Personality and Quit Intentions

Muriithi enjoyed hiring new staff. He treasured the chance to provide new people an opportunity to strengthen their careers all the while providing for their families. Like most executives, he preferred to employ staff who would stay for many years rather than those who would quit too soon, thus wasting valuable onboarding time and resources.

Muriithi maintained a 52% retention rate of employees at the five year point with his firm. Proud of his worker low turnover success, he endeavored to improve it further and become a leader in his industry. However, he noticed that certain staff with similar dispositions tended to stay longer or others with opposite dispositions stayed shorter. He desired to know whether personality played a role in the length of time a staff stayed with his firm.

Social science researchers also ponder the multitude of factors that lead employees to leave organizations. The specific research that Muriithi should investigate involves intention to quit literature. Researchers strive to empower executives to lower their employees’ intentions to quit their firms. Lower intention to quit exists as positively correlated to greater commitment to an organization and higher job performance. Business Talk in the Business Daily previously investigated the independent variables leading to the dependent variable of intention to quit on 20 November 2014. However, now the famed Journal of Management, read by every credible management professor in the world, and which still stands in the top ten among all the thousands of research publications in the world, released in its February 2016 issue statistics that delineate the latest cutting edge research on the role of personality in staff turnover intentions.

Previously, research by five different social scientists that came out in 1991 highlighted the strong role of personality in impacting workplace behaviors. Thereafter, researchers linked one’s personality to a whole range of workplace behaviors including but not limited to how one searches for a job and job satisfaction. In 1993, researcher Michael Jenkins uncovered the link between various personality characteristics and one’s intention to quit their particular employment. By 2008, Ryan Zimmerman uncovered that personality exists as a significant factor that influences actual employee quitting, not only turnover intentions.

So what should Muriithi be aware of regarding whether an employee stays or leaves? Most of the literature focuses on the extent that positive, or normal, personality traits affects turnover. Employees who demonstrate more agreeableness or consciousness stay with their employers longer than those who do not because they develop positive working relationships with those around them that helps them perform better and receive more commendations. Similarly, those who display kindness and
hardworking traits remain with their current jobs due to their strong sense of obligation and allegiance to the people they work alongside and the organization itself. Therefore, many supervisors categorize employees with high levels of agreeableness, consciousness, kindness, and hardworking traits as good employees.

However, another positive personality trait, openness to experiences, actually causes greater turnover in staff exhibiting high levels of it. Scientists reason that such individuals value the novelty of change and seek it out at the expense of their current workplaces. So, not all positive personality employees will stay long with Muriithi’s firm.

Now, in the Journal of Management, Sang Woo and team’s work from Purdue University in the United States captivatingly delves deeper into the role of dark, or negative, personality aspects in order to predict ultimate workplace behavior as it relates to voluntarily resigning and the speed at which such people quit. Employees who hold negative emotions more frequently quit their jobs and espouse greater intentions to quit. Managers should notice the following warning signs that the above latest research uncovers.

Research from way back in 1950 conducted by Karen Horney and refined by Hogan and Hogan in 2001 and 2009 details three kinds of negative personality traits: moving away, moving against, and moving towards. Moving away psychological constructs includes excessive skepticism, cautiousness, reserved, excitable, and too leisurely. Moving against incorporates boldness, mischievousness, imaginative, and colorful traits. Finally, moving toward involves diligent and dutiful traits. Each of the before mentioned traits in extremes can lead to personality disorders.

Sang Woo and colleagues ran regressions determining the likelihood of employees demonstrating such traits to stay with or leave their jobs. They found that negative personality traits usually predicted intentions to quit more accurately than even positive personality traits. Those employees that demonstrate moving against traits leave organizations the fastest among those with any other positive or negative personality dimensions. Moving against workers often engage in various deviant behaviors including falsifying documents, theft, absenteeism, and policy violations.

So executives, be aware and look for employees who demonstrate personalities that fit with your objectives. Share stories of how your coworkers’ dark personalities have hurt your workplace with other readers through #KenyaJobs on Twitter.

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