

Original article

TEAM MEMBER VOLUNTARY TURNOVER, INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBERS AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: The study investigated the scenario of voluntary employee turnover in the halfway through project work and the introduction of new members to preplace those who had left. The respondents of the study were team members who remained in respective projects for the entire duration in Sri Lanka. The study context is such that employees were requested to lodge their intentions to resign at least one-month prior to the actual date of resignation. It was found that the contribution of leaving team members until the actual date of resignation is limited and it had significant effect on project performance; remaining team members' ability to manage information transfer in view of leaving members and the contribution of new members who were hired in place of resigned members also had significant effects on project performance.

Keywords: projects, teams, team member change, voluntary employee turnover.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the key components of projects is people; projects are composed of individuals who come together from different functional areas to share their expertise to achieve project outcomes or performance. More understanding about expertise of project team members and process variables such as information transfer between team members are important when managing project teams. The context of the present study is software development projects. In software development projects, the most critical resource is knowledge, and mere presence of expertise on a team is insufficient to achieve project outcomes; expertise should be managed and coordinated to achieve its full potential. Despite the importance of people, the literature lacks explanations of how team member voluntary turnover and new team member introductions in the halfway through software development projects influence delivering project outcomes.

By drawing a sample of team members from software development projects, who remained in the respective projects from the beginning to the end, the study investigated their perceptions of voluntary turnover of team members in the halfway through project work and the introduction of new members to preplace those who had left. The specific objectives of the study were to investigate 1) the contribution of leaving team members until the date of resignation, 2) remaining team members' ability to manage information transfer in view of leaving members, 3) the contribution of new members who were hired in place of resigned members, and 4) whether all these have any effect on project performance.

The study intends to make contributions to both theory and practice. First, remaining team members' perceptions show the ability of teams to respond to changes in team composition and become flexible in its personnel, which are very much critical to quality, cost, and the delivery of results within

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given time limits. Second, employees resigning from their workplaces are frequent. On the one hand, the leaving team member could hoard or offer incomplete transfer of knowledge (Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2001). On the other hand, when competing goals and conflicts exist within a team, the leaving member may behave uncooperatively preventing others from achieving project's common goal suggesting that one's individual success comes at the expense of the common goal (Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2013). Hence, investigations on how team member resignation and the introduction of a new team member in place of the leaving team member could impact project outcomes are important. In this respect, the present study is novel, and provides valuable information for decision-making and scope for further studies on this important area. Third, the rate at which firms learn depend on expertise of individual workers, their ability to leverage knowledge accumulated by others, and their capacity for coordination (see Reagans et al., 2005). When team members leave in the halfway through project work and new members are introduced in place of leaving members, the ability of the remaining team members for information transfer is very much important for project performance. Therefore, the findings of the study will provide new understanding on how these events may influence teamwork and project performance.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Project performance

The performance of a project can be viewed from the perspective of operational performance such as meeting time schedules, budget, and quality objectives (Verner et al., 2014), which are very common and popular criteria in the context of projects. These operational performance criteria include both process and product perspectives of performance. The efficiency of process-related criteria of software development includes time schedule and budget of the project whereas the effectiveness of product-related criteria includes the quality of the product (Faraj & Sproull, 2000).

From another perspective, project performance can be evaluated using objective and subjective

measures. Objective measures include output quality measured using the number of defects, resource consumption, cost variance, and schedule variance whereas subjective measures include user satisfaction, satisfaction with teamwork experience and perceived output quality collected from different stakeholders involved in the project (Shaukat et al., 2022; Verner et al., 2014). As a stakeholder group, team member ratings as subjective measures can be collected for many areas of software development project performance including satisfaction with teamwork, product quality and adherence to time and budget.

2.2. Team member change in projects

Team member changes occur when an existing team member leaves the team, or a new member joins the team (Lewis et al., 2007). Existing team members may change due to voluntary turnover or due to involuntary reasons such as promotion or reassignment. The present study was conducted in the context of voluntary turnover of team members and the introduction of new members in place of those who resigned. Organizations could find difficulties to maintain a clear and transferable role structure and expertise, and new members could be introduced considering their broad competencies rather than narrow expertise. In the present study, the replaced newcomer had knowledge and skills, in broad, relevant to the completion of the project and to perform the role of the leaving member. Still, changes to the composition of teams' knowledge and social relationships between team members undoubtedly affects the functioning of teams and project performance.

2.2.1. Contribution of leaving team members until the date of resignation

The degree of interdependence among team members determines the degree of cooperative or competitive interactions that they maintain in the project (Alblas, 2022; Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2013). The interdependencies related to project completion can be of several forms (see Johnson & Johnson, 2006). In addition, project team members can be interdependent with each other for friendship and sense of identity (Johnson & Johnson,

2006). In cooperative team contexts, members are more likely to have an increased shared understanding among each other and less reserved to share their expertise with compared to competitive contexts (Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2013). Further, if team members perceive limited payoffs by sharing their valuable knowledge in competing situations, they tend to hoard or offer incomplete sharing of knowledge (Jarvenpaa & Staples, 2001; Tsai & Cheng, 2012). Further, if the project team is experiencing competing goals between the leaving member and the remaining members, the leaving member could behave uncooperatively, preventing the team achieving project outcomes (Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2013). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis-1: *Perceptions of remaining team members on adequate contribution of leaving team member (until the date of resignation) positively relates to project performance*

2.2.2. Remaining team members' ability to manage information transfer

Individuals bring specialized knowledge/skills or expertise to perform team tasks. Further, while working in a team, each team member accumulates knowledge about team tasks and different roles of the project (Reagans et al., 2005). Therefore, knowledge resources and knowledge/skill dependencies within a team should be managed effectively for members to recognize where these are located (Faraj & Sproull, 2000; Šmite et al., 2017). In a situation of a team member change, on the one hand, the ability of the remaining members to successfully manage knowledge resources that the leaving member had brought to the team is important (Summers et al., 2012). On the other hand, if a new member is introduced in place of the leaving member, the ability of remaining members to disseminate task-relevant information to the new member is also utmost important to ease the transition (Summers et al., 2012). Failures to manage information transfer within a team hinders the successful achievement of project outcomes. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis-2: *Perceptions of remaining team members on their ability for knowledge*

transfer positively relates to project performance

2.2.3. Contribution of new members who are hired in place of resigned member

Voluntary turnover of team members may lead to new members being selected into project teams. If a newcomer felt that the organization is fair in assigning him/her to an ongoing project, such member may display more adaptive behaviors maintaining fairness in his/her relationships with remaining team members of the project (see Tsai & Cheng, 2012). Further, when new members are aware of interdependencies on each other for the completion of mutual project tasks and project outcomes (rewards), they may depict more cooperative interactions with the remaining team members (see Ghobadi, 2015; Johnson & Johnson, 2006). However, the literature suggests that the influence of new team members on the functioning of teams could be either positive or negative (Choi & Thompson, 2005). Regarding positive effects, the new team member may replace an ineffective team member and could increase creative potential of the team (Choi & Thompson, 2005), task focus (Choi & Thompson, 2005), diversity (Lewis et al., 2007), the appropriateness of knowledge stock (Kane et al., 2005), and the effectiveness of routines/internal processes (Kane et al., 2005) of the team. Regarding negative effects, the introduction of a new team member may increase time spent in socialization process (Lewis et al., 2007) and disrupt established routines of the team (Lewis et al., 2007). However, when new team members are properly socialized to the organization and to the team, the perceived risk from newcomers for the contribution may become minimum and they may engage in proactive behaviors (see Chou & Chang, 2016). Further, newcomers with motives such as signaling competence to the team and intellectual stimulation may depict more cooperative interactions and adaptive behaviors (see Ghobadi, 2015). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

Hypothesis-3: *Perceptions of remaining team members on adequate contribution of the new team member positively relates to project performance*

3. METHOD

3.1. Population, sample, and method of data collection

The study was conducted in a software development firm that expressed the interest to participate in the investigation. The firm allowed access to six outsourced software development projects involving most recently completed mobile and web applications for commercial clients. The firm's policy was such that any employee who intends to resign from the firm should officially inform at least one month prior to the date of resignation. New members were introduced to teams once the actual resignation occurs. Each project experienced voluntary turnover of one team member and the introduction of a team member to replace the resigned member on a permanent basis until the project was completed. It is also observed that newcomers were introduced considering their broad competencies for the completion of the project and to perform the role of the leaving member. All the team members were in full-time employment, and they were housed at the physical location of the business operation in Sri Lanka. They had face-to-face interactions when needed in the development process.

The respondents of the study were team members who remained in respective project teams for the entire duration of the projects. This excluded team members who resigned from the firm (voluntary resignation) and who were introduced in place of the resigned members in the middle of the respective project. Eighty-six team members fulfilled these selection criteria. It was decided to consider the entire study population as the sample of the study (total population sampling). The participants were informed the objectives of the study; their participation was voluntary, and responses were anonymous. The link for web-based survey questionnaire was emailed to the participants. They completed the survey considering their most recently completed software development project. A total of 71 valid responses were returned. Table 1 shows the characteristics of respondents.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	
Job position (%):	
Software engineer	52.1
Business analyst	7.0
Quality assurance engineer	19.7
User interface engineer	5.6
Other	15.5
Highest level of education (%):	
Diploma	5.6
Bachelors'	69.0
Postgraduate	25.4
Tenure (%):	
Less than 1 year	13.5
Between 1-2 years	28.3
Between 2-5 years	35.2
More than 5 years	23.0
Age:	
Mean	29.82
Minimum	23.00
Maximum	38.00
Std. Deviation	2.66

3.2. Measures

Project performance was measured with eight items developed for the study. Subjective process measures in terms of product quality, adherence to time schedules, and adherence to given budget were used. The items are shown in Table 2. The remaining team members' perception of the contribution of the leaving team member until the date of resignation was measured with four items developed for the study. The items are shown in Table 3. The remaining members' ability to manage the information transfer in view of the leaving team member was measured with four items developed for the study. The items are shown in Table 4. The remaining team members' perception of the contribution of new members who were hired in place of resigned members was measured with three items developed for the study. The items are shown in Table 5. All the measures were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.3. Methods of data analysis

Data were tested for internal consistency reliability, factor structure, convergent validity, discriminant validity and construct reliability (CR). Convergent validity was measured by average variance extracted

(AVE), and discriminant validity was measured by the square root of AVE. Multiple regression analysis was used to identify associations between independent variables and the dependent variable. Beta coefficient and the adjusted coefficient of determination were used to interpret the results of regression analysis.

4. FINDINGS

The main four measures of the study were subjected to factor analysis. For each measure,

factor analysis yielded single factors. The results are shown in Tables 2 to 5. Correlations between variables are provided in Table 6 together with the values of means and standard deviations. It is evident that the contribution of leaving member is minimum (mean = 2.33, on a five-point Likert scale). Still, the contribution of leaving member and project performance are positively related suggesting that if the contribution increases in turn project performance increases (vice versa).

Table 2: Project performance

Item	Factor Loading
Project deliverables are completed on time	.859
Team completed project deliverables on agreed time regardless of team member changes occurred during the project	.717
Project delivered the software with expected quality	.725
User acceptance testing ensured that the software has met the expected quality	.777
Team maintained proper documentation on testing process to ensure the quality of the software	.746
Team met the expected quality of the software regardless of team member changes occurred during the project	.853
Project completed within the budget	.761
Team completed project within budget regardless of team member changes occurred during the project	.827
Eigenvalue	2.529
% of Variance	63.219
Cronbach's Alpha	.798
AVE	.616
CR	.927

Table 3: Contribution of the leaving team member until the date of resignation

Item	Factor Loading
Team member who has given resignation did not take many day-offs.	.812
Team member who has given resignation helped to transfer the relevant knowledge to the remaining members	.797
Team member who has given resignation did not perform job tasks just for the sake of doing	.796
Team member who has given resignation maintained appreciable relationships with the remaining members till the date of resignation	.806
Eigenvalue	1.269
% of Variance	63.461
Cronbach's Alpha	.753
AVE	.644
CR	.879

Table 4: Remaining members’ ability to manage information transfer

Item	Factor Loading
When the leaving team member transfers knowledge, I can understand it	.797
I can transfer the knowledge that I gained from the leaving team member to the new team member	.765
The remaining team members helped each other to overcome knowledge transfer deficiencies	.724
I can perform job tasks as expected irrespective of one member is leaving the team	.755
Eigenvalue	2.315
% of Variance	57.875
Cronbach's Alpha	.754
AVE	.579
CR	.846

Table 5: Contribution of new members who were hired in place of resigned members

Item	Factor Loading
New team member stimulated the remaining team members	.767
New team member adapted to project tasks as quickly as possible	.873
I am satisfied with new team member’s adaptation to the on-going project	.842
Eigenvalue	2.061
% of Variance	68.689
Cronbach's Alpha	.765
AVE	.686
CR	.868

Table 6: Correlations

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4
1 Contribution of the leaving team member	2.33	.77	.80			
2 Remaining members’ ability to manage the information transfer	3.72	.68	.139*	.76		
3 Contribution of new member	3.53	.67	.154*	.329**	.83	
4 Project performance	3.92	.61	.300*	.496**	.323**	.78

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$; square root of AVE in diagonal entries

Regression results shown in Table 7 reveal that project performance significantly positively related to contribution of leaving team member, remaining members’ ability to manage the information transfer, and contribution of newcomer. Specifically, beta coefficient of .161 ($p < 0.05$) reveals that contribution of leaving team member significantly positively related to project performance, supporting H1. Beta coefficient of 0.391 ($p < 0.01$) reveals that remaining

members’ ability to manage information transfer significantly positively related to project performance. This supports H2. As predicted in H3, beta coefficient of 0.173 ($p < 0.05$) reveals that contribution of newcomer significantly positively related to project performance. Regression coefficient of 0.261 ($p < 0.001$) suggests that all three variables account for 26% of variation of project performance.

Table 7: Summary of regression analysis

Variable	Project performance	
	β	$R^2(\text{Adj.})$
Contribution of the leaving team member	.161*	.261***
Remaining members’ ability to manage the information transfer	.391**	
Contribution of new member	.173*	

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The ability to respond to changes in personnel during project teams is of paramount importance to achieve project outcomes. The central question this paper addressed is the effect of voluntary turnover of team members in the halfway through the project and the introduction of new members to preplace those who had left on project performance. The findings revealed the extent to which cooperative behavior is prevalent as opposed to self-serving behavior. Specifically, whether team members who have given resignation depict cooperative behavior till the date of resignation and whether new members who were hired in place of resigned members depict cooperative behavior for the achievement of common goal - project outcomes. Leaving team members and newcomers can make choices about the extent to which they contribute for the joint production of given software. The findings revealed that the contribution of leaving team members until the date of resignation was considerably low (mean = 2.33, on a five-point Likert scale), and it had significant effect on project performance. Further, the findings revealed that the contribution of new members who were hired in place of resigned members seems adequate (mean = 3.53, on a five-point Likert scale) and it had significant effect on project performance. Furthermore, the ability of remaining members to manage information transfer suggests the extent to which the team can become flexible for changes in personnel within the team. The findings revealed the remaining team members had ability to manage the information transfer in view of the leaving member (mean = 3.72, on a five-point Likert scale), and it had significant effect on project performance.

5.1. Contribution of the findings for the existing literature

The study attempted to combine three main areas of interests. First, due to potential negative effects on productivity and employees' morale, the voluntary turnover of employees has long been of interest to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Second, workplaces have been experiencing widespread shift towards team-based work.

Third, work teams experiencing team member changes due to voluntary turnover is inevitable and prevalent. However, team member change not only occur due to voluntary turnover of employees but also due to replacement of employees in place of those who had voluntarily left. In this respect, the contribution of the newcomer to the existing team is also important in the achievement of project's common goal. The findings of present study help to advance extant literature along above mentioned three themes as described below.

First, the study investigated the remaining team members' perception of the contribution of leaving team members, until the actual date of resignation. Since a project team is a sub-group of the organization, resigned team members' low levels of identification with the organization may decrease team-oriented contributions for the achievement of project outcomes. It is also possible that resigning employees may not identify themselves in terms of similarities that exist as project team members since chances available for them to develop a history of working together over multiple projects is minimal. In this context, resigning team members' sensemaking process (see Rockmann & Northcraft, 2010) regarding project work, workplace/organization, and team members are very important. Individuals use expectations to decide whether to remain engaged in or disengage from their interpersonal relationships. The expectations shape perceptions of individuals, and they make judgements based on these, which ultimately directs their behavior. Therefore, it is possible to argue that resigning team members contribution to project work from the date of lodging the resignation and until the actual date of resignation may depend on how far their expectations are met within the employing organization. The findings imply that the individual pursuit of self-interest can have detrimental effect on project performance.

Second, organizations can encourage employee contributions for task performance using the tactics of planned behavior. However, we have not come across previous studies revealing organizations implementing incentive schemes targeting resigned employees for their contributions until the actual date of resignation. Further, employees

who lodged their resignations may not perceive future reciprocal benefits for their contributions. In contrast, newcomers could perceive reciprocal benefits for their contributions. Furthermore, it is important to consider whether perceived reputation enhancement could have any value for the voluntarily resigned employees. When employees do not develop a history of working together, it is unlikely for the resigned employees to find enjoyment by helping other team members. In addition, if voluntary employee turnover is a result of unjustifiable or unfair organizational practices, it may influence contributions of leaving members until the date of resignation. The findings led us to think that voluntarily resigned employees may wish organizations to see them as less substitutable.

Third, the study investigated remaining team members' ability to manage information transfer in view of the leaving member. When building on the strategic management literature, dynamic capabilities are identified as capabilities for continuous integration, reconfiguration, and renewal of resources and to effectively respond to environmental changes. Employees' voluntary turnover and the introduction of new employees are changes in the internal organization environment that influence flexibility of project teams. A project team's ability to anticipate difficulties due to team member changes in the middle of project work make them prepare for such changes. In this regard, teams can take steps such as systemic learning and share experiences and knowledge to manage potential team member changes. Further, project teams can adopt coordination mechanisms and routines to develop ability to react to/cope with team member changes during project work. The findings revealed that remaining team members' ability to manage the information transfer had significant positive effect on project performance. Through effective information transfer, team members could enhance shared knowledge of team members even though team member changes occur halfway through project work.

Fourth, the study investigated the contribution of newcomers who were hired in place of resigned employees. The findings revealed that

the contribution of newcomers who were hired in place of resigned employees had significant positive effect on project performance. If newcomers possess knowledge and skills to perform project tasks, if they are aware of interdependencies on each other for project tasks and outcomes such as rewards as well as if they have motives, such as demonstrating competence to the team, they may depict more cooperative interactions and interpersonal adaptability to achieve project goals by working with the remaining team members.

5.2. Implications of the findings for practice

First, turnover of team members and their limited contributions until the date of actual resignation cause disruption, and influence project outcomes. It may be possible for organizations to replace these resigned employees with competent personnel. Being software development firms, having technological infrastructure alone seems not guarantee the contribution of leaving employees. Despite efforts of organizations for effective information transfer, leaving employees tend to hoard knowledge or depict self-serving behaviors limiting their contributions for the achievement of common project goals. Although the organization's policy of one-month notice for voluntary resignations intended a smooth transfer of project work, the findings suggest that the contribution of leaving team members after giving resignation is limited. The findings may encourage organizations to explore mechanisms to enhance cooperative behavior as opposed to self-serving behavior from leaving team members until the actual date of resignation.

Second, previous studies suggest that team member satisfaction is tied to unmet expectations (see Rockmann & Northcraft, 2010), and satisfaction may decrease when team members feel frustrated. On the one hand, if the remaining team members feel frustrated about the contribution of leaving team members, they may become less satisfied with their jobs. On the other hand, the firm introduces newcomers on a permanent basis until the completion of each on-going project. This can reduce remaining members' perceptions towards the replacement as an

outgroup member. However, if newcomers fail to contribute for project work, the remaining team members may feel frustrated, and may become less satisfied with their jobs. Therefore, organizations should understand the feelings of remaining team members, and pay more attention to managing perceptions of remaining team members during project work.

Third, the findings suggest that remaining team members' ability for information transfer had significant effect on project performance. Hence, organizations should develop practices to equip employees with appropriate knowledge and skills and applications of these for effective information transfer considering probable occurrences of team member changes during projects. Further, organizations should encourage practices among team members to understand where knowledge is distributed among them, which would prepare them to perform better in integrative and coordinative functions when team member changes occur during projects. In this regard, the term social knowledge is referred to knowledge shared by team members as opposed to knowledge possessed by individuals. Organizations could develop institutional practices and technological infrastructure for the management of expertise to enhance social knowledge of the teams.

Fourth, when a newcomer is introduced on a permanent basis until the completion of an ongoing project, it is less likely for remaining team members to identify him/her as an outgroup member. This may increase newcomers' chances to integrate into the team. Since project work is getting popular worldwide and employee mobility across organizations is increasing, the socialization of newcomers should be given utmost importance in project teams to reduce any process losses associated with newcomer introductions to ongoing projects.

6. CONCLUSION

Projects teams that are successful in managing their resources including expertise known to perform better. Due to the increased mobility of personnel across organizations, the voluntary turnover of employees and the introduction of new employees to replace the

resigned employees are inevitable and common occurrences in teams. Such team member changes make substantial impact on project outcomes. The represent study investigated team member changes in terms of voluntary team member turnover and the introduction of new members to replace the resigned members on project performance. It was found that the contribution of leaving team members until the date of resignation is limited and had significant effect on project performance; remaining team members' ability to manage information transfer in view of the leaving member and the contribution of newcomers also had significant effects on project performance.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The respondents for the study were employees of software development teams, and the size of sample is small. Further, the study did not make any distinction between nature of tasks or team roles performed by leaving team members. Furthermore, the study evaluated project performance using popular criteria of adherence to budget, timeline, and quality. Future research could broaden the project performance evaluation criteria and could collect data using objective as well as subjective measures. Regarding areas for future research, the findings on the contribution of leaving team member open new areas for research, such as leaving members' interpretations of their contributions and reasons behind their interpretations. In addition, past studies such as Choi and Thompson (2005) suggest that newcomers may have greater influence on remaining team members. Hence, future research could incorporate these areas of interest.

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