

“Should I Stay or Should I Go?” - The role of Organizational Commitment in the relationship between Psychological Empowerment and Turnover Intention among IT professionals

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Abstract: Turnover intention is one of the most studied variables for developing retention strategies. The purpose of this study was to provide a predictive model for employee’s retention in IT industry. In order to achieve this goal a research with 110 participants, professionals from Information & Technology industry (94 men, 16 women) was conducted. A structural equation model demonstrated that psychological empowerment predicts the intention to remain in the organization and this effect is completely mediated by the organizational commitment. The contribution added by the study is related to proposing a model that can be useful for human resources specialists and researchers interested in developing retention strategies.

Keywords: turnover intention, IT professionals, psychological empowerment, organizational commitment.

Introduction

In a competitive business sector one of the major challenges is keeping employees. As Romania is concerned, the IT&C sector seems to need more and more professionals and a secure job is not the main concern for the employees working in this field (Văduva & Neagoie, 2016). Taking into consideration the increase number of workplaces and the costs of losing specialists as administrative, recruitment and selection, training, development and lower productivity costs (Mitrovska & Eftimov, 2016), we consider that research should focus on employee retention practices. Despite the fact that turnover behavior is the main issue, a research on turnover intention is a more pragmatic approach providing retention practices. According to Mobley’s model (1977), the intention to quit precedes the actual process of leaving the organization. In his model, Mobley presented the entire process of leaving an organization as going through stages. Firstly, the employee starts to evaluate his job regarding

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his satisfaction, if he finds it unsatisfactory starts thinking about leaving the organization, evaluates the cost of quitting and begins to have the intention of leaving. After these steps, the employee starts having the intention to leave and this brings the actual quitting. Furthermore, the model of reasoned action proposed by Fishbein & Ajzen presents the intention as “the best single predictor of individual behavior” (as cited in Egan, Yang & Bartlett, 2004, p. 286). Taking into account the models explained before, the turnover intention becomes center of interest for researcher and practitioners interested in personnel retention.

Predictors of turnover intention

In order to give a comprehensive understanding of the antecedents of the turnover intention regards IT professionals, Ghapanchi and Aurum (2011) reviewed 28 years of research papers and classified factors into 5 categories: factors related with their job, factors related with their organization, psychological factors, individual factors and environmental factors. Their findings suggest that role ambiguity and role conflict are the most studied factors which lead to turnover intention. Based on the fact that authors include those two factors into the job related factors category, implications of the human resources department can contribute or diminish the antecedents leading to ambiguity and role conflict. Solli-Sæther (2011) conclude that for the transferred IT employees the role ambiguity and the role conflict are significant predictors for turnover intention and have 31.5% of predictor’s variance explained. Another research (Calisir, Gumussoy & Iskin, 2011) confirm the implication of role conflict and ambiguity in turnover intention of the IT employees, describing the two factors as predictors for the stress related to their job which is a predictor for job satisfaction. In the end, job satisfaction and organizational commitment lend to turnover intention. Calisir et al. (2011) showed that organizational commitment has a greater direct effect on turnover that job satisfaction and explain more of the variance.

Regarding the organizational commitment, Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) explained that it should involve more stability in time than job satisfaction. They point out also the fact that commitment is related to goals and values of the organization while satisfaction is related to tasks and duties. In the model proposed by Mowday et al. (1979) commitment goes beyond passive status becoming a pillar of the involvement in the well-being of the organization and is a predictor for turnover. Comparing with the three-dimensional model proposed by Meyer & Allen (1991) which separates the commitment in three components (affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment), the questionnaire proposed by Mowday et al. (1979) measure the organizational commitment as one dimension concept.

As IT professionals are concerned, there is no conclusion on the implication of organizational commitment in predicting the turnover intention. SamGnanakkan (2010) confirmed the mediated effect of the three component organizational commitment on human resources practices and turnover intention. Another findings concludes on the negative association between affective and continuance commitment and turnover intention (e.g. Paré & Tremblay, 2007; Rahman, Naqvi, & Ramay, 2008; Gaan, 2011, Cho & Huang, 2012). However, the results are not always replicated; a research by Uzoka, Mgaya, Shemi, Kitindi & Akinnuwesi (2011) did not found the organizational commitment as a significant predictor for turnover intention. Hence, the main approach is considering organizational commitment as a mediator for the relationship between turnover intention and other variable.

Psychological contract between employee and organization

Rousseau (1989, p. 121) defined the psychological contract as “individual beliefs in reciprocal obligation between individual and organization”. The contract can be transactional, with a monetary purpose and mostly on short time or relational, on long term and involving a relationship beside the financial gains (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). The responsibility for forming the psychological contract comes for all the stakeholders of the company, employees as coworkers, human resources specialist and managers (Rousseau, 2001). Regarding the commitment of the employees, Jabeen, Behery & Abu Elanain (2015) conclude on the positive association between both types of contracts (relational and transactional) with the organizational commitment. Their results are a premise for understanding the reciprocity and involvement of contractual parties, employee and employer, in the psychological contract.

Aims of the present study

The main purpose of this study is to propose an explanatory model for the intention to remain in the organization for IT employees. Starting from the assumption that factors related with the job, as role conflict and role ambiguity produce stress we assumed that a well known role in the organization will keep employees. In order to achieve this, we supposed that psychological empowerment explained as the image employees have about them in a work environment (Spreitzer, 1995) predicts turnover intention. Psychological empowerment is related to the perceived work role and Spreitzer (1996) demonstrated that a low role ambiguity represents one of the premises for empowerment. Psychological empowerment is seen as “multifaceted” concept “manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual’s orientation to his or her work role: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact” (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990 as cited in Spreitzer, 1995, p. 1443). In the beginning of the research we hypothesized that psychological empowerment is a

predictor for the intention to stay in the organization. For a better understanding of the relationship between those variables, we assumed and verified the intervention of a mediator variable. Based on the fact that organizational commitment is a predictor for turnover intention (e.g. Calisir et al., 2011) and is associated in a positive way to psychological empowerment (Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011), we hypothesized that it can explain the relationship between psychological empowerment and the intention stay in the organization.

Method

Participants

The research group was composed of 110 employees from the IT industry, 94 men and 16 women of which 24 aged between 20-25 years, 52 aged between 25-30, 26 aged between 30-35, 5 aged between 35-40, 2 aged between 40-45 and 1 aged between 45-50.

Measures

In order to test the hypothesis three instruments were translated from English to Romanian using the back and forward translation method: The Turnover Intention Scale (Roodt, 2004), the Psychological Empowerment Scale (Spreitzer, 1995) and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday et al., 1979).

The short version with 6 items of the Turnover Scale (Roodt, 2004, Bothma & Roodt, 2013) was used in the data analysis and one item was removed. The instrument measures the turnover intention defined as “the conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization” (Tett and Meyer, 1993 as cited in Bothma & Roodt, 2013, p. 2) and can predict the actual turnover behavior. The scale measures reliably the turnover intention concept ($\alpha = .80$). Respondents use a five-point Likert scale in order to answer to each question. In this study the high scores indicate the intention to remain in the organization.

In order to measure the psychological empowerment, the scale provided by Spreitzer (1995) with four dimensions was used (impact, self determination, meaning and competence). Based on their four dimensions, the psychological empowerment is presented as the impact on the outcomes felt by the employee, his self-determination in doing his job, the personal meaning of his work and a perceived competence of his ability. The Psychological Empowerment Scale consists of 12 items, each dimension being measured through 3 items. A seven-point Likert scale was provided for each item and the high scores indicate a high level of psychological empowerment. The Cronbach alpha of the scale was calculated for 2 samples and was .72 and .62.

The Organizational Commitment Scale “is developed by Porter and his colleagues” (as cited in Mowday et al., 1979, p. 224) and measures the concept defined as the involvement and identification with the organization. The

responses for the 15 items are provided using a seven-point Likert scale and the high scores reveal high commitment to the organization. The reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha and it was between .82 and .93. An item that measures the turnover intention ("It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this organization") was removed before applying the tool. From the 14 items instrument only 8 items were used in data analysis. Items were removed for a better fit of the instrument.

Procedure

The 110 participants are working in different IT companies from Romania, each participant being contacted via a social professional network and the administration of the instrument was online.

Results

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 20 and AMOS Graphics 20. In the first part descriptive analysis are presented and, in the second part, structural equation models are used for testing the hypothesis. In the first step CFA for the three instruments were conducted and some items were excluded. From the psychological empowerment scale all items were kept divided in four dimensions. From the Turnover Intention Scale only one item was removed and from Organizational Commitment Questionnaire some more items were removed. In Table 1 we provided the items from OCQ used in Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

Table 1. Final version of Organizational Commitment Questionnaire used in SEM

Scale	Item
Organizational Commitment Questionnaire	OCQ2 I talk up this organization to my friends as a great organization to work for.
	OCQ4 I would accept almost any type of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization.
	OCQ8 This organization really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.
	OCQ10 There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this organization indefinitely. (R)
	OCQ11 Often, I find it difficult to agree with this organization's policies on important matters relating to its employees. (R)
	OCQ12 I really care about the fate of this organization.
	OCQ13 For me this is the best of all possible organizations for which to work.
	OCQ14 Deciding to work for this organization was a definite mistake on my part. (R)

The fit indices of the final version of the instruments are presented in the table 2.

Table 2. Fit indices for scales

	Items	χ^2	RMR	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
Turnover intention	5	13.548	.064	.958	.963	.125
Psychological Empowerment	12/4	4.810*	.406	.980	.972	.114
Organizational Commitment	8	23.676*	.106	.950	.986	.041

Note: Items (number of items for the final version of the scale used in SEM), RMR (root mean square residual), GFI (Goodness of Fit Index), CFI (comparative fit index), RMSEA (Root mean square of approximation).

* $p < .05$

Beside the fit indices we calculated the reliability through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and the result showed a good internal consistency for all 3 scales. For TIS, the Cronbach's Alpha was .842, for the Psychological Empowerment Scale, the Cronbach's Alpha was .885 and for each dimension: impact ($\alpha = .867$), self-determination ($\alpha = .875$), competence ($\alpha = .839$) and meaning ($\alpha = .867$). For OCQ, the internal consistency was also good, $\alpha = .823$.

For the structural equation modeling maximum likelihood estimation model was used and the standardized scores were reported. In order to evaluate the model fit indices are provided for both confirmatory analysis and structural models.

In order to test the hypothesis, we compared the model without mediator with the model with mediator. The first assumption was about psychological empowerment predicting turnover intention. In figure 1 the first model, testing the first hypothesis, is presented.

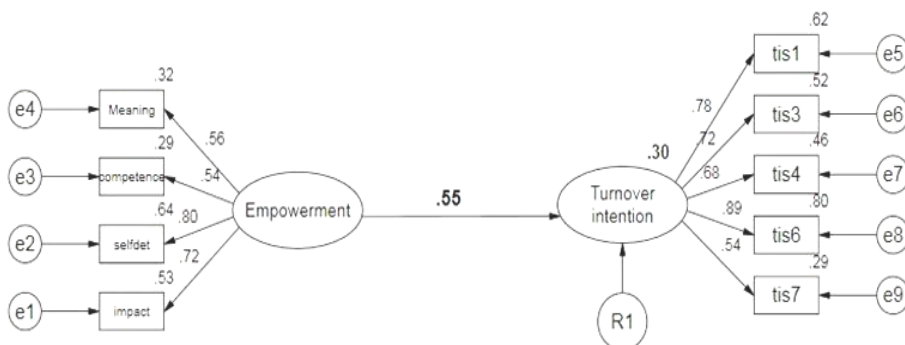


Figure 1. The mediation path from psychological empowerment to turnover intention without mediation. The values represent standardized regression coefficients. * $p < .001$

The first hypothesis is supported which means the psychological empowerment predicts turnover intention ($\beta = .550, p < .001$) and explains 30% of variance. The fit indices, $\chi^2 = 78.786, p < .001$; RMR = .426; GFI = .887; CFI = .866 and RMSEA = .136 prove a poor fit, hence we added a mediator variable in order to improve the model and to explain the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

In Figure 2, the model testing the second hypothesis is presented. The eight - items version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire was added as a mediator.

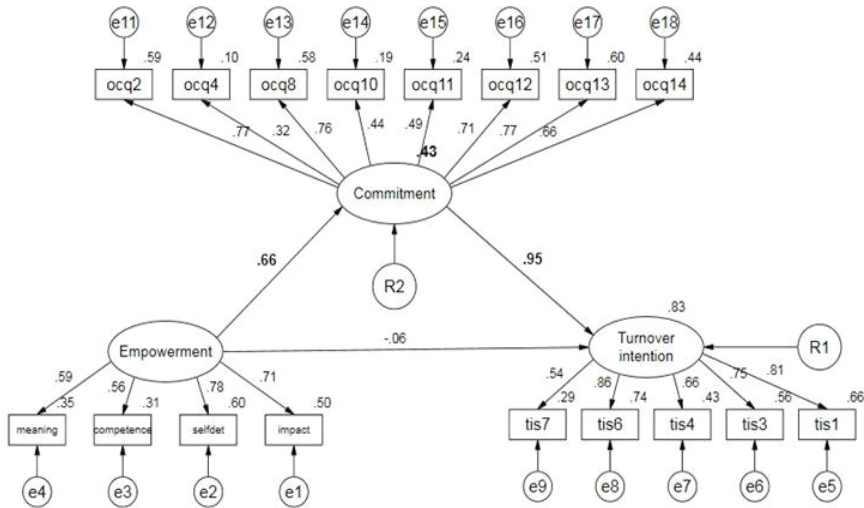


Figure 2. The mediation path from Psychological Empowerment to Turnover Intention through Organizational Commitment. The values represent standardized regression coefficients.

* $p < .05$

In this model the direct effect of psychological empowerment and turnover intention (as intention to remain in the organization) was lower than in the first model and insignificant ($\beta = -.06, p = .570$) findings that support the full mediation. The effect of psychological empowerment on organizational commitment (*path a*) is significant ($\beta = .655, p < .001$) and the effect of mediator on dependent variable (*path b*) is also significant ($\beta = .948, p < .001$). The variance of turnover intention explained by the model is higher than the one explained only by psychological empowerment ($R^2 = .83$) finding that supports better matching of the second model to predict intention to stay in the organization. In order to provide confidence intervals (presented in table 3) a 1000 samples bootstrap was performed.

Table 3. Effects on turnover intention with bootstrap

	β	S.E.	95% CI 1000 - Bootstrap	
			Lower	Upper
Direct effect	-.062	.173	-.454	.185
Indirect effect	.621*	.201	.375	1.174
Total effect	.559*	.117	.303	.764

Note: β (standardized estimate), S.E. (standard error)

* $p < .05$

Based on the fact that the direct effect is decreased and insignificant after adding the mediator variable we can consider the organizational commitment as a complete mediator involved in explaining all the variance between psychological empowerment. The fit indices for both type of mediation model, partial and complete mediation are provided in table 4.

Table 4. Fit indices for mediation models

	CFI	GFI	RMR	RMSEA	AIC	R ²
Partial mediation	.907	.841	.352	.076	263.775	.83
Full mediation	.908	.841	.352	.076	262.087	.82

The values of the mediation models are better than those of the no mediation model but there are no differences between partial mediation and full mediation model. Taking into consideration the insignificant direct effect we can conclude that the full mediation model fits better than the partial one.

Conclusions and discussion

Turnover intention is still one of the understudied challenging research topics in Europe (Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2011) even if the turnover intention is considered the last step before the actual turnover (Mobley, 1977) and offers the possibility to implement strategies of retention. For competitive sectors retention programs represent an important step for a successful business.

The present study aims to offer an understanding of the aspects involved in turnover intention from Information and Technology professional working in Romania. In order to achieve the purpose of the study we hypothesized the influence of psychological empowerment in the intention to stay in the organization and the mediating role of the organizational commitment. For testing the relationship between variables we used the structural equation

modeling and compared the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable in the model without mediator and in the mediator model. The indirect effect and the bootstrap confidence intervals are also discussed in the paper.

The first hypothesis was supported therefore the psychological empowerment predicts the intention to remain part of the organization. Results can be explained if we take into account the role conflict and role ambiguity implication in the turnover intention (Calisir et al., 2011; Solli-Sæther, 2011) and the psychological empowerment as a concept involving a low role ambiguity (Spreitzer, 1996). Thus, IT professional feeling their work meaningful, the impact in their department, competence in resolving work tasks and self-determination tend to have an intention to remain in the organization. However, psychological empowerment explains a low percentage of the intention to keep the job (30%) and an improvement for the model was necessary.

The second hypothesis was also supported by the results. The organizational commitment completely mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and a decreased turnover intention. The direct effect is insignificant while the indirect effect is significant $\beta = .621$, S.E. = .201 [95% CI: .375 – 1.174], hence, we can conclude that organizational commitment is a mediator for the relationship between the independent variable, psychological empowerment, and the dependent variable, decreased turnover intention as the “95% CI does not contain zero” as stated by Preacher & Hayes (2008, p. 886). The mediation involves causality (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) and, in this case, the psychological empowerment is the first step for having employees with an intention to stay with the organization. As measured by Spreitzer’s scale (1995), the psychological empowerment is related to the work context which involves the implication of the organization. Being confident about their work role in the organization the specialist returns by developing the commitment to the organization fact that contributes to the intention of staying in the organization. This exchange between organization and employee could be seen thru the psychological contract and understood as a relational contract with implication in forming and maintaining the relationship between the specialist and the organization (Rousseau, 1989, 2001).

This study provides a clarification on understanding the relationship between variables implicated in turnover intention. The psychological empowerment is a result of a well defined work role in the organization and psychologically empowered employees have control on the way they are doing their job and in their department, feel skilled and, also, feel that their job has a personal meaning. The concept is only related with the work context which makes it a responsibility for the organization and brings benefits for the organization motivating employees to commit and to intend to remain part of the organization. Results are similar with findings of Sam Gnanakkan (2010)

concluding on commitment as a mediator of the relationship between human resources practices and turnover intention.

Regarding the limitations of the study, we should take into account that the external validity is limited for employees from IT industry, working in private sector. The number of the participants can also be a limit, even if it is enough for structural equation modeling, is small for the number of Information and Technology specialist working in Romania. Another limitation of this study is related to remove items mainly from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire which makes the comparison with similar studies difficult. In order to exceed this limit, we provided the items used in the data analysis.

This study aims to verify the relationship between psychological empowerment, organizational commitment and turnover intention and provides a model that can be useful for future researchers interested in predicting turnover intention but also for practitioners from organizations interested in employee retention. Findings provide an insight into the effects of empowering from psychological point of view the professionals working in a competitive business sector, where money is not enough for keeping employees. A structural model was necessary for analyzing each path involving psychological empowerment, organizational commitment and decreased turnover intention.

In conclusion, based on results we can consider organizational efforts involved in enhanced psychological empowerment useful for their commitment to the organization and for their intention to remain in the organization and future human resources practices could take it into account. Future research should focus on improving the model by adding variables as mediators and moderators in order to provide a key for keeping employee.

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