

## **Conservation of Resources as driving the Embeddedness-Turnover Model: Re-designing the embeddedness web.**

**Background:** Employee turnover is traditionally predicted using job satisfaction, organisational attachment and job search/ availability models. Given the costs associated with losing talented employees, re-training, recruiting etc. improving the prediction of turnover models, even slightly, may prove to be immensely impactful in terms of better understanding why employees choose to leave, and implementing better interventions that encourage them to stay. Especially within healthcare industries where in addition to these substantial costs, patient care and treatment efficiency is also impacted.

The idea of job embeddedness was presented as a way of further explaining the complexities of turnover beyond the traditional job satisfaction, commitment and job alternatives model. Embeddedness is the idea that an employee's fit with their organisation and the work they are doing as well as the formal and informal networks (links) that surround their working lives both influence the decision to stay with an employer. These influences along with considering all of the things one would need to forego if they were to leave an organisation (sacrifice) weave together into a complex and intricate web that keeps an employee stuck to the organisation. The overall theory being the more elements of fit, link and sacrifice an employee has, the more intricate their web, the more stuck they become, and therefore, the less likely they are to leave.

**Aims:** It is the purpose of this study to provide more support for embeddedness as improving the traditional prediction model. This is to be achieved through the testing of community (non-work related), fit, links and sacrifice factors, as influencing the decision to leave an employer. Many believe these factors to be important while others believe them to only influence turnover, when leaving the organisation also requires leaving that community. Conversely some believe only organisational factors influence organisational decisions. Assessing community embeddedness as a predictor of turnover intent is the first aim of this study.

The second, related to job availability and its relationship to embeddedness and turnover. Debate exists within research as to whether high job availability impacts the strength of the embeddedness-turnover relationship as when embeddedness is high, an employee may become more aware of potential job opportunities through increased networking. This subsequently weakens the embeddedness-turnover relationship as higher job alternatives are related to greater turnover.

The final aim of this study is to assess whether the embeddedness web is able to be explained by another theory, that of the Conservation of Resources (COR). In simplifying the fit, links and sacrifice elements of embeddedness into definitions related to resource gain (fit and links) and resource loss (sacrifice) it is suggested that the COR framework may offer further explanations of turnover behavior. The principle component of COR theory is that people are most driven by the desire to conserve resources. When applied to embeddedness it is suggested that sacrifice, the potential giving up of resources, should offer the greatest prediction of turnover, over fit and links.

**The Study:** An online questionnaire was completed by 227 Accredited Exercise Physiologists (AEP's). This occupation was chosen for two reasons; firstly because it aligned this study within a series to be conducted throughout the Australian allied health industry. The second being that the collective benefit and cost effectiveness of AEP's in the prevention and treatment of chronic health issues is severely undervalued both publically and

professionally. This coupled with the federally and Western Australia State government-mandated hiring freeze where suggested to influence perceptions of job availability and job demand. These contextual influences were indirectly assessed through hypotheses related to perceived employability as a measure of perceptions of job availability and skill demand and directed content analysis of responses to two qualitative questions. It was suggested that given these contextual influences, the influence of perceived employability would be greater than both commitment and satisfaction, in regard to predicting turnover intent.

**Findings:** The study aimed to justify community embeddedness' influence on turnover however, it was not found to be the case within this sample. This finding offers support to the researchers who claim community embeddedness' to hold limited influence in the decision to leave. During participant recruitment it was found that the majority of AEP's work within large metropolitan centers. Given that most of the jobs are within capital cities, the idea that changing jobs would require leaving the community is less likely. This offers some explanation for its non-contribution to the prediction of turnover. Further research into how community embeddedness is defined and the influence it may hold between metropolitan and regional workers was recommended.

No support could be offered for high perceived employability as weakening the embeddedness-turnover relationship as perceived employability was found to not contribute to the prediction of turnover or moderate the embeddedness relationship. References to the contextual factors were identified through directed content analysis however their influence was suggested to be more subtle than expected given these non-significant results. This non-significant finding offers support for theories suggesting embeddedness to negate the influence of job alternatives.

This study offers support for the COR theory as it applies to embeddedness as sacrifice was the only embeddedness factor to significantly contribute to the prediction of turnover. This suggests employees to be most influenced by what could be potentially lost when leaving an employer. This finding prompts a subtle but important re-designing of the embeddedness web as previously it was thought that fit, link and sacrifice were equally important. Instead the web can be thought of as representing resource gain and is made of individual fit and links strands. Sacrifice, can be represented as the severing of these individual strands (elements within the organisation) that the employee values and is reluctant to give up. Strand thickness is representative of the value of that strand as thicker strands are not easily severed (sacrificed). Therefore a web made up of many thick strands will serve to keep an employee stuck to the organisation, more so than a web made up of many weaker strands (things easily foregone/ replaced). This fully aligns the embeddedness model within the COR framework as fit and links work together to generate resources but it is the willingness to give up these factors that is most predictive of turnover.

This re-design is both practically and theoretically significant in that it emphasises the quality of selected strands and not simply their quantity. Practically, this promotes a person-centric view in that only improvement in specific organisational fit and link strands that the *employee deems valuable* will result in increased reluctance to leave.