

The Relationship between Interpersonal Conflict and Turnover Intention: Do Incentives, Gender, Managerial Position, Experience, and Organization Type Matter?

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Abstract

This study aims to uncover the relationship between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention in a range of organizations by addressing the issue of how various factors influence the relationship between interpersonal conflicts and the willingness of employees to leave their jobs. The study tested a series of hypotheses constructed from a review of contemporary literature, revealing the contribution of incentives, gender, managerial position, experience, and organization type in moderating this relationship.

This quantitative study surveyed 317 employees working at various levels in private and public organizations in the United States. The results were analyzed using correlation coefficients.

The findings showed high turnover rates among employees exposed to interpersonal conflicts in the workplace with higher rates among males. A higher turnover intention rate was also identified among non-managerial rather than managerial positions. The findings show that turnover rates decrease according to rising levels of experience and the satisfaction with incentives provided by employers improve job retention, even when the same employees have been exposed to interpersonal conflict in the workplace. Additionally, the turnover rate among employees in public organizations is higher than in private organizations when exposed to interpersonal conflicts.

The research has significant implications for human resource practices, as it reveals the key variables affecting the reactions of employees to interpersonal conflicts in the workplace.

Keywords: Interpersonal Conflict, Turnover, Incentives, Experience, Managerial Position

Introduction

Employees are considered primary resources for public and private organizations. Existence, performance, success, and the development of organizations are critically contingent on this resource. Organizations can and do overcome problems, develop products and services, and recover from crises through the efforts of their employees. Furthermore, organizational expansion, including launching new lines of products and services, and entering new markets requires the efficiency and productivity of skilled employees.

Within organizational structures, management teams have

commitments and responsibilities to human resources. They spend significant capital on salaries, compensation, and other expenses, including professional development, and expend energy on recruiting employees through job advertisements, interviews, and proficiency exams. Furthermore, employees need to keep abreast of new developments in their specialized fields. This entails the preparation of strategic plans for developing employees' skills and improving their performances. The implementation of these plans requires financial investment, as well as administrative efforts.

Due to the importance of human resources in organizations and the costs borne by organizations relating to human resources, it is vital to utilize these resources in the best possible manner. Hiring substitute employees is not considered an appropriate solution to workforce shortfalls. Rather, this approach is costly as new employees require time to acquire the necessary skills to work, as experience may be an issue.

This study examines turnover intention as one of the main issues related to retaining human resources in organizations by shedding light on the relationship between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention. The study focuses on the role of incentives provided by organizations, gender, managerial position, experience, and organization type in moderating the relationship between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention. There is a lack of studies on the role of these variables in employees' turnover intentions in the presence of interpersonal conflict.

Literature review

Turnover is experienced by many organizations worldwide (Luz, Paula, & Oliveira, 2018). Turnover intention is defined as the desire of employees to leave their current jobs. The turnover rate is determined by identifying the percentage of employees who leave their jobs over the total number of employees in the same period (Devi & Krishna, 2016). Berry et al. (2012) found a relationship between lateness and absenteeism, and absenteeism and turnover, thus requiring organizations to pay attention and mitigate these indications to reduce turnover rate. Turnover certainly has effects on different aspects of organizations. Finkler et al. (2007) explained that one of the consequences of turnover is decreased productivity. Luzet al. (2018) mentioned that turnover has consequences that include low productivity and financial losses.

The focus of this study is on interpersonal conflict in the workplace, which remains one of the most significant factors in terms of employee behavior that leads to turnover intention. This is because interpersonal conflicts in the

workplace have a direct and strong impact on employees. Rahim (2001) explained that conflict may affect employees in different ways, including their performance, loyalty, and satisfaction. Sims (2002) stressed that though conflict may also have positive impacts (e.g., creativity), it certainly has negative impacts, such as hostility, aggressiveness, loss of resources, and performance. These factors certainly lead to turnover. Employees seek to work in peaceful, productive, and friendly environments.

LanzandBruk-Lee (2017) explained that there is a relationship between conflict among employees and turnover intention, recommending that hospitals pay attention to turnover as it is a costly issue. Similarly, Shauka et al. (2017) found that there is a relationship between turnover and conflict in the workplace. Kunaviktikul et al. (2000) revealed in their research on nurses in Thailand that participants encounter moderate conflicts in the workplace and adopt accommodation strategies to resolve them. Nevertheless, turnover intention among participants increases over time. A study by Langove and Isha (2017) focused on the association between interpersonal conflict in the workplace and turnover intention, where participants were executives in software companies in Malaysia. Results showed a significant relationship between the two variables.

Bhayo et al. (2017) found that turnover intention is associated with the dominating, avoiding, integrating, and obliging styles of conflict management. By examining these conflict management styles, we find that not only do they differ, but some are even opposed to each other. For instance, in the dominating style, parties attempt to achieve their goals by ignoring the goals of the other parties (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). However, in the integrating style, each party tries to achieve both their own and the other party's goals (win-win outcomes) (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007). Although there are differences between these styles (dominating, avoiding, integrating, and obliging), we find that they are associated with turnover intention. This shows that the influence of conflict is far more significant than what can be reduced by handling conflicts effectively.

Each of the studies discussed was conducted on populations of diverse geo-locations. Yet, they consistently argue that such conflicts are associated with turnover intention. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis.

H1: There is a significant correlation between interpersonal conflict in the workplace and turnover intention.

Several factors may affect this relationship, either positively or negatively, such as incentives, gender, managerial position, experience, and type of organization. Some studies explored the influence of these variables on

employees' loyalty toward the organization but no one has investigated their effects on the relationship between interpersonal conflicts and turnover intention, and this is the originality of this research.

Motivation is the main driver of the employees' performance. McKeown et al. (2002) explain that strategies of motivation created by organizations can lead to the retention of employees. In terms of loyalty, organizations that provide incentives to their employees may gain their loyalty, as noted by Fallon and McConnell (2014) and Bruce (2002) who state that incentives provided by organizations assist in retaining employees.

Hossain and Mahmood (2018) stress that wages and training are considered essential incentives that employees aspire to secure. The wages offered by organizations should be high compared to their rivals to retain employees. As for training opportunities, this helps employees improve their skills, which in turn reflects well on the development and growth of employees. Devi and Krishna (2016) explain that human resource management can play an important role in reducing the rate of turnover through the training and professional development of employees. Oladunmoye (2017) explains that employees in Southwest Nigeria receiving support from their organizations tend to stay.

Previous studies did not address whether incentives reduce employees' turnover intentions when exposed to interpersonal conflicts; however, incentives will likely have this effect. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis.

H2: The presence of incentives may reduce the influence of interpersonal conflicts on turnover intentions among employees.

The differences between males and females go beyond appearances and social roles, occurring in genetic, behavioral, and physiological aspects (Snell & Turner, 2018). Gilbert (1993) confirms that such differences are not only biological but also behavioral, mental, and cultural. This is manifested and illustrated in the ways we perceive matters in our lives. Brizendine (2006) explains that the differences in the brains of males and females affect thinking and the expression of emotions. Worldview theory states that values, norms, and beliefs also impact individual perceptions of matters and issues (LeBaron, 2003).

Putallaz and Bierman (2004) show that females are likely to be less aggressive than males. Hayward (2003) explains that males are more aggressive than females due to differences in biology and social interaction. In the early stages of life, males are more hostile than women.

According to Björkqvist (2018), girls are less physically aggressive than boys. The more aggressive a person tends to be, the less s/he would be able to tolerate and deal with situations collaboratively.

In terms of interpersonal conflict, to some extent males and females view the conflict from different angles. Heath (2017) mentions that males view conflicts differently than females, whereas Wilmot and Hocker (2007) state that individual perceptions of conflicts influence their approach to them. Berryman-Fink and Brunner (1987) explain that females tend to use a cooperative style more than males, whereas Chan et al. (2006) and Altinok (2009) find that males prefer using competing styles more than females. On the other hand, females tend to use an avoidant style more than males.

Dealing with conflicts positively by females compared to males would limit the impact of conflicts on females. Kriesberg (2007) stresses that dealing with conflict positively reduces its negative effects, making it constructive, and vice versa. Sims (2002) states that dealing constructively with conflicts reduces negative emotions and reactions resulting from conflicts.

No previous study indicated whether males and females differ regarding turnover intentions in case of interpersonal conflicts. However, gender may affect the correlation between interpersonal conflicts and turnover intentions. Accordingly, I propose the following hypothesis.

H3: The correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention in males can be stronger than in females.

Regarding managerial positions, supervisors and managers have more privileges as compared to other employees. These could be tangible (e.g., rewards) or intangible (e.g., prestige and self-esteem). For instance, according to Bass and Bass (2008), many studies show that employees in managerial positions are more satisfied than those not in managerial positions. Schultz and Schultz (1998) explain that satisfaction among females occupying managerial positions is higher than in their counterparts who do not occupy managerial positions. Thus, employees in managerial positions may tend to stick to their jobs more than other employees. Larson and McClellan (2017) state that employees feeling satisfied with their jobs tend to remain in those jobs.

Employees in managerial positions hold a fairly strong position in organizations which is beneficial for them in cases where they must deal with interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. When a party is in a powerful position, the effects of interpersonal conflicts on them may be limited, compared to powerless parties. Singh (2008) states that

power in negotiation gives negotiator advantages regarding outcomes. Jeong (2010) also stresses that power impacts on conflicts in terms of influencing additional parties, and in the process of conflict resolution.

No studies are touching upon the differences between employees in managerial and non-managerial positions regarding turnover intentions in case of interpersonal conflicts. However, the literature review suggests that employees in managerial positions may have better job satisfaction than other employees. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis.

H4: The correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention in employees occupying managerial positions is less strong than in those with non-managerial positions.

Furthermore, the experience is an important factor in a range of organizational aspects. Its importance lies in performance and the ability to manage work efficiently. Gagné et al. (2019) confirm that the quality of the services provided by nurses in hospitals is affected by the experience. Moreover, experienced employees tend to have the ability to deal with and adapt to changes that occur in both the internal and external work environments. They may handle issues and problems successfully at the workplace, as they have inevitably already encountered such situations.

Additionally, the longer employees stay at a job that features appropriate psychological support and moral factors, the higher their commitment to their jobs and organizations. Kalbers and Cenker (2007) found that experience may play a significant role in retaining employees because of increase in commitment. Committed employees see themselves as part of the organization, in contrast to non-committed employees (Griffin & Moorhead, 2012). Furthermore, committed employees view the success of their employers as part of their success. This, in turn, enhances employment retention. Yao et al. (2019) explained that employees with high commitment and loyalty may tend to stay more in their jobs.

To conclude, there are no studies on the role of experience in limiting the effects of interpersonal conflicts on turnover intention. Yet, it is likely, based on the argument above, that experience may play a role in influencing the effects of interpersonal conflict on turnover intention. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis.

H5: Professional experience of employees may moderate the correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention.

Non-profit and profit organizations are similar in terms of

mechanism and construction. The differences lie in the purpose of their existence. Whereas a non-profit organization seeks to provide public services, profit organizations consider their primary goal to be profit (Starling, 2011). This determined managerial differences, which might affect the level of loyalty and commitment of employees in each sector.

Agyemang and Ofei (2013) found that employees working in the public sector in Ghana were less committed and engaged than their counterparts in the private sector. Bysted and Jespersen (2014) revealed that employees in the private sector in Scandinavia viewed creativity at work as an essential requirement for work development, whereas other employees working in the public sector considered creativity at work as something that should be rewarded by managers. This shows that employees in the private sector may have more enthusiasm for work than their counterparts in the public sector. Markovits et al. (2010) found that the commitment of Greek employees in the public sector was more correlated with satisfaction than their counterparts in the private sector.

On the other hand, Wang et al. (2012) discovered in Taiwan that employees in the public sector were less motivated than those in the private sector. Yet, they found that turnover intention among employees in the private sector was higher than in the public sector. Also, Malik (2011) concluded that employees in private banks in Pakistan felt more stressed than other employees in public banks, considering measures such as support from the management, and work hours load.

There are no studies on the differences between employees in the two sectors regarding turnover intention in case of interpersonal conflicts. However, based on the arguments above, it might be assumed that employees in the private sector are more committed and loyal to their organizations. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

H6: Employees in the public sector may tend to turn over more often than their counterparts in the private sector when experiencing interpersonal conflicts in the workplace.

Methodology

Instrument

The survey used in this study on turnover intention was created by Rahim [used with approval from the Center for Advanced Studies in Management]. The survey measures turnover intention from different aspects using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly agree–Strongly disagree) [questions from 13 to 17 in the survey]. The survey has been tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha with the resulting value

of 0.89 (Rahim et al.2015). In addition, participants were asked to answer questions to identify the frequency of subjection to interpersonal conflict in the workplace using a five-point Likert scale (Never–Always). Satisfaction with incentives is measured through four items on a five-point Likert scale (Not satisfied at all–Very satisfied) focusing on four types of incentives that organizations provide to their employees: compensation, recognition, rewards, and appreciation. Additional demographic questions were included to identify the variables of gender, ethnicity, region of residence, managerial position, education, experience, and age.

Data sample

The survey was randomly distributed via email to 317 employees in private and public organizations in the United States, through the powerful audience panel of Survey

Monkey. Initial demographics show that 56.2 % of participants work in the public sector while 43.8 % work in the private sector. The percentage of male participants is 44.2 %, whereas 55.8 % are females. In terms of the position occupied, 64.0 % of participants occupy a managerial position, while 36% do not. The participants are from different regions of the United States: north-east (23.69 %), south-east (21.85 %), mid-west (20.92 %), south-west (13.23 %), and west (20.31 %). Regarding ethnicity, Whites (73.85%), Blacks(7.69%), Hispanic (8.62%), Asians (7.38%), others (2.46%). The participants are also of different ages, as illustrated in Figure 1, experiences as illustrated in Figure 2, and educational backgrounds as illustrated in Table I.

Figure 1. Age distribution

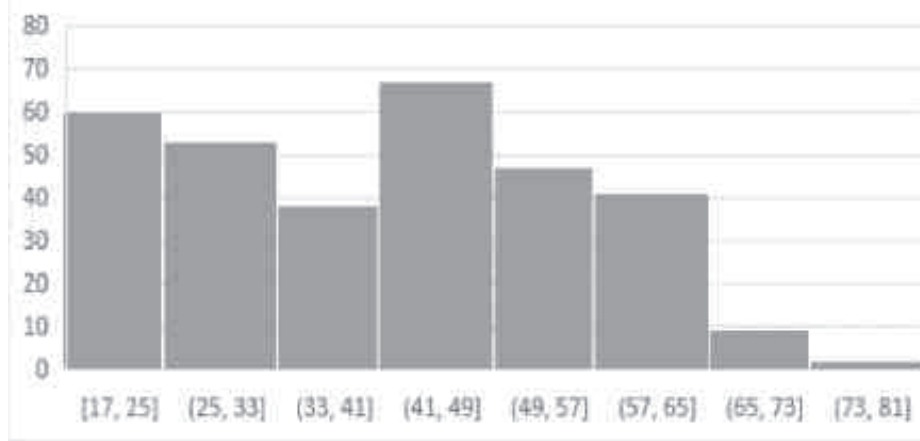


Figure 2. Experience distribution

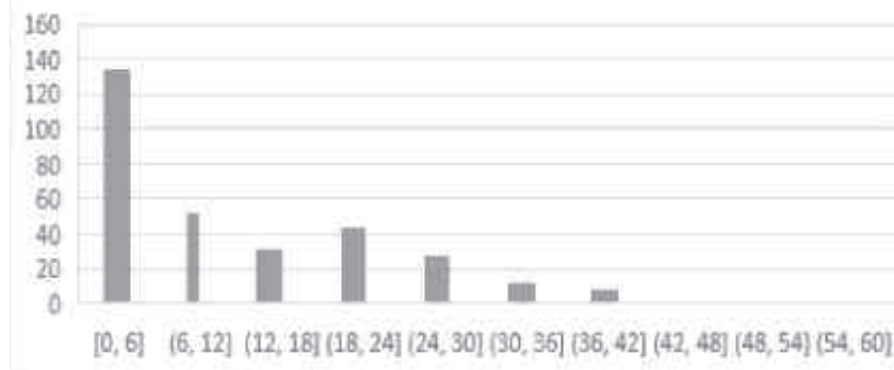


Table I. Educational background

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Less than High School	1	0.3
	High School	90	28.4
	Two-year Diploma	46	14.5
	Bachelor	110	34.7
	Master	43	13.6
	Ph.D.	11	3.5
	Others	16	5.0
Total		317	100.0

Results and discussion

The results show a strong correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention where the correlation is statistically significant at a level of 0.01 (Table II). Accordingly, the first hypothesis could not be

rejected. The literature states that employees exposed to conflicts in the workplace tend to quit their jobs: a natural result of the stresses and negative emotions resulting from conflict involvement (Wilmot & Hocker, 2007).

Table II. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention

		Conflict involvement	Turnover intention
Interpersonal conflicts	Pearson Correlation	1	.145**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.010
	N	317	317
Turnover intention	Pearson Correlation	.145**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.
	N	317	317

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

The correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention variables increases from 0.145 (Table II) to 0.154 (Table III) after isolating the variable of employees' satisfaction with incentives provided by their employers. Thus, the second hypothesis could not be rejected. This reflects the positive role that incentives play

in changing the workplace environment from negative to positive.

Table III. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention after isolating the satisfaction of employees with provided incentives variable

Control Variables			Conflict Involvement	Intention
Incentives	Conflict Involvement	Correlation	1.000	.154
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.006
		df	0	314
	Intention	Correlation	.154	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.006	.
		df	314	0

Regarding gender, the results show that the correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention is higher among males (0.189; Table IV) than females (0.154; Table V). Thus, the third hypothesis could not be rejected. This indicates that interpersonal conflicts affect males

more than females. This likely stems from differences in perceiving and approaching conflict. Altinok (2009) and Chan et al. (2006) confirm that females approach conflicts more peacefully and cooperatively than males.

Table IV. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention for males

		Conflict Involvement	Conflict Intention
Conflict Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.189 [*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	140	140
Turnover Intention	Pearson Correlation	.189 [*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	140	140

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table V. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention of females

		Conflict involvement	Turnover intention
Conflict involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.154
	N	177	177
Turnover intention	Pearson Correlation	.108	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.154	
	N	177	177

In terms of managerial position, the results show that the correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention rate among those in non-managerial positions (0.193; Table VI) is more significant than among those occupying managerial positions (0.115; Table VII). Thus,

the fourth hypothesis could not be rejected. Schultz and Schultz (1998) and Bass and Bass (2008) found that satisfaction among employees in managerial positions is high. Accordingly, the impact of interpersonal conflict is lower.

Table VI. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention for employees not occupying managerial positions

		Conflict Involvement	Turnover Intention
Conflict Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.193**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	203	203
Turnover Intention	Pearson Correlation	.193**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	203	203

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 (2-tailed)

Table VII. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention for employees occupying managerial positions

		Conflict Involvement	Turnover Intention
Conflict Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.115
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.224
	N	114	114
Turnover Intention	Pearson Correlation	.115	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.224	
	N	114	114

Regarding experience, the results show that experience assists in reducing the turnover intention of employees exposed to interpersonal conflict. The correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention is 0.145 (Table II), but after isolating the experience variable from

the relationship, the correlation increased to 0.159 (Table VIII). Thus, the fifth hypothesis could not be rejected. This is because experienced employees are likely to have more loyalty and commitment to their current roles than other employees (Griffin & Moorhead, 2012).

Table VIII. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention after isolating the experience variable

Control Variables			Conflict Involvement	Turnover Intention
Years of Experience	Conflict Involvement	Correlation	1.000	.159
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.005
		df	0	312
	Turnover Intention	Correlation	.159	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.005	.
		df	312	0

Regarding organization type, the analysis also shows that organization type affects the correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention. The findings show that the correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention for employees in the private sector (0.187; Table IX) is higher than it is for employees in the public sector (0.095; Table X), so the sixth hypothesis

could be rejected. The literature argues that employees in private sectors generally are more satisfied and tend to stay in their jobs more than their counterparts in the public sector. However, the results show that when employees in both sectors are exposed to interpersonal conflicts, employees in private sectors tend to turnover more than those in the public sector.

Table IX. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention for employees in the private sector

		Conflict Involvement	Turnover Intention
Conflict Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.187 [*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.012
	N	178	178
Turnover Intention	Pearson Correlation	.187 [*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	
	N	178	178

Table X. Correlation between interpersonal conflict and turnover intention for employees in the public sector

		Conflict Involvement	Turnover Intention
Conflict Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.095
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.268
	N	139	139
Turnover Intention	Pearson Correlation	.095	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.268	
	N	139	139

Conclusion

The results have important implications for human resources and conflicts in organizations as they assist in understanding the reactions of employees exposed to interpersonal conflict at the workplace. Brooks (2018) stresses the need to understand the behavior of employees (their perspectives, reactions, attitudes, etc.) to effectively direct their behaviors.

This research contributes to the literature on organizational behavior, including organizational interpersonal conflict by providing a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the psychological impact of conflicts in organizational-based work environments. It also reveals the role of biological and social differences in shaping differences among individuals in terms of dealing with interpersonal conflict.

Moreover, there is a need to identify the causes of turnover intention among remote workers, or internet-based employees. This group does not engage in direct interactions with colleagues as compared with traditional workplaces, which means that the findings on turnover studies conducted on the latter may not be applied exactly to the former. Amant and Zemliansky (2005) confirm that

the nature of interactions and communications in internet-based work has different characteristics and nature.

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Survey

The goal of this research is to identify whether the relationship between turnover intention and interpersonal conflicts in workplace is affected by motivation, gender, managerial positions, experience, and organization type. Please be advised that accuracy and honesty in answering the survey will assist the researcher in obtaining accurate results. Names or other forms of identities are not required in this survey.

1- Gender:

- o Male
- o Female
- 2- Age (in years)
- 3- Number of years of your experience in your current work:
- 4- Region:
 - o Northeast
 - o Southeast o
 - Midwest o
 - Southwest o
 - West
- 5- Ethnicity:
 - o White
 - o Black
 - o Hispanic o
 - Asian
 - o Other
- 6- Your current position in your work is:
 - o Managerial
 - o Non-managerial
- 7- Type of your organization:
 - o Private organization
 - o Public organization
- 8- How often are you involved in interpersonal conflicts in your organization?
 - A- Never
 - B- Rarely
 - C- Sometimes
 - D- Often
 - E- Always

Questions from 9 to 12 need to be answered on 5 points Likert scale (Not satisfied at all.....Very satisfied)

How do you evaluate compensation incentives provided by your organization? (e.g., raises; bonuses)

How do you evaluate recognition incentives provided by your organization? (e.g., praising, thanking, certificate of accomplishment)

How do you evaluate rewards incentives provided by your organization? (e.g., prizes)

How do you evaluate appreciation incentives provided by your organization? (e.g., social activities held by your organization, sports events)

Questions from 13 to 17 need to be answered on 5 points Likert scale (Strongly disagrees.....Strongly agree)

13- It is likely that I will actively look for a new job in the next year