

# Career Abandonment Intentions among Software Workers

Ricardo Colomo-Palacios,<sup>1</sup> Cristina Casado-Lumbreras,<sup>2</sup> Sanjay Misra<sup>3</sup>  
and Pedro Soto-Acosta<sup>4</sup>

1 Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain

2 Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

3 Atilim University, Turkey

4 Universidad de Murcia, Spain

## Abstract

Within the software development industry, human resources have been recognized as one of the most decisive and scarce resources. Today, the retention of skilled IT (information technology) personnel is a major issue for employers and recruiters as well, since IT career abandonment is a common practice and means not only the loss of personnel, knowledge, and skills, but also the loss of business opportunities. This article seeks to discover the main motivations young practitioners abandon the software career. To achieve this objective, two studies were conducted. The first study was qualitative (performed through semistructured interviews) and intended to discover the main variables affecting software career abandonment. The second study was quantitative, consisting of a Web-based survey developed from the output of the first study and administered to a sample of 148 IT practitioners. Results show that work-related, psychological, and emotional variable are the most relevant group of variables explaining IT career abandonment. More specifically, the three most important variables that motivate employees to abandon the career are effort–reward imbalance, perceived workload, and emotional exhaustion. In contrast, variables such as politics and infighting, uncool work, and insufficient resources influence to a lesser extent the decision to leave the career. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

**Keywords:** Software personnel; Career abandonment; Career commitment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Information technology (IT) has been fundamental for improving productivity as well as for the development of knowledge-intensive products and services (Soto-Acosta, Martinez-Conesa, & Colomo-Palacios, 2010). However, engaging in IT investment is not a necessary nor sufficient condition for improving performance, since IT investments might be misused

(Tallon, Kraemer, & Gurbaxani, 2000). Today, the successful exploitation of IT within the business depends on the availability of IT professionals to design and integrate IT infrastructure and applications (Agarwal & Ferratt, 2002). This statement has been supported by scholars, who argue that IT human capital represents a strategic resource for firms, which has the ability to bestow competitive advantages (Bharadwaj, 2000; López-Fernández, Martín-Alcázar, & Romero-Fernández, 2010; Wade & Hulland, 2004).

Within today's IT scenario, firms recognize the importance of information systems (IS) management for firm performance and functioning (Yeh, Lee, & Pai, 2011). Managing IS is a core capability of an organization because it helps to control critical downstream and upstream data (Chang, 2009). However, in spite

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Correspondence to: Sanjay Misra, Atilim University, Incek, Ankara, Turkey e-mail: ssopam@gmail.com

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