

The Role of HR Practices in Enhancing Third-Party Workforce Effectiveness: A Study of SSHRD Group - Chennai

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates site-level human resource (HR) practices in managing third-party or contract workforce within the manufacturing sector, with specific reference to SSHRD Group's operations at the Johnson Manufacturing Unit, Oragadam, Chennai. The study is motivated by the growing reliance on contract labour in Indian manufacturing and the persistent gaps in empirical knowledge about operational-level HR functions that govern this workforce segment. Using a structured questionnaire administered to 100 respondents — comprising apprentices under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS), contract workers, and temporary workers — the study applies descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, linear regression analysis, and one-way ANOVA to test three substantive hypotheses.

Key findings reveal a strong positive relationship between grievance process accessibility and issue resolution speed ($r = 0.874, p < 0.001$), and a significant impact of fair treatment on employee retention intention ($R^2 = 0.528, \beta = 0.624, p < 0.001$). Notably, employment type (NAPS, contract, temporary) does not significantly influence intention to continue ($F = 0.484, p = 0.618$), suggesting that the quality of HR practices — rather than the contractual category of engagement — is the primary determinant of workforce stability. The study underscores the importance of transparent, equitable, and accessible HR systems as strategic levers for sustainable third-party workforce management in manufacturing environments. Practical implications for HR practitioners and policy recommendations for manufacturing organisations are discussed.

Keywords: Third-party workforce; Contract labour; Grievance handling; Employee retention; Fair treatment; Site HR; Manufacturing sector; India; Labour Codes; Organisational justice

I. INTRODUCTION

The globalisation of supply chains and the intensifying pressure on manufacturing firms to reduce operational costs while retaining workforce flexibility have fundamentally transformed the employment landscape. Across emerging economies, and particularly in India, the deployment of contract or third-party labour has become a cornerstone of workforce strategy. In sectors such as automobiles, pharmaceuticals, steel, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), contract workers frequently outnumber permanent employees, with some large assembly plants reporting contract-to-permanent ratios as high as 3:1 (Government of India, Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2023 [1]).

This tripartite employment arrangement — involving the principal employer, the contractor, and the worker — introduces significant complexity into workforce governance. Accountability for wages, working conditions, and welfare provision is diffused across multiple entities, creating structural vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect workers in contingent employment (Kalleberg, 2000 [2]). India's Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970, has long sought to address exploitative practices, but enforcement has been inconsistent. The recently enacted Four Labour Codes — consolidating 44 central labour laws — represent the most ambitious regulatory realignment in decades, yet their implementation across states remains uneven, and shop-floor realities frequently diverge from legislative intent (Srivastava et al., 2025 [3]).

Within this ecosystem, site HR personnel occupy a uniquely critical, yet empirically understudied, position. Unlike corporate HR, which operates at the level of strategy, policy design, and talent planning, site HR functions at the operational frontline: monitoring attendance, coordinating payroll with contractors, ensuring statutory compliance, managing worker grievances, and maintaining day-to-day industrial harmony. These frontline functions directly

determine whether third-party workers perceive their employment as fair, dignified, and worth sustaining. Yet despite their centrality to manufacturing operations, the empirical literature on site HR practices and their measurable outcomes for contract labour remains sparse (Negt et al., 2025 [4]).

This paper addresses that gap by examining HR practices at SSHRD Group, a professional HR services organisation managing workforce operations across multiple manufacturing clients in Chennai. The study focuses on the Johnson Manufacturing Unit, Oragadam, a mid-sized automotive components manufacturer employing approximately 300 workers, of whom roughly two-thirds are engaged through third-party arrangements. The research evaluates three specific outcomes: the efficiency of grievance redressal, the determinants of employee retention intention, and whether employment type moderates retention behaviour.

The study makes three contributions to the literature. First, it provides rare empirical data from an Indian manufacturing site HR context, where most prior studies have relied on sectoral aggregates or national surveys. Second, it applies a rigorous three-test statistical framework — Pearson correlation, regression, and ANOVA — allowing for nuanced interpretation of HR practice–outcome relationships. Third, it generates practical, actionable recommendations grounded in shop-floor realities rather than normative HR theory alone.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature; Section 3 details the research methodology; Section 4 presents and discusses results; Section 5 draws conclusions and outlines practical and policy implications; and Section 6 acknowledges limitations and suggests future research directions.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on two intersecting bodies of scholarship: the sociology of non-standard employment and the HR practices–outcomes literature. Kalleberg (2000 [2]) seminal taxonomy of non-standard employment relationships — encompassing part-time, temporary, and contract work — established that contingent workers systematically experience reduced job security, limited access to organisational benefits, and attenuated attachment to employing organisations. This framework was extended by Connelly and Gallagher (2004 [6]), who demonstrated that attitudinal outcomes among contingent workers diverge significantly based on whether their non-standard status is voluntary or involuntary. Workers who choose flexible arrangements often report higher autonomy and comparable satisfaction to permanent counterparts; those in involuntary contingent employment consistently report lower commitment and higher turnover intention.

De Cuyper et al. (2008 [7]) further elaborated on the mediating role of HR support: temporary employment per se does not necessarily produce adverse outcomes; rather, it is the interaction between contingent status and weak HR support systems that generates negative attitudinal spirals. This finding has particular relevance for the Indian manufacturing context, where the quality of site-level HR support varies dramatically across contractor relationships and principal employer oversight levels.

The Indian manufacturing context introduces regulatory and cultural layers that complicate the application of Western contingent work theory. Maroof and Murgai (2023 [8]) conducted one of the most granular examinations of HR practices for contract labour in Indian manufacturing, identifying poor engagement, inadequate monitoring, and fragmented HR systems as the primary drivers of elevated absenteeism and attrition. Their study noted that many manufacturing plants delegate virtually all HR functions for contract workers to the contractor, creating an accountability vacuum that workers experience as institutional indifference.

Srivastava et al. (2025 [9]) highlighted that the introduction of India's new Labour Codes is prompting forward-looking organisations to formalise and systematise their contract labour practices, establishing standardised onboarding, grievance, and performance management systems. Organisations that proactively invest in this systematisation appear to be gaining early-mover advantages in workforce stability and regulatory compliance. However, the authors note that implementation capability varies significantly by firm size, sector, and management sophistication.

The National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) adds a further dimension to this landscape. NAPS apprentices occupy a legally distinct employment category, neither permanent employees nor ordinary contract workers, yet they

are frequently deployed in production roles and managed alongside contract workers at the site HR level. The extent to which NAPS-specific HR practices (stipend via Direct Benefit Transfer, apprenticeship monitoring, skill certification) are effectively implemented at the plant level is an under-researched question with direct implications for workforce development policy.

The relationship between HR practices and employee outcomes has attracted extensive scholarly attention. Ouabi (2024 [10]) conducted a comprehensive review of HR practice–employee outcome associations, finding strong and consistent relationships between structured HR policies and positive behavioural outcomes including organisational citizenship behaviour, reduced absenteeism, and elevated performance. Alam (2024 [11]) specifically demonstrated that supervisory support and structured HR practices significantly elevate employee engagement and productivity, even in environments characterised by high task routinisation, a finding directly relevant to manufacturing settings.

The concept of organisational justice, formalised by Colquitt et al. (2001 [12]), provides the most robust theoretical scaffolding for understanding the fair treatment–retention nexus. Colquitt's four-dimensional model — distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice, established that employees' assessments of fairness across these dimensions are strong predictors of trust, commitment, and retention behaviour. Subsequent meta-analyses have consistently replicated these findings across cultural and sectoral contexts, including manufacturing environments in emerging economies. The present study operationalises a composite measure of fair treatment that captures elements of all four justice dimensions within the site HR context.

Despite the richness of this theoretical corpus, three specific gaps motivate the present study. First, the HR practices–outcomes literature has overwhelmingly studied permanent employees; its extension to third-party workers, who face structurally different employment conditions, remains underexplored. Second, empirical studies of site-level HR functions, as distinct from corporate HR are rare, particularly in Indian manufacturing. Third, comparative analysis of HR outcomes across NAPS, contract, and temporary employment categories within a single site has, to the best of the authors' knowledge, not previously been reported in the literature. The present study addresses all three gaps.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive, cross-sectional research design was adopted. This design was appropriate given the study's objectives: to characterise the current state of site HR practices and to test specific relational hypotheses among measurable constructs. Cross-sectional designs are standard in HR practice research where the primary aim is hypothesis testing rather than causal inference (Creswell, 2014). Primary data were collected via a structured questionnaire at the SSHRD Group–managed Johnson Manufacturing Unit, Oragadam, Chennai, during January–March 2026.

The target population comprised all third-party workers engaged at the Johnson Manufacturing Unit during the data collection period — approximately 210 individuals. A sample of 100 respondents was drawn using convenience sampling, conditioned on respondents being available during scheduled production breaks and consenting to participate. This sample size meets the minimum threshold recommended for Pearson correlation ($n > 50$) and regression ($n > 10$ per predictor variable) analyses, and it represents a 48% sampling fraction of the accessible population, which is adequate for the inferential tests employed.

The sample comprised three employment categories: apprentices under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS, $n = 34$, 34%), contract workers ($n = 34$, 34%), and temporary workers ($n = 32$, 32%). The near-equal distribution across categories was partially intentional, reflecting site HR's categorisation of workers and the proportional composition of the site workforce. Male respondents constituted 89% of the sample ($n = 89$), consistent with the gender composition of automotive component shop floors in Chennai. Detailed demographic breakdowns are presented in Table 3 in Section 4.1.

The research instrument was a four-section structured questionnaire designed and pre-tested by the research team in consultation with site HR managers. Section I collected personal and employment information (employment type, gender, experience tenure). Section II contained sixteen Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) measuring perceptions of eight HR practice dimensions: grievance process accessibility, issue resolution speed, fair treatment and trust, retention intention, attendance system accuracy, HR motivation impact, Direct Benefit Transfer

(DBT) benefit regularity, and work environment support. Section III comprised four opinion-based items assessing specific operational HR processes. Section IV included a ranking task in which respondents prioritised five HR functions in order of perceived importance.

Content validity was established through review by two subject-matter experts in Indian labour law and HR management. A pilot test with 15 workers (excluded from the main analysis) yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 for the Likert-scale section, indicating satisfactory internal reliability. The questionnaire was administered in both English and Tamil to ensure comprehension across the workforce.

A. Statistical Analysis

Three inferential tests were conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, each corresponding to a substantive hypothesis:

- Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (H1): To quantify the linear association between grievance process accessibility and issue resolution speed. The assumption of bivariate normality was verified using the Shapiro–Wilk test prior to analysis.
- Simple Linear Regression (H2): To examine the predictive impact of fair treatment on retention intention, estimating the proportion of variance explained (R^2) and the standardised regression coefficient (β).
- One-Way ANOVA (H3): To test whether mean retention intention scores differed significantly across the three employment categories (NAPS, contract, temporary). Levene's test was used to verify homogeneity of variance, and effect size was reported using eta-squared (η^2).

All analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics v26. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) were computed for all scale items and demographic variables.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Sample Profile

Variable	Category	n (%)	Contextual Note
Employment Type	NAPS Apprentices	34	Regulated under Apprentices Act; stipend paid via DBT
	Contract Workers	34	Engaged through registered labour contractors
	Temporary Workers	32	Short-term direct engagements, demand-driven
Gender	Male	89	Reflects typical shop-floor gender composition
	Female	11	Primarily in quality-check and packaging
Experience	< 1 year	41	Recent joiners, highest vulnerability
	1–3 years	39	Mid-tenure; growing expectation of regularisation

	> 3 years	20	Long-service contract workers; core retention concern
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Table 1. Demographic and Employment Profile of Respondents (n = 100)

As shown in Table 1, the sample is broadly representative of the site workforce. The predominance of male respondents (89%) reflects the gender composition typical of automotive shop-floor environments in the Chennai–Oragadam industrial corridor. The high proportion of respondents with less than three years of experience (80%) is characteristic of contract labour markets in this sector, where turnover is high and long-service contract workers — those with more than three years at the same site — constitute a small but strategically important segment.

B. Descriptive Findings: HR Practice Perceptions

HR Practice Dimension	Agree / Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree / Strongly Disagree (%)
Grievance Process Accessibility	75	10	15
Issue Resolution Speed	75	10	15
Fair Treatment & Trust	44	38	18
Retention Intention	80	18	2
Attendance System Accuracy	31	44	25
HR Motivation Impact	44	38	18
DBT Benefit Regularity	37	35	28
Work Environment Support	37	42	21

Table 2: Summary of HR Practice Perceptions (n = 100)

Table 2 reveals significant heterogeneity in worker perceptions across HR practice dimensions. Grievance process accessibility and issue resolution speed recorded the highest positive ratings (75% agree/strongly agree each), suggesting that the site HR team has established relatively well-functioning grievance infrastructure. Retention intention was the most positively rated construct (80% agree), which is noteworthy given the non-permanent nature of employment, a finding that anticipates the regression results in H2.

In contrast, attendance system accuracy (31% agree), work environment support (37%), and DBT benefit regularity (37%) attracted substantially lower positive ratings, each with sizable neutral or negative response bands. These three dimensions represent the most actionable areas for HR improvement. The high neutral response rate for attendance system accuracy (44%) is particularly concerning, as it may reflect genuine ambiguity about how attendance is recorded and how errors are corrected — a structural opacity that can erode worker trust over time.

DBT timeliness emerged as the most problematic operational dimension: 47% of respondents reported that Direct Benefit Transfer payments (primarily stipend disbursement for NAPS apprentices) are 'rarely' timely. Given that DBT delays directly affect the financial security of the lowest-earning workforce segment, this finding carries significant practical urgency. Regarding grievance resolution speed, 39% of respondents reported that issues take more than a week to resolve, suggesting that while the channel is accessible, escalation and closure mechanisms require strengthening.

Ranking data (Section IV of the questionnaire) placed attendance management (rank 1) and NAPS administration (rank 2) as the highest-priority HR functions perceived by workers, while HR communication ranked last. This ranking has important implications: workers' primary HR concerns are transactional and rights-based (getting attendance right, getting stipend on time) rather than developmental, and HR communication efforts — however well-intentioned — are not yet resonating with the workforce.

C. Hypothesis Testing

H1: Grievance Process Accessibility and Issue Resolution Speed

Pearson correlation analysis yielded $r = 0.874$ ($p < 0.001$), indicating a very strong positive linear relationship between grievance process accessibility and the speed of issue resolution. The null hypothesis (no association) is rejected. The strength of this correlation — placing it firmly in the 'very strong' range by conventional benchmarks ($r \geq 0.80$) — warrants careful interpretation. It suggests that the two dimensions are not merely correlated but may be functionally interdependent: sites where workers find it easy to raise grievances tend to be those where the HR team has invested in structured tracking and resolution protocols, producing faster closure times as a systemic outcome.

This finding aligns closely with Maroof and Murgai (2023 [8]), who identified fragmented and inaccessible grievance systems as a primary structural driver of third-party workforce instability in Indian manufacturing. It also supports the prescriptions of Srivastava et al. (2025 [9]) for systematising grievance management as part of Labour Code compliance frameworks. The practical implication is clear: investments in grievance channel accessibility — whether through digital platforms, dedicated HR helplines, or regular worker-facing HR sessions — produce compounding returns by simultaneously improving resolution speed and workforce confidence in the system.

H2: Fair Treatment and Employee Retention Intention

Simple linear regression yielded a strong, statistically significant result: $R = 0.726$, $R^2 = 0.528$, $F(1, 98) = 109.74$, $p < 0.001$. The standardised regression coefficient was $\beta = 0.624$ ($p < 0.001$). The regression equation is: Retention Intention = $1.693 + 0.624 \times (\text{Fair Treatment})$. Fair treatment explains 52.8% of the variance in employee retention intention — a remarkably high proportion for a single-predictor model in an organisational behaviour context, where effect sizes of $R^2 = 0.10$ to 0.20 are typical.

This result carries profound theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it provides strong support for Colquitt et al.'s (2001 [12]) organisational justice framework in the specific context of third-party manufacturing employment — a context where justice concerns might be expected to be attenuated by the temporary nature of the employment relationship. The finding that fairness explains over half the variance in retention intention confirms that contingent workers are not indifferent to organisational justice; on the contrary, they may be more sensitive to perceived fairness precisely because their employment security is lower and their institutional recourse more limited.

Practically, this result reframes the economics of fair HR treatment. Organisations that invest in equitable HR practices — consistent wage payment, transparent performance feedback, respectful supervisory conduct, non-discriminatory treatment — are not merely meeting ethical obligations; they are generating measurable reductions in turnover intention, with direct cost implications for contractor replacement, onboarding and productivity ramp-up cycles.

H3: Employment Type and Retention Intention

One-way ANOVA found no statistically significant difference in retention intention across the three employment categories: NAPS ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.71$), temporary workers ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.68$), and contract workers ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.79$) ($F(2, 97) = 0.484$, $p = 0.618$). The effect size was negligible ($\eta^2 = 0.010$). Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variance ($p = 0.812$). The null hypothesis is accepted.

This finding is perhaps the most strategically consequential of the three. It establishes that employees across all three employment categories hold statistically comparable intentions to remain with the organisation — despite holding meaningfully different contractual statuses, compensation structures, and statutory entitlements. The absence of significant between-group differences, combined with the strong predictive power of fair treatment (H2), leads to a clear inferential conclusion: the employment contract per se does not drive retention intention; the quality of HR practices does.

This has direct implications for HR strategy design in manufacturing firms. Segmenting HR interventions by employment type — investing more in permanent employees and treating contract workers as administratively managed — is not only ethically problematic under the new Labour Code framework but also strategically inefficient. Uniform, inclusive HR practices appear capable of generating comparable retention intention across all workforce segments.

Hypothesis	Test	Statistic	p-value	Decision
H1: Grievance Accessibility → Resolution Speed	Pearson r	$r = 0.874$	< 0.001	Rejected H_0
H2: Fair Treatment → Retention Intention	Regression	$R^2 = 0.528$	< 0.001	Rejected H_0
H3: Employment Type → Retention Intention	One-Way ANOVA	$F = 0.484$	0.618	Accepted H_0

Table 3: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provides converging empirical evidence that site HR practices are decisive determinants of third-party workforce outcomes in manufacturing settings. Three principal conclusions emerge. First, grievance system accessibility directly and strongly accelerates issue resolution ($r = 0.874$), confirming that structural investments in grievance infrastructure produce measurable operational improvements. Second, fair treatment is the single strongest predictor of retention intention, explaining 52.8% of its variance — a result that positions HR fairness not as a compliance obligation but as a core strategic retention lever. Third, employment type does not significantly differentiate retention intention, suggesting that inclusive HR practices can effectively and efficiently serve the entire third-party workforce without segmented investment strategies.

Based on the empirical findings, four prioritised recommendations are offered for HR practitioners managing third-party workforces in manufacturing settings:

- Implement real-time grievance tracking systems with defined resolution SLAs. Given that 39% of workers report grievance resolution times exceeding one week, organisations should deploy digital grievance platforms (mobile-accessible, vernacular-language capable) with automated escalation protocols and mandatory closure timelines. SLA compliance should be a KPI for site HR teams.
- Prioritise DBT disbursement compliance. The finding that 47% of respondents experience delayed DBT payments represents a critical failure in the HR–worker trust compact, particularly for NAPS apprentices whose entire stipend depends on this mechanism. Site HR teams should establish direct coordination protocols with accounting and contractor liaisons to ensure zero-delay DBT processing.
- Invest in HR communication and transparency. The 44% neutral/negative rating for HR communication and the last-place ranking of HR communication in the priority survey signal a significant trust gap. Monthly structured HR townhalls, multilingual communication boards, and individual onboarding briefings can address this gap systematically.
- Embed fair treatment as a strategic HR objective. Given its outsized predictive impact on retention ($R^2 = 0.528$), fair treatment should be operationalised through concrete HR process standards: consistent wage payment timelines, transparent attendance error-correction protocols, structured and non-discriminatory feedback mechanisms, and supervisor training in procedural and interpersonal justice.

At the policy level, the findings support the Labour Code provisions requiring principal employers to assume joint responsibility for contract worker welfare. The empirical evidence presented here demonstrates that when principal employers — through their site HR partners — invest in accessible grievance mechanisms and equitable treatment, measurable workforce stability outcomes follow. Regulatory frameworks should therefore incentivise and audit these investments, rather than relying solely on contractual compliance documentation.

Furthermore, the NAPS framework's reliance on DBT as the exclusive stipend channel creates a structural vulnerability: any delay in the DBT ecosystem immediately and visibly impacts apprentice welfare, eroding confidence in the scheme

among both workers and industry participants. A supplementary direct-payment mechanism, or a mandatory DBT SLA enforced by the Ministry of Skill Development, could mitigate this risk.

A. Limitations and future research

This study is subject to four principal limitations that should be acknowledged in interpreting its findings. First, the convenience sample from a single manufacturing unit constrains the external validity and generalisability of the results. The Johnson Manufacturing Unit serves as a theoretically relevant but singular case; whether the patterns observed here hold across different sectors, geographies, or organisational sizes is an open empirical question. Future studies should deploy multi-site, multi-sector designs to test the robustness of the HR practices–outcomes relationships identified here.

Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. The regression result (H2) establishes a strong predictive association between fair treatment and retention intention but cannot establish directionality or rule out confounding variables. Longitudinal designs that track retention behaviour over 12–24 months, rather than measuring intention at a single point, would substantially strengthen the causal claims.

Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which is subject to social desirability bias — particularly in a context where workers may perceive the questionnaire as linked to their employer or contractor. Future studies should triangulate self-report data with objective HR outcome measures (actual turnover rates, grievance closure logs, attendance records) to enhance construct validity.

Fourth, the single-predictor regression model for H2, while statistically justified by parsimony and theoretical grounding, necessarily leaves 47.2% of retention intention variance unexplained. Future research should develop more comprehensive models incorporating supervisory quality, career development opportunity, peer relationships, and off-site HR support as additional predictors.

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