

Influence of Person-Supervisor Fit on IT Employees' Intention to Stay

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Summary: Supervisor-subordinate dynamics are changing after the pandemic because several IT organizations have adopted a hybrid work mode. Extant literature seems to have paid less attention to supervisor-related variables as predictors of employee turnover in Indian IT. Our developmental paper addresses this research gap by investigating how a human-centric supervisor-related variable (i.e., person-supervisor fit) impacts intention to stay (ITS). Organizational identification (OI) is introduced as a mediator since it depends upon physical interactions between employees and their work environment and its development could be a challenge as IT professionals are majorly working virtually. Further, career commitment is included as a moderator between OI and ITS resting on the premise that career advancement opportunities offered by organizations despite post-pandemic structural changes could influence ITS. Our findings would be based on a survey of Indian IT employees with a structured questionnaire.

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1. Introduction

Employee turnover is a cost-centric phenomenon for any organization. Attrition costs in monetary terms are high because of multiple reasons. As an example, organizations have to train new incumbents for at least six months and offer them compensation during the training period (Business Today, 2022). There could also be a loss of productivity because the new employee needs some time to perform as expected. Apart from these economic costs, high employee turnover could lead to lowered service quality, missed business opportunities, higher administrative burdens, and lower employee morale (Lee, Hsu and Lien, 2006).

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the volatility of talent in Indian IT sector. Around 53 percent of Indian IT professionals intend to seek new employment within the next year (Business Standard, 2022). Predicting and controlling employee turnover is therefore imperative for IT organizations. Existing literature has identified various factors responsible for employee turnover in Indian IT sector. For example, Vinayak, Bhatnagar and Agarwal (2021) found that perceived overqualification influences turnover intention (TI) among entry-level managers. Birur and Muthiah (2013) demonstrated that perceived support during and after an international assignment determines turnover intention among IT repatriates. Lacity, Iyer and Rudramuniyaiah (2008) identified job satisfaction, organizational satisfaction, and social norms as the antecedents of turnover intention. Reviewing such literature, we have concluded that limited attention has been paid to supervisor-related predictors. We have addressed this research gap by proposing a relationship between person-supervisor fit (PS fit) and IT employees' intention to stay (ITS). Academic exploration of PS fit, a human-centric construct, would help IT organizations develop sustainable employee retention strategies.

According to van Vianen, Shen and Chuang (2011), person-supervisor fit is the perceived match between the characteristics of employees and their supervisors, including values, personality, and behavioural styles. In the post-pandemic era, the dynamics between supervisors and subordinates are likely to change since several Indian IT organizations have adopted a hybrid work mode. Our study aims to investigate whether person-supervisor fit influences employees' intention to stay with their current organization from the unique perspective of the psychological attachment employees develop towards their organization through the mediational role of organizational identification (OI). Organizational identification is understood as "the process of incorporating the perception of oneself as a member of a particular organization into one's general self-definition" (Riketta, 2005, p. 360). Our choice of organizational identification is driven by the perspective that "the concept of identity helps capture the essence of who people are and, thus, why they do what they do—it is at the core of why people join organizations and why they voluntarily leave...." (Ashforth, Harrison and Corley, 2008, p. 334). Since organizational identification as a process (Edwards, 2005) depends upon the physical interaction between an employee and his/her work environment, we consider it more relevant for IT professionals who are majorly working virtually.

Employees are nowadays becoming more committed to their careers than to their organizations amidst uncertainties arising from business decisions like layoffs. Career commitment (CC) is defined as "individuals' attachment to their profession or occupation" (Lin, 2020, p. 760). Bedeian, Kemery and Pizzolatto (1991) assert that as long as an organization offers relevant career opportunities, an employee's career commitment becomes a more significant predictor of turnover intention when compared to variables like organizational identification. If organizations continue to provide career advancement opportunities, despite the post-pandemic structural changes in Indian IT, such initiatives might

impact intention to stay among their employees. Overall, this study addresses the following research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: Does person-supervisor fit influence employees' intention to stay, and what role does organizational identification play in this relationship?
- RQ2: To what extent does career commitment influence employees' intention to stay in their current organization?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Intention to Stay and Person-supervisor Fit: the Linkage

Intention to stay is "... the willingness to remain in the organization" (Gyamerah et al., 2022, p. 86). Scholars (e.g., Cho et al., 2009) presume intention to stay and turnover intention as two sides of the same coin. Drawing on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein (1967), Ajzen (1985) postulated that a "person's intention to perform (or not to perform) a behaviour is the immediate determinant of that action" (p.12). Therefore, intention to stay is the immediate antecedent of actual stay with an organization, making it one of the best determinants of employee retention (Griffeth, Hom and Gaertner, 2000 c.f. Dechawatanapaisal, 2018).

In terms of dyadic relationships that could influence turnover intention or intention to stay in employees, leadership styles (e.g., benevolent leadership by Gyamerah et al., 2022) have been subject to much exploration. Sobiah et al. (2022) have explained the impact of transformational and transactional leadership on intention to stay through organizational commitment (OC). Another commonly researched supervisor-related predictor is perceived supervisor support (PSS) (e.g., Chami-Malaeb, 2022). Person-supervisor fit is an aspect of person-environment fit (PE fit) connecting an employee with his/her supervisor that is yet to be fully explored (Guay et al., 2019). PS fit extends beyond mere supervisor-employee interplay as it has significant consequences for an employee's work environment (Guay et al., 2019) because of the proximity between a supervisor and an employee (Enwereuzor, Ugwu and Nnadozie, 2021). It is a more inclusive construct in comparison to other supervisor-related constructs such as PSS and leader-member exchange. These constructs centre around a singular facet of supervisory conduct or the quality of the working relationship, whereas person-supervisor fit scrutinizes the congruence between supervisors and subordinates across numerous dimensions, including personality, lifestyle, leadership style, work style, and values. Our study uses this unique perspective to add value to the existing literature on supervisor-related constructs, as it offers a broader framework for understanding the dynamics of the supervisor-subordinate relationship.

The similarity-attraction paradigm (SAP) (Byrne, 1971) suggests that people are attracted to individuals who possess similar traits and characteristics (Guay et al., 2019). As a result, congruence between a supervisor and an employee may foster closer relationships between them (Peng et al., 2021). When supervisors and employees share comparable life goals, activity preferences, values, and personalities, they are more likely to be attracted to each other, which can ultimately result in a mutual fit (Chuang, Shen and Judge, 2016). People tend to favour individuals they perceive as similar to themselves (Byrne, 1971 c.f. Kim and Kim, 2013). Similarly, subordinates who share similar lifestyles, leadership styles, personalities, work styles, and values with their supervisors are more likely to receive favourable treatment from them (Enwereuzor, Ugwu and Nnadozie, 2021) in terms of personal support, approval, and special benefits, over which supervisors have authority (van Vianen, Shen and Chuang, 2011).

Person-supervisor fit has been majorly researched as a predictor of various work outcomes. For example, Andela and van der Doef (2019) found that person-supervisor fit can influence turnover intention, job satisfaction, and burnout. Similarly, Oh et al. (2014) conducted a cross-cultural meta-analysis to examine the impact of person-supervisor fit on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit. Astakhova (2016) has investigated how PS fit predicts affective commitment (AC). Extant studies (e.g., Andela and van der Doef, 2019; Tak, 2011) have analyzed PS fit along with other dimensions of PE fit. However, Kristof-Brown and Guay (2011) note that “multicollinearity is often a concern when determining the unique impact of various types of fit” (p. 37). Hence, we have used PS fit as an isolated predictor to examine its unique impact on intention to stay.

2.2 Organizational Identification

Organizational identification has been described by Ashforth and Mael (1989) as a type of social identification (SI), where SI is “a perception of oneness with a group of persons” (p. 20). Specifically, organizational identification is “one form of psychological attachment that occurs when members adopt the defining characteristics of the organization as defining characteristics for themselves” (Dutton et al. 1994, p. 242). Organizational identification can explain and predict several workplace attitudes and behaviours since it is an essential psychological state that represents the connection between employees and their organization (Edwards, 2005). Hence, organizational identification has been used as a mediator in multiple studies (e.g., Dechawatanapaisal, 2020).

2.2.1 Person-supervisor Fit and Organizational Identification: the Linkage

The association of PS fit with organizational identification can be explained with relational identification (RI) as a nested concept within organizational identification. Relational identity is defined by Sluss and Ashforth (2007) as “the nature of one’s role relationship, such as manager-subordinate and coworker-coworker” (p. 11), while relational identification is “the extent to which one defines oneself in terms of a given role-relationship” (p. 11). Supervisor identification (SI), a type of relational identification, is the degree to which the relationship with a supervisor is viewed as self-defining (Young and Steelman, 2014). This concept is drawn from the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), which explains that an individual’s self-concept comprises personal and social identities (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In this context, SI is “the extent to which individuals have developed a self-concept that first recognizes that he/she and his/her leader share similar values and/or second wishes to change his/her self-concept, in order to become more similar to the leader” (Gkorezis, Bellou and Skemperis, 2015, p. 1006). Sluss and Ashforth (2008) note that when a relational identity (in our case, the supervisor) meets an employee’s task and social-psychological needs, the latter views such a relational identity as attractive. This, in turn, stimulates subordinates’ supervisor identification, which converges with their organizational identification through the cognitive mechanism of social influence. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H1: Person-supervisor fit positively influences organizational identification.

2.2.2 Mediating Role of Organizational Identification

Van Dick et al. (2004) argue that employees who possess strong organizational identification become psychologically intertwined with their organization as it becomes a component of their self-concept. They perceive the organization’s successes and failures as their own (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Leaving the employer could damage their self-concept as it would result in losing a part of themselves (Van Dick et al., 2004). Hence, employees tend to stay with their

organization to prevent their self-concept from getting damaged, which could result in a high intention to stay. Therefore, we postulate that:

H2: Organizational identification positively impacts intention to stay.

Aligning with previous scholarly works (e.g., Dechowatanapaisal, 2020), we propose organizational identification as a mediator between PS fit and intention to stay. However, deviating from the arguments used in the past, we propose to link organizational identification with PS fit and intention to stay through relational identification. In cases with high supervisor identification, employees are likely to be influenced by their supervisor's opinions. Employees tend to view their organization favourably because supervisors usually present their organization positively (Sluss and Ashforth, 2008). This positive view enhances the organization's attractiveness and image, which, in turn, boosts employees' organizational identification (Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002). We agree with Sluss et al. (2012) that the relationship between relational identification and organizational identification is generalizable, and we hypothesize that organizational identification mediates the influence of PS fit on intention to stay, as follows:

H3: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between PS fit and intention to stay.

2.3 Moderating Role of Career Commitment

Careers in certain fields like management earlier were closely linked to an employee's ability to advance within a specific organization, but this relationship has shifted to emphasize an individual's ability to progress across multiple organizations (Noordin, Williams and Zimmer, 2002). Attitude towards one's career is shaped by a person's unique needs and expectations, which vary across individuals. Blau (1985) defines career commitment as "one's attitude towards one's profession or vocation" (p. 278). This commitment is demonstrated through the development of individual career goals, as well as a person's attachment, involvement, and identification with such goals.

Even when faced with difficulties and setbacks, an employee with a high level of career commitment will persist in pursuing his/her goals (Fu and Chen, 2015). Career commitment has received lesser attention from researchers, although it is easily distinguishable from other relevant workplace attitudes like AC and job involvement (Lin, 2020). Several studies (e.g., Vandenberghe and Ok, 2013) have also demonstrated an association between CC and employees' intention to leave. organizational identification and career commitment may not be linked because they belong to separate domains of organization and career, respectively. In contrast, Gakovic (2002) argues that "organizational identification and career commitment may be complementary as opposed to conflicting phenomena....." (p. 9). Hence, to empirically test the relationship between the two and their combined influence on intention to stay, we hypothesize that:

H4: Career commitment moderates the impact of organizational identification on intention to stay, such that the impact becomes stronger when career commitment is high than low.

Figure 1 depicts our proposed research model.

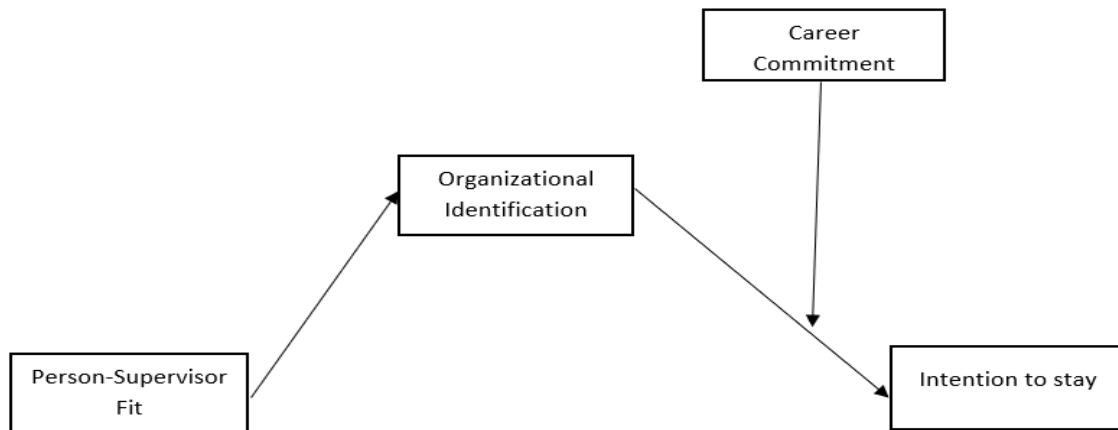


Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

3. Proposed Research Plan

Going ahead, we plan to test our research model empirically by collecting responses through a structured questionnaire from Indian IT employees using a random sampling technique. We would gather employee responses applying a bifurcated approach, spanning over two distinct phases, separated by a gap of four weeks. The first phase will amass employee insights pertaining to person-supervisor fit and organizational identification, while the remaining variables, namely career commitment and intention to stay, will be assessed in the second phase. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part would seek participants' demographic information and the second has items on the model constructs (refer to Table 1). Each item will be measured on a five-point Likert-type scale with anchors “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

Table 1: Construct-wise Survey Items

S.No.	Construct	Source	No. of Items
1.	PS Fit	Chuang, Shen and Judge (2016)	5
2.	Organizational Identification	Mael and Ashforth (1992)	6
3.	Career Commitment	Blau (1989)	7
4.	Intention to stay	Cammann et al. (1979) and Lyons (1971)	4
Total Items			22

Upon incorporating feedback on our proposed model from the British Academy of Management Conference 2023, we plan to initiate the survey. Subsequently, we will analyze data using structural equation modeling (SEM).

4. Expected Practical Implications

Our study is expected to have various implications for organizations. Even if an organization recruits candidates with high PO fit levels, their return on investment in training or recruitment of those employees is lower if there is a poor PS fit (Chen, Tang and Wang, 2021). Hence, organizations need to draft their selection policies to ensure an optimum match between employees and their managers (Enwereuzor, Ugwu and Nnadozie, 2021). However, it is important to note that fit is a dynamic concept that changes with time, as highlighted by Feij et al. (1999). Therefore, regular surveys examining the match between supervisors and subordinates must be conducted. In case of any significant deviation reported in PS fit levels, such employees need to be re-assigned to different supervisors having similar characteristics.

As person-supervisor fit and intention to stay could potentially be linked through organizational identification, it is imperative for organizations to formulate strategies to increase organizational identification among their employees. One such strategy, proposed by Van Dick et al. (2004), is benchmarking. By benchmarking against successful competitors, an organization's prestige gets threatened, which in turn strengthens organizational identification among the employees.

Moreover, organizations should encourage supervisors to conduct regular meetings with employees to gain a better understanding of their career aspirations. Subsequently, HR managers, in consultation with supervisors, could communicate internal organizational opportunities that align with employees' career aspirations.

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