

# Networking can cut two ways for employers, employees

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Psychologist Caitlin Porter found that giving employees a chance to network with their colleagues can reduce the likelihood that they'll leave for another job. Credit: University of Houston

There may be more going on at the office happy hour than you thought.

While it has been established that networking can boost career success, what that means for employers - and what they might do to retain talent - has been less studied. In a study published in the current edition of the journal *Personnel Psychology*, researchers report that offering opportunities for workers to network with their colleagues can reduce the likelihood of turnover by 140 percent.

"Work used to be a major source of friendships, and that's declining," said Caitlin Porter, assistant professor of industrial organizational psychology at the University of Houston and lead author on the paper. "That gives people less reason to stay. So giving people the opportunity to build their relationships could help with retention."

Porter conducted the research as part of her doctoral work at Purdue University. Other authors on the paper include Sang Eun Woo and Michael A. Campion, both of Purdue.

Researchers looked at various types of networking - internal networking vs. external - to determine what networking behaviors predicted an employee would leave their company within two years, as well as the impact of four other factors: job satisfaction, job embeddedness, perceived employment opportunities and actual job offers.

In general, Porter said, scholars define "networking" as a set of behaviors performed with professional contacts, including the mutually beneficial exchange of resources, such as news about job openings and advice on how to better perform a job.

External networking, with people from outside an employee's workplace, is often facilitated by professional groups or trade associations. Internal networking can be more casual, even gathering for coffee and donuts

before a meeting. Both offer the opportunity to talk about common issues, ask for advice and offer support, Porter said.

Using data collected from a group of industrial organizational psychologists followed for two years, the researchers elaborated on earlier work that had found a correlation between networking and job turnover by distinguishing between internal and external networking to determine why and how each contributes to employee decisions to leave a job.

Internal networking promoted [job satisfaction](#) and job embeddedness - a feeling that the worker should remain in the job, both because of ties to coworkers and concerns about losing real or perceived benefits - and reduced turnover. External networking, meanwhile, increased the likelihood of turnover by 114 percent, a figure that was even higher if opportunities for internal networking were reduced.

"This study reveals that internal networking behaviors are associated with a reduced likelihood of voluntary turnover, and external networking behaviors are associated with an increased likelihood of voluntary turnover," the researchers wrote. "Employee networking, in general, functions as a double-edged sword by simultaneously exerting opposing influences upon one's desire and ability to leave the organization."

Employers can't forbid external networking, which also offers benefits as employees return to the office with new ideas. But they can increase opportunities for people to network with their coworkers, Porter said.

"Everything can't just be work all the time," she said. "People need to interact with each other."

Provided by University of Houston

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