

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS ON SEARCH BEHAVIOR INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Job embeddedness is an important area of research given its connection to employees' willingness to search for another job and turnover. However, the antecedents of job embeddedness are less known. This study, using a sample of 225 retail buyers, expands current research by examining the mediating role of job embeddedness with organizational identification, perceived organizational support (POS), organizational justice, and search behavior. The results indicate that job embeddedness is an important mediator variable.

INTRODUCTION

Managing turnover is an important concern for organizations because of its potentially harmful costs (Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel, and Pierce, 2013; Heavey, Holwerda, and Hausknecht, 2013; Kacmar, Andrews, Van Rooy, Steilberg, and Cerrone, 2006). The costs of replacing an employee (recruitment, selection, and training) can be substantial ranging from 60 to 200 percent of an employee's salary (Allen, Bryant, and Vardaman, 2010; Sunder, Kumar, Goreczny, and Maurer, 2017). In addition, turnover has been shown to have a negative relationship with firm performance (Kacmar et al., 2006) including decreased customer service (Hausknecht, Trevor, and Howard, 2009). Thus, the fact that turnover has been a major area of study for many years (Hom, Lee, Shaw, and Hausknecht, 2017) is not surprising.

While many studies have tested models of turnover, their ability to predict turnover variance is only about 25 percent (Lee, Hom, Eberly, Li, and Mitchell, 2017). Given the situation, Mitchell, Holton, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) proposed a new construct, job embeddedness, to better predict turnover. Job embeddedness is defined as the "extent to which people feel attached, regardless of why they feel that way, how much they like it or whether they choose to be so attached" to an organization (Crossley, Bennett, Jex, and Burnfield, 2007, p. 1032). It involves both internal and external forces tying employees to their job (Crossley et al., 2007).

While recent research has shown that job embeddedness is an important predictor of turnover (e.g., Crossley et al., 2007; Felps, Mitchell, Hekman, Lee, Holtom, and Harman, 2009; Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee, and Mitchell, 2012; Porter, Posthuma, Maertz, Joplin, Rigby, Gordon, and Graves, 2019), much less is known concerning antecedents of job embeddedness. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between job embeddedness and three antecedent variables: organizational identification, perceived organizational support (POS), and organizational justice. Each antecedent variable has been included in many studies. However, they have rarely been included in studies of job embeddedness (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Collins and Mossholder, 2017; Ng and Feldman, 2014; Nguyen, Taylor, and Bergiel, 2017) and never been included together in a study involving job embeddedness. Thus, the purpose of this

study to expand prior research by analyzing the relationship among organizational identification, POS, organizational justice, job embeddedness and search behavior with a sample of retail buyers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice examines employees' perceived fairness in the workplace. Three types of justices have been identified in the literature (Colquitt, 2001): distributive (the perceived fairness of outcome allocation), procedural (the process by which rewards are allocated) and interactional (the interpersonal treatment employees obtain from management). While all three types of justices are related significantly to various outcomes (Colquitt, Scott, Rodell, Long, Zapata, Conlon, and Wesson, 2013), the focus of this study is on distributive justice and procedural justice.

Distributive Justice

Distributive justice is derived from Homan's (1961) and Adams' (1965) work regarding equity theory. According to equity theory, employees are motivated by fairness. Employees expect to receive rewards based on their investments and the amount of effort they put forth. To determine fairness in the workplace, an individual compares his or her input/ratio to another employee (a referent other) inside or outside the organization. The employee compares the amount of effort or input (e.g., education and seniority) put forth with the output received (pay and promotion) from the company in comparison to this other person. A perception of fairness will exist if the employee perceives that he or she is receiving an adequate reward given his or her input (e.g., education and seniority) in comparison to what the other person receives.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice examines the employee's perception of how he or she was treated during the allocation process. Procedural justice began with Thibaut and Walker's (1975) work concerning dispute resolution. Their research focused on examining whether a favorable outcome could be mitigated by the perceived fairness of the process that was used to reach the decision. They examined both the process stage and the decision stage of the proceedings and concluded that the process by which the outcome was determined was, in some cases, more important than the actual outcome. A key part of procedural justice is allowing participants a voice in the process. Providing a voice in the process will ease dissatisfaction with an unfavorable outcome (Colquitt et al., 2013).

Perceived Organizational Support

Organizational support theory involves the degree to which employees perceive that the organization values their contributions (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa, 1986). Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) are the

foundation for POS. According to Blau (1964), social exchange involves “the voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (p. 91). When employees perceive that they have been treated fairly by the organization (e.g., fair compensation for their efforts, provided with promotional opportunities for superior performance), they will feel an obligation to reciprocate the behavior (the norm of reciprocity) through increased commitment and loyalty (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, and Rhoades, 2001). Both parties will develop feelings of trust, leading to long-term relationships (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). For example, employees will expect that high performance will be noticed and rewarded. When this situation exists, employees will respond with increased in-role and extra-role performance (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

Research has reported that employees who are provided a voice (procedural justice) during the performance appraisal process will have increased POS (DeConinck, 2010; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Stinglhamber, De Cremer, and Mercken, 2006). While limited, research has found a significant relationship between distributive justice and POS (Cameran, Cropanzano, and Vandenberghe, 2007; Loi, Hang-yue, and Foley, 2006). In addition, a recent meta-analysis by Colquitt et al. (2013) reported a high correlation between POS and procedural justice ($r = .49$) and distributive justice ($r = .45$).

H1a: Procedural justice is related positively to POS

H1b: Distributive justice is related positively to POS.

Organizational Identification

Organizational identification derived from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity theory is defined as “the individual knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance” (Tajfel, 1972, p. 31). People categorize themselves into social groups (e.g., organizational or religious groups) (Tajfel and Turner, 1985), which enables a person to identify and maintain membership with that group (Foremen and Whetten, 2002). To enhance their self-esteem, group members will pursue unique differences between themselves and other reference groups (Tajfel, 1982). Members of a group view themselves as distinct from other groups. Group membership has a strong influence on peoples’ behavior.

Organizational identification, which is a type of social identification, is defined as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate” (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 21). Organizational identification refers to the enduring and distinctive characteristics of an organization that distinguishes it from other organizations (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Individuals classify and compare themselves to other organizations based on the practices, values, and characteristics of their organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Identification occurs when members and the organization’s identity overlap, causing members to highly value membership in the organization (Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008). People will experience greater organizational identity when their values coincide with the organization’s values and these values are distinct and more attractive from other organizations’ values. A low level of organizational identification is associated with few emotional connections to the organization (Zavyalova, Pfarrer, Reger, and Hubbard, 2016). Ashforth et al. (2008) state that organizational identification “is at the core of why people join organizations and why they voluntarily leave, why they approach their work the way they do and why they interact with others the way they do during that work” (p. 334).

Employees who perceive that the way rewards are distributed, and the process used to make that decision are fair have a higher level of organizational identification (Haynie, Flynn, and Baur, 2019). In addition, employees who perceive that the organization supports them also should identify highly with the organization (Lee, Park, and Koo, 2015; Hekman, Bigley, Steensma, and Herdford, 2009; Lam, Liu, and Loi, 2016).

H2a: Distributive justice is related positively to organizational identification.

H2b: Procedural justice is related positively to organizational identification.

H3: POS is related positively to organizational identification.

Job Embeddedness

The early models of turnover (Mobley, 1977; Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth, 1978), hypothesized that turnover was a function of employees' job satisfaction, alternative job opportunities, and turnover intentions. This stream of research provided insights into understanding the reasons for turnover. However, because much of the variance in turnover was not explained by these models, Mitchell and colleagues (2001) developed the concept of job embeddedness to further explain reasons that employees choose to stay rather than leave their organizations.

Job embeddedness consists of three components: fit, links, and sacrifices, which are related to both the community (off-the-job embeddedness) and the organization (on-the-job embeddedness) (Mitchell et al., 2001). Both informal and formal connections to people in the organization describe on-the-job links while off-the-job-links comprise connections in the community. The fit dimension involves a person's compatibility with the organizational culture and the community. It is the degree to which a person's job fits with other characteristics of one's life. Sacrifice is what an individual loses in terms of psychological or material activities if he/she leaves. Mitchell et al. (2001) describe the three dimensions of job embeddedness as a "web of influences" impacting people's decision to stay or leave the organization. Job embeddedness has been described as an anti-withdrawal construct (Lee et al., 2004). Employees are less likely to leave the organization when they perceive both the costs of departing are high and sacrificing their contacts inside and outside the organization as high. A recent meta-analysis reported that job embeddedness is correlated significantly with job search behaviors, turnover intentions, and actual turnover (Jiang et al., 2012).

Intuitively, POS should be a significant antecedent to job embeddedness. Employees who perceive they are supported by their organization should feel more embedded. Based on the norm of reciprocity and social exchange theory high quality exchange relationships should develop between the employer and employee and with colleagues (Wayne, Shore, and Liden, 1997). They will feel an obligation to reimburse the organization and therefore become more embedded. A limited number of studies have investigated the relationship between job embeddedness and POS. Afsar and Badir (2016), using a sample of hotel employees, reported that POS moderated the relationship between POS and organizational citizenship behavior. Two other studies also reported a direct relationship between job embeddedness and POS (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2017).

H4: POS is related positively to job embeddedness.

Organizational Identification and Job Embeddedness

As stated earlier only one study could be located that examined the relationship between organizational identification and job embeddedness (Ng and Feldman, 2014). This study found that employees who identified highly with the organization also were highly embedded with the firm. Given the importance of both organizational identification and job embeddedness in many previous studies, one purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the two variables. Since organizational identification is an important reason why people join and stay with an organization (Ashforth et al., 2008), it should be related to an employee's level of job embeddedness.

H5: Organizational identification is related positively to job embeddedness.

Prior research has reported that organizational identification is related significantly to turnover intentions and turnover (Conroy, Becker, and Menges, 2017; Jing, Tatachari, and Chattopadhyay, 2017; Riketta, 2005). However, job embeddedness was not included in these studies. Does job embeddedness mediate the relationship between organizational identification and search behavior? Or is the relationship between organizational identification and search behavior both direct and indirect through job embeddedness? A second model will test for the indirect relationship. Since no study has included organizational identification, job embeddedness, and search behavior, a research question rather than a hypothesis will be proposed.

R1: Is the relationship between organizational identification and search behavior direct or indirect through job embeddedness?

Last, research supports that job embeddedness is related to search behavior (Jiang et al., 2012).

H6: Job embeddedness is related negatively to search behavior.

METHODS

Sample

The names of 1,500 retail buyers were purchased from a company specializing in direct mailing lists. An email message along with the survey was sent to each buyer. A link was provided for them to respond to the survey. A total of 198 buyers completed the survey. Two weeks later a second email message was sent to the buyers who had not completed the survey. Twenty-seven additional buyers completed the survey. The final sample size was 225.

The demographic profile of the buyers was as follows: they had worked as a buyer for an average of 11.3 years and with their current company for 6.8 years; their average age was 39.6 years, about 60 percent were male (134); and their average salary was \$79,250.

Measures

Job embeddedness was measured using Crossley's et al. (2007) seven – item scale. *Procedural Justice*, seven items, and *Distributive Justice*, four items were measured using scales developed by Colquitt (2001). *Perceived Organizational Support* was measured using four items from the survey of perceived organizational support (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986). Organizational identification was measured using the six-item scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). Five items taken from the *Job Search Behavior Index* developed by Kopelman, Rovenpor, and Millsap (1992) were used to measure job search. The original scale used a yes/no format. The scale was modified in this study to use a five-point Likert format.

Construct Validity

As recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2009) construct validity was tested by examining the variance extracted (VE), construct reliability (CR), and standardized factor loadings (SFL). First, the variance extracted was above .5 for all variables. Second, the standardized factor loadings were above .5. Third, construct reliability was high. The results for each variable follows: POS VE=.74, CR=.86, SFL =.82 to .91; organizational identification VE=.68, CR=.85, SFL=.66 to .86; job embeddedness VE=.68, CR=.87, SFL=.75 to .86; search behavior VE=.83, CR=.9, SFL=.87 to .93; distributive justice VE=.72, CR=.88, SFL=.80 to .87, and procedural justice VE=.67, CR=.88, SFL=.75 to .88. The correlation matrix, means, and standards deviations appear in the table below.

	POS	OI	JE	Search	DJ	PJ	Means	Std. Dev.
POS								
OI	.41							
JE	.41	.39						
Search	-.23	-.37	-.40					
DJ	.38	.16	.15	-.09				
PJ	.40	.16	.16	-.08	.40			
Means	3.52	3.58	3.72	2.35	3.41	3.68		
Std. Dev.	1.12	1.11	.98	1.15	1.03	1.01		

POS = perceived organizational support, OI = organizational identification, JE = job embeddedness, DJ = distribution, PJ = procedural justice

RESULTS

The results were analyzed using LISREL 10.10. As recommended by Kline (2005) and Hair, Babin, and Krey (2017) the chi-square test, the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) were used to evaluate the fit of the model.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) meet or exceed commonly suggested cutoff values as proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999) ($\chi^2 = 877.58$, $df = 512$, $p = .00$,

CPI = .95, Std. RMR = .039; RMSEA = .056). Next, the hypothesized model was assessed. The results for the hypothesized model indicated a very good fit ($\chi^2 = 908.25$, $df = 518$, $p = .00$, CFI = .94, Std. RMR = .05, RMSEA = .058). All the hypotheses were supported. Procedural justice is related positively to POS (H1a, $\beta = .29$, $t = 3.95$), distributive justice is related positively to POS (H1b, $\beta = .26$, $t = 3.58$), distributive justice is related positively to organizational identification (H2a: $\beta = .19$, $t = 2.48$), procedural justice is related positively to organizational identification (H2b: $\beta = .20$, $t = 2.70$), POS is related positively to organizational identification (H3, $\beta = .25$, $t = 3.37$), POS is related positively to job embeddedness (H4, $\beta = .29$, $t = 4.15$), organizational identification is related positively to job embeddedness (H5, $\beta = .29$, $t = 4.15$), and job embeddedness is related negatively to search behavior (H, $\beta = -.41$, $t = 6.04$).

A second model was run to investigate the research question regarding the relationship between organizational identification and search behavior. The results indicated that the revised model was significantly different than the hypothesized model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 18.86$, $1df$). Organizational identification was found to be a direct predictor of search behavior ($\beta = -.25$, $t = 3.59$).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to extend prior research on job embeddedness by analyzing the influence of three antecedent variables (POS, organizational identification, organizational justice) on job embeddedness among a sample of retail buyers. The findings show the importance of including these constructs in studies examining variables that influence job embeddedness. The significance of the research results is discussed below.

Theoretical Implications

First, no previous study has included POS, organizational justice, organizational identification, job embeddedness, and search behavior in one study. Several meta-analyses have been undertaken showing the importance of these variables in predicting various job attitudes and behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2013; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Ricketta, 2005). This study makes an important contribution by showing how these variables directly or indirectly are related to search behavior.

Second, POS has been analyzed extensively (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). However, its relationship with job embeddedness has seldom been studied (Allen and Shanock, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2017). The results indicate that POS is both a direct and indirect predictor of job embeddedness through organizational identification. This study shows that POS is an important variable influencing retail buyers' willingness to stay with their organization.

Third, the results confirm prior research indicating that organizational justice is related positively to organizational identification (Kurtessis et al., 2017) and indirectly to job embeddedness through organizational identification. Retail buyers who perceive they have been rewarded fairly for their efforts (distributive justice) and have been treated fairly regarding the procedures used to arrive at the outcome (procedural justice) will identify more highly with their company.

Managerial Implications

Given the high cost of turnover, finding ways to reduce turnover is important. To reduce turnover, organizations need to understand the underlying causes of turnover. Job embeddedness has been shown to be an important variable related to turnover (Crossley et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2017). Job embeddedness involves employees' degree to which they are attached to their organization and the difficulty in leaving for another job.

Therefore, understanding variables influencing job embeddedness is important. This study indicates that POS is one of the variables that directly and indirectly through organizational identification impacts job embeddedness. When an organization demonstrates support for employees (concern for employees' well-being, values their contributions, and cares about their opinions), this group of retail buyers reported greater organizational identity and were more embedded in their job. The results regarding POS have several managerial implications. First, organizations need to determine what kind of support employees need to perform their jobs successfully. Second, ascertain if employees perceive the organization is providing them with adequate support. For example, in what areas is the organization providing expected support and where is support lacking? Third, determine which employees need more organizational support. Some employees (probably new hires) may want and need a lot of support while more senior employees may need less support. The immediate supervisor has an important part in determining if proper support is provided to subordinates. He or she needs to talk with subordinates and determine if enough organizational support is being provided to them. Failure to provide support ultimately leads to lower job embeddedness and higher turnover.

Organizational justice also has an important role in the turnover process. When employees perceive they have been treated fairly, they will feel an obligation to reciprocate the fair treatment resulting with a more favorable attitude toward the organization and productive work behavior. Perceptions of procedural justice will occur when, during the performance appraisal, employees can express their views and feelings, perceive that procedures are applied consistently and free of bias, is based on accurate information, and that the appraisal was conducted with high ethical and moral standards.

How do organizations determine if employees perceive they have been treated fairly? First, solicit anonymous feedback from employees regarding the perceptions of distributive justice and procedural justice. Did his or her supervisor allow the employee to participate in the outcome/performance appraisal process? Do employees perceive the organization's outcome process is fair? Second, the supervisor has an important role in the process. Organizations need to train supervisors on how to conduct an unbiased, fair performance appraisal that allows participation from subordinates. Training supervisors in organizational justice principles has several advantages (Skarlicki and Latham, 2005). First, it can increase organizational effectiveness by increasing employees' attitudes and behaviors. Second, human resource procedures (hiring, training, and performance appraisal) are likely to be accepted by employees when they are perceived to be fair. Third, organizational justice training provides a guideline for ethical behavior among leaders in the organization.

The last implication involves organizational identification, which is important since it is linked to search behavior and, based on other research results, turnover (Ashforth et al., 2008). Creating greater organizational identity will reduce the desire of retail buyers to search for another job. One way to increase organizational identity is to hire employees whose values are like the values of other organizational members.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Several opportunities for future research exist based on the study's results. First, since this study was the first one to include organizational justice, POS, organizational identification, job embeddedness, and search behavior, future research needs to replicate this study's findings with a different group of employees. Second, as with many studies, this one was cross-sectional. Future research, conducted within a singular organization, would allow actual turnover data to be collected rather than examining only search behavior intentions. Third, other variables could be included in the model such as perceived supervisor support, organizational and supervisor trust, and job alternatives. In conclusion, this study has indicated that organizational justice, POS, and organizational identification influence retail buyers' job embeddedness and search behavior. These results provide important information in managing turnover among retail buyers.

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