Mapping the Literature on Conflict Management and Employee Retention

Georgiana MOICEANU[1], Mehmet KAYAKUS[2], Iustina-Cristina COSTEA-MARCU[1], Andrei Dan PANDURU[1*]

[1]National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, 313 Splaiul Independentei, Bucharest, Romania

[2]Akdeniz University, Dumlupinar Bl. Antalya, Turkey

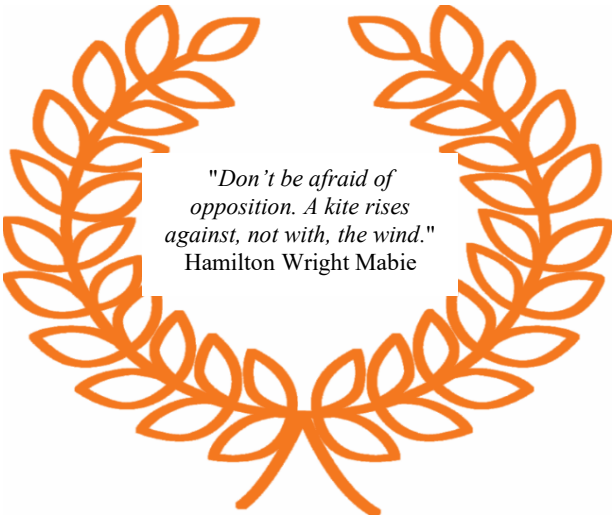
Abstract

Effective conflict management is now seen as a strategic tool for sustaining workforce stability and enhancing organisational performance. This study aims to examine the scientific literature connecting conflict management and employee retention through a bibliometric analysis of publications, using data extracted from the Web of Science Core Collection. The results show a clear upward trend in research interest, reflecting heightened organisational concern for employee well-being. Most of the documents were original articles, with limited presence of review studies, indicating a fragmented field with room for theoretical integration. The United States led the research output, while keyword network analysis revealed job satisfaction, turnover, and work-family conflict as central themes. These findings highlight the need for more cross-disciplinary and comparative studies to better understand how conflict resolution practices influence long-term employee retention.

Keywords: waste industry, digital transformations, automated recycling bin

Introduction

Over the past three decades, the challenges of employee retention and workplace conflict have drawn increasing concern from both practitioners and scholars in the field of organisational management. This growing attention is well-founded, given the profound implications these issues carry - not only for the individual employee, but also for teams, organisational culture, and the long-term health of the enterprise. Retention is no longer viewed simply as a matter of compensation or benefits; rather, it is understood as part of a wider organisational dynamic influenced by interpersonal



*Correspondence to Andrei Dan PANDURU: dan_andrei.panduru@upb.ro

relationships, leadership quality, and the often-subtle tensions that arise in day-to-day work environments.

Workplace conflict, whether visible or underlying, plays a critical role in shaping an employee's decision to remain or disengage. These conflicts may stem from differences in communication styles, mismatched expectations, cultural dissonance, or structural ambiguities in roles and responsibilities. Just as importantly, the way an organisation responds to conflict - through its policies, managerial behaviour, and informal norms - can either reinforce employee loyalty or quietly encourage exit.

What makes employee retention particularly complex is that it does not rest on a single cause. Instead, it unfolds through an evolving mix of individual, interpersonal, and systemic factors. An employee's professional history, values, perceived growth opportunities, and trust in leadership all interact with organisational pressures, team dynamics, and even external socioeconomic forces. These interactions form a web of influences that cannot be easily reduced to linear models or simplistic strategies.

Conflict management. Over the past five years, the discourse around workplace conflict has matured significantly, reflecting the evolving complexity of modern organisations. Conflict is no longer viewed as merely a disruption to be avoided, but as a dynamic process that, if managed effectively, can foster growth, innovation, and cohesion (Al-Maaitah and Mohammad, 2021). Yet, unresolved conflict remains one of the most pervasive threats to employee satisfaction and organisational stability. Recent studies underscore the direct correlation between conflict mismanagement and high turnover rates, diminished productivity, and the erosion of workplace culture (Dhillom et.al., 2025).

Current research differentiates between interpersonal conflict, often stemming from personality clashes or communication breakdowns, and task-related conflict, which can emerge from divergent perspectives on goals or procedures. While the latter can sometimes be beneficial - sparking debate and innovation - interpersonal conflict is frequently destructive and emotionally charged (Hwang and Shin, 2024). These nuances necessitate a strategic and context-aware approach to conflict management, particularly in environments where collaboration and knowledge sharing are key to performance.

Conflict management strategies have become more refined, moving beyond the traditional binary of avoidance and confrontation. A growing body of literature, including the work of Sashikant et.al. (2025), emphasises the situational application of strategies such as collaborative negotiation, mediation, and restorative dialogue. Their findings suggest that adaptability, emotional intelligence, and leader-mediated interventions significantly improve conflict outcomes and employee retention. Moreover, organisations that embed conflict resolution into leadership training and team development programs tend to see measurable improvements in trust, morale, and retention metrics (Omene, 2021).

Sector-specific considerations also play a role. Public institutions, for instance, often operate under rigid hierarchies and administrative protocols, which can suppress open communication and complicate conflict resolution efforts (Krueger et.al, 2022). In contrast, private-sector organisations - particularly in the tech and service industries - may have more agility but also face unique pressures related to competition and performance expectations.

Of particular interest is the role of remote and hybrid work environments in reshaping the conflict landscape. Virtual collaboration tools have introduced new stressors - such as communication lag, perceived exclusion, and unclear boundaries - which have been shown to heighten conflict if not proactively addressed (Choi, 2025). This has led to a surge in research on digital conflict resolution methods, including asynchronous mediation and AI-supported facilitation tools, though scholars remain cautious about their ethical and practical implications.

Ultimately, conflict cannot - and should not - be eliminated from organisational life. It is, as many

experts now argue, an inevitable feature of diverse and dynamic workplaces. What matters is how conflict is understood, approached, and resolved (Ayoko, 2016).

For management professionals and scholars alike, the implication is clear: conflict management must be treated not as a reactive measure, but as a core strategic function, embedded into the very fabric of organisational life.

Employee retention. In recent years, the academic conversation around employee retention has expanded beyond traditional models of financial compensation and career advancement to emphasise the psychosocial and organisational dynamics underpinning long-term employee engagement. Current empirical work underscores the dual influence of conflict and supportive managerial practices in shaping turnover intentions. For example, Mutadzakupa et al. (2023) demonstrated that in high-turnover service sectors like tourism, work-life integration and inclusive HR strategies significantly mitigate employees' intent to leave, especially when supported by structured employee feedback mechanisms. Similarly, Lamane-Harim, Cegarra-Leiva, and Sánchez-Vidal (2023) found that a work-life balance supportive culture not only reduces work-family conflict but also strengthens organisational commitment in SMEs—suggesting that cultural dimensions play a vital role in retention. Treuren's (2024) study offers further nuance by revealing that on-the-job "link embeddedness" (social and relational integration within the firm) buffers the adverse effects of work-family conflict on leaving intentions, especially during periods of organisational stress.

Meanwhile, research by Lee, Gan, and Chia (2023) among ICT employees in Malaysia confirms that behavioural and strain-based work-family conflict consistently predict higher turnover intentions, reinforcing the call for conflict-aware leadership models. Qadri (2024) adds a regional lens, illustrating that flexible working arrangements - such as telecommuting and adaptive scheduling - substantially boost retention among executive-level professionals in the Saudi private sector. Collectively, these findings suggest that employee retention is not simply a function of benefits or tenure policies, but of how conflict is anticipated, understood, and constructively addressed through embedded organisational practices. For management scholars and practitioners alike, the challenge lies in aligning conflict resolution strategies with retention frameworks in a way that acknowledges generational needs, workplace diversity, and the emotional ecology of modern employment.

Research Methodology

The goal of this study is to present the research evolution that tackles conflict management in correlation with employee retention. To accomplish the systematic review outlined in this study and to align with the research objectives, we adopted a mixed-methods approach grounded in the PRISMA 2020 framework for transparent and replicable reviews (Page et al., 2021). This methodology is particularly well-suited for studies that integrate both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of scholarly production. The review process unfolded in two distinct but interdependent phases. The first phase focused on the identification and selection of relevant academic publications, drawing from core databases to capture high-impact literature published. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were clearly defined to ensure the relevance and quality of the sources. The second phase involved the analysis and synthesis of the retrieved records through bibliometric techniques and content analysis. Bibliometric indicators such as publication frequency, type of documents, Web of Science index and keyword co-occurrence were used to map the intellectual structure of the field.

To address the research questions guiding this study, we conducted a structured search within the Web of Science Core Collection, which served as the primary database for retrieving relevant literature. This platform was selected due to its established reputation for indexing high-quality, peer-reviewed research and its recognised significance within the Romanian academic community. Web of Science offers comprehensive

coverage of scientific output, including journal articles, conference proceedings, and academic books—all of which are curated through a rigorous selection process, ensuring a high level of credibility and relevance.

Given that the database indexes titles, abstracts, and keywords in English, the search was carried out using English-language terms. We initiated the process by identifying appropriate keywords to capture the core themes of our investigation. Using the TOPIC field search, we entered the terms "employee retention" AND "work conflict", which yielded an initial result of 224 records.

Following this step, we applied a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the dataset and ensure the relevance and quality of the publications selected for bibliometric analysis. These criteria included:

1. The inclusion criteria:

- Use oft keyword "employee retention"
- Use of the second keyword "work conflict"
- Use of the connection word AND
- Selecting for both words "TOPIC", which according to the search means "Searches title, abstract, keyword, plus, and author keywords"
- Material production till 2024, inclusive
- Web of Science Core Collection

2. The exclusion criteria:

- The material was published in 2025 because the year is not yet complete.
- Other scientific databases.

Considering that we wanted to include as many studies as possible, we did not apply other exclusion criteria. After considering these criteria, only 198 results were provided by the Web of Science Core Collection.

For this study, detailed data were extracted for each document, including information such as document type, year of publication, author names, keywords, and citation metadata. This dataset formed the basis for the bibliometric analysis. To ensure objectivity and minimise selection bias, each author independently reviewed the records during the screening phase. In cases where discrepancies arose regarding a document's eligibility, the full text was examined collectively until consensus was reached.

Furthermore, the PRISMA 2020 checklist was applied systematically to each selected document to ensure methodological rigour and transparency in the inclusion process. The entire review process was documented using the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, which is presented in Figure 1 to illustrate the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

The next stage in the methodology involved exporting all retrieved records in plain text format, which included detailed metadata such as document type, authorship, keywords, abstracts, researcher identifiers, citation counts, and publication dates. This comprehensive dataset provided the foundation for subsequent analysis. Upon download, the dataset underwent a manual and automated verification process to identify and remove duplicate entries, thereby safeguarding the consistency and accuracy of the bibliometric evaluation.

To ensure a holistic analysis that integrates both quantitative metrics and qualitative insights, we extended our review to the journals in which the selected documents were published, with particular attention to their academic relevance and impact. The general bibliometric analysis commenced with an evaluation of annual publication trends, offering insight into the growth trajectory of research activity on employee retention and workplace conflict.

Following this, we identified the most prolific authors, assessing their institutional affiliations, total citation counts, and impact metrics across three research domains: human resource management, organisational behaviour, and conflict resolution. The analysis was then expanded to highlight the most productive institutions, along with the publishers contributing the highest volume of scholarly output.

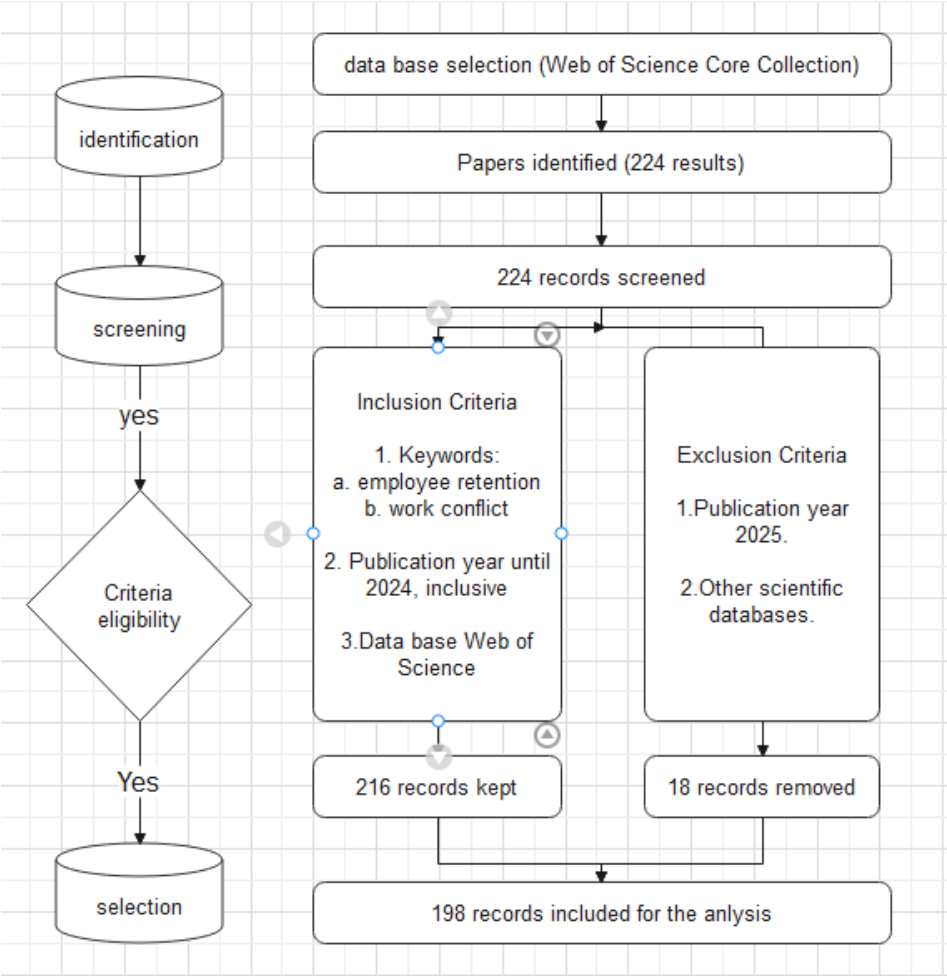


Figure 1 – *Research diagram*

In addition to institutional and author-level analysis, we examined the distribution of document types - including articles, proceedings papers, and reviews - and identified the countries contributing most significantly to the academic discourse on the topic. As a final step, a citation network analysis was conducted using authors as the unit of analysis, enabling the visualisation of scholarly influence and thematic clustering. This network mapping was facilitated by VOSviewer, which allowed us to identify key contributors, collaborative patterns, and the intellectual structure of the field.

Research Results

Regarding the findings that resulted from the research methodology, we were able to analyse the evolution of conflict management in correlation with employee retention. Thus, starting with the analysis of the topic done by scientists over the years, we can see that the research trend is ascending. Year 2020 emerged as particularly significant, with the highest number of articles (Figure 2). As can be observed, the topic gained popularity from around 2008 till 2015, when most of the articles were published. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the subject became of interest once again.

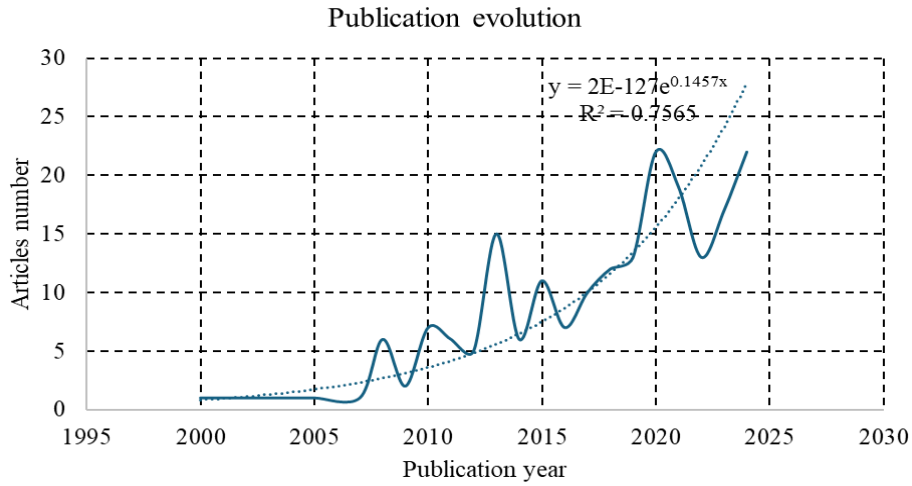


Figure 2 – *Diachronic productivity of materials published in Web of Science*

Regarding the type of document mostly published, we can see from Figure 3 that 91.92% are "article" type, while all other types represent less than 9%. The analysis of the overall topic by "review articles" is even less than 4%, which indicates the need for a correlation done on the subject selected.

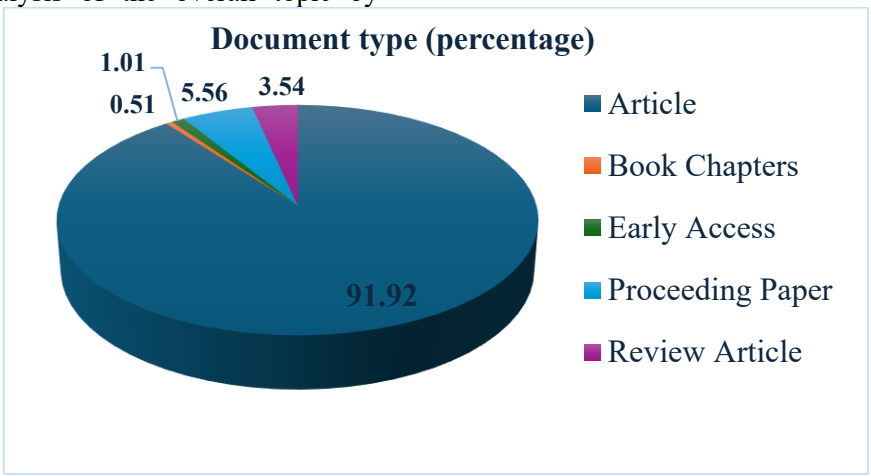


Figure 3 – *Scientific documents published type*

According to Figure 4, the Web of Science Index shows that the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) has the highest number of publications, having a percentage of more than 55%, followed by Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) with 36.87%.

Since the connection between the keywords selected for the analysis revealed a small number of articles compared to another topic, we also wanted to see which countries were more preoccupied with the topic. Thus, in Figure 5, we can see the countries with the highest number of publications are the USA with a record of 34% followed by Australia with a record of 7.5%, India with a record of 7.07% and Germany with a record of 6.5%. In correlation to the number of articles published over the years, we can say that the interest in other countries is increasing, and they are starting to study the subject, bringing new incite on the issue.

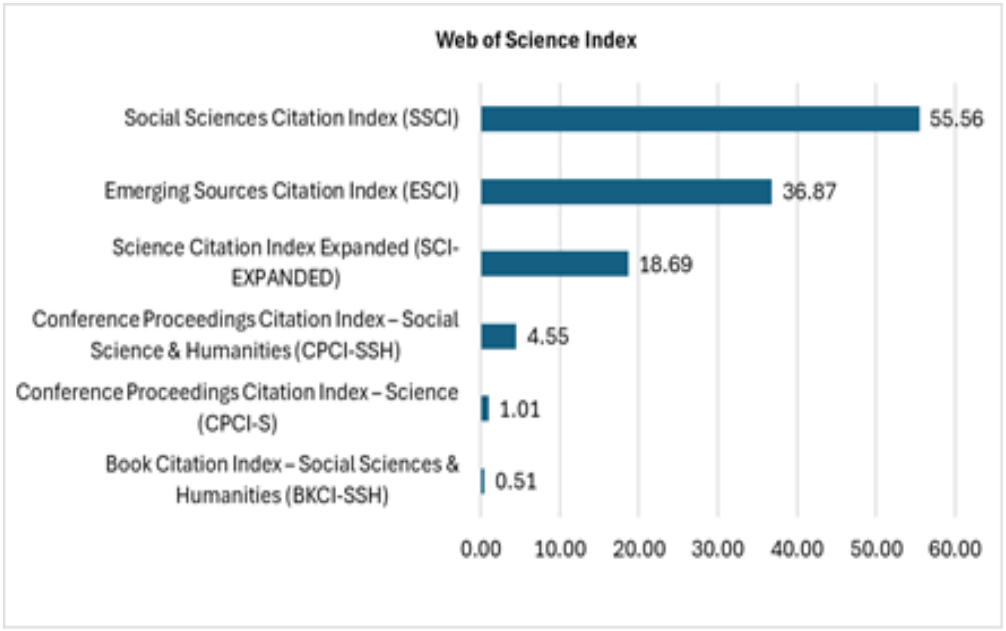


Figure 4 – *Publications distribution by WoS Indexes*



Figure 5 – *Publishing countries*

To better present the interest in the topic, we created a network that expresses the co-occurrence of all keywords used by the authors. Thus, using VOSviewer, the network was created as it can be observed in Figure 6. Out of 1157 keywords, 83 met the threshold, meaning the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword is 5. A total of 5 clusters could be identified, the largest cluster having 21 items. The links for these keywords are 1756, and the total strength is 3892.

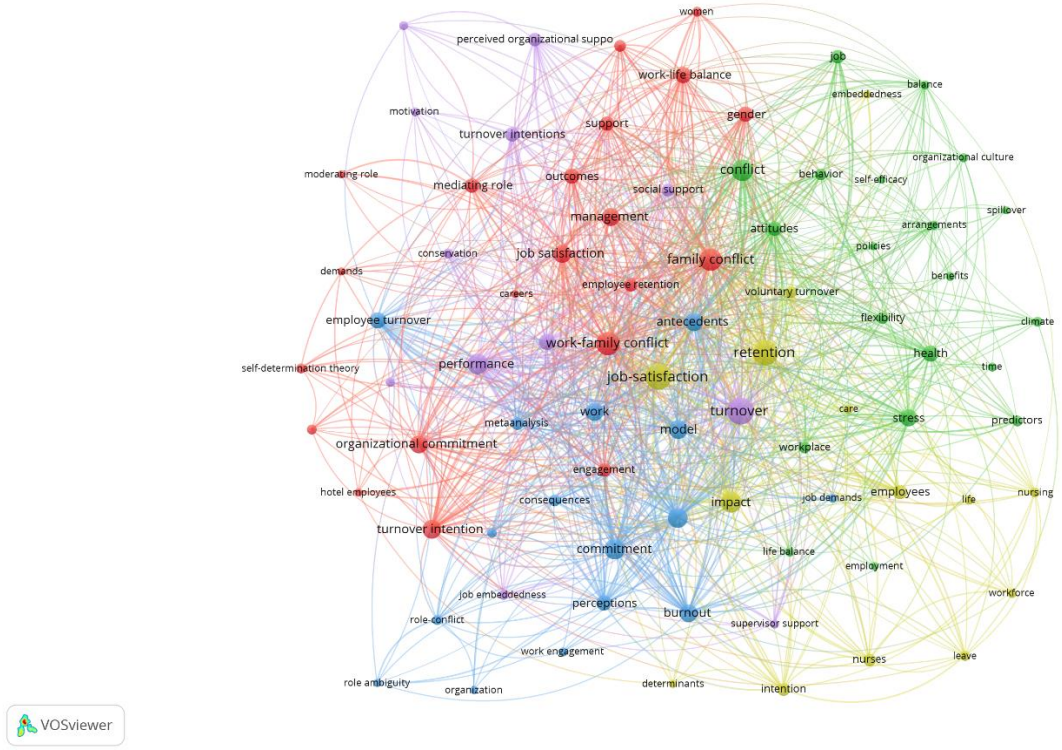


Figure 6 – *Network of all keyword co-occurrences*

In Table 1, we can see the top 10 keywords and their occurrences and total strengths. As can be observed, the word most met is turnover, but it has a lower total link strength of 319, unlike job-satisfaction, which has 333 total link strengths but has an occurrence of 49.

Table 1. *The most important Keywords from the network analysis*

Nr. crt.	Keywords	Occurences	Total link length
1	Job-satisfaction	49	333
2	Turnover	52	319
3	Retention	48	314
4	Family Conflict	38	264
5	Wok-family conflict	40	244
6	Impact	32	215
7	Conflict	35	209
8	Performance	31	208
9	Commitment	32	190
10	Satisfaction	30	190

To better present the keywords met in the analysis in Figure 7, we can see the two main clusters and the links between the keywords.

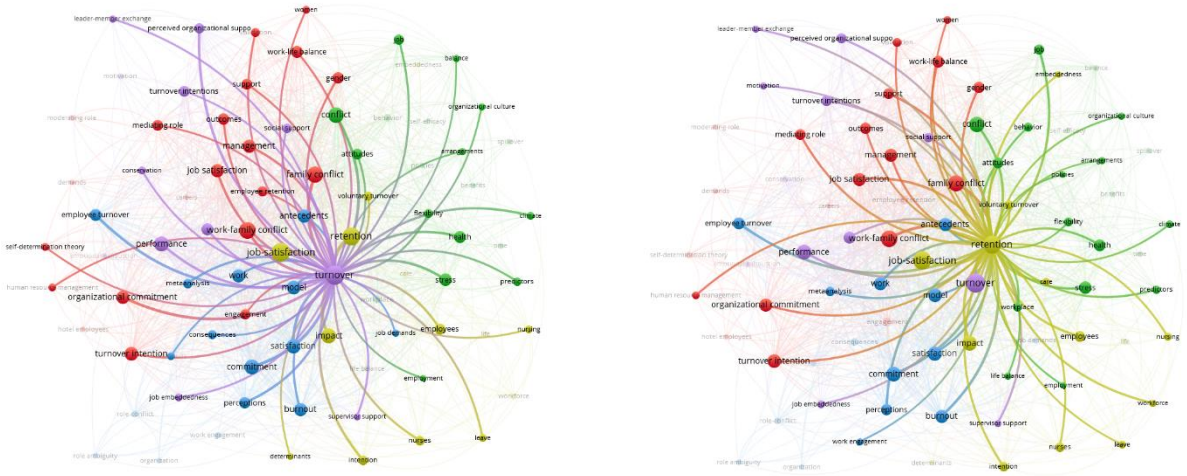


Figure 7 – *Network of the main clusters of all keyword co-occurrences*

Conclusions

This study examined the intersection of conflict management and employee retention through a bibliometric lens, using data from the Web of Science Core Collection. The analysis confirms that academic interest in the topic has grown steadily, with a noticeable peak in 2020. Earlier momentum between 2008 and 2015 laid the groundwork for this link reconsideration.

The overwhelming majority of publications were original research articles (over 91%), with review articles accounting for less than 4%, signalling a clear need for more integrative studies in this domain. The topic remains concentrated in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and the United States leads global contributions, followed by Australia, India, and Germany. Keyword mapping revealed five major thematic clusters, with job satisfaction, turnover, and retention as central concepts. Notably, job satisfaction, while less frequent than turnover, showed stronger conceptual linkages, suggesting its foundational role in retention-related research.

In sum, the field is growing but fragmented. There is room for more theoretical synthesis, cross-cultural comparison, and practical application. As scholars and practitioners, we must now move beyond isolated case studies toward frameworks that integrate conflict resolution and employee engagement into long-term organisational strategy.

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