

Chapter 20

Managing IT Employee Attitudes that Lead to Turnover: Integrating a Person–Job Fit Perspective

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ABSTRACT

IT staff turnover and low retention rates are costly and contribute to organizational inefficiency. The authors extend the existing literature by investigating whether differences in individual preferences for various job characteristics as well as the ability of organizations to meet employee expectations (person–job fit) affect contentment levels and, consequently, attrition rates. Specifically, they investigate the question, “Does a person–job fit perspective provide more explanatory power with regard to antecedents to turnover among IT professionals than either person or job characteristics alone?” for systems developers. Survey results indicate that a person–job fit perspective does provide more explanatory power for certain job attributes, but not for others. In particular, the relationships between system developers’ preferred and actual job levels of social support as well as of job challenge are better indicators of attitudes than actual levels of either attribute alone. However, actual job challenge and actual job stress (as perceived by workers) are, individually, better predictors of employee self-esteem, burnout, and alienation than their respective degrees of fit with employee preferences.

INTRODUCTION

Employee turnover and retention has been studied as a critical factor in efficiently managing information technology (IT) personnel and in organizational survival (Jiang & Klein, 2002; Thatcher, Stepina, &

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Boyle, 2003). The loss of key players and their associated intellectual capital from turnover can negatively impact organizational restructuring efforts during turbulent times and growth efforts during boom times (McCoy, Dixon, Sinur, & Cantara, November 2010). The IT industry has experienced both a significant shortage of qualified candidates (Thibodeau, 2012; TechAmerica, 2009) and a relatively high turnover rate among employees (Jiang & Klein, 2002); exacerbated by high career abandonment levels in the IT profession (Colomo-Palacios R., Casado-Lumbreras, Misra, & Soto-Acosta, 2014).

“Inadequate technical skills” are a primary barrier to achieving strategic goals and objectives (Morello, 2009; Morello, 2011). The rapid cycle of technological IT competencies and the current global economic climate require continuous training and retention strategies (Chen, Hwang, & Raghu, 2010; Mithas, Ramasubbu, & Sambamurthy, 2011; Laumer, Maier, Eckhardt, & Weitzel, 2011). The total benchmark cost (e.g., advertising and recruiting outlays) of losing an IT employee is estimated to be nearly 150% of annual salary (Watkin, 1990); it is unlikely that these costs have diminished. Thus, losing several high-level IT professionals in one year may cost an organization more than \$1 million. Such high costs, in combination with frequent turnover makes employee retention a central concern for managers (Jiang & Klein, 2002). The ability to effectively retain talented IT employees more efficiently than other firms could be a sustainable competitive advantage.

Existing research on IT professionals has focused on which rewards and job characteristics predict positive attitudes, turnover intentions, and other antecedents to turnover (Moore, 2000a; Moore, 2000b). Typical job satisfaction conceptualizations and predictive models of turnover focus on job-level and organizational factors failing to recognize individual differences (Jiang & Klein, 2002).

Since person-job fit (p-j fit), by definition, involves the employee’s efforts to align personal competencies with those necessary for the job, p-j fit is a primary source for human capital in the firm. Research has been devoted to understanding the fit between “wants” (preferences for various job characteristics) and “haves” (perceptions of what exists in the organizational environment) respecting career orientation variables for IT professionals (Jiang and Klein, 2002), or gaps across skills and competencies (Colomo-Palacios, Casado-Lumbreras, Soto-Acosta, García-Peñalvo, & Tovar-Caro, 2013); however, has not specifically investigated the value of the fit perspective at the job level. Although person-job interaction has been the subject of previous research in industrial and organizational psychology (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson, 2005), the approach is not widely used in research on IT professionals (Ayyagari, Grover, & Purvis, 2011). Indeed, research has not tested the value of a person-job (P-J) fit approach (Chatman, 1991) versus independently considering either person or job characteristics in predicting key attitudinal turnover indicators for IT workers. If validated, the P-J fit approach would suggest that managers should measure employee preferences and then to retain employees, actively attempt to match job characteristics to these preferences. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether a P-J fit perspective is a value-added contribution relative to analyses that only consider perceived job characteristics. Therefore, this study addresses the research question:

RQ: Does a person-job fit perspective provide more explanatory power with regard to antecedents to turnover among IT professionals than either person or job characteristics alone?

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