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Turnback Intention: An Analysis of the Drivers of IT Professionals' Intention to Return to a Former Employer

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Abstract

Recent statistics indicate that most organizations prefer to fill IT vacancies by rehiring an IT professional who had previously worked in the organization. Less is known about what drives IT professionals to "turnback," a term we define as returning to working for a former employer. To explain this important and rarely considered IT job mobility behavior, we build on job embeddedness theory and on the concepts of shocks and job dissatisfaction from, among others, the unfolding model of voluntary turnover to develop the theory of IT professional turnback. We perform fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) of data collected from 248 IT professionals to draw conclusions about the intentions among IT professionals to return to work for a former employer, and develop a mid-range theory. Our results reveal two configurations contributing to high turnback intentions and three configurations contributing to low turnback intentions. Our model distinguishes between work shocks, personal shocks, and IT work shocks. IT shocks are a new category of shocks specific to the IT profession. We contribute theoretically by theorizing a behavior relevant to IT professionals and explaining attributes contributing to turnback intention.

Keywords: Boomerang employee, IT professionals, job embeddedness theory, shocks, job satisfaction, turnback, qualitative comparative analysis