

# Chapter 1

## Voluntary Turnover of Information Systems Professionals: A Cross-Cultural Investigation

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This investigation examines the motivating factors associated with voluntary turnover decisions of information systems (IS) professionals within the context of two different cultures—Singapore and New Zealand. The narrative inquiry approach was employed to interview 35 IS professionals. Ninety-seven turnover episodes were identified, including 42 in Singapore and 55 in New Zealand. The findings indicate that there exist universal turnover factors which are culturally independent. However, there are also factors that are culturally sensitive, which should be considered by managers when dealing with an international workforce.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The expansion of the global information economy and the consequent integration of information

systems (IS) into core business functions have created issues regarding recruiting, retaining, and managing IS professionals (Segars & Hendrickson, 2000; Standbridge & Autrey, 2001). This

situation is further exacerbated by companies attempting to identify and acquire the appropriate skills mix (Shah, Sterrett, & Wilmore, 2001). Also, the turnover rate for IS professionals exceeds that of other professionals, with estimates varying from 25% to 35% (Gionfriddo & Dhingra, 2000; Jiang & Klein, 2002). Voluntary turnover decisions can result in incurring significant expenses on the part of the company to find and replace necessary personnel.

Previous research into voluntary turnover decisions of IS professionals has focused upon a single culture (Madan, 2004; Theron, 2004). As business is increasingly conducted on an international basis, it seems appropriate to investigate the influence of national culture on the voluntary turnover decisions. The purpose of this investigation is to assess the impact that culture has on aspects of voluntary turnover of IS professionals. The turnover issues will be addressed from a cultural perspective. Thus, data are analyzed within the framework of Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions, which, while others exist (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; House, Hanges, Mansour, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998) seemed the most appropriate for this research project.

The study reported here represents a contribution to knowledge as well as reporting on an innovative way of employing an accepted research approach and interview technique. The investigation of factors affecting job change, especially related to IS professionals, is relatively underresearched. The studies that are available relate to identifying either individual aspects, such as perspective (Crepeau, Crook, Goslar, & McMurtrey, 1992); attitude (Igbaria, Parasuraman, & Badawy, 1994); and personality (Wynekoop & Walz, 1998) or organizational factors such as environment (King & Sethi, 1998); organizational response (Benamati & Lederer, 2001); and skill sets (Feeney and Willcocks, 1998; Lee, Trauth, & Farwell, 1995). This study provides a better understanding of career-path impacts by combin-

ing individual and organizational factors through grounding the data in the interpretations of IS professionals and how they interact with their environment. Also, the studies listed previously used either special purpose or generic surveys as a research method. The research reported here employed narrative inquiry in an innovative way by conducting interviews (McCracken, 1998) based upon a research participant's résumé. This qualitative approach allows for an in-depth investigation of the subject and the gathering of rich biographical personal accounts of research participants' interpretations of specific career-path impacts.

This article is organized in the following manner. The next section presents a cultural perspective that provides the context to analyze the research results. Various turnover models are then reviewed to develop a research framework for this specific investigation. The next section presents a description of the adopted research method. The results are then presented, followed by a discussion of the findings. Finally, conclusions are drawn relative to the objectives of the project.

## **CULTURE PERSPECTIVE**

Hofstede (1991) suggests that one social group is distinguished from another through the group's collective programming of the mind. Hofstede's (1991) cultural dimensions framework has been used extensively for multicountry comparisons (Ford, Connelly, & Meister, 2003). The framework has made a significant impact on international business studies (Chandy & Williams, 1994). Its contribution to theory development has been established by prior research (Carpenter & Fredrickson, 2001; Carter, 2000; Merritt, 2000; Moenaert & Souder, 1996; Png, Tan, & Wee, 2001). Further, support has been determined for the validity of the dimensions regarding cultural variability (Ronen & Shenkar, 1985; Shackleton & Ali, 1990). A number of IS investigations have

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