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AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND INTENTION TO
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BASED ORGANIZATIONS OF THE STATE OF SANTA CATARINA
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**AFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AND INTENTION TO
LEAVE THE ORGANIZATION OF PROFESSIONALS FROM
TECHNOLOGY BASED ORGANIZATIONS OF THE STATE OF
SANTA CATARINA**

**COMPROMETIMENTO ORGANIZACIONAL AFETIVO E INTENÇÃO DE SAIR DA
ORGANIZAÇÃO DE PROFISSIONAIS DE EMPRESAS DE TECNOLOGIA DO ESTADO
DE SANTA CATARINA**

**COMPROMISO ORGANIZACIONAL AFECTIVO E INTENCIÓN DE DEJAR LA
ORGANIZACIÓN DE PROFESIONALES DE EMPRESAS TECNOLÓGICAS DEL
ESTADO DE SANTA CATARINA**

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RESUMO

Objetivo. Identificar a relação entre o comprometimento organizacional afetivo e a intenção dos profissionais de sair de empresas de tecnologia.

Design/metodologia/abordagem. Delineamento de levantamento com corte transversal e alcance correlacional. Foram utilizadas as escalas: Comprometimento Organizacional Afetivo e Intenção de Rotatividade. Os dados foram analisados por meio de correlação por postos de Spearman e pelo teste de Kruskal Wallis.

Resultados. A amostra foi composta por 440 profissionais que trabalham em organizações privadas de TI localizadas em Santa Catarina. Foi identificada uma alta correlação negativa entre a intenção de sair voluntariamente da organização e o comprometimento afetivo com a organização (-0,748, $p < 0,000$).

Limitações/implicações da pesquisa. O estudo trata de apenas um dos três determinantes da intenção de sair da organização, conforme a teoria do comportamento planejado. A amostragem não probabilística pode não representar fielmente a população de interesse.

Implicações práticas. Práticas de gestão de pessoas e de socialização que favoreçam o vínculo com a organização de tecnologia são importantes para minimizar a intenção dos profissionais saírem da mesma. Profissionais escolhem as organizações nas quais trabalham também em função do orgulho e do interesse que possuem pela mesma e o quanto estão contentes, entusiasmados e animados com ela.

Originalidade /valor. O estudo foca em profissionais que atuam em organizações de tecnologia, analisa um consequente específico do comprometimento organizacional afetivo: a intenção de sair da organização, dentro do aporte conceitual da teoria do comportamento planejado.

Palavras-chave. Comprometimento Organizacional Afetivo. Intenção de Sair da Organização. Empresas de Base Tecnológica.

ABSTRACT

Objective. To identify the relationship between affective organizational commitment and the intention of professionals to leave technology-based organizations.

Design/method/perspective. A transversal survey with a correlational scope. The Affective Organizational Commitment Scale and the Turnover Intention Scale were used. The data were analyzed based on Spearman correlations and the Kruskal-Wallis test.

Results. The sample was made up of 440 professionals working in private IT companies in the state of Santa Catarina. The results show a high negative correlation between the intention to voluntarily leave an organization and affective commitment to that organization (-0.748, $p < 0.000$).

Limitations/research implications. The study analyzed only one of the three determinants of the intention to leave an organization, according to the Theory of Planned Behavior. The non-probabilistic sample could not adequately represent the population of interest.

Practical implications. Human resources management and socialization practices that strengthen professional bonds to a technology company are important for reducing professionals' intention to voluntarily leave an organization. Professionals choose the organization they work for also based on pride, their interest in that organization, and how happy, enthusiastic and animated they feel working there.

Originality/value. This study focuses on professionals in technology companies and uses Theory of Planned Behavior to analyze a specific consequence of affective organizational commitment: the intention to leave a company.

Keywords: Affective Organizational Commitment. Intention to Leave an Organization. Technology-Based Companies.

RESUMEN

Objetivo. Identificar la relación entre el compromiso organizacional afectivo y la intención de los empleados de dejar las empresas de base tecnológicas.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque. Diseño de encuesta con corte transversal y rango correlacional. Se utilizaron las siguientes escalas: Compromiso Organizacional Afectivo e Intención de Rotación. Los datos se analizaron utilizando la correlación de rangos de Spearman y la prueba de Kruskal Wallis.

Resultados. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 440 profesionales que actúan en organizaciones privadas de TI ubicadas en Santa Catarina. Se identificó una alta correlación negativa entre la intención de dejar voluntariamente la organización y el compromiso afectivo con la organización (-0,748, $p < 0,000$).

Limitaciones / implicaciones de la investigación. El estudio trata de un solo determinante de la intención de dejar la organización, según la teoría del comportamiento planificado. El muestreo no probabilístico puede no representar fielmente la población de interés.

Implicaciones prácticas. Las prácticas de gestión y socialización de personas que favorezcan el vínculo con la organización tecnológica son importantes para minimizar la intención de los profesionales de dejarla. Los profesionales eligen las organizaciones en las que trabajan también en función del orgullo e interés que tienen en ella y lo felices, ilusionados y animados que están con ella.

Originalidad/valor. El estudio se centra en profesionales que actúan en organizaciones tecnológicas, analiza una consecuencia específica del compromiso organizacional afectivo: la intención de abandonar la organización, en el marco conceptual de la teoría del comportamiento planificado.

Palabras clave: Compromiso organizacional afectivo. Intención de dejar la organización. Empresas de base tecnológica.

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies have demonstrated that qualified technical professionals, especially in the area of information technology (IT), are scarce, and are therefore in high demand in the job market (Mangia & Joia, 2015). But these professionals resign more often than they are fired (Mak & Sockel, 2001; Ahsan et al., 2013). This reality is due to the exponential increase in the number of technology-based companies in Brazil (Bello & Steil, 2020) and the proportionally smaller supply of graduates majoring in areas related to IT (Hecker, 2005; Brasscom, 2019). In the current highly competitive environment, with accelerating innovation and the growth in the number of companies, organizations are facing the challenge of hiring and retaining qualified people.

Aware of this market reality, these professionals have actively sought professional growth and employability (Boomaars et al., 2018). There is evidence that having more abilities makes a professional more employable in the internal and external job markets (van Dam et al., 2006). IT professionals, in particular, highly value career opportunities, training, learning, autonomy and challenging work (Joseph, Ng, Koh, & Ang, 2007; Ahsan et al., 2013). When these opportunities do not exist within the organizational environment, and the professional's chances of finding employment elsewhere are very high, it is very likely that they will seek to leave the company in search of more attractive job opportunities (Cho & Huang, 2012; Luz, Paula, & Oliveira, 2015; Frufrek & Pansanato, 2017).

The search to understand the factors that determine the intention to leave a company has become more widespread in academia (Yamamoto, 2011; Ahsan et al., 2013), especially studies of technical professionals' characteristics and how they interpret their work environment (Prihandinisari, Rahman, & Hicks, 2020). A systematic review of the literature in Portuguese identified eighteen antecedents of the intention to leave an organization, most of them occupational in nature, related to work and the attitudes of professionals towards their work within their companies (Steil, Floriani, & Bello, 2019). Organizational commitment and job satisfaction were the two most investigated constructs, with both having a significant negative relationship with the intention to leave an organization (Cappi & Araújo, 2015; Bello & Steil, 2020). This review analyzed all the studies focusing on determining factors of intention to leave an organization, but did not associate the specific determinants with any particular professional category or company sector.

Behavioral intention is used in studies of worker mobility, because it is an immediate cognitive antecedent to volitive behavior (Ajzen, 2011). It has to do with the decision-making process (to act in a deliberate and conscious manner), added to the potential effort needed to perform a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1985; 1991, 2019). Behavioral intention is the central construct of Theory of Planned Behavior; it is the main predictor of behavior, and is responsible for roughly 20% to 30% of the variance in volitive behavior in various domains (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Sheeran & Abraham, 2003). Therefore, identifying behavioral intention for a significant behavior means being able to predict, with some degree of confidence, whether a behavior will occur.

According to Theory of Planned Behavior, an intention is comprised of three determinants which are conceptually interdependent: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). This model has been widely used in research that aims to understand workers' intentions when they voluntarily leave an organization where they work (Garcia, 2003; Polizzi Filho, 2011; Steil et al., 2019). Organizational commitment is an attitude, because it involves cognitive judgements that can lead to behavioral responses (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). One of the characteristics of technology professionals is that they tend to be more committed to their profession than to the company where they

work (Trusson & Woods, 2017). This is because the main identification of IT professionals is to their profession, as noted by a previous study of 300 IT professionals from various companies, which concluded that professional identification is related to affective commitment to the profession (Brooks et al., 2015). The authors of this study indicate that IT professionals make decisions related to their profession, with a lesser emphasis on the company where they are working at a given time. This fact, added to the growing mobility of professionals in Brazil (Interunion Department of Statistics and Socio-Economic Studies – DIEESE, 2014) and the more active role that these professionals take in their careers (Amundson et al., 2010), creates a situation in which a professional's ties with their company become more fragile.

These issues are problematic in terms of understanding the relationship between professionals who work at technology companies and their intentions to leave the companies where they work. The technology sector of Santa Catarina is the sixth largest industrial complex in Brazil in terms of the number of companies; third in terms of productivity; and fourth in terms of the number of employees (Acate, 2022). With an average increase in recruitment of 9.9% a year, and with vacancies that remain open, the percentage of IT professionals in Santa Catarina who resigned was 43.9% (voluntary turnover). This percentage is higher than the state average for other sectors, which is 34.6% (Acate, 2020). This data has put the sector on the alert, not only in terms of recruitment, but also in regard to the factors that lead to resignations in these companies, and has led them to try to establish more efficient talent retention strategies. A worldwide study of directors in large companies has demonstrated that the failure to attract and retain qualified professionals is considered their main challenge, taking precedence over issues such as economic growth and level of competitiveness (Keller & Meaney, 2017).

Given this goal of understanding the professional ties which are at work in the IT sector, this study examines their relationship with the company, focusing on a specific type of attitudinal tie – affective organizational commitment – and the intention to leave IT companies in the state of Santa Catarina. Other studies, both Brazilian (Garcia, 2003; Ferreira & Siqueira, 2005; Carmo, 2009; Polizzi Filho, 2011; dos Santos Silva, Cappellozza, & Costa, 2015; Bello & Steil, 2020) and international (Hussain & Asif, 2012; Ahsan et al., 2013) have already analyzed the relationship between affective organizational commitment and the intention to leave a company. In addition to the accumulated knowledge concerning this subject, this study can be justified for the following reasons. First, it focuses specifically on professionals who work in IT companies. Besides being more committed to their profession than the organizations that they work for (Trusson & Woods, 2017), IT professionals have specialized abilities that are difficult to replace (McKnight, Phillips, & Hardgrave, 2009). This reality, along with the scarcity of these professionals in the job market (Brasscon, 2019; Steil, Bello, De Cuffa, & Freitas, 2022), has led to the need to understand the relationship between affective commitment among the professionals who work in these companies and their intentions to leave them. Recent studies (Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2011; Steil, Floriani, & Bello, 2019) have also focused on the specific characteristics of IT companies and the dynamics of the movement of knowledge within these organizations (Omar, 2018).

The second element that justifies this study is the understanding of the intention to leave a company as a behavioral intention, which can be understood based on one of the elements that constitutes the Theory of Planned Behavior. Here, the level of analysis in this study is the individual, with a focus on the attitude of the IT professional to his or her organization, which is affective commitment, and has a negative relationship with the intention to leave an organization, which determines the professional's behavior. Even though previous studies have already identified the negative relationship between affective commitment and the intention to leave an organization, these studies have not analyzed their results within the broader light of the Theory of Planned Behavior, or this relationship within this context, and focusing on this specific target public.

This study recognizes the existence of various perspectives on organizational commitment, and considers a three-dimensional model consisting of affective, normative and continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment was selected for this investigation, because the affective base of commitment is considered to be the essence of workers' ties to their organizations (Menezes, Aguiar, & Bastos, 2016).

This article is organized as follows; it begins by giving a conceptual framework of the two constructs and the relationship between the intention to leave an organization and organizational commitment, which leads to the hypothesis that professionals with greater affective commitment will have less intention to leave the IT organization they work for. Next, it presents the methodological procedures, including a description of the data collection instruments, the sample, and the data analysis procedures. This is followed by the results and their theoretical and practical implications. Finally, we present our conclusions.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Intention to Leave an Organization

The intention to leave an organization is defined as a deliberate decision to leave a job (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978; Vandenberg & Nelson, 1999), and is part of the broader cognitive process of leaving, which involves thoughts about leaving the organization, the intention to seek work elsewhere, or simply the intention to leave (Mobley, et al., 1978; Wang, Yang, & Wang K, 2012). Intention to leave is a subjective estimate about the probability that an individual will leave an organization in the near future, and not a guarantee that they will actually leave (Steers & Mowday, 1981; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, R 1982). The intention to leave an organization, and actually leaving, are related, with intention to leave being the predictive variable of the effective leaving of the organization (Fishbein, 1975; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Vandenberg and Nelson, 1999; Wasti, 2003), and it is considered the strongest variable, before even turnover (Tett & Mayer, 1993; Wasti, 2003).

The intention to leave an organization is a construct based on Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and it represents cognitive psychological processes regarding an individual's decision making on whether or not to carry out a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991). According to this model, behavior intentions antecede behavior and possess three conceptually interdependent determinants: 1) attitude, which refers to how favorably an individual evaluates a specific behavior, 2) subjective norm, which represents the social pressure to perform a certain behavior, and 3) perceived behavioral control, which consists of how much the individual trusts in his or her capacity to execute a specific behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010), such as leaving an organization.

The closer the measurement of behavioral intention is to the behavior of interest, the greater the predictive power of this intention. This is due to three properties of behavioral intentions: accessibility, certainty and temporal stability (Cooke & Sheeran, 2013). Among these properties, the stability of the intention is the most powerful moderator of the intention-behavior relationship. This is why the measurement of behavioral intention needs to be made close to the execution of the behavior. In terms of leaving an organization (or even the intention to remain in an organization), we suggest that this measurement needs to be carried out periodically.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment corresponds to a type of tie or link, of an attitudinal/affective nature, which is maintained between workers and an organization. Studies of this construct became more common from 1970s, and from 1990 in Brazil, making this one of the most investigated phenomena in the field of organizational behavior (Rodrigues & Bastos, 2010; Bastos, et al., 2014; Menezes, et al., 2016). Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982) suggest that organizational commitment represents a strong relationship of an individual who identifies with the values and goals of an organization. For these authors, organizational commitment captures the positive feelings of affective ties that individuals have with their organizations. These feelings can transform into enthusiasm, trust, attachment and dedication (Siqueira & Padovan, 2008), which are encouraged, in order to fulfil the organization's objectives.

Meyer & Allen (1990, 1997) consider organizational commitment to be a three-dimensional construct, with affective, normative and instrumental (or continuance) foci. Commitment with an affective focus considers the worker's emotional ties to the organization, while the normative refers to a sense of obligation, and a continuance focus establishes a link between the employee and the organization due to the costs associated with leaving.

Affective-attitudinal, normative and continuance foci are based on the same premise; they admit that individual ties to an organization exist, and are inevitable, but they differ in how this tie develops and is maintained within the organizational environment (Bandeira, Marques & Veiga, 2000). However, there is a tendency to consider commitment as an affective type of tie, involving identification and attachment. In this sense, it differs from normative or instrumental ties which are based on what is lost by leaving the organization (Costa & Bastos, 2014). In considering the behavioral and psychological ties between an individual and an organization within a relationship of beliefs and acts (Bastos, 1993), added to the fact that the affective dimension has been more associated with positive behavior which is expected by the organization (Feitosa, 2019), it is assumed that "the affective base of commitment should, in fact, be considered to be the essence of the tie between the worker and his or her organization" (Menezes, Aguiar, & Bastos, 2016). This affective tie with the organization presents lower turnover, absenteeism, and intention to leave the organization, and an improvement in performance indicators (Siqueira & Gomide Jr., 2004). In the next section, we relate affective commitment to the intention to leave an organization.

The Relationship between Affective Organizational Commitment and Intention to Leave

Studies investigating the relationship between affective organizational commitment and intention to leave have demonstrated that affective organizational commitment can minimize individual intentions to leave where they work. Brazilian studies (Garcia, 2003; Ferreira & Siqueira, 2005; Costa, et al., 2008; Costa & Bastos, 2014; dos Santos Silva, et al., 2015; Cappi & Araújo, 2015; Bello & Steil, 2020) have found predictive validity for affective commitment as an immediate antecedent of leaving an organization. These findings demonstrate an inversely proportional relationship, which confirms the results of most international studies (Cho & Huang, 2012; Ahsan, et al., 2013; Uzoka, Shemi, Mgaya & Obot, 2015; Omar, 2018). A lack of organizational commitment is a predictor of intention to leave an organization (Ferreira & Siqueira, 2005), and it is negatively related to retaining talent (Ahsan, et al., 2013; dos Santos Silva, et al., 2015).

A study by Cho and Huang (2012) among IT professionals found a negative relationship between affective organizational commitment and professionals' intentions to leave a company. These were also the findings of Hussain and Asif (2012) among telecommunications services employees. Another of their studies found that greater affective commitment and a perception of strong organizational support have a negative impact on the intention to leave an organization (Hussain & Asif, 2012). Meanwhile, in a study by Uzoka et al. (2015), focusing specifically on IT professionals, affective commitment did not have a predictive effect on the intention to leave an organization.

Despite the greater attention paid to affective organizational commitment and the intention to leave an organization, several studies have found a direct relationship between these variables within IT professionals. To try to fill in this gap and help develop evidence about the nature of this relationship, this study seeks to test the following hypothesis:

H1 - Professionals with greater affective commitment have less intention to leave technology organizations.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study uses a quantitative approach and is descriptive in nature, because it seeks to "observe, register, analyze and correlate facts or phenomena (variables) without manipulating them" (Cervo, Bervian, & Silva, 2007, p. 61). This is a transversal study with a correlational scope designed to identify the relationship between affective organizational commitment and professionals' intentions to leave IT companies in southern Brazil.

Instrument

The process of operationalizing the instrument began by defining the constructs. Next, the measurement scales were selected, with the possibility of either using scales used in previous studies, or developing a new one (Hair Jr, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2009). For this study, we opted to use an instrument composed of two already existing scales, for which evidence of their validity has been proven.

Although we used instruments which present already developed evidence of validity, given that this study examines a specific segment (IT companies), we opted to perform a pilot test, in order to adjust the questionnaires to the reality of sector, as well as a pre-test, to verify the validity of the content and determine whether it was correctly measuring the constructs of intention to leave and affective commitment within this specific context (Hair Jr, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2009). Nineteen people participated in the pilot test, and another 77 people participated in the pre-test, in which the questionnaire was applied in its preliminary version. Both were applied according to accessibility criteria, using Google Docs.

To measure the independent variable affective organizational commitment, we used the Affective Organizational Commitment Scale (AOCS) in its shortened version (Bastos, Siqueira, Medeiros, & Menezes, 2008). It is composed of five self-evaluated items that seek to measure the participants' feelings in relation to the companies where they work. At the beginning, the AOCS presents the following sentence: "The company where I work makes me feel...". Then, the participants are asked to evaluate each item of the instrument: 1) Proud of it; 2) Happy with it; 3) Enthusiastic about it; 4) Interested by it; 5) Animated by it. The responses given for each item were registered using an ordinal scale of semantic differences, from 1 to 5, where 1 means "No"; 2 means "A Little"; 3 means "More or Less"; 4 means "Very"; and 5 means "Extremely". We opted for the shortened version of the scale because it has an elevated index of precision (0.93) and a high and almost perfect correlation ($r=0.95$; $p < 0.01$) with the complete scale (Bastos et al., 2008). Thus, it was possible to use a more streamlined questionnaire maintaining the positive psychometric indices of the reduced scale.

To measure the dependent variable, we used the Turnover Intention Scale (TIS) (Siqueira, 2014). The TIS was constructed to understand how an individual elaborates a plan to leave an organization. It is composed of three phrases that lead the interviewee to declare what he or she is thinking and planning, and whether they would like to leave the organization in the future. The responses are registered using a five-point Likert scale (1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = frequently; 5 = always). The precision index of the scale (Cronbach's Alpha) is 0.95 (Siqueira, 2014).

Data Collection, Population and Sample

The study population consisted of professionals in technology companies located in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil, with a formal long-term contract, excluding consultants. This study uses secondary data from a research project entitled "Rewards and retaining professionals in knowledge intensive technological organizations in Santa Catarina" (MCTI/CNPq/Universal, number: 446551/2014-7). The sample was not probabilistic, because the probabilities that some or all of the elements of the population were part of the sample were unknown (Gil, 2002). At the end of the data collection period (the second half of 2016), 440 valid questionnaires were received, representing the study sample.

Data Collection Procedure

To verify the normality of the variable data (organizational commitment and intention to leave) we applied the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests. The normality tests revealed that the AOCS and TIS variables did not present normal distributions, thus the null hypothesis was rejected ($p < 0.000$). After identifying the non-normality of the data, we opted to use descriptive and non-parametric technical statistics to analyze the data. Spearman correlation rankings was used to identify whether there was any correlation between the AOCS and TIS variables.

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to verify the existence of significant differences between the AOCS and TIS variables as a function of the qualitative levels of the respective variables (low, medium and high). We calculated the average scores for the AOCS and TIS for each participant, and recodified the new variables that represented the qualitative levels, established in accordance with the following criteria: a) low for averages below three; b) medium for averages equal to or greater than three and less than four; c) and high for averages equal to or greater than four.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Sample

The sample was made up of 440 professionals who worked for private IT organizations located in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina. Men made up 52% of the sample, while women represented 48%. Participants between the ages of 21 and 30 made up 55.7% of the sample, and those between 31 and 40 made up 29.5%. In terms of marital status, 50% were married or in a stable union, 45.2% were single, 3.18% were divorced or separated, and the remaining 1.62% declared another status. Most of the participants (71%) did not have children.

Most of the professionals had a college (42.5%) or a graduate (specialization, MBA, Master's or PhD) (35%) degree. Most had worked in their organization for four years or less. Most worked in companies located in southern Santa Catarina (35%), Greater Florianópolis (30%) or the Vale do Itajaí region (27%). During the data collection period, 22.9% of these professionals received up to twice the minimum wage; 35.2% received between twice and four times the minimum wage; 22% received between four and six times the minimum wage; and 19.8% of them received more than six times the minimum wage. Next, we present our results and discuss the reasons why these professionals stayed in or resigned from these IT companies in Santa Catarina.

The Relationship between Intention to Leave and Affective Organizational Commitment in IT Companies

The descriptive analysis of the AOCS and TIS variables revealed that, on average, the professionals of the sample had an average level of organizational commitment ($x = 3.55$; $s = 1.06$) and low intention to leave their organization ($x = 2.62$; $s = 1.18$). After recodifying the average AOCS and TIS scores as low, medium or high, we found that participants with high levels of organizational commitment had, on average, low intentions of leaving their organization ($x = 1.82$). Conversely, those with high intentions of leaving had lower organizational commitment ($x = 2.44$). The average AOCS and TIS scores are shown in Table 1, classified in qualitative form.

Table 1

Average AOCS and TIS Scores, Classified in Qualitative form

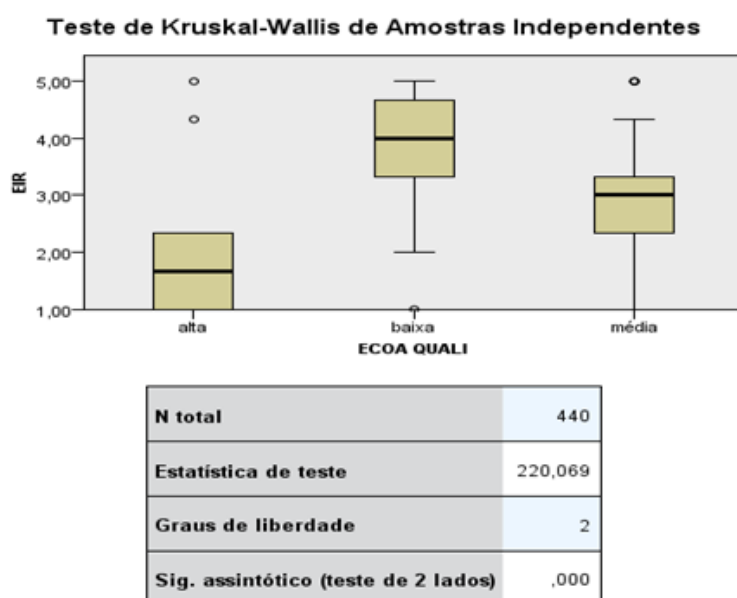
Qualitative Variables		Average Scores
Affective organizational commitment		x Intention to leave (TIS)
Low		3.88
Medium		2.84
High		1.82
Intention to leave		x Affective organizational commitment (AOCS)
Low		4.18
Medium		3.05
High		2.44

Source: Elaborated by the Authors (2020).

To verify the existence of significant differences between the average scores and the qualitative levels, we applied the Kruskal-Wallis test, what revealed a significant difference between the average intention to leave as a function of the qualitative level categories for affective commitment ($H(2) = 220.069$, $p < 0.000$). Thus, the null hypothesis that the distribution of the intention to leave is the same among the qualitative categories of affective commitment was rejected. Figure 1 shows a box diagram illustrating these results.

Figure 1

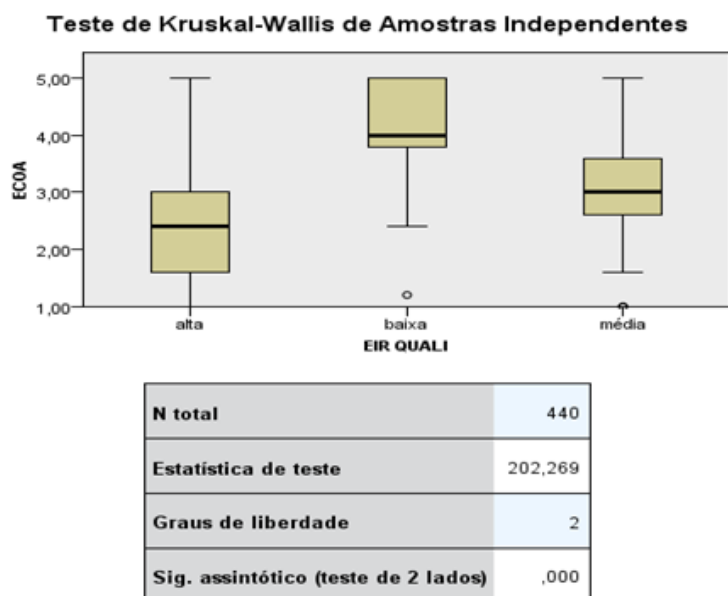
Box Diagram of the Kruskal-Wallis Test of Independent Samples



1. A estatística de teste está ajustada para empates.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors (2020).

In terms of the difference between the average affective commitment as a function of the qualitative categories for intention to leave, applying the Kruskal-Wallis test also revealed a significant difference between the averages ($H(2) = 202.269$, $p < 0.000$). Thus, the null hypothesis that the distribution of organizational commitment is the same among the qualitative categories for intention to leave was rejected. The box diagram that illustrates these results appears in Figure 2.

Figure 2Box Diagram for the *Kruskal-Wallis* Test of Independent Samples

1. A estatística de teste está ajustada para empates.

Source: Elaborated by the Authors (2020).

Analysis of the Spearman correlation rankings revealed that the AOCs and TIS variables present high mutual negative correlation (-0.748 , $p < 0.000$). These results suggest that professionals with low affective organizational commitment have a high intention to leave their organization. Meanwhile, professionals with a low intention to leave their organization present high levels of organizational commitment.

The results of this analysis of the variables confirm that professionals with low intention to leave the organization present high affective organizational commitment, on average ($x = 4.18$). Thus, we identified a high negative correlation between intention to leave and affective organizational commitment (-0.748 , $p < 0.000$). The evidence found in this study corroborates previous results, confirming the hypothesis proposed in our study.

According to Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982), affective commitment occurs when the individual identifies with the company and the personal benefits that this link can bring for them. Individuals with higher levels of affective commitment have a sense of belonging and identification with the organization, which increases their desire to pursue a course of action which is in line with the organization's objectives (Anis, Khan, & Humayoun, 2011). For Allen and Meyer (1990), this psychological tie between individuals and an organization is closely linked to the decision to remain in the organization.

Other studies conducted in Brazil have already shown that affective organizational commitment is a predictor of intention to leave an organization (Garcia, 2003; Ferreira & Siqueira, 2005; Carmo, 2009; Polizzi Filho, 2011; dos Santos Silva, et al., 2015; Bello & Steil, 2020) and international studies have also shown this result (Hussain & Asif, 2012; Ahsan et al., 2013). However, the findings of the present study offer an academic contribution to the advance of knowledge specifically concerning technology-based companies. More recent studies (Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2011; Steil et al., 2019) have studied high tech companies and the dynamics of the movements of knowledge professionals (Omar, 2018).

Studies conducted specifically in knowledge intensive organizations (Ahsan et al., 2013; Uzoka et al., 2015) point out work characteristics and corporate policies that can be central to increasing affective commitment among these workers and diminishing their intentions to leave. For example, organizational factors such as financial compensation (salaries, benefits and promotions) are fundamental for maintaining a team's organizational commitment (Steil et al., 2016). Proper remuneration consistent with market rates (Ahsan et al., 2013), as well as the perception of training opportunities, culminating in career development (Ahsan et al., 2013; Steil et al., 2016; Omar, 2018) are some of the organizational factors considered to be important among these knowledge professionals. In addition, other occupational factors, such as satisfaction with the nature of their work, in terms of the scope of activities (Luz, Paula, & Oliveira, 2015), and the perception

that it is challenging work performed with greater autonomy (Ahsan et al., 2013) all favor affective organizational commitment.

In terms of the scope of Theory of Planned Behavior, the findings of this study demonstrate the (negative and significant) relationship between the attitude towards voluntarily leaving an organization, represented by affective commitment, and the intention to leave an organization. To identify all the predictors of the intention to leave an organization, new studies will need to include not just attitudes related to voluntarily leaving an organization, but also these individuals' subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

Implications for Practice

In Brazil, there are 846.6 thousand professionals working directly in the IT sector. Santa Catarina represents 8.0% of this total (Acate, 2022). High staff turnover and the accelerated growth in the number of companies makes this dispute for IT professionals that much more competitive. Some vacancies are currently remaining open, and the search for qualified workers is one of the main difficulties facing the technology sector of the state. Understanding the factors that can spur intentions to leave organizations could represent an important advance in talent retention policies.

Although IT professionals may be more committed to their professions than to their organizations (Trusson & Woods, 2017), and the organization-related variables carry less weight in the decision making in terms of their careers (Brooks et al., 2015), this study demonstrates that affective commitment is related to the decision-making process when they decide to voluntarily leave the organizations where they work. In other words, the variable affective organizational commitment was associated with career decisions for the IT professionals who participated in this study, albeit to a lesser degree than other variables. This finding has practical implications for managers as well as for IT professionals themselves.

For IT company managers, this results of this study reinforce the importance of personnel management practices and socialization, which strengthens the worker's ties to a company (Morrow, 2011; De Oliveira, Costa & dos Santos Claro, 2015). Challenging positions, clarity of roles, and feedback and professional recognition of work done, all strengthen ties between a company's leaders and its employees (Cunha et. al. 2007; De Oliveira, Costa, & dos Santos Claro, 2015; Frufrek & Pansanato, 2017) and between employees and their organizations.

From the point of view of IT professionals, this study demonstrates that IT professionals also select the organizations where they work based on pride, interest in the work, and how happy, enthusiastic and animated they are with the work (because these feelings are items of the commitment scale used in this study). Knowing whether these factors are being promoted by an organization, and that IT professionals will tend to develop the intention to voluntarily leave that organization, is fundamental for managers and human resource professionals in IT organizations.

CONCLUSION

In line with the trend in recent studies on retaining professionals, this study sought to verify the relationship between affective organizational commitment and the intention of IT professionals to leave their companies in the state of Santa Catarina. Corroborating previous studies, the hypothesis of this study was confirmed. The results indicate that the greater a professional's affective commitment, the lesser the chances that this professional will voluntarily leave the organization.

This study contributes to the scientific community by deepening and advancing knowledge of this subject within the specific context of technology-based companies. Even with the specificities of these organizations in relation to organizations in other sectors of economic activity, it is understood that the results demonstrated here can inform strategies to strengthen the ties workers feel with their organizations, favoring the retention of key professionals within the organization.

Affective commitment is an occupational variable, and a factor that can be "managed", through the implementation of actions that give IT professionals a more positive perception of their organization, and positive feelings, through affective ties that can be transformed into trust, enthusiasm, and dedication (Siqueira & Padovan, 2008).. this, in turn, which will encourage them to want to achieve their organization's objectives. The human resources department can play an active role in improving the positive impressions of these employees (Das & Baruah, 2013) and the retention of people with knowledge and abilities deemed essential for the organization's performance (Irabor & Okolie, 2019).

We suggest that future studies be conducted in other regions of Brazil, aimed at understanding the relationships between affective organizational commitment and behavioral intentions in other contexts throughout the country. These studies would help improve understanding of this relationship, and consolidate scientific knowledge.

The main limitation of this study is that it examines just one attitudinal variable to elucidate the factors that cause these professionals to consider leaving technology-based companies. This study does not measure the subjective norms or perceived behavioral control of these professionals in relation to their behavior of voluntarily leaving the organizations where they work. However, even given this limitation, the results of this study corroborate previous studies, examine this reality for IT professionals (most international studies in this area have focused on the health sector), and confirm the relevance of this relationship in the creation of drivers for human resource policy based on the affective commitment of the employees of an organization. It is also possible that methodological bias may have affected the methodology and sample characterization when the questionnaires were returned, because the study did not use a probabilistic sample. Thus, it is possible that the study participants are precisely those with greater affective involvement with their organizations, while those with less affective commitment may be under-represented. After all, more dedicated professionals, in general, are also those who are more ready to correspond to the organization's expectations. In addition, formal ties to their work were recent for most of the participants (with up to 3 years of service). Studies of individual-organization ties point out that psychological contracts are generally more fulfilled during the first few years of work (Cunha et al., 2007). Thus, it can be considered that the respondents, at the time of the data collection, had a perception of greater affective commitment due to their positive psychological contracts through the recent formal ties established between the respondents and these organizations.

This study contemplates a sample of professionals who work in companies in the principal technological complexes of Santa Catarina. However, it uses a transversal view of the data, representing the individual intentions of a group of people at a given moment in time. Due to the instability of the behavioral intention related to voluntarily leaving an organization, we suggest performing longitudinal studies in the future. To deepen our knowledge of the investigated context, we also suggest future studies in public technological organizations and mixed economies.

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