

Stream 6: Human Resource Management

Competitive Session

**Migrants' turnover intentions in the aged care industry explained using on-the-job embeddedness**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Australian organisations are facing a range of potential labour market shortages. Issues such as an ageing population, combined with reductions in the number of younger workers in the domestic market, have resulted in an increased demand for a skilled migrant work force. Unfortunately, migrant employees are up to 33% more likely to leave their jobs than their local counterparts. Accordingly, it is crucial to understand how to retain migrant employees and reduce their higher turnover intentions. Using job embeddedness theory as a framework, this paper found that migrant employees who record lower levels on one factor of job embeddedness (on-the-job links) experienced lower turnover intentions compared with non-migrant employees. Practical implications are discussed.*

**Keywords:** retention, turnover, NESB workers, workforce diversity.

Organisations face two equally important yet intertwined issues: an ageing population of baby boomers who are set to retire, and a shrinking domestic labour pool of younger workers (Healy, Mavromaras, & Sloane, 2012; Nguyen, 2008). With an ageing workforce and the majority of workers 45 years or older (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008; Productivity Commission, 2013), migrants have become an increasingly important component of the workforce in many countries (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Carr, Inkson, & Thorn, 2005; Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010).

Studies in the migrant management literature have tended to focus on the problems migrants face in host countries and host country organisations such as assimilation/acculturation (Alcorso, 2003; Nagel, 2005; Ryan, Sales, Tikli, & Siara, 2008; Sanders, Nee, & Sernau, 2002; Shurupova, 2007; Westwood & Leung, 2000), discrimination (Chiang, 2004; Constant, Kahanec, & Zimmermann, 2009; Joerg, 2010; Kofman & Raghuram, 2005), and barriers to career development (Cohen, Arnold, & O'Neill, 2011; Hibbins, 2005; Ho & Alcorso, 2004; Mahuteau & Junankar, 2008; Rivera-Batiz, 2007; Syed, 2008). Surprisingly little attention has been paid to migrant turnover or migrant turnover

intention (Junankar & Mahuteau, 2004; Shah, 2009), and the implications of migrant turnover and turnover intention for organisations from a human resource management (HRM) perspective (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011).

Although migrant employees are proving to be important for employers who seek to maintain or develop their competitive advantage (Nguyen, 2008), and many migrant employees are lauded for their strong work ethic and positive work attitudes (MacKenzie & Forde, 2009), migrant employees present a challenge for employers. Migrant employees are leaving their jobs at a higher rate than non-migrant employees (Junankar & Mahuteau, 2004; Shah, 2009). For example, Shah (2009) found that migrant employees coming from an English speaking background leave their jobs at a rate 20% higher than non-migrant employees. Shah (2009) also found that migrants coming from a non-English speaking background leave their jobs at a rate 33% higher than non-migrant employees. The challenge for organisations relying on migrant labour is how to retain and embed migrant employees, thereby reducing voluntary turnover.

We use job embeddedness theory to predict migrant turnover intentions and to provide insight into the challenge of retaining migrant employees. Job embeddedness theory argues that the more attached – in other words, embedded – an individual employee is on- and off-the-job, the less likely it is that the employee will leave his or her job (Halvorsen, Treuren, & Kulik, 2015; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001; Zhang, Fried, & Griffeth, 2012). Job embeddedness theory provides a solid theoretical framework to explain why employees stay with an organisation, incorporating the organisational, social and perceptual factors that influence employee retention (Jiang, Lu, McKay, Lee, & Mitchell, 2012). The research model is presented in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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## **Job embeddedness theory**

According to Mitchell et al. (2001), every individual is attached to their employing organisation, as well as to their life outside of work. The more attachments, the more difficult it would be to leave the organisation or the community (Halvorsen et al., 2015; Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012; Tanova & Holtom, 2008). Employees who are embedded are more likely to stay compared to their less embedded colleagues (Zhang et al., 2012).

Job embeddedness theory describes two distinct types of embeddedness: on-the-job embeddedness and off-the-job embeddedness. On-the-job embeddedness binds employees to the organisation, and makes it harder for an employee to consider leaving (Mitchell et al., 2001; Jiang et al., 2012). Off-the-job embeddedness binds employees to their communities, and makes it harder for an employee to consider relocating (Zhang et al., 2012). Both types of embeddedness directly influence an employee's intentions to stay with his or her current employer (Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Within each component there are three factors called 'fit', 'links' and 'sacrifice' (Lee et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). Fit describes the extent to which an individual's job and community align with other aspects of his or her life. On-the-job fit is defined as an individual's compatibility with his or her work setting (Lee et al., 2004). On-the-job fit might involve person-job fit (a person's skills matching the requirements of a particular job) or person-organisation fit (a person's values mirroring an organisation's values). Off-the-job fit might result when a person's community offers opportunities to pursue his or her interests (e.g. an avid cyclist who has access to bike paths in his neighbourhood).

Links are the formal or informal connections between a person and institutions or other people. On-the-job links are work-related relationships (Holtom, Mitchell, & Lee, 2006) that result from being a part of a work-group, or being a member of a professional association (such as the Academy of Management for management scholars). Off-the-job links are the relationships an individual has with people and institutions outside of the workplace (such as a spouse, family, friends, health club membership, or local sports team).

Sacrifice is the fear or reluctance to give up entitlements accrued over time both on- and off-the-job. In other words, sacrifice relates to the ease with which attachments (on- and off-the-job fit and links) can be broken (Mallol, Holtom, & Lee, 2007). On-the-job sacrifice captures the perceived and real cost of material, intangible or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job (Mitchell et al., 2001). For example, an individual leaving a job might need to change health plans and lose access to a favourite doctor. A sense of pride associated with working for a particular organisation could be lost with a job move. Off-the-job sacrifice captures the perceived and real cost of material, intangible or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving the neighbourhood or state to facilitate a job move (Mitchell et al., 2001). An individual might experience off-the-job sacrifice by relocating from an inner city suburb with easy access to health care facilities to a rural area where access to health care facilities is difficult.

### **Job embeddedness factors and turnover**

Job embeddedness represents the first attempt to systematically incorporate both on- and off-the-job influences on employee retention (Jiang et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2012). Each component (on- and off-the-job embeddedness) and each factor of these components (fit, links and sacrifice) are important (Felps et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2004). But few researchers have disaggregated the components to their individual factors. Fewer still have used the individual factors as predictors of turnover intentions or actual turnover (Bambacas & Kulik, 2013).

This paper seeks to address the under-researched area of the job embeddedness literature by examining the relationship between on-the-job fit, on-the-job links and on-the-job sacrifice and what impact these relationships have on the intention to leave.

### **Hypotheses**

We expect migrants to have less on-the-job fit than non-migrant employees. Migrants are more likely to be employed in jobs that are a bad fit (Forte & Mackenzie, 2009), stemming from employer reluctance to hire someone with no local experience and poor English communication skills. This reluctance to hire on the part of employers means that migrant employees will have less choice

and will be forced to take any job that is offered, regardless of fit. If an individual is not able to choose a job based on how well they fit into the workplace environment, there would logically be a lower level of on-the-job fit experienced, and subsequently higher turnover intentions. Accordingly:

*Hypothesis 1: Migrant status will moderate the relationship between on-the-job fit and intention to leave, such that migrants will experience higher turnover intentions.*

We also expect that migrant employees are likely to have fewer links within an organisation than non-migrant employees. Migrant employees are likely to be different than non-migrant employees that form the majority of the workforce. Being different, a migrant employee may have increased difficulty forming relationships in the workplace (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998; Riordan, 2000). This has an effect on the level of on-the-job links a migrant employee has, and subsequently would lead to higher turnover intentions. Accordingly:

*Hypothesis 2: Migrant status will moderate the association between on-the-job links and intention to leave, such that migrants will experience higher turnover intentions.*

Finally, we expect that migrant employees are likely to have lower on-the-job sacrifice levels than non-migrant employees. One reason for this is because migrants are likely to be placed in or accept jobs that fall well below their skill level (Forde & Mackenzie, 2009), and therefore will be less likely than non-migrant employees to see leaving their job as a downwards step in their career. Also, since migrant employees have already moved internationally to be working at the organisation, it is likely that they will perceive less costs of moving again than a local non-migrant employee who is more likely to have been located in the same place for a longer period of time. These factors influence the level of on-the-job sacrifice that migrant employees would experience, and therefore also lead to higher turnover intentions. Accordingly:

*Hypothesis 3: Migrant status will moderate the association between on-the-job sacrifice and intention to leave, such that migrants will experience higher turnover intentions.*

## METHOD AND SAMPLE

To test the research model, two surveys were sent to all employees of a large aged care provider in South Australia, which we call AgeCorp, that employs 1,313 people who work in a variety of occupations such as direct care (e.g. registered nurses), community domestic assistants (e.g. cleaners), hotel services (e.g. food preparation staff), allied health (e.g. physiotherapists), office and administrative staff (e.g. receptionists), and management (e.g. supervising nurse).

Of the 1,313 employees at AgeCorp, 491 responded to the first survey (Wave 1; 37.4% response rate) and 340 responded to the second survey (Wave 2; 25.9% response rate). Of the 340 employees who completed a Wave 2 survey, 121 had completed both ('repeaters'). The repeaters were identified by a unique confidential code that respondents were asked to generate at the end of each survey. This code was generated by respondents using the first two letters of their mother's first name, the last two letters of their father's first name, and the date (using two digits) that the respondent was born. For example, if a respondent's mother's name was Karen and father's name was John, and the respondent was born on 23 November 1970, the LongCode for this individual would be **kahn23**. This is a method of identification that has been used in longitudinal research (Yurek, Vasey, & Havens, 2008).

### Measures

The Wave 1 survey measured job satisfaction, perceived alternative jobs and on-the-job embeddedness. The Wave 2 survey measured intention to leave. Each item was rated on a Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

#### *Control variables*

Aguinis and Vandenberg (2014) recommend that control variables only be used when there is a clear, theory-based reason for inclusion. All of the analyses reported here have been conducted with job satisfaction and perceived alternative jobs as control variables. These two variables were chosen because they represent the traditional turnover model (Lee et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2001). By controlling for the traditional model, it is possible to identify the variance in the intention to leave that

is accounted for solely by employee job embeddedness and not employee affect (job satisfaction) and the prevailing labour market (perceived alternative jobs).

Job satisfaction was measured in this study using three items devised by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh (1983). The first item was, 'All in all, I am satisfied with my job'. The second item was, 'In general, I like working for this organisation'. The final item was, 'In general, I like my job'. Perceived alternative jobs was measured by using seven items from Crossley et al. (2007). The first item was, 'I could easily find a better job than the one I have now'. The second item was, 'I could easily find another job'. The third item was, 'I could easily find a similar job somewhere else'. The fourth item was, 'I know of several alternative jobs that I could apply for'. The fifth item was, 'It would be easy for me to find another job that pays as well as my current job' (reverse scored). The sixth item was, 'It would be hard to find a job as good as the one I have now'. The final item was, 'I have actual job offers in hand'.

#### *On-the-job embeddedness*

On-the-job embeddedness was measured using the nine-item scale published by Felps et al. (2009), made up of the items of on-the-job fit, on-the-job links and on-the-job sacrifice.

#### *Intention to leave*

Intention to leave was measured using three items from Abrams, Ando and Hinkle (1998). The first item was, 'I think about leaving this organisation'. The second item was, 'In the next few years I intend to leave this organisation'. The final item was, 'I'd like to work at this organisation until retirement' (reverse scored).

## **RESULTS**

All analyses were conducted using the repeater data. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the repeater data.



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Insert Table 1 about here

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### Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted that migrant status would moderate the relationship between on-the-job fit and intention to leave such that migrants would experience higher turnover intentions than non-migrants. The results are displayed in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Step 4 of Table 2 introduces three interaction terms – migrant x on-the-job fit ( $b = .69$ ,  $s.e. = .28$ ,  $p < .05$ ), migrant x on-the-job links ( $b = -.57$ ,  $s.e. = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and migrant x on-the-job sacrifice ( $b = -.38$ ,  $s.e. = .26$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ). Figure 2 presents the interaction between migrant status and on-the-job fit.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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Figure 2 illustrates the significant interaction of migrant status x on-the-job fit (Step 4 of Table 2). Following the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991), we tested the significance of the simple slopes. For migrants (indicated by the broken line), there was a positive non-significant relationship between on-the-job fit and intention to leave ( $b = .38$ ,  $s.e. = .26$ ,  $t = 1.44$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ). For non-migrants (indicated by the solid line), there was a significant negative relationship between on-the-job fit and intention to leave ( $b = -.31$ ,  $s.e. = .14$ ,  $t = -2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). On-the-job fit decreased

intention to leave; this is the relationship that job embeddedness theory predicts. Hypothesis 1, therefore, is not supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that migrant status would moderate the relationship between on-the-job links and intention to leave such that migrants would experience higher turnover intentions than non-migrants.

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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Figure 3 illustrates the significant interaction of migrant status x on-the-job links (Step 4 of Table 2). Following the procedure outlined by Aiken and West (1991), we tested the significance of the simple slopes. For migrants (indicated by the broken line), there was a significant negative relationship between on-the-job links and intention to leave ( $b = -.57$ ,  $s.e. = .19$ ,  $t = -2.99$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This is the relationship that job embeddedness theory predicts: the greater the links an individual has on-the-job, the less likely it becomes he or she will leave. For non-migrants (indicated by the solid line), there was a non-significant relationship between on-the-job links and intention to leave ( $b = .00$ ,  $s.e. = .10$ ,  $t = 0.00$ ,  $p = n.s.$ ). Hypothesis 2, therefore is supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that migrant status would moderate the relationship between on-the-job sacrifice and intention to leave such that migrants would experience higher turnover intentions than non-migrants. The interaction term presented in Step 4 of Table 2 was non-significant. Hypothesis 3, therefore, is not supported.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As organisations become reliant on migrant labour to fill gaps in their workforces, retaining migrant employees becomes a specific challenge for HR managers (Halvorsen, Treuren, & Kulik,

2012; Halvorsen et al., 2015). The goal in this paper was to predict migrant turnover intentions and compare them to non-migrants' using the factors of on-the-job embeddedness.

Fit has long been shown to be a reliable predictor of intention to leave (Van Vianen, 1999; Villanova, Bernardin, Johnson, & Dahmus, 1994). In the job embeddedness literature, on-the-job fit relates to an individual's compatibility with his or her work setting (Zhang et al., 2012), and can take on many different forms such as person-job fit, person-organisation fit or supervisor-subordinate fit. For non-migrants, an increase in fit decreased the intention to leave. For migrants, there was no effect.

For migrants, the more the connections – links – at work, the less the intention to leave. This finding is the relationship that job embeddedness suggests: the more links, the harder it is to leave (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). There is much research in the broader turnover literature to support this finding. Price and Mueller (1981) found that being happy with co-workers was associated with low turnover. Reichers (1985) argued that being part of a team and group, and commitment to others at work would reduce turnover. These findings would be supported by Becker (1992), who extended Reicher's (1985) and Price and Mueller's (1981) research and included commitment to supervisors, unions and top management as elements of connections at work that reduce turnover.

### **Theoretical Implications and Future Research Directions**

This study has made a contribution to the job embeddedness literature, addressing two key areas. First, this study broke job embeddedness into its factors (on-the-job fit, links and sacrifice) to directly test the intention to leave for migrants and non-migrants. Second, this study has tested job embeddedness in a diverse workforce, focusing squarely on the migrant/non-migrant subgroups. Previous studies of job embeddedness were not looking for subgroup differences in turnover intentions or actual turnover.

The findings provide further evidence that job embeddedness factors operate in different ways for subgroups of people (e.g. Bambacas & Kulik, 2013). For non-migrants, on-the-job fit decreased the intention to leave, but had no effect on migrants. On-the-job links decreased the intention to leave for migrants, but did not have an effect for non-migrants.

Future research could expand upon these findings in several ways. First, additional studies could focus on providing further evidence to support the results shown above. In particular, the finding that the three factors of job embeddedness may have different levels of influence on certain subgroups of employees needs to be more broadly examined. Further research could maintain the focus on migrant employees, or examine alternative employee subgroups. Second, the research process shown here could be replicated across different industries to establish whether or not these findings are isolated to the aged care sector, or can be generalised to all migrant workers. Finally, additional research could be conducted into the measurement techniques applied to job embeddedness, to establish more clarity around the three comprising factors, particularly in light of the finding that they may influence various subgroups differently.

### **Practical Implications and Recommendations**

This study has made a contribution to HR practice by providing insight into reducing migrant employee turnover. While increasing levels of on-the-job fit and sacrifice would be useful, the findings suggest that establishing on-the-job links at work is the most important factor in reducing intentions to leave among migrants. Organisations have many opportunities to influence on-the-job links. In this section, we present some strategies that HR managers could implement in their organisations to increase migrant on-the-job links.

Socialisation helps newcomers to an organisation adapt to entry experiences and to acquire desired or necessary attitudes, behaviours and knowledge (Allen, 2006; Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Cable & Parsons, 2001). Specifically, two kinds of organisation socialisation tactics can be used to increase on-the-job links: collective socialisation tactics and serial tactics (Allen, 2006).

With collective socialisation tactics, a newcomer learns what he or she has to do in a job and about the organisation itself within a group or cohort (Allen & Shanock, 2013). An example of this is an employee induction program. Organisations can help migrants become more familiar with the organisation and their co-workers through an induction program that focuses on the role that they will be playing in the organisation (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011; Wanous, 1992).

Serial tactics provide an experienced organisational member as a role model or mentor (Allen & Shanock, 2013). Research has shown that mentoring helps an employee acquire the skills and knowledge to further succeed in his or her job (Morrison, 1993). Employees who are confident in their ability to do their job are more likely to engage with co-workers and display greater cooperation (Feldman, 1981), creating and strengthening on-the-job links (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

## **Limitations and Conclusions**

While providing contributions to both theoretical and practical fields, there were several limitations and delimiters of the current study that need to be considered. First, the researchers limited the scope of the study to the aged care sector only, and the challenges associated with migrant employees affect a much wider range of industries. Also, the present findings were based on a comparison of 93 non-migrants against 28 migrants. There was a considerable drop-off in the number of migrant respondents from Wave 1 to Wave 2. In Wave 1, 113 migrants returned a completed survey, and in Wave 2, 96 migrants returned a completed survey. This represents a high rate of attrition between the two Waves. An ideal situation would be to have an equal proportion of migrants to non-migrants, and a larger sample size.

In conclusion, this study presented an examination of migrant workers in the aged care sector, focusing on how factors of job embeddedness influenced their intentions to leave. Using quantitative research methods, it was found that forming links in the workplace has much more influence on migrant workers' intentions to leave as compared to non-migrant employees. The findings presented in the study provide a good foundation for future research to continue to expand on, and also provide managers with practical recommendations for effectively meeting the challenge of reducing turnover amongst migrant employees.

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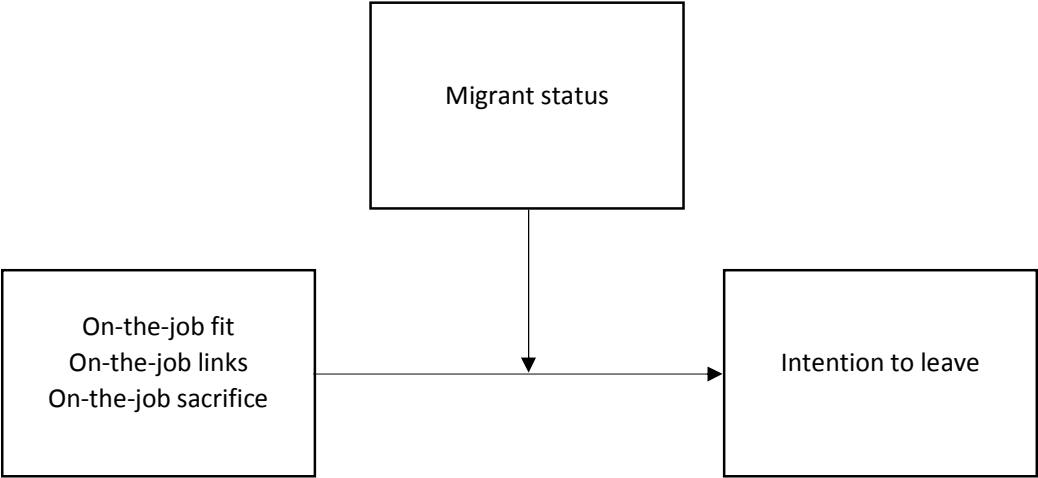
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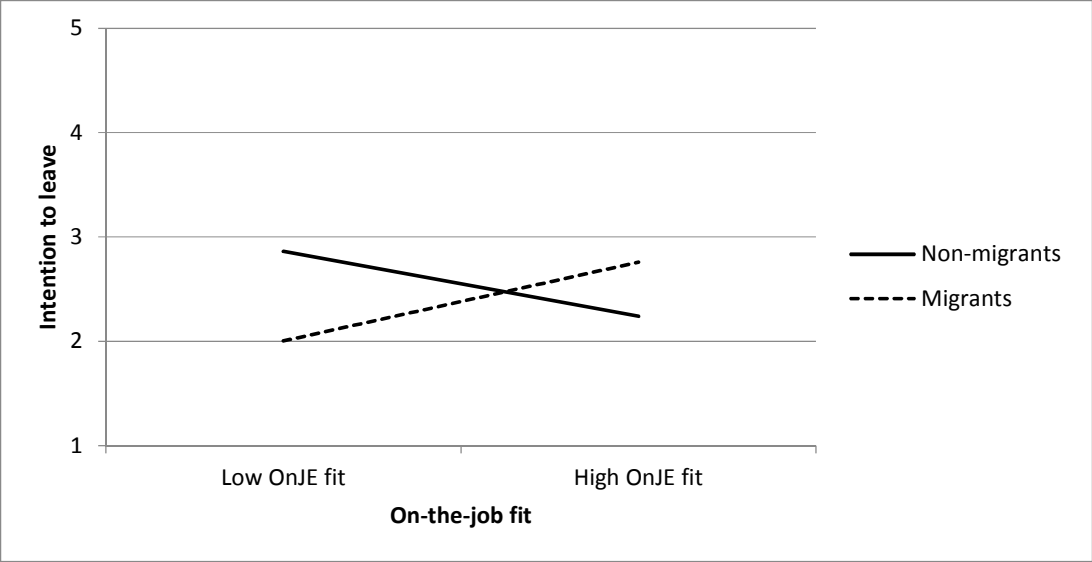


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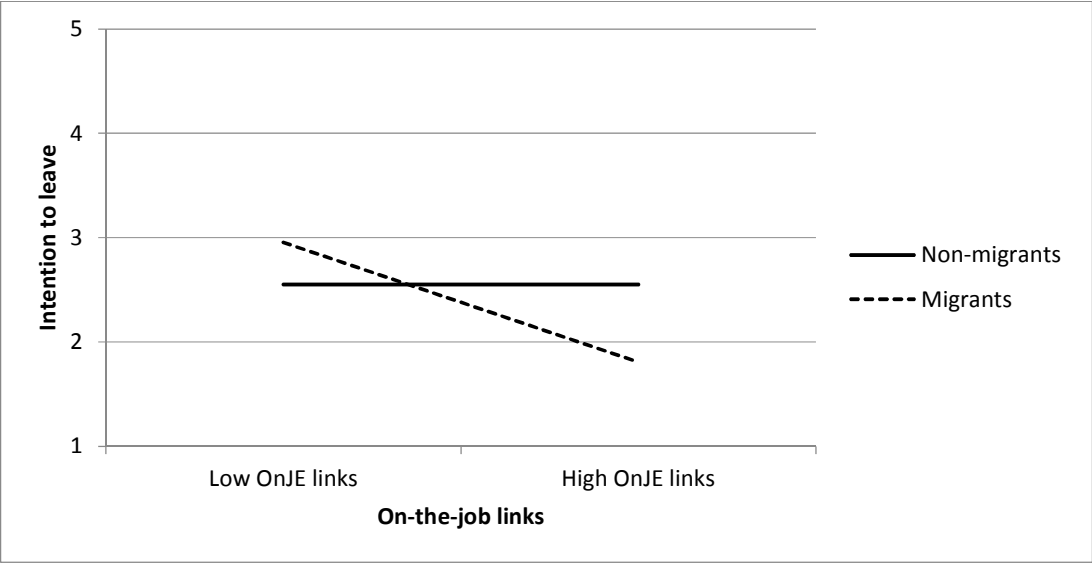
**Figure 1: The Research Model**



**Figure 2: Moderating Effect of Migrant Status on the Relationship Between On-the-job fit and Intention to Leave.**



**Figure 3: Moderating Effect of Migrant Status on the Relationship Between On-the-job Links and Intention to Leave.**



**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Repeater Data**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. ITL <sup>(a)</sup>	2.51	0.78							
2. Migrant status <sup>(b)</sup>	0.23	0.42	-.09						
3. Job sat	4.24	0.54	-.41 <sup>***</sup>	.03					
4. PAJ	3.02	0.69	.29 <sup>***</sup>	.04	-.28 <sup>***</sup>				
5. OnJE fit <sup>(c)</sup>	0.00	0.78	-.45 <sup>***</sup>	-.04	.75 <sup>***</sup>	-.24 <sup>***</sup>			
6. OnJE links <sup>(c)</sup>	0.00	0.78	-.25 <sup>***</sup>	.00	.31 <sup>***</sup>	-.21 <sup>*</sup>	.32 <sup>***</sup>		
7. OnJE sac <sup>(c)</sup>	0.00	0.81	-.46 <sup>***</sup>	-.06	.62 <sup>***</sup>	-.47 <sup>***</sup>	.67 <sup>***</sup>	.29 <sup>***</sup>	

N = 121 † p < .10, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001

Notes: (a) ITL was measured at Time 2, in the Wave 2 survey. All other variables were measured at Time 1, in the Wave 1 survey.

(b) Migrant status is a dichotomous categorical variable, where 0 = non-migrant and 1 = migrant.

(c) These variables were the result of the averaging of the z-scores of the constituent items of the scale.

ITL = Intention to leave, Job sat = Job satisfaction, PAJ = Perceived alternative jobs,

OnJE fit = On-the-job fit, OnJE links = On-the-job links, OnJE sac = On-the-job sacrifice.

**Table 2: Moderated Regression Analysis: On-the-job Embeddedness Factors, Migrant Status and Interactions Predicting the Intention to Leave**

Variables	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4		
	b	s.e.	$\beta$	b	s.e.	$\beta$	b	s.e.	$\beta$	b	s.e.	$\beta$
Constant	4.05	.67		2.65	.84		2.58	.84		2.95	.84	
Job Satisfaction	-.51***	.12	-.36	-.11	-.09	-.08	-.09	.18	-.06	-.09	.17	-.06
Perceived Alt Jobs	.21*	.10	.19	.12	.17	.10	.12	.10	.10	.00	.11	.00
On-the-job fit				-.20**	-.55	-.20	-.21	.13	-.21	-.31*	.14	-.31
On-the-job links				-.09*	.36	-.09	-.08	.09	-.08	.00	.10	.00
On-the job sacrifice				-.20 <sup>†</sup>	-.24	-.20	-.21 <sup>†</sup>	.12	-.21	-.22 <sup>†</sup>	.12	-.22
Migrant status							-.21	.15	-.12	-.21	.15	-.11
Migrant x on-the-job fit										.69*	.28	.32
Migrant x on-the-job links										-.57**	.21	-.28
Migrant x on-the-job sacrifice										-.38	.26	-.17
R <sup>2</sup>	.20***			.27***			.28***			.33***		
$\Delta R^2$	.20***			.07*			.01			.06*		

N = 121, <sup>†</sup> p < .10, \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001