Behavioral Intentions and Retention of Technical and Scientific Staff in Research and Development Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Different reasons influence intentions of technical and scientific professionals to stay or leave their current jobs, impacting the ability of companies to retain these professionals. This paper identified the antecedents of intentions to leave, intentions to stay, and retention of such technical and scientific professionals in private research and development organizations from the Greater Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil. Data was collected via online questionnaires between December, 2014 and March, 2015. Job satisfaction and supervisory support were negatively related to the intention to leave the organization, and positively related to the intention to stay in the organization. Training and development opportunities and organizational culture presented negative relation only to the intention to leave the organization. The article discusses these results and presents suggestions for future studies.

KEYWORDS

Intention to Stay, Intention to Leave, Knowledge-Intensive Organizations, Turnover Intentions, Voluntarily Leave

INTRODUCTION

Retaining technical and scientific professionals is one of the main concerns of managers of research and development organizations (R&D). These organizations are immersed in a highly mobile job market (O’Neal, 2005) and face a scarcity of qualified professionals (Armstrong & Murlis, 2007). Since R&D organizations market intangible assets, great part of their knowledge lies with their professionals (tacit knowledge), making them valuable to organizations. Tacit knowledge is not easily copied or transferred (Massingham, 2008), and when professionals leave an organization, they take with them all the critical knowledge regarding “work practices and routines and knowledge about company’s failures and successes.” (Daghrous, Belkhodja, & Angell, 2013, p. 641). Research shows that qualified technical professionals are harder to replace than other professionals (Upadhyay, 2009) and that they voluntarily leave organizations more often than they are fired.

Staff retention is the organizational competence of keeping value added employees working for the organization (Bode, Singh, & Rogan, 2015; Brown et al., 2012) so that organizational strategic goals are reached (Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor, 2004). Many studies have directed efforts toward identifying the antecedents of people retention in organizations. Some of these antecedents include job market
(Carrell, 2007); organizational environment and learning (Govaerts et al., 2011); gender (Huang, Lin, & Chuang, 2006); motivation (Mgedezi, Toga, & Mjoli, 2014, 2001); training (Carrara et al., 2014; Hillman & Foster, 2011; Oliveira, Ckagnazaroff, Silveira, & Moraes, 2012); benefits (Carrara et al., 2014; Yamamoto, 2011); job satisfaction (Yamamoto, 2011; Terera & Ngirande, 2014); organizational identification (Hytter, 2007); and education (Kyndt, Dochy, Michielsen, & Moeyaert, 2009).

Prior research on people retention has associated this construct to employees’ cognitions influencing the actual behaviours of continuing to work in the organization (intention to stay) or voluntarily leaving it (intention to leave the organization) (Paille, 2013). Intention to stay refers to the conscious willingness to stay at the current job (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). On the other hand, intention to leave consists of the conscious willingness to leave the current job in the near future (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Intention to leave involves thoughts about the desire to search for other work opportunities, or, simply, the possibility of leaving the organization (Cho, Johanson, & Gucha, 2009).

The constructs of intention to stay and intention to leave the organization are rooted in the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Ajzen, 2011). The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is considered to be the most widely applied model of cognitive antecedents of behaviour and explains around 27% of the variance in behaviour in different areas (Armitage & Conner, 2001). TPB establishes three direct antecedents to the intention toward a behaviour: attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. An attitude refers to how an individual evaluates a certain behaviour he or she wishes to execute (in a positive-negative continuum). Subjective norms are based on the person’s beliefs about what significant others think she or he should do (Ajzen, 1991). The third construct is perceived behavioural control, which “is a function of the individual’s perception of how hard it would be to perform the behaviour, thus is determined by the extent to which they believe they have self-efficacy to perform the behaviour, and perceive that they have control over the behaviour” (Greaves, Zibarras, & Stride, 2013, p.110).

Compared to people retention construct, intention to stay and intention to leave organization are less researched constructs. In fact, no studies that included all three constructs simultaneously were found. This article aims to diminish this gap by addressing all three phenomena within a single study, which means working with constructs from two distinct analysis levels: the organizational level (staff retention) and the individual analysis level (behavioural intentions to stay and voluntarily leave organizations). The article, therefore, identifies the antecedents to people retention and to behavioural intentions to stay or leave private R&D organizations from the perspective of their technical and scientific professionals.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The present investigation analyses how classic constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational culture, perception of training and development opportunities, and perceived supervisory support relate to technical and scientific professionals’ intentions to stay or voluntarily leave their current job. The study also tests if these constructs influence the ability of an organization to retain those professionals.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is an “evaluative state that expresses contentment with, and positive feelings about, one’s job” (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 343). It is one of the most influential areas of research in both organizational Psychology and organizational behaviour. In line with the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), one of the most validated measures of job satisfaction, this research includes the following job satisfaction facets: work, supervision, co-workers, pay, and promotion.

Most earlier studies identified significant positive association between job satisfaction and intention to stay of nurses working in hospitals (Jiang et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Laschinger et
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