

A study on the level and relationship of job embeddedness and turnover intentions among Saudi Arabian working-class

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ABSTRACT

In this competitive environment for the survival of the organization, it is essential to retain competent workforce, and keep them well aligned with organizational objectives. Turnover of employees creates panic situation and unnecessary burden of high recruitment cost. The present study identifies the relationship between job embeddedness and turnover intention. The survey of 119 employees was conducted in Saudi Arabia. The study found no significant relationship between job embeddedness and turnover intention. Negative correlation was found between turnover intention with respect to age and experience of employees. It clearly states that as the employees gain experience, their turnover intent decreases. Age is also an important factor of turnover intention. It was found that older employees showed less turnover intent in comparison to younger employees. The results will provide insights to organization for making effective strategies to keep employees embedded with their jobs and help in reducing turnover intent and actual turnover.

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1. Introduction

Modern industry requires effective workforce which are well aligned with the organizational objectives to sustain in this competitive environment. Behavioral issues of employees need to be given prime importance in the current competitive business environment. The present study examines the impact of job embeddedness (JE), henceforth JE on turnover intention, henceforth turnover intention (TI) of employees. In this study, the researchers attempt to identify the factors which keep employees embedded with job, and its relationship with turnover intention among Saudi Arabian workforce. If an organization focuses on the behavioral aspect of employees, especially the positive aspects, it could help in decreasing turnover and save the costs associated with it. Once the organization is aware which employees are going to stay for longer period of time or leave, then it can make effective strategies for its sustainability and progress (Holtom & O'Neill, 2004; Reitz & Anderson, 2011). JE is a construct that identifies the employee's association with organization. TI identifies the employees' intention to quit and functions as an early warning system. Based on the intend of the employees, the organization can easily determine who are going to leave the organization. This could help in devising effective strategies to retain high performers.

1.1 Literature Review

Job Embeddedness

JE is a construct that directly affect the employee decision to stay with their respective organizations. Mitchell et al. (2001) introduced the term "Job embeddedness" and identified different factors which are usually responsible for the continuance of employment with a particular organization. They could be classified under on-the-job factors and off-the-job factors. Employees often have bonding with the co-workers, absolute match of skills with the job demands and organization related community services. These factors are often found to be related with on-the-job factors that could ensure JE. Some off- the-job

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factors also keep the employees embedded with the job. Some of them include personal relationships and community related commitments etc. (Holtom et al., 2006a; Jiang et al., 2012). Employee are often reluctant to lose the financial benefits and social association, which could lead to JE. If an employee find himself fitting well with the community, there could arise in him a feeling of belongings and positive attitude. Mitchell et al. (2001) considered JE to have three components – link, fit and sacrifice. These three components are invariably associated with one’s organization and their respective community. Each of the components are now discussed below:

Fit: Organization fit refers to comfort level of an employee with the organization and its environment. In order to perfectly fit, an employee’s career aspiration, values and goals must be compatible with the current job demand that includes skills, knowledge and abilities to perform the job. Along with this, it also required to be fit with the community and surrounding environment. These factors will keep employee well embedded with job personally as well as professionally (Mitchell et al, 2001). Many authors opined that organization fit and community fit are important elements to decide duration of stay in organizations. Employees well fit with organization and community will be comfortable at and stay longer in comparison to poor fit with organization as well as community (Chatman, 1991; Zhang et al., 2012).

Link: Link specifies the formal and informal relationship of employees and other people within the organization (Mitchel et al, 2001; Holtom et al. 2006a; Zhang et al., 2012). Links with the community states the relationship of employee within the community and other people. According to Feldman and Ng (2007) employees have on-the-job professional link within the organization and outside the organization. Informal link refers to the personal and social relationship with surrounding community.

Sacrifice: In the event of an employee quitting the job, there is an element of sacrifice involved. This could include sacrifice of benefits like perks, job status, good colleagues, etc. There are also the chances of forfeiting other financial benefits due from the organization (Mitchel et al, 2001; Holtom et al. 2006a). In addition to that, employees may also have to make community related sacrifice like pristine and sylvan surroundings, good neighbors, friends, good weather conditions and safe community.

Turnover intention (TI)

TI mostly literature is based on Mobley’s (1977) framework. He identified that employees have to go through several physiological steps before quitting the job. These steps include evaluation of job, job dissatisfaction, thinking for quitting, cost of quitting, intention to search alternative jobs, searching alternative and evaluations of the available alternatives. It is after these steps that one decides about the intention to stay or quit. TI reflects the attitude of an employee about the job and states the probability of an employee to quit the job (Getz, 1994). Tett and Meyer (1993) identified TI as a situation when employee finally decide of leaving the organization deliberately and willingly. This is final step before actual quitting from the organization. Many authors like Aizen (1991), Bothma and Roodt (2012), Muliawan et al. (2009) also accepted that behavioral intention leads to actual behavior. This is the reason why TI is treated close to actual turnover. Price (2001) considered TI to be not just about changing the location, it is associated to change in work role, job and finally the organization. Price et al., (1981) and Tett and Meyer (1993) stated that perceived organization support is one of the major determinants of TI, as lack of organizational support and heavy work load creates pressure among employees and they look forward to leave the current job, and they finally quit. Sandhya and Sulphrey (2019) found that employee engagement, psychological contract and psychological empowerment could act as a driving force against TI. Job market situation also directly affect the TI of employees. For instance, if job market reacts positively, with multiple opportunities available outside the organization then it could aid TI. If employees do not get the desired job or are faced with limited opportunities in job market, then employees become defensive and do not want to lose current job. (Price & Mueller, 1986; Senter & Martin, 2007). Mustapha and Mourad (2007) and Miller (2010) emphasizes that if employers are not aware of the TI of employees, it may result in high employee’s turnover. This could create a tense atmosphere at workplace, reduce productivity, and induce mistrust. In addition to this the employer will have to bear with a high recruitment cost. Employees could also leave the organization because of inadequate salaries in order to fulfill their needs, personal issues with the manager, career advancement problems, issues with co-workers and lack of role clarity (Pawar & Chakravarthy, 2014). TI of employees create alarming situation and signals the employer of an impending turnover. As such, managements need to make effective strategies to retain employees and avoid the losses of turnover, especially in case of labor-intensive industries (Santhanam et al, 2017). Employers need to adopt a proactive approach to avoid adverse consequences due to EI.

JE and TI

Different studies support the aspect that JE is directly associated with TI as it predicts possible turnover (Crossley et al., 2007; Holtom et al., 2006a; Holtom & O’Neill, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchel et al. (2001) described that both on-the-job factors and off-the-job factors closely bind employees with the current job and do not allow employee to leave the organization. Coetzer et al., (2017) considered TI can be well predicted by JE in large organizations. They found the opposite with respect to small organizations, as in small organizations employees sacrifice many benefits in comparison to large organizations. Zhang et al. (2012) specified that employees stay in organization is dependent how well employees are associated with the organization and community. Highly embedded employees stay longer period of time in comparison to employees who are less embedded with organization and community. JE does not determine the causes of employees’ turnover or intention

to quit, though they specify different reasons of staying with the organization (Holtom et al., 2008; Mitchell et al., 2001). The JE framework clearly suggests that employee's commitment increases and intention to quit will decrease if individual aspirations match with the current organization along with the social association with the community and surrounding environment. (Mitchell et al., 2001). As per the theoretical framework of Mitchell et al., (2001), there is expectation of negative relationship of JE and TI. The study of Felps et al., (2009) identified the relationship between JE and TI. He explained that employees are often influenced by their co-workers as they are well attached with them. If some employees are looking for new job opportunities and discuss the sources of employment like job availability on job portals or newspapers with their co-workers, then those employees who had previously no intention to leave are influenced and look for the best available alternatives though this turnover intent developed among them. Cho & Son (2012) found that if employees are having positive relationship, higher career satisfaction and higher job satisfaction they have less TI. This is supported by his empirical study conducted on small and medium construction IT workers. It was also found that if employees are having higher career and job satisfaction, there would have less TI. A study by Mitchell et al. (2001) found a negative relationship between JE, intention to leave and actual voluntary turnover. This denotes that embedded employees had less TI. In the same vein, Holtom et al. (2008) stated that intention to leave an organization would be higher for those with low JE. Conversely, Coetzer et al. (2017) found significant effect of JE on TI; particularly in large scale organizations. They further found that JE had no significant relationship with TI in small organizations. Another study by Ciptaningtyas et al. (2017) found significant relationship between JE and TI. The present study is based on the proposition that if employees are embedded with their jobs, it will result in less turnover intent or actual turnover. As can be seen from the review of literature, most of the studies have been conducted in the western context, with practically no studies being undertaken in the Middle-East in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. The present study attempts to fill this gap in literature. The study assumes significance as this is a region where large number of expatriate workforce is engaged.

2. Material and Methods

The data for the present study was collected through online survey using Google forms. The survey link was sent to white-collar employees in selected organizations of different industries in Saudi Arabia. 119 participants participated in the online survey. The survey web site did not allow the respondents to leave blank any questions, therefore all respondents answered all items. Convenience sampling was used in present study. The tools used for the collection of data are as under:

Job embeddedness (JE): JE was measured with Job embeddedness scale developed by Holtom et al. (2006b). The scale had 19 items on a five point scale. A few sample items are as under:

- a. "If I stay with my organization, I will be able to achieve most of my goals"
- b. "I feel like I am a good match for my organization."

Turnover intention (TI): TI was measured with turnover intention scale developed by Malek et al., (2018). The scale had 4 items on a five point scale. A few sample items are as under:

- a. "I have searched for another job"
- b. "I plan on quitting this job within the next year."

Demographics particulars like gender, age, marital status, experience, nationality, highest qualification, employment status of spouse, etc. were also elicited. The demographics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographics of the Sample

Particulars		Number	Percentage	Particulars		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	95	79.8	Spouse Working	Not working	79	66.4
	Female	24	20.2		Working	40	33.6
Nationality	Saudi	88	73.9	Own home	No	79	66.4
	Non-Saudi	31	26.1		Yes	40	33.6
Qualification	Graduate	79	66.4	Marital status	Unmarried	60	50.4
	Post- Graduate	30	25.2		Married	59	49.6
	Ph.D.	10	8.4	Total Experience	5-Jan	46	38.7
Age	20-25	25	21		10-Jun	30	25.2
	26-30	33	27.7		15-Nov	34	28.6
	31-35	22	18.5		16 and above	9	7.6
	36-40	19	16				
	41 and Above	20	16.8				

Source: Researcher's Compilations

Most of respondents in the present study were males; as data could be collected only from 24 females (20.2%). This is due to cultural dimension present among the workforce of Saudi Arabia. While 60 (50.4%) were unmarried, 59 (49.6%) married, and they were near to equal proportion. Majority of the sample were graduates 79 (66.4%), with post graduates and Ph.D. forming 25.2 and 8.4% respectively. 67.2% of the respondents were below 35 years of age and majority of employees 63.2% were having experience of up to 10 years. Thus, it can be assumed that the data collected for the present work is representative in nature.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

Particulars	Job Embeddedness	Turnover Intention
Mean	59.07	12.03
SD	10.070	4.149
Cronbach's Alpha	.875	.890

The JE Scale was having a Cronbach's Alpha value of .875 and TI scale was having a Cronbach's Alpha value of .890. These values are well above the required standard of .70 suggested by Nunnally (1978). These figures denote the reliability of the instrument used for the collection of data. Kumar and Beyerlein (1991) also mentioned high alpha value means that respondents' consistency of the responses to all items of the scale. The mean value of JE was 59.07, SD 10.07 while mean value of TI was 12.03 and SD 4.149 respectively.

3. Results

The data was analyzed using different statistical tools like t-test, correlations, ANOVA etc. Correlations analysis was done to identify the relationship between JE and Turnover intention. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Results of Correlation analysis

Particulars	Job Embeddedness	Turnover Intention	Experience	Age
Job Embeddedness	1	.066	-.044	-.016
Turnover Intention		1	-.262**	-.246**
Experience			1	.870**
Age				1

Correlations analysis was done to identify the relationship between JE, TI and other demographic variables. In the relationship between JE and TI the r value was .066, which shows no significant relationship between the two. In the relationship of JE and experience r value was -.044, and in the relationship between JE and age the r value was -.016. The r scores clearly specify that there is no significant relationship between the different variables. In the relationship between TI and age the r value was -.262, which presents negative significant co-relation between the two. In the relationship between TI and experience, the r value was -.246, which presents negative significant correlation. This result is well aligned with previous studies conducted by Lambert (2006) & Martin and Roodt (2008). These studies concluded the employees with more experience has less TI in comparison to employee with less experienced employees. The overall results of correlation analysis clearly stated that as employees gain experience, their turnover intent decreases. This denotes that individuals with more years of experience are unwilling to quit in comparison to less experienced employees. Age is also an important factor of TI. It was found that older employees showed less turnover intent in comparison to younger employees. These results also matched with earlier studies which denoted that older people has less TI or intention to quit (Lambert, 2006; Chen et al., 2010; Emiroğlu et al., 2015). Martin and Roodt (2008) reported that older employees want to stay with organization for longer period of times as they spent most of their time with current organization. t-test was performed to identify difference in JE and TI with respect to various demographic variables like gender and nationality. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Results of t-tests

Particulars	N	Mean	Std. deviation	T	
Job Embeddedness	Male	95	59.87	9.177	1.753
	Female	24	55.88	12.756	
Turnover Intention	Male	95	11.98	4.151	-2.41
	Female	24	12.21	4.222	
Job Embeddedness	Saudi	88	58.34	10.184	-1.330
	Non-Saudi	31	61.13	9.598	
Turnover Intention	Saudi	88	12.41	4.008	1.715
	Non-Saudi	31	10.94	4.412	

As it can be observed from the table, no significant difference was found between JE and TI, and demographics like gender and nationality. Since the mean score of JE for males were 59.87 and female 55.88, it can be considered that male employees are more embedded with their jobs. The TI scores of males were 11.98 and 12.21 for female employees. It shows that female employees have higher levels of TI as compared to males. This result is in line with earlier studies (Carbery et al., 2003; Lambert, 2006; Emiroğlu et al., 2015). The mean score of JE for Saudi was 58.34 and for Non-Saudi were 61.13, which shows that Non-Saudi employees were more embedded with their jobs in comparison to Saudi employees. On the other hand, the score of TI was 12.41 for Saudi and 10.94 for Non-Saudi employees. This result clearly denotes that non-Saudi employees are more embedded with the jobs as well as less TI, as there may be lack of employment opportunities in their respective nations. ANOVA test was conducted to find out the differences between the variables and different demographic factors like qualification and experience. The results are presented in Table 5. It can be seen from the results that there is no significant difference between JE and TI with respect to these demographic variables. The findings of the present study are in contrast to that of earlier studies. For instance, Carbery et al. (2003) and Karatepe et al. (2006) found TI to differ based the level of the

education. More qualified persons get better opportunities and their expectations levels are also high, Therefore, it could be difficult to stay with same organization for longer period of time (Lambert, 2006). JE also did not have significance difference with the experience of the sample.

Table 5

The results of ANOVA test

	Particulars	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	T		
Experience	Job Embeddedness	Between Groups	65.137	3	21.712	.210	.889
		Within Groups	11900.325	115	103.481		
		Total	11965.462	118			
	Turnover Intention	Between Groups	280.050	3	93.350	6.131	.001
		Within Groups	1750.874	115	15.225		
		Total	2030.924	118			
Qualification	Job Embeddedness	Between Groups	368.012	2	184.006	1.840	.163
		Within Groups	11597.450	116	99.978		
		Total	11965.462	118			
	Turnover Intention	Between Groups	8.597	2	4.298	.247	.782
		Within Groups	2022.327	116	17.434		
		Total	2030.924	118	184.006		

TI was found to have significant difference with different experience categories. This denotes that experience has a significant impact on the TI. More experienced people are reluctant to leave their jobs and hence their TI is on the lesser side. These results are in consistence with earlier studies conducted by Lambert (2006) and Martin and Roodt, (2008). They concluded that employees with more experience have less TI, in comparison to less or inexperienced employees. Emiroğlu et al. (2015) found signified difference in terms of TI and tenure of employees, he identified that the employees with tenure of 5-10 years or more have less level of TI in comparison to short tenure 2-4 years or less.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The present study was conducted to identify the relationship between JE and TI, as it is important for the organizations to know how they can keep the employees embedded with their jobs and overcome the problems associated with turnover. Of late, companies need to spend too much on the recruitment and training of employees. in this fast-changing environment, it is essential to keep competent employees with the company. It would be waste of energy and resources to go in for fresh recruitments in close frequency, as a direct consequence of employee turnover. While job embeddedness provides clear idea about the connectivity of employees with the organization, turnover intention would be potential alarm for the company about an impending turnover. Companies need strategic approaches to deal properly to overcome these issues. To achieve the study objectives, different statistical tools like correlation, t-test and ANOVA were applied. The study found no significant relationship between job embeddedness and turnover intentions. Negative correlation was found between turnover intention and to age as well as experience of employees. These results are similar to a few previous studies (Lambert, 2006; Chen et al., 2010; Emiroğlu et al., 2015; Martin and Roodt, 2008). Age was one of the factors of which influence the TI and many researchers found negative relationship between age and TI. Most of the researcher also accepted that older age of employees had lesser level of TI (Carbery et al., 2003; Ghiselli et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2010;). Further, workplace identity was also found to reduce TI (Sulphrey, 2019). t-test results found no significant relationship between JE and TI, and demographics like gender and nationality. Since the mean score of JE for males were higher than female it can be considered that male employees are more embedded with their jobs. The TI scores of females were higher than male employees. This shows that female employees have higher levels of turnover intention as compared to males. This result is in line with earlier studies (Carbery et al., 2003; Lambert, 2006; Emiroğlu et al., 2015). Coetzer et al. (2017) found no significant relationship between JE and turnover intention in the case of small organizations. The present study did not focus on the size of the organization. This aspect can be verified in future studies, so as to come up with better understanding of the complex relationships between JE and TI. It is expected that future studies could be undertaken based on the findings of the study.

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