

Professional Employee Retention: Examining The Relationships Between Organizational Citizenship Behavior And Turnover Cognitions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between organizational citizenship behaviour, intention to search a job, intention to leave the organization, and the profession. Using a sample of social workers (N = 327), findings show that while intention to leave the employer is explained by helping, civic virtue and sportsmanship, intention to leave the profession is explained only by civic virtue and sportsmanship. The implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: Employee Retention; Organizational Citizenship Behavior; Professional Employees

INTRODUCTION

Employee withdrawal occurs when an employee exhibits an inclination to disengage from the workplace if the latter is deemed to affect physical or mental health (Gupta and Jenkins, 1983). Lateness, absenteeism and turnover are the major forms of withdrawal behaviour (Hanish and Hulin, 1990; Rossé, 1988). Following Boswell and Olson-Buchanan (2004, p. 130) "withdrawal may also come in the form of adaptive behaviours whereby an employee lessens participation in the work situation yet maintains membership in the organization." Deviance literature (for example, Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2004; Robinson and Bennett, 1995) adds another form of behaviour tantamount to withdrawal in the workplace that includes being absent when not really sick, working slowly, taking excessively long breaks or long lunch periods, etc. (for a more complete list see Robinson and Benett, 1995). Both types of literature on job satisfaction and employee commitment report extensive data showing that when employees are dissatisfied with their jobs or become less committed to their organizations, they are prone to engage in a withdrawal process (Hom and Griffeth, 1995). Increasingly, the link between organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and employee withdrawal has become a focal point of research. Many empirical studies have found a significant negative correlation indicating that OCB promotes employee retention (Chen, 2005; Chen, Hui and Sego, 1998; Coyne and Ong, 2007; MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Ahearne, 1998; Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Blume, 2009). These previous findings are consistent with Harrison, Newman and Roth (2006), who provide empirical evidence supporting a view of OCB as the initial stage of employee withdrawal. Because OCB is recognized as a form of discretionary behaviour, not formally required in the workplace (Organ, Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 2006), it is less risky for employees to reduce OCB than to exhibit deviant behaviour or to express discontent by increasing their rate of absenteeism. In practical terms, this means, for example, that a low level of OCB is a significant indicator that may reflect an intended process of withdrawal from the organization.

Recent literature has largely overlooked the link between OCB and changing professions. In most studies, employee retention is restricted to the notion of an employee leaving an organization to join another organization. However, employee retention may legitimately be expanded to include changing professions. Changing employers and changing professions are significantly different processes. A change of employer occurs when an employee