



## When Employees Keep Looking: Factors That Impact the Job Search – Turnover Relationship

Have you ever searched for available jobs, even though you were employed at the time? If so, you are not alone – employed individuals are currently the largest population of job seekers. With so many employees perusing the job market, managers may find it is to their advantage to know that certain influential factors could sway their employees to stay or leave.



Specifically, managers may be interested to learn that job satisfaction, the availability of job alternatives, and job investment (i.e. embeddedness), affect employee turnover decisions. The Job Search – Turnover Relationship Job searching, or the active pursuit of job opportunities in other organizations, is a precursor to the majority of voluntary employee turnovers.

Despite this trend, all job searchers are not necessarily job leavers and all job leavers are not necessarily job searchers. Research has shown that an employee's job searching behavior is not enough to accurately predict whether he or she quits. However, managers should keep in mind that job searching gives employees the opportunity to compare their current job against an unknown number of alternative opportunities.

### **Deciding Factors: To Stay or to Leave**

As a manager, you may wonder – if many of my employees are actively looking at available job opportunities, how can I prevent them from leaving for another offer? In order to retain job-searching employees, managers should be aware of what factors affect their decisions to stay with their current job or quit and pursue another opportunity. The following are three factors that affect employee's decisions to stay or leave:

**Job Satisfaction:** Employees who are less satisfied with their current working conditions are more likely to accept an alternative opportunity. One reason for this stems from the intention behind the job search. Dissatisfied employees are more likely to job search with the intention of finding a replacement job, whereas their satisfied peers are more likely to be testing the market, seeking leverage in their current employment, etc. In addition, dissatisfied job searchers may accept lower-quality job offers than their satisfied peers. In contrast, satisfied employees require substantially better offers before they are willing to leave their current organization.



**Job Embeddedness:** Job embeddedness is the degree to which an employee feels unable or unwilling to leave his or her job. This concept is a combination of three sub-components regarding the employee: 1) formal and informal ties with the organization, 2) compatibility with the organization, and 3) cost or sacrifice that would be forfeited by leaving the organization. As a job searcher's level of job embeddedness increases, the risk of turnover decreases. In other words, job searchers who have fostered ties with their organization, consider themselves to fit in well with their job and organizational culture, and consider the cost of leaving to be great, are less likely to actually accept a suitable alternative.

**Job Alternatives:** A third factor that affects job searchers is the availability of suitable alternative positions. In general, the probability of turnover increases when a job searcher has multiple alternatives to choose from. With that in mind, the employees who are highly marketable, or who have a large number of potential alternatives, are at the greatest risk for turnover.

### **Practical Implications**

It is important for employers and HR managers to foster positive work attitudes and embeddedness in order to retain employees. Workplace initiatives, such as job enrichment and providing a supportive work climate, are proven tactics for increasing job satisfaction. Job embeddedness can be promoted within the organization ( e.g. work teams and committees) or within the community (e.g. facilitate home ownership). HR managers may also want to target retention efforts for the high-risk individuals, or those who are less satisfied, not embedded in their jobs, and have other alternatives available. To do so, organizations may benefit from assessing employee work attitudes, employee links to the organization and community, and occupation-level labor trends.

*This was a summary of the research and practice implications from Swider, B. W., Boswell, W. R., & Zimmerman, R. D. (2011). Examining the job search–turnover relationship: The role of embeddedness, job satisfaction, and available alternatives. Journal of Applied Psychology, 96(2), 432-441.*



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[www.degarmo.com](http://www.degarmo.com)

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(866) 4-DEGARMO