Chapter XII

The Relationship Between Role Variables and Turnover Intentions Among IT Professionals: An Examination of Moderating Effects

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ABSTRACT

Results from prior studies have indicated that role ambiguity and role conflict are sometimes directly related to turnover intentions among information technology professionals, but sometimes they are not. The purpose of this research is to provide possible explanations for these discrepant results. This study hypothesized that the relationships between role variables and turnover intentions are moderated by (a) achievement need strength and (b) organizational tenure. These hypotheses were
tested using data from a questionnaire survey. The results showed that achievement need strength moderates the relationship between role variables and turnover intentions, and organizational tenure moderates the relationship between role ambiguity and turnover intentions. One implication of these results is that moderating variables may help to clarify inconsistent findings in prior research. Another implication is that employers should take into consideration the effects of moderating variables when designing retention strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers who studied turnover tendencies of information technology (IT) professionals often proposed that role conflict and role ambiguity are among the driving forces leading to turnover (Igbaria & Greenhaus, 1992; Gupta et al., 1992; Baroudi, 1985). This is not surprising because early research has shown that system designers’ positions are associated with high levels of role conflict and role ambiguity (Bostrom, 1980), and that these two role variables are negatively correlated with outcomes such as job satisfaction and general satisfaction (Goldstein & Rockart, 1984)—the predecessors of turnover intentions. Although results from a few empirical studies have shown that role conflict and role ambiguity are directly related to turnover intentions (Igbaria & Greenhaus, 1992), some have found that they are related only indirectly (Baroudi, 1985). In the latter instance, job satisfaction and organizational commitment mediate the relationship between role variables and turnover intentions. The inconsistent results pertaining to the relationship between role variables and turnover intentions are puzzling. Prior research has not provided explanations for the inconsistencies.

This chapter presents the results of a study that investigated the inconsistent results obtained in prior research. The objective was to clarify why a direct relationship between role variables and turnover intentions sometimes existed, while sometimes it did not. Although role conflict and role ambiguity have been acknowledged as variables that significantly impact turnover intentions among computer professionals, researchers have not understood exactly how these variables work. The inconsistent results create uncertainties in understanding the turnover phenomenon. This research was aimed at filling the gaps in our understanding.
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