The study of the turnover of MIS professionals—The gap between Taiwanese and US societies

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

There are two issues relating to the turnover of MIS professionals that remain largely unexplored in the literature: (1) the relationship between the turnover and career anchors of MIS professionals; and (2) the role played by national culture in this relationship. Due to the fact that MIS professionals often process significant information by means of specific technical skills in organizations, high turnover rates among these professionals create problems for organizations. Traditionally, MIS professionals have been considered different from other professionals. Therefore, identifying MIS professionals' motivation for job change and resolving problems they encounter may lead to a reduction in the turnover rate of these professionals in organizations. In this study, 353 MIS professionals in Taiwan were interviewed to identify their career anchors and motivation for job change. The result indicates the value of exploring a new category of anchor—"*learning motivation*". The result also suggests that the anchor of greatest concern for these professionals is lifestyle, followed by organizational stability and learning motivation. The finding of this study differs from those made in a US context, where service is ranked top. Finally, this study posits three propositions related to career anchors and cultural factors across different ages.

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1. Introduction

Of immense importance to an organization are its human resources, which include employees' capacity to contribute to the company, staff training provided by the company, and implicit agreement, which may be characterized as aids/enhancements to human resources. The Taiwan Institute of Economic Research in 2003 predicted a shortfall in high quality MIS professionals from 2004 to 2011; a prediction with very serious implications. At the same time, a continuing challenge in the management of MIS professionals is the high turnover rate within the profession (Joseph, Ng, Koh, & Ang, 2007). Since the commencement of the recording of statistics, the turnover of MIS professionals has been seen to be problematic (Adams et al., 2006).

These figures depict a relatively high turnover rate among MIS professionals. An investigation into the general situation of computer applications in Taiwan between 2002 and 2004 reveals the turnover rate for MIS professionals to have been 3.97%, compared with 2.09% for other professionals such as physicians, lawyers, civil engineers, teachers, and business managers (The Report on Computer Application in Taiwan, 2004; The Report on Employees Statistics in Taiwan, 2005). In light of this, the challenge facing the IS industry in Taiwan is to find strategies to cut down the high turnover rate of MIS professionals. Understanding the reason for

the high turnover rate is an important basis upon which such strategies can be built.

In the USA during the 1960s and early 1970s, annual turnover in the IS field ranged between 15% and 20% (Hayes, 1998). In the late 1970s, turnover ran to as high as 28% annually (Hayes, 1998). In 1987, the turnover rate of MIS professionals reached nearly 20% (Connolly, 1988), around twice the average for business managers and professionals (Guimaraaes & Igbaria, 1992; Lucas, 1989). By the 1990s, the turnover rate had reached between 25% and 33% annually (Hayes, 1998). From April 1998 through to March 2001, the turnover rate among these professionals was also much higher than that for other professional workers (Addison, 2003; Campione, Jerrell, & Morgan, 2002). In the 21st century, notwithstanding the recent trend toward relocating IS jobs offshore, MIS professionals' turnover remains a chronic problem (Adams et al., 2006). On the basis of the above data, the rising turnover rate poses, for professionals and academics alike, serious concerns about how to retain qualified MIS professionals (Adams et al., 2006; Joseph et al., 2007).

With respect to the issue outlined above, this paper finds that in comparison with other occupations, MIS professionals are more affected by newly developed information technology (Joseph et al., 2007). In addition, MIS professionals need to stay current with respect to other professional knowledge which extends beyond their own field (Bartol, 1983). If the factors causing MIS professionals' turnover can be ascertained, it will be possible for solutions to be found to prevent it, and thus to reduce the costs incurred from the turnover. In this regard, numerous researchers into the

Table 1
Previous studies of career anchors of MIS professionals in the US context.

Previous studies	Sampling	The most important career anchors	The most unimportant career anchors
Burn et al. (1995)	USA	(1) Variety (2) Autonomy (3) Creativity	(1) Managerial competence (2) Organizational stability (3) Technical competence
Igbaria and McCloskey (1996)	USA	(1) Service (2) Job security	(1) Entrepreneurship (2) Autonomy (3) Technical competence
Crook and Crepeau (1997)	USA	(1) Organizational stability (2) Variety (3) Service	(1) Technical competence (2) Identity (3) Autonomy
Igbaria et al. (1999)	USA	(1) Service (2) Organizational stability (3) Lifestyle	(1) Managerial competence (2) Entrepreneurship (3) Technical competence
Wynne et al. (2002)	USA	(1) Organizational stability (2) Service (3) Identity	(1) Pure challenge (2) Entrepreneurship (3) Managerial competence
Magid et al. (1999)Hsu et al. (2003)	USA	(1) Job security (2) Geographical security (3) Service	(1) Entrepreneurship (2) Autonomy
Summer and Yager (2004)	USA	(1) Organizational stability (2) Variety	(1) Autonomy (2) Creativity (3) Technical competence

MIS domain acknowledge the importance of the influence of career planning on the turnover rate of MIS professionals (Burn, Tye, & Ma, 1995; Crook & Crepeau, 1997; Gottschalk, 1999; Hsu, Jiang, Gary, & Tang, 2003; Igbaria & McCloskey, 1996; Igbaria, Kassicieh, & Silver, 1999; Summer & Yager, 2004; Wynne, Ferrat, & Biros, 2002).

The concept of career anchor was originally proposed by Schein (1978), who described it as that which guides an employee's career decisions. A career anchor refers to an individual's self-perceived needs, values and talents that shape one's career decisions (Schein, 1978). Career anchor is a self-concept of career that refers to the combination of an individual's needs, attitudes, values, and talents in the process of career development (Delong, 1982). It is shaped by long-term testing and accumulated experience with respect to self-development, learning, family, and work (Chang, 1999). For this reason, the first question to be resolved in this paper is: "What is the relationship between the turnover and career anchors of MIS professionals in the Taiwanese context?"

Another reason for the high turnover rate among MIS professionals is the rapid growth of the market and fast-changing nature of IT techniques (Campione et al., 2002), explaining the strong motivation to learn among MIS professionals found in this study. Employees do like to learn and hope that they can make progress in any field. However, if they are not able to acquire new knowledge from work, they hope that the company can provide a learning environment (Campione et al., 2002). Meanwhile, learning is defined as the permanent process of changing behavior that is based on exercise or experience (Boshier, 1971). The learning environment, which includes staff on-the-job training, etc., is provided by the company. It is clear that the individual must have motivation first before acquiring learning behavior because motivation is intrinsic to behavior, and behavior is the external expression of motivation (Boshier, 1971). Thus, Loudon and Bitta (1993) believed that motivation is a form of power, which can satisfy individual needs and prompt people to act. Kotler (1997) found that motivation is a form of need for incentive; it is capable of prompting an individual into action and satisfying their need. In light of this, Houle (1961) classified learning into three categories: (1) goal-oriented, where learning is used as a method to achieve a goal that is clear in the learner's mind; (2) activity-oriented, where the action of learning is derived from its meaning, not from the goal or con-

tents; (3) learning-oriented, in which the pursuit of knowledge is the principal reason for learning. Boshier (1971) proposed the learning motivation theory, in which deficiency motivation and growth motivation are regarded as facilitators of learning motivation, especially that which is intrinsic in nature. In light of this, the second question to be resolved in this paper is: "Does the multiple case study approach of this study facilitate exploration of the new 'learning motivation' career anchor?"

While previous studies have established the different types of career anchors from the context of US society only (see Table 1), this study attempts to explore career anchors within the context of a Chinese cultural society such as Taiwan, and to compare its findings with those of the studies mentioned above. This approach is adopted on the basis that organizational management is culturally dependent (Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Moreover, the view of a number of researchers that national culture is an important factor influencing the turnover of MIS professionals (Joseph et al., 2007) supports the adoption of such an approach. This research then, focuses on the domestic industry and applies the theory of turnover (Mobley, 1977) to investigate the turnover of MIS professionals and their career anchors in Taiwanese society. In light of this, the third question to be addressed in this paper is: "What are the differences between the results of the present study and those of the previously mentioned US studies?" The result of the study will provide insight into the importance for organizations of the retention of MIS professionals.

2. Literature review

The turnover of MIS professionals is costly, not only in terms of replacing staff and training new employees, but also with respect to systems development, productivity and quality (Gunasekaran, Love, Rahimi, & Miele, 2001; Tan & Igbaria, 1993). Thus, turnover creates direct costs for organizations in terms of recruiting and training, as well as indirect costs incurred through disruptions to organizational processes (Summer & Niederman, 2003; Thatcher, Stepina, & Boyle, 2002–2003). To replace an MIS professional, an organization may spend from one to seven times the employee's annual salary (Kochanski, 2001). As a consequence of high rates of turnover and associated costs, employers have shifted away from