

Impact of Self -Concept on Turnover Intention: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

A high level of employee turnover can jeopardize organizational productivity; increase the hiring costs and the valuable loss of tacit knowledge. In recent times the focus has shifted from external organizational factors to individual psychological variables as the deeper forces behind employee's motive to quit organizations. The empirical paper investigates the relationship between employee's self-concept with turnover intention in the organizational context. The individual self-concept may play a pivotal role in employee's turnover intention as hypothesized in the paper. Samples of 180 employees were surveyed in four organizations of Saudi Arabia. It was found that the individual self-concept had a positive relationship with turnover intention. The future implications have been discussed.

Keywords: collective; individual; organization; self-concept; turnover intention

Introduction

Employee turnover has serious consequences for effective organizational operations. The time and energy devoted to find suitable new employees and the time required for new employees to reach maximum level of output may sometimes result in barriers in achieving organizational objectives. Turnover intention has been a critical issue for management for many years (Chen, Lin & Lien, 2010) and it is a major problem for organizations now. Moreover, most often turnover intention is consequential to the actual quitting behavior (Griffeth et al, 2000; Horn et. al, 1992). Turnover and turnover intention have been separately measured (Bedeian et al., 1991), but turnover intention was recognized as the final cognitive variable having an immediate causal effect on turnover (Bedeian t al., 1991). Actual turnover is expected to increase as the intention increases (Mobley, 1977; Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978).

Each of us has a self-concept – the set of characteristics that reflect the type of person we are (Wakslak et al.2008). By enabling us to define who we are, a self -concept is central to our existence as human beings: it shapes our thoughts and actions, it serves as a lens through which we interpret the environment and our experiences, and it drives us to behave with some consistency across a variety of situations (Kettle, 2011).Traditionally, studies have focused on job satisfaction and organizational commitment as the primary precursors of voluntary (as distinguished from involuntary) turnover. Increasingly, however, researchers have suggested investigating possible personality variables that may help explain even more variance in turnover (Jenkins, 2006).

Barrick & Mount (2005) accepted that behavior at work is influenced by personality. Furthermore, self-esteem, self-efficacy, job performance, and job satisfaction are all areas that have been linked to personality (Judge & Bono, 2001). In the context of turnover intention there have been studies on personality characteristics: Boudreau et al (2001) found that personality characteristics, such as agreeableness and neuroticism were related with withdrawal process. Also, Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003) found that proactive personality was found to be related to both proximal and distal outcomes for organizational newcomers.

Generally speaking, personality traits are believed to be stable over time and unaffected by environmental factors (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; Mooradian & Swan, 2006).Hence it becomes imperative to understand the personality dimension of self-concept in the context of turnover intention.

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to people's self-definitions in relation to others (Markus & Wurf, 1987), which exist at three levels (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Lord & Brown, 2004). The self-concept is composed of one's attitudes, beliefs, intentions, norms, roles, and values (Hoover, 2009).

Social-psychological theories of self-concept formation identify three main sources of knowledge about the self: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and self-perceptions (Gecas 1982; Rosenberg 1981, 1991). The self-concept, however, is both a product of events and a social force in its own right (Rosenberg 1981). Theories of self-concept motivation suggest that individual's desire, seek, and try to create positive reflected appraisals, favorable social comparisons, and self-perceptions that attest to competence and morality (e.g., Gecas 1982, 1991; Rosenberg 1981; Schwalbe 2005).

People's self-concepts are extensive autobiographical knowledge structures that imbue information with meaning, organize memory, inform perceptions of themselves and others, and regulate cognition and behavior (Lord & Brown, 2004; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Oyserman, 2001).

Turnover Intention

Turnover Intention (TI) is defined by Lee (2008) as the subjective perception of an organizational member to quit the current job for other opportunities. Employees who leave on the organization's request as well as those who leave on their own initiative can cause disruptions in operations, work team dynamics and unit performance. Both types of the turnover create costs for the organization. If an organization has made significant investment in training and developing its employees, that investment is lost when employee leaves (Mello, 2011).

Carmeli and Weisberg (2006) used the term turnover intentions to refer to three particular elements in the withdrawal cognition process (i.e., thoughts of quitting the job, the intention to search for a different job, and then intention to quit). Theoretically, turnover intent (and turnover) has been explained using Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action which purports those intentions mediate the relationship between attitudes and behavior. Consequently, attitudes about the job, management, co-workers, supervisor, organization, available alternative jobs, and self may encourage a behavioral predisposition to remain or withdraw from the organization. Theoretically, several researchers (Mobley et al., 1979; Arnold & Feldman, 1982; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Breukelen, Van Der Vlist, & Steensma, 2004) have suggested that intention to turnover is the best predictor of actual turnover dependent variable is common (Lum, Kervin, Clark, Rid, Sirola, 1998). Shore and Martin (1989) and Khatri et al. (2008) noted that turnover intention is an appropriate dependent variable because it is linked with actual turnover. The research by Griffeth et al. (2000) found that turnover intentions, or intentions to quit a job, have been found to be one of the best predictors of actual quitting.

Rationale of the Hypotheses

It can be argued that self-perception is the gaining of an insight into possible selves whereas self-concept is the actual framework in which the 'self' is understood (Bracken, 1996; Hattie, 1992). The significance of this psychological construct lies in the development of a specific and consistent framework in which we can interact with our personal self-knowledge and experience of the external environment (DeSteno & Salovey, 1997).

Many writers use the terms self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence as though they were interchangeable with the term self-concept. However, self-concept researchers, such as Marsh (1987), Bracken (1996) and Byrne (1996) suggest that self-esteem is more specifically an emotional evaluation of the self. If our perception of the 'self' varies from the reality then our self-esteem, hence self-concept is affected.

A good self-concept is in itself considered a significant outcome in a variety of areas, it is also highly valued as an important mediating factor that can influence other important psychological and behavioral outcomes (Cowin, 2002).

Previous studies confirm the importance of Turnover Intention in examining employee turnover behavior. Employee turnover intention can be described as a psychological response to specific organizational conditions along a continuum of organizational withdrawal behaviors, ranging from day-dreaming to actually leaving the organization (Kraut, 1975).

Turnover intention can hence be attributed as a significant psychological and behavioral outcome. Also, theoretical and empirical evidence suggest that self-concept may operate at implicit levels (Ku'hnén & Oyserman, 2002; Lane & Scott, 2007) and have effects on attitudes and behaviors that occur outside people's awareness and control (Johnson & Lord, 2007; Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998). This may trigger into employee's turnover intentions later on.

In recent decades researchers have placed an increasing emphasis on multiple dimensions of self-concept (Mishra, 2007). Self-concept refers to the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence (Yahaya & Ramli, 2009). In other words, self-concepts are cognitive structures that can include content, attitudes or evaluative judgments and are used to make sense of the world, focus attention on one's goals and protect one's sense of basic worth (Oyserman & Markus, 1998).

Franken (1994) states that "there is a great deal of research which shows that the self-concept is, perhaps, the basis for all motivated behavior. It is the self-concept that gives rise to possible selves, and it is possible selves that create the motivation for behavior" (Yahaya & Ramli, 2009). Individual self-concept involves self-definitions based on people's separateness from others where self-worth is derived from being unique from others and behavior is driven by personal attitudes and welfare. (Brewer & Gardner 1996; Jackson et al., 2006). The individual self-concept implies to the distinctive competencies and abilities of the employee which leads to a higher degree of self-regard. The *individual level* involves self-definitions based on one's sense of uniqueness, where self-worth is derived from being different—and better—than others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). At this level people are motivated by personal values and pursuits that maximize their own welfare, which is similar to the cultural value of individualism (Hofstede, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 2001).

According to Johnson & Yang (2010), pay and career development opportunities are significant for employees with strong individual identities. Additionally, socio emotional outcomes like recognition, respect, and power are also important. In general, any incentive or punisher, tangible or otherwise that has direct implications for the self and can serve as a reference for comparison with others is important to employees with strong chronic individual identities.

Based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The individual level of Self-concept is positively related to employee's turnover intentions.

Collective self-concept involves self-definitions based on group memberships where self-worth is derived from group success and fulfilling group roles. Behavior is motivated by the welfare and role expectations of partners and groups in the case of relational and collective self-concept, respectively. The relational and collective levels (jointly referred to as interdependent self-concept) are independent from, rather than polar opposites of, individual self-concept (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The *collective level* involves self-definition based on group memberships (Brewer & Gardner). At this level people are motivated by the norms and goals espoused by the groups they belong to. These shared goals and norms typically enhance the welfare of the group, but that is not always the case (e.g., group norms may prescribe devotion to an individual leader) (Johnson et. al, 2006). The self-worth of people with collective identities is heavily dependent on the success and relative social standing of the groups they belong to, as well as the successful performance of their assigned group roles (Johnson & Yang, 2010). Hence, in a way the perceived support of organizational group and the subsequent sense of cohesiveness and solidarity affect the employee's feeling of commitment and loyalty towards the organization and minimize the intentions of turnover. The following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: The collective level of the self-concept is negatively associated with employee's turnover intentions

Method

Study Design

The survey respondents were employees of four mid-sized companies of different work sectors in Saudi Arabia. The required consent was taken from the management of concerned companies. A total of 250 employees from these companies were asked to participate in the study. The response rate was 78% for the employee sample. Removing 14 employees due to missing data, the final data for 180 employees was taken into consideration.

In the studied organizations, individuals were located in the same facility and interacted with each other in order to perform their jobs. Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents worked in various departments including production, HR, Sales and logistics and Finance and Accounting. In all organizations included in the survey, employees were evaluated annually and rewards were based on individual performance.

Respondents were assured of the strict confidentiality of their responses and were told that no one in the organization would ever see the completed questionnaires. After reading the invitation to participate and consent forms (which summarized the ethical guidelines of the study), the participants completed the questionnaires.

Data Collection

The majority 64 % of the respondents was married and 36 % of respondents were single. Males constituted 84% of the sample.

The respondents having bachelor degree were 67% as their highest level of academic qualifications and 33% had obtained at least a Master's degree. 46% of respondents had 6 to 8 years of work experience whereas 24% had 3 to 5 years of experience. Respondents with 9 years and above of experience represented 20% of the sample whereas respondents with less than 2 years of experience were 10%. The mean of age was 32 with std. deviation of 4.58.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Respondents

Variable		N	%	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	152	83.5	0.155	0.363
	Female	28	15.4		
Age	Below 30 Years	41	22.5	1.611	1.278
	30-35 years	54	29.7		
	36 - 40 years	37	20.3		
	41 -50 years	30	16.5		
	51 years & above	18	9.9		
Experience	Below 3 years	19	10.4	1.783	0.898
	3-5 years	39	21.4		
	6 to 8 years	84	46.2		
	9 years & above	38	20.9		
Education	Graduate	114	62.6	0.366	0.483
	Post – Graduate	66	36.4		
Marital Status	Single	65	35.7	0.638	0.481
	Married	115	63.3		
Turnover Intention		180	100	2.631	1.213
Individual Self-concept		180	100	2.967	1.113
Collective Self-concept		180	100	2.725	0.997

Note:

1- Gender : 0= male , 1= female; Age: 0= below 30 years; 1= 30 to 35 years ; 2= 36 to 40 years ; 3= 41-50 years ; 4= 51 years and above; Experience: 0= below 2 years; 1= 3 to 6 years ; 2= 7 to 10 years ; 3= 11 years and above ; Education: 0= Graduate, 1 = Post – graduate; Marital Status: 0=Single, 1=Married.

2- Characteristics of the respondents : employee

Measures

Self-Concept

The employee's self-concept was measured using the Levels of Self-Concept Scale (Selenta & Lord,2005). The individual self-concept level was measured using the 5-item comparative identity subscale, which emphasizes the motivational aspects of this level. Individuals who score high on this scale are motivated to demonstrate their uniqueness and personal success. The collective self-concept level was measured using the 5-item group achievement focus subscale, which emphasizes one's contribution to successful group functioning.

Individuals who score high on this scale are motivated by the welfare of the groups that they identify with (Johnson & Chang, 2006). The individual and the collective self-concept level were deliberately chosen for the survey as they portrayed the relevant dimensions of the employee's self in the organization. Items were anchored on a five point scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). The scale has been reliable and valid in past research (Selenta & Lord, 2005; Johnson, Selenta & Lord, 2006).

Some questions that reflected the individual level of the self-concept are: "I thrive on opportunities to demonstrate that my abilities or talents are better than those of other people"; I feel best about myself when I perform better than others."

Examples of two items of the questionnaire that reflected the collective levels of self-concept are: "Making a lasting contribution to groups that I belong to, such as my work organization, is very important to me"; when I become involved in a group project, I do my best to ensure its success."

Both scales have been shown to be reliable and valid in past research (Selenta & Lord, 2005; Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006). The reliability was found to be .79 (internal consistency for individualistic self-identity) and .71 (internal consistency for relational self-identity).

Alphas for the scale was .77 (individual) and .63 (collective) respectively, consistent with previous studies (Johnson & Chang, 2006; Johnson et al. 2006).

Turnover Intention

Turnover intent was assessed by a five-item scale from Walsh, Ashford and Hill (1985). Responses to such statements as "I intend to leave within the next 6 months" and "I am starting to ask my friends and contacts about other job possibilities" were measured on a seven-point agree-disagree response format. The coefficient alpha for this scale in the present study was .76; in Ashford, Lee, & Bobko (1989), it was .92; and in Walsh et al. (1985), it was .90.

Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using SPSS 20. Prior to running hierarchical multiple regressions, the data were checked for normality, outliers and multi-collinearity. The hypotheses were tested with hierarchical multiple regression models. As seen in table 2, age and gender were entered in Model 1. Sub factors of self – concept was added in Model -2. Turnover intention has been taken as dependent variable.

Control Variables:

Previous research has shown that turnover intention differs for people of different ages. It was found that there is a consistent negative relationship between age and turnover. Younger employees have a higher probability of leaving (Porter and Steers, 1973; Price, 1977; Horner et al., 1979; Muchinsky and Tuttle, 1979, Yin-Fah, 2010). Younger employees have more chances, low family responsibility, and no lost chances in the existing organization. Similar to age, length of service was contributing to turnover intention. It was found that, the shorter the period of service, the higher is the turnover. Mangione (1973), in a multivariate study, found that length of service is one of the best predictors of turnover.

Results

Spearman Correlation was done to analyze the relationship among key variables (see Table 1). Turnover intention was having significant positive relationship with individual self-concept level whereas it has significant negative relationship with collective self-concept level. It can be stated that if collective self-concept level increases, turnover intention will decrease and higher the individual self-concept level, higher will be the turnover intention.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	1							
Age	-.061	1						
Experience	-.084	.772**	1					
Education	-.072	-.148*	-.125	1				
Marital Status	-.060	.251**	.438**	-.100	1			
Turnover Intention	-.030	.303**	.323**	-.089	.096	1		
Individual Self-concept	-.084	.247**	.256**	-.036	.068	.833**	1	
Collective Self-concept	.057	-.079	-.244**	.029	-.042	-.219**	-.224**	1

N= 262, *p< 0.05 and **p<0.01

Hypothesis Testing

H1: The individual level of Self-concept is positively related to employee's turnover intentions

Regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship of individual level of self-concept and turnover intention; it was found that there is significant relationship between both the variables. ($\beta = 0.32, p < .001$). Thus result supports the hypothesis that there is significant and positive relationship between individual level of self-concept and turnover intention.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Variable	Step 1	Step 2
Gender	-.037	.154
Age	.287**	.100*
Individual S. C.		.876**
Collective S.C.		-.040
R	.303	.841
Adjusted R2	0.082	0.701
Change adjusted R2	0.092**	0.616**
F	8.972**	105.859**

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age
 - b. Predictors: (Constant), Gender, Age, Individual S.C., Relative S.C. & Collective S.C.
 - c. Dependent Variable: Turnover Intention
- S.C. – Self-concept

H2: The collective level of the self-concept is negatively associated with employee's turnover intentions

To check the hypothesis, regression coefficient was analyzed. The result showed that there was no significant relationship between collective level of self-concept and turnover intention ($\beta = -.24, p > .001$). The result does not support the hypothesis. There is negative significant relationship between collective level of self-concept and turnover intention.

Discussion

The theoretically and empirically substantiated self-concept model had been used in conjunction with the measures of Turnover Intention. Overall, two hypotheses were tested in the study. In hypothesis one, Individual Self-concept was found to be positively associated with Turnover Intention. This is in sync with Hattie (1992) who highlighted that the sense of uniqueness influences the whole range of those behavioral aspects that deserve attention and respect.

A person with high feeling of own dignity very often considers aspects of his/her own life as important, believes in their realization, perception of oneself, one's own actions in a more integral way and is more aware of it. Hence if an employee has a high perception of his own innate abilities, will not compromise with aspects that are in conflict with his interests and will eventually have higher level of turnover intentions. Moreover, Positive stable self-regard lies in the basis of person's belief in one's own abilities, it is connected with one's readiness to take a risk, stipulates optimism concerning expectations of a successful outcome of one's actions (Kolysko 2004). Hence, the individual employee will exhibit greater extent of turnover intentions and seek a positive change which will be exhibited later by job search behavior. Extrinsic as well as intrinsic rewards will be weighed meticulously as against perceived skills, competencies and work experience. Employees with high confidence on one's own capabilities and potential will take the initiative to look for other suitable career prospects. The finding has been substantiated by previous research. Employees who perceive their abilities superior as compared to their colleagues have higher intention to switch jobs because of the demand they have in the market. There have been more studies in sync with the results of my study: March and Simon (1958) hypothesized that good performers would find it easier to quit their jobs as they would be in greater demand on the job market. Consistent with March and Simon's theory, Jackofsky (1984) theorized that a curvilinear relationship existed between performance and turnover with both low and higher performers more likely to leave than average performers. Here, it can be further explained that the high value employees are the assets and are greatly sought in the industry but the low value employees always have the risk of discharge anytime, hence they may have turnover intentions.

However, in contrast the study of Kirschenbaum & Weisberg (2002) states that for the average worker, the probability of intent to quit is stronger when a change in job type is involved.

The second hypothesis, that is collective self-concept has tested negative in the research. This reinforces the previous findings. As the interpersonal relationship increases within the organization, turnover intention drops. Additionally, according to the Social Identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) identifying with groups serves to maintain a positive self-concept. This in turn naturally minimizes turnover intentions of the employee. There may be a sense of support and cooperation which makes the employee feel more settled and content in the organization and reduces the propensity to have turnover intentions. In sharp contrast, when the interpersonal relations are not conducive, cohesive and supportive then the employee might think otherwise. People perceive and judge not only matters, but also other people on the basis of self-relevant dimensions (Hill, Smith, & Lewicki, 1989; Lewicki, 1983, 1984; Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). Thus we will seek the company of the ones, who make us feel good (or atleast those who can provide circumstances that satisfy our needs) and avoid those who induce negative effect. The mental representation of our relations with others thus provides the base for the emergence of social structures (Dorner, 2006).

Till date, there has been no empirical research conducted on the relationship between Self-concept and Turnover Intention, so this study is unique and a pioneering effort to carry out the findings. The objective of the study was to examine the effects of self -concept's individual and collective levels on turnover intention which has been reached and completed.

Limitation of the Study and Future Implications

The research has used cross-sectional data and without the use of longitudinal studies, it would be somewhat difficult to understand the perceptions and relationships that occur over time. Self-concept is a complex cognitive appraisal process that yields different reactions at different points in time. Future research with a longitudinal design should examine the causal relationships found in this study. Moreover, data for variables was collected from the same source (employees) and this may raise concerns about common method variance (Podsakoff et. al, 2003). The respondents in this study were from a homogenous culture and few companies. Future studies may test if the empirical findings replicate in other samples of interest as well as across nations and cultures. The research was conducted with a sample size of 180 respondents; future studies should involve larger samples from different sectors and also cross cultural sources.

Finally, more moderating and mediating variables of major job attitudes and various personality variables can also be included in future research along with mixed methods for deeper and broader insights.

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