

Understanding Turnover Intention: Country of Job as a Moderator

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This study explores the factors affecting turnover intention and proposes that turnover intention is influenced by two intra-organizational factors, namely, finesse factor and firm factor, and employees' association to a specific job area. It also posits that country of job attenuates the relationships between the intra-organization factors and turnover intention. The findings indicate that the intra-organizational factors – finesse factor and firm factor – have a negative relationship with turnover intention. This implies that the more positively the employees perceive the intra-organizational factors in an organization, the lower their intention to leave the organization. Employees' associations to various job practice areas have also been found to have a differing significant impact on their intention to leave an organization. Finally, country of job has a moderating effect on the relationships between the firm factor and turnover intention, and between the finesse factor and turnover intention.

Key words: *Job practice area, Turnover intention, Finesse factor, Firm factor, Country of job.*

Introduction

Employee turnover is a complex issue. Various studies have explored the causes and consequences of employee turnover over the past half century (e.g., March and Simon, 1958). The major consequences of employee turnover include the cost of recruitment and training of the new employees (Govaerts et al., 2011; Alexander et al., 1994), loss of talented social capital (Dess & Shaw, 2001), loss of important tacit knowledge (Droege & Hoobler, 2003), and adverse effect on the morale of the remaining employees (Rekha & Kamalanabhan, 2010). With the baby-boomers gradually retiring, organizations will face a shortage of workers and a risk of losing knowledge and experience (Govaerts et al., 2011). As a result, the demand for talent will increase, and the retention of talented, skilled employees will



become crucial to maintain competitive advantage (Govaerts et al., 2011). In addition, the globalization of employee marketplace makes it a difficult task for organizations to attract and retain employees with the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities (Sturman, 2003).

The extant literature suggests that employees contemplate leaving an organization for various reasons. A number of studies have identified factors influencing turnover in different sectors. For instance, Ghapanchi and Aurum (2011) have identified 70 conceptually distinct drivers for turnover in IT sector. They have classified these drivers into job-related factors, individual attributes, organizational factors, psychological factors, and environmental factors. Meeusen et al. (2011) suggest that work context characteristics, work climate, and personality dimensions are the major predictors of turnover intention in nurse anesthetists. Carraher (2011) posits that attitudes towards benefits, pay, pay satisfaction, gender, and age affect the employee turnover in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (Carraher, 2011). Yet, other studies indicate that the learning and working climate (Govaerts et al., 2011), empowerment and transformational leadership (Gill et al., 2011), HR practices (Thite & Russell, 2010), justice in procedures, support, job stress, job satisfaction and commitment, demographic diversity characteristics (Rekha & Kamalanabhan, 2010) etc., are critical antecedents of turnover intention among employees in various industries.

However, a review of the literature shows a lack of research about the factors affecting the turnover intention among employees in both geographically and functionally diversified organizations. There is a paucity of evidence of exploring the issue of turnover intention from the perspectives of intra-organizational factors in conjunction with employees' job practice areas. Moreover, the role of country of job as a moderator in the relationships between intra-organizational factors and employee turnover intention has never been investigated. These are the impetuses for this study and we hope that the findings will help fill this crucial knowledge gap.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II provides the theoretical foundation of the study. Section III presents the research model and hypotheses. Section IV describes the research methodology. Section V presents the analyses and results, followed by discussions, limitations, and future direction in Section VI.

Theoretical Foundation

Turnover Intention

Turnover is defined as the rate at which employees voluntarily resign from their position in the organization (Bernardin, 2003). Turnover intention (i.e., intention to leave) has been widely studied in the organizational sciences over the past half century. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) posits that behaviour is a result of behavioural intention. Turnover behaviour is, thus, a result of turnover intention. Researchers have identified turnover intention as the immediate precursor for turnover behaviour (e.g., Mobley et al., 1978; Tett & Meyer, 1993). In this study, we use turnover intention as the dependent variable. Since turnover intention leads to actual turnover, the use of turnover intention as the dependent variable is appropriate (Shore & Martin, 1989). Some studies (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Price & Mueller, 1981) suggest that turnover intention be used over turnover behaviour because many external factors affect turnover behaviour, making the prediction of actual turnover more difficult than intention.

Factors Affecting Turnover Intention

Various theories have been developed and utilized to explain the nature of and to predict turnover intention. For example, March and Simon (1958) developed the organizational equilibrium theory, which posits that employees intend to leave an organization when they perceive that there is an imbalance between what they contribute to the organization and what they receive in return. There are two factors that influence the equilibrium – desire to move, which is a function of employees' satisfaction with their work environment; and ease of movement, which is influenced by macro and individual level factors that determine employment conditions. Porter and Steers (1973) developed the Met Expectations Theory based on the Equilibrium Theory, and propose that “the discrepancy between what a person encounters on the job in the way of positive and negative experiences and what he expected to encounter” plays a critical role in whether he/she intends to leave the organization.

Many studies (e.g., Chawla & Sondhi, 2011; Doh et al., 2011; Barel et al., 2009; Teng & Kong, 2008; Ing-Chung et al., 2006) have identified factors that affect turnover intention. For instance, Chawla and Sondhi (2011) studied the organizational and personal factors affecting turnover intentions and suggested that organizational commitment, fairness of rewards and total work experience, among others, were associated with turnover intentions. Ing-Chung et al. (2006) examined the effect of three sets of factors on job retention: individual-based, firm-based, and market factors. They found that while some factors from all three affected employee retention, “firm-based factors had a significantly more pronounced impact on the ultimate decision than individual-based factors” (p. 491). Doh et al. (2011) concluded that “performance management, professional development, manager support, and socially

responsible actions had a positive relationship with pride in and satisfaction with the organization. A lack of pride in and a lack of satisfaction with the organization have a strong relationship with new professionals' intention to leave and subsequent turnover.” (p. 35). Moreover, the autonomy granted to the employee to organize his or her work lowers the risks of voluntary departures (Barel et al., 2009); and perceived organizational support significantly predicts organizational commitment and intention to leave (Teng & Kong, 2008).

In line with the extant literature, the Met Expectation Theory forms the foundation for this study in that it helps identify an organization's internal skills, expertise and work-based factors that explain the discrepancy between what an employee expects of and what s/he experiences in the organization. This study defines the finesse factor to embody an organization's soft supports such skills, expertise and intelligence of the supervisor that move subordinates forward with enthusiasm, and the firm factor to encompass the work-based factors such as clarity of work assignments, availability of materials and resources, ergonomics, etc.

Research Model and Hypotheses

We propose and validate the research model presented in Figure 1. The research model is primarily based on the Met Expectations Theory (Porter & Steers, 1973), which states that the key determinants of turnover intention arise from the discrepancy between what employees expect to encounter and what they actually encounter on the job in the form of positive and negative experiences. The set of expectations can take various forms. This study examines two sets of expectations – finesse factor and firm factor – that influence turnover intention. In addition, we also propose that employee job practice area plays a role in predicting employees' intention to leave.

Finesse Factor

The finesse factor measures the technical expertise, cognitive skills, and emotional intelligence of the supervisor that help facilitate smooth working relationships among subordinates and team members (Gaillour, 2004). Gaillour (2004) suggests that the supervisor's finesse embodies his ability to inspire and coach others to move forward with enthusiasm and to effectively communicate and listen to others. This leads to the proposition that employees' perception about their supervisor's finesse has an impact on their intention to either leave or stay with the organization. If employees perceive supervisor's finesse positively, they are likely to stay with the organization; and vice versa. Thus, the following hypothesis can be postulated:

H1. There is a negative relationship between employees' positively perceiving their organization's finesse factor and their intention to leave.

Firm Factor

The firm factor includes work-based factors that provide employees with clarity of work assignments, required resources and materials, and opportunity to learn and utilize their skills, knowledge and abilities at work. Thus, the firm factor includes ergonomics, the availability of material and resource to complete one's task, and a proper understanding of one's responsibilities. Govaerts et al. (2010) found that the opportunity for employees to learn is a key determinant in their willingness to stay with their employer. They found that "letting people learn more and do more of what they are good at will encourage them to stay with the organization" (p. 35). Lin and Rashid (2010) found that role ambiguity has the most adverse influence on employee retention. This suggests that role clarity, i.e., the fact that the employee knows what is expected of him/her at work, would have a positive impact on employee retention. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. There is a negative relationship between employees' positively perceiving their organization's firm factor and their intention to leave.

Job Practice Area

The term job practice area refers to employees' primary, formal areas of expertise such as engineering, architecture, finance, banking, etc. Hossain (2018) posits that job practice area acts as an antecedent to turnover intention, arguing that job practice area is independent of both the finesse and firm factors. We concur with the proposition set forth by Hossain (2018) and as such formulate the following hypothesis:

H3. There is a relationship between employees' job practice area and their intention to leave an organization.

Country of Job

Country of job refers to the national affiliation of a job's origination. Studies (e.g., Huang & Vliert, 2003) have found that the link between job characteristics and job satisfaction is stronger in some countries and weaker in other countries. As job satisfaction is inversely related to turnover intention, this implies that the country of job will have a differing role in the relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention. While there may be multitude of job characteristics affecting turnover intention, in this study we limit them only to two intra-organizational characteristics, namely, the firm factor encompassing the

ergonomics, the availability of material and resource to complete one's task, and a proper understanding of one's responsibilities; and the finesse factor encompassing a supervisor's abilities to aspire and coach others. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4a. Country of job has a moderating effect in the relationship between the firm factor and turnover intention.

H4b. Country of job has a moderating effect in the relationship between the finesse factor and turnover intention.

Methodology

A survey method was used to collect data for this study. The data have been collected from a multinational company with many job practice areas. The survey was sent to employees in the United States and Canada using the company's internal communication system. In this study, we examined five job practice areas, namely, architecture, building engineering, environmental management, mining, and urban land engineering. We received a total of 5,085 complete responses from these job practice areas. The questionnaire comprised of 15 questions measuring the independent and dependent variables. The first set of questions was related to the supervisor exhibiting constructive feedback skills, managerial competence, professional development counselling skills, listening skills. Another set of questions was related to the learning and growth opportunity given to the employee, the opportunities for him/her to utilize his/her skills and knowledge, the material and equipment availability, the work physical environment. Finally, there were questions on the employee satisfaction with current job, whether the employee would be recommending a friend to the company and the possibility for the employee of leaving within the company within the 12 months.

Analyses and Results

The data were initially factor analyzed to identify the relevant factors. The results of the factor analyses for independent- and dependent-measures are presented in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. The factor analysis of the independent measures resulted in two factors, with items loading into factors as expected based on the theory. As Table 4 shows the factor analysis of the dependent measures resulted in one factor. Cronbach's alpha was used to check the reliability of the factors. Nunnally (1978) suggests that a Cronbach's alpha of 0.65 or higher is an acceptable value for internal consistency of the measures. The Cronbach's alphas for the factors (Tables 1 and 2) range from 0.764 to 0.834 and thus support the contention that all the factors had an adequate reliability. The convergent validity of the factors was checked by examining the item-total correlations (Table 3). Factors are deemed to have adequate convergent validity if all item-total correlations equal or exceed the recommended criterion of 0.40 (Jayanti & Burns, 1998). Table 3 shows that all item-total

correlations are more than the recommended criterion of 0.40. We, therefore, conclude that the scales have adequate levels of convergent validity. To check the discriminant validity of the scales, the across factor correlations were then compared to the reliabilities of the scales. A construct has an adequate level of discriminant validity if the reliability of the construct is higher than the correlations between that construct and any other construct (Gaski & Nevin, 1985). Since the constructs Job Practice Area and Country of Job represent dummy variables, we examine the discriminant validity for the Firm and Finesse factors. The correlation between the Firm and Finesse factors is 0.566, which is less than the Cronbach's alphas of both the Firm Factor and the Finesse Factor (Table 1). This suggests that the scales also have adequate levels of discriminant validity.

We employed multiple regression analysis to test the proposed hypotheses. The proposed research model (Figure 1) in this study has one dependent variable (i.e., Intention to Leave) and three independent variables (i.e., Firm Factor, Finesse Factor, and Job Practice Area). Summated scores were used to obtain the scores for the dependent measure and two independent measures – Firm Factor and Finesse Factor. The third independent measure – Job Practice Area – represents a dummy variable. The survey was administered to employees in five job areas, namely, architecture, building engineering, environmental management, mining, and urban land engineering (Samuel and Russell, 2018). We tested hypothesis H3 by examining whether employees' association to these job practice areas significantly affects their intention to leave. For regression analysis, we used employees' association to architecture as the reference group and dummy coded their associations to building engineering, environmental management, mining, and urban land engineering as BLDG, ENVIR, MINING, and LANDP, respectively. The hypotheses H4a and H4b test the effect of Country of Job as a moderator in the relationships between intra-organizational factors and turnover intention. This is also a dummy variable. For regression analysis, we used country of job affiliated to the United States as the reference group and dummy coded the affiliation to Canada as CANxFIRM and CANxFINESSE to indicate the moderators to the Firm and Finesse factors, respectively. The variables used in the regression analysis were as follows: ILEAV as the dependent variable; FIRM, FINESSE, BLDG, ENVIR, MINING and LANDP as independent variables; and CANxFIRM and CANxFINESSE as the moderators. Table 4 shows the results of multiple regression analysis.

We conducted the runs test, Levene's test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to test for randomness, constancy of variance, and normality, respectively. The results of these tests show that there is no evidence of violation of the assumptions underlying multiple regression analysis. Also, there is no evidence of multicollinearity because the VIFs and condition indices are within acceptable levels (VIFs < 4.00 and condition indices < 30.00).

The results of multiple regression analysis (Table 4) show that FIRM, FINESSE, BLDG,



ENVIR, MINING, LANDP, CANxFIRM, and CANxFINESSE are significant predictors of ILEAV. These findings support all five hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4a, and H4b), suggesting that the firm factor, finesse factor, job practice area and country of job play significant role in predicting employee intention to leave.

Discussions, Limitations, and Future Direction

The objective of this study was to explore the intra-organizational factors, the employees' job practice area and the employees' country affiliation pertaining to the turnover intention. As suggested by the extant literature, we posited that two intra-organizational factors, namely, the Firm Factor and the Finesse Factor, and employees' job practice area are the antecedents to employee turnover intention. We also posited that employees' country affiliation attenuates the relationships between intra-organizational factors and employee turnover intention. The findings suggest that both the intra-organizational factors and employees' job practice area are significant antecedents to employee turnover intention. The findings also indicate that employees' country affiliation is a significant moderator to the relationships between intra-organizational factors and employee turnover intention.

As hypothesized, both intra-organizational factors were found to have significant influence on employee turnover intention. The items measuring these factors provided respondents with positive statements such as the supervisor's inspiration to do their best work, and the availability of materials and equipment to complete their work assignments. Responses to these items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale anchored between (1) strongly disagree and (5) strongly agree. However, responses to the items measuring turnover intention were captured using a 5-point Likert scale anchored in opposite order. The results indicate that there is a negative relationship between the intra-organizational factors and turnover intention. This implies that the more positively the employees perceive the intra-organizational factors (i.e., the firm and finesse factors) in an organization, the lower their intention to leave the organization.

Also as hypothesized, employee job practice area was found to have significant influence in predicting turnover intention. We found that employees' associations to various job practice areas have differing significant impact on their intention to leave an organization. For example, employees with job practice area as building engineering, environmental management, mining, or urban land engineering have differing degrees of intention to leave the organization compared to architecture.

Finally, the employees' country of job was found to have a significant moderating effect on the relationships between intra-organizational factors and their turnover intention. It negatively attenuates the relationship between the firm factor and turnover intention and

positively attenuates the relationship between the finesse factor and turnover intention. Therefore, the findings imply that the impact intra-organizational factors have on employees' turnover intention will vary by the affiliation of job to a particular country.

There are a number of limitations to this study. The research model presented in this study is based on the review of prior literature. However, this study does not claim that a comprehensive, exhaustive list of factors has been identified. Also, this study considered only five job practice areas and two origins of country of job. Future studies can extend the model by incorporating constructs, and other job practice areas and country origins that can supplement the model.

Table 1: Results of Factor Analysis and Reliability for the Independent Variables

Items	Components	
	Finesse Factor	Firm Factor
FINN4: My supervisor inspires me to do my best work.	.868	
FINN6: My supervisor gives me constructive feedback on the work I do.	.789	
FINN1: My supervisor has consistently demonstrated competent managerial skills.	.775	
FINN3: In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my development.	.691	
FIRM3: I have the opportunity to utilize my skills, knowledge and abilities at work on a regular basis.		.780
FIRM2: I have the materials and equipment to complete my work assignments.		.774
FIRM4: My expectations of the work I was initially hired for have been met.		.716
FIRM1: I know what is expected of me at work. (I understand the targets I am to achieve, the approved processes for doing my work, and the required standards of quality.)		.686
Cronbach's Alpha	0.834	0.778
Factor Mean	3.709	3.853
Factor Standard Deviation	0.763	0.627

Table 2: Results of Factor Analysis and Reliability for the Dependent Variable

Items	Components
	Intention to Leave
LEAV1R: Considering everything, please rate your level of satisfaction with your current job at the present time.	.892
LEAV2R: I would recommend working at XYZ to a friend.	.870
LEAV3R: How likely are you to seek a position with another employer in the next 12 months?	.836
Cronbach's Alpha	0.823
Factor Mean	2.348
Factor Standard Deviation	0.857

Table 3: Scale Reliability and Convergent Validity

Scale Items	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Independent Measures		
Finesse Factor		0.834
FINN4: My supervisor inspires me to do my best work.	.787	
FINN6: My supervisor gives me constructive feedback on the work I do.	.684	
FINN1: My supervisor has consistently demonstrated competent managerial skills.	.685	
FINN3: In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my development.	.512	
Firm Factor		0.778
FIRM3: I have the opportunity to utilize my skills, knowledge and abilities at work on a regular basis.	.641	
FIRM2: I have the materials and equipment to complete my work assignments.	.510	
FIRM4: My expectations of the work I was initially hired for have been met.	.628	
FIRM1: I know what is expected of me at work. (I understand the targets I am to achieve, the approved processes for doing my work, and the required standards of quality.)	.551	
Intention to Leave		0.832
LEAV1: Considering everything, please rate your level of satisfaction with your current job at the present time.	.731	

LEAV2: I would recommend working at XYZ to a friend.	.691	
LEAV3: How likely are you to seek a position with another employer in the next 12 months?	.647	

Table 4: Regression Analysis Predicting Employee Turnover Intention

Predictors	Unstd Beta Coeff.	Std Beta Coeff.	t-Stat	p-Value	VIF	Hyp.	Hyp. Effect	Supported ?
FIRM	-0.654	-0.481	-23.491	0.000	1.514	H ₁	-	Yes
FINESSE	-0.318	-0.275	-12.156	0.000	1.481	H ₂	-	Yes
CANxFIRM	-0.095	-0.219	-2.945	0.003	1.569	H _{4a}	-	
CANxFINESSE	0.116	0.262		0.000	1.635	H _{4b}	+	
BLDG	0.068	0.034	2.793	0.005	1.320	H ₃	+	Yes
ENVIR	0.083	0.044	3.561	0.000	1.587			
MINING	0.056	0.029	2.357	0.018	1.203			
LANDP	0.108	0.027	2.563	0.010	1.237			
R =	0.724		F-Stat =	697.562	(df: $v_1 = 8, v_2 = 5076$)			
R ² =	0.524		p-Value =	0.000				
Adjusted R ² =	0.523							



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