

Internal Employability as a Strategy for Key Employee Retention

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EMPLEABILIDAD INTERNA COMO ESTRATEGIA PARA LA RETENCIÓN DE EMPLEADOS CLAVE

RESUMEN: Las economías alrededor del mundo, en especial en países del sur de Europa, están sufriendo los paralizantes efectos de la extremadamente compleja crisis económica y financiera. Este estudio examina el impacto de ciertas políticas de recursos humanos enfocadas a incrementar la empleabilidad interna como un medio para retener a los empleados valiosos y para promover la flexibilidad laboral dentro de la empresa, así como para incrementar las actitudes positivas hacia la ciudadanía organizacional. Se proponen la satisfacción y el compromiso como variables que intermedian la relación entre la empleabilidad interna percibida y la intención de abandonar la empresa y sobre el desarrollo de comportamiento de ciudadanía organizativa. El modelo de investigación propuesto se contrasta usando el modelamiento de ecuaciones estructurales (LISREL). Los resultados obtenidos a partir del estudio empírico indican que la empleabilidad debe ser considerada un factor esencial para conseguir el compromiso, la lealtad, la adaptabilidad y productividad deseada por parte de los empleados, pues fortalece el contrato psicológico entre la empresa y el trabajador mediante el reconocimiento profesional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: empleabilidad interna, satisfacción laboral, compromiso organizacional, intención de renunciar, comportamiento de ciudadanía organizacional.

L'EMPLOYABILITÉ INTERNE COMME STRATÉGIE POUR LA CONSERVATION D'EMPLOIS-CLÉ

RÉSUMÉ : Partout dans le monde et en particulier dans les pays du sud de l'Europe, les économies souffrent des effets paralysants de l'extrême complexité de la crise économique et financière. Cette étude examine l'impact de certaines politiques de ressources humaines visant à augmenter la capacité d'emploi interne comme un moyen pour retenir les employés compétents et pour promouvoir la souplesse de travail dans l'entreprise, ainsi que pour augmenter les attitudes positives vers une citoyenneté organisationnelle. La satisfaction et l'engagement sont proposés comme variables qui interviennent dans la relation entre la possibilité d'emploi interne perçue et l'intention de quitter et sur le développement du comportement de citoyenneté organisationnel. Le modèle d'investigation proposé est mis en relief par l'usage du modèle d'équations structurelles (LISREL). Les résultats obtenus à partir de l'étude empirique indiquent que la capacité d'emploi doit être considérée comme un facteur essentiel pour obtenir l'engagement, la loyauté, l'adaptabilité et la productivité désirée de la part des employés, car cela renforce le contrat psychologique entre l'entreprise et le travailleur par la reconnaissance professionnelle.

MOTS-CLÉS : Employabilité interne, satisfaction professionnelle, engagement organisationnel, intention de renoncer, comportement de citoyenneté organisationnel.

EMPREGABILIDADE INTERNA COMO ESTRATÉGIA PARA A RETENÇÃO DE EMPREGADOS CHAVE

RESUMO: As economias ao redor do mundo, especialmente em países do sul da Europa, estão sofrendo os paralizantes efeitos da extremadamente complexa crise econômica e financeira. Este estudo examina o impacto de algumas políticas de recursos humanos voltadas a incrementar a empregabilidade interna como um meio para reter os empregados valiosos e para promover a flexibilidade trabalhista dentro da empresa, bem como para aumentar as atitudes positivas para a cidadania organizacional. São propostas a satisfação e o compromisso como variáveis que intermediam a relação entre a empregabilidade interna percebida e a intenção de deixar a empresa e para o desenvolvimento de comportamentos de cidadania organizacional. O modelo de pesquisa proposto contrasta usando o modelo de equações estruturais (LISREL). Os resultados obtidos a partir do estudo empírico indicam que a empregabilidade deve ser considerada um fator essencial para conseguir o compromisso, a lealdade, a adaptabilidade e produtividade desejada por parte dos empregados, já que fortalece o contrato psicológico entre a empresa e o trabalhador mediante o reconhecimento profissional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: empregabilidade interna, satisfação no trabalho, compromisso organizacional, intenção de renunciar, comportamento de cidadania organizacional.

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ABSTRACT: Economies the world over and particularly those in southern Europe, are suffering the crippling effects of the extremely complex economic and financial crisis. This study looks at the impact of certain human resource policies geared towards increasing internal employability as a means of retaining valued employees and promoting job flexibility within the firm, as well as increasing positive attitudes towards organizational citizenship. Satisfaction and commitment are proposed as mediating variables of the relationship between perceived internal employability and ITQ/OCB. The proposed research model is contrasted using structural equation modeling (LISREL). The results obtained from the empirical study indicate that employability should be considered an essential factor in achieving the desired commitment, loyalty, adaptability and productivity from employees by strengthening the psychological contract between firm and worker through professional recognition.

KEYWORDS: Internal Employability, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Intention to Quit, Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

Introduction

The current complex financial and economic crisis has been widely recognized and examined. Despite the fact that this negative economic cycle is worldwide, it is patent that Europe in general and, in particular, countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece have been markedly affected, above all, in terms of unemployment. In the last quarter, Spain and Greece showed unemployment rates of 26.2% and 26%, respectively, followed by Portugal with 16.3%, with ever-increasing levels of uncertainty in the labor market.

Some European countries, however, are experiencing lower levels of unemployment, such as Norway with 3%, Germany with 5.4% and Holland with 5.5%. Outside Europe, considering countries that are still regarded as developing nations, we can see that Brazil, for example, has an unemployment rate of 5.3%, while Venezuela's unemployment rate is 7.3%. Despite relatively low unemployment rates compared to southern European countries, it might be suggested that the slowing down of these economies might equally lead to a drop in employment figures. We therefore believe that

working towards the development of the employability for professional workers may constitute a fundamental strategy for strengthening the psychological contract.

Focusing more specifically on the case of the Spanish job market, several changes have occurred over a short period of time. For example, the significant evolution of the service sector, to the detriment of more traditional industries, and an economic and labor dependence on the construction industry. In addition, the temporary nature of contracts and labor flexibility has increased considerably, thereby creating two different segments in terms of types of professional work. On the one hand, there is a primary market of stable jobs, which are well paid and are characterized by frequent opportunities for professional promotion. On the other, we have the secondary market, offering jobs with little stability and low wages with scant or no chance of promotion (Castaño, 1999). The main characteristics of the latter segment are becoming increasingly accentuated and have become the norm over recent years as a result of labor uncertainty. Considering the present difficulties inherent in maintaining a job in the short term or staying in a lifelong position with a firm, employability can be interpreted as a key strategy for improving professional development.

In this sense, the literature suggests that, on an individual level, acquiring training and experience via the drive towards employability has three fundamental effects on workers: a greater perception of well-being, perception of job security and an improved skill set (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004; De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Bernston, Witte & Alarco, 2008). During periods of economic recession, where reduced wages and increased unemployment rates are commonplace, employability plays an essential role through its positive impact on staff flexibility; employees show a greater willingness and an attitude of sacrifice that can safeguard the survival and success of a business. Such efforts can make employees feel more confident by allowing them to enjoy greater opportunities both internally and externally.

We also consider that the opportunity to continue learning is increasingly important for people looking for new employment. Consequently, clear employment policies may be a critical factor in attracting and retaining the best candidates. In this sense, and within a period of high unemployment, firms have interesting opportunities to increase their human capital via new capabilities that may become the basis for new competitive advantages in the future.

This study focuses on the impact of an improvement in employability at an organizational level, and is based on the premise that greater employability is positively related to

increased productivity and higher retention of employees, thus, reducing rates of voluntary turnover (Black & Lynch, 1996). A high retention rate can be interpreted as a consequence of commitment and satisfaction, although it may also be seen as the result of a lack of opportunities in the job market. Equally, a lower intention to leave the firm may imply an increasingly positive collective behavior in the working environment, which can have an impact on organizational success.

One objective of this research is, thus, to carry out an in-depth analysis of the influence of internal employability on employee retention and a proactive attitude amongst personnel. To this end, the study has been structured into the following sections. We first review the concepts of employability and the intention to quit the firm as key constructs for research. We then go on to examine the impact of employability on the intention to quit, highlighting the role of job satisfaction and organizational commitment as intermediating variables. In the next section, we present the empirical study carried out, as well as the most relevant results. The article ends with the conclusions and proposals for future research.

Theoretical Framework

Perceived Employability. Concept and Typologies

In the current climate, labor relations develop within a context that is characterized, in general terms, by decreasing commitment on the part of the firm towards its workers. This attitude breaks away from the psychological contract as it has been traditionally conceived causing job insecurity, increasing levels of demand in terms of productivity and updating skills, as well as difficulties in reconciling family life with work. Alongside this phenomenon, a great deal of objective data exists that appears to reveal growing levels of absenteeism, a predisposition to quit the firm, and emotional detachment among both employees and employers (Capelli, 2006; Conference Board, 2005; Deloitte Research, 2004; Frauenheim, 2006).

In accordance with the aforementioned current socio-economic and working situation—also characterized by continual salary reductions and high levels of unemployment—relatively new concepts, such as employability (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Fugate et al., 2004), and flexicurity (Cazes & Nesporova, 2007; Withagen & Tros, 2004;), are destined to play an important role when reconfiguring the psychological contract, strengthening the link between firm and worker, and improving the competitiveness of organizations. With regard to employability, which



constitutes the central element of our research, the OIT (2004) defines it as the acquisition of transferrable competences and skills, with a view to strengthening people's ability to take advantage of the opportunities provided by education and training. Employability should not only contribute to finding and conserving jobs, but also to progressing within the firm or helping individuals to change jobs, as well as helping them to adapt to constantly evolving technology and the different conditions of the labor market (Smith, 2010).

From the perspective of the individuals' personal experiences, employability is understood as the ability to join the world of work, remain in employment, and even obtain a new position, either within or outside the organization (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Nickson, Warhurst, Commander, Hurrell & Cullen, 2012). In this sense, the variable is of a strongly subjective nature in terms of the workers' perceptions, their skills and attitudes, and the objective situation of the labor market.

The literature also clearly distinguishes between two types of employability. *Internal employability*—the fundamental

theme of this study—determines the level of competitiveness of a worker within the firm; that is to say, it establishes the professional profile that the worker must develop in order for the training received to fit in with the needs of the organization. This is related to the professionals' skills and the confidence they have in themselves. This type of employability can again be separated into two subgroups. One type that allows people to continue doing the same job, and the other, enables individuals to change the work they do within the organization. *External employability* determines a worker's level of competitiveness, but in this case, at labor market level. It refers to the capability of workers to change jobs, which may or may not be similar in another firm, thereby, reflecting the value of professionals in the external labor market (Sanders & De Grip, 2004).

Intention to Quit the Firm (ITQ). Concept and Determinants

Intention to quit the firm (ITQ) is the extent to which workers consider leaving their current firm or even their

profession (McNatt & Judge, 2008). This intention corresponds directly to the individual's willingness and decision-making (Campbell & Campbell, 2003), as a consequence of an inability to adapt to evolving labor relations. Quitting the organization voluntarily is the most characteristic behavior associated with this construct. Several authors point to the intention to quit as a precedent for voluntary turnover (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Shore, Newton & Thornton, 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993). However, we understand that a marked predisposition to quit the firm does not always result in individuals taking the final step of leaving (Maertz & Campion, 2004), as this depends, along with other factors, on the existence of job opportunities in the labor market. Therefore, while the final decision to quit can be considered the workers' last resort, the intention to quit the firm should be interpreted as an expression of disinterest in continuing to work in the organization, but not necessarily as preempting leaving their jobs (Firth, Mellor, Moore & Loquet, 2004).

There is no clear consensus as to which are the most characteristic determining factors, but there is a more generalized agreement with regard to some of the key constructs, discussed below.

Firstly, we differentiated *demographic* factors from *personal* ones such as gender, level of education, worker category and amount of time the individual has been in the position (Khatri, TzeFern & Budhwar, 2001). In terms of gender, Cotton and Tuttle (1986) and Hom and Griffeth (1995), among others, indicate that men display a greater tendency to an intention to quit, whereas women tend to be more conservative in this respect. With regard to the relationship with the level of education, several authors suggest that employees with a higher level of education consider the possibility of leaving their firms more frequently, with a view to opting for more and/or better job opportunities (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). In terms of worker category, the literature indicates that employees in executive positions are more likely to leave the firm than lower categories (Khatri et al., 2001). It should also be added that the less time an employee spends at or invests in an organization, the lower their level of commitment, and thus the likelihood of quitting the firm becomes higher.

The second group of determinants refers to the *external* or *non-controllable* factors (Khatri et al., 2001). These aspects depend fundamentally upon the economic cycle. If the current climate is one of economic growth, it may favor the intention to quit, as there are more alternative job opportunities available (Iverson & Deery, 1997). If, on the other hand, there is an economic recession underway, ITQ tends

to drop, due to less or non-existent work alternatives (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel & Hill 1999). The last group of factors we are concerned with encompasses *internal* factors, some of the most relevant of which are job satisfaction, organizational commitment, the nature of the work carried out and salary levels. According to a large body of literature, there is broad consensus on the negative relationship between job satisfaction and the intention to quit the firm (Blau, 1993; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Dickter, Roznowski & Harrison, 1996; Khatri et al., 2001; Shore et al., 1993). The same occurs in the relationship between organizational commitment and a predisposition to leave the firm (Clegg, 1983; Elangovan, 2001; Firth et al., 2004; Jaramillo, Mulki & Locanter, 2006; Siong, Mellor, Moore & Firth, 2006; Williams & Hazer, 1986). The effect of the nature of the work carried out is founded upon the idea that the characteristics of the job can mediate in the motivation for leaving the firm and, in terms of wages, low salaries also provide an incentive to quit.

The Impact of Internal Employability On ITQ: A Theoretical Proposal

It is important to understand that this research focuses on the factors affecting internal employability. In this sense, we analyze the effects of the way in which an organization makes a deliberate effort to boost the competitiveness of its professionals in one or various jobs, and contemplates the real chances of internal promotion on the predisposition to quit the firm and the subsequent development of proactive collective attitudes and behaviors. It should also be highlighted that we are analyzing perceived employability (which is subjective) through the extent to which professionals achieve their desired job, which should correspond to their level of training and skills (Rothwell, Herbert & Rothwell, 2008).

When analyzing the relationship between internal employability and ITQ, we understand and propose that it is essential to analyze the role played by job satisfaction and organizational commitment as intermediating variables. Driving to promote the development of employability has a positive influence on these variables, and may result in increased levels of productivity (Loewenstein & Spletzer, 1998). It should also be pointed out that both job satisfaction and organizational commitment are related to other important variables, such as performance, training policies and professional recognition, among other constructs. However, this study focuses attention on the relation between satisfaction and commitment with the intention to leave the firm and, consequently, with organizational citizenship behavior.

Job satisfaction is defined as a pleasant or positive emotional state brought about by an assessment of an individual's job, or via the experiences in and of work (Locke, 1976). Job satisfaction also implies an emotional orientation shown by employees towards their roles within the organization (Kalleberg, 1977). Therefore, achieving job satisfaction in the firm or developing subjective well-being on the part of employees engenders a better quality working environment. The more workers recognize the fact that they are satisfied in their jobs, the more they are likely to find greater levels of unity in the workplace and/or interdependence of organizational knowledge and experience. It is widely recognized that individuals differ in their needs and, therefore, show different preferences with regards to the characteristics of their jobs and the associated rewards (Revuelto & Fernández, 2012).

Investment in activities aimed at improving the endowment of skills and competences of employees are essential strategies in the effort to promote employability, thus, favoring social and labor promotion (fundamentally on an internal level) and/or keeping the same job. The overriding objective of such proactive human resource policies therefore lies in striving to develop human potential to the maximum, thereby increasing the chances of maintaining or improving the current job and, as a result, stimulating greater job satisfaction (Forrier & Sels, 2003). As an antecedent to greater employability, we should also consider the necessary investment in training policies on the part of firms with a view to retaining the professionals considered to be essential to the firm. Such a proactive strategy fosters the transfer of knowledge and skills in the form of organizational learning (Céspedes, Jerez & Valle, 2005; Skylar & Yalcin, 2010; Fenwick, 2012).

Indeed, opportunities for promotion are one of the pillars for the creation of overall satisfaction in individuals. Social and work-related promotion and/or improvements in a current post can lead to the development of subjective well-being, which is a precursor to job satisfaction (D'Addio, Eriksson & Frijters, 2007). Consequently, the more the firm becomes positively involved in the process of improving the employability of its professionals (continuously enabling new job opportunities within the firm), the more satisfied they will be, thereby fostering the process of participation, as well as organizational change towards an improvement in performance and competitiveness (Revuelto & Fernández, 2010). A person is therefore employable when he or she is in a position to obtain, keep and gain promotion in a job they consider to be satisfactory. This reasoning leads us to believe that perceived internal employability in workers is positively related to their (subjective) well-being. Thus, opportunities for learning and

promotion will enable greater control over their professional careers (Fugate et al., 2004), and consequently engender higher levels of job satisfaction. These reflections lead us to propose the first hypothesis of this research.

H1: Employees with high indices of perceived internal employability have greater levels of job satisfaction.

Organizational commitment—the second intermediary variable proposed—is defined as the emotional and functional attachment the employee has with the institution (Rockeach, 1973; Rockeach, 2000). Commitment is therefore not only related to the degree of identification the worker has with the firm, but also with his or her job and what it involves. Similarly, organizational commitment is dependent upon the extent to which an individual identifies with participation in a given organization, normally characterized by strong beliefs and acceptance of the organizational values and objectives, as well as the desire to work hard for the firm and to stay in the job (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Huselid & Day, 1991). The more this identification and participation takes place (Curry, Wakefield, Price & Mueller, 1986), the more the professional can involve themselves completely in achieving goals and reaching targets.

The internal vision of employability is controlled by company executives, who may consider the possible commercialization of their most valued employees to be a risk when there are attractive job offers in the external market (Roehling, Cavanaugh, Moynihan & Boswell, 2000). Consequently, company executives are increasingly advocating programs that entail specific training with a view to instilling loyalty in key employees.

In this sense, investing in internal development via the acquisition of competences with a high degree of specificity could turn out to be beneficial for both the firm and the employee. On the one hand, it entails the guarantee of continuity in the job, given that professional workers would keep their competences up to date and, on the other, the firm employs workers whose skills are more difficult to transfer to competitors or to other sectors. Therefore, adopting activities to develop knowledge, skills and capabilities (based on an orientation towards learning and employment) on the part of the organization, which enables improved employability (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005), will inevitably lead to higher levels of organizational commitment on the part of employees (Van Dam, 2004), above all of an emotional nature, with feelings of obligation toward the firm (Hutchison, 1997) as a result of the perception among workers of greater organizational interest in the well-being of workers (Tansky & Cohen, 2001). Following on from this analysis, we can propose the second hypothesis.

H2: *Employees with higher levels of perceived internal employability show a greater predisposition to organizational commitment.*

In the literature, employee satisfaction is considered an important antecedent of organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Jaramillo et al., 2006). There is broad consensus with regard to the positive relation between job satisfaction and personal involvement in the firm (Yousef, 1998). Therefore, we propose that the greater or lesser degree of job satisfaction is directly related to the level of organizational commitment among employees. Such relevant behavior for the firm in turn has an effect on organizational performance and efficiency (López-Araújo, Osca & Peiró, 2007). Conversely, the increasing dissatisfaction among professional workers reduces perceived levels of well-being of those belonging to the organization, leaving them less inclined to develop organizational commitment. Indeed, job satisfaction has, in previous studies, been frequently used by researchers as a predictor of organizational commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Yousef, 1998).

Of equal importance is the close relationship between the individual's psychological well-being and achieving job satisfaction (Wright & Bonnet, 2007). A low association of both elements can be seen as a prediction of an increase in voluntary turnover among employees, resulting in the immediate need to search for new employment as a direct result of lower levels of organizational commitment. This leads us to propose our third hypothesis.

H3: *Employees with greater perceived job satisfaction have higher levels of organizational commitment.*

A number of studies claim that a lesser or greater degree of job satisfaction constitutes one of the most significant determinants in the intention to quit the firm and, consequently, in voluntary turnover (Clegg, 1983; Elangovan, 2001; Williams & Hazer, 1986). When there is a sense of improvement in the levels of attachment and consideration on the part of the firm, workers will feel more inclined to stay in their current jobs (Scott, Bishop & Chen, 2003), as a consequence of a greater overall perception of well-being (Judge & Klinger, 2007). Equally, as employees feel they have greater control and power over their own work, levels of job satisfaction will increase, and hence, the intention to quit the firm will decrease (Paré & Tremblay, 2007).

Accordingly, managers see the control of job satisfaction and organizational commitment as a key strategy for reducing workers' intention to leave the firm and voluntary rotation (Firth et al., 2004). Therefore, job dissatisfaction is one of the major stress factors related to work, along with a lack of commitment, both of which strongly influence the

intention to quit. Over time, job dissatisfaction also wears people down emotionally, and factors such as this can be the precursors to the intention to quit, and to voluntary turnover (Jaramillo et al., 2006). Such factors lead us to present the fourth hypothesis.

H4: *Employees with higher levels of perceived job satisfaction have a lower intention to quit the firm.*

Firm investment in fostering the employability of professionals, particularly those who are key or potentially key employees, with a view to developing their vision of internal development, is fundamentally related to a low or negligible voluntary rate of turnover (Benson, 2006; Back-Kyoo, 2010), as a result of increased loyalty. Thus, the development of greater organizational commitment is interpreted as a significant antecedent to a reduction in ITQ among professionals (Jaramillo et al., 2006; Siong et al., 2006). Employees who are committed to the organization identify with those that display an emotional attachment to the firm (Firth et al., 2004). Thus, firm managers often believe that working in favor of an increase in commitment, as part of a positive, proactive human resource policy, enables a decreased intention to leave the firm, and voluntary turnover (Firth et al., 2004). The greater or lesser willingness to commit on the part of the firm's professionals plays an important role in explaining the causes for organizational intention to quit, which consequently affects organizational success (Jaramillo et al., 2006). We therefore propose the fifth of our hypotheses.

H5: *Employees with a higher level of organizational commitment show a lower intention to quit the firm.*

At this point, it is appropriate to consider an analysis of the influence that the intention to leave the firm may have on collaborative behavior, due to the obvious repercussions on the success of human resource management. Such behavior, described in the literature as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), was originally defined by Organ (1988). The author describes OCB as a particular type of behavior within and for the firm that goes further than the mere demands of the job, and has no direct or formal rewards in company policy. This type of behavior is characterized by helping others voluntarily, with a view to attaining strong interpersonal relationships, thereby increasing the indices of relational social capital (Bolino, Turnley & Bloodgood, 2002). In this sense, the reasons for adopting this (personal) attitude is not founded on achieving formal and quantitative recognition (Organ, 1997), but on improving cooperation levels between co-workers, leading to an improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of working relationships.

Thus, OCB is identified with the impulse of social, spontaneous behavior in the firm (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; George & Brief, 1992), which fosters the motivation to work in favor of achieving targets established by the organization through participation (Davis & Newstrom, 1991) and cohesion between groups and work teams, forging a sense of belonging and group identity.

Although it is true to say that a low predisposition towards leaving the organization does not necessarily imply an obligation to work in favor of more collective attitudes, we understand and propose that, it may indeed be a tendency among workers who are motivated by collaborating in favor of an improvement in working relationships who, in turn, do not feel the need for voluntary turnover. In this sense, the perception of mutual support among co-workers increases the level of well-being of the individuals in the firm and, hence, the way work is carried out and proactive behavior favors greater emotional involvement toward the organization (Bishop et al., 2000; Scott et al., 2003). Saks (2006) claims that there is a correspondence between employee involvement (in relation to his or her work and the firm) and attitudes and intentions, in other words, their organizational behavior.

A disposition towards positive, cooperative behavior among co-workers increases the attractiveness of team work due to increased team cohesion, as well as in the reciprocity of supportive behavior between organizational members (Chen, Tang & Wang, 2009). Consequently, this

attitude reaffirms a positive working atmosphere, whilst also tending to develop greater motivation in the employee and increased cooperation. We can thus propose that:

H6: Employees who are less predisposed to quitting the organization show a greater tendency towards organizational citizenship behavior.

Following this description of relations, we present the proposed research model in Figure 1, whose principal objective lies in studying the impact of internal employability on employee intention to quit the firm.

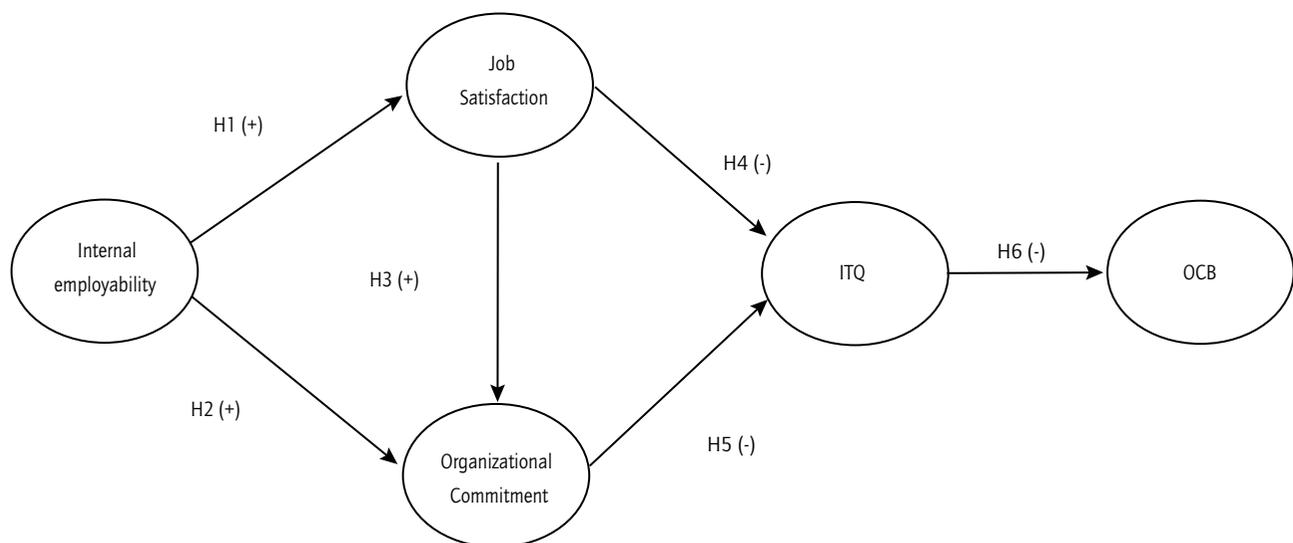
Methodology

Data

Bearing in mind the object of this study, in order to empirically contrast the hypotheses proposed in the theoretical model, the chosen population consists of employed professionals (under contract with a private company) in the province of Valencia, Spain. The reason for analyzing professionals working in private companies (rather than public bodies) is that efforts to improve the employability of workers tend to be more frequent in this sector.

The database consulted for this research was that compiled by the Valencian Institute for Statistics (IVE), with a database of 687,700 workers. The sample finally used was n=238, with a sample error of 6.4% and a confidence (significativity) level of 95%.

FIGURE 1. Proposed Research Model



Source: Author's own.

The tool used for gathering the data was a questionnaire, sent via e-mail and as a hard copy to a series of firms once we had obtained permission to carry out the research from the human resources department. The questionnaire was sent and data were gathered during the month of June 2011.

Measurement of the Variables

The questionnaire used to gather the data was structured into various sections, which corresponded to the different constructs for analysis (perceived internal employability, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and the intention to quit the firm), besides an initial section devoted to general information. Each construct was analyzed through a set of items proposed in previous studies (Table 1). Each item was evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, where one was “very low” and five “very high”.

TABLE 1. Groups of Hypotheses in the Causal Analysis

Group	Hypotheses	Constructs	Variables or items	Previous studies that used the items
G1	H1 H2 H3	Internal employability	7 items	Delery and Doty (1996); Gong and Chang (2008)
		Commitment	12 items	Porter, Steers, Modway and Boulian (1974); Meyer and Allen (1997); Yousef (1998); Mellor, Mathieu, Barnes-Farrell and Rogelberg (2001); Zaleska and De Menezes (2007); Chew and Chan (2008); Addae and Parboteeah (2008)
		Satisfaction	12 items	House and Rizzo (1972); Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990); Chew and Chan (2008)
G2	H4 H5	Commitment	12 items	Porter et al. (1974); Meyer and Allen (1997); Yousef (1998); Mellor et al. (2001); Zaleska and De Menezes (2007); Chew and Chan (2008); Addae and Parboteeah (2008)
		Satisfaction	12 items	House and Rizzo (1972); Greenhaus et al. (1990); Chew and Chan (2008)
		ITQ	3 items	Lyons (1971); Chew and Chan (2008)
G3	H6	ITQ	3 items	Lyons (1971); Chew and Chan (2008)
		OCB	13 items	Wagner and Mosch (1986); Dobbins and Zaccaro, (1986); Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990); Farh, Earley and Lin (1997); Rego and Souto (2004); Luna and Camps (2006); Chen, Niu, Wang, Yang & Tsaur (2009); Chow (2009)

Source: Author's own.

In order to attain the objectives of this study, the proposed hypotheses were contrasted via causal analysis (structural equations, LISREL), and these were separated into three groups, given that the complexity of the series of relations made an overall analysis unfeasible.

To provide more information, Table 2 shows only the average scores (1 = low level of agreement and 5 = high level of agreement) and the standard deviations of each of the constructs. The score for each construct is calculated via the mean score of the items that constitute it.

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Satisfaction	238	2.08	4.17	3.0714	0.42170
Employability	238	1.57	4.86	3.1633	0.65571
Commitment	238	1.83	4.25	2.9076	0.46196
ITQ	238	1.00	5.00	2.6695	0.60238
OCB	238	1.62	4.85	3.2773	0.71235
N valid (acc. list)	238				

Source: Author's own.

Validity and Reliability of the Scales Used

In order to check the validity of the constructs proposed, we use Cronbach's alpha model of internal consistency. We were able to analyze the reliability of each construct in the scale, and verify whether the reflective indicators are homogenous and therefore measure the same latent variable. Equal to or greater than 0.7 were regarded as optimal values (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). However, certain authors, such as Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1999), consider values of 0.6 and above to be acceptable for studies of an exploratory nature.

In addition, an exploratory factor analysis of principal components was carried out (convergent validity) with the idea of verifying the individual reliability of each of the indicators with its respective construct. The criterion used for accepting that the reflective indicators form a part of the construct is a loading equal to or greater than 0.7. However, different researchers suggest that this empirical norm should not be quite so strict during the initial stages of scale development, and that loadings of 0.5 are also acceptable (Chin, 1998; Hair et al., 1999; Uriel & Aldás, 2005). For this study, we decided to use an acceptance criterion of 0.60 for factor loadings.

By applying the two techniques, we verified the internal consistency of the constructs, as the validity of the scale was correct—all the Cronbach alpha are higher than the acceptable threshold (0.7)—and all the CFA show factor

models that explain a sizeable part of the variance of the construct they represent.

Results

Upon examining the three groups of proposed hypotheses (G1, G2 and G3), the results obtained for the structural equations (LISREL) are shown below. With regard to the first group of hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3) related to the causal relations between the constructs perceived internal employability, satisfaction and commitment, the model estimated in LISREL supported the three hypotheses proposed (Figure 2).

The validity of the model is confirmed by the moderated goodness of fit index (the maximum value is one) and a reduced mean square error (Table 3).

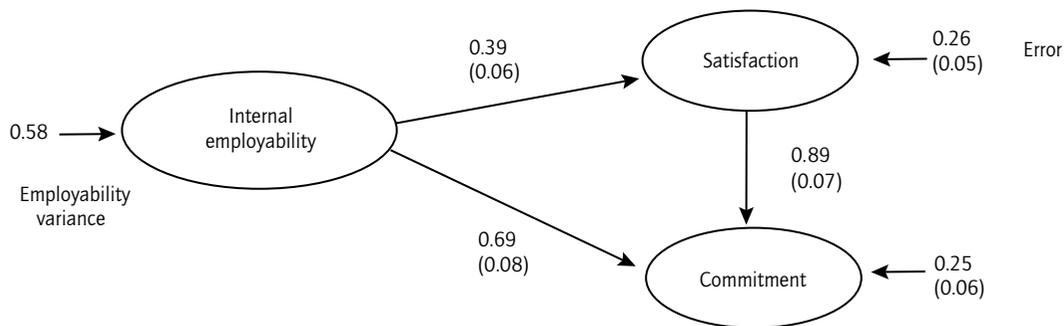
TABLE 3. Goodness of Fit 1

Goodness of fit index	0.63
Root mean square error	0.15

Source: Author's own.

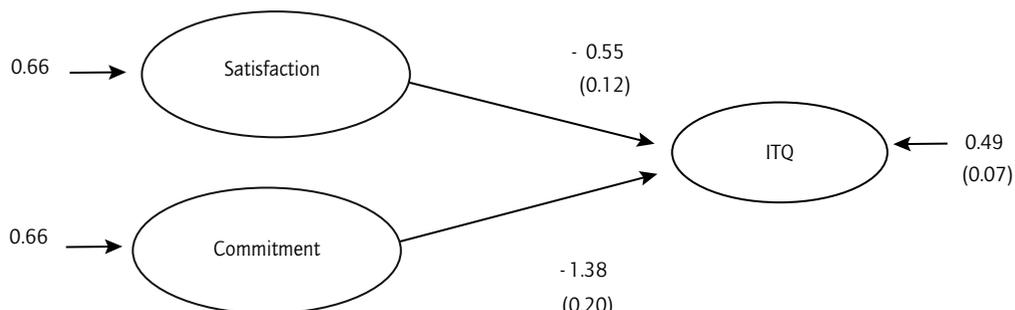
With regard to the second group of hypotheses (H4 and H5), which relate the constructs of satisfaction, commitment and ITQ, the estimated LISREL model confirms both relations (Figure 3).

FIGURE 2. Estimated Structural Model G1



Source: Author's own.

FIGURE 3. Estimated Structural Model G2



Source: Author's own.

A detailed analysis of the goodness of fit statistics confirms the moderate validity of the model of estimated structures (Table 4).

TABLE 4. Goodness of Fit 2

Goodness of fit index	0.59
Root mean square error	0.11

Source: Author's own.

With regard to the third group of hypotheses (H6), which relates the constructs of ITQ and OCB, the estimated LISREL model confirms the proposed relation (Figure 4).

A detailed analysis of the goodness of fit statistics confirms the moderate validity of the estimated model of structures (Table 5).

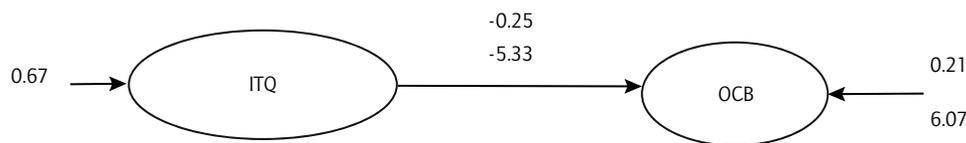
TABLE 5. Goodness of Fit 3

Goodness of fit index	0.60
Root mean square error	0.13

Source: Author's own.

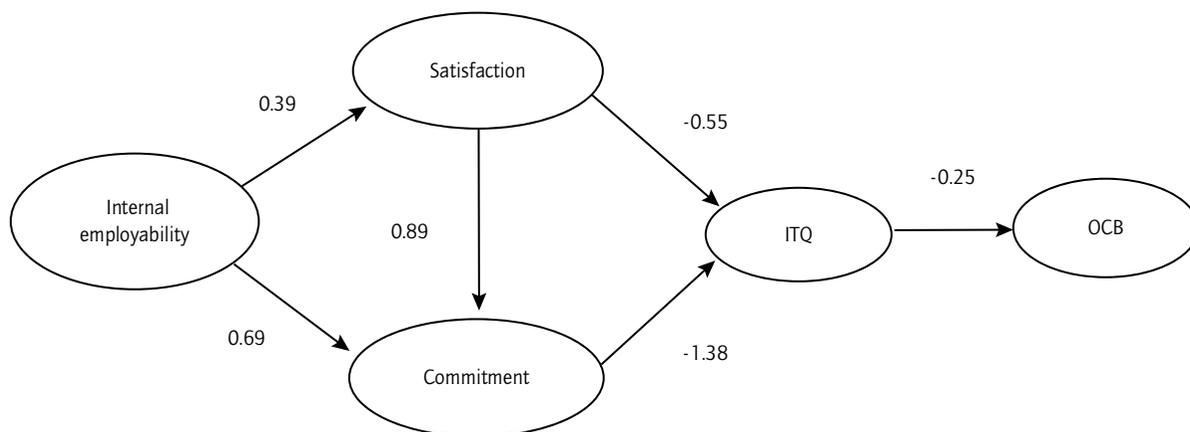
To conclude this section, we show the final estimated model, which reflects all the causal relations between the constructs of our theoretical model (Figure 5), as well as the result of the contrast of hypotheses (Table 5).

FIGURE 4. Estimated Structural Model G3



Source: Author's own.

FIGURE 5. Diagram of the Final Estimated Model



Source: Author's own.

TABLE 5. Summary of Contrasted Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Related factors	Contrast
H1	Internal employability- Satisfaction	Confirmed
H2	Internal employability - Commitment	Confirmed
H3	Satisfaction -Commitment	Confirmed
H4	Satisfaccion - ITQ	Confirmed
H5	Commitment - ITQ	Confirmed
H6	ITQ - OCB	Confirmed

Source: Author's own.

Conclusions

This research focuses on studying the impact of perceived internal employability on the intention to quit the firm on the part of employees, taking job satisfaction and organizational commitment as intermediating variables in this process. It also examines the possibility that a low tendency to leave the organization fosters the development of proactive, collective behavior in the firm.

The model for this study was contrasted via causal statistical analysis using structural equations (LISREL), analyzing the cause-effect relations between all the constructs. In

light of the results obtained, the main conclusions suggest that a) perceived internal employability does have a positive effect on job satisfaction and long-term organizational commitment, and b) job satisfaction has a moderate positive effect on organizational commitment.

In line with this idea, people with high indices of perceived internal employability participate more actively in the organization's different learning processes, with the primary objective of satisfying their own professional interests, thereby complying with their desired career plans. Therefore, the degree to which the firm becomes positively involved in this process, continually enabling employment opportunities, means that professional employees attain a higher level of job satisfaction, as well as organizational commitment. These practices lead to greater loyalty among workers and, consequently, a lower intention to quit.

It is also important to indicate that both job satisfaction and employee commitment to the organization have a negative effect on the intention to leave the firm, although commitment has a greater impact than job satisfaction (Lum, Kervin, Clark, Reid & Sirola, 1998). In this sense, greater involvement at work is closely linked to positive behavior in the workplace, and in this case, with a lower

motivation to leave. Similarly, workers associate a greater degree of job satisfaction with the positive perception of cooperative and/or team work (Mathieu, 1991) and, consequently, are less predisposed to leave the organization (Scott et al., 2003), lessening the likelihood of voluntary turnover and absenteeism and, instead, enhancing an orientation towards collectivism in labor relations. Thus, positive involvement at work contributes to sharing attitudes, beliefs and norms and develops greater socially positive behavior in the firm.

Our analysis suggests several academic and professional implications. On an academic level, it is important to highlight the empirical contrast carried out. The results obtained enable us to better understand the variables of the relationship examined and, with that, the initial conceptual framework. As well as the fact that the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment are ratified, emphasis should be placed upon the relations between perceived internal employability, ITQ and OCB, as a means of increasing the likelihood of key employee retention and collaborative behavior among professionals; aspects that are essential to the success of human resource management. The results obtained corroborate the initial approach outlined for this research, which posits that, in times of economic crisis, employability plays a key role by generating a positive impact on the key professionals in the organization and consequently increases the firm's chances of survival and success.

This research seems to indicate that internal employability does not have a direct effect on the intention to quit, whereas it does on job satisfaction and above all on organizational commitment, as intermediating variables. One of the fundamental contributions of the study lies in the conclusion that it is commitment (or more precisely emotional commitment), rather than satisfaction that affects the intention to quit. The link between employee and organization is thus fundamental, particularly during a recession; a link that should stem from a sense of belonging and emotional ties that arise on seeing their varying expectations and professional needs recognized.

Human resource managers should interpret the current difficult economic climate as an opportunity to invest in internal employability strategies. This development for employees, above all for those considered to be key for the organization, is extremely relevant for strengthening the psychological contract, as well as for maintaining organizational competitive advantages. It is essential for firms to develop the knowledge and skills of their employees in order to safeguard and exploit the value of those advantages.

There are four essential aspects to consider in terms of professional implications with regard to the effects of perceived internal employability and the intention to leave the firm. Firstly, it is likely that investment in employability policies made by the firm will lead to an increased perception of professional recognition among employees. A situation of this kind increases the indices of employee involvement, as well as satisfaction and trust, thus, strengthening the necessary psychological contract (Inkson & King, 2011; Sonnenberg, Oene & Paauwe, 2011).

Secondly, greater commitment to the organization implies more adaptive behavior among professionals, reducing the intention to quit, resulting in less voluntary turnover among workers and, in turn, strengthening loyalty. This factor is extremely important for the organization with regard to professionals considered to be valuable, as key employee retention is maintained and/or levels of competitiveness in the firm are increased.

Greater organizational commitment and increased involvement among professionals also avoids a certain amount of organizational costs, and helps to maintain or increase levels of efficiency and effectiveness, thereby improving the final quality of goods and services and customer care.

Fourth, as employees become less predisposed to quit, organizational citizenship behavior is enhanced, and with it, the effectiveness and efficiency of labor relations, while communication channels through feedback also improve. This aspect creates greater recognition of different organizational needs.

It is also important to address the main limitations of the study with a view to reflecting on the possible alternatives for improvement in the future. One of the clearest limitations involves not including perceived external employability among employees as a construct. This variable could have an impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment and, consequently, on the intention to quit the firm. We interpret that the possibility of an employee changing jobs to a similar or different type of firm clearly influences the commitment shown, and therefore affects personnel retention. Therefore, the analysis of perceived external employability is suggested as a study objective for future research.

Another limitation is the size of the sample used, which could be broader. The geographical area chosen is a specific one, with very particular characteristics, thus, hindering to an extent the generalization of results. Consequently, this study could be extended to include a greater geographical area, bearing in mind its influence on the economic and institutional context.

Finally, in terms of other possible future lines of research, we would suggest three possible avenues for further investigation. Firstly, researchers should consider carrying out a similar study during times of economic wellbeing and growth, with a view to comparing the evolution of the results and the conclusions in the two periods. Secondly, it is important to consider the study and direct impacts that job satisfaction and organizational commitment have on organizational citizenship behavior, incorporating new and necessary conclusions on the current organizational climate. Lastly, there is the possibility of including new variables in the empirical model for contrast, with a view to widening and enriching the different cause-effect relations proposed. Some examples of variables that might equally function as determinants of internal employability (internal and/or external) are those related to gender, age, professional category, previous experience in the same job and/or a similar firm, professional recognition and training policies, among other constructs.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Out of the following five statements, please indicate the option you deem to be most appropriate on a scale from 1 to 5, where:

1 = the least favorable option, or the lowest level of agreement

5 = the most favorable option or highest level of agreement

Employability	Very low 1	Low 2	Moderate 3	High 4	Very high 5
a) Compared to our closest competitors, I feel that there are better chances for internal promotion in my firm.					
b) Training plans at my organization cater for the future needs of the firm.					
c) I am willing to change the tasks I carry out in my job if the firm needs me to fulfill different functions					
d) I am capable of carrying out different activities at work, and/or of changing jobs within the firm because I consider it important for my professional development.					
e) When there are changes in the firm, I would prefer to stay in my department with my current co-workers.					
f) The firm possesses mechanisms for internal promotion.					
g) I consider that I have real options for internal promotion in my organization					
h) I am willing to work for another firm.					
i) If the firm offers me the chance of new employment at a different workplace/location (but within the same organization) I would accept the offer.					
j) The firm offers real options for changing workplace and/or geographical location.					

Satisfaction	Very low 1	Low 2	Moderate 3	High 4	Very high 5
a) I receive positive recognition for my professional work when it is of high quality.					
b) I receive guidance and suggestions for improvement when my professional work is not efficient enough.					
c) I am satisfied with the progress I have made in achieving my professional goals.					
d) My current position caters for my professional expectations.					
e) I consider my current job to be a stepping Stone in my professional career but it is not my ideal job.					
f) I work under a great deal of stress.					
g) If I had a different job, my welfare and/or health would probably improve.					
h) The way things are done in my organization annoys/irritates me.					
i) I have a great deal of stability in my current job.					
j) My salary positively reflects how much I am valued in my work.					
k) My salary corresponds to the level of responsibility and demands of my job.					
l) The firm recognizes my work through benefits such as incentives, pension plans, insurance, medical assistance, grants, etc.					

Commitment	Very low 1	Low 2	Moderate 3	High 4	Very high 5
a) I am willing to make a greater effort than expected in order to contribute to the success of my organization.					
b) When I talk to people, I defend my organization as a great place to work.					
c) I would do any job within this organization.					
d) I feel that my personal values fit with those of the organization.					
e) I do not feel emotionally attached to the organization.					
f) This firm means a lot to me personally.					
g) I would have feelings of guilt if I were to leave the organization now.					
h) I would not leave this firm now because I feel I have personal obligations to the people that work there.					
i) I feel that if I were to receive a better job offer that it would not be right to leave my current firm.					
j) At the current time, staying with the organization is more of a question of need than a desire or will.					
k) I stay with this organization because I feel that I would not easily find an opportunity with another firm.					
l) I continue to work for this organization because if I left, I would have to make greater personal sacrifices.					

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)	Very low 1	Low 2	Moderate 3	High 4	Very high 5
a) The firm establishes accessible permanent information channels with all its employees.					
b) At work, I express my opinions honestly, even when others may disagree.					
c) At times I motivate others to express their opinions and ideas.					
d) I defend the organization when other employees criticize it.					
e) I feel free to communicate my opinions honestly and openly to my superiors.					
f) I trust my superior(s)					
g) I am free to express my disconformity with the opinions of my superiors.					
h) I am willing to help my co-workers to resolve work-related problems.					
i) The members of my work group get on well with one another.					
j) There is great team spirit at work.					
k) I go to voluntary meetings because I consider them important.					
l) I carry out extra and/or complementary tasks out of my own free will for my firm.					
m) The people in my organization are concerned about the welfare of others.					

Intention to quit the firm (ITQ)	Very low 1	Low 2	Moderate 3	High 4	Very high 5
a) I intend to work at my current firm for as long as possible.					
b) I often think about leaving my current firm.					
c) I may look for a new job within the next year.					