

On The Next Decade of Research in Voluntary Employee Turnover

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ABSTRACT

At least two thousand articles on voluntary employee turnover have been published in the last one hundred years. In turn, numerous authors have reviewed the theory and research on employee turnover. Our intent with this paper is therefore *not* to provide a comprehensive literature review as excellent ones are available elsewhere. Instead, the purpose of this article is to summarize major contributions in the present and provide our perspectives on the future directions of turnover research. Following a relatively terse review of the turnover literature, we elaborate on how organizational scholars can further enhance the understanding of turnover by (a) probing into the turnover process with a better consideration of time, (b) studying the role of volitional control on employees' leaving/staying, (c) further investigating how the context in which employees reside influences leaving, and (d) opening up the "black box" of the collective turnover process.

Dating back at least a hundred years (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hauscknecht, 2017), theoretical and empirical research on voluntary employee turnover (or why people quit) generated over two thousand articles (T. H. Lee, Gerhart, Weller, & Trevor, 2008). To summarize this volume of research, scholars periodically compile narrative (e.g., Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008; Hom et al., 2017; Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012; Morrell, Loan-Clark, & Wilkinson, 2001) or meta-analytic (e.g., Griffeth, Hom, & Gartner, 2000; Heavey, Holwerda, & Hausknecht, 2013; Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee, & Mitchell, *forthcoming*) reviews of narrow or broad arrays of turnover antecedents (e.g., Hausknecht, 2017; Jiang, Liu, McKay, T. W. Lee, & Mitchell, 2012; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Thus, we can reasonably conclude that the body of theoretical and empirical knowledge on employee turnover is vast and that yet another literature review (given recent large-scale and narrower reviews) would not add much to our knowledge at this time.

Instead, our article draws from our collective experiences in authoring empirical papers (e.g., Li, Lee, Mitchell, Hom, & Griffeth, 2016), narrative (Holtom et al., 2008) and empirical (Rubenstein et al., *forthcoming*) reviews, and theoretical formulations (e.g., Hom et al., 2012; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001) on employee turnover (as well as our knowledge of related literatures) to speculate – with perhaps an attitude – on where the theory and research on turnover should go in the next decade. Because theories of employee leaving – and staying – represent our “collective and academic memory” of the empirical knowledge, we begin with a brief synopsis of major theories to set the stage for our suggestions on future research directions. Like other narrative reviews, we apply our subjective judgment in the selection of theories and articles reported below. We focus, however, on highly cited and influential papers from across the decades. For more comprehensive or elaborate reviews, please see the citations above.

MAJOR TURNOVER THEORIES

James G. March and Herbert A. Simon (“with the collaboration of Harold Guetzhow”)

While early turnover research (CA. 1917-1957) was largely atheoretical and applied in nature, the publication of **Organizations** by James March and Herbert Simon in 1958 (collaborating with Harold Guetzhow, who “shared in its planning and contributed to the broth of ideas in which the book took form” [page v]) changed the world for turnover scholars. These scholars inaugurated the first formal turnover theory, promulgating foundational constructs underlying employee decisions to participate in organizations (the converse of leaving)—namely, the perceived desirability and ease of movement. Over the years, the perceived desirability of movement has come to mean job (dis-) satisfaction, whereas the perceived ease of movement has been construed as perceived or actual job alternatives. March and Simon (1958) suggest that employees who are happy with their job and who do not perceive or actually have other job options more likely stay and participate. March and Simon’s greatest legacy may be popularizing systematic theorizing about employee turnover, instigating numerous theories rooted in their preliminary model as well as innovative conceptual departures from the heritage they had erected. Their ideas (on turnover) remained, however, dormant for nearly twenty years.

William H. Mobley, James L. Price and the Next Generation

Building on March and Simon (1958), Mobley (1977) later introduced an “intermediate-linkage” formulation that delineates the process by which job dissatisfaction culminates in turnover. Portraying how employees depart, his seminal model posits that dissatisfaction → thoughts of quitting → subjective expected utility (SEU) analysis of the benefits and costs of seeking alternative jobs and turning over → search intentions → evaluation of alternative job offers → comparison of job offers with the present job → intentions to quit (after choosing a job

offer) → actual quitting. The impact of this model on our academic knowledge cannot be overstated as it continues as a core foundation for modern research, emphasizing how turnover unfolds over time and the cognitive considerations involved in this process (Hom et al., 2017).

Following a sociological tradition instead of Mobley's psychological orientation, Price (1977) concurrently refined the March-Simon model by deriving the first content model of turnover and identified *why* rather than *how* employees quit based on a thorough review of empirical findings across varied disciplines (from labor economics to sociology). Specifically, his model specifies oft-documented workplace antecedents of job satisfaction, such as pay and centralization, while envisioning that availability of alternative employment moderates how dissatisfaction drives leaving. Later, Price and Mueller (1981, 1986) expanded this initial model by incorporating "external" causes, such as kinship responsibility and occupational commitment, while articulating a rudimentary causal sequence among antecedents. Their focus on outside factors was very important for subsequent research. They also pioneered factor analysis for validating measures of model variables and path analysis for verifying model paths.

Based on a separate literature review, Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino (1979) envisioned another content model depicting a wide-ranging set of distal environmental (e.g., labor market) and dispositional (e.g., individual) characteristics that influence employees' quit decisions and behaviors by affecting proximal causes (namely, job satisfaction, the current job's SEU [i.e., expected payoffs], and job alternatives' SEUs). Rooted in expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), their grand theory centered on how employees' decisions to quit hinge on those proximal causes. Mobley et al. clarified why dissatisfied employees may *not* quit—if they anticipate future promotions (higher job SEU) or worse payoffs from other jobs (low alternative SEUs). Like Price and Mueller, Mobley and his colleagues empirically tested their models (Mobley, Horner,

& Hollingsworth, 1978; Youngblood, Mobley, & Meglino, 1983). These early tests inspired a vibrant and large wave of empirical tests of the Intermediate Linkages Model (and competing alternatives; e.g., Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992), while establishing job satisfaction and SEU comparisons between perceived alternatives and the present job as core explanatory constructs in prevailing theories (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). The 1979 model also highlighted distal influences on leaving such as personal attributes (Griffeth & Hom, 1988).

Expanding upon Mobley and Price's formulations, Steers and Mowday (1981) notably introduced *both* organizational commitment and job performance as turnover causes (in consonant with then-contemporary findings), while recognizing alternative ways of accommodating to dissatisfying jobs other than quitting (e.g., absences). Hulin, Rosnowski, and Hachiya (1985) later articulated how dissatisfied employees exhibit other behaviors besides leaving (e.g., reduce inputs) and how marginal participants in the labor force (e.g., marginal drifters, hobos) may not engage in the rational decision-making process outlined by Mobley et al. (1979) when deciding to leave. The Hulin et al. view prompted turnover researchers to consider a broader range of withdrawal behaviors and participants in secondary labor markets. In sum, these "next generation" scholars inspired and foreshadowed much of what followed, albeit in a more incremental fashion than the first generation (O'Reilly, 1991).

Paradigm Shifts

Why people leave. In a major break from the dominant March-Simon tradition of seeing job satisfaction as the primary antecedent to turnover, and drawing from image theory (Beach, 1997), Lee and Mitchell (1994) proposed the Unfolding Model of Voluntary Employee Turnover. They conceptualized four paths to turnover, of which one (Path 4) is the classic dissatisfaction-induced leaving (Hom et al., 1992), while putting forth three alternative paths

triggered by various “shocks”—or jarring events evoking thoughts of leaving. Path 1 represents a way of leaving whereby a shock activates a preexisting plan. For instance, an employee may plan to quit in a few years to attend law school and enacts this plan when he or she receives notification of law school admission (the shock). Path 2 occurs when an abhorrent workplace event—the shock—prompts immediate quitting (e.g., a superior orders a subordinate to perform an illegal act). Incumbents may vacate jobs via Path 3 when they receive outside job offers or strong feelers (e.g., unexpected invitation to apply for an attractive job opportunity) that cause them to question their current job commitment.

Events are seen as precipitating the leaving process. While the early work on events simply defined them as initiating the thinking of leaving process, more recent work by Morgeson, Mitchell, and Liu (2013) clarifies the meaning of events and identifies event attributes of novelty, disruptiveness and criticality (importance). Thus, not everything that happens is seen as an event and the same “happening” may be perceived differently by different people.

In a creative extension, Maertz and Campion (2004) integrated motives for leaving (or staying) with different turnover paths (including but adding to the unfolding model paths) into their Field Forces Model. Their formulation envisions how different motives (e.g., dissatisfaction, social pressures to quit, perceived certainty of better job alternatives) engender different “decision types” (a.k.a., turnover paths), such as “impulsive quitters” (who exit spontaneously due to acute negative affect) and “comparison quitters” (who compare and favor other alternative jobs over current job). In our view, the Field Forces Model compliments the unfolding model by incorporating traditional content motives for leaving (e.g., job satisfaction,

alternatives, normative pressures) and specifying how they elicit different processes (i.e., decision types).

Since the inception of the unfolding model and initial corroboration (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996; Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999), the preponderance of later empirical tests supports the model. Subsequent researchers replicated the original taxonomy of four turnover paths or incrementally modified them (e.g., Donnelly & Quiren, 2006; Holt, Rehg, Lin, & Miller, 2007; Kulik, Treuren, & Bordia, 2012; Morrell, Loan-Clark, & Wilkinson, 2004). Moreover, predictive tests established that shocks or differentiating turnover according to different paths can explain additional turnover variance beyond job satisfaction and alternatives (Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Glomb, & Ahlburg, 2005; T. H. Lee et al., 2008). What's more, other scholars applied the unfolding model to inform their understanding of performance-turnover relationships (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011), differential effects of different recruiting sources on newcomer turnover (Weller, Holtom, Matiaske, & Mellewigt, 2009), and how leader departures prompt followers to quit (Shapiro, Hom, Shen, & Agarwal, 2016). Finally, Shipp, Furst-Holloway, Harris, and Rosen (2014) extended the unfolding model to explain how “boomerangs”—former employees returning to firms—quit and follow different turnover paths than leavers exiting permanently (“alumni”).

On the other hand, Morrell, Loan-Clarke, Arnold, and Wilkinson (2008) and Niederman, Sumner, and Maertz (2007) report poorer classifications of leavers according to the unfolding model. In particular, Morrell et al. (2008: 143) say that, “... the unfolding model is ‘on the right track,’ but in its current form has limited convenience” because it does not apply to a sufficiently wide range of labor market conditions.” In sum, the unfolding model is generally valid but may not fit all situations or types of turnover (Shipp et al., 2014) without refinement.

Why people stay. Redirecting the conceptual lens from why people leave to why they stay, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez (2001) introduced “job embeddedness (JE)” to capture on-the-job and off-the-job contextual factors (akin to Lewin’s field forces) embedding employees in workplaces. They posited that one’s *fit* to the job or community, *links* to other people, and *sacrifices* one makes if one leaves collectively induce one to stay. Fit, links and sacrifice derive, moreover, from both one’s organization *and* community. Even more so than the unfolding model, JE stimulated a plethora of theory and research about why people stay in varied work roles (e.g., occupations, expatriate assignments).

The body of theory and research on job embeddedness is now substantial (e.g., see Jiang et al. [2012] for a meta-analytic review, Kiazad, Holtom, Hom, & Newman [2015] for a theoretical extension of JE, and Lee et al. [2014] for a narrative review), but it can be summarized as follows. (1) We are quite confident that job embeddedness lessens turnover and explains additional variance in turnover over and above that by job attitudes and perceived alternatives. (2) We are confident that JE enhances job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors, while somewhat confident that JE can lower absences. (3) JE may also moderate (e.g., mute the effects of turnover shocks, Burton, Holtom, Sablinski, Mitchell, & Lee, 2010) or mediate (e.g., translate how human resource management practices affect quit propensity, Hom et al., 2009) causal antecedents in the turnover process.

Recently, job embeddedness theory has deepened understanding of unique populations. For example, Halvorson, Treuren, and Kulik (2015) use JE to clarify why Australian migrants stay, while Morganson, Major, Streets, Litano, and Myers (2015) use JE to understand college students’ persistence in STEM majors. Although job embeddedness was originally theorized as a causal indicator model (a.k.a., a formative construct), Crossley, Bennett, and Jex (2007)

developed a global JE index based on a reflective measurement model. Although their data supported the reflective model, whether and when JE is best conceived as a reflective or causal indicator construct remains an on-going debate (Edwards, 2011).

“Standing on the shoulder of giants.” From our terse review of turnover research, James March, Herbert Simon, William Mobley, James Price, Charles Hulin, Richard Mowday and others beget an enormous number of productive conceptualizations and empirical studies across six decades. Although standing on these intellectual giants’ shoulders, recent scholars deviate – fervidly so – from their foundational formulations and research methods. All the same, the founding fathers have inspired the current scholarly community towards fervid creativity in theorizing and research methodology. Looking forward, we offer some future research directions through a consideration of time, control, context and collective turnover.

THINKING IN TIME

Long ago, Neustadt and May (1986) advised elected and appointed government leaders, as well as the bureaucrats who assist them and “those who report on them or study them or try to influence them (page *xi*),” to understand prior events and historical flows before making decisions about current events. In other words, they recommended “thinking in time” to avoid repeating past mistakes. In a related vein, Mitchell and James (2001) ask management scholars to consider the role of time in their theories and research. More specifically, they ask us to think about what happens across time (e.g., when do events occur and how are they sequenced?). With respect to our review, turnover theory and research involve, more often than not, an informed prediction about a future event. Much of this work follows what Steel (2002) calls “the standard research practice” where data on turnover predictors (e.g., job attitudes, job embeddedness, applicant attributes) are collected on one occasion (e.g., via survey) and information on leaving

is collected later (often 6 to 24 months later from personnel records). Regression models are then used to estimate predictors' validity for forecasting turnover. From the vast landscape that is turnover theory and research, our accuracy in predicting leaving using this approach is, sad to admit, modest (rarely explaining more than 25% of the turnover variance; Maertz & Campion, 1998). What, then, might we do to break this "predictive ceiling" (Hom et al., 2017)?

Static Predictor Scores *and* Trajectories over Time

Because the standard research practice (a.k.a., cross-sectional predictive design) fits naturally with efforts to forecast subsequent turnover, we may have inadvertently limited our thinking to static predictor scores. For example, we typically assess prospective predictors with well-validated measures and use their one-time assessment (static scores) to project employees' future employment status (stay versus voluntarily quit) with regression or structural equation models (SEM). This pervasive approach has contributed invaluablely to our knowledge on turnover by estimating relative predictive validity of static turnover antecedents (cf. Griffeth et al., 2000; Rubenstein et al., *forthcoming*), but we can and should learn more.

Thinking beyond static scores, turnover researchers are revisiting Mobley's (1982) longstanding prescription to focus on temporal changes in turnover causes. Capitalizing on new multilevel techniques for analyzing panel data, contemporary researchers increasingly demonstrate that *momentum matters* – that the trajectory of change in predictors' scores can account for additional turnover variance beyond their static scores (Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011; Hausknecht, Roberson, & Sturman, 2011; Liu, Mitchell, Lee, Holtom, & Hinkin, 2012). On a 7-point Likert scale, for example, an increase in a job satisfaction score of three at Time 1 to a score of five at Time 2 (+2) should hold different meaning than a decreasing satisfaction score (-2) from seven at Time 1 to five at Time 2. Thus,

two employees whose Time-2 job satisfaction is identical (5 points) may feel dissimilar quit propensities because their satisfaction had moved in opposite directions since Time 1. In support, recent dynamic studies attest to how differential changes in job attitudes engender different quit likelihoods, while establishing that attitudinal changes account for unique variance in turnover beyond that of static attitudinal scores (excepting static scores assessed just before turnover occurrence; Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe, & Stinglhamber, 2005; Liu et al., 2012). In other words, turnover theories (especially their depictions about how prospective leavers pursue and evaluate job alternatives as their knowledge of other jobs and their own marketability likely improves over time; Steel, 2002) are better tested by investigating the trajectories of turnover determinants over time (Mobley, 1982). By so doing, we can corroborate implicit (but untested) assumptions underlying most theories that changes over time in distal antecedents affect turnover via changes in proximal antecedents (a.k.a., *dynamic mediation*; Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010).

Moreover, Liu et al. (2012) observed that the extent to which a temporal shift in an individual's job satisfaction foreshadows that individual's turnover hinges on his or her (a) colleagues' average (unit-level) job satisfaction trajectory, (b) within-unit dispersion of colleagues' trajectories and (c) whether the individual's own trajectory aligns with the unit trajectory. When coworkers' job satisfaction levels collectively and uniformly decline over time, a person's falling job satisfaction more accurately predicts her leaving as coworkers' trajectories emit social cues reinforcing the person's trajectory. When Liu et al. (2012) included an individual's trajectory, unit-level trajectory, and within-unit trajectory dispersion (and their interaction) in a prediction equation, they improved explained turnover variance over and above mean satisfaction scores from 10 to 43 percent! Looking beyond job satisfaction, we advocate enhancing turnover predictions by assessing trajectories of prevailing antecedents (e.g.,

commitment, job alternatives, quit intentions; Bentein et al., 2005) and recent distal ones (e.g., leader departures, coworker and supervisory job embeddedness; Ng & Feldman, 2013).

Co-Evolving Process of Turnover

Most turnover models posit both uni- and bi-directional effects among model constructs. Early models put forth by Mobley (1977), Steers and Mowday (1981) and Hom and Griffeth (1995) recognize one or more feedback (reciprocal) effects. While rarely tested (cf. Lee & Mowday, 1987; Price & Mueller, 1986), reciprocal effects are nonetheless prominently featured in Steel's (2002) cybernetic model about how negative feedback about prospective leavers' employability during job search can weaken their resolve to leave or induce them to reassess their negative attitudes toward their job. All the same, turnover theories still neglect potential co-evolutionary dynamics among turnover antecedents (Pollock, Lee, Jin, & Lashley, 2015). For example, a shock may trigger an employee's thoughts of leaving that then cause the employee to lower her job embeddedness (by severing links and cognitively reducing perceived job fit, for example) and exclusively attend to disagreeable job aspects. In turn, diminished embeddedness and satisfaction may reinforce thoughts of leaving, which originally caused their decline.

Moreover, such bi-directional processes might not always be parallel. That is, the effects of one causal direction might be stronger than the reciprocal direction, and such dynamics could change under different circumstances (e.g., individual differences or different phases). The co-evolutionary approach detailed in Pollock et al. (2015) is a useful perspective to tease out bi-directional processes (with endogeneity well controlled) and compare relative strength of effects by different causal directions across different time frames and individuals. Following Pollock et al. (2015), turnover scholars should model and study co-evolutionary forces. By thinking about

and investigating such bidirectional effects, scholars would extend oversimplified portrayals of reciprocal effects by traditional and present-day theoretical views (Mobley, 1977; Steel, 2002).

Shocks

Morgeson, Mitchell, and Liu (2015) theorize and document that event-driven behavior is more prevalent in the organizational behavior field than commonly suspected and provide definitional attributes for events. With respect to the narrower turnover topic at hand, shocks (i.e., a jarring event that evokes thoughts of quitting) are demonstrated to prompt leaving (e.g., Holtom et al., 2008; Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Inderrieden, 2005). While roughly classifying them according to different turnover paths they elicit (Holtom et al., 2005; Mitchell & Lee, 2001), researchers have not explored the nature of shocks in depth. What features qualify certain events (but not others) as “shocking” (extreme image violations?, Lee & Mitchell, 1994), and why people differ in their interpretations of events as shocks? The unfolding model offers insight into how three different types of shocks (personal, negative work and job-offer shocks) drive different turnover paths. We suggest more refinement of this tripartite taxonomy. For example, negative job shocks may be decomposed into additional types, including *impending* negative events and accumulated minor hassles (Purl, Hall, & Griffeth, 2016). Considering Morgeson et al.’s (2013) event attributes of novelty, disruptiveness and criticality may add insight as well.

In particular, taking into consideration the broader context likely adds to our understanding as potential shocks exist “all around employees.” Shocks can be, of course – and often are – internal to the workplace (i.e., pension vesting or reaching \$1 million in 401(k) plans, or workplace changes), but often are also external (i.e., retirement of an employee’s partner, birth of a child, or children entering high school). Life events outside of the immediate control of the employer (“unavoidable” turnover; Hom & Griffeth, 1995) often substantially impact retention

and thereby merit our attention. Moreover, certain shocks occur in a regular and predictable fashion in everyday experience. For example, Chinese New Year prompts millions of Chinese migrant workers to journey home—often to remote villages—for short holiday vacations. For many, the regular act of “going home” may prompt many not to return or represent a pretext to employers for leaving. Year-end bonus distributions in China also drive up quits as employees may remain long enough to receive annual bonuses. Chinese employers thus expect annual spikes in voluntary quits after routine and expected events, such as holidays and annual bonuses. The nature of shocks and their impact on turnover warrant greater scrutiny in future research.

To date, precisely how shocks prompt turnover (or other event-driven behaviors within organizational behavior) is also inadequately studied. Lee and Mitchell (1994) originally conceptualized “image violation” (or “image compatibility”) as a key intervening mechanism for turnover path 2, whereby negative (positive) job shocks activate leaving (staying) by violating (meeting) employee’s values, goals or strategies. The unfolding model also offers the activation of matching scripts (e.g., plan to exit when a law school admission letter arrives allowing one to pursue a career goal) as an explanatory mechanism. Yet, possibly more mechanisms might explain the impact of shocks. Shapiro et al. (2016), for example, invoked crisis decision-making theory to suggest that employees may appraise the shock’s consequences before deciding to leave. We call for more precise articulation on how shocks drive decisions to stay or leave (beyond judgments of image violations or compatibility). Temporal influences are particularly interesting to explore as shocks’ effects may depend on when they occur and how quickly they are acted upon. For example, do effects wane over time if one cannot immediately leave (e.g., delay imposed by an employment contract may prompt cognitive dissonance inducing one to stay; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982)? Do certain shocks gain in strength as time passes,

becoming progressively unbearable as one experiences their aftermath? It is also conceivable that employees experience multiple shocks over time that interact with each other in ways not anticipated by the original unfolding model. Perhaps, shocks substitute, amplify or even cancel each other. Because of past shock—or lack thereof—experiences, some employees may interpret a seemingly trivial situation as a shock (viewing it as the “final straw”; Kulik, Treuren, & Bordia, 2012), whereas others may downplay a seemingly extraordinary event (e.g., impending dismissal; Burton et al., 2010) if they had endured earlier traumas (e.g., being laid off or watching other being laid off; Trevor & Nyberg, 2008). Analogously, some employees may concurrently encounter shocks associated with different paths (e.g., both pregnancy and poor performance reviews) that act synergistically to expedite leaving. A new parent thus feeling frustrated at work may be even more eager to become a stay-at-home father (Gerson, 1985). Finally, affective events theory and research suggest that “positive workplace events” may embed (rather than uproot) employees (by fostering positive moods or emotions; Judge, Weiss, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Hulin, 2017) and may even counter the effects of turnover-inducing shocks. In sum, expanded reconceptualization of the meaning of shocks and the process by which they shape leaving *or* staying merit greater scholarly attention.

THINKING OF CONTROL

The Search for the Holy Grail in Turnover Research

In its long history and with over two thousand published articles, Holtom et al. (2008) described the Search for the Holy Grail as finding *the supremely but singularly* accurate predictor of turnover. They described the dominant paradigm as: distal influences (e.g., individual characteristics, job embeddedness) → intermediate influences (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational commitment) → near antecedents (e.g., search and quit intentions) → actual

turnover. Generally speaking, Hom et al. (2012) observed that our collective ability to explain turnover variance remains modest due in part to historic preoccupation with distal and intermediate influences rather than proximal antecedents. To illustrate, Dickter, Roznowski, and Harrison (1996) showed that turnover predictions degrade as the duration between a static measure of job satisfaction and turnover behavior increases. Thus, traditional research designs that collect criterion data months (or years) after measuring job satisfaction may include data from study participants whose satisfaction likely changed since its assessment (attenuating predictive validity). If the goal is maximizing turnover prediction, Hom et al. (2012) thus suggest focusing and assessing turnover influences temporally closer to turnover occurrence.

Proximal Withdrawal States Theory (PWST)

To identify more proximal antecedents of turnover, Hom et al. (2012) propose Proximal Withdrawal States Theory (PWST) specifying various mindsets about participating—or withdrawing from—organizations. At its conceptual core, PWST holds that turnover arises from an individual's current preference to stay or leave and perceived control over staying or leaving. Those persons high on preference to stay and high on control over staying are seen as “enthusiastic stayers” (ES; i.e., I want to stay and I can stay), whereas those low on preference to stay and high on control over staying are “enthusiastic leavers” (EL; i.e., I want to leave and I can leave). In contrast, those low on preference to stay and low on control over staying are seen as “reluctant stayers” (RS; i.e., I want to leave but I have to stay), whereas those high on preference to stay and low on control over staying are “reluctant leavers” (RL; i.e., I want to stay, but I have to leave).

In the first direct test of PWST, Li et al. (2016) found that job satisfaction and embeddedness did not relate to job search or intent to leave for reluctant stayers and leavers,

while job satisfaction (Nagelkerke $R^2=0.2\%$), job embeddedness (Nagelkerke $R^2=2.2\%$) and intent to leave (Nagelkerke $R^2=0.3\%$) poorly predicted their actual turnover. For enthusiastic stayers and leavers, however, job satisfaction and job embeddedness strongly predicted their job search and intent to leave, while satisfaction (Nagelkerke $R^2=12.7\%$), embeddedness (Nagelkerke $R^2=5.9\%$) and intent to leave (Nagelkerke $R^2=13.4\%$) strongly predicted their actual turnover. Thus, focusing on ES and EL incumbents enhanced turnover predictions from job satisfaction, job embeddedness and intent to leave. Such findings suggest that conventional models and predictors best explain and predict turnover among employees who have high control over their preferences for staying and leaving (i.e., ESs and ELs) but poorly explain and predict turnover among those having low control over their preferences (i.e., RSs and RLs). In other words, inclusion of RSs and RLs weakens predictive validity (though past studies omit employer-initiated leaving but not exits “coerced” by other external referents [e.g., spousal pressures; Hom & Griffeth, 1995]).

Integrating prior research on commitment profiles (Meyer, Stanley, & Vandenberg, 2013) and unfolding model turnover paths (Lee et al., 1996, 1999), PWST further specifies various participation and withdrawal substates for the four prime mindsets. To illustrate, Hom et al. (2012) differentiate between several types of enthusiastic stayers, such as “engaged stayers” who stay primarily because of high job fit or strong workplace links versus “embedded engaged stayers” who stay for intrinsic reasons but also to avoid losing job benefits or community amenities. They envision them to behave alike in the workplace (e.g., high job performance and organizational citizenship behaviors [OCBs]), though the latter are slower to leave (short “turnover speed”; Lee et al., 1999) than the former. By contrast, “slackers”, as another ES type, stay for less taxing, secure jobs that offer ample job benefits (e.g., unionized, government, or

tenured employees). According to the PWST formulation, they perform worse and engage in less OCBs than the other ES substates, though they also exhibit slow turnover speed.

Going beyond the four prime PWS mindsets, Hom et al. (2012) contend that scrutiny of their substates further deepens insight into how employees leave (not just turnover occurrence but also turnover speed and destinations) as well as how they behave if they stay (e.g., job performance, OCBs, counterproductive work behaviors). Though as yet to be fully explored, preliminary research by Woo and Allen (2014) has directly documented the existence of some PWS subtypes (although past research has alluded to such subtypes; Lee et al., 1996, 1999; Meyer et al., 2013). Affirming a particular RS substate (“trapped stayers”) envisioned by PWS theory (Hom et al., 2012), Allen, Peltokorpi, and Rubenstein (2016) further documented that employees highly embedded in adverse work environments (e.g., abusive boss, insecure employment) most endured poor physical health and emotional exhaustion. As Hom et al. (2012) theorized, PWS substates thus also exhibit different profiles of attitudes and behaviors.

Ongoing research should more firmly establish PWS existence, going beyond Li et al. (2016) who required study respondents to choose which of four PWS types best described their current mental state. Such an approach forces respondents to choose one type when they may not easily fit into any particular category. For example, a collectivist who stays due to normative obligation to her boss but who also loves her job may have trouble self-categorizing herself as a “reluctant stayer” (feeling pressured to stay) or “enthusiastic stayer” (feeling job fit). We suggest following Woo and Allen’s (2014) use of latent profile analysis (LPA) to identify PWS states. Their LPA identified PWS clusters that represent continua on which different employees vary continuously, representing varying degrees of “reluctant staying,” for example. Extensions of the Woo-Allen approach would more fully assess self-reported reasons for staying or leaving to

generate more comprehensive profile indices that might better detect PWS states and substates theorized a priori (Hom, Seo, Lee, Mitchell, & Griffeth, 2016). Furthermore, Maertz (2012) and Bergman, Payne, and Boswell (2012) advise against dichotomizing perceived control over staying and leaving and preference for staying or leaving. Bergman et al. (2012) further advise considering how re-hired (a.k.a. boomerang) employees, people with multiple jobs and anticipated destinations fit with the PWST taxonomy. Integrating these critiques in future competitive tests, extensions and refinements of PWST will help delineate the impact this theory can have on the future of the turnover field. Given the limited empirical research directly testing PWST theory, we see this as a critical step moving forward.

An Important Step Forward

Enthusiastic stayers and leavers are reasonably well studied and thereby warrant the least additional academic inquiry (as traditional turnover and embeddedness models explain their behaviors well) or organizational oversight (as the former function well, while managers must recruit replacements for the latter). Reluctant stayers and leavers are less understood and represent mindsets that employers may not easily influence (when external forces for staying or leaving are dominant; Hom et al., 2012). Yet incumbents lacking decision control may represent a significant segment of the workforce. To illustrate, Li et al. (2016) report that 49% of Study 1 participants self-identified as either reluctant stayers or reluctant leavers, while 20% of Study 2 participants self-identified as such. Perhaps, identifying and explicating the etiology of reluctant staying and leaving mindsets can represent a new conceptual tool for turnover researchers?

In particular, reluctant leavers may not readily acknowledge themselves as such because they may feel reactance, resistance or self-esteem threats for disclosing that they feel coerced or pressured to act in ways contrary to personal preferences (especially if they belong to

individualist cultures). Employers can readily identify some reluctant leavers, such as marginal performers who are likely to be fired, as well as some reluctant stayers trapped in jobs by employment contracts or unsurpassed pay and benefits that would be relinquished upon leaving. When, however, coerced into staying or leaving by extra-organizational forces (e.g., spousal relocation, family embeddedness in community), such reluctant stayers and leavers may be difficult for employers to identify. After all, they may feel reluctant to admit or acknowledge that their stay or leave decisions are *not* fully autonomous due to social desirability bias or threats to self-esteem. Thus, one potential contribution of PWST may be inspiring different ways to validly measure reluctant mindsets (Li et al., 2016), such as soliciting family pressures indirectly (cf. Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010). Because conventional turnover models for retaining or embedding employees (and work motivation models as well) seem most applicable to enthusiastic stayers and leavers, reluctant stayers and leavers may need to be managed differently. For example, applying “golden handcuffs”—or even “felt-lined handcuffs”—to reluctant stayers may backfire. They would feel even more trapped in a job they would prefer to leave, while reluctant leavers may face more marital conflict with spouses who want to assume better job opportunities or lifestyles elsewhere.

THINKING IN CONTEXT

Long ago, Pfeffer (1991: 795) noted “Turnover has most often been examined as the consequence of an individual decision process, with the individual acting in isolation” In other words (and until recently), turnover researchers did not seriously consider how the social context shapes employees’ quit decisions (though the study of organizational commitment began as a construct through which context operates; Lyman Porter, personal communication).

Towards identifying contextual effects in the leaving process, we advocate that turnover researchers theorize and pursue several new research directions.

Turnover Contagion

Across 45 bank branches and 1,038 departments in a hospitality company, Felps, Mitchell, Hekman, Lee, Holtom, and Harman (2009) observed that employees whose coworkers in mass actively pursue other jobs (due to low collective embeddedness in work units) more likely quit themselves. Akin to the spread of an illness, turnover may become contagious. When many coworkers seek alternative employment, an employee in the midst of such mass exodus may too follow suit as such overwhelming “social cues” increase the legitimacy of leaving and its viability (suggesting the prospects of “greener grass” elsewhere).

Looking forward, turnover scholars might clarify the etiology of organizational norms about collective leaving (or conversely, collective unit-level embeddedness). Qualitative research by Bartunek, Huang, and Walsh (2008) identifies a common crisis (or challenge) afflicting a work group that arouses collective sense-making and emotional contagion (negative affect) that culminate in collective turnover. Similarly, cohorts of law firm associates or public accounting auditors nearing their evaluation for promotion to partner may look for another job because they are unlikely to be promoted or because job search is widely expected (an occupational norm) – and a contagion effect may take hold.

Thinking broader, a nascent or later-stage start-up firm may be composed largely of millennials, who expect to leave after a few months or years. Given strong, broad-based and uniform norms about leaving, a “turnover culture” likely emerges (Maertz, Stevens, & Campion, 2003; West, 2004). In the late 1990s, for example, the first author interviewed Silicon Valley computer programmers during the dot-com boom. Many of these young people then thought

getting another (high paying) job was a matter of making a single phone call. In the second decade of the 21st century, we recommend that turnover researchers theorize and study staying and leaving in turnover cultures, as well as nascent or later-stage start-up firms.

Links

When first introducing job embeddedness, Mitchell et al. (2001) conceptualized links as how many connections (or ties) an employee has with coworkers, work groups and other social entities within and outside the organization. While turnover and commitment scholars have long investigated employees' *affective* responses to colleagues and immediate superiors (e.g., constituent commitment, supervisory satisfaction; Becker, 1992; Griffeth et al., 2000; Seo, Nahrgang, Carter, & Hom, 2017), the proliferating embeddedness literature ushered a renaissance of scholarly inquiries into relational antecedents of leaving—notably, alternative ways to capture links via social network methodology (Hom & Xiao, 2011; Mossholder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005). Methodologically, embeddedness researchers have often operationalized links as the number of connections among individuals, groups and larger entities. They nonetheless acknowledge that this simple operationalization inadequately reflects how links embed job incumbents or the quality of those links (Lee et al., 2014; Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

Toward future work on links, we reiterate Holtom et al.'s (2008) call to capture the affective strength of various embedding links. For example, employees' like or dislike for links—not merely their number—can also affect their decision to stay or leave. Holtom et al. (2008) further recommend expanding the original notion of links to incorporate linkages between an employee's contacts (i.e., structural configuration of links). Addressing such prescriptions, recent network analyses have established that network centrality (capturing volume of workplace friendships), eigenvector centrality (network ties to highly sought-out or popular contacts), and

network closure (employees' peers are mutually connected) promote retention (Ballinger, Cross, & Holtom, 2016; Feeley, Hwang, & Barnett, 2008; Hom & Xiao, 2011; Mossholder et al., 2005) or moderate its antecedents (Vardaman, Taylor, Allen, Gondo, & Amis, 2015).

To clarify turnover contagion, subsequent network investigations might elucidate how job attitudes of participants in an incumbent's social network affect the latter's decision to stay or leave via network lines of communication (Felps et al., 2009). Further, examining the types of resources (e.g., information about job leads) or messages (e.g., disparaging views of job; Bartunek et al., 2008) conveyed via network contacts may offer a way to understand collective turnover and turnover cultures. In some organizations, for example, looking for another job is never made public, whereas in other organizations (or occupations), looking for another job is common (e.g., managers are expected to serve as references), expected (e.g., millennials issue positive norms about job hopping) or actively encouraged (e.g., accounting or law partners solicit employment for junior staff at client firms that strengthen business ties between clients and professional service firms). Thus, we suggest that turnover scholars theorize and study the varied ways links can affect retention and turnover via their affective strength, normative prescriptions to leave, structural configurations, and network resources (Ballinger et al., 2016).

Extrawork Alternatives to the Current Work Role

Conventional turnover thinking maintains that desirable job alternatives prompt employees (though singularly) to leave for other jobs. Although noted long ago that employees also leave for non-employment or unpaid roles (Hulin et al., 1985; Hom & Kinicki, 2001), turnover scholars often overlook why employees leave for such destinations or inadequately enumerate a broad range of specific—work and nonwork—alternatives (typically specifying one type of vague option, such as leaving the workforce or a particular industry). Rudimentary

accounts from existing theories emphasize the incompatibility between current organizational and extra-organizational roles (e.g., interrole conflict or script-based leaving; Lee et al., 1996) or family pressures to quit (to comply with family urgings or meet family responsibilities; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Going forward, we urge greater theoretical and empirical explorations of the nature of alternatives.

Job transfer, relocation and turnover. Since March and Simon (1958), turnover theorists have recognized that intrafirm mobility can substitute for interfirm mobility; that is, employees may transfer to a more desirable job rather than quit (Dalton & Todor, 1987, 1993; Jackofsky & Peters, 1983; Lee & Johnson, 1994; Mobley, 1977; Mobley et al., 1979; Steers & Mowday, 1981). After all, employees dissatisfied with their current job may seek a more satisfying job within the organization rather than just leave (Hulin et al., 1985). By contrast, classic embeddedness theory largely ignored the loyalty-inducing effects of job transfers, which can improve job fit or links. Because a job transfer is "... a relatively permanent reassignment that entails movement of an employee within an organization from one of its operating sites to another" (Pinder & Walter, 1984: 188), transfers requiring employees to relocate may actually clash with their embeddedness in a community (e.g., giving up good weather or recreational opportunities) or their family's embeddedness in the community (e.g., forcing spouse to give up a good job or disrupting children's schooling and friendship networks; Feldman, Ng, & Vogel, 2012). Rather than forego such community amenities or links, employees required to relocate may actually quit, especially if there are other employment options in the local community (Allen, 2006).

We suggest that turnover and embeddedness scholars reconsider the role of job transfers in participation decisions. Traditional turnover views regard job transfers as a way for

dissatisfied incumbents to assume better jobs internally (Hulin et al., 1985; Mobley, 1982). Yet job transfers are not always desirable or voluntary. They may represent shocks much as do external shocks (e.g., spousal relocations; Lee et al., 1996) or job demotions (Burton et al., 2010). They may even involve geographic relocation (e.g., expatriation). Such transfers may actually drive employees to quit. To illustrate, military officers often relocate across different military bases, and they may not reenlist (or retire early) if they must move away from a community in which they or their families are embedded (Smith, Holtom, & Mitchell, 2011). By comparison, embeddedness scholars might acknowledge that job transfers to another “operating site” within the same city may further embed employees (by increasing job fit or links). Looking forward, we advocate that turnover scholars theorize and examine how transfer and/or relocation supplement our understanding of job embeddedness and employee turnover. At the minimum, desirable transfers may represent an avenue for reluctant leavers and stayers to enthusiastically remain in the organization. To illustrate, reluctant leavers may follow spouses relocating elsewhere for work by transferring to another organizational site in the same locale, while reluctant stayers might transfer to better fitting jobs.

Destinations. While Mobley et al. (1979) first conceptualized how centrality of “non-work values” affects the turnover process, modern scholars failed to refine this provisional conception to more fully articulate how external role preferences affect quit decisions. People leave to do things other than take another job. They become stay-at-home parents, return to school or relocate to care for an aging widowed parent. Griffeth et al. (2012) propose that destination preferences may help predict turnover and turnover destinations, yet they do not clarify their origins nor the process by which employees decide to choose one external destination over others (and the current job). Might the latter be explained by image theory or a

rational calculation of SEUs for extra-work and work roles (Hom & Griffeth, 2013)? Perhaps, both decision processes occur sequentially. To illustrate, an aspiring novelist may first screen out interim jobs that prevent honing his or her craft (using quick compatibility judgments to rule out jobs requiring rigid or long work hours) and use SEU analysis to choose a job from remaining jobs to pay the bills until they can earn a living as a full-time novelist. Or might a third process exist, such as imitation via turnover contagion (Felps et al., 2009)?

Conceivably, theories of career development and life stages might elucidate when external roles become more prominent or salient as employees age (Hom, Leong, & Golubovich, 2010). Teenage workers (dominating secondary labor markets) may quit jobs to enroll in college, while young adults of child-bearing age may opt out of the labor market temporarily for stay-at-home parenting. By contrast, mature workers approaching retirement age may quit jobs to pursue more meaningful avocations (e.g., prosocial activities, such as volunteer work) as they encounter more mortality cues (e.g., personal illnesses or disease, deaths of peers; Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009). These theoretical lenses view quit decisions as representing crucial decisions marking the beginning or end of certain career or life stages.

Finally, prevailing lines of inquiry on turnover functionality (Salamin & Hom, 2005; Sturman, Shao, & Katz, 2012) and collective turnover (Hausknecht, 2017; Heavey et al., 2013; Park & Shaw, 2013) generally overlook turnover destinations to competing firms, limiting comprehension of how turnover can harm organizations. Yet strategic management scholars have long established that employees joining competitors or becoming competitors via start-ups can decrease the performance—if not survival—of their current employer (Campbell, Ganco, Franco, & Agarwal, 2012; Gardner, 2005; Phillips, 2002; Somaya, Williamson, & Lorinkova, 2008; Wezel, Cattani, & Pennings, 2006). We prescribe that scholars track turnover destinations (which

firms or businesses hire—or pirate—away employees) to more accurately gauge turnover dysfunctionality (Hollenbeck & Williams, 1986). We also suggest more inquiry into the reasons why employees might choose certain turnover destinations. Traditional and modern theories imply that employees rely on compatibility judgments (a job's consistency with their values, goals, or behavioral strategies) or SEUs when comparing different work destinations (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mobley et al., 1979). Yet, Shapiro et al. (2016) speculate that utilitarian motives cannot fully explain why, for example, employees follow exiting (inspirational) leaders to other workplaces. Hom et al. (2012) implies that perhaps different “destinations” could be predicted from existing profiles of attitudes and actions. Thus, destinations profiles and preceding states may help inform us about *who* will leave but also *where* they will go.

Contextualizing models. Turnover and embeddedness authors increasingly concede that social referents can influence or dictate an employee's decision to stay or leave. Ramesh and Gelfand (2010), for instance, theorize and find evidence that *family embeddedness* (e.g., the material and social benefits that families derive from an employer) can decrease turnover in the Indian and U.S. context. Other studies of relocation decisions by dual-income couples (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005), premature expatriate departures (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010) and labor market exits (Royalty, 1998) imply that quit decisions by employees in these circumstances are not fully self-determined. Given how employee departures can materially affect the well-being of significant others (e.g., relocation harms spouses' careers as their skills are less portable; Feldman et al., 2012), it is not surprising that in-groups or family members can sway turnover decisions. How do we best model such collective decision-making? Perhaps we can capitalize on insights from theories of social information processing (Felps et al., 2009), family power dynamics (Abraham, Auspurg, & Hinz,

2010; Eby & Russell, 2000), collective sense-making (Bartunek et al., 2008), family decision-making in household purchases (e.g., cars, vacations; Belch & Willis, 2002), or theories of reasoned action (planned behaviors, behavioral reasoning; Westaby, 2005)? Why do certain family or in-group members wield greater influence over turnover decisions (due to their family power, household income contributions, or saliency [e.g., turnover contagion]?), and how are conflicting referent demands (including conflicts with an employee's personal wishes) resolved (via a sum of referent pressures weighted by referent power; cf. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980)?

Such theoretical extensions can yield new insights (e.g., community embeddedness increases military separations, while reducing civilian turnover; Smith et al., 2011) and even novel constructs (e.g., family embeddedness, home-country attractions for expatriate families; Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Following Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou's (2005) suggestion for cultural contextualization, further contextualization of prevailing turnover models or embeddedness models for different occupations, industries, or cultures may prove fruitful. They enhance a model's precision for accounting for turnover in particular contexts but may also reveal constructs or processes that have greater generalizability beyond that context (e.g., family embeddedness may apply to individualist cultures too, Ramesh & Gelfand, 2010).

THINKING TOWARDS COLLECTIVE TURNOVER

While the literature on employee turnover (and our preceding discussion) primarily focuses on an individual's decision to quit or stay, researchers are increasingly interested in studying collective turnover at a group, unit or organizational level, which is typically measured as a turnover rate by dividing the number of leavers during a certain period by workforce size (see Hausknecht, 2017, for a recent literature review on collective turnover, and who more formally defines collective turnover as, "the aggregate levels of employee departures that occur

with groups, work units, or organizations.” p. 528). Mounting recognition of the greater material costs of collective turnover and that unit-level predictors can cause collective but not individual-level turnover prompt growing interest (Heavey et al., 2013; Park & Shaw, 2013).

Early research provides an informative, albeit largely atheoretical, examination of collective turnover. For example, Terborg and Lee (1984) found that turnover rates among sales personnel were predicted by local economic activity and average employee age, tenure, time in present position, as well as education. In the past 15 years, however, surging research has advanced theories and findings on collective turnover, in part due to the emergence of strategic human resource (HR) management. Accumulated research identifies a broad array of antecedents to collective turnover, including HR systems (e.g., “high-performance” or “high-commitment” workplace systems), individual HR practices or bundles (e.g., pay structure, benefits, staffing/selection procedures), climate and shared attitudes (e.g., commitment, justice), workforce composition (e.g., age, tenure, education, diversity) and labor market characteristics (e.g., downsizing, industry mobility, unemployment rate; Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011; Heavey & Hausknecht, 2013). We also know that collective turnover generally has a significant, negative impact on firm performance (in terms of financial performance, sales, shareholder return), productivity and efficiency, as well as customer satisfaction (Park & Shaw, 2013).

Yet, how collective turnover diminishes firm effectiveness hinges on certain contextual factors (e.g., Hausknecht & Holwerda, 2013; Hausknecht, Trevor, & Howard, 2009), and these effects are not necessarily linear or instantaneous (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011; Park & Shaw, 2013), suggesting that thinking in time and context are also important for turnover research at levels higher than the individual. (For more comprehensive reviews of the antecedents and outcomes of collective turnover, please refer to narrative reviews by Hausknecht [2017,

Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011] and three meta-analyses [Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel, & Pierce, 2013; Heavey et al., 2013; Park & Shaw, 2013].) Much existing work on collective turnover is grounded in individual-level turnover theories (Hausknecht, 2017), yet processes of how individual and collective turnover unfold are not necessarily isomorphic (Dess & Shaw, 2001). Theory development at the collective level (beyond theories about high performance work practices; Hom et al., 2009; Huselid, 1995; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012) is therefore urgently needed to improve understanding of collective turnover (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011).

Answering this call, Nyberg and Ployhart (2013) promulgate Context-Emergent Turnover (CET) Theory, which posits collective turnover as the quantity and quality of depletion of employee knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs). As such, CET delves into nuanced differences across traditionally calculated turnover rates, accounts for the coordination and efficiency loss beyond individual turnover events, and highlights the need to consider time (e.g., turnover rate and timing), context (e.g., climate and structural interdependence) and human capital resources inflow (i.e., quantity and quality of KSAO inflows through hiring and staffing) to fully delineate the harmfulness (or benefits) of collective turnover. Call, Nyberg, Ployhart, and Weekley (2015) initially tested core CET principles and showed how the relationship between changes in the turnover rate and changes in unit performance is moderated by (a) quality of departed employees, (b) turnover dispersion across time and (c) quantity and quality of replacement hires. Hale, Ployhart, and Shepherd (2016) further observed that departure of an employee or manager will result in a greater decrement in bank branch performance and a slower recovery rate when branches are highly interdependent.

Looking Forward at Collective Turnover

Process models of collective turnover. While prior research mostly examined the effects of collective turnover, potential moderators or predictors of collective turnover, we advocate process-oriented models that open up the “black box” of the collective turnover process. It is well understood that individual turnover events in a certain unit are often interrelated, rather than independent (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011; Nyberg & Ployhart, 2013). Thus, in addressing how and when collective turnover affects unit outcomes, we might unravel the interactive and synergetic process among individual turnover events. To this end, we can integrate group- and organization-based theories with our existing understanding of the turnover process. For example, Nyberg and Ployhart (2013) draw from resource-based theory to clarify the impact of collective turnover, while Hale et al. (2016) integrate CET and group adaptability to shed light on the process by which individual turnover events affect collective outcomes over time.

Process models tailored to different levels. Macro-level scholars have long understood that generalizing from individual-level turnover research to collective turnover may prove fallacious (Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011). Thus, we welcome models of collective turnover tailored to particular organizational levels, not only because what causes team turnover may not necessarily cause firm-level turnover but also because the efficacy (and types) of moderators may vary across levels. For example, CET suggests that coordination loss is critical to collective turnover beyond individual turnover events and that structural interdependence is an essential moderator (Nyberg & Ployhart, 2013). Conceivably, the moderating role of structural interdependence is stronger when considering collective turnover at the team level where team members are aware of each other’s contributions and grasp the necessary communication flow more readily, thereby facilitating an adaptive response when an individual turnover event occurs. While interdependence exists at the firm-level, it may be less salient to rank-and-file employees

and more difficult for them to fully comprehend (e.g., one's job might depend on market research data but one may not be aware of how such data is obtained and on whom, as a consequence, one is dependent). Thus, higher-level interdependencies are underestimated and not appropriately understood, reinforcing detrimental effects by individual-level turnover events.

More empirical CET investigations. By linking collective turnover to human resource capital, CET theory yields profound insight into contingencies determining the effects of collective turnover. Because the loss or depletion of employee KSAOs underlies much of the cost of collective turnover, such costs can be ameliorated by organizational interventions that retain or restore human resource capital. For example, Call and colleagues (2015) found that effective replacement hires can reduce the detrimental effects of collective turnover. Relatedly, another useful mechanism is to preserve leavers' tacit job knowledge through documentation and team learning. By having employees regularly document their new work procedures or projects and establishing an internal database accessible to employees, companies might retain a significant part of departing employees' knowledge that can later be accessed by newcomers. Also, holding team learning meetings or fostering informal knowledge-sharing routines may prevent loss of knowledge and skills unique to certain employees and thus reduce turnover costs when those employees leave. These ideas need fuller exploration theoretically and empirically and would further understanding and management of collective turnover.

CONCLUSION

Decisions to leave an organization invariably involve selecting options other than continuing at one's current job. As such, one quits with some alternative in mind. For many years, turnover scholars focused on employees' SEU calculations for the current job and alternative jobs to determine whether they stay or leave for jobs offering higher utility. In the last

twenty years, turnover scholars moved beyond a narrow focus on SEU calculations and job dissatisfaction to consider a broader set of causal agents.

Contemporary turnover theories suggest processes that unfold over time and how to track these processes. The unfolding model considers, for example, shocks and image violations, whereas Maertz and Campion (2004) consider reasons for leaving. Beach (1997) offers image theory as an alternative decision making process to SEU computations. Russell and Van Sell (2012), for instance, suggest ways to measure the attractiveness of alternatives, and Steel (2002) describes ways in which people learn about alternatives (and their own marketability) during job search. Hom et al. (2012) suggest that the nature of destinations matter to the decision to leave.

In this paper, we cannot do justice to the vast, cumulative and theory-based knowledge that is voluntary employee turnover, and it is not our intent to do so, given several excellent and recent reviews available elsewhere. Instead, we take a future-oriented perspective and seek to identify promising research avenues. Our hope is, of course, that the directions presented here might nudge, jar or even shock the field to go where no management scholar has gone before.

Our critique leads us to believe that the field of turnover research is at perhaps a worrisome juncture, defined by two opposing and valent forces. On the one hand, we enjoy a large body of theory and empirical knowledge that yield sound evidence-based strategies for reducing unwanted turnover. On the other hand, traditional research strategies have hit an invisible ceiling of predictive validity where adding yet another predictor variable using the standard research practice will likely have limited utility. How should we proceed? We conclude this paper by speaking more directly (and more passionately) to our audience than might be the norm in academic papers and provide ideas for how both management researchers and practitioners should approach their study of turnover given the challenges the field is facing.

To current and future turnover scholars

We urge that turnover scholars pursue some of the innovative research directions reviewed in this paper and break away from the standard research practice. Interestingly, innovativeness in this case does not arise from integrating a new predictor from a different literature or even from creating an entirely new construct that might become yet another turnover predictor. The clear majority of recommendations outlined in this paper focus on established explanatory constructs in the turnover literature (e.g., job satisfaction, job embeddedness, perceived alternatives, job search and shocks as antecedents to turnover), but encourage researchers to measure and/or analyze them in non-traditional ways. To truly advance the literature then, scholars must fully embrace the varied research designs and analytic tools that are now available (and that senior members of the author team of this paper could not have imagined when they started their careers).

In their extensive literature review, Holtom et al. (2008) identified a model (see their Figure 5.5: 244) with a comprehensive list of turnover antecedents that have surfaced in varying degrees of depth in the literature prior to their review. Rubenstein et al. (*forthcoming*) meta-analyzed turnover antecedents (for those where a sufficient number of studies exists) and in that process generated a roster of predictors, most of which Holtom et al.'s (2008) model included. Scholars interested in the turnover field should examine these (and other) turnover papers but NOT ask the question: “*What* is missing?” BUT instead ask, “*How* have we not studied existing antecedents yet?” For example, have they been examined yet from a contextual or temporal perspective? Holtom et al.'s (2008) model in Figure 5.5 placed a clock symbol next to those antecedents that had been empirically tested from a time perspective. Almost a decade has passed since their review and more clock symbols can surely be added today, but as identified

earlier, so many compelling time-driven research questions remain unexplored. The same applies to contextual examinations of existing antecedents.

While traditional turnover models allude to the complexity of the turnover process, and acknowledged issues with time, context and level, turnover scholars from an earlier era had limited tools at their disposal to test these dynamic and complex ideas. Yet today, we can do exactly that. Online survey tools, online participant pools and enabling technologies such as mobile devices, social media platforms and even wearable sensors (Chaffin, Heidl, Hollenbeck, Howe, Yu, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2017) facilitate collection of data, in real time and as continuous ratings where even small changes in attitudes during short temporal periods can be detected (Gabriel, Diefendorff, Bennett, & Sloan, 2017). Analytical tools like multilevel SEM, LPA, social network analysis and natural language processing (among many others), and general availability of advanced and flexible modeling techniques and statistical software packages make it now possible to isolate the effects of turnover predictors over time and at different levels. Despite increasingly sophisticated toolsets, such research projects remain undoubtedly complex and challenging, yet they are also more insightful and—at least in our view—more fun! While we all have experienced the necessary but sometimes frustrating grind that comes along with learning new methods, collecting multi-level, multi-source and multi-time data, and the many ways in which factors outside of our control can slow and sometimes derail data collection, the rewards can be boundless. We must fully embrace the opportunities these methods and tools offer, while remaining informed and guided by theory.

To practitioners

Similar to traditional turnover research, practitioners commonly collect data in static ways such as measuring employee engagement, satisfaction and motivation levels once a year.

Temporal trends might be considered by examining overall unit-level changes in, for example, engagement from one year to the next (e.g., managers might be alerted when engagement levels fall an average of 10 points across the organization), but more sophisticated analyses beyond mean comparisons are not the norm. Similarly, contextual considerations may be investigated by examining mean differences across business units or departments, but interdependencies among these differences are often overlooked. We advocate that practitioners consider changes to their data collection and analysis and transform their employee surveys. Proximal withdrawal states theory and its early empirical tests suggest that measuring control *and* preference can help identify those employees who are on the verge of leaving or staying for the wrong reasons and therefore more likely to exhibit counterproductive work behaviors. Rather than focusing on why employees quit (as commonly done in exit surveys), employee surveys might also ask employees reasons for why they stay and suggest how employers can improve working conditions so that they will remain happily employed (as enthusiastic stayers, assuming you want to keep them). In addition to an annual survey (or census), surveying smaller representative samples of employees four times a year to gauge collective trajectories also seems prudent to have more fine-grained data on contextual and temporal influences on turnover. State Farms and AllState, for instance, track new hires for several years carrying out panel surveys where they can track individuals but this is administered by a special survey unit that promises confidentiality to them.

For larger organizations in particular, statistical analyses of surveys of workforces by business units, departments and teams can estimate how unit-level turnover depends on unit-level differences in predictors (measured by surveys or archival records) as well as unit-level trends in predictors. In addition, assessing preferences for non-job destinations may substantially

increase our prediction of who leaves and may motivate firms to consider ways to accommodate leavers' extraorganizational pursuits (e.g., part-time work hours to allow for degree completion).

We also urge practitioners to analyze their data with more sophisticated statistical analyses. Organizations might benefit from hiring employees with a statistical or data-analytical background who can analyze data with more advanced statistical techniques (e.g., move towards "big data"; Hom et al., 2017). Thus, the more nuanced and complex analyses we advocate for in research also apply to data collection efforts within organizations to allow practitioners to formulate data-driven targeted interventions and measure their effectiveness.

In closing

Ten years ago, many scholars may have been discouraged that much of the accumulated knowledge on turnover only allowed us to predict about a quarter of the variance in this critical outcome variable. As we approach the late teen years of the 21st century, however, our assessment is now an optimistic outlook. Over the past few years, many ambitious and insightful projects have been published that depart from the normative turnover study and furnish innovative theoretical and empirical perspectives. These novel ways to build new turnover theory and to collect and analyze turnover data while remaining strongly grounded in theory show the way forward. There remain many untapped opportunities for turnover research, and we highlight some of them here with the hope to inspire the next generation of scholars to creatively think about and empirically investigate the turnover phenomenon. Such prospects leave us with excitement and anticipation about what the next decade of turnover scholarship will bring.

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