

# TURNOVER AND JOB EMBEDDEDNESS IN TIJUANA MEXICO

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper we analyze the relationship between family and community links and future intentions to quit from employees at the export processing zone (EPZ) in Tijuana, Mexico. With survey data gathered in an organization belonging to a Tijuana EPZ, we applied the theory of embeddedness to identify the causes behind turnover. A questionnaire with 125 items using a 4-points Likert scale was developed to assess job embeddedness, family embeddedness, satisfaction with benefits, and affective commitment and correlated the potential causes with employee's future intentions to stay or leave the organization. One hundred employees completed surveys. Statistical analyses of their survey data revealed strong relationships between certain predictor variables and intentions to stay.*

**JEL:** M12

**KEYWORDS:** job turnover, embeddedness, EPZ, job satisfaction, affective commitment

## INTRODUCTION

While an extensive literature research has been developed about turnover in the last fifty years since export processing began in northern Mexico, very little research has addressed how job embeddedness -or forces inducing employees to stay- affect the quit propensity of manufacturing employees in export processing zones (EPZ). Traditional turnover research in Mexican EPZs and elsewhere (e.g. America) has focused on job attitudes and unemployment rates, finding that job dissatisfaction and/or job opportunities in other companies often induce employees to quit. Yet this preoccupation with the psychology of leaving fails to explain the psychology of staying because why employees quit can be quite different from why they stay in a job (Mitchell & Lee, 2001). To address this oversight, Mitchell and Lee (2001) recently proposed "job embeddedness", which represent forces inducing employees to stay -namely, (a) fit to the job and community; b) links (ties to people inside and outside the organization); and (c) sacrifice (what job or community benefits employees would lose if they leave)- Mitchell and Lee (2001) demonstrated that job embeddedness can improve turnover predictions beyond that of traditional determinants of turnover (i.e., job attitudes, employment opportunities). Our study tests whether job embeddedness theory can explain why Mexicans staying in EPZ factories as most investigations of this model have been carried out in the United States, raising doubts about its generalizability. For greater validity, we also extend this model to include more culturally specific determinants that can affect staying and consider how they can improve this model. With survey data gathered in a factory from Tijuana EPZ, we thus seek to determine whether an extended theory of job embeddedness can explain employee quit propensity.

The paper begins with a documentary research related to turnover studies and findings. Next, we analyzed the data collected using the questionnaire developed to be applied in Mexico with the purpose of finding the relationship of the variables of the model. Tijuana is a dynamic EPZ area along the Mexican Border

that has contributed to employment growth, economic resources and knowledge spillovers since 1960. EPZs in Mexico originated as part of the Mexican government's 1965 Border Industrialization Program. Most EPZs in Tijuana are foreign-owned, controlled or subcontracted manufacturing plants that process or assemble imported components for export. EPZs inputs are generally duty-free imported and countries like the U.S. only tax the value-added portion. EPZs account for more than 60% of Mexico's exports. The area of Tijuana, Mexico employs roughly 120,000 workers in over 3,000 off shore manufacturing companies. Approximately 58% of the jobs in Tijuana are from the EPZs. Tijuana is also geographically desirable to foreign investors as it is conveniently located directly on the U.S. Mexican Border allowing for inexpensive shipment of assembled products directly into U.S. twin plants.

Tijuana is the "TV manufacturing capital of the world." EPZ companies produce more than 12 million television sets each year. Tijuana's largest employers, for example, are Sony and Sanyo. Also, other manufacturing plants not related to the electronics have chosen Tijuana as their center of production due to the geographical advantages described above. Because of such plentiful employment, Tijuana has drawn many migrants from other parts of Mexico. Thus, Carrillo and Santibañez (2001) found that less than twenty-three percent of the EPZ workers there were natives of Tijuana.

The main research objectives of this paper are: a) to describe the relationship between job embeddedness and future turnover intentions; b) to describe the relationship between family embeddedness and future turnover intentions; c) to describe the relationship between satisfaction with benefits and future turnover intentions and d) to describe the relationship between affective organizational commitment and future turnover intentions. We first review the literature on turnover (focusing on the Mexican EPZ industry) and job embeddedness. Second, it will describe data and methodology used in this research. Third, it will describe the results and findings using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations. Lastly, we will make some concluding comments about the main findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on motivational theories of worker turnover in the EPZs is scarce. Management scholars have rarely sought to understand why EPZ workers quit factory jobs. Rather, most theories about why and how employees quit have been developed and validated in the U.S. Because of cultural and economic differences between the U.S. and EPZ areas in developing countries, U.S. based models may not generalize to EPZ workers. Consequently, understanding why EPZ workers quit factory employment is limited, if not biased given the application of turnover models derived from other cultural contexts.

Arrijoja (1993), partially proved that these western-based models could be applied in EPZ countries although his research was very limited and almost 20 years have passed since he validated his hypothesis. Other researchers such as Pena (2000) argued that conditions in the maquila industry were different, which allowed the emergence of new hypothesis that refuted the old ones. She also stated that up to the middle of the sixties, research examined the bivariate relationship between job satisfaction and turnover.

English, Williams & Ibarreche (1989) found that Mexican workers perceive personal and working conditions in a very different way than American workers. Also, they found a strong relationship between personality variables and job continuation. (Carrillo- Santibañez 2001). Rodriguez (1988) found that turnover didn't affect productivity of these companies due to the abundant labor available searching for jobs. Carrillo and Santibañez (2001) emphasized the need of managing high turnover in the maquiladora sector, because such turnover can be costly and hamper production. For them, turnover was practically impossible to lower without affecting the location of the plants and the manufacturing process.

Ahr & Ahr (2000) mentioned that since March & Simon (1958) theory, researchers have focused in finding out how jobs availability and job dissatisfaction interact to result in turnover behavior. They stated that under certain circumstances, the availability of job opportunities may stimulate job dissatisfaction in workers by creating expectations that are not met in the present job. According to Kacmar and associates, employee perceptions of organizational practices are affected by favoritism, suppression of organizational competition and manipulation of internal policies. In the maquila industry, some employees stay in the organization due to loyalty to the company (normative commitment), while others stay due to the fact that leaving their job would incur considerable costs to them (e.g., lost job benefits). Those employees that show attitudes and habits desired by managers tend to stay because they want to (affective commitment).

In the maquila industry, centralization is high because top executives are foreigners who rarely delegate or share decision-making authority with local Mexicans (Kacmar et.al 1999). According to them, the perception of the organizational practices is affected by activities such as favoritism, suppression of organization competition and manipulation of internal policies. In the maquila industry workers do not perceive organizational policies as just because supervisors they do not behave respectfully toward workers and do not fairly allocate opportunities and remuneration to workers.

Lack of knowledge of the Mexican culture, its employment relationships, laws, and the prevailing atmosphere of business could lead to poor attrition management in the maquila industry. High maquila turnover, which can exceed 100% can offset the advantages of the low-cost maquila labor because turnover entails additional expenses in recruitment, selection and training, as well as productivity losses when inexperienced new hires replacing exiting workers (Cascio 1991).

Going beyond previous research on the maquila industry, our study considers job embeddedness to more fully explain why maquila workers stay or leave. A growing research stream concludes that job embeddedness explains additional variance in turnover beyond that of standard turnover antecedents (e.g., job attitudes, job opportunities) (Mitchel and Lee, 2001). Hom et al (2009) showed that job embeddedness can also explain why Chinese managers stay. Even so, Ramesh & Gelfand (2010) found this theory was insufficient for understanding attrition in collectivist cultures. They demonstrated that “family embeddedness”—comprising family opinions about an incumbent’s employment in a firm, family benefits from incumbent’s employment, and ties between family and incumbent’s colleagues—can explain additional variance in turnover beyond that of job embeddedness. Customizing job embeddedness theory for collectivist cultures is increasingly essential as turnover is a crucial challenge for manufacturers in export processing zones EPZ (Sargent & Matthews, 2008) in developing typically collectivist countries. To illustrate, factory turnover can amount to 31% in China (Chiu, Luk, & Tang, 2002) and exceed 100% in Mexico (Maertz, Campion, & Stevens, 2003).

Understanding what embeds the Mexican EPZ workforce is important as they represent a vital source of low-cost factory labor (hired directly or indirectly) for U.S. transnationals (Gereffi, 2009). Even Chinese manufacturers may also become concerned about turnover in Mexico as they increasingly invest there to circumvent NAFTA tariffs, hire even less costlier Mexican labor, and access Latin American markets (Liu & Chenyin, 2011).

Apart from the forces for staying highlighted in embeddedness theories, we consider forces driving EPZ employees to quit, such as job dissatisfaction or shocks—critical events at work (or outside work) prompting incumbents to think about quitting (Lee & Mitchel, 1994) EPZ workers are especially prone to varied shocks noted by Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model. According to EPZ research, they quit due to a) personal (path 1) shocks (invoking pre-existing plans to quit), such as returning home to care for family members, b) negative workplace (path 2) shocks, such as hazardous working conditions or unpaid

wages, and job-offer (path 3) shocks, such as being recruited away by former co-workers or other plants (Johnson, 2004; Maertz et al., 2003; West, 2004). By simultaneously considering both forces to stay and to leave, we can estimate whether –and how strongly- embeddedness forces can help retain maquila workers who are exposed to much stronger forces to leave.

While exposed to greater forces that "push" (path 2 shocks) or pull" (path 1 shocks) them away from the factory job, EPZ workers however lack certain "pull" forces keeping them in jobs (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Because many Mexican and Chinese EPZ workers emigrated from the interior countryside for work, they are rarely embedded in the EPZ community (Garcia & Tovar, 2007). To illustrate, Mexican migrants may live in substandard housing or lack ties to local border residents and thus would not find it costly (in terms of foregone community amenities) if they leave border communities. They also may have few--if any--family members residing nearby and even may have left children in their villages to be reared by grandparents. Because EPZ workers encounter more shocks and are weakly embedded in communities in which they work (lacking community links and sacrifice; Mitchell & Lee, 2001), it is not surprisingly that this workforce exhibits exorbitant turnover. In sum, evaluating "attenuation" capacity of our extended model to deflect or mute shocks' effects advances previous research by probing this capacity with EPZ workers, representing both a powerful as well as an international test.

The International Extended Job Embeddedness Model specify four antecedents of Factory turnover. For this model, job embeddedness includes job fit, job links, job sacrifice, community fit, community links and community sacrifice as important dimensions.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire with 125 items using a 4 points Likert scale was developed to test the international extended job embeddedness model. Questions measuring variables such as attachment to the firm and community, satisfaction with benefits offered by the employer, Attitudes towards job and community, Family attitudes towards job, recent events causing the employee to think about leaving, benefits of returning home or emigrating to USA, cultural questions and personal data were used to correlate vs. employee future intentions to stay or leave the organization. The questionnaire items and corresponding variables are described in Table 1.

As noticed in Table 1, the new adapted model contains 16 subscales. Each subscale groups a number of items in the questionnaire. Upon securing firm permission, we directly administered the survey to 100 workers when their work shifts ended. The purpose was to assure survey confidentiality as well as address respondent questions. After this first survey application, we tested the predictive validity of the model with logistic regression and cultural moderation with hierarchical moderated (logistic) regression.

The sample characteristics are described in Table 2. Most of the employees surveyed are young, 52% of them are less than 30 years old, 52% are male, 48% are married, 80% have a low level of education, where 40% only have elementary school and 40% secondary school. About seniority, 20% are new employees of 1 year or less, 28% have between 1 and 2 years of seniority, 12% have between 2 and 3 years and 40% have been working for the company for more than 3 years.

As shown in Table 2, Panel A, the level of education was divided between elementary school and secondary school. Only 20% of the sample had a high school diploma or more. We noticed that some employees don't know how to read and write, even though they mentioned their level of education as elementary school. As shown in Table 2, Panel B, the seniority level was mainly of more than 3 years, only 20% is a new employee of less than one year. And 40% has been working in the company for more than 3 years. That represents a high percentage of employees that decided to stay in the company for such

a period of time. As shown in Table 2, Panel C, the main age of the employees is between 20 to 30 years old, employees are really young and only 20% are older than 40 years. Young employees prefer to work in the outsourcing companies for their easiness to be hired and to learn the processes. As shown in Table 2, Panel D, the main gender are males due to the hard labor and harsh conditions of the factory where women only detail and do final jobs, even though in this sample both male and female are almost equal.

Table 1: Operational Description of International Extended Job Embeddedness Model

Subscales	Item
Workplace And External Shocks	ES1-2
Family Embeddedness	FE1-10
Job Embeddedness	JE1-23
Satisfaction With Benefits	SB1-18
Pay Adequacy	PA1-4
Global Job Embeddedness	GJE5-12
Job Satisfaction	JS13-15
Affective Organizational Commitment	AOC16-19
Perceived Job Prospects	PJP19-21
Supervisory Commitment	SC22-25
Team Commitment	TC26-29
Defecting Coworkers Or Supervisors	DCS30-31
Normative Pressures From Family To Stay Or Leave	NP11-13
Relocation Desirability From Tharenou And Caulfield Model On Expatriate Turnover	RD1-8
Measures O Hofstede Cultural Dimensions 1-6 = Power Distance 7-12 = Collectivism 13-17 = Uncertainty Avoidance	HCD1-17
Factory Retention	FR1-5

*This table provides a description of the International Extended Job Embeddedness Model. Source: Peter Hom, 2011*

The questionnaire was designed using two survey formats: (1) Likert-type scales ranging from 1, “strongly disagree” to 10 “strongly agree” and (2) demographic questions. Employees self-reported data on all variables with the exception of characteristics of the organization, for which human resources personnel provided data. The control variables used in this research were Organizational characteristics and employee profile were controlled as both have been found to correlate with turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). Gender was coded as “male” 1, and “female” 2.

The variables in the model were measured by individual perceptions and assessments as recorded on the questionnaire. The questionnaire included multiple items intended to measure the perception of the employee for the variables attachment to the firm and community, satisfaction with benefits offered by the employer, Attitudes towards job and community, Family attitudes towards job, recent events causing the employee to think about leaving, benefits of returning home or emigrating to USA, cultural questions and personal data were used to correlate vs. employee future intentions to stay or leave the organization. Most of these variables were based on previous measurement work by Hom and Garcia (2011). We designed 128 questions in a new questionnaire.

Table 2: Summary Statistics

<b>Panel A: Education Level</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Level of education</b>
40%	elementary school education
40%	secondary school education
20%	had high school or more
<b>Panel B: Seniority</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Level of seniority</b>
20%	One year or less
28%	between 1 and 2 years
12%	Between 2 and 3 years
40%	More than 3 years
<b>Panel C: Age</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Age</b>
52%	20-30 years old
28%	31-40 years old
20%	Older than 40
<b>Panel D: Gender</b>	
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Gender</b>
52%	Male
48%	Female

*This table provides summary statistics regarding education levels individuals in the sample. Source: self research.*

## RESULTS

We analyzed Pearson correlations. For the variable of future intentions to leave the job, we used the methods described by Hom, Shang and Garcia (2012) in their turnover research. Findings about demographics of the employees show that the group that presented high turnover represents 49.7% of the sample, and the low turnover group represents 41.7%, having 8.6% of non responders. Average seniority was 18 months in the job. Also, employees that stayed longer than 18 months in the job are older than 26 and younger than 35 years old. Married women represent most of the low turnover employees. On the other hand, 48% of the total employees sampled are foreigners who don't have family or community links in this city. And 47% of the total employees sampled are renting a small house temporarily. About the satisfaction with the benefits offered by the organization, we found that the average of the employees were satisfied. Still a great number was showing dissatisfaction, which could lead to turnover. Some of the results are shown on Table 3. As noticed in Table 3, most employees are satisfied with most of the benefits offered by the organization. Less than 16% are showing dissatisfaction with some of the benefits received. As noticed, The frequency of 16% mentions the yearly increases benefit as very dissatisfying for the employees surveyed.

Table 3: Satisfaction with the Benefits Offered by the Organization

<b>Benefit Description</b>	<b>Very Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Very Satisfied</b>
Christmas bonus	8%	20%	12%	52%	8%
Seniority bonus	12%	20%	32%	28%	8%
Punctuality bonus	4%	16%	8%	52%	20%
Yearly salary increases	16%	24%	28%	20%	12%

*This table shows satisfaction levels with benefits. Source: self research*

In Table 4 we show the Spearman Correlations to find the relationship of the variables included in this research. As shown in Table 4, correlations between family and community embeddedness and withdrawal cognitions are significant and inverse (-0.236) employees with no family and community links are the ones that leave the organization first. We found a significant inverse relationship between withdrawal cognitions and employee's affective commitment (-0.337). Also, Job satisfaction shows an inverse significant correlation with withdrawal cognitions of -0.390. Objectives are achieved with these findings.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The goal of this paper was to analyze if having family and community links keeps the employees from leaving their jobs at the export processing zone (EPZ) in Tijuana. Descriptive statistics show most sampled employees were young and with a low education levels. Many have no community links and are identified as floating population. Those employees belonging to the floating population show no affective commitment and are temporarily working while waiting the opportunity to “jump” to the other side of the border. Correlations demonstrate that a future intention to quit and family and community embeddedness are highly related. Affective commitment and future intention to quit are highly significant too.

The main findings of these paper were to realize that Mexico is a collectivist society. People respond to the norms of others to fulfill their need for social affiliation. Community embeddedness of fit and sacrifice reflect an individual’s preferences (i.e., self need of acceptance). Community links is related to future quit intentions. As noted, 48% of the employees sampled have no community links and have future intentions to migrate to USA. Job embeddedness theory does not fully capture the emotional intensity of links (which Holtom and colleagues, 2008 acknowledge).

Table 4 Pearson Correlations

Pearson CorrelationMatrix	Withdrawal Cognitions	Shocks	Family Embeddedness	Overall Job Embeddedness	Pay Adequacy	Job Satisfaction	Benefit Satisfaction	Organizational Commitment
Withdrawal Cognitions	1	0.363**	-0.280**	-0.236*	-0.269**	-0.390**	-0.192	-0.337**
Shocks	99	1	0.006	0.019	0.007	0.000	0.059	0.001
Family Embeddedness	98	98	1	0.078	0.018	0.011	0.492	0.005
Overall Job Embeddedness	96	96	96	1	0.254*	0.436**	0.291**	.391**
Pay Adequacy	98	99	96	99	1	0.345**	0.562**	.336**
Job Satisfaction	96	96	97	97	100	1	0.509**	.724**
Benefit Satisfaction	99	99	97	100	100	100	1	.472**
Organizational Commitment	99	99	97	100	100	100	99	100

This table shows the Pearson Correlation Analysis.

According to Hom, Shang and Garcia (2012) American-based models are so individualistic, assuming that people are motivated mostly by self-gain. We are finally recognizing social influences, though we continue to disparage them as “constraints” on self-fulfillment. Yet newer theories on collectivism suggest that collectivists embrace the opportunity to serve group goals (finding altruism “intrinsically rewarding; cf. Adam, 2007) or that their self-identity derives from group affiliations (Brewer & Chen, 2007). As we carry out more turnover studies in collectivist countries, we need to revamp our models to fit these cultural differences. As shown in the results, Family embeddedness and affective commitment are good predictors for turnover. For the sample of this research, it was very clear the importance of community and family links to feel attached to their roots. Having 35% of the population in Tijuana considered as floating population, due to their status, it is very understandable that employees consider

their jobs at the EPZ as temporary and a necessary step before crossing the border. Many of those employees that get hired by these companies (48%) according to this research will leave the company at the first opportunity.

With high instability in the border towns of the EPZ, administering and keeping the work force is a hard task for most human resources' managers. Organizations need to "read" the future employee intentions to stay or leave the company understanding the hidden reasons he has for his final destination. This research also, extends generalizability for Mitchell and Lee's (2001) original theory of job embeddedness, which heretofore has primarily been validated in Western developed economies (mostly America; Holtom et al., 2008; Gong et al., 2011).

The limitations of this paper were the large amount of missing data that surveyed employees left when answering the questionnaires. Even though we reorganized the questionnaire and readapt the questions after a pilot application, the low scholar level of many employees made the questions hard to answer for them. Also, fear to retaliation from the management made the employees leave many important questions blank.

Another limitation in our investigation was to use withdrawal cognitions rather than turnover. While understanding its etiology is important in its own right (e.g., psychological quits or withdrawal; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998) given its consequential impact on behaviors other than turnover. Future research should include a larger sample of companies in Tijuana were different activities apart from the EPZ show if the tendency of turnover is the same according to the economy situation. Also, including factory conditions and risks as variables should give important information.

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