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Do Job Satisfaction and Commitment to the Organization Matter When It Comes to Retaining Employees?

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Do Job Satisfaction and Commitment to the Organization Matter When It Comes to Retaining Employees?

Abstract

Reducing employee turnover through retention practices is an area of great interest to employers. Extension has experienced the loss of many county agents due to resignation and also retirement incentives. Prior research suggests a linkage of factors that can predict the likelihood of employees' intention to quit. The study included 480 Extension agents with less than 6 years of employment, representing 12 states in the southern United States. Findings indicate significant relationships between employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to quit.

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Introduction

Voluntary turnover of valued employees is a concern of managers and administrators due to the financial costs of replacing those employees and the lost productivity of good employees. Voluntary turnover is different than involuntary turnover in that it is based upon the employee's deliberate decision to separate from an organization. Voluntary turnover occurs through resignation or retirement, whereas involuntary turnover is a result of termination through an employee being fired or laid off (Lee, Gerhart, Weller, & Trevor, 2008).

In recent years, Extension has experienced the loss of many county agents due to retirement incentives offered as a cost-saving measure to manage reduced appropriations in funding as well as through other forms of attrition such as resignation. This reduction in the workforce can create added strain on the employees who remain, which may lead to additional turnover. Rousan and Henderson (1996) note, "When county Extension agents voluntarily leave their positions, an interruption in programming is likely to occur" (p. 56). Safrit and Owen (2010) explain, "Turnover among county Extension agents results in disrupted educational programs, unmet citizen needs, low morale among remaining Extension professionals, and wasted financial and material resources dedicated to Extension agent on-boarding and in-service training" (p. 2). (Note: "On-boarding" includes all of the actions in hiring employees, whereas "in-service training" includes the professional development activities that occur after hiring.) Even if a new employee is hired to fill the vacancy, the time needed to acclimate him or her to the role is costly to the relationships needed for successful programming and maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders.

Research has shown that commitment to the organization and job satisfaction are important contributors to employee retention and reduced intent to quit. Organizational commitment has been defined as a psychological link between the employee and the employing organization that make it less likely that the employee will voluntarily leave the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996).

Employee turnover is also costly to any organization. Taking into account both the direct and indirect costs of employee turnover, the minimum costs equate to 1 year's pay and benefits (Ramlall, 2005). While human practices may have been taken for granted in the past, Extension professionals are now calling for more guidance practices that reduce Extension agents' intent to quit. There is a continuing need to study the factors associated with employee turnover in Extension (Kutilek, 2000).

Review of Literature

The importance of studying organizational commitment and job satisfaction is that organizations that depend on positive relationships with clientele and co-workers cannot afford to have employees who are not committed to the organization and leave after only a short amount of time on the job. A positive relationship with stakeholders is critical for continued success of Extension (Seevers, Graham, Gamon, & Conklin, 1997). Mueller, Boyer, Price, and Iverson (1994) stated that "when employees are both satisfied with their jobs and committed to the organization, the bond with the organization will be strengthened and will result in greater cooperation and a reduced likelihood of quitting" (p. 128). However, job satisfaction and organizational commitment have been shown to be different in relation to employee attitudes about their work. Job satisfaction is more focused on the individual's response to the job or to specific aspects of the job, such as pay, supervision, and working conditions. Commitment, on the other hand, is more global in relation to the attitude of the employee toward the organization, as well as its goals and values (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Within Extension, we need to know more about the job satisfaction and commitment of agents, especially as they relate to intent to quit.

It is important to consider employee intent to quit as a factor affecting actual turnover. Research has shown that intent to quit is the best predictor of actual turnover behavior and has been found to be highly correlated to both job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Mowday, Koberg, & McArthur, 1984; Steele & Ovalle, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Human resource practices play a significant role as well (Figure 1). Spector (1985) determined nine facets of job satisfaction, including pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating procedures, coworkers, nature of work, and communication. An employee's affective or attitudinal reaction to these facets determines job satisfaction. Organizational commitment studies conducted by Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) categorized commitment as: a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a definite desire to maintain organizational membership.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Model Showing Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment as Predictors of Intention to Quit



Method

The purpose of the study reported here was to investigate the levels and relationships among Extension agents' job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit (Figure 1). The researchers developed an on-line questionnaire, drawing questions from Spector's (1985) Job Satisfaction Survey; Mowday, Steers, and Porter's (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire; and Landau and Hammer's (1986) intent to quit measure. All three of these scales make use of Likert-type items, using scales from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." An example item from the Job Satisfaction Survey is "I like doing the things I do at work." An example item from the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire is "I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help this organization be successful." An example item from intent to quit measure is "As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave Cooperative Extension."

The instrument was tested for content validity by a panel of experts and pilot-tested with 10 Extension agents from a state outside the targeted region. In final analysis, the three constructs produced the following Chronbach alpha reliability scores: Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, .914; Job Satisfaction Survey, .848; and Intent to Quit, .910. For a copy of the full research instrument, readers may contact the authors.

The study followed appropriate procedures for human subjects research, including oversight and approval from the appropriate Institutional Review Board. The sample included county Extension agents from the Southern region who had been employed in their current position for less than 6 years. Among the 13 states in the Southern region, 12 participated in the study. The study employed stratified sampling, targeting 40 employees from each state. If more than 40 agents in the state met the study criteria, a random selection method was used to narrow the participants to 40.

Each state either provided the researcher with a listing of their employees who met the criteria or sent the survey information directly to the participants. Accordingly, the sampling process varied from state to state. Directors of Extension in the participating states notified their employees by email of their selection to participate in the study and encouraged their participation. The researchers then followed up by email to administer the questionnaire via SurveyMonkey. Within 30

days of the initial notice, 390 Extension agents responded to the questionnaire, for a response rate of 81%. Among the data collected, 25 responses were incomplete, leaving a final usable response rate of 76% (n=365). Due to the anonymity assured by some state systems, it was not possible to follow up with non-respondents. This limitation of the study, as well as the focus on a particular geographic region, prevents generalization of the findings. Extrapolation of the conclusions and recommendations should be considered judiciously.

Results

The data collected from participants revealed attitudes related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit, all based on a seven-point Likert-type scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). Results show that the overall intent to quit rating fell within the slightly disagree range (M=2.8, SD=1.77), suggesting disagreement with intent to quit. The overall score on organizational commitment was in the moderately agree range (M=5.6, SD=1.12), suggesting moderate agreement with a commitment to the organization. Overall ratings on job satisfaction showed slight agreement (M=4.6, SD=0.89), indicating respondents slightly agreed they were satisfied with their jobs. With all measures, some variability was observed among state-level Extension systems. Intent to quit ratings, for example, ranged from moderate disagreement (1.9 for state D) to neither agreeing nor disagreeing (3.7 for state A) (Table 1).

Table 1.
Extension Agents' Intent to Quit, Organizational Commitment, and Job Satisfaction, Based Upon State of Employment

State	N	Intent to Quit	N	Organizational Commitment	N	Job Satisfaction
		M(SD)		M(SD)		M(SD)
A	29	3.7 (1.55)	29	5.0 (1.13)	27	4.2 (0.64)
B	35	2.0 (1.02)	35	5.7 (0.90)	33	4.8 (0.89)
C	25	2.6 (1.38)	25	5.8 (0.93)	24	4.7 (0.92)
D	31	1.9 (1.59)	31	6.0 (0.91)	29	5.2 (0.90)
E	29	2.8 (1.61)	29	5.6 (1.10)	28	4.6 (0.92)
F	34	2.7 (1.79)	34	5.8 (0.98)	31	4.8 (0.75)
G	19	2.2 (1.60)	19	6.0 (0.87)	18	4.8 (0.79)
H	35	3.0 (2.00)	34	5.6 (0.87)	33	4.6 (0.76)
I	34	2.9 (2.06)	33	5.3 (1.52)	35	4.5 (1.02)
J	35	2.3 (1.82)	35	5.9 (1.12)	31	5.0 (0.75)
K	31	3.6 (1.85)	30	5.3 (1.07)	28	4.1 (0.85)

L	27	3.5 (1.73)	27	4.9 (1.33)	27	4.0 (0.80)
Weighted Total	365	2.8 (1.77)	361	5.6 (1.12)	344	4.6 (0.89)

Note. Ratings based on statements that used a seven-point Likert-type scale: "Strongly Disagree" (1), "Moderately Disagree" (2), "Slightly Disagree" (3), "Neither Agree nor Disagree" (4), "Slightly Agree" (5), and "Moderately Agree" (6), "Strongly Agree" (7). M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

To investigate relationships, the researchers paired the independent variables of job satisfaction and organizational commitment with the dependent variable of intent to quit. The magnitudes of the correlations are described using terms and classifications appropriate for the context of social science research. A correlation of .10 is described as a small effect size, a correlation of .30 is described as a medium effect size, and a correlation of .50 is described as a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). For interpretation purposes, "large effect size" signifies a "strong relationship." The results show that there is a strong and negative relationship between job satisfaction and intent to quit ($r = -.619$, $p = .000$) and that there is also a strong and negative relationship between organizational commitment and intent to quit ($r = -.652$, $p = .000$). Furthermore, there is a strong and positive relationship between the independent variables of job satisfaction and organizational commitment ($r = .717$, $p = .000$) (Figure 2).

Figure 2.

Conceptual Model Showing Correlations Between Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment and Intent to Quit.



Notes: Arrows do not imply causality, merely a correlation. All correlations were significant at $p \leq .001$.

Discussion

Although voluntary turnover in Extension remains a serious concern, the study reported here highlights some positive attitudes from Extension agents with less than 6 years of employment in the Southern Region. Overall, the agents are somewhat satisfied with their jobs, are moderately committed to the organization, and do not intend to quit in the near future. These findings reinforce those of Ensle (2005), who reported that Extension agents were moderately satisfied with their jobs, their colleagues, and Extension in general. This finding is important, for Strong and Harder (2009) found that job satisfaction was an important motivator for agents to remain employed in Extension, and the findings from the study show strong relationships between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Extension now has the opportunity to build upon these positive attitudes, creating an even stronger organization. There is an opportunity to learn from states' experiencing success and replicating that success. More research is needed to clarify which human resource practices offer the most benefit.

Application

Because job satisfaction and organizational commitment are the best predictors of employee intent to quit, organizations should conduct formal assessments of their employees during the first 6 years of employment to measure success in providing an employment environment that promotes job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These assessments may provide information useful for analyzing and modifying human resource practices that will help to improve where there are deficiencies in employee perception of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Sometimes the key factors are beyond the control of the organization, but other times small, practical improvements can make a big difference.

Because findings suggest that low job satisfaction is a strong predictor of intent to quit, organizations should consider giving attention to human resource practices such as recruitment and hiring, benefits and compensation, training and development, and evaluation and supervision, as they seek to improve the job satisfaction of employees in the organization. Similar to the Roadmap for Excellence presented by Saunders and Reese (2011), organizations should prepare a roadmap to guide human resource practices that will promote job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. Because the states included in the study produced differing results in the perceptions of their employees toward HR practices, administration should share experiences and best practices with each other to improve the satisfaction and commitment of their employees, and reduce their intent to quit. The study reported here provides baseline data as individual states work to improve their human resource practices.

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