Understanding the Complexity of Intention to Stay: Influencing Factors and Strategic Insights for Enhancing Employee Retention

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Abstract: Based on a comprehensive literature review, this paper clarifies that intention to stay is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by individual characteristics, organizational environment, and external market conditions, it is not simply the opposite of intention to leave. While intention to leave focuses on why employees leave, intention to stay emphasizes positive connections and long-term commitments with the organization. For effective human resource policies and retention strategies, it is crucial to analyze intention to stay separately from intention to leave, this distinction helps in understanding employee motivations and enhances organizational competitiveness. Future research should explore the specific interactions between these intentions to further enhance organizational competitiveness, especially with the rapid changes in work environments and technological advancements.

Keywords: Intention to Stay, Influencing Factors, Intention to Leave

1. Introduction

The importance of intention to stay has gained recognition in recent years. Understanding its complexity and multi-dimensional factors is essential for effective human resource policies and retention strategies. However, its intricacies remain insufficiently understood. Most organizations focus on reducing turnover rates, neglecting the enhancement of intention to stay through positive interventions, leading to inadequate understanding of employees' needs and motivations.

The study of intention to stay requires a more comprehensive and positive perspective compared to intention to leave, by identifying and reinforcing positive factors that encourage long-term commitment, organizations can improve employee satisfaction and loyalty, reduce turnover risk, and enhance overall competitiveness. Therefore, a detailed exploration of intention to stay and its influencing factors is imperative.

2. Concept

Intention to stay is the result of employees' comprehensive evaluation of their current work environment, career development opportunities, and organizational culture. It reflects employees'

satisfaction with the existing organization and their future expectations. For example, Mowday et al.[1], Jiang & Huang[2] emphasized the degree to which employees are willing to work hard in their current position without seeking other opportunities. Hunjra et al.[3] viewed intention to stay as a psychological connection between employees and the organization. Price [4] highlighted the importance of personal career planning in intention to stay. Some scholars also believe that intention to stay is the opposite of turnover intention, suggesting that reducing turnover intention can increase intention to stay[5]. However, Jiao & Zheng[6] pointed out that intention to stay is not merely the opposite of turnover intention, it is a positive tendency and a good predictive indicator of employees' willingness to stay in the organization.

The following table summarizes various definitions of intention to stay as highlighted by different scholars:

Table1: Definitions of Intention to Stay

Author	Year	Definition
Mowday et al.	1979	The degree to which individuals working in an enterprise do not attempt to seek other job opportunities or have thoughts of leaving.
Price & Mueller	1981	The perceived likelihood of continuing to stay in the organization.
Price	2001	The degree to which employees plan to stay in their current organization based on professional development considerations.
Gu et al.	2008	The intention to voluntarily continue working in the current company, opposite of turnover intention.
Hunjra, Ali, Chani, Khan & Rehman	2010	A psychological process linking the employee and the organization.
Jiao & Zheng	2019	A positive tendency, serving as a good predictor of employees' choice to stay or leave.
Jiang & Huang	2020	The degree to which organizational members are willing to continue working hard in their current position after some time.

3. Influencing Factors of Intention to Stay

The concept of intention to stay encompasses a range from simply not seeking other job opportunities to complex internal psychological processes. This indicates that intention to stay is a multi-level, multi-factor-driven phenomenon that requires researchers to study and understand it from various perspectives.Generally, scholars identify three main perspectives on the influencing factors of intention to stay.

3.1. Individual Factors

At the individual level, Hausknecht et al.[7] found through empirical research that employees' intention to stay increases with their career level. Personal traits significantly affect intention to stay. Barrick[8] discovered that employees with strong conscientiousness are more likely to stay. Iverson and Pullman[9] pointed out that employees with family responsibilities are more inclined to stay. Bao et al.[10] found that employees with self-acceptance values are more likely to choose to stay [11]. Cinar et al.[12] showed that employees' personal work relationship remodeling positively impacts intention to stay, with workplace friendships playing a partial mediating role. Chang et al.[13] found

a positive impact of employees' work abilities on intention to stay. Yao & Liang[14] indicated that employees' work values significantly positively influence intention to stay. Additionally, age and health status[15], personal values[16], personal preferences[17], the work-family facilitation relationship[18], etc., also impact intention to stay.

3.2. Organizational and Job Factors

At the organizational and job factors level, several key reasons have been identified for why employees stay with a company. Herman[19] highlighted the importance of a compatible corporate culture, satisfactory colleague relationships, adequate support, and growth opportunities. Hausknecht et al.[7] further expanded on this by summarizing 12 key organizational factors, including job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, sense of belonging, job choice opportunities, promotion opportunities, and organizational fairness.Building on this, Radford, Shacklock, and Meissner[20] enriched the perspective by noting that job satisfaction, perceived supervisor support, job embeddedness, work environment, compensation, career opportunities, and job stability all influence employees' intention to stay.

Moreover, Lu et al.[21] found a strong correlation between organizational commitment and intention to stay; higher organizational commitment enhances the intention to stay, whereas lower commitment increases turnover intentions.Additionally, Zhang et al.[22] argued that the degree of organizational socialization positively impacts employees' intention to stay. Hong et al.[23] conducted an empirical analysis and discovered that employee training and evaluation systems, as well as compensation, significantly influence the intention to stay of university employees.In terms of leadership style, inclusive and transformational leadership significantly impact employees' intention to stay[24]. Milliman[25] proposed a novel perspective, finding through empirical research that workplace spirituality (including meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment with organizational values) has a direct positive correlation with the intention to stay. Other studies have also identified factors such as organizational fit[26], sense of purpose[27], organizational ethics systems [28], organizational climate[29] as influential on the intention to stay.

3.3. External Environmental Factors

At the level of external environmental factors, several studies have highlighted the significant influence of external job opportunities and labor market conditions on employees' intention to stay.

Li Jia[30] examined the impact of perceived external job opportunities on the retention intentions of employees in private enterprises, discovering a negative correlation between perceived external job opportunities and retention intentions. Furthermore, Xiao and Zhao[31] emphasized that imbalances in labor market supply and demand significantly affect employees' decisions to stay or leave.Additionally, HakemZadeh et al.[17] found that the alignment between actual employment policies and preferred employment policies plays a crucial role in explaining employees' intention to remain in their current industry, suggesting that policymakers can positively influence employees' intention to stay in the industry by promoting the consistency between actual and preferred employment policies within the industry.

4. Discussion: Intention to Leave vs. Intention to Stay

In academic research on human resource management, the exploration of intention to leave and intention to stay has been a persistent topic. Although these concepts are sometimes used interchangeably in practice, it is essential to investigate whether they share the same theoretical foundation and practical implications.

Human capital is critical for organizational performance and growth. Effective talent management, from strategic planning to daily operations, enables organizations to attract, retain, and develop high-quality talent, enhancing competitiveness and long-term success[32]. Since the 1970s, research has focused on employee turnover, primarily examining intention to leave within the "intent precedes leaving" framework[33]. This framework views intention to leave as a key predictor and prevention method for turnover[34], leading to classic turnover models.

Compared to intention to leave, research on intention to stay emerged relatively late. This delay is due to early organizational behavior studies focusing more on preventing the negative impacts of employee turnover rather than actively exploring how to enhance employees' intention to stay. Over time, organizations began to realize that solely focusing on reducing turnover rates does not fully capture the complex relationship between employees and the organization. Consequently, intention to stay gradually became a new research area, representing an unformed attitude and behavior [35]. This research delves into the positive factors that encourage employees to remain in the organization long-term and is a strong, statistically direct cognitive antecedent of retention[36]. Moreover, it can moderately predict actual turnover rates[37].

Previous research largely did not distinguish between the effects of determinants on turnover intention versus employee retention on intention to leave and intention to stay. It was implied that intention to stay and intention to leave are two sides of the same coin, suggesting an inverse relationship between the two. In this view, a high intention to leave implies a low intention to stay, and vice versa, making them seemingly interchangeable. However, intention to stay is not merely the opposite of intention to leave. It transcends the negative concept of intention to leave by emphasizing the identification and reinforcement of the motivations and conditions that drive employees to continue working within the organization. It is more effective than intention to leave in predicting employees' long-term career choices[38][39]. Empirical research by Cho et al.[40] supports this conclusion, indicating that the two are not simply opposite concepts. Nancarrow et al.[41] demonstrated in their empirical studies that while there is overlap between intention to leave and intention to stay, their measurement structures differ, the factors predicting intention to leave and intention to stay are similar but differ across different occupational groups, therefore, these concepts should be used cautiously, particularly when measuring them in organizations and when developing retention programs, policies, or activities aimed at modifying intention to leave and intention to stay.

Unlike intention to leave, which benefits from many classic measurement tools, there is no unified method to measure intention to stay. Measurement approaches for intention to stay include direct measurement[42][43][44][45][46], indirect measurement through intention to leave[34], a combination of direct and indirect measurement[47][48], or open-ended questions[49][50]. These methods are mostly single-dimensional, with varying numbers of items and relatively simple structures.

Hence, understanding intention to stay requires a deeper, more comprehensive analysis, rather than merely viewing it as the opposite of intention to leave. Intention to stay emphasizes maintaining positive connections and long-term commitments. Since the goal is to retain talented employees, HRM researchers should investigate factors influencing intention to stay, rather than focusing solely on what drives employees to leave. Therefore, it is crucial to develop new, robust measurement tools tailored specifically for intention to stay when formulating human resource policies and retention strategies.

5. Conclusion

This paper establishes that intention to stay is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by individual characteristics, organizational environment, and external market conditions. Factors such as career opportunities, job satisfaction, organizational culture, leadership styles, and economic

conditions impact employees' decisions to stay. Consequently, organizations must adopt comprehensive strategies to enhance intention to stay and distinguish between intention to stay and intention to leave.

With rapid changes in the work environment and technological advancements, future studies should explore these specific manifestations and interactions to better inform human resource policies and retention strategies. Developing new measurements and retention strategies, particularly those integrating technological innovation, will be crucial. This approach will help organizations respond effectively to societal changes, improve retention rates, and enhance competitiveness.

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