

A Review of Job Embeddedness:

Conceptual, measurement, and relative study conclusions

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Abstract—Job embeddedness is a relatively new theory in turnover research, it provides a broader perspective for organization to retain employees. However, domestic researchers need a further understanding on the content, measurement and other research conclusions of job embeddedness. Based on the literature review, this paper make a commentary on the domestic and overseas research outcomes of job embeddedness from the following five aspects specifically: the concept of job embeddedness, the dimension and measurement of job embeddedness, the antecedent and outcome variables of job embeddedness, the moderating and mediating effects of job embeddedness, and the shortage of current research and directions for future study.

Keywords—Job embeddedness; Turnover; Concept; Measurement; relative study conclusions

I. INTRODUCTION

Voluntary turnover brings a variety of tangible and intangible costs to an organization (Mobley, 1982). In the past decades, scholars have developed many multivariate turnover models which were based on the March & Simon's theory of organization equilibrium in order to understand the mechanism behind voluntary turnover (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Price, 2001). However, a large number of studies have shown that traditional attitudes accounting for only 4-5% of the variable on turnover (Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Maertz & Gampion, 1998; Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000). This illustrates that some of the more important factors may have not been included in the employee turnover model (Yang Chunjiang, Ma Qin Hai & Zeng Xianfeng, 2010).

In this context, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski & Erez (2001) creatively turned their attention from "the factors which affect employee turnover" to "the factors which encourage employee to remain with an organization", and developed a theoretical system of job embeddedness (JE) gradually. Job embeddedness introduces the consideration for non-work factors into the traditional turnover model, and empirical studies reveal that JE predicts incremental variation in turnover after controlling for traditional turnover predictors (Mitchell et al, 2001; Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton & Holtom, 2004; Malloy, Holtom & Lee, 2007; Crossley, Bennett, Jex & Burnfield, 2007). Thus, it becomes the research focus and trend in the field of employee turnover.

In domestic, Xu Shang-Kun (2007), Yuan Qing-Hong & Chen Wen-Chun (2008), Yang et al. (2010), Zhang Mian,

Fried & Griffeth (2012), Lufu Choi & Chen Yun-chuan (2013) have made an literature review of job embeddedness. In their paper, they pointed out the shortcomings of previous research and presented some useful suggests for further research. However, compared with the richness of theoretical and empirical research on job embeddedness on abroad, the research is relatively weak at home. It is important to emphasize the necessity of theoretical development before exploring the relationship between JE and other variables. Only on the basis of unfolding the development of theory can we clarify the direction of future research. According to this, this paper will review the conceptual, measurement issues of job embeddedness and its relative study conclusions first, and then discuss the shortage of current research and directions for future study.

II. THE CONCEPT OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

A. The Pose and Master of Job Embeddedness

Job embeddedness was first reported in the study about voluntary turnover (Mitchell et al, 2001), focusing on factors that encourage employee to remain with an organization. The put forward of this concept was based on Lewin's "Field theory" and the embedded figures of psychology, combined with the new turnover theory formed by Mitchell's "Unfolding Model", and referenced to the empirical research conclusions of non-work factors and other organization-focused predictor which associated with retention/leaving. Mitchell et believed that a variety of factors which from organizations and communities may make individuals "embedded" into their work. Therefore, they described job embeddedness as a net or a web in which an individual can become stuck. The one who is highly embedded has many social links that are close together, and then influence the retention behavior of employee, thus can explain the employee's turnover decision. Job embeddedness suggests that there are numerous strands connect an employee and his or her family in a social, physical, and financial web that includes work and non-work friends, groups, and the community and the physical environment in which he or she lives (Mitchell et al, 2001).

Since then, Yao, Lee, Mitchell, Burton & Sablinski (2004) defined job embeddedness as "the combined forces that keep a person from leaving his or her job", including marital status, community investment, job tenure and other factors. Their views fully reflected the consideration about the importance of

non-work factors, and explained two questions which troubled employer effectively, the questions are “Why do a lot of employees who are satisfied with their present job exert turnover behavior ”and “Why do some employees who are dissatisfied with their present job choose to stay in the organization”.

As can be seen from the above literature review, scholars’ definition of job embeddedness are all from both the organization and community aspects, and the conclusions are quiet common. Based on this, this study defined job embeddedness as “the combined forces from organization and community which keep a person from leaving his or her job”. According to the job embeddedness theory, under the same condition, the one who has high level of embeddedness is more likely to stay in their organization, while the one with low level is more inclined to turnover.

B. *The Comparison Between Job Embeddedness and Conventional Attitudinal Variables*

Before the propose of job embeddedness, organizational commitment and job satisfaction are the most widely studied attitudinal variables in the employee turnover problems. The former generally refers to the degree of an individual identity with and participate in an organization, including three dimensions, that is affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment; and the latter refers to employees’ satisfaction with their job. Both the two attitudinal variables have some similarities with job embeddedness: when talking about employee turnover problems, they all concerned about work-related emotional factors. Besides, some of their subdimensions have some similarity with the dimension of organization-related sacrifice in job embeddedness. However, there have some significant differences between the two attitudinal variables and job embeddedness. Job embeddedness not only include the work-related non-affective judgement, but also cover the factors associated with the community. In addition, apart from the organization-related sacrifice dimension, job embeddedness differs from the two well-known job attitudes in some significant ways.

III. THE DIMENSION AND MEASUREMENT OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

A. *The Dimension of Job Embeddedness*

Mitchell et al(2001) explained that the critical aspects of job embeddedness are(1)links, which reflect the formal and informal connections between a person and institutions or other people. The higher the number of these links, the more the person is bound to job and organization,(2)fit, which is defined as an employee’s perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and its environment. The better the fit, the higher the likelihood that an employee will fell tied to organization and community, thus the lower the possibility to turnover,(3)Sacrifice, which captures the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving a job. The more an employee would give up when leaving, the more difficult it will be for him or her to leave the organization and community. These three critical aspects are important both on and off the job, as a result, this three-by-two matrix suggests six dimensions: links, fit, sacrifice associated

with organization and with community. Then, Lee et al(2004) further categorized the organizational factors into on-the-job embeddedness, and the community factors into off-the-job embeddedness according to the place where the influences occur.

Although the two-dimension model of job embeddedness has been widely recognized by researchers, as it was developed in the United States, scholars began to investigate the utility of this model in other culture gradually(Mallol et al,2007; Tanovad&Holtom,2008;Hom,Tsu, Lee,Ping,Wu&Zhang,2009; Wendy, Harman, Michael& Taho,2009;Vesa Peltokorpi, 2013). Ramesh&Michele(2010) firstly made a cross-cultural comparative study of job embeddedness based on different national culture. On the basis of research in the United States and in India, they added a new dimension, that is family embeddedness(include family links, family fit and family sacrifice) to the job embeddedness model, and proved its utility in both the United States and India. Family factors’ explanation of attitudinal variables further enriched the understanding of organization-family relationship in the research of employee turnover, and also confirmed the research value of “family embeddedness” in different cultural background.

B. *The measurement of job embeddedness*

Currently, the measurement of job embeddedness is mainly conducted by questionnaire, involving composite measure and global measure.

1) *Composite measure.* Mitchell et al.(2001) developed an initial composite scale which contain 40 items to assess the six dimensions of job embeddedness, the measurement of each dimension is composed of several items. They used this questionnaire to assess embeddedness of employees from a regional grocery and a community-based hospital, the alpha reliability for this measure was 0.85 for the employee grocery and 0.87 for the hospital employee. Lee et al. (2004) made a revise of the original 40-item measure to fit the sample’s setting, and formed a 34-item questionnaire finally. Holtom, Mitchell, Lee&Tidd(2006) carried out a further simplify of the original measure, and ultimately retained 21 items. Besides, Cunningham, Fink& Sagas (2005) also made a deletion of several items from the original measure, they predigested the multiple measurement of each dimension becomes a simple item, and proved that the alpha reliability of each dimension was between 0.52-0.71.

The composite scale has theoretical richness in empirical research, and can reduce the cognitive exaggeration based on self-evaluation effectively. However, it still has several problems: First, there are too many items in the scale and contain some questions which people may avoid because these issues involve privacy. Second, the scale gives equal weight to each dimension, but in reality, different individuals will emphasize different dimension. Third, there exist the problem of multicollinearity in the measure, and it will affect the reliability and validity to some extent.

2) *Global measure.* Crossley et al (2007) suggested that the overall measurement can be designed to replace the original sub-items of each dimension. Based on the existing research, they re-analyzed the items on each dimensions, and developed

an global measure of job embeddedness. The scale includes seven items, using a 5-point Likert scoring method (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), and view the job embeddedness as a whole to measure. In their study, the reliability of this scale reached 0.88. The global scale overcomes the limitations of the original composite scale, and promote the development of the measurement for job embeddedness. However, the shortcomings of global scale is also very obvious, it does not highlight the non-attitudinal and off-the-job factors like the composite measure does.

Since the composite measure and global measure has its own distinct advantages and disadvantages, in a specific study, the choice of the measurement should be based on the research purpose. If a study aims to explore the associations between the components of job embeddedness and outcomes, it is better to use the composite measure. On the other hand, if the study aims to test models using latent constructs, the global measure will be a better choice, especially for the studies that use structural equation modeling (Zhang, et al. 2012).

IV. THE ANTECEDENT AND OUTCOME VARIABLES OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

A. *The antecedent variables of job embeddedness*

Based on the research outcomes so far, the antecedent variables of job embeddedness can be attributed to two main categories. The first category is the demographic variables. Previous studies have found that gender (Fink, Cunningham, & Sagas, 2003), personality traits (Giosan & Holtom, 2005), race (Mallol, et al., 2007), age (Wang Li, Shi Jin-tao, 2007), career development stage (Tomas, 2007) all can affect the level of employees' job embeddedness. The second category is job characteristic factors. Former studies show that organizational socialization tactics (Allen, 2006), environmental perception (Li Yu-Xiang & Liu Jun, 2009), open-mindedness and organizational commitment (Chen, Chou & Wang, 2010), leader-member exchange (LMX) (Harris & Michele, 2011), the training, empowerment and compensation in organization (Karatepe & Karadas, 2012) are related to job embeddedness. In addition, the latest cross-cultural study found that a distinctive of cultural and institutional factors affected the job embeddedness in Japanese organizations. (Vesa Peltokorpi, 2013).

B. *The outcome variables of job embeddedness*

Job embeddedness is built on the basis of turnover model, its fundamental purpose is to study employee turnover from the retention perspective. Therefore, many scholars are exploratory test the relationship between job embeddedness and turnover intention (Mitchell et al, 2001; Allen et al, 2006; Ramesh et al, 2010; Harris et al, 2011; Dawley & Andrews, 2012; Jiang, Liu, McKay, Lee & Mitchell, 2012; Rivera et al, 2013), between job embeddedness and turnover behavior (Mitchell et al, 2001; Lee et al, 2004; Cunningham et al, 2005; Crossley et al, 2007; Holtom, 2008; Harris et al, 2011; Jiang et al, 2012) in different industries. Most of the research findings supported that job embeddedness are positively correlated with turnover variables.

In addition, other researches of related embeddedness outcome are mostly about individual behaviors in workplace. Studies have found that job embeddedness is correlated with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Lee

et al, 2004; Wijayanto & Kismono, 2004), job performance (Lee et al, 2004; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008), organizational trust (Wang Li & Shi Jintao, 2007), organizational commitment (Wang Li & Shi Jintao, 2007), the turnover and entrepreneurship activities of hi-tech employees (Mai Yi-Yuan & Gu Xue-Na, 2009), the effectiveness of knowledge work teams (Chen et al, 2010), innovative behavior (Ng & Feldman, 2010), job satisfaction (Harris et al., 2011), repatriated employees' individual identity level (Kraimer, et al., 2012).

In recent years, the range of embeddedness outcome research began to expand. Felps, Hekman, Mitchell, Lee, Harman & Holtom (2009) jumped out of the scope of job embeddedness' influence on individual, and found that coworkers' job embeddedness and job search behaviors play critical roles in explaining why people quit their jobs. By studying the "shocks" in organization, Burton, Holtom, Sablinski, Mitchell & Lee (2010) found that a person with high level job embeddedness will improve their in-role and extra-role performance to respond to negative events. Smith & Mitchell (2011) used the survey data from 1839 enlisted personnel in the U.S. Air Force, and found that unlike previous studies, people who were more embedded in their communities were more likely to voluntarily leave, rather than reenlist or retirement. This study concerned the moderate effect of pension and frequent mandatory relocations that service members face.

V. THE MODERATING AND MEDIATING EFFECTS OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS

In addition to exploring the antecedent and outcome variables of job embeddedness, some scholars have tried to introduce job embeddedness as moderate or mediate variable into their research models to enrich them. Among these researches, it's more common to use job embeddedness as a moderate variable. For instance, job embeddedness moderate the effects of OCB on volitional absences (Lee et al, 2004), volitional absences on performance (Lee et al, 2004), performance on turnover (Lee et al, 2004; Liang Xiaowei & Liao Jian-Qiao, 2005), organizational-based self-esteem (OBSE) on OCBs (Sekiguchi, Burton, and Sablinski, 2008), LMX on task performance / OCB (Sekiguchi et al, 2008), LMX on job satisfaction / turnover intention / turnover behavior (Harris et al., 2011), and job search on turnover (Swider, Boswell & Ryan, 2011).

Few studies have investigated the mediating effects of job embeddedness. The study of Allen (2006) showed that job embeddedness plays a fully mediating role in socialization tactics on employee turnover. Karatepe & Karadas (2012) found that job embeddedness had partly mediator effect between empowerment/compensation and frontline staff's service recovery performance.

Furthermore, in the recent study, Dawley & Andrews (2012) showed that off-the-job factors moderate the relationship between on-the-job embeddedness and turnover intentions such that this relationship is weaker when off-the-job embeddedness is higher. Lo, Wong, Yam & Whitfield (2012) developed a newly dimension of job embeddedness construct, the new model considered three embedding factors: individuals' community embeddedness towards their home country (HomeCCE—newly developed), embeddedness towards the organization in which they are employed in the host country

(HostCOE) and embeddedness towards the host country community (HostCCE). Then they applied the model to a sample of self-initiated expatriates (SEs) and found that HostCOE plays a mediating role between a SEs' HomeCCE and turnover intention and willingness to accept unsolicited job offers; and these mediated relationships are moderated by the variables: expatriate-dominated private sector and the SEs' HostCCE.

VI. CONCLUSION

Job embeddedness is a relatively new theory in recent years. It tries to predict leaving from retention perspective, and introduces non-job factors into the turnover model. This new theory is gaining more and more attention and recognition from scholars. According to the literature review of job embeddedness, we can see that most of the current study about job embeddedness are focused on correlation study to explore its relationship with other variables, fruitful results have gained from the antecedent and outcome variables to moderating and mediating mechanisms of job embeddedness.

However, in the areas of theoretical and empirical research, job embeddedness still has many shortcomings and issues which worth a further explore. First, few studies have examined the conceptualization and measurement issues, so future research should strengthen the fundamental theory research of job embeddedness and reinforce the development of measuring tools. Second, in the concept of job embeddedness, the definition of "community" is not clearly, and the conclusions of community embeddedness is quite few. Consequently, further research is needed to gradually specify the meaning of "community", and based on this, make a further study on the relationship between community embeddedness and other variables. Finally, as job embeddedness is closely related to the internal and external environment of the employee's organization, while the organizational and social environment are strongly influenced by social cultural, it is necessary to increase the cross-cultural studies of job embeddedness, to make a further exploration and localization fixes of structure and measurement under the non-US background.

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