

EFFECT OF INDIVIDUAL CULTURAL ATTRIBUTES ON IT PROFESSIONALS' TURNOVER INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

Employee turnover is one of the major concerns of managers in today's organizations. Work exhaustion and burnout have been named among the causes that explain intention to quit and turnover. IT organizations are facing high levels of work exhaustion and burnout and consequently turnover is one of the problems that can be derived from this situation. Extant literature proposes a set of studies that focus on the determinants of turnover and on turnover intention among IT professionals. Despite this recent works there are incomplete conclusions on turnover antecedents among IT professionals.

This research-in progress work wants to shed some light on the mediating variables that can explain turnover intention among IT professionals. Since different variables have been introduced on the study of turnover, cross-cultural research on turnover intention among IT professionals is scarce and inconclusive. This work introduces individual cultural attributes as mediating variables on previous IT professionals' turnover intention models. The main goal of this research study will be to report on the causal effects of cultural attributes on IT professionals' turnover intention.

The authors are ready to design the questionnaire and they expect to be able to present the outcomes of the qualitative validation phase and to discuss the preliminary results in the conference.

KEYWORDS

Turnover intention, IT workforce, individual cultural attributes, organizational commitment

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee turnover has been named as one of the significant challenges to organizations. Turnover effects have been associated with difficulties that firms must face. Some of these difficulties have been compiled in Moore (2000), Joseph et al (2007) and Zimmerman (2008) and include decreased customer satisfaction and productivity, wasting of investment in professionals' recruitment and training if workers leave, and some more causes.

Turnover intention for IT workforce is even worst. IT professionals experience a contradictory situation. On the one hand, they are under the pressure of spending cuts and changes in IT implementation (Rutner et al, 2008), and, on the other hand, firms ask for higher levels skills and competences. As a consequence, IT professionals are more exposed to work exhaustion and burnout (Moore, 2000) and to increased turnover. This situation leads firms to explore management strategies to retain IT professionals and to avoid losing IT talent.

The main goal of this work-in-progress is to gain some insight into the causes of turnover for IT professionals. This work focuses on the mediating effect of individual cultural values on turnover intention for IT professionals. Accordingly, this study proposes to extend Moore's (2000) model with a new construct based on the individual cultural influences on organizational commitment. The authors expect to complement Rutner et al's (2008) work by enhancing previous research work with new variables that allow a deeper knowledge of causal relationship for turnover intention.

This research study is based on a quantitative approach to analyze a Structural Equation Model (SEM). A questionnaire is going to be designed and a survey is going to be delivered to a set of IT service professionals. It is expected that the survey is going to be delivered by e-mail to employees of different nationalities (European and South American countries) of an international IT (telecommunication service

provider) company in job positions of intensive contact with customers, related with telecommunication service delivery, maintenance and project management. The authors expect to receive between 100 and 150 valid responses for use in the planned research.

This paper begins by presenting a description of the previous research to justify the research model. Next, the theoretical model and the intended results are described. Due to the preliminary stage of this research-in-progress work, results cannot be included in this document. Finally, preliminary conclusions are drawn.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, Rutner et al (2008) proposed to improve a previous model on Information Technology (IT) professional turnover intention (Moore, 2000) with the effect of emotional dissonance. Turnover intention is one of the major concerns of IT executives and it makes sense to provide different perspectives that can help in analyzing its effect in organizations. Zimmerman (2008) argues that turnover research has been mainly based on environmental causes and proposes to emphasize the research on the effect of personality traits and other individual's characteristics on the individual's turnover intention and behavior.

Following this line of reasoning, the authors propose to introduce individual's cultural attributes in employees' turnover models. The scope of research is based on IT professionals' turnover intention and individual cultural attributes are taken from the work by Hofstede (2001) and Dorfman and Howell (1988). In this section the authors outline the most relevant models used to study IT professionals' turnover intention and the research literature that can be used for assessing individual cultural attributes.

2.1 Employees' Turnover Intention and Information Technology Professionals

2.1.1 Employees' Turnover Intention

Initial turnover models had a special emphasis on the environmental effects on the employees' behavior. Zimmerman (2008) proposes to change this focus and advocates for a model where personality attributes drive the research on turnover intention and behavior. His main effort is based on trying to estimate the correlation between personality traits and turnover. Secondly, he tests a model of turnover that includes individuals' personality traits as factors of turnover. Zimmerman (2008) reports that "there has been no published research based on meta-analytic estimates that tests an overall model of turnover that includes dispositions, job satisfaction, intention to quit, and turnover behaviors". Zimmerman's (2008) conclusions state that personality traits have direct effect on intentions to quit and turnover. These results provide support for the hypothesis that personality plays a role in turnover intention and behavior.

Finally, turnover intention has been soundly predicted by organizational commitment in Western and Eastern cultures (Chen and Francesco, 2000). They reported some differences between the results found in a Chinese sample and those found in a sample from the US. They attribute the reasons for the differences to the underlying dynamic in the Chinese culture.

2.1.2 IT Professionals' Turnover Intention

The concepts of work exhaustion (or job burnout) and turnover intention were examined in the context of IT professionals (Moore, 2000). Work exhaustion was shown as a significant predictor for turnover intention. The results of the study also revealed that 1) IT professionals experiencing higher levels of exhaustion reported higher intentions to leave the job and 2) work overload and fairness of rewards were strong contributors to exhaustion and turnover intention.

Emotional dissonance (Rutner et al, 2008) - the conflict between norms of emotional display and an employee's felt emotion - complements the base Moore's model of turnover intention (Moore, 2000). This turnover intention model adds three new variables: job satisfaction, negative emotional dissonance and positive emotional dissonance. The results of this study revealed that emotional dissonance predicts work exhaustion and job satisfaction.

Another common option for IT professionals is to quit their current jobs and create new entrepreneurial companies (Mourmant et al, 2009). Mourmant et al's model proposes two new constructs: readiness to quit (RTQ) and necessary configuration to quit (NCQ). These constructs along with Image Theory are used to

propose a model to understand the factors and processes that influence turnover behaviour for prospective (nascent) IT entrepreneurs.

A contextual model of IT turnover has been recently proposed by Joseph et al (2007). They propose to analyze IT turnover intention taking into account three different levels on the turnover effects: environmental, firm and individual.

Voluntary turnover decisions of IT professionals within the context of Singapore and New Zealand were studied (Hunter et al, 2008). This research employed a narrative inquiry approach to interview IT professionals. The results indicate that on one hand there exist universal turnover factors which are culturally independent. On the other hand, there are factors that are culturally sensitive, as power distance and individualism, in the case of these two countries.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Research and Organizational Commitment

2.2.1 Individual Cultural Values

Tsui et al (2007) in a comprehensive compilation of cross-cultural research on management, claimed for the importance of cross-cultural research for managers and management researchers. In our global environment, researchers and practitioners recognize that multicultural issues condition most of the research work they are involved in.

One of the sounder theoretical framework for cross-cultural research has been provided by Hofstede (Hofstede, 2001). His framework has been used to give support to cultural world-countries differences for the last two decades. Five dimensions define Hofstede's cultural model (Hofstede, 2001): *Power Distance, Individualism vs. collectivism, Masculinity vs. femininity, Uncertainty avoidance, and Long vs. short term orientation.*

Specifically, Hofstede's framework is one of the most used in cross-cultural research in the IT field and has been provoking a strong interest within the IT community (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006). Moreover, most of the studies in the IT field have been based on cross-cultural analysis at a national level. In this research in progress work the authors focus on the individual cultural values and their goal is to shed some light on the effects of individual cultural values on turnover intention.

Individual cultural values were initially explored by Dorfman and Howell (1988) and they provided evidence and validity on their use in management research. Recently, individual cultural values have been used in the IT field (Hwang, 2004; Ali and Brooks, 2009) to analyze IT adoption problems. The authors expect to be able to use the results of an incoming research work (Trabado and Miralles, 2010) to assure the reliability of individual cultural values measures.

2.2.2 Organizational Commitment

As a result of cultural differences in organizational commitment and other culturally mediated personality traits (Abrams et al, 1998; Zimmerman, 2008), this study finds support to investigate the role that individual's cultural attributes play in predicting turnover intention.

In order to introduce individual cultural attributes in the research model and following Hwang (2004), the authors propose the *Organizational Commitment Cultural Orientation* construct (OCCO). In this research-in-progress work, the authors follow Fischer and Mansell's (2009) results and defined OCCO by low *Individualism*, high *Power Distance*, high *Uncertainty Avoidance*, high *Long Term Orientation*, and low *Masculinity*. Based on previous research, it is expected a negative relationship between OCCO and turnover intention (Abrams et al, 1998).

Based on this paper literature review, this research aims to analyze the following research question: Do individual cultural values affect IT professionals' turnover intention?

3. THEORETICAL MODEL AND INTENDED RESULTS

The theoretical model for this research work is based on a structural equation model (SEM) that has been built on previous studies on turnover intention (Moore, 2000; Rutner et al, 2008). This work intention is to

extend those previous models to include individual cultural values as mediating variables. Due to space restrictions, the model is not depicted in the text.

Moore's (2000) model proposed that IT professional turnover intention was the dependent variable. In the analysis, she found support for *Work Exhaustion* to be a significant predictor of *Turnover Intention*. Following the results of Moore (2000) and Rutner et al (2008), *Perceived Workload* and *Fairness of Rewards* were also found to be significant predictors of *Turnover Intention*. The rest of the independent variables, *Perceived Workload*, *Role Ambiguity*, *Role Conflict*, *Autonomy*, and *Fairness of Reward*, were proposed to be predictors of *Work Exhaustion*. (Moore, 2000 and Rutner et al, 2008). This research study model is going to be based on the above causal relationships with a new additional construct that will account for the effect of the individual cultural attributes.

Individual cultural attributes are introduced through the OCCO construct. Hofstede cultural attributes (Hofstede, 2001) are going to be used at the individual level (Dorfman and Howell, 1988) to capture individual cultural behavior effects on the model. All Hofstede's (2001) indicators are going to be included *Individualism*, *Power Distance*, *Uncertainty Avoidance*, *Long Term Orientation*, and *Masculinity*.

The authors plan to produce a questionnaire to analyze the model and to drive a research based on a qualitative validation of the model and the questionnaire in an international IT company. The authors expect to propose hypotheses which show the influence between the cultural attributes and the variables of the models above mentioned. E.g., individualism is supposed to influence autonomy whereas uncertainty avoidance is supposed to influence role ambiguity. In a second phase, a quantitative survey will be issued on the same international IT company among professionals of different nationalities and job positions with an intense contact with customers. The authors expect to receive between 100 and 150 valid responses in order to find evidences to confirm the different hypotheses proposed.

4. CONCLUSION

Burnout and work exhaustion are among the most important problems that affect service employees when they interface between the organization and the customer. This work focuses on service employees that perform IT support activities in other organizations. These IT professionals experience high demanding working environment because firms expect not only technical skills but also problem solving and customer service expertise. This highly demanding working environment can lead to high turnover intention. The main aim of this work-in-progress is to study the relationship between individual cultural attributes and IT professional's turnover intention. Although turnover intention has been studied from different perspectives the evidence on the effect of cultural values on IT professionals' turnover intention needs to be explored from new perspectives.

The authors propose a theoretical model based on SEM to analyze the effects of individual cultural attributes on IT professionals' turnover intention. What the authors expect to get is the prediction for the different hypotheses that can be obtained from the research model. The following steps will be based on performing a qualitative validation of the research hypotheses in order to prepare the questionnaire of this research-in-progress work.

Because of the preliminary situation of this work, the authors aim to be able to discuss de model with the conference audience. The authors expect to be able to present and in-depth description of the research model and the preliminary results of the qualitative validation in the conference.

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