Turnover Intention for Knowledge Workers: The Effects of Core Self-Evaluations, Proactive Personality, Perceived Organizational Support, Developmental Feedback, and Job Complexity

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Abstract

Despite extensive examination of the predictors for turnover and turnover intention, most studies have focused on attitudinal and behavioral aspects of individual employees. Based on the study of knowledge workers in a Korean conglomerate, we investigated the effects of personal (i.e., core self-evaluations and proactive personality) and contextual factors (i.e., perceived organizational support, developmental feedback, and job complexity) on turnover intention. All the factors, except for proactive personality, were significant. Knowledge workers with higher core self-evaluations show lower level of turnover intention. Managers and HR/OD professionals could play a pivotal role for retention of these knowledge workers by building better practices for organizational culture, providing job redesign, and employee developmental practices such as coaching and mentoring practices.
Turnover Intention for Knowledge Workers: The Effects of Perceived Organizational Support, Developmental Feedback, Job Complexity, Core Self-Evaluations, and Proactive Personality

Human resource development (HRD) can play a pivotal role in attracting, motivating, and retaining talented employees, thus, leading to a sustained competitiveness in the long run (Joo & McLean, 2006). Furthermore, engaged employees with relevant knowledge and skills are regarded as essential to an organization’s performance and success; therefore, retention of these valued employees is essential (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2008). For decades, turnover intention has been established as the strongest predictor of turnover in multiple fields (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett 2004; Joo, 2010; Michaels & Spector, 1982; Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

In their meta-analysis of turnover issues in the IT industry, Joseph, Ng, Koh, C., and Ang (2007) summarized extant theories of turnover. For instance, March and Simon's (1958) organizational equilibrium theory of turnover, which is similar to the traditional equity theory, is the foundation of most turnover theory. Building on this theory, Porter and Steers (1973) proposed the met expectations theory of turnover, which is based on expectancy theory of motivation. Mobley (1977) also extended March and Simon's theory, positing the linkage model that explicated the withdrawal cognition and job search behaviors between job satisfaction and turnover.

However, there continues to be a theory-practice divide in terms of recognizing the need to retain valuable and skilled employees without a better understanding of what predicts their intention to leave the organization—even after decades of study. With regard to the previous research on turnover, Barak, Nissly, and Levin (2001) suggested three major categories of turnover antecedents: (a) demographic factors, both personal and work-related; (b) professional
perceptions, including organizational commitment and job satisfaction; and (c) organizational conditions, such as fairness with respect to compensation and organizational culture. It appears that greater attention needs to be given to inclusively identifying the influence of both personal and contextual factors on employees’ turnover intentions.

In a subsequent meta-analysis of turnover research, Griffeth et al. (2000) reported that few demographic attributes meaningfully predicted turnover. According to previous studies, factors influencing turnover intention included career decision-making self-efficacy (Peterson, 2009), personality (Allen, Weeks, & Moffitt, 2005), job satisfaction (e.g., Egan et al., 2004; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Valentine et al., 2011), organizational commitment (Cole & Brunch, 2006; DeConinck & Bachmann, 2011; Joo, 2010), employee engagement (Bothma & Roodt, 2012), and job performance (Salamin & Hom, 2005; Yi, Y., Natarajan, R., & Gong, T., 2011). As Griffeth et al. (2000) also noted, there were few studies using personality predictors, with the exception of Digman (1990) and Barrick and Mount (1996); these studies examined the effects of the Big Five personality factors on turnover. The current study investigated the roles of emerging personality factors such as core self-evaluations, proactive personality, and goal orientations.

Focusing overwhelmingly on individual characteristics, most models have not adequately addressed the effect of organizational factors in contributing to the individual’s decision to stay or leave (see reviews by Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Peterson, 2004). Terborg and Lee (1984) and Shaw et al. (1998) called for rigorous research to explicitly consider organizational level variables as predictors of turnover.
Beyond personal attitudinal factors, organizationally-focused dimensions also have been found to be related to predictors of turnover. For example, studies have identified the relationship between employee turnover and supervisor support (Maertz et al., 2007), work environment (Perryer et al., 2010), and work culture (Peterson, 2009). Considering that each of these factors is a key determinant in employees’ actual decisions to stay or leave, understanding the influence of personal and contextual factors on employees’ turnover intention is key. For example, practices of organizational justice or fairness could be a strong factor influencing employee retention. Since fair treatment by employees connotes that they value employees and care about their well-being (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). When employees perceive organizational support, they develop stronger organizational commitment (Shore & Wayne, 1993). Among other contextual factors, the current study examines the effects of perceived organizational support, job complexity, and developmental feedback on turnover intention.

**Research Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of the current study was to identify the impact of selected personal characteristics and contextual characteristics on managerial employees’ turnover intentions. The research question was: what is the relationship between employees’ (a) core self-evaluation, (b) proactive personality, (c) perceived organizational support, (d) developmental feedback, and (e) job complexity, and the outcome variable, turnover intention? Thus, the theoretical contribution lies first in this more comprehensive approach, which identifies the impact of both selected personal and contextual characteristics on turnover intentions. Secondly, these specific variables have not been seen together in the turnover literature to date.

Following is a discussion of the theoretical framework that supports the five hypotheses. Then, research methods, including data collection and measures, are described. Research
findings are reported and discussed. Finally, limitations are identified, and implications for further research and HRD practice are offered.

**Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

The constructs core self-evaluations, proactive personality, perceived organizational support, developmental feedback, and job complexity were reviewed to identify the relationship between those constructs and turnover intention among managerial employees. Five hypotheses were derived based on the literature review on those constructs.

**Core Self-Evaluations**

Core self-evaluations refer to a single, higher-order concept of individuals’ fundamental appraisals of their self-worth and capabilities (Judge et al., 1998; 2002). According to Judge et al. (1997), core self-evaluations comprise four core dispositional traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability. Thus, the higher the CSE score, the higher each trait of a positive self-concept will be (Judge et al., 2003).

Core self-evaluations originally were suggested to explain dispositional influences on job satisfaction (Chang et al., 2012; Judge et al., 1998). A number of investigations have suggested a positive relationship between CSE and job satisfaction (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2003; Judge et al., 2005; Wu & Griffin, 2012). Since job satisfaction has been a critical factor in predicting turnover intention for decades (Egan et al., 2004; Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2001; Mobley, 1977; Tett & Meyer, 1993), investigating the direct relationship between core self-evaluations and turnover intention would be worthwhile. Moreover, a recent meta-analysis of core self-evaluations (Chang et al., 2012) identified that core self-evaluations is negatively related to turnover intention. Individuals with high core self-evaluations concentrated more on the positive aspects of their environment and less on negative aspects (Ferris et al., 2011), and thus were more satisfied with
their working conditions.

**H1. Core self-evaluations will be negatively related to turnover intention.**

**Proactive Personality**

Bateman and Crant (1993) introduced proactive personality as a construct that represented individual differences in people’s tendencies to take action to change their current situations. More specifically, proactive individuals were more likely to actively look for opportunities and to manipulate the environment in order to achieve their goals (Bateman & Crant, 1993; Crant, 2000). Conversely, less proactive individuals were more likely to be passive, letting events occur and then reacting to the changes (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

Individuals with proactive personalities appeared not to decide easily whether or not to stay in the organization when confronted with unfavorable situations. Rather, they tended to overcome the situational constraints and influence the changed environment (Bateman & Crant, 1993), persisting with problem-solving activities until their objectives were achieved (Crant, 2000).

**H2. Proactive personality will be negatively related to turnover intention.**

**Perceived Organizational Support (POS)**

Perceived organizational support (POS) is defined as general beliefs regarding the extent to which employees perceive that their organization values their contributions and pays attention to their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Derived from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), POS explains the reason why employees exhibit positive behaviors towards their organization such as organizational commitment and loyalty. When the organization provides benefits to its employees, those employees reciprocate (Eder, 2008). For example, employees who perceive the organization has treated them in a positive way
are more likely to be attached and remain with the organization. Conversely, if employees perceive that the organization has not treated them in a positive way, they are less likely to be attached and remain with the organization. In their meta-analysis, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) demonstrated the negative relationship between POS and turnover intention. More recently, Perryer, et al. (2010) and Arshadi (2011) supported that POS negatively influenced employees’ intentions to quit. More specific to knowledge workers, the current study measures the extent to which organizational cultures support a culture of creativity and innovation.

H3. Perceived organizational support will be negatively related to turnover intention.

**Developmental Feedback**

Developmental feedback refers to the extent to which supervisors offer employees helpful and useful information that facilitates their employees’ learning and development on the job (Zhou, 2003). According to Zhou, 2003, developmental feedback is future oriented; supervisors provide their direct reports with appropriate information related to their job performance in the future with no pressure for a specific consequence. This approach is in contrast to traditional performance feedback that focuses on the completion and improvement of the current tasks. These informational practices enhance intrinsic motivation which leads to a higher level of interest in the task itself and orientation toward learning and improvement (Zhou, 2003).

According to Harris, Boswell, and Xie (2011), supervisors’ developmental feedback promoted devotion to the task with greater duration, intensity, and persistence among newcomers. Moreover, Joo and Park, 2010 noted that supervisors’ developmental feedback facilitated employees’ learning and development, signaling support to employees regarding their future at the organization.
H4. *Developmental feedback will be negatively related to turnover intention.*

**Job Complexity**

Job design has been considered a significant predictor of employee motivation, attitudes, and creative performance at work (Amabile, 1988; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). According to the *Job Characteristic Model* (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), jobs have five dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Those five dimensions lead to higher levels of work motivation by generating individuals’ psychological states such as *experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for the work outcomes, and knowledge of the results of the work activities* (Chung-Yan, 2010, p.238). Complex jobs are mentally challenging and require utilizing a number of complex skills (Chung-Yan, 2010), and stimulate excitement and interest (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

Thus, in general, job complexity is considered a positive aspect of work (Chung-Yan, 2010). In a meta-analysis, Humphrey et al. (2007) supported this position, finding that job complexity was positively associated with internal work motivation, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, and job performance. Consistent with Humphrey et al., Grebner et al. (2003) found that job complexity negatively predicted intention to quit. To complete a complex task, individuals are required to find novel approaches or optimal solutions to problems rather than operating according to standard procedures with existing work methods (Man & Lam, 2003). In a knowledge society, those activities might motivate workers to adhere to the current job. Thus, job complexity is considered to be an important predictor of turnover intention.

H5. *Job complexity will be negatively related to turnover intention.*
Methods

This section includes an identification of the sample and brief description of the data collection methods. Then each of the instruments, identifying the five instruments used to measure each of the independent variables, and the single instrument used to measure the dependent variable, intention to leave the organization will be described.

Data Collection and Sample Demographics

A cross-sectional survey was used to obtain individual perceptions of knowledge workers employed in a Korean conglomerate. This conglomerate is a Fortune Global 100 company. Six questionnaires were distributed to 340 employees, and 291 were returned, yielding a final response rate of 85.6%.

Demographic variables included (a) gender, (b) age, (c) education level, (d) hierarchical level, (e) type of job, and (f) length of a leader-follower relationship. Most respondents were male (88%) in their 30’s (95%) in managerial or assistant managerial positions (98%). In terms of educational level, 44% of the respondents graduated from a four-year college and 34% from graduate school. The length of the relationships with the current supervisor was evenly distributed across the following categories: less than one year (21%), between one year and two years (24%), between two and three years (16%), between three and five years (20%), and over five years (19%). Classification by job type was as follows: 8% in marketing and sales; 13% in production; 9% in engineering; 37% in research and development; 18% in information technology; 6% in supporting functions such as finance, HR, and legal; and 9% in other. In summary, most respondents were highly educated male managers or assistant managers in their 30’s.

Measures
Six instruments were distributed, all of which had shown acceptable levels of reliability and validity in previous research. Each survey was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Core self-evaluations.** This 12-item *Core Self-Evaluations Scale* (CSES) developed by Judge, Erez, Bono, and Thoresen (2003) is a composite of four core traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability. Judge et al. (2003) provided evidence of a unitary factor structure and psychometric support for this scale. Instead of measuring the four specific traits separately and weighting the scores, the scale is a direct and relatively brief measure of an individual’s core personality. The reliability for the 12 items was .81 in this study. Sample items included “Overall, I am satisfied with myself,” and “I determine what will happen in my life.”

**Proactive personality.** The self-report measure of proactive personality was a 10-item scale of the *Proactive Personality Survey* (PPS) (Siebert et al., 1999), a shortened version of the instrument originally developed by Bateman and Crant (1993). The reliability coefficient of the 10-item scale was .86, which was similar to that of the full version (.88) (Siebert et al., 1999). In the current study, the first item, “I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life,” was omitted because this question was too generic and might have lead to negative cultural nuances in South Korea. The internal reliability of nine items was .83 in the current study. A sample item was: “I excel at identifying opportunities.”

**Perceived organizational support.** Zhou and George (2001) utilized four items from Scott and Bruce’s (1994) measure for perceived organizational support for creativity ($\alpha = .84$). This construct measures the extent to which an organizational culture supports a system for creativity and innovation. The internal reliability was .88 in the current study. A sample item was:
“The reward system here encourages innovation.”

**Developmental feedback.** All three items of the *Developmental Feedback Scale* (Zhou, 2003) were used. Although the internal reliability was .82 in the current study, Zhou (2003) had reported it to be .86. A sample item was: “While giving me feedback, my supervisor focuses on helping me to learn and improve.”

**Job complexity.** Six items from the *Job Diagnostic Survey* (JDS) (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) were used to assess the challenges and complexity of employees’ jobs. Originally, this instrument was composed of 15 items: three items for each of the five job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback). The median alpha of the job characteristics measures in Oldham and Cummings’ (1996) study was .68. Researchers in previous studies argued that the sub-constructs of job characteristics were not independent of one another (Dunham, 1976; Kulik, Oldham & Langner, 1988; Pierce & Dunham, 1978). Therefore, in the current study, only six items were used—task significance (3 items) and autonomy (3 items)—because these items were deemed to be most appropriate for measuring job complexity. The internal consistency reliability was .77 in the current study. A sample item included, “the job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work.”

**Turnover intention.** A three-item scale developed by Mobley et al (1978) was used for this study to measure turnover intention. The three items were distinctive from each other in their factor analysis. In the current study, the reliability was .89. An example of one item is, “As soon as I can find a better job, I’ll leave the organization.”

**Results**

The results of the study are reported in four parts. First, the construct validity of each measurement model was examined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Second, the
descriptive statistics, correlations, and reliabilities of the reduced measurement model analyses are reported. Third, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. Multiple regression analysis is appropriate when a single metric dependent variable is hypothesized to have relationships with two or more metric independent variables (Howell, 2007; Kline, 2005; Siegel, 2003).

**Measurement Model Assessment**

An overall CFA was conducted to estimate the quality of the factor structure and designated factor loadings by statistically testing the fit between a proposed measurement model and the data (Yang, 2005). The CFA was used to estimate the convergent and discriminate validity of the six constructs: (a) core self-evaluation, (b) proactive personality, (c) perceived organizational support, (d) developmental feedback, and (e) job complexity, and the outcome variable, (f) turnover intention. The goodness-of-fit indices used in this study include: chi-square ($\chi^2$), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), normed fit index (NFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation of the Measurement Model</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>679.83**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ** p < .01

**Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities.**

Table 2 presents the correlations among the six constructs and the reliabilities. Overall, most correlations showed moderate and positive relationships among the four constructs. All the contextual factors turned out to be significant. With regard to personality factors, whereas core
self-evaluations was a significant predictor of turnover intention, proactive personality turned out to be non-significant. All measures demonstrated adequate levels of reliability (.77 - .89).

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics, Correlations and Reliabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>s.d.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Perceived organizational support</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Developmental feedback</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Job complexity</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Core self-evaluations</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Proactive personality</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Turnover intention</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; N = 291

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3 shows the results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis of turnover intention. Overall, demographic variables, personality, and contextual factors accounted for 9% of the variance in turnover intention. In step 1, in order to control demographic variables, gender, age, education, hierarchical level, and the length of a leader-follower relationship were entered. Among the demographic variables, none was found to be significant. In step 2, the main effects of personal characteristics (i.e., core self-evaluations and proactive personality) explained an additional 3% of the variance in turnover intention. However, the F-value turned out to be non-significant. In step 3, as a result of entering a second main effect, contextual factors (i.e., perceived organizational support, developmental feedback, and job complexity), the adjusted R²
accounted for an additional 7%. Finally, in step 4, the moderation effects of personal and contextual factors were examined. None of the moderation effects were significant (Δ$R^2 = -.01$).

Table 3.

Hierarchical multiple regression results for turnover intention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Turnover Intention</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>Model 4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1: Demographic variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job level</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2: Personal factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core self-evaluations (CSE)</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive personality (PP)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3: Contextual factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived organizational support (POS)</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental feedback (DF)</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job complexity (JC)</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4: Interaction Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE * POS</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE * DF</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE * JC</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP * POS</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP * DF</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP * JC</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$-value</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>3.57**</td>
<td>2.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

**Discussion**
The findings of this study are discussed on the basis of the conceptual model compared with previous research. Then, implications of this study for research and practice in the field of HRD will be offered followed by limitations of the study and concluding remarks.

**Research Findings**

This empirical study of knowledge workers in a Korean conglomerate investigated personal antecedents (core self-evaluations and proactive personality) and contextual antecedents (perceived organizational support, developmental feedback, and job characteristics) as they related to turnover intention. As Lewin (1947) suggested, the formula $B = f(P, E)$, human behavior ($B$) can be explained as a function ($f$) of the combination of one’s personal characteristics ($P$) and one’s perception of the environment ($E$) (as cited in Burke, 2002). We found, in terms of the correlation coefficient, all contextual factors were modest but significant predictors of turnover intention.

More specifically for contextual factors, given their perceived organizational support for creativity and innovation, these Korean knowledge workers tended to imply that they would stay in an organization as long as they perceived that the company cared about their well-being and encouraged creativity and innovation and as long as their jobs are challenging and motivating. Based on the classic job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), and as the result of Humphrey et al.’s (2007) meta-analysis, a number of researchers found that complex jobs for knowledge workers that require more autonomy and significance are positively associated with internal work motivation, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, and job performance. Thus, we conclude that complex jobs would lead to less turnover intention for knowledge workers. Last, developmental feedback from supervisors turned out to be non-significant as a regression analysis, but, in terms of correlation coefficient, it was a mediocre but
significant predictor for turnover intention. Thus, supportive leadership including coaching and mentoring practices would help retention of knowledge workers in a Korean context.

With regards to personal characteristics, supporting a recent meta-analysis of core self-evaluations (Chang et al., 2012), core self-evaluations was negatively related to turnover intention. Individuals with high core self-evaluations concentrated more on the positive aspects of their environment and less on negative aspects (Ferris et al., 2011), and thus were more satisfied with their working conditions. That is, employees with a high level of core self-evaluations intended to stay longer.

While core self-evaluations was a significant predictor of turnover intention, proactive personality turned out to be non-significant. It is noted that the respondents are knowledge workers in one of the best companies in terms of corporate reputation and HR practices in Korea. That is, they are expected to have less intention to leave this organization, because they could hardly find comparable employers in Korean labor market that is characterized as less mobile than Western countries. This could be one reason why personality was not a significant determinant of turnover. Further studies are recommended in the Korean context as well as other non-Western contexts.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

With regard to theoretical contributions, this study integrated personality (i.e., core self-evaluations and proactive personality), organizational culture (i.e., perceived organizational support), leadership (i.e., developmental feedback), job design (i.e., job complexity), and turnover research. Despite extensive investigations of the antecedents of turnover intention over multiple decades, most studies have focused on attitudinal and behavioral aspects of individual employees such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Peterson (2004) proposed an
organizational model of employee persistence that encompasses personal characteristics, organizational, performance, career, and extra-organizational factors. However, in general, there has been a lack of attention to identify inclusively the influence of both personal and contextual factors on employees’ turnover intentions. In particular, little empirical research has been conducted to integrate these dimensions in a non-Western context—in this case, a Korean context.

With regard to the role of proactive personality, Korean culture is characterized by collectivism, high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long-term orientation (Hofestede, 1980). In East Asian countries (i.e., Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) that share these traditional Confucian values, individuals highly value harmony and building good relationships when interacting with other organizational members, and tend to emphasize fitting in with their organizations rather than challenging the status quo or proactively changing the work environment (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Triandis, 1995). It is noted that this Korean cultural context is quite opposite to that of many North American and European countries (Hofestede, 1980). Thus, the role of proactivity on creativity in Asian culture needs to be further examined.

As for the practical implications, HR and OD professionals might play a pivotal role for retention of these knowledge workers by building better practice representative of a learning organization culture, providing job redesign, coaching and mentoring practices, and leadership development programs that could enhance supportive leadership. First, HR and OD professionals need to enhance the level of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) to improve the level of retention. Based on the reciprocity norm, POS would elicit employees' perceived obligation to be concerned about the organization's welfare and to help the organization reach its objectives.
(Eisenberger et al., 1990). In addition, supportive leadership could decrease the level of turnover intention. HR/OD professionals need to take an integrated approach including coaching and mentoring to enhance developmental feedback.

Lastly, another implication is job redesign in general and job enrichment in particular. Given that knowledge workers apply theoretical and analytical knowledge in developing new products and services (Drucker, 1999), and since it is therefore more difficult to monitor these knowledge workers (Joo & Lim, 2009), their job needs to allow for greater empowerment by allowing more autonomy and responsibility (Joo, 2010).

Although the effect size of core self-evaluations was smaller than contextual factors, that variable turned out to be a significant predictor for turnover intention. Core self-evaluations consist of four core dispositional traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (Judge et al., 1997). HR practitioners might use core self-evaluations as a selection and screening tool, thus potentially reducing turnover costs and consequently hiring and training costs.

**Limitations and Future Research**

There are several potential limitations in terms of methodology. First, the current empirical study confined itself to a cross-sectional survey method, which leaves room for speculation with regard to causality among the variables. Second, this study relied on self-reported answers by employees who volunteered to participate. In addition, while representative of most Korean private organizations, the sample of predominantly highly educated male managers is restricted to a certain group in terms of demographic characteristics. Finally, in the current study, the proposed predictors accounted only for nine percent of the variance in turnover intention, which means there are still many other factors that have not yet been examined.
Future research could be based on objective indicators and multiple sources. That is, actual turnover data could be used instead of self-responded turnover intention measure. In addition, in order to increase the generalizability of the present study, more studies in various cultural and national context representing diverse demographic groups are needed. While the current study was limited to knowledge workers, most of whom were males with higher educational levels, future research should be conducted with workers from different educational backgrounds, fields and other diverse characteristics. Future research, such as a comparative study, between (a) a variety of Asian countries, and (b) a large Asian company and a large US company are recommended. Finally, more antecedents that can have more influence on turnover intention should be found in the future.

Conclusion

Even in an economic downturn, employee turnover is a critical issue for organizations, given highly competitive and ever-changing expectations. The purpose of this study was to examine several personal and contextual antecedents of turnover intention for knowledge workers in South Korea. In this study, contextual factors had a greater impact on employees’ turnover intention than did personality factors. By developing and maintaining constructive leadership, organization-wide and at individual job levels, HR/OD practitioners can make a positive contribution for the competitiveness of their organizations.
References


