

Retaining Quality Employees through Career Development and Perceived Supervisor Support

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Abstract

This conceptual paper highlights the importance of perceived supervisor support in the relationship between employee career development and their intention to turnover. Career development should both cater to individual employees as well as meet the needs of the organization. It could serve as an important link to reducing turnover among employees in the initial stages of their career, but perceived supervisor support could possibly enhance the retention of quality employees among them. Upon review of related literature, this study suggests that career development is mediated by perceived supervisor support to reduce turnover intention. Additionally, it proposes that gender and race, by way of representative bias, shape employees' perceptions of supervisor support. This argument is sustained by the growing body of research concluding that supervisor-related perceptions can shape organization-related perceptions. The theoretical and practical significance and implications of perceived supervisor support are also discussed.

Keywords: *Career development, Supervisor support, Turnover intention, Gender, Race.*

1. Introduction

This research investigates the role of perceived supervisor support as a mediator in the relationship between career development and intention to turnover. A review of the empirical literature would be able to shed light to this area of inquiry and consequently offer suggestions to organizations on how to reduce employee turnover and retain quality employees.

The term *turnover* is defined by Price (1977) as the ratio of the number of organizational members who have left during the period being considered divided by the average number of people in that organization during the period. Frequently, managers refer to turnover as the entire process associated with filling a vacancy, whereby each time a position is vacated, either voluntarily or involuntarily, a new employee must be hired and trained. This replacement cycle is known as turnover (Woods, 1995).

A high turnover rate can affect productivity and increase cost of an organization (Butali, Wesang'ula, & Mamuli, 2014). Beer (1981) found that high turnover brings negative impact to organizations such as loss of productivity and profitability. Utter (1982) also agree that

productivity could drop in slump when there is replacement of employees by new hires. Besides the unproductive performance portrayed by new hires in contrast to veteran workers, productivity of trainers may drop as well during the training periods.

A global research involving 32 countries, 266 industries, and 506 occupations around the world shows that labor shortage risks is an important issue that every country will need to focus on in the future (Ward, 2014). Additionally, a global employment consultancy report shows that more than one of three talents around the world face difficulty finding a job and 38 percent of managers could not find a suitable talent (Graham, 2015). The serious employee shortage in the world will make an unparalleled challenge for all business leaders and policy makers over the next fifteen year and beyond (Freeman, 2006).

2. Intention to Turnover

Turnover intention is defined as an employee's intention to voluntarily change jobs or companies (Saeed, Waseem, Sikander, & Rizwan, 2014). The concept captures the individual's perception and evaluation of job alternatives (Mobley et al., 1979). When employees are not satisfied with their employment or when organizations do not trust their employees, the employees' intention to turn over will be greater. Hence, they will leave the organization and the duration of their job will be shorter (Pfeffer, 2007). Actual intention and turnover intention have been measured separately; yet, actual turnover is expected to increase as the intention increases. The results of the different studies provide support for the high significance of turnover intention in investigating the individual's turnover behavior.

3. Career Development

Career development is about the development of employees that is beneficial for both the individual and the organization. Effective career development programs enhance individual work performance by continuously learning and adapting, while the organization offers favorable developmental relationships with their employees. Learning and adaptability are important for employees to continue to strive for career success. Similarly, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) suggested training and exposure may imply a high level of concern for organizations to extend employees' potential in the organization. Employees who receive such developmental opportunities would boost their motivation and confidence in their work.

Subsequently, employees who receive such opportunities might repay their organization with the likeliness of extending their self-fulfillment, leading to reduced turnover intention.

3.1 Career Development and Intention to Turnover

The often changing business environment and employment relationship have created recognition opportunities for personal growth throughout employee careers (Baruch, 2003). The availability of career development could be seen as discretionary support leading to perceived support, and could be reciprocated with a willingness to remain as members of the organization. This is consistent with Liu's (2004) finding on IT workers in the United States, stating the importance of development opportunities as an important supportive HR tool to enhance loyalty for knowledge workers.

It cannot be denied that in the career development process, the organization must supply adequate information about its mission, policies, and support for self-assessment, training, and development. It is important to note that significant career growth can occur when individual contribution combines with organization opportunity. Increase in skills and the opportunity to manage their career successfully helps to retain valued employees (Chang et al, 2007; Sherman et al., 1998).

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4. Supervisor Support

Supervisors administer employees' work, providing direct and indirect feedback of their work, and serve as the pivotal person in influencing rewards, appraisal, and career development in an organization. Maertz and Griffeth (2004) theorized that attachments to supervisors could have influential effects on employees' turnover intention. Several studies showed that satisfaction with supervisory support reduces turnover intention (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Krackhardt, McKenna, Porter, & Steers, 1981; Lee, 2004). Maertz et al. (2007) called for

further research on the personal and situational characteristics for supervisors to extend employees' positive attitudes and attachment to an organization, indicating the necessity for examining the effect of supervisory support in providing performance feedback, trust and confidence, empowerment, and career development plans that could influence turnover intention.

Supervisory support has become a major topic in recent research (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Maertz, et al., 2007; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006; Stinglhamber & Vandenberghe, 2003). These studies contribute to the growing body of research on the influence of supervisor to staff motivation and retention. Other intangible socio-emotional elements of supervisory support such as providing empowerment, confidence at work, personal guidance in career plans as well as treating subordinates with respect and trust are coherent with organizational support and care. Apart from work related feedback and development opportunities, personal relationships could affect a larger portion of those with attachment to the organization via favorable actions of agents (Levinson, 1965). This might explain the preference of Malaysians to work in harmonious and relationship-based workplace (Abdullah 2001; Pearson & Chong, 1997). Such a culture shows that authority and supervisory support play a pivotal role in influencing employee work related perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Ferris & Gilmore, 1984; Yoon & Lim, 1999).

4.1 Perceived Organizational Support and Intention to Turnover

One of many positive organizational aspects is perceived organizational support (POS) (Mowday, 1998). According to Eisenberger et al. (1986), POS is defined as the social exchange relationship that results from the exchange between an employee and the employing organization. Individuals with high POS would be less likely to seek out and accept jobs in alternative organizations (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Tuzun & Kalemci, 2011). This discovery is supported by Loi et al. (2006) who suggested that enhancing POS would lower employees' intention to leave the organization. Moreover, the concept of POS is seen as the key predictor of turnover intentions (Maertz et al., 2007). When employees believe that they are being supported by their employers, the employees reciprocate by having lower turnover intentions (Cropanzano et al., 1997). POS also has positive impact on employee attitudes and behaviors mainly because POS creates a sense of obligation within the employees to repay the organization through the organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger

et al., 1990). POS can influence employees' felt commitment to care about the organization and to help it reach its goals, and this obligation can exert pervasive effects on turnover intention (Nasrin Arshadi, 2011).

4.2 Perceived Supervisor Support and Intention to Turnover

Maertz and Griffeth (2004) theorized that attachments to supervisors could have influential effects on employees' turnover intention. Their study demonstrated that supervisor attachments have separate effects on turnover cognitions—distinct from attachments and attitudes related to the organization itself. In return, employees tend to direct their actions toward the target from which it benefits them (Hoffman & Morgeson, 1999). Therefore, employers should consider the potential relationship between employees and the supervisor that directly affects the employees' turnover decision.

It is agreed that employees have different relationships with the supervisor and the organization (Becker, 1992; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Reichers, 1985) but by responding towards the perceived supervisor support (PSS), any result of responsibility should be generally towards the supervisor rather than the organization (Hoffman & Morgeson, 1999). By increasing the PSS and level of commitment, the organization can reduce the turnover intentions of their employees (Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2012). PSS is crucial to retain employees in the organization (Gentry et al., 2006). These theoretical findings all strongly propose that PSS should cause attachments straightforwardly to the supervisor, and which should directly influence turnover cognitions.

5. Mediating Role of Perceived Supervisor Support in the Relationship between Career Development and Intention to Turnover

Employees tend to view a supportive supervisor as a form of organizational support. As they have good relationships with their supervisor, they believe their organization has a supportive work culture. Hence, employees feel the need to significantly curb behaviors that are detrimental to the organization such as having very low absences at work, reporting instances of theft, and avoiding a “work to rule” mentality. That is why many scholars' works demonstrate the significance of testing the employee-supervisor relationship. For example, when subordinates in a high-quality relationship are satisfied with their job, the positive effects

of the relationship will be translated into employees' commitment to the organization and their willingness to stay with the organization. The switching and opportunity costs are too high for satisfied employees to change jobs, making it clearly more beneficial for them to stay with the organization and contribute towards its overall wellbeing.

As career development is at one's control and responsibility, one should make choices, adapt to circumstances (such as organizational change), learn to grow, and control one's own destiny (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). The decision for employees to stay or leave might depend on whether the work is challenging, whether they gain support at work and personal growth. This requires employers to provide resources, tools, and the appropriate environment to ensure continued self-development.

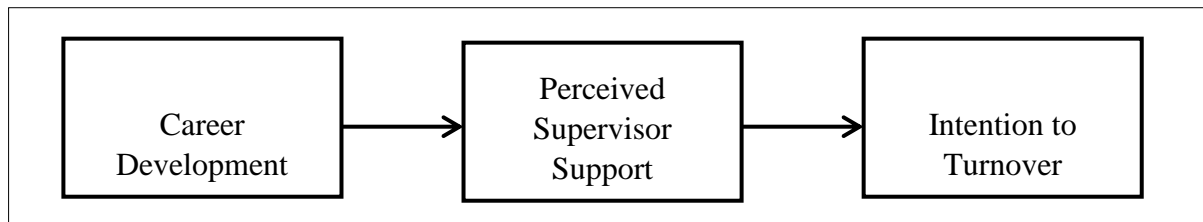


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

6. Discussion

In 1991, O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell found that employees whose individual values did not match with the organization's values (low person-organization fit) were more likely to turn over after 20 months of tenure. It is imperative for the organization to note that retaining high performers is a big issue for an organization, since it can be devastating for organizational efficiency. Generally, organizations that provide relevant quantity and quality development schemes are signaling to employees their likeliness to develop a cadre of skillful employees to grow together with the business. Huselid (1995) suggested that progressive HR practices that embrace career-related practices could improve knowledge, skills, and the abilities of an organization's current and potential employees, and enhance the retention of quality employees.

Leader influence during socialization and perceived supervisor support were also negatively related to turnover (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), as were interpersonal citizenship behaviors (Mossholder et al., 2005). Interestingly, another study found that employees who exhibited lower levels of supervisor-rated

organizational citizenship behaviors were more likely to quit (Chen, Hui & Segó, 1998). Such employees lack a high-quality relationship with their immediate line manager and may as a result be less psychologically attached to the organization (Pierce, Jussila, & Cummings, 2009).

In addition, demographic variables cannot be disregarded. Age, race, tenure, level of education, level of income, job category, and gender have been proven to affect employee retention and have been discovered to have established relationship with turnover intention. The intended contribution of this study is to increase our knowledge into boundary conditions for work design in influencing employee outcomes (Johns, 2010) by investigating whether a social characteristic relates directly to turnover intention. A unique perspective on the contextual influences of turnover was provided by Burton and Beckman (2007) who found that position imprinting (e.g., the experiences of position creators) and external pressures (e.g., normative expectations regarding typical experiences for the position) predicted turnover propensities. For example, employees who were different from their position's creator were more likely to turnover than employees who were similar to the creators. This can be concluded that employees with same race or gender with their supervisor, also known as representative bias, will feel more attached and therefore reduce the intention to turnover.

7. Conclusion

The increasing demand for knowledge workers has added bargaining power to knowledge-intensive organizations. Their needs and wants certainly should be fulfilled to help organizations in achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. Career orientation of this group of workers should be regained as part of HR policies to form a solid employee-employer relationship. In Malaysia, relationships among subordinates and supervisors are relatively important. A caring organization that appreciates its employees has to be conveyed through agents. The supervisory role deserves more attention in the future incorporating a larger role in the retention of employees. HR policies and practices that enhance personal growth and motivate the workforce would secure a durable employee-employer relationship via social exchange process, which brings a win-win situation that benefits both parties in the long run.

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