The Dynamic Role of Social Exchange and Personality in Predicting Turnover Intentions among Professional Workers

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Abstract

The dynamic role of fairness, trust and teamwork has strongly affected professionals’ attitude and behaviours that are commonly complex and uncontrolled. Separations between personality and professionals’ behaviour have led to poor social interaction activity within an organisation. This paper is aimed at discussing the impact of social exchange in predicting turnover intentions among professional workers and the mediating role of personality in this relationship. Clear and strong behavioural expectations among professional workers must engage with fair treatments on interactional, distribution and procedures. Organisational trust formed the central focus on integrity between employee-employer where professional workers perceived that the ethical practises should be in place. Teamwork develops high commitment among team members and a two-way communication encourages feedback, clear job expectations and sustains long term relationships. Professional workers’ openness to experience value helps in the freedom to create new ideas, innovation and create new experience for career development. The propositions were developed to explain the relationship between social exchange and personality in predicting professional workers’ turnover intentions. Based on several limitations, there would therefore seem to be a definite need for conducting an empirical study to link between social exchange and turnover intentions among specific or combination professional occupations such as engineers, doctors, architects, accountants and lawyers. The need to conduct a qualitative study is to prove the most important dimensions used to predict actual turnover intentions among professional workers, whilst a quantitative method is employed to examine the impact among variables based on the developed research model.

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1. Introduction

The issue about retention evidence for professional workers remains unsolved (George, 2015). Talent retention has been an object research since the 1990s. It has started from the overview of selecting and retaining issues until the development of the framework to understand and implement the powerful retention strategies among professional workers (Hiltrop, 1999; Sigler, 1999; Igbaria & Siegel, 1992). Much more information has become available on ways to encourage professional workers to remain in the same employment. The efforts include individual and organisational factors, environment, psychological aspects, political, exchange ideology, organisational culture and socialisation (Andrews, Witt and Kacmar, 2003; Bigliardi, Petroni & Dormio, 2005; Coombs, 2009; Flint, Haley & McNally, 2013; May & Askham, 2005; Williams & Glisson, 2013). What is not yet clear is the amount of organisation’s influence and control against these aspects to avoid departing decisions of core talents to look other jobs (Brashear, Manolis & Brooks, 2005). In spite of predicting various strategies that match with retention, social values involved a long-term process on how this element matches to professionals’ behavioural expectations (George, 2015). More importantly, social-based factors are not owned by any organisation and it should be combined with other social exchange approaches to predict an accurate professional worker’s turnover intentions (Avanzi, Fraccarollo, Sarchielli, Ullrich & van Dick, 2014).

Social interaction is an initial step for professional workers’ work development (Hiltrop, 1999). Rust, Stewart, Miller and Pielack (1996) added the continuity of social interactions help organisations to reflect positive professionals’ retention outcomes. A serious weakness with poor social relationship, however, is that the interpersonal treatments between employees and employers cannot be generated (Flint, Haley & McNally, 2013). From an individual perspective, the decision to leave current employers has affected a reciprocal relationship between both parties (Singh, Fouad, Fitzpatrick, Liu, Cappaert & Figuereido, 2013). This relationship commonly referred to as exchange which relates to long-term human relationship between employees and organisation (Croppanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Mensah & Alemna, 1997). Islam, Khan, Ungku Ahmad and Ahmed (2013) highlighted that exchange relations and employee’s behaviours cannot be separated to witness lower turnover intentions. Conclusions reached by several authors revealed that professional workers have a strong behavioural expectation which to influence in deciding to leave current employers voluntarily (Singh et al, 2013; Temkar, 2013). To better understand the mechanisms of social exchange and its effects on behavioural turnover intentions, human characteristics and personality work for predicting actual behavioural intentions (Sahi & Mahajan, 2014). Difficulties arise when an attempt is made to understand different human characteristics and personality from one another. The main weakness is that, personality evolves continuously and this evolution influences individual quantity and quality of their social exchange activities (Bolton and Lane, 2012; Yang, Gong & Huo, 2011).

Up to now, little evidence has been found associating organisational justice, organisational trust and teamwork with turnover intentions among professional workers. The central function of social exchange provides a strong foundation of justice and trust (Avanzi et al, 2014; DeConinck, 2010). Teamwork is considered to be the most important cooperative behaviour among organisation members, yet it is difficult and requires a lot of effort to sustain group morale (Kharbanda & Stallworthy, 1990). Since this aspect has been recognised as being a complex social activity within an organisation (Nelsey & Brownie, 2012), many authors have isolated teamwork and turnover intentions with professional workers. Apart from that, personality determines an individual’s behaviour to shape interpersonal interaction, little is known about the impact by which this predictor affects professional workers’ behavioural intentions (Sahi et al, 2014). In view of all the gaps that have been mentioned so far, the purpose of this study is to discuss the influence of social exchange in predicting turnover intentions among professional talents. The discussion of social exchange is only limited to three main elements, namely organisational justice, organisational trust and teamwork. In addition, this paper also explores the moderating role of personality in the relationship between social exchange and turnover intentions among professional workers. To discuss these objectives, two research questions are developed:

a) What is the impact of social exchange (organisational justice, organisational trust and teamwork) on
turnover intentions among professional workers?

b) How far does personality moderate the relationship between social exchange and turnover intentions among professional workers?

2. Literature review

By drawing the concept of turnover intentions, Takase (2010) provides a comprehensive analysis on how turnover intentions can be characterised. In this detailed analysis, he concluded that turnover intentions involved multi-stage process such as psychological, cognitive and behavioural. Psychological is an initial step followed by cognitive and the actual decision of staying or leaving the current organisation is made on behavioural intentions. According to Mobley (1982), turnover intentions can be referred to as voluntary intention to cease from being employed by his or her current employer. It is a conscious willfulness to leave the organisation on the employee’s own wills (Kuvaas, 2006; Tett & Meyer, 1993). It is thought that turnover intentions lead to an actual turnover and significant links between turnover intentions and actual turnover behaviour are found in previous studies (Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Tett et al, 1993; Tett et al, 1993).

Professional workers refer to as a highly-skilled, knowledgeable and produce distinctive values to organisations (Goffee & Jones, 2007). Features that are meant to be describe them are commonly a special type of occupation, autonomy, competency, expertise and highly functioning group (Gelens, Dries, Hofmans & Pepermans, 2013; Ranft and Lord, 2000). Accountants, architects, dentists, doctors, engineers, IT professionals, lawyers and lecturers are among the professional worker’s occupations (Abdull Rahman, 2012; Ranft et al, 2000; Tremblay, Wils & Proulx, 2002). Scholars hold the view that turnover intentions and professional workers are an on-going phenomenon. One possible implication of this is that the organisation suffers from allocating a huge budget to recruit, select and replace professional workers (George, 2015). When loosing professional workers one is likely to experience the adverse impact of brain drain and talent competition which one is ready to surrender (Pa Kim, 2008). Integration between talent retention and professional workers has seen as a vital event to balance between experts and values to remain functional in the competitive market (Claiborne, Auerbach, Zeitlin & Lawrence, 2015; Ranft et al, 2000).

2.1. Social exchange theory (SET)

The social exchange theory (SET) has been vigorously challenged in recent years by a number of researchers (Brimhall, Lizano & Barak, 2014; Cheng & Waldenberger, 2013; Singh et al, 2013). For example, Singh et al (2013) highlighted the difficulties to understand an engineer’s social support and how self-confidence prevents professional workers from leaving the current organisation. Flint et al (2013) address the issue and attempts to identify the unspecific obligations among the different individual employees and their return expectations. Other than that, Cropanzano et al (2005) brought the organisation’s attention to control unwanted employee’s behaviour that is lacking certain social exchange approaches that they should commit. SET has been widely used in explaining an organisations member’s relationship. This theory relates to understanding workplace behaviour and how employees and employers interact with one another (Biron & Boon, 2013; Cropanzano et al, 2005; Smith, 2005). According to Blau (1964), successful exchange appears when there is a commitment among members. Justice, leader-member exchange, psychological contract, teamwork and trust are the common elements discussed under this theory. SET stresses that the individual voluntary actions happen if there are some expected returns from what they have contributed (Tse et al, 2013). The rationale of SET and turnover intentions decision are the reciprocal process between employees and their current employers (Wittmer, Martin & Tekleab, 2010).

2.2. The influence of social exchange and turnover intentions among professional workers

Social exchange relates to social interactions between employees and organisations (Cropanzano et al, 2005). Establishment of reciprocity relationships between both parties influence employee’s behaviours (Wittmer et al, 2010). Stronger relationships will directly impact on member’s attitudes and behaviours towards better performance, motivation and lower withdrawal decisions. It has been demonstrated that a high turnover results in failure to social exchange relationship (Avanzi et al, 2014; Schulz, Luhtans and Messersmith, 2014). Factors that are thought to influence social exchange have been explored in several studies. Chen and Yu (2014) and Sanjeevkumar (2012)
claimed that jobs, working environment and social support have improved retention rate. One study by Brimhall et al. (2014) examined the employee’s perspective towards supervisory relationship and found that 43 percent of variance in the intention to leave highlighted two main keys which include diversity climate and job satisfaction. In an analysis of emotional stability, the quality of supervisors and peer support will reduce the unstable emotions between employees and supervisors (Karatepe, 2013). In the same year, Nouri and Parker (2013) employed the interference of social exchange into accounting firms. The findings revealed that employment relationships increase commitment and reduce the turnover among junior employees. Investigation of the social exchange involved in turnover intentions among professional workers was first carried out in 1990s. Table 1 summarises the social exchange studies development which include elements of social exchange, occupations and authors. It is almost certain that the retention of professional workers will improve with perceived organisational support in the long term. This phenomenon though needs to be interpreted with caution as this finding might not be generalised to represent professional worker’s behavioural intention to leave the present organisation as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Occupations</th>
<th>Social exchange elements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ertürk and Vurgun (2015)</td>
<td>IT professionals</td>
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<td>George (2015)</td>
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<td>Abdull Rahman (2012)</td>
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<td>Fu et al (2013)</td>
<td>Doctors</td>
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<td>Tymon Jr, Stumpf and Smith (2011)</td>
<td>General</td>
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<td>Thurasamy, Lo, Anri and Noor (2011)</td>
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Note. LMX - leader-member exchange; OJ - organisational justice; POS - perceived organisational support; OT - organisational trust; PS - psychological contract; TW - teamwork

2.2.1 The influence of organisational justice on turnover intentions among professional workers

Organisational justice proved an important genre in the social exchange community (DeConinck, 2010). Many scholars hold the view that organisational justice is affected by employee’s behaviour. A likely explanation is that fair treatment enhances social relationship among organisation members (Parker and Kohlmeyer III, 2005). There is some evidence to suggest that organisation justice associated with turnover intentions (Heponiemi et al, 2013; Hsing et al, 2008; Westlund & Hannan, 2008). Enhancing justice is likely to reduce an employee’s job stress and reduce negative intentions to leave their current employer (Boyas, Wind and Ruiz, 2013). According Heponiemi et al (2013), improving justice is similar to improve employee’s satisfaction, involvement and retention. Strategies to enhance justice might involve trust (DeConinck, 2010). Justice is an obligation to improve a member’s trust in the organisation. The possible interference of trust cannot be ruled out without justice to influence the daily activities of the organisation (Tulubas & Celep, 2012). In supporting the interrelation between organisational justice and organisation trust, Vanhala and Ahteela (2011) highlighted that the perception connections of justice is used to build trust within an organisation. The absence of trust would suffer from practices involving injustice (Brashear et al, 2005). Marzucco et al. (2014) indicated that procedural, interactional and distributive justices are related to organisational justice.

Hassan and Hashim (2011) found that distributive justice negatively related to turnover intentions, whilst procedural and interactional justice to predict the period of how long present employees are engaged with the same employment (Ghosh & Sahney, 2011). Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs (2013) found that gen Y is impressed to stay in if there is justice value implemented within an organisation. The evidence of justice and turnover intentions can be clearly seen in the case of innovative behaviour. In 2007, Shih, Ru, Fu and Rong proved the relationship between distributive justice and employee’s innovative behaviour. The dynamics of role distributive justice leads to reduce turnover intentions, commitment and job satisfaction (DeConinck & Stilwell, 2004; Shih et al, 2007). The relationship between an interactional justice and turnover intentions has been widely investigated (Flint et al, 2013). Even though interactional justice is a significant predictor in predicting employee’s turnover
intentions, Flint et al (2013) argued on how this element would ultimately improve the quality of the employee’s exchange with current supervisor. This is because the perception of employees toward jobs and organisations lead them to create good and better relationships among members. If this happens, the turnover intentions will notify lower intentions (DeConinck et al, 2004). Nadiri and Tanova (2010) concluded that procedural, distributive and interactional justice is the stronger determinants in predicting turnover intentions. Thus, the following propositions are developed:

H1a: Organisational trust and organisational justice are interrelated in predicting turnover intentions among professional workers

H1b: Distributive justice is negatively related to turnover intentions among professional workers

H1c: Interactional justice is negatively related to turnover intentions among professional workers

H1d: Procedural justice is negatively related to turnover intentions among professional workers

2.2.2 The influence of organisational trust on turnover intentions among professional workers

In the consequent analysis on turnover intentions, May et al (2005) questioned the level of trust and its influence on organisation members’ ability to connect with behaviours and attitudes. Maintaining level of trust has proved negative results of turnover intentions (Ertürk et al, 2015; Smith, 2013). Smith (2013) argues that an outcome of trust begins from an individual person. The person’s confidence and ability to inspire trust in others builds in the leader’s honesty and power value (Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2011). This view is supported to maintain social exchange and gain trust between organisation members. Organisational trust is found in a stronger predictor for predicting turnover intentions among CEO and top management (Costigan, Insinga, Berman, Kranas & Kureshov, 2011). In the management level, trust must be increased to win the confidence among existing employees (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). The analysis of organisation trust gains within clients, suppliers, business partners, supervisors, leaders, salespersons and nurses to witness a low level of turnover rates (Brashear et al, 2005; Cabrera and Soto, 2011; McCabe and Sambrook, 2013). A recent study of Ertürk et al (2015) proved that low level of trust among IT professionals gained several possibilities. Low level of trust allows employees to manipulate information, resist new ideas, hide mistakes, over promises and often feel stress. Conversely, high level of trust commonly shares information, admits mistakes, always honest, has good communication, retains transparency and promotes integrity. Smith (2013) agreed that to improve retentions, professionals should develop trust among members with enhancing consistency, transparency and integrity.

It is believed that integrity is a key dimension of organisational trust (Appelbaum et al. 2004; Katou, 2013). DeConinck (2011) refers integrity as a belief of trustees conforms to set of principles that trustors thought possible. Integrity is developed with justice, consistency, open and honest (Tulubas et al, 2012). Much of the available literature on the integrity deals with limited discussion, mainly with professional workers’ turnover intentions. In 2011, Costigan et al revealed that a CEO’s integrity is a significant relationship to employee’s turnover. Employee perceptions on CEO and top management level trust work for directing their competence in making the decision making process more fairly and justly. A survey conducted by Birt, Wallis and Winternitz (2004) identified intrinsic factors among South African workers and their influence on talent retention. This descriptive study found that 65 employees ranked manager integrity and quality as important values. The evidence of greater retention gains from higher employee’s perception towards integrity possessed by managerial position employees. They added that integrity is controlled by individual employees, thus their behavioural expectation reflects the turnover intention decisions. This behavioural aspect however is very difficult to monitor and witness practitioner’s credibility and enhance perceived integrity. Hence, a proposition as shown below is developed:

2a: Integrity and turnover intentions among professional workers are negatively associated

2.2.3 The influence of teamwork on turnover intentions among professional workers

Co-operative behaviours among team members are critical functions among modern organisations (Park, Henkin & Egley, 2005). Teamwork has become one of the most important activities of the 1990s. The controversial relates to the benefits gained among organisation members and selecting the right team members (Kharbanda et al, 1990). Recent developments of teamwork within an organisation need to understand the different roles of team members, role demand and promoting a well-being program. However, few writers have admitted the limited number of paper produced with teamwork (Goh, Chan & Kuziemsky, 2013; Tanco, et al., 2011; Williamson, Lounsbury & Han,
to the improvement of performance. The impact of personality on turnover intentions is significant. Yang et al (2011) proved this relationship which revealed proactive personality in career success and external job mobility affects turnover intentions. Ertürk et al (2015) analysed the retention strategies among professional workers and suggested to study personality traits in predicting turnover intentions. Drew, Carless and Thompson (2008) proved that personality affects turnover intentions among police officers. The resignation takes place if the police officers fell upset compared to those who own extraversion type of personality. Unlike Drew et al (2008), Maertz and Griffith (2004) found that openness to experience has only shown a positive influence on turnover intentions. One possible explanation is that high openness to experience will create a new experience for employees to seek other job opportunities.

The moderating role personality has not been discussed in much detail in predicting turnover intentions among professional workers. However, previous researches have consistently shown that personality has a positive impact on turnover intentions. The emergence of personality contributes to career satisfaction, job performance and turnover rate. In an investigation on an engineer’s personality, Williamson et al (2013) proved that openness to experience affects the decision for selecting and retaining engineers’ in a long term career. The knowledge of engineer’s openness to experience improves their career satisfaction, job performance and turnover intentions. A wider role of personality can be seen in teamwork. Muchinsky (2003) claimed that personality factors relate to
teamwork performance. Moreover, justice is the predictor to improve openness within an organisation. According to Meisler (2013), organisational justice and emotional intelligence are important predictors to predict employee’s turnover intentions. Thus, the following propositions are advanced:

4a: Openness to experience and turnover intentions among professional workers are negatively related

4b: Relationship between organisational justice and turnover intentions among professional workers are moderated by openness to experience

4c: Openness to experience moderates the relationship between integrity and turnover intentions among professional workers

4d: Openness to experience moderates the relationship between communication and turnover intentions among professional workers

2.3. Research model

Research model is developed to assess the relationship between social exchange and turnover intentions among professional workers. Figure 1 shows the paths of specific link among social exchange variables (organisational justice, integrity and communication) and turnover intentions. This study also discusses the moderating role of personality (openness to experience) in the relationship between social exchange and turnover intentions among professional workers.

3. Discussion

This paper discusses the significance of social exchange in predicting turnover intentions among professional talents. In addition, this paper discusses the moderating role of personality in the relationship between social exchange and turnover intentions among professional workers. The central question in this paper asks how social exchange meets the professional worker’s behavioural expectations and influence the positive retention decision. The social exchange theory (SET) conceptualises human relationships (Avanzi et al, 2014; Silva & Caetano, 2014) and the establishment of social relationship enables the employee’s to meet his or her expectations towards job and employment. SET is a foundation to describe employee’s behaviours (Ghosh et al, 2011) and the key channel to treat employees with fairness, support and trust (Avanzi et al, 2014; Andrews et al, 2003; Ertürk et al, 2015; Smith 2015). The desired outcome is a higher retention and quality employee-employer relationship (Croppanzano et al, 2005). Guidance and advice from the supervisor will help employees to manage tasks and be responsible for problems and this initiative improves human relationship and social interaction within an organisation.

Separation between professional workers and current employers is the common event. Strong demand of professional workers leads to a higher turnover (Mosley & Hurley, 1999). The implication of losing professional workers will lead to the downfall from huge investments with attracting, selecting and replacing existing ones. Due to this challenge, many organisations have started analysing the turnover among professional workers and utilising any possible resources to enhance retention (Chapman, 2009). Turnover intentions are an individual cognitive behaviour and this behavioural intention is difficult to predict (Bigliardi et al, 2005; Igbaria et al, 1992). Cuskelly and Hoye (2013) added that behavioural intentions involve attitudinal which is commonly complex and very
difficult to measure. Singh et al (2013), Temkar (2013) and Tuzun and Kalemcı (2012) suggested understanding professional workers’ behavioural intentions and expectations since they have a strong expectation towards job and employment. Employment expectations are related to the employee’s attitudes and behaviour. When intentions translate into behaviour, the decisions of staying or leaving are fully controlled by an individual person (Rust et al, 1996).

4. Conclusion

According to Avanzi et al (2014), Cheng et al (2013) and Mensah et al (1997), one of the main reasons why a professional worker leaves his current organisation is the failure of the employment relationship. Kroon and Charissa (2013) argued that the possible outcome of retention is the improvement of social relationship within an organisation. Islam et al (2013) indicated that the link between social exchange and employee’s behaviours are the vital components for fighting voluntarily turnover among present employees. Social exchange engages fairness, trust, teamwork, support and leadership to promote a meaningful work environment and harmonisation between the employee and employer. The quality of social exchange exists when the principles of justice are implemented. Although justice is dynamic and a very subjective perception from one’s single employee to another (Gelens et al, 2013), treating employees with distributive, interactional and procedural justice enhance commitment, satisfaction and turnover. A professional worker’s perceptions towards justice will benefit a positive economic change (Marzocco et al, 2014). Lack of teamwork will also lead to not achieving the goals of the organisation (Park et al, 2005). Professional workers who rely on teamwork directly will generate ideas, openness to innovation and strengthen power. More importantly, a high level of professional teamwork will sustain a group morale, commitment and loyalty.

Trust shapes the employee’s turnover intentions. Organisations which are to promote trust among members are able to gain support from their employees. A high level of trust will is likely to improve the individual’s integrity. Competence and integrity can be promoted in many ways, mainly into the decision making processes. Thus, by enhancing behavioural integrity it is a signal to sustain organisational business reputation and creating high values of the organisation members’ positive perception and confidence. Another factor that should be highlighted is the individual’s personality and its influence on actual behavioural turnover intentions. Understanding the employee’s different characteristics and personality stabilises the social relationship. Openness to experience among professional workers affects his or her entrepreneur’s skills to innovate, create and produce an excellent idea (Zhang et al, 2011). Understanding different personalities among professional workers and behavioural intentions help in building good interpersonal skills, team performance, communication and innovativeness.

The main limitation of this paper is the limited findings from previous literatures that are needed to support the discussion. This paper is purely based on a conceptual paper without proving any empirical finding to witness the impact of social exchange and personality in predicting turnover intentions among professional workers. Limited sources and findings have made this study difficult to provide much information about professional worker’s turnover intentions. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct a comprehensive research mainly involving professional workers, either by using the quantitative, qualitative or mix methods. A combination of both methods will strengthen the findings to be more accurate and aligned. Longitudinal studies also found very limited studies in predicting turnover intentions among professional workers. This paper only discusses three main variables of social exchange such as organisational justice, organisational trust and teamwork. Each of the variables involves a sub-element to whether or not these elements react into turnover intentions among professional workers.
Future research should study on other elements, such as leader-member exchange and organisational support as they are relevant among professional workers’ to practice. Wider functions of personality benefit to predict actual characteristics of professional workers. Instead of discussing openness to experience, future researchers should assess other personality dimensions from the big five personalities (extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability and agreeableness) and proactive personality. This study does not discuss any specific occupation to represent professional workers’ turnover intentions from the social exchange perspective. It is beneficial to study a professional worker’s behavioural intentions among engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, accountants or lecturers.

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