

# The myth of quitting in anger

June 1 2016

---



Credit: University of Cambridge

Anger often decreases – rather than boosts – a person's intention to quit a job when they identify strongly with their company, says a new study.

Anger at the workplace is commonly associated with employees storming out of the office and quitting their jobs, but a new study from the Cambridge Judge Business School suggests that the picture is far more complex.

More broadly, [positive emotions](#) are usually thought to lead to

constructive outcomes and [negative emotions](#) to damaging outcomes for business and other organisations.

A new academic study finds, however, that these generalisations are often a myth: when identification with a company is high, anger over job situations often decreases (rather than boosts) a person's intention to leave because such employees want to stick it out and improve the organisation rather than walk out in a huff.

Conversely, when a person's identity with their organisation is low, anger increases their intention to quit, says the study published in the *Academy of Management Journal*.

Researchers at the Cambridge Judge Business School found that for an individual highly-identified with the organisation, anger directed toward the organisation is similar to self-blame because the organisation is part of their self-definition, and hence such people are less likely to respond to negative feelings by disengaging.

The practical implication of the research, the authors say, is that it is unwise for companies to broadly characterise specific emotions as beneficial or detrimental to the organisation.

"The study suggests that company policies that are designed to promote positive emotions or minimise negative emotions may in fact not have the intended effect," says Jochen Menges, University Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at Cambridge Judge Business School and Professor of Leadership at WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management in Germany. "So rather than seeking to suppress certain workplace emotions, companies should instead adopt practices that seek to encourage greater organisational identification."

The research focused on a large company in the pilot training and

certification business, with a final dataset of 135 people employed in the United States and Europe who were evaluated over a one-year period. They were asked about their intentions to leave the company or remain, and about both general organisation issues (such as schedule and pay) and specific matters related to the job – such as events that "made you feel good at your job," "made you feel disrespected as a pilot" or "made you feel close to other pilot instructors."

As a follow-up, the study looked at actual staff turnover at the flight training company six months after the last survey of employees and found a significant correlation between the number of employees intending to leave the company and the actual staff turnover.

The study examined guilt and pride, in addition to anger – and found here, too, a dark side of positive emotion and a bright side of negative emotion. For example, while pride is generally associated with a likelihood to remain at a [company](#), for employees lacking in work-related identifications, a feeling of pride made them more likely to consider moving on.

The research looked at a people's identity with their occupation as well as organisation, and found that while occupational identity is not as powerful as organisational identity in staff turnover, it does play a complementary role.

**More information:** S. Conroy et al. The Meaning of My Feelings Depends on Who I Am: Work-related Identifications Shape Emotion Effects in Organizations, *Academy of Management Journal* (2016). [DOI: 10.5465/amj.2014.1040](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.1040)

Provided by University of Cambridge

Citation: The myth of quitting in anger (2016, June 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-06-myth-anger.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.