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Employee Turnover: Implications for Hotel Managers

Abstract

The hotel industry has been experiencing a severe labor shortage in recent years. The need for organizations to attempt to retain current employees has increased as a direct result of this shortage. An area that has not received as much attention in industry literature is to look at what may be the determinants and the predictors of the turnover process. The authors' discuss the role of specific intentions, reasoned action, and job satisfaction and the implications of these factors for hotel managers.

Keywords

Clayton W. Barrows, Employee Turnover: Implications for Hotel Managers, Job Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction, Quitting, Tardiness

Employee Turnover: Implications for Hotel Managers

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The hotel industry has been experiencing a severe labor shortage in recent years. The need for organizations to attempt to retain current employees has increased as a direct result of this shortage. An area that has not received as much attention in industry literature is to look at what may be the determinants and the predictors of the turnover process. The authors discuss the role of specific intentions, reasoned action, and job satisfaction and the implications of these factors for hotel managers.

The high costs that can be attributed to employee withdrawal behavior in the workplace are well documented. Koch and Steers¹, Hulin, Roznowski, and Hachiya², De Micco and Giridharan³, and Wasmuth and Davis⁴ have all pointed to the attributable costs. Turnover is not the only damaging behavior exhibited by employees. Bluedorn⁵ defines withdrawal behavior as a reduction in the employees' sociopsychological attraction to, or interest in, the work organization. Such behavior may manifest itself in many different forms including tardiness, absenteeism, diminished performance, and, ultimately, in separation from the organization. Separations may occur in the form of voluntary separations (employee-initiated) or involuntary separations (organization-initiated).⁶ Indeed, turnover in any form can prove costly.

Porter and Steers⁷ distinguish between avoidable turnover and unavoidable turnover. The authors contend that distinguishing between the two can, in itself, be a difficult task, and indeed is not always possible. Generally it is believed that those who leave as a result of reasons which are organizationally avoidable may be different from either those who leave for organizationally unavoidable reasons, or those who remain.⁸ Turnover cases which are voluntary and avoidable are a serious problem in the service industry, and particularly in the hotel industry.⁹ The problem of employee turnover can be found at all levels of the hotel hierarchy, from line employees through upper levels of management. Although it is recognized as being one of the more central problems currently facing management, the literature from the hotel perspective is limited at this time.

Job Dissatisfaction Influences Turnover

The issue of employee turnover has received much attention over the course of the last 15 years, and much research has been conducted

since the publication of the first comprehensive review of the literature by Brayfield and Crockett.¹⁰ More recently, reviews have been conducted by Porter and Steers¹¹, Mobley, *et al.*¹², Muchinsky and Tuttle¹³, and Cotton and Tuttle.¹⁴ As is revealed in these qualitative reviews, the single variable which researchers most commonly attempt to relate to turnover is that of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction as it relates to turnover has been mentioned repeatedly and has been found to have a consistent negative relationship to turnover; those who are dissatisfied on the job have been found to be more likely to leave than are their satisfied counterparts.¹⁵

Porter and Steers¹⁶ report that of all the research conducted prior to their review which focused upon proposed causes of withdrawal behavior and, specifically, turnover, job satisfaction is consistently seen as being the central factor. In their review, the authors classify the studies of job satisfaction factors into four separate and distinct categories which focus upon organization-wide factors, immediate work environment factors, job content factors, and personal factors. Some 60 studies are separated into these various categories. The authors argue that some of the methods used are flawed, mainly in the use of the measurement techniques employed. This seems to have been particularly true with those that were conducted prior to the Brayfield and Crockett review.¹⁷ The review by Porter and Steers fails to consider the external factors that may contribute to the individual's decision to leave an organization. Examples could include the general economic conditions of the environment, job opportunities that exist outside of the organization, and ease of movement as perceived by the individual. It has been shown, for example, that in any given market, as unemployment increases, turnover will generally decrease.¹⁸ It is clear that on the one hand the organization may not have much, if any, control over prevailing economic conditions, but where employee satisfaction is concerned, the organization may have substantial control. The possibility of interaction between these two variables is always present and cannot be overlooked.

The second point of interest in the Porter and Steers paper is their discussion of employee met expectations which they define as the difference between the experiences which a person expected to encounter on the job and those which he actually encounters. Thus, as different employees may experience different levels of satisfaction, they may also have vastly differing expectations. Indeed, expectations may even change over time of those employees remaining with the organization (stayers). This supports the belief that length of service may also be a determinant of turnover.¹⁹ Porter and Steers propose a relationship between an individual's met expectations and level of satisfaction and claim that the overall level of job satisfaction is the sum total of these met expectations. Presumably, the more that an individual's expectations are met, a decrease in that employee's propensity to leave is likely to occur.

Porter and Steers have also been criticized for their method of clustering studies which they perceived to be similar. This criticism is based largely on differences in measurement techniques between studies,

which makes legitimate comparisons difficult, if not impossible.²⁰ Porter and Steers did nothing to dispel the general belief that job satisfaction may indeed be an important predictor of employee turnover, in and of itself. The variance accounted for remains statistically significant in some cases, but generally unimpressive. The authors' proposed framework of met expectations did generate some interest though. Mobley *et al.*²¹ cite five studies that were conducted since the Porter and Steers review and which attempt to establish a relationship between met expectations and turnover. Since they still indicate further inconsistencies in their attempts, further research is evidently needed in this area.

Personality Variables Provide Mixed Results

Other proposed predictors of turnover which have not met with much success include demographic characteristics, personality differences, and tenure. Results of these studies generally suggest that age and tenure are consistently negatively related to turnover, but that the other variables have produced inconsistent results.²² Blau explores the relationship between a single personality variable, locus of control, with turnover, where locus of control as defined by Rotter²³ is the degree to which individuals attribute the control of events to themselves (internal) or to their environment (external). Blau proposes that locus of control is able to moderate, but not necessarily predict, the relationship between withdrawal cognitions and turnover. Additionally, he emphasizes that attempts to identify individual personality characteristics as predictors of turnover have been inconclusive and that they best be studied as moderators to the turnover process.

Spector and Michaels²⁴ also attempted to relate locus of control to the employee withdrawal process. In their study, the authors measured such variables as intention to quit, satisfaction, and turnover on their sample of employees at a mental health facility. They hypothesized that external scorers would both be more inclined to leave and that locus of control would act as a moderator between job satisfaction and turnover in the external scorers. The results indicated that the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit was stronger for the external scorers. The relationship between job satisfaction and turnover was found to be the same for both groups. The authors suggest that it may be that locus of control directly affects intentions.

Organizational Commitment is a Factor in Turnover

Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian²⁵ have defined the organizational commitment construct as simply a more global evaluation of the employee/organization relationship, one that includes job satisfaction. It is one part of the general area which also includes the issues of organizational involvement and commitment. Specifically, Porter *et al.* define commitment as a strength of identification, belief and acceptance with the organization leading to the desire to maintain association.²⁶ Previous research has found both commitment and involvement to be negatively related to turnover. Porter, Crampton, and Smith²⁷ have suggested

that in some cases it appears that a decline in commitment will lead to an individual's decision to leave the organization, while in others the decision to leave the organization is followed by a decline in commitment. Their study was able to measure employee attitudes as they relate to turnover, but even though there appears to be a relationship, further research is evidently needed to determine the exact relationship between these variables.

Koch and Steers²⁸ found that attachment, a concept which focuses on the aspects of the job itself, is a better predictor of turnover than is job satisfaction. The authors explain by suggesting that where job satisfaction focuses on the affective responses, it largely ignores an individual's behavioral intentions.

Use of Intentions Should be Effective

The models which attempt to relate satisfaction with turnover rarely are able to explain more than 20 percent of the variance though, and in many cases are not able to explain more than 14 percent. Linking specific intentions with specific behaviors has shown moderately more success. Ajzen and Fishbein²⁹ state that intentions are the immediate precursor of behavior. Mobley³⁰ asserts that, this being the case, an individual's intentions should be the single best predictor of turnover. As Ajzen and Fishbein have indicated, in order for intentions to be best interpreted for purposes of prediction, the following should occur: Intentions should be measured at the same level of specificity as the behaviors in question; in controlled studies, intentions should be measured as close to the time that the behavior is to be observed, as possible; and execution of the behavior should not be impeded by factors which are beyond the subject's immediate control, that is, behaviors should be under volitional control for the predictive qualities to achieve high correlations.³¹

Mobley has suggested that there are at least two intentions in the turnover process that may be of interest: the intention to search for another job and the intention to quit the current job. In addition, intention to search and search behavior can generally be expected to precede an individual's intention to quit and quitting behavior.³² It has been found that when all of these conditions are met, intentions are able to predict single acts (behaviors) on a very consistent basis. If behaviors in the workplace can be considered to be extensions of a person's normal life, thus being under their volitional control in most instances, then the use of intentions as predictors of turnover should be quite effective.

Turnover Results From Reasoned Action

Ajzen and Fishbein's³³ theory of reasoned action is based on the assumption that intentions are indeed the precursor of behavior. The theory also takes into consideration the strength of the intention, the individual's evaluation of the behavior, and subjective norms, the social factors that may be involved. The model's other basic assumption is that the behaviors to be observed be under volitional control of the individual. Attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms are considered to be the determinants of intention.

Mobley *et al.*³⁴ state that, based on the research to date tying intentions to turnover, it has been shown that the two are consistently related and that the relationship accounts for more of the variance than do the proposed models linking job satisfaction and turnover. Mobley *et al.* have suggested that a number of factors should be considered in any turnover model. These include consideration and analysis of the individual; recognition of the individual's perceptions and evaluations of intentions and behaviors; and recognition of intentions as the determinant of behavior.³⁵ Prestholdt, Lane, and Mathews³⁶ have suggested that the theory of reasoned action would be well suited to the study of the turnover process and its prediction, as it does possess these characteristics as suggested by Mobley. In a study conducted by Prestholdt and his colleagues on registered nurses, the theory of reasoned action was applied. Two earlier studies which had applied the theory to other samples were limited in that one was criticized for not being readily comparable with voluntary turnover and the other study was considered to be an inadequate test due to the measurement techniques employed.³⁷

The authors chose to study the nurses in their sample because of the high rate of turnover associated with the nursing profession as well as for the amount of literature produced on nurses as subjects of turnover. A questionnaire was administered which attempted to measure the nurses' behavioral intentions with respect to remaining on the staff and to leaving the employ of the hospital. The status of the subjects was then followed up after a period of six months. Differential measures were determined between those subjects who had remained on the staff and those who had left.

The model was successful in accounting for 32 percent of the variance when predicting turnover and, according to the authors, provide support for the continued use of the theory as it applies to turnover, in finding that turnover was determined by differential intentions. In addition, it was found that the predictors of intention, as described in the model, accounted for 68 percent of the variance in intention.

Turnover is Situational in Nature

The research seems to indicate that job satisfaction, in itself, and as a global construct, is not able to adequately explain the turnover process. Personality related variables also have not explained significant portions of the variance. Locus of control seems the most powerful of these types of variables, but has encountered problems with measurement. Also, as suggested by Cotton and Tuttle³⁸, research should continue to investigate the relationships of causally linked variables and their moderating variables.

Met expectations and organizational commitment both indicate promise, although further research is needed on these concepts as possible predictors of turnover. More research is evidently needed linking intentions to turnover, but where attempts have been made to measure specific intentions as they relate to equally specific behaviors, success has been significant. The theory of reasoned action seems especially suited to application to the turnover process and specifically to studies

of voluntary turnover.

There is no single solution which can be universally applied to turnover patterns in an effort to relieve the problem. Organizations, individuals, systems, and situations vary as do the individual causes of turnover. As with most human resource issues, the causes should indicate the methods to be employed, in this case, in an attempt to reduce undesired turnover.

Fernsten and Brenner³⁹ have suggested that management can attempt to enrich the jobs of employees in instances where job dissatisfaction is determined to be the cause. In their study of hourly workers employed at hotels, job satisfaction was indeed found to be a key issue and, specifically, worker satisfaction with job content factors. When this kind of work situation exists, job enrichment would seem to be an attractive and effective solution. It would be in any manager's best interest to consider job design, or redesign, where it is suspected that employees may be dissatisfied with the job itself.

Managerial intervention should be the common denominator in any approach that attempts to confront the problem of turnover. Whether this occurs in the form of job redesign, reassignment, employee compensation, or any other form is a matter of situational consequence. Knowing the employees, and knowing and addressing their wants, needs, and aspirations will go a long way in alleviating the problem of turnover.

The hotel industry must better research the causes of turnover as they specifically apply to the industry environment. Wasmuth and Davis⁴⁰ have suggested that working conditions have been cited as a major cause of turnover among hotel employees, particularly in the food and beverage department. They further suggest that hotels must be looked at on a departmental basis, a view which supports the notion that turnover is highly situational in nature.

In order to apply turnover theory to specific situations in the hotel industry, further investigation into the exact nature of turnover as it applies to hotel specific situations is crucial. Hopefully this would in turn lead to a better understanding of the process. An effort should be made to link the internal and external variables which may be contributing factors, as proposed in the Heneman model.⁴¹ External variables may be especially important to consider since movement in the industry is common at most occupational levels. The theory of reasoned action could prove most useful when considering the intention/behavior relationship and the antecedents of intentions. If the model were applied to a variety of decisions as they relate to the turnover process, the predictive powers of the model could prove quite useful to researchers and practitioners.

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