A Cross-Cultural Study: Work Stress as Mediator between Job Satisfaction and Intention to Quit

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Abstract

Job satisfaction has been of great interest in the field of organizational psychology. Present study aimed at investigating the predictive relationship in between employee's job satisfaction and intention to quit. The mediating role of work stress between job satisfaction and intention to quit was also investigated. There was a significant difference in the variables between job satisfaction, intention to quit and work stress cross-culturally. The results manifested that job satisfaction predicts intention to quit and work stress (p <.000). Moreover, work stress predicts intention to quit (p <.000). Furthermore, work stress significantly mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit (p<.05). Participants belonging to UAE have a greater intention to quit as compared to participants belonging to Pakistan (p<.001). It is concluded that if job satisfaction is lower among employees, they are more likely to suffer from work stress and develop intentions to quit the job.

Key words: Job Satisfaction, Intention to Quit and Work Stress

Introduction

In recent times, the organizations have gone through major transitional phases where recession is one of the most fetal viral which has adversely affected this sector. Worldwide, banking organizations are in desperate financial assistance from the government due to the major crisis they have under gone. During this recession period, most companies are forced to lower their costs in order to survive. An often used strategy in practice to deal with increased expenses is to reduce employee costs by either terminating employees or reduce employee career opportunities. This whole situation gives birth to the most devastating mental state where an employee feels a decline in their job satisfaction. If an employee is no longer satisfied with his job, both his interest and concentration at work will reduce. As a result he would feel over burdened and stressed because of the mammoth amount of work load.

Due to the uncertain job market, organizations and organizational behavior have been extensively studied. This is done mainly to understand the determinants which contribute towards job satisfaction. It is considered to be the most demanded area in the field of research in Industrial and Organizational Psychology where colossal amount of evidences contribute to the betterment of the organizational sector chiefly because work is one of our major life activities (Levy, 2006). It is difficult to define job satisfaction with reference to a particular construct. In the previous years, many different models have been studied by the researchers to explain the concept of job satisfaction. Muchinsky (2006) stated that it is the degree of pleasure an employee derives from their job. Job outcomes such as performance, intention to quit and turnover are considered to have a profound link with job satisfaction (Brown & Peterson, 1993). Employees tend to be satisfied with their job if they are getting what they want out of it (Levy, 2006).

Job satisfaction can influence one employee's decision to remain with an organization and ultimately whether to remain in that career (Knight, Crutsinger, & Kim 2006). That's when an employee decides to either quit his job or stay in it till he gets a new option. Job satisfaction has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of intention to leave the job for both the genders (Lease, 1998). Due to job satisfaction having a large influence on an employee's intention to quit, these results could be extremely important in reducing turnover (Tan, Tan & Tiong, 2007).

To be precise, intentions are the most immediate determinants of actual behavior (Firth, Mellor, Moore, & Loquet, 2004). Intention to quit is defined as the precursor of actually quitting a particular job (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978). The avoidant behavior an employee elicits at work increases the level of dissatisfaction with one's job (Mobley, 1977). Job satisfaction may be strongly related as a precursor to intention to quit (Johnston, 1987). However, there are a number of reasons associated with one's intentions to quit the job. For example work stress and job satisfaction correlate with commitment which impacts on one's decision to leave or stay with the organization (Tan, Tan, & Tiong, 2007).

The present research aimed to provide insight into how job satisfaction affects intention to quit an organization and the mediating role work stress plays at work. Work stress is referred to as any force that pushes a psychological or physical function beyond its range of stability producing a strain within the individual (Levy, 2006). In this study, the focus is on psychological reactions because psychological stress, in essence predicts organizational determinants of job stress (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983). Among the psychological reactions, seven categories were identified. Few of them include: increase in worries and feelings of frustration (Levenstein, 1993).

Parker and DeCotiis (1983) have contributed in identifying significant domains of stress i.e. job related domain. This is further divided into two groups which are responsible for the optimum level of an employee's performance. The two groups include: work content and work context. In work content, job content (i.e. lack of variety), workload and work-pace, working-hours and participation & control (i.e. decision making) are mentioned. In work context, career development (i.e. bad performance appraisal system), role in the organization (i.e. unclear role), interpersonal relationships (i.e. bad relation with coworkers), organizational culture (i.e. poor leadership), and the work-home interface (i.e. conflicting demands from home and work) are discussed (Cox, Griffiths, & Leka, 2003).

Adverse affects of work stress are evident to both employees and the organizations which hinders the productivity. Huge empirical evidence has reported in detail about the causes, symptoms and consequences of work stress and interventions that could reduce the effect of stress on individuals (Muchinsky, 2006; Beehr, Jex, Stacy, & Murray, 2000). Employees in a retail job are potentially in stressful positions as they try to meet the requirements of managers, co-workers and customers concurrently (Knight, Crutsinger, & Kim, 2006).

In a nutshell, the current study aims at understanding the predictive interaction between the variables of job satisfaction with work stress and intention to quit the job. Moreover, the predictive relationship between work stress and intention to quit was also studied in detail. Furthermore, mediating role of work stress was also catered. To sum it up, the literature covered in this section manifests that work stress can prove to be harmful for the quality of work which would result in job dissatisfaction, thus, experiencing increased intention to quit the job.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a predictive association between job satisfaction and intention to quit
2. There will be a predictive association between job satisfaction and work stress
3. There will be a predictive association between work stress and intention to quit
4. Work stress would mediate the relationship of job satisfaction and intention to quit
5. There will be a significant difference in the variables of job satisfaction, intention to quit and work stress cross-culturally

Method

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected from the various organizations such as private banks, audit firms and petroleum companies.

In total there were 146 participants (mean age = 31.1 years; SD = 6.66) out of which 73 participants (57 males and 16 females) were from the private organizations in Karachi, Pakistan and 73 participants (49 males and 24 females) were collected from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Research Measures

Semi-Structured Interview Form

Brief Semi-Structured Interview Form held information pertaining to name, age, gender, education, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, income group, marital status, residential locality, occupation, job status (permanent or contract), number of jobs changed, designation, duration of work experience, job equity index, frustration index and total working hours at work.

Global Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (GJSQ; Quinn & Shepard, 1974)

GJSQ has four items and the responses were rated on the 7-point likert scale (*1= strongly disagree* to *7= strongly agree)*. Maximum score is 28 and minimum score is 4. Higher scores reflect towards higher level of job satisfaction. It has a strong coefficient alpha reliability value of .83.

Intention to Quit Scale (Camman, 1979)

It has three items and the responses were rated on a 5-point likert scale where 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. Maximum score is 15 and minimum score is 3. Higher values reflect towards strongest intentions to quit the job. The scale's alpha reliability value is .75.

Work Stress Scale (WSS; Parker & DeCoitiis, 1983)

WSS has 9-items on a 5-point likert scale. This scale also has a strong alpha reliability value of .86. The maximum score is 45 and minimum score is 9 where 1=*strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*.

Procedure

At first, permission was taken from the authors of the research measures before starting the data collection. Since the present study employed cross-cultural correlational method, the participants had to be approached in two separate countries. The managers of the organizations were initially contacted through telephones for an appointment. Verbal permission was taken to proceed with the data collection. After their approval, all the employees were approached individually for the administration of the research measures. Each questionnaire required 7-10 minutes approximately for the completion. It was administered in the same sequence in both the countries. They had a complete right of withdrawal from participating in the study. The participants were provided with the research measures in the following sequence. At first, GJSQ was presented which was then followed by Intention to Quit Scale. WSS was presented to the participants at the end. After the completion of the research measures, participants were debriefed about the purpose of the research followed by thanking them for their participation in the study.

Statistical Analysis

After data collection, GJSQ (GJSQ; Quinn & Shepard, 1974); Intention to Quit (Camman, 1979); and WSS (Parker and DeCoitiis, 1983) were scored according to the standard scoring procedures. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, V-11.0) was employed to analyze the data. To test the hypotheses of the present study, Linear and Stepwise Regression Analyses were computed. Descriptive statistics was also employed.

Result

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the demographic details

Variables	Pakistan (*n*= 73)		U.A.E (*n*= 73)		Total sample (N= 146)	
	f	*%*	*f*	*%*	*f*	*%*
Job Status						
Permanent		81%		96%		88%
Contract		19%		4%		12%
Input > Output						
YES		66%		66%		66%
NO		34%		34%		34%
Frustration Index						
YES		47%		53%		50%
NO		53%		47%		50%

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Age and the variables of Job Satisfaction, Intention to Quit and Work Stress

Variables	Pakistan (n = 73)		U.A.E (n = 73)		Total sample (N = 146)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Job Satisfaction	20.01	5.4	19.096	5.017	19.55	5.21
Intention to Quit	10.61	3.99	13.11	5.127	11.86	4.745
Work Stress	25.73	6.39	25.986	6.145	25.86	6.249
Age	31.44	6.243	30.82	7.087	31.1	6.66

Table 3: Linear Regression of Job Satisfaction (JS) as a predictor of Intention to Quit (ItoQ) and Work stress (WS)

Variables	*R*	*R²*	*Adj R²*
ItoQ	.491	.241	.236
WS	.205	.042	.035

df= 144
a. Predictors: (Constant), JS
b. Dependent Variable: ItoQ, WS

Table 4: Linear Regression with Work Stress (WS) as a predictor of Intention to Quit (ItoQ)

Predictors	*R*	*R²*	*Adj R²*
WS	.311	.097	.091

df= 144
a. Predictors: (Constant), WS
b. Dependent Variable: ItoQ

Table 5: T-Tests depicting the Cross Cultural findings on over all Samples of all Variables

Variables	Mean change	t-test	Sig Value
JS	.918	1.064	.289
ItoQ	-2.49	-3.279	.001**
WS	-.246	-.238	.813

Table 5 shows that there is significant difference of mean scores on the variable of Intention to Quit among employees of Pakistan and UAE, whereas UAE employee score higher than Pakistani employees, df= 144, *p < .001 (sig)

Table 6: Stepwise Regression Analysis Predicting Intention to Quit (ItoQ) from Job Satisfaction (JS) on Entire Sample, Work Stress (WS) as the Mediator

Variables Entered	Model Summary			ANOVA		Coefficient				
Step I	*R*	*R²*	*Adj R²*	*F*	*Sig.*	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	*t*	*Sig.*
						B	*SE*	*B*		
Constant						20.599	1.337		15.412	.000
JS	.491	.241	.236	45.74	.000	-.447	.066	-.491	-6.763	.000
Step II										
Constant						15.481	2.124		7.289	.000
JS	.536	.287	.277	28.83	.000	-.447	.066	-.491	-6.763	.000
WS						.167	.055	.220	43.047	.003

Note: R² = 0.241 for step 1. ΔR² = 287

Discussion

The behavioral manifestation of the employees is of great significance for organizations. The growth, turn over, productivity, popularity in the market, all depends on how well employees perform in an organization. Keeping this view in mind, the present study focuses on the provoking factors behind quitting a job and the precautionary measures which an organization should take to prevent the employees from experiencing job dissatisfaction. Moreover, the mediating factors were also studied to analyze statistically the major issues through which employee turnover could be managed. The main rationale of the present study was to investigate whether job satisfaction would predict intention to quit in the organizational setting in two different countries, i.e. Pakistan and UAE.

According to hypotheses '1' and '2' (Table 3), job satisfaction significantly predicts intention to quit and work stress. Job satisfaction contributes 24% change in intention to quit. However, it contributes 4% change in work stress. A trend is observed, according to which if the employees are satisfied with their jobs, there would be less intention to quit their jobs. According to hypothesis '3' (Table 4), work stress significantly contributes 9.7% change in intention to quit. Expensive literature also supports the findings of the third hypothesis (Firth, Mellor, Moore, & Loquet, 2004; Gupta & Beehr, 1979; Kemery, Bedeian, Mossholder, & Touliatos, 1985). These analyses showed that job satisfaction significantly predicts both work stress and intention to quit. At times of work stress, employees feel extremely frustrated.

The piled up agitation due to work stress gives rise to the intention to leave the organization. Employee is faced with such a condition because of the decline in his job satisfaction. There can be multiple reasons attributed behind a decrease in job satisfaction. Choosing a wrong field as a career and later realizing it was not of the interest, can fuel job dissatisfaction. Moreover, under-trained in the designated job can result in negative consequences. An employee whose job specification doesn't meet the criteria of job description would be more vulnerable to do blunders. Such a fear inducing situation reduces his job satisfaction and makes him more prone to experience work stress.

In hypothesis '4', Hierarchical regression was applied to investigate the mediating impact of work stress between job satisfaction and intention to quit. It was discovered that work stress significantly mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit (Table 6). Job satisfaction individually explained 24.1 % variation in intention to quit, however, this variation increased to 28.7 % with the inclusion of work stress in the equation at Step II. Thus, if work stress exceeds the tolerance level of an employee, there are more chances of him experiencing job dissatisfaction and as a result he would quit his job. Various reasons can be attributed for this finding. When there is discrepancy observed in the job designation and job specification as mentioned in the earlier text, employees would feel dissatisfied with their jobs and as a result would plan of quitting it. This decision originates mainly from the work load. At times work stress affects the employees profoundly by deteriorating both physical and psychological functioning. Such a devastating condition would prevent the employees from experiencing job satisfaction and avoidant behavior will be manifested in their behaviors.

To extend the findings, according to hypothesis '5', there was an insignificant difference observed when the variables were studied cross-culturally except for the variable of intention to quit (Table 5). A significant difference was observed in the intention to quit an organization between both the countries (t (144) = 3.279, p = <.001). Employees in UAE are more likely to quit their jobs irrespective of their highly paid wages and permanent jobs. Various reasons can contribute to this fact. People living in UAE are faced with more challenges professionally. The sudden change in the competitive world stresses them more, thus inculcating the sense of insecurity in them about their jobs. Most of the employees have their families residing in their hometowns, which also affects their mental harmony in an adverse manner. Sincere advice is what they lack due to distant family bonding. Another reason could be the sudden growth in the job market. This encourages the employee to move to a better and safer opportunity, leaving behind the organization they previously worked with. However, this strengthens the fact that employees living in UAE are less loyal to their organizations and would prefer to quit their current job if provided with a more promising opportunity.

Like other researches, this research too has various limitations. Most importantly, private sectors were targeted. In such firms, employees usually have a good research orientation. They were very cooperative in the administration of the research measures. However, the same research should also be conducted in the government sector for more generalizing results. This study is also gender bias, so if the same number of males and females were taken, gender analysis could yield profound results in both the countries. This would help in understanding the trend of how both the genders deal with their professional problems. Larger sample would also prove to yield more reliable and objective results. The present study helps in identifying the major determinants as to why an employee would plan to quit his job. Majorly as an intervention tool, job dissatisfaction should be targeted on the regular basis. Through performance appraisal techniques, this target could be achieved.

Moreover, the management should plan to make the jobs more interactive and creative. Monotony and boredom affects the productivity and as a result job dissatisfaction would be experienced. Job rotation and job enlargement plans can help the employee stay motivated with their jobs. Team building techniques will help the management keep all the employees familiar with one another. Workshops to build effective means to cope up with work stress can bring about dramatic and fruitful results. Training can assist the employees avoid intentions to quit by incorporating job satisfaction in them by majorly targeting stronger support system and ways to deal with work stress.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the aim of the research was to analyze the impact job satisfaction has on the intention to quit a job. It was noted that if the work load increases, the employees would try to escape from the job by any means i.e. quitting it. It can also be concluded that when investigated cross-culturally, higher rate of quitting the jobs was observed in U.A.E.

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