

Work-Related Identity Discrepancy and Employee Turnover Intention: The Mediation Effect of Job Satisfaction

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Abstract

As for the competition of a contemporary enterprise, talents are the core resources, and how to retain talents becomes the hot topic. However, research to date has not yet made it clear that there may exist a relationship between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory, we hypothesize a mediating model in which work-related identity discrepancy is associated with employee turnover intention via job satisfaction. With data collected from 510 employees in China, we show that work-related identity discrepancy is associated with employee turnover intention. Moreover, we find job satisfaction mediates the main effect. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Work-related identity discrepancy; Employee turnover intention; Job satisfaction; Social Cognitive Theory

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the economy, employee turnover has become one of the main problems troubling enterprises (Wang et al., 2019). Meanwhile, high turnover rate brings a series of negative effects to enterprises, such as the rise of the management cost of advanced manufacture enterprises, the exposure of the trade secrets, and the loss of the employees' enthusiasm as well as their loyalty (Mai et al., 2016). frequent reduce employee turnover, there are more and more studies on this topic (Haque et al., 2019; Raza et al., 2018). Employee turnover intention refers to the intention of employees to leave the current enterprise with careful consideration after working in the enterprise for a period of time (Mobley et al., 1978). Aquino et al (1997) point out that leaders are closely related to employees' turnover intention. Nevertheless, current studies mainly focus on the role of antecedent variables such as leadership style and leadership behavior (Kong & Zhao, 2018; Xiao & Zhao, 2017), and there are few studies on how employee identity change caused by leadership change affects employee turnover intention, such as work-related identity discrepancy.

Work-related identity discrepancy refers to the gap among the actual self, the ideal self, and they ought self caused by external events that break the cognitive balance of the existing work identity (Swann et al., 2009). When a leader who has a high relationship with employees leaves the company, some employees may not adapt to the new one. As a consequence, work-related identity discrepancy may happen. And most evidence suggests that work-related identity discrepancy is harmful to employees such as work withdrawal behavior, job engagement (Liu et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019). Under the influence of Chinese "circle" culture, the phenomenon may be commonly witnessed. Because leaders usually establish their own "small circle" in the organization (Lin & Cheng, 2016), when the leader leaves the firm, employees as "insiders" will be lost, resulting in work-related identity discrepancy. In addition, Lei & Che (2012) believes that the change of identity is an important antecedent variable of employee turnover intention. With the economic rapid growth, job mobility is so frequency that work-related identity discrepancy is very prevalence. It is both theoretical and empirical implications to illuminate the association between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention as well as the mechanism for this association. Job satisfaction is the direct experience generated by employees integrating all aspects of their work (Hoppock, 1937). Job satisfaction has an important impact on turnover intention (Smith et al, 1969). There are three factors affecting job satisfaction, namely organizational factors, personal factors and environmental factors (Mobley et al, 1978). Based on social cognitive theory, external environment changes will affect individual cognition and then influence employee attitude such as job satisfaction.

However, few researchers have considered the mediating effect of job satisfaction in the relationship between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention.

In sum, this paper contributes to the existing literature in two ways: First, we demonstrate the effect of work-related identity discrepancy as an antecedent on employee turnover intention. Second, we probed job satisfaction as a mechanism in the impact of work-related identity discrepancy on employee turnover intention.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1 The effect of work-related identity discrepancy on employee turnover intention

Social cognitive theory proposed by Bandura(1986)has been widely used to verify the behavior of individuals, which emphasizes that the individual's behavior, the subject cognition and social context are dynamic interactions. According to the three-dimensional interaction model of social cognitive theory, when individuals face the change of external environment, he(or she) will be affected by the internal cognitive factors before further responding to the current environment. And work-related identity discrepancy that comes from the change of leadership is a kind of "external environment" which employees generally face at work. That is to say, when employees, especially the core employees of the former leading circle, experience the change of leadership, they will hold the view that leader change will damage their "invisible position" in the team after recognizing and evaluating by themselves, and thus generate turnover intention.

Meanwhile, existing studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between leadership turnover and employee turnover intention. Seibert et al(2013)concluded that the leadership departure is positively related to the staff turnover; Ballinger & Rockmann(2010) found that the higher the quality of the exchange between leaders and members, the more likely the subordinates are to leave when the leader leaves; Shapiro et al (2016) inferred that leadership change will make employees less dependent on the organization and then lead to turnover intention.

Hence, it is reasonable to believe that work-related identity discrepancy, as one of the negative effects of the leadership change, will have a positive effect on employee turnover intention. Therefore, our first hypothesis was as follows: Hypothesis 1: Work-related identity discrepancy will be positively associated with employee turnover intention.

2.2The mediating effect of job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is the direct experience generated by employees integrating all aspects of their work(Hoppock,1937), which is determined by working environment, superior leadership, working pressure, and so on(Jiang et al,2006; Locke et al,1986). Trevor and Nyberg(2008) confirmed that employees who experience the change of leadership but fail to adjust in time to adapt to it when perceiving work-related identity discrepancy will choose voluntary turnover. Indeed, in the process of breaking away from the old identity to adapt to the new identity, work-related identity discrepancy will cause adverse consequences, such as increased anxiety and stress, decreased physical and mental health (Barreto et al.,2010), interpersonal tension (Vough et al.,2013), confusion, self-doubt, and uncertainty, increasing turnover rate, reducing performance and job satisfaction (Thatcher & Greer,2008), and so on. And job satisfaction has an important impact on turnover intention(Smith et al, 1969). Ng and Feldman (2013) also pointed out that the departure of leadership will lead to a sense of uncertainty about the future which causes the staff to do nothing at work and finally reduces the employee's job satisfaction. At the same time, some literature showed job satisfaction had a negative effect on employees turnover intention. Bai(2015) demonstrated that job satisfaction is negatively associated with employee turnover intention in a study of the career plateau of enterprise managers. Ding and Zheng (2016) proved that job satisfaction negatively affected employee turnover intention. Li et al(2018) found that the higher the job satisfaction of employees is, the lower their turnover intention will be.

According to the social cognitive theory, individuals encountering a potential pressure source in work will automatically generate a cognitive process to assess the potential threats or challenges of the pressure source to the individual itself. And employee job satisfaction is usually determined by a state of mind coming from whether the employee can produce a benign perception of the work itself or the working environment, the working pressure, and so on. This means that individual undergoing a leadership change will perceive this situation as a pressure source for a cognitive assessment, and individual apperceiving work-related identity discrepancy will reduce trust in new leaders, develop a bad perception of work stress and then reduce job satisfaction. When employees perceive a sense of low job satisfaction, they will tend to leave.

All in all, work-related identity discrepancy brought by the leadership change will make the staff feel the pressure from work, cause a threat to its internal perception and a reduction in job satisfaction, and eventually result in turnover intention. So we speculate that work-related identity discrepancy negatively affects employee job satisfaction, and job satisfaction will negatively affect employee turnover intention. Therefore, our second hypothesis was as follows: Hypothesis 2: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of work-related identity discrepancy on employee turnover intention.

The overall conceptual model of our research is summarized in Figure 1.

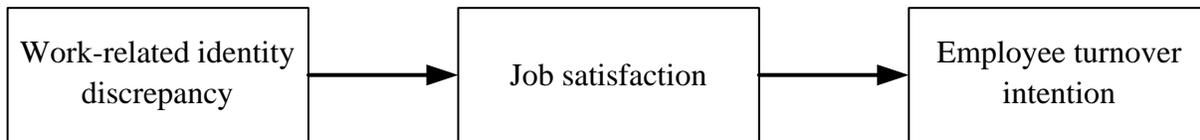


Figure 1 The conceptual model of the research.

3. Research Design

3.1 Participants and Procedure

We collected 841 copies of the survey from the employees who experienced leaders change in China; 510 valid responses were collected, giving a response rate of 60.6%, 40.78% were men and 59.22% women. The average age of the respondents was 30.31 years (SD=9.1), the main age ranging from 20 to 40 years. In terms of education, 36.9% of the respondents had a master's degree or above, 55.1% a bachelor's degree, and 0.8% had a high school diploma or below. Of the respondents, 52.8% were employees, 3.3% supervisors, and 19.0% middle-level managers. In addition, Respondents working years mainly focused on the 1-5 years, Proportion reached 54.1%.

3.2 Measures

In order to ensure the reliability of measurement tools, This research mainly adopts a mature scale. All scales were scored by Likert 5 points (1= "strongly disagree"; 5= "strongly agree"). All scales in this study are described as following:

- (1) Work-Related Identity Discrepancy (WID): We used the scale by Huang (2019) to assess WID, which contains 7-items. Sample items include "I feel that the new leader is inferior to the previous one." and so on. The scale's reliability was .870.
- (2) Employee Turnover Intention (ETI): We used employee turnover intention scale by Farh(1998) to assess ETI, which contains 4-items. Among them, Item 4 is reverse sample items include "I often think of to resign from my current job" and so on. The scale's reliability was .807.
- (3) Job Satisfaction(JS): We used employee turnover intention scale developed by Hackman (1980) to assess, which contains 3-items, Sample items include "Overall, I am happy about your work" and so on. The scale's reliability was .881.
- (4) Control Variables: We controlled for respondents' demographic variables, including age, gender, education, working time, and position. As previous research suggested that these variables affect employees' behavior (Thau et al., 2009). To ensure the accuracy of the results, these variables are controlled.

4. Results

This study uses SPSS21.0 and AMOS17.0 to analyze the data. The steps are as follows: First, doing the descriptive statistical analysis of the data; Second, testing the common method bias, and analyzing the data problems; Third, analyzing the direct effect and the mediation effect of job satisfaction.

4.1 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

The correlation coefficient, mean and standard deviation of the variables in this study are shown in table 1. Work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention show a strong positive correlation($\gamma=.434$, $p < .01$), and work-related identity discrepancy and job satisfaction have a strong negative correlation($\gamma=-.210$, $p < .01$), job satisfaction and employee turnover intention have a significant negative correlation($\gamma=-.395$, $p < .01$), The results preliminarily support the hypothesis of main effect and mediating effect in this study.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.gender	1.59	.492									
2.age	30.3	9.193	-.196**								
3.marital status	1.47	.569	-.060	.653**							
4.education	3.45	.882	-.030	.265**	.276*						
5.position	3.27	.883	.295**	-.293**	.268*	.192**					
6. Working time	8.65	9.248	0.184*	.944**	.622*	.327**	-.263**				
7.Relationship with ex-leader	1.96	.671	.159**	-.084	-.059	.020	.195**	-.062			
8.WID	2.50	.781	.054	-.164**	-.096*	-.091*	.051	-.172**	.050		
9.ETI	2.47	.758	.080	-.257**	.218*	-.086	.127**	-.265**	.151*	.434**	
10.JS	3.44	.806	-.007	.131**	.067	-.082	-.102*	.120**	-.014	-.210**	-.395**

Note.WID=work-related identity discrepancy, ETI=employee turnover intention, JS=job satisfaction

***p < 0.001 ; **p < 0.01 ; *p < 0.05

4.2 Common method bias

Following Zhou and Long's (2004) suggestions, we first conducted varimax rotation analysis of principal factors for all variables to determine the presence and magnitude of common method variance, according to the number of factor precipitation or common factor interpretation. Three common factors (eigenvalue >1) were extracted from the test results, and the first factor explained only 27.17% of the variance, that is, less than the recommended explanation criterion of 50%. Thus we reasonably concluded that common method variance in the present research was not significant.

4.3 Reliability and validity analysis

The study uses SPSS21.0 statistical analysis software to analyze the reliability and validity of scales. The results are shown in Table 2. Cronbach alpha coefficients of all scales were above .80, indicating that the reliability of the scale is quite high. The KMO values of each scale were all greater than .60, and the results of Bartlett spherical test were significant, and each scale's cumulative variances were greater than 50%, indicating good validity.

Table 2 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Cumulative Interpretation Variance
WID	.870	.850	72.17%
JS	.881	.741	80.81%
ETI	.807	.751	65.00%

Note.WID=work-related identity discrepancy, ETI=employee turnover intention, JS=job satisfaction

***p < .001 ; **p < .01 ; *p < .05

Next, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of work-related identity discrepancy, employee turnover intention, and job satisfaction by calculating several fit indices, comprising chi-square/degrees of freedom (χ^2/df), comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). We compared a three-factor model with a one-factor model and found that the three-factor model had a better fit to the data, $\chi^2/df=7.12$, CFI=.881, IFI=.881, TLI=.854, RMSEA=.110, than the one-factor model did, $\chi^2/df = 25.19$, CFI =.510, IFI = .512, TLI = .421, RMSEA = .218. Thus, work-related identity discrepancy, employee turnover intention, and job satisfaction are three empirically distinctive constructs.

4.4 Hypothesis testing

Main effect test. We used hierarchical regression analysis to test Hypothesis 1. As shown in Table 4, we first entered the seven control variables (gender, education, age, position, et al.) into the regression model and then entered work-related identity discrepancy via the stepwise regression method (Model 2). The results show a significant negative correlation between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention ($\beta = -.397, p < 0.001, M2$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 4 The Main and Mediating Effects

Type of the Variable		ETI				JS	
		M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Control	gender	.011	.006	.025	.018	.035	.038
	age	.024	.040	.071	.075	.124	.116
	marital status	-.080	-.092	-.089	-.097	-.023	-.018
	education	-.007	.013	-.049	-.025	-.114*	-.124*
	position	.028	.023	.010	.009	-.048	-.046
	Working time	-.218	-.167	-.200	-.160	.049	.023
	Relationship with ex-leader	.128**	.113**	.129**	.116**	.004	.011
Independent Mediator	WID		.397***		.335***		-.200***
	JS			-.375***	-.308***		
	F	7.383	20.367	18.605	27.767	2.558	4.938
	R ²	.093***	.245***	.229***	.333***	.034*	.073***
	ΔR^2	.093	.152	.136	.088	.034	.039

Note. WID=work-related identity discrepancy, ETI=employee turnover intention, JS=job satisfaction

***p < .001 ; **p < .01 ; *p < .05

The mediating role of job satisfaction. According Baron and Kenny (1986), a mediating effect must meet three conditions: (1) The independent variable is associated with the dependent variable and the mediator; (2) the mediator has a significant effect on the dependent variable; and (3) when the independent variable and the mediator are simultaneously substituted into the regression equation to explain the dependent variable, the effect of the mediating variable is significant and the effect of the independent variable disappears (the fully mediating effect) or weakens (partial mediating effect).

As shown in Table 4, Work-related identity discrepancy is negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($\beta = -.200, p < .001, M6$), positively correlated with employee turnover intention ($\beta = .397, p < .001, M2$). Meanwhile, job satisfaction is negatively correlated with employee turnover intention ($\beta = -.375, p < .001, M3$). Finally, when work-related identity discrepancy and job satisfaction were simultaneously entered into the regression equation, the negative effect of work-related identity discrepancy is still significant ($\beta = -.308, p < .001, M4$), but is weakened in comparison with M2 ($\beta = .335 < 0.397, p < .001, M4$). These results reveal that job satisfaction plays a partial mediating role between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported. We tested Hypothesis 2 with Hayes' PROCESS macro (2013), in which 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrapped samples are used. The results are shown in Table 5. The indirect effect and 95% confidence intervals (CI) of work-related identity discrepancy on employee turnover intention through job satisfaction are .356, CI [.283, .430], does not include 0. Hypothesis 2 is therefore supported.

Table 5 Bootstrap test for mediation effect

Mediator	WID (X) → JS (M) → ETI (Y)			
	effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Job satisfaction				
direct effect	.356	.037	.283	.430
indirect effect	.064	.020	.030	.109

5. Discussion

This research mainly focuses on the effect of work-related identity discrepancy on employee turnover intention, especially on the mediating role of job satisfaction. It shows that: (1)work-related identity discrepancy significantly has a positive effect on employee turnover intention; (2)job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Our research mainly contributes to the literature in two aspects. First, based on the social cognitive theory, we explore the relationship between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention.

Most scholars focus on negative antecedents on employee turnover intention (Aquino et al., 1997; Lei & Che, 2012; Kong & Zhao, 2018), but there is little research to employ perceived work-related identity discrepancy as the antecedent of employee turnover intention.

Meanwhile, as a psychological variable, work-related identity discrepancy was introduced into management research for the first time, which enriched the nomological network of identity research. Second, this study suggests that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention. Chinese society always emphasized Guanxi.

When the leader leaves, work-related identity discrepancy may be more intense, which can reduce employees' job satisfaction and then improve their turnover intention. Meanwhile, it is of great significance to full understanding the individual attitude and behavior changes in the workplace.

5.2 Management implications

The results show that work-related identity discrepancy has an obvious positive effect on employee turnover intention via job satisfaction. According to the conclusions, we provide the following suggestions for organization managers. First, the organizations can establish employee aid programs (EAP) to intervene in the psychological adjustment of relevant employees timely, pay attention to the employee emotional management, help employees get out of the trouble as soon as possible, then retain talents for the organization. At the same time, we also point out that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention. Therefore, it is necessary to build a scientific management system and create a harmonious organizational atmosphere to improve employees' job satisfaction. Second, the human resources department should train employees to adjust their emotions and improve their job satisfaction so as to reduce their turnover intention. Third, at the individual level, employees should actively deal with leader turnover events, adjust their mental states, and enhance the self-control of emotions.

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

Although we have contributed significantly to the theory and practice of work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention, our study comes with limitations. For example, we collected only cross-sectional data and did not examine the time effect on variables. This restrained us from testing the dynamic impact of work-related identity discrepancy on employee turnover intention, even though our findings suggest that work-related identity discrepancy can be used as a positive predictor of employee turnover intention. Future researchers could use a time-series research design to collect horizontal and vertical data through empirical sampling or could employ a field test method. By using this strategy the relationships between the variables may be determined more adequately.

Further, we adopted a single-source data measurement method, using employees' self-reports to obtain data on both work-related identity discrepancy and employee turnover intention. This approach might have made our results vulnerable to common method variance. In other words, employees are likely to consider their own face problems and have reservations in filling in the questionnaire, although our varimax rotation analysis of the principal factors revealed that common method bias was weak in our research, and our confirmatory factor analysis showed that our primary variables are distinctive from each other. To mitigate measurement variance derived from the use of a common method, future researchers may consider the procedural and statistical remedies recommended by Podsakoff et al(2012), such as collecting employee turnover intention data through their supervisors' evaluation.

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