komolafe (2020), a reward system that does not match employee expectations can result in low motivation and suboptimal performance. In addition, Fong & Wong (2021) explain that a mismatch between the reward system and organizational goals can reduce the effectiveness of motivation. This highlights that by implementing the right reward system will increase effectiveness and also motivate employees.

According to Ratnawati & Subudi (2018), employee engagement is described as a way to ensure that employees are committed to the goals and values of the organization, motivated to contribute, and improve well-being. Engaged employees will care about the future of the company and they are willing to invest their best performance for the success of the organization (Noviardy, 2020). Motyka (2018) explained that employee engagement has a significant positive effect and serves as a key driver of employee performance, organizational productivity, and overall business outcomes. Employees who feel engaged in the workplace will show a tendency to have a commitment to the company, encourage achievement, increase productivity, and the turnover rate will decrease (Febriansyah & Ginting, 2020).

High employee turnover is a common challenge in the palm oil processing industry due to factors such as harsh working conditions, remote locations, and limited adequate work facilities (Tampubolon & Sagala, 2020). This condition was experienced by PT. Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, Dumai, which showed that the site employee turnover rate was not within normal limits.

The highly competitive CPO (crude palm oil) processing industry as faced by PT. Wilmar Nabati Indonesia has made the company realize that losing qualified employees can have a serious impact on the company's operations, considering the specialization of skills required in this sector. High turnover resulting from difficulties in attracting qualified talent, especially in critical talent positions, not only disrupts operational stability but also increases the cost of recruiting and training new employees, and has the potential to reduce efficiency and work quality. Factors such as the lack of continuous development programs, limited career development opportunities, and a competitive work culture cause employee engagement and motivation to decline, which ultimately impacts talent retention.

The novelty of this research lies in the simultaneous analysis of the effect of employee engagement on talent retention by incorporating the reward system as a mediating variable, which remains underexplored in the context of the CPO processing industry. The uniqueness of this study is further highlighted by its focus on PT Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, Dumai, which is a company with a site-based work environment that demands technical expertise. This approach contributes new insights into how the mediating role of the reward system can enhance the link between employee

engagement and talent retention. In addition, the use of SEM-PLS strengthens the empirical value of the research by providing deeper and more relevant analysis for developing effective human resource management strategies in this competitive and labor-intensive industry.

This research offers several significant contributions. Firstly, it aims to identify the characteristics of employees in CPO company. Secondly, it attempts to analyze the influence of employee engagement on talent retention mediated by reward system in CPO company. Finally, from a practical standpoint, it is hoped that this research will inform organizational leader's decision-making processes, and helps managers be more precise in retaining employees, especially those in critical positions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Engagement

According to Gallup (2023), employee engagement is the emotional involvement and commitment of employees to their workplace. Employee engagement is also defined as employees who work enthusiastically and dedicatedly, give more than expected, and actively strive to support organizational goals. Employee engagement is influenced by three key psychological states, i.e.: psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability of physical and emotional resources, which mediate the relationship between human resource practices and engagement in the workplace (Rabiul *et al.* 2021). According to Bakker & Demerouti (2017), employee engagement is defined by three key dimensions: (1) vigor, which refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working; (2) dedication, characterized by a strong sense of enthusiasm, pride, and involvement in one's work; and, (3) absorption, describing a state of being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in the work. These components represent a positive and fulfilling work-related mindset, resulting in employees feeling motivated and satisfied. According to Yuswardi (2019), employee engagement is the level at which individuals or employees enjoy carrying out their work tasks with full attention. Employee engagement is related to what employees expect from work and in the workplace, the transformation of the way employees work, and the long-term work where people work (Riyanto *et al.* 2021).

Employee engagement indicators described by Dessler (2020) are divided into three, namely: (1) Say, which is measured from engaged employees who will show a tendency to speak positively about the company. (2) Stay, which is measured from engaged employees who have a strong sense and desire to remain in the company. (3) Strive, which is measured from engaged employees who have high motivation and try to give extra effort in their work.

H1: Employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on talent retention.

H2: Employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on reward system.

Reward System

According to Dikhaminjia *et al.* (2025), a reward system encompasses both financial and non-financial benefits, such as salary, bonuses, recognition, and flexible work arrangements, which together significantly enhance employee motivation and organizational commitment. Reward system consists of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that organizations use to increase employee productivity and loyalty with a focus on recognition and compensation as the main elements (Jeni *et al.* 2020). Reward system is a systematic process used by organizations to provide rewards to employees based on their performance, including financial and non-financial compensation to retain employees (Layek

& Koodamara, 2024). Reward system can influence both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by supporting individual basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While extrinsic rewards may drive extrinsic motivation, recognition and opportunities for self-development nurture intrinsic motivation by fulfilling these needs, leading to greater internalization and sustained engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In addition, according to Noorazem *et al.* (2021), an effective reward system not only improves employee performance but also increases organizational loyalty, creating a positive work environment where employees feel valued, and recognized for their contributions.

There are two types of rewards expressed by Normi (2017). The first type is extrinsic rewards, namely rewards that come from outside a person. Extrinsic rewards are divided into two parts, i.e.: (1) financial rewards in the form of salary, employee benefits, and bonuses or incentives; and, (2) non-financial rewards in the form of status or recognition, and promotion. The second type is intrinsic rewards, namely reward that is regulated by oneself consisting of completion, achievement, and autonomy. Reward system measurement indicators by Hassan (2022), that is: (1) Basic Salary and Allowances, (2) Recognition and Appreciation, (3) Career Development Opportunities, and (4) Work Environment.

H3: Reward system has a positive and significant effect on talent retention.

Talent Retention

Talent retention is defined as an organization's ability to retain talented employees by implementing effective talent management practices, which include creating a supportive work environment, providing career development opportunities, and offering competitive reward systems (Alias *et al.*, 2017). Talent retention can also be defined as the ability of an organization to retain its skilled employees (Mey *et al.*, 2021). According to Urme (2023), talent retention involves implementing comprehensive talent management strategies, such as in-depth recruitment and selection, continuous training and development, performance feedback, competitive compensation, and a supportive organizational culture, that effectively reduce turnover by enhancing employee engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction. Rocio & Monika (2019) define talent retention as an organizational process to retain employees by creating a positive work environment and supporting individual development.

According to Deloitte (2024), talent retention indicators can be analyzed using the following four dimensions, namely: (1) Turnover rate, measured by the percentage of employees who leave the company in a certain period; (2) Retention rate, measured by the percentage of employees who remain in the company for a certain period; (3) Promotion rate, measured and calculated from the number of employees who are promoted, and employees who show growth opportunities in the organization that can increase retention; and, (4) Training and Development Investments, measured by investments in employee training and development that contribute to increased engagement and retention.

H4: Employee engagement has a positive and significant effect indirectly through reward system on talent retention.

METHOD

This research used a quantitative approach, collecting data through an online questionnaire from employees of PT Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, Dumai. The sampling method used a non-probability sampling technique, a saturation sampling technique, in which all members of the population were

used as samples. The sample in this study consisted of all 177 field employees at the CPO company. All samples were further categorized based on gender, age, length of service, job title, and highest level of education.

In this study, the relationship between reward system, employee engagement, talent retention, and job satisfaction will be analyzed using SEM-PLS analysis. The stages in SEM-PLS analysis consist of drawing a path diagram according to the research model framework; conducting an outer model test to assess the validity and reliability of indicators in measuring their variables (constructs); assessing the goodness of fit model to ensure that the processed data fits the estimated model so that the sample used can provide a picture of the actual population conditions; and, conducting an inner model test which is the stage of testing the influence between variables as a tool to test the research hypothesis (Hair *et al.* 2022). This research model contains four latent variables, namely the reward system, employee engagement, talent retention, and job satisfaction variables. All of these variables are 1st order latent constructs that are measured by several measurement indicators.

The measurement model testing stage includes convergent validity, discriminant validity and composite reliability. The results of the PLS analysis can be used to test the research hypothesis if all indicators in the PLS model have met the requirements of convergent validity, discriminant validity and composite reliability (Hair *et al.* 2022). To produce the results of the outer model test, the PLS model must be estimated using algorithm techniques. Convergent Validity test was carried out using SmartPLS 4.0 software which was assessed based on the correlation between the internal score and the construct score. According to Ghazali (2021), an indicator is said to be valid if the loading factor value is more than 0.70 and the average variance extracted (AVE) value is more than 0.50. If the initial construct does not meet the requirements, then the indicator elimination (dropping) is carried out one by one against the lowest loading factor value. After carrying out the indicator elimination stage, the research construct is recalculated to obtain the final calculation model.

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

This study was conducted on 177 site employees, most of whom were male, 135 people, while 42 were female. This shows that the workforce at PT Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, Dumai is still dominated by men, which is consistent with the general characteristics of the industrial sector, especially in operational and technical positions in the site area. In terms of age, most respondents were in the 26-30 years range; which shows that most respondents are in the productive age group, which generally has a level of job stability and readiness to face operational workloads in the field. The latest educational characteristics show that most respondents are undergraduate graduates (S1) as many as 109 people; that reflects the companies tend to recruit workers with higher educational backgrounds, especially in technical and strategic positions that require scientific competence. In terms of position or job, the respondent with the highest number is the Laboratory; which shows the function of quality control and product testing is an important part of the production process. In terms of length of service, most respondents have worked for more than 5-10 years, namely 97 people; that shows the most respondents are employees with a high level of seniority, and have had deep experience and involvement in the company's culture and work system in depth.

Based on Figure 1, it is known that the latent variables of employee engagement are Stay (X1.3) (X1.4) and Strive (X1.5) (X1.6). The 'Strive' (X1.5) is the dimension with the highest loading coefficient value, this dimension has the greatest influence on the latent variable of employee

engagement with a coefficient value of 0.816, which means that some employees have made extra efforts to ensure the achievement of company goals. Second, the dimensions that reflect the reward system variables are reflected by four dimensions, namely Basic Salary and Allowances (Z1) (Z2), Appreciation (Z4), and Career Development Opportunities (Z6). The ‘Career Development Opportunities’ (Z6) is the dimension with the highest loading factor value, so this dimension has the greatest influence on the reward system latent variable, namely 0.816. Third, the dimensions that reflect the talent retention variable are Employee Turnover Rate (Y1), Retention Rate (Y4), and Promotion Rate (Y5) (Y6). The ‘Retention Rate’ (Y4) is the dimension with the highest factor loading value, so this dimension has the greatest influence on the latent talent retention variable with a coefficient value of 0.818.

Construct reliability can be assessed from the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values of each construct (Hair *et al.* 2022). The recommended composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values are greater than 0.7; but in development research type, due to the low factor loading limit used (0.5), low composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values are still acceptable as long as the requirements for convergent validity and discriminant validity are met. In this study, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs also exceeded 0.7, indicating that the constructs have met the required reliability.

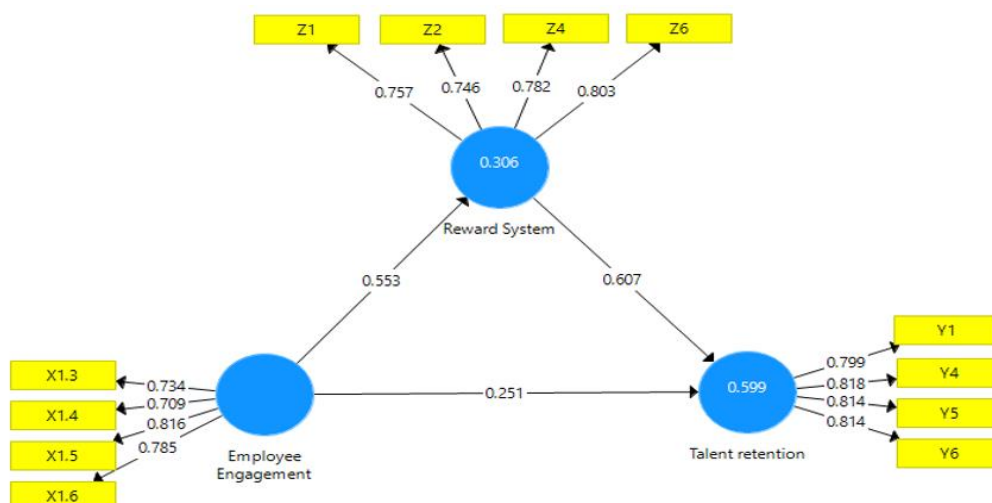


Figure 1. Final Loading Factor Calculation Model

Source: Primary data (processed), 2025.

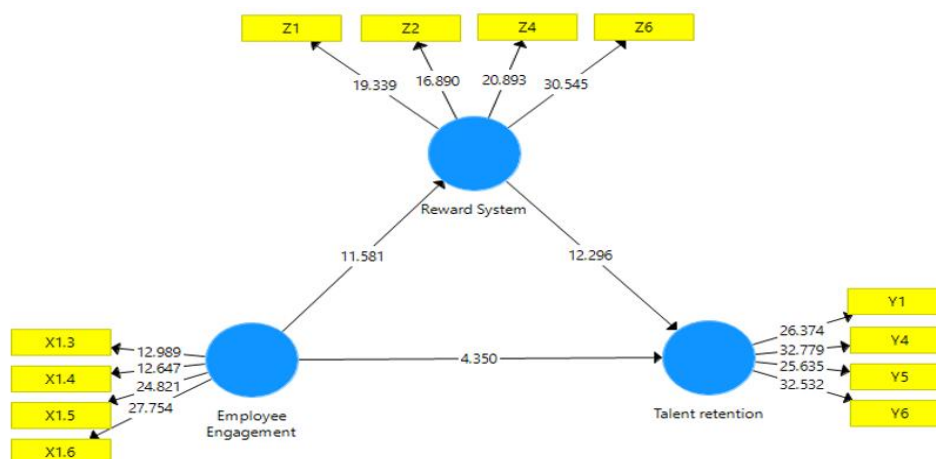


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Analysis Results

Source: Primary data (processed), 2025.

Table 1. Bootstrapping Process Results (Significance Level = 0.05)

Hypothesis	Original Sample	t-Statistik	p-values	Results
<i>Direct Relationship</i>				
Employee engagement - > talent retention	0.251	4.350	0.000	Accepted
Employee engagement - > reward system	0.553	11.581	0.000	Accepted
Reward system - > talent retention	0.607	12.296	0.000	Accepted
<i>Indirect Relationship (mediation effect)</i>				
Employee engagement * reward system - > talent retention	0.335	8.055	0.000	Accepted

Source: Primary data (processed), 2025.

After testing the outer model to determine the validity and reliability of a construct, the next step is to test the structural model (inner model) by observing the R-square value and t-statistic value of the path coefficient estimates obtained through the bootstrapping process. According to Ghazali (2021), the R-square value is used to test the structural model. This measurement is used to determine the predictive power of the structural model. An R-square value > 0.67 indicates that the PLS model is strong in predicting endogenous factors, an R-square value of $0.33 - 0.67$ indicates that the PLS model is in the moderate category, and an R-square value of $0.19 - 0.33$ indicates that the PLS model is weak in predicting endogenous factors (Hair *et al.* 2022). The analysis results show that the R-square for talent retention is 0.599 (moderate). Therefore, the R-square in this category is quite strong in talent retention, indicating that this SEM-PLS model has moderate model strength. Meanwhile, the reward system variable showed an R-squared value of 0.306 (weak), so the R-squared value was in the moderately strong category, thus indicating that this SEM-PLS model had a moderately strong model strength. The following bootstrapping analysis can be seen in Figure 2.

In PLS analysis (Table 1), after the model is proven to fit, the influence between variables can be tested. The influence test used is a direct influence test. Based on the results of the bootstrapping analysis with 177 samples, the results of the direct influence test between variables were obtained. The direct influence is the influence of the exogenous variable directly on the endogenous variable. In SEM-PLS analysis, the significance and direction of the direct influence are seen from the p-value, t-statistic, and the path coefficient connecting the endogenous and exogenous variables. If the p-value obtained is < 0.05 and the t-statistic > 1.96 , it is concluded that the exogenous variable has a significant effect on the endogenous variable, with the direction of the influence corresponding to the sign attached to the path coefficient. Furthermore, if the p-value obtained is > 0.05 and the t-statistic < 1.96 , it is concluded that the exogenous variable does not have a significant effect on the endogenous variable (Hair *et al.* 2022).

Discussion

The first finding shows that employee engagement has a positive effect on talent retention. This finding reinforces the results of a previous study by Taufan & Abdul (2019), which stated that employees' emotional and cognitive involvement in their work plays an important role in their decision to remain with the company. Albrecht *et al.* (2021) also emphasized that employee engagement is one of the key predictors of talent retention, especially when organizations provide consistent support to their employees. Theoretically, this finding aligns with the Job Demands-

Resources (JD-R) framework, which explains that employee engagement can serve as a personal resource that strengthens the relationship between employees and the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the context of the crude palm oil processing industry, which is characterized by demanding tasks and requires workforce stability, employee engagement becomes essential in retaining competent talent.

The second finding indicates that employee engagement has a positive influence on employees' perceptions of the reward system implemented by the company. This result is in line with the findings of Albrecht *et al.* (2021), who found that engaged employees tend to perceive HR policies, including compensation and reward systems, more positively. Kuvaas *et al.* (2017) also asserted that engaged employees are more appreciative of and responsive to reward systems because they feel their personal values align with the organization's culture. Therefore, it can be concluded that employee engagement impacts not only affective aspects but also employee perceptions of managerial systems such as the reward system.

The third finding shows that the reward system has a positive effect on talent retention. This supports the study by Hassan (2022), which found that an effective reward system including financial compensation, performance recognition, career development opportunities, and a supportive work environment significantly contributes to employee retention. Urbani *et al.* (2023) also found that a fair and well-structured reward system can enhance job satisfaction, which ultimately strengthens employee loyalty to the company. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), a sufficient reward system can fulfill basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and social relatedness, all of which play a role in reinforcing employees' intentions to stay in his/her current company.

The fourth finding reveals that the reward system acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between employee engagement and talent retention. In other words, high employee engagement increases positive perceptions of the reward system, which in turn enhances employees' intentions to stay with the company. This finding is consistent with the research by Wijayanto *et al.* (2022), which showed that the relationship between employee engagement and employee retention is strengthened through the mediating role of the reward system. Saks (2022) also supports this finding by explaining that the reward system serves as an important bridge in the reciprocal relationship between the organization and its employees. Within the framework of Social Exchange Theory, when companies demonstrate tangible appreciation and support for their employees, the employees tend to reciprocate with greater loyalty and long-term commitment (Devi & Reddy, 2025).

Based on the research findings, the managerial implications emphasize the importance of enhancing employee engagement, particularly in the strive dimension. This reflects employees' willingness to exert maximum effort in their roles and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. Management should foster this by building a work environment that supports empowerment, collaboration, and clear direction. In addition, career development opportunities should be positioned as a core element of the reward system. Providing structured career paths, training programs, and transparent promotion mechanisms can fulfill employees' aspirations and increase their commitment. Lastly, improving the company's retention rate as the strongest indicator of talent retention requires a strategic focus on maintaining high performing employees. This includes identifying critical talent and ensuring they feel valued, supported, and see a clear future within the company. A proactive approach to engagement and development will ultimately support long-term employee loyalty and business sustainability.

The managerial implications of this study are focused on analyzing indicators that have the highest loading factor values in the SEM-PLS analysis, namely the strive in the employee engagement variable; career development opportunities in the reward system variable; and, retention rate in the talent retention variable. This study highlights the need for organizations to prioritize employee engagement, especially in encouraging employees to strive for excellence. Managers should strengthen this through a supportive work culture and by integrating career development into the reward system. Structured career paths, relevant training, and fair promotion practices not only motivate employees but also strengthen their commitment. Moreover, retaining high-performing employees requires strategic efforts to ensure they feel valued and see long-term opportunities within the company.

CONCLUSION

The study found that both employee engagement and reward system have a significant positive effect on talent retention among site employees at PT Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, Dumai. Furthermore, reward system was proven to mediate the relationship between employee engagement and talent retention significantly. These findings confirm the acceptance of hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4. It implies that increasing employee engagement and strengthening reward systems such as recognition, fair compensation, and career development can enhance the employee intention to remain in the company. These results are especially relevant in the context of the crude palm oil processing industry, where workforce stability is crucial.

However, this study is not without limitations. The analysis relied on the SEM-PLS method with cross-sectional data, which restricts the ability to capture changes in employee behavior over time. In addition, the sample was limited to site employees from one company and may not fully represent broader organizational contexts. Future researchers are encouraged to use longitudinal designs, expand the sample to include multiple company types, and explore other possible mediators or moderators such as organizational culture or leadership style to enrich understanding of factors influencing talent retention.

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