

Positive Organizational Behavior and Intention-to-Leave: A Case of ICT Professionals in Malaysia

Safiah Omar¹ and Fauziah Noordin²

¹Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
omar.safiah@gmail.com

²Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
fauziah716@salam.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

Issues of turnover in the ICT industry brings up the need for the assessment of the level of intention-to-leave among ICT professionals in Malaysia. The constructs of positive organizational behavior were assessed in order to determine whether they have any influence on the ICT professionals' intention-to-leave. This quantitative study consists of 393 ICT professionals from various ICT organizations in peninsular Malaysia. Descriptive analyses, correlations, and structural equation modeling are among the analyses used in this research. In correlation analysis, constructs of positive organizational behavior were found to be negatively related to the constructs of intention-to-leave. Negative relationships were also found between the two constructs in structural equation modeling. Implications and suggestion for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Positive organizational behavior, intention-to-leave, ICT

professionals

1. Introduction

A study on factors that have influence on intention-to-leave is important as evidenced from various outcomes of organizational performances (Hayes, O'Brien-Pallas, Duffield, Shamian, Buchan & Hughes, 2006). High level of intention-to-leave can decrease the level of employees' engagement and increase the level of absenteeism in organizations (Kivimaki, Vanhala, Pentti, Lansisalimi, Virtanen & Elovainio, 2007) whether the occurrence of actual leaving takes place or not.

In Malaysia, the information and communication technology (ICT) industry has the highest level of employment turnover at the rate of 72% (MEF, 2012). Meanwhile, the number of students that enroll in ICT programs in higher education drops tremendously from approximately 89,000 students to 19,000 students after the year 2002 (Wong, 2010). Several studies also indicate that there will be a shortage in

supply of ICT employees in Malaysia (JobStreet.com, 2010; MDec & Synovate, 2011) as well as in foreign countries especially in Europe (McLaughlin, Sherry, Carcary, O'Brien, Fanning & Teodorakis, 2012). Thus, assessment on intention-to-leave can determine the current condition of ICT employees specifically in Malaysia and whether the industry's employment markets are at stake or otherwise.

Positive organizational behavior (POB) is identified in this study as the potential factor that can influence intention-to-leave. This is based on broaden-and-build theory where positive attitude and behavior develop in upward spiral that leads to better decision making and towards becoming resilient (Fredrickson, 2004). The constructs of POB recently developed from the existence of positive psychology and has been improved to be more suitable in order to be used in organizational behavioral settings (Luthans, 2002a).

Firstly, this study intends to assess the level of both intention-to-leave and positive organizational behavior among ICT professionals in Malaysia. Secondly, this study assesses relationships that might exist between the constructs of positive organizational behavior with intention-to-leave the organization and intention-to-leave the career.

2. Brief Literature Review

2.1 Positive Organizational Behavior (POB)

POB is defined as “the study and application of positively oriented human

resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace” (Luthans, 2002b, p. 59). POB is derived from positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and developed accordingly to be used particularly in organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002a). Unlike the positive psychology or any other positive work behavior that are mostly trait-like, POB is *state-like* which is malleable to changes and can be exposed for development within a short-time period (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

In this study, POB has three constructs which are hope, optimism, and resilience. Hope refers to the positive motivational state of determination to achieve goals based on the sense of being successful (Snyder, 1995). Optimism is a belief that good things will happen to a person's life rather than bad things (Scheier & Carver, 1993). Optimism is a function that is self-regulatory that determines whether an individual will strike for and maintain working towards achieving desired goals (Creed, Patton, & Bartrum, 2002). Finally, resilience is defined as the ability to rebound from negative events and progress into positive events (Luthans, 2002b). Resilient individuals tend to have emotional stability which opens up the mind to explore many solutions before making any decision (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

2.2 Intention-to-Leave

Intention-to-leave refers to having the thoughts or feeling of leaving (Alam &

Mohammad, 2010; Luthans & Jensen, 2002). There are two types of leaving that are assessed in this study. They are intention-to-leave the organization and intention-to-leave the career. The two types of leaving are distinct from each other whereby intention-to-leave the organization is when an individual leave the organization and work in another organization within the same career field. Whereas, intention-to-leave the career is when an individual quits the current career and work either in the same organization or another organization but other than the current career field. Organizational turnover starts from unit to unit, organization to organization, and the most severe is from one career to another (Krausz, Koslowsky, Shalom, & Elyakim, 1995). Thus, this study distinguishes the types of intention-to-leave into different constructs.

2.3 POB and Intention-to-Leave

Based on broaden-and-build theory, positive attitudes broaden and widen the arrays of individual thinking (Fredrickson, 2004). Positive emotion and behavior have often been linked to the development of creativity, flexibility, emotional stability, and resiliency in individuals (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Particularly in organizations, the existence of positive attitude creates an upward spiral that may lead to better work performances (Fredrickson, 2003). This is evident from a study where it indicates that organizations that focus on strength and good values rather than finding mistakes and correcting them have better work performances and financial stability (Fryer, 2004).

The phenomenon of high turnover in ICT industry demands such assessment on the level of intention-to-leave. Answering the call from positive psychology which states that “what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention” (Peterson, 2006, p.4) brings this study to explore the retention strategies by assessing the factors of intention-to-leave from the positive perspectives. Such assessments are important in research because studies on positive attitudes received far too little attention as compared to the negative attitudes (Fredrickson, 2004; Luthans, 2002a). Positive values that determine human strengths are often left aside (Turner, Barling, & Zacharatos, 2002). To add to these, researchers who conduct studies on positive perspectives have been regarded as not serious scientists (Segerstrom, 2006).

In intention-to-leave, there are empirical studies that assessed the causes that contribute to leaving such as conflicts (Aminah, 1997; Harrell, Chewing, & Taylor, 1986; Noraini, 2004), job dissatisfaction (Mobley, 1977), and burnout (Goddard & O'Brien, 2003; Jourdain & Chenevert, 2010; Malik, Zaheer, Khan, & Ahmed, 2010) but the assessment on causes that reduce and/or eliminate the thoughts of leaving are still lacking in the literatures. Thus, this study picked up the needed behavioral constructs that measure human strengths and assessed whether they have any influence on intention-to-leave both the organization and the career. Moreover, recent studies found that the constructs of POB are associated with employee's retention (Peterson & Luthans, 2003) and other types of positive work outcomes

such as work happiness and job satisfaction (Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

3. Methodology

The research was conducted quantitatively using self-administered questionnaire as the main assessment instrument. This approach was chosen because it can answer the research questions objectively where bias can be avoided (Cresswell, 2005). Three means of data collection were used which are drop-off/pick-up, mail, and online methods. T-test was conducted prior to the main analyses in order to ensure that the style of answering from all respondents using these three methods are the same.

3.1 Sample of research

The sample of this study consists of 393 ICT professionals from 22 ICT organizations in Malaysia. Among them, 60% are male and 40% are female. 88.4% are aged less than 34 years old, 9.5% are less than 44 years old, and 2% are 45 years old or more. Most of the respondents hold bachelor degree (66.8%) followed by master degree (17.6%), diploma (13.3%), doctoral/Ph.D (1%), and professional course (1.3%). There are 60.5% Malays, 27.6% Chinese, 10.5% Indian, and 1.5% under *others* category. *Others* here refer to ethnic origins from East Malaysia such as Iban, Bidayuh, Kadazan, and Melanau. Majority of the respondents are Muslims (60.7%) followed by Buddhists (15.8%), Christians (14.3%), and Hindus (14.3%).

3.2 Assessment Instrument

The instrument used for POB was adopted from Youssef and Luthans (2007) and comprised three constructs which are hope, optimism, and resilience. Each construct has 6-items and the scale of 1-7 were used. Scale 1 represents the highest level of disagreement whereas 7 represents the highest level of agreement with the statement of the items. An example of the item in POB instrument is "I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job". The Cronbach's Alpha for hope is 0.824, optimism is 0.793, and resilience is 0.809.

The instrument used for both intention-to-leave the organization and intention-to-leave the career were taken from Alam and Mohammad (2010). There were 3-items for each construct and the scale of 1-7 was also used. An example of the item is, "Presently, I am actively searching for other job". Cronbach's Alpha values for the internal consistency are 0.886 for intention-to-leave the organization and 0.919 for intention-to-leave the career.

3.3 Research Analyses

Various types of analyses were used in this study in order to answer the research questions. The analysis softwares used are statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 20 and analysis of moment structure (AMOS) version 18. In order to fulfill the first objective of the study, descriptive statistics were referred to in order to find the scores for POB and intention-to-leave constructs. The second

objective is fulfilled by using correlation analysis and structural equation modeling whereby the associations and the relationships between the two constructs can be assessed.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Referring to Table 1, the mean scores for

hope and resilience in POB constructs are the same at 4.97 with standard deviation of 0.91 and 0.93 respectively. The mean for intention-to-leave the organization (M=4.13; SD= 0.88) is higher than the one for intention-to-leave the career (M= 3.50; SD= 0.85). The mean score for hope, optimism, resilience, and intention-to-leave the organization are at the moderate level whereas intention-to-leave the career is at the low level.

Table 1: Mean Score for POB and Intention-to-Leave

Variable	Mean	SD
Hope	4.97	0.91
Optimism	4.21	1.22
Resilience	4.97	0.93
Total Mean	4.72	1.02
Intention-to-Leave Organization	4.13	0.88
Intention-to-Leave Career	3.50	0.85

Note: 1.00 – 3.99 = low; 4.00 – 4.99 = low-moderate; 5.00-5.99= moderate-high; 6.00 – 7.00 = high

4.2 Correlation Analysis

In Table 2, the correlation analysis between the constructs of POB and intention-to-leave the organization and intention-to-leave the career are negative and significant at level

0.01. The highest correlation is found between optimism with intention-to-leave the career (r= -0.543) followed by the link between optimism and intention-to-leave the organization (r= -0.502).

Table 2: Correlation for POB and Intention-to-Leave

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Hope					
2. Optimism	.248**				
3. Resilience	.622**	.330**			
4. Itlo	-.498**	-.502**	-.433**		
5. Itlc	-.457**	-.543**	-.428**	.791**	

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Itlo – Intention-to-leave organization

Itlc – Intention -to-leave career

4.3 Structural Equation Modeling

Prior to conducting path analysis for structural equation modeling, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in order to retain only the relevant items that contribute to good indices value for both

POB and intention-to-leave constructs. In Table 3, the fit indices obtained are all within the cut-off values which indicate that both CFA for POB and intention-to-leave have good-fit (Bollen, 1989; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hoyle, 1995).

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analyses

<i>Indices</i>	<i>POB</i>	<i>ITL</i>
χ^2	73.22	14.48
$\chi^2/df (\leq 5)$	2.29	2.90
CFI (≥ 0.9)	0.97	0.99
GFI (≥ 0.9)	0.96	0.99
NFI (≥ 0.9)	0.95	0.95
RMSEA (≤ 0.08)	0.065	0.079
Result	Good Fit	Good Fit

Table 4: Structural Equation Modeling

	B	S.E.	C.R.	β	P
Hope \rightarrow POB	1.047	.088	11.962	.842	***
Optimism \rightarrow POB	1.060	.091	11.691	.892	***
Resilience \rightarrow POB	1.000			.922	
POB \rightarrow ITLO	-1.267	.117	-10.860	-.645	***
POB \rightarrow ITLC	-1.189	.118	-10.078	-.592	***

Note: POB – Positive organizational behavior;
 Itlo – Intention-to-leave organization
 Itlc – Intention-to-leave career

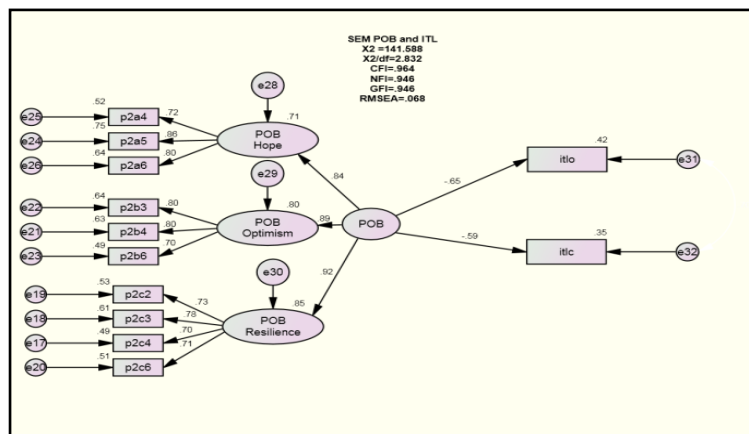


Figure 1: Structural Equation Modeling for POB and Intention-to-Leave

Referring to Table 4 and Figure 1, both relationships between POB and intention-to-leave the organization and the relationship between POB and intention-to-leave the career are significant at level 0.001. The β value for POB and intention-to-leave the organization is higher ($\beta = -0.645$) than POB and intention-to-leave the career ($\beta = -0.592$). Among the three constructs in POB, resilience has the highest contribution with β value of 0.922. The squared multiple correlations for intention-to-leave the organization is 0.417 and intention-to-leave the career is 0.350. This indicates that 41.7% of the intention-to-leave the organization's variance are explained by the existence of hope, optimism, and resilience. The constructs of POB only explained 35% of variance in intention-to-leave the career.

5. Discussion

This study, in the first place is intended to assess the level of POB and intention-to-leave. Secondly, it is to determine whether the constructs of POB may have any influence on the intention-to-leave the organization and career. The results found in this study indicate that the levels of hope, optimism, resilience, as well as intention-to-leave the organization are at moderate levels. One of the important findings is that the level of intention-to-leave the career is low. It means that ICT professionals in Malaysia do not have high possibility to quit the ICT career. Although the baby boomers are retiring (Hecker, 2005) and there is a low number of graduates from ICT programs in higher education (Wong, 2010), the current ICT professionals do not intend to leave the career too soon and it can somewhat be a relief to this industry.

The negative associations found between the constructs of POB with intention-to-leave the organization and intention-to-leave the career raise the need for organizations to develop positive attitude and behavior in the workplace. In addition, the β -value for the relationships between POB constructs and both intention-to-leave the organization and career obtained from structural equation modeling support the broaden-and-build theory where the existence of positive attitude and behavior can influence positive work outcomes (Fredrickson, 2003). Particularly in this study, the existence of hope, optimism, and resilience among ICT professionals influence their intention to stay. This can be explained by the upward spiral developed from positive attitude that broadens and widens the thought repertoire which gives various thinking perspectives before individuals make any decision (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

The negative relationships found can also be related to previous findings between POB and work happiness, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Youssef & Luthans, 2007) and these variables are often found to reduce the intention-to-leave (Mahdi, Zin, Nor, Sakat, & Naim, 2012; Mohamad & Abdul Rahman, 2011; Paille, 2011; Roya, Salmiah, Wan Khairuzzaman, & Ungku Norulkamar, 2005; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Thus, it is expected that the constructs of POB are negatively related to the intention-to-leave the organization and the intention-to-leave the career.

Hope, optimism, and resilience are *state-like* constructs and are malleable to changes. These constructs can be developed within individuals in the organizations through trainings, workshops, and seminars (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Plamer, 2012; Youssef &

Luthans, 2007). This means that such skills can be enhanced in employees within a short period of time and are beneficial to the organizations. This can be regarded as one of the strategies for retention in the organizations.

6. Conclusion

This exploratory analyses on hope, optimism, and resilience with the intention-to-leave the organization and the intention-to-leave the career found strong negative relationships that indicate the contributions of these constructs of POB in explaining leaving intention among ICT professionals in Malaysia. Although almost all constructs are at moderate levels, the increasing scores in POB constructs can reduce the level of intention-to-leave further among these ICT professionals. The findings are limited to the ICT industry which means that further analyses should be conducted to other industries in Malaysia to further generalize the research implications. Other mediating variables as well as moderating factors can also be included in future studies for in-depth understanding of these studied areas.

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