

Original Article

From push to full: factors influencing turnover decisions of middle-level athletic administrators

SIMON M. PACK¹, DOYEON WON²

¹Division of Sport Management, St. John's University, USA

²Department of Sport Industry Studies, Yonsei University, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Published online: February 15, 2017

(Accepted for publication January 11, 2017)

DOI:10.7752/jpes.2017.s1018

Abstract:

In the highly competitive field of athletic administration it is quite common that push and pull factors exist that either pull away or back in employees and that may ultimately push them away. Being that the administrators involved in this study (n = 203) were all from mid-level management positions in intercollegiate athletics, this allowed for a broader spectrum of results dealing specifically with mobility or lack thereof. There is where the various mitigating factors impacted decisions of turnover. For instance, the careerist orientation accounts for much of the pull within or internally while commitment to the organization (athletic department) may play an even greater role. Furthermore, the practical implications of how an organization can continue to retain the good employees and not only serve as a stepping stone to their next promotion in the field.

Key Words: *athletic administrators; turnover intention; careerist orientation; pull and push factors*

Introduction

In the recent proceedings of the Academy of Management (Maertz, Keith & Dalton, 2015) sought to further explain an age-old question within management and organizational behavior – why do people leave their job? And more specifically, why do the good performers and the poor performers leave? Mounting evidence exists that both push and pull factors impact turnover decisions for employees (e.g., Mano-Negin & Kirschenbaum, 1999). This assertion is largely based on the quality and quantity of opportunities for alternative employment (Hui, 1988; Mueller & Price, 1990). Intuitively it makes sense that poor performers would be driven by the push factors to leave a job or organization while the good performers would be pulled away to another organization. Within, American intercollegiate athletics there is a wide variety of mid-level employment from institution to institution demanding on the size and budget of the athletic department and the relative significance of that particular program within the scheme of the institution. These mid-level administrators are vertically moving from institution to institution and are typically looking at these jobs as “stepping-stone” jobs until something better comes along.

As such, human resource professionals (athletic management supervisors) and researchers alike are often confronted with the question of how benefits can improve the predictability of employees' subsequent attachment or commitment to the organization and the job itself. Further evidence suggests that organizational benefits may have a major impact on employee attitudes thus preventing turnover behavior (Allen, Clark & McDermid, 1993). Turnover decisions reflect a balance among the following: (a) career-related preferences, (b) attitudes and aspirations, and (c) the extent to which one's employment is secured. In sum, the research question addressed in this study was whether the push factors are able to overcome the impact of the pull factors in predicting the turnover intentions of intercollegiate athletic administrators.

Push factors, or careerist attitudes, are indicative of a “stay on the job only until I find a better one” attitude (Mano-Negin & Kirschenbaum, 1999, p. 691). In addition, careerists may leave their jobs just simply to leave (Louis, 1982), because of an over-reaction to inhospitable job situations (Landau & Hammer, 1986), or based on perceptions of being more cosmopolitan (Kirschenbaum & Goldberg, 1976) and more narcissistic (Lasch, 1979) than colleagues. In other words, the strength of middle level athletic administrators' careerist attitudes (push factors) has consequences for turnover intentions. On the other hand, pull factors are more closely related to Meyer and Allen's (1991) conceptualization of continuance commitment.

This suggests that the accrual of benefits increases middle level athletic administrators' vested interest in remaining with their particular athletic department because such benefits would be lost upon leaving. This also differs from (Maertz et al., 2015) notion that the “push” comes from within and the “pull” comes from outside the organization. In this case the “pull” from within is strong when commitment is high. Furthermore, such investments, measured at the individual level by the degree of satisfaction with organizational benefits, also dissuade turnover intentions.

Beyond the aforementioned notion of promotion from the middle level to more senior positions is quite relevant with this group of administrations and these employees serve a valuable role in the day to day operations of an intercollegiate athletic department. The variables under study in this particular research endeavor necessitate the use of athletic administrators in highly structured, hierarchal environments with several levels of accountability. Moreover, voluntary turnover at the middle level of athletic administration can be extremely costly and detrimental to the success and culture of an athletic department. Madum (2016) actually found quite the contrary among Danish Football clubs as when their manager (coach) was dismissed the team actually performed better. Thus, the current study was to investigate the degree of interplay between push and pull factors in the turnover decisions of collegiate athletic administrators.

Material & Methods

Procedures

The participants of the current study were middle level athletic administrators at the NCAA Division I institutions. We used a mail survey method to collect data for the current study. Two middle-level athletic administrators from each Division I athletic department ($N = 324$), excluding service academies, were asked to participate in this study. The response rate was 31.19% ($= 204/654$). However, there was one incomplete response and thus excluded for the analysis. Participants were asked to complete a survey instrument including scales to measure push factors (careerist-orientation), pull factors (i.e., high sacrifice, low career alternatives, job security), turnover intentions, and demographic information including age, gender, and organizational tenure.

Participants

The researchers chose middle level athletic administrators (as opposed to the directors of athletics) to accommodate the investigation of constructs that may be more relevant to rank below the directors of athletics. Of 203 athletic administrators, 57.6% ($n = 117$) were females and 42.4% ($n = 86$) were males. The ethnic profile of the majority respondents consisted of Caucasian (86.7%, $n = 176$), African American (7.9%, $n = 16$), and Hispanic (2.5%, $n = 5$). The participants had been athletic administrators for an average of 11.57 ($SD = 9.33$) years, and the average age of the respondents was 43.86 ($SD = 9.89$) years old. A t-test revealed that the age difference between males and females was not significantly different. In terms of Divisional affiliations, 81 subjects (39.9%) were athletic administrators at Division I-A institutions while 62 (30.5%) and 50 (24.6%) respondents were with Division I-AA and I-AAA, respectively. Other 10 (4.9%) respondents did not indicate their divisional affiliations.

Instruments

The instrument included scales to measure push factors (careerist-orientation), pull factors (i.e., high sacrifice, low career alternatives, job security), turnover intentions, and demographic information including age, gender, and organizational tenure. Internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) for all scales ranged from .71 to .90. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), unless otherwise indicated.

Push factor (Careerist-orientation). Athletic administrators' careerist-orientation was measured by a scale originally developed by Feldman and Weitz (1991). A sample question reads: "You cannot count on organization to look out for your own best careerist interests."

Pull factors. Pull factors included low career alternative (2 items), high sacrifice (2 items) and job security importance (2 items) used by Mano-Negrin and Kirschenbaum (1999).

Job satisfaction. A three-item scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (1997) was used to measure athletic administrators' job satisfaction with the current position. The scale has shown more than acceptable internal reliability in various studies (e.g., Blazer et al., 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1997).

Turnover intention. As the precursory indicator of actual turnover behavior (Arnold & Feldman, 1982; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Price & Muller, 1986), athletic administrators' turnover intentions were measured by two-items adapted from a scale developed by Meyer et al. (1993). An exemplary item included "I frequently think about leaving the athletic department."

Statistical analysis

Data were mainly analyzed with correlation analysis and a series of hierarchical regression analyses.

Results

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 describes descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of variables used in this study as well as correlations among variables. Results indicated that study participants showed moderately high job security importance ($M = 5.39$), job satisfaction ($M = 5.33$), and high sacrifice ($M = 4.23$) while they showed moderately low careerist orientation ($M = 3.00$), turnover intention ($M = 3.24$), and low career alternative ($M = 3.56$).

Table 1
Descriptive statistics by divisional affiliations

Variables	Overall (N = 203)	Division		
		I-A (n = 81)	I-AA (n = 62)	I-AAA (n = 50)
Age	43.86 (9.89)	44.83 (10.81)	43.10 (9.36)	42.88 (9.48)
Org tenure	11.57 (9.33)	12.16 (9.81)	9.77 (8.51)	12.20 (9.39)
Careerist Orientation	3.00 (1.31)	2.91 (1.29)	3.20 (1.27)	3.05 (1.38)
Career Alternative	3.56 (1.27)	3.21 (1.46)	3.82 (1.40)	3.79 (1.28)
High sacrifice	4.23 (1.61)	4.19 (1.66)	4.35 (1.66)	4.25 (1.52)
Job security importance	5.39 (1.27)	5.41 (1.29)	5.26 (1.36)	5.56 (1.12)
Job satisfaction	5.33 (1.16)	5.60 (1.07)	5.15 (1.21)	5.17 (1.27)
Turnover intention	3.24 (1.65)	2.95 (1.59)	3.44 (1.73)	3.55 (1.70)
Gender (# females/sample)	117/203	52/81	29/62	31/50

Correlation Analyses

As shown in Table 2, job satisfaction was significantly positively correlated with job security importance ($r = .31, p < .01$) and high sacrifice ($r = .23, p < .01$) while significantly negatively correlated with low career alternative ($r = -.32, p < .01$) and career orientation ($r = -.26, p < .01$). Reversely, turnover intention was significantly negatively correlated with high sacrifice ($r = -.25, p < .01$) and job security importance ($r = -.16, p < .05$) while significantly positively correlated with career orientation ($r = .61, p < .001$) and low career alternative ($r = .25, p < .01$). Turnover intention was negatively associated with age ($r = -.36, p < .01$) and job satisfaction ($r = -.55, p < .01$).

Table 2
Bivariate correlations among variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Careerist orientation	--	-.00	-.28**	-.15*	-.51**	-.53**	-.26**	.61**
2. Career alternative		--	.32**	-.21**	.07	.06	-.32**	.25**
3. High sacrifice			--	.06	.18*	.23**	.23**	-.25**
4. Job security importance				--	.08	.10	.31**	-.16*
5. Age					--	.63**	.01	-.36**
6. Org tenure						--	.04	-.28**
7. Job satisfaction							--	-.55**
8. Turnover intention								--
Mean	3.00	3.56	4.23	5.39	43.86	11.57	5.33	3.23
S.D.	1.31	1.27	1.61	1.27	9.89	9.33	1.16	1.65

Regression Analyses

First model

A series of regression analyses were carried out to find the effects of push and pull factors on turnover intentions. For the first model, the first entry into the model was demographic variables (i.e., age and organizational tenure). Next, push and pull factors were entered. This order of entry allowed the examination of whether push and pull factors influenced turnover intention, after controlling for the effects of other personal variables. The regression model was significant ($R^2 = .49$), $F(6, 196) = 31.08, p < .001$ level. Independent variables accounted for 35% of the variance in turnover intention of athletic administrators. Partial support is found for the hypothesis in that two of the three push factors (low career alternatives and high job sacrifice) and pull factor were significantly related to turnover intention: careerist orientation ($= .55$), low career alternative ($= .32$), and high sacrifice ($= -.21$). However, the regression coefficient for job security was not significant.

Second model - A hierarchical regression was performed in order to explore the unique contribution of push and pull factors. Results indicated that the push factor careerist orientation explained a significant amount of the variance in turnover intention ($R^2 = .19, p < .001$) after controlling for age, organizational tenure, and pull factors. Similar to the first model, low career alternative ($= .37$) and high job sacrifice ($= -.30$) were critical pull factors while careerist orientation ($= .55$) was a strong pull factor in influencing administrators' turnover intention.

Third model- The last regression model included demographic variables in the first step, job satisfaction in the second step, and pull and push factors in the third step. The regression model was significant ($R^2 = .58$), $F(7, 195) = 39.04, p < .001$ level. Demographic variables and job satisfaction explained 14% and 29% of the variances in turnover intention respectively. Results indicated that the push and pull factors altogether explained

a significant amount of the variance in turnover intention ($R^2 = .16$, $p < .001$) after controlling for demographic variables and job satisfaction. Specifically, careerist orientation as a push factor ($\beta = .46$) and low career alternative as a pull factor ($\beta = .19$) were statistically significant predictors of turnover intention.

Table 3
Hierarchical regression analyses on turnover intention ($N = 203$)

Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
IV	<i>B</i>	IV	<i>B</i>	IV	<i>B</i>
<u>1. Control</u>		<u>1. Control</u>		<u>1. Control A.</u>	
Age	-.31***	Age	-.31***	Age	-.31***
Org tenure	-.08	Org tenure	-.08	Org tenure	-.08
ΔR^2	.14	ΔR^2	.14	ΔR^2	.14
ΔF	15.63***	ΔF	15.63***	ΔF	15.63***
<u>2. Pull/Push</u>		<u>2. Pull</u>		<u>2. Control B.</u>	
Careerist	.55***	Low career alt	.37***	Job sat.	-.54***
Low career alt.	.32***	High sacrifice	-.30***	ΔR^2	.29
High sac.	-.21***	Job sec	-.03	ΔF	100.12***
Job sec imp.	.01	ΔR^2	.16		
ΔR^2	.35	ΔF	14.90***		
ΔF	33.87***				
		<u>3. Push</u>		<u>3. Pull/Push</u>	
		Careerist	.55***	Careerist	.46***
		ΔR^2	.19	Low career Alt	.19**
		ΔF	74.15***	High sacrifice	-.09
				Job sec imp.	.08
				ΔR^2	.16
				ΔF	18.60***
R^2	.49		.49		.58
Adj. R^2	.47		.47		.57
$F(df)$	31.21*** (6, 196)		31.21*** (6, 196)		39.04*** (7, 195)

Note: $p^* < .05$, $p^{**} < .01$, $p^{***} < .001$

Discussion

Regarding the results of the study, both stronger push factors and weaker pull factors contribute to predicting turnover intentions of middle level athletic administrator. Within the realm of middle level intercollegiate athletic administration, push factors (i.e., careerist-orientation) are stronger predictors of turnover intentions than pull factors. The findings suggest that athletic department rules of advancement, usually linked to tenure, may be a strong mechanism for retaining athletic administrators, provided that careerist orientation is relatively low. This can help athletic departments develop a proper human resource strategy by providing information concerning important factors to an athletic administrator in their turnover decisions.

Conclusions

As previously mentioned, organizations have been dealing with turnover and competition from other organizations for many years. The specific field of athletic administration is no different in this regard. From a practical implications standpoint, organizational managers must be aware of their employees' intentions and they must decide on what strategies to employ to retain when necessary.

Conflicts of interest - N/A

References:

- Allen, S.G., Clark, R.L. and McDermid, A.A. (1993) 'Pensions, Bonding and Lifetime Jobs', *Journal of Human Resources*, 28: 463-81.
- Arnold, H., Feldman, D. (1982). A multivariate analysis of the determinants of job turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 67, 350-60
- Blazer, D. (1990): *Emotional Problems in late life*. New York: Springer.
- Eisenberger, R, Cummings, J., Armeli, S., Lynch, P. (1997). Perceived organizational support, discretionary treatment, and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82(5), 812-820.
- Feldman, D. and Weitz, B. (1991) 'From the Invisible Hand to the Gladland: Understanding a Careerist Orientation to Work', *Human Resource Management*, 30: 237-57.
- Hui, H. (1988) 'Impacts of Objective and Subjective Labor Market Conditions on Employee Turnover', *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 61: 211-19.

- Kirschenbaum, A. and Goldberg, A. (1976) 'Organizational Behavior Career Orientations and the Propensity to Move among Professionals', *Sociology of Work and Occupations*, 3: 357-72.
- Landau, J. and Hammer, H.T. (1986) 'Clerical Employees' Perceptions of Intra-organizational Career Opportunities', *Academy of Management Journal*, 29: 385-404.
- Lasch, C. (1979) *The Culture of Narcissism*. New York: Madum, A. (2016). Managerial turnover and subsequent firm performance: Evidence from Danish soccer teams. *International Journal of Sport Finance* 11(1), 46-62.
- Maertz, C.P., Keith, M., Dalton, G.K. (2015). The reasons good vs. poor performers quit their jobs. *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, p.1.
- Mano-Negrin, R. and Kirschenbaum, A. (1999). Push and pull factors in medical employees' turnover decisions: The effect of a careerist approach and organizational benefits on the decision to leave the job. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. 10(4), 689-702
- Meyer, J.P. and Allen, N.J. (1991) 'A Three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment', *Human Resources Management Review*, 1: 61-98.
- Mueller, C.W. and Price, J.L. (1990) 'Economic, Psychological and Sociological Determinants of Voluntary Turnover', *The Journal of Behavioral Economics*, 19: 321-35.
- Steel, R.P., Ovalle, N.K. (1984). A review and meta-analysis of research on the relationship between behavioral intentions and employee turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 69(4), 673-686.