Comments on Development of Job Embeddedness about Study on Turnover and Exploration into Application in Enterprises

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Abstract

This article discussed the problem of employee turnover by taking job embeddedness theory as the perspective of research and introduced job embeddedness and its latest research progress on the basis of reviewing developmental process of study on employee turnover. Then, the author put forward relevant enlightenments, application and development direction that can be referred to by enterprises in China to reduce the turnover rate of employees,

Keywords: Job embeddedness, Study on turnover

In the current society in which human capital becomes increasingly the core competition advantage of an enterprise, voluntary turnover of core employee more and more arouses extensive attention from the academic field and business field. Turnover of core employees is extremely likely to bring about rapid loss of human capital and social capital in the enterprise, increase of replacement cost of talents, disclosure of technical and management confidentiality and reduction of core competition of the enterprise, etc, which may result in immeasurable losses to the enterprise. As has been indicated by research, turnover of core employees has become one of the severe issues that perplex survival and development of an enterprise. How to effectively confirm influential factors for turnover of core employees, predict the turnover behavior of employees and keep back these core employees is a key issue that is urgently to be focused and resolved by the enterprise.

1. Development of study on employee turnover and presentation of the theory of "job embeddedness"

Development of study on turnover has generally gone through three stages, namely, traditional attitude turnover theory, multipath turnover theory and the current job embeddedness theory. Generally speaking, all these studies on voluntary turnover regard employee turnover as a dependent variable, on the basis of which they establish a dependent variable-based turnover model and accordingly deduce turnover aspiration and turnover behavior of employees.

The traditional attitude turnover theory predicts the turnover behavior and retention of employees by taking such job attitude factors as "job satisfaction" and "organizational commitment" a intermediate variable. According to this theory, employees with high job satisfaction and organizational commitment are believed not easy to leave their positions. The main typical studies include the earlier model of "decision by participants" by March & Simon. This model takes the perceived turnover aspiration and turnover possibility as two primary turnover variables which afterwards are evolved into "job satisfaction" and "perceptible job opportunity", and become the major factor of predicting employees' turnover behavior and the foundation for establishment of a large number of models. The following models are all traditional models established on the basis of job attitude: Price Model (1977), Mobley's intermediary chain model and expansion intermediary chain model (1977), Steer & Mowday Model (1977) and the Cusp-catastrophe model by Sheridan & Abelson. Although these models have confirmed correlativity between job attitude and turnover, they merely focus on one factor or several possible decision making factors, which is not enough to explain the complicated turnover intention and turnover behavior,

especially the turnover behavior caused by non-work factors. In their study in 2000, Griffeth and Hom et al discovered that, employee satisfaction could only explain 3.6% of the variance variation of actual turnover behavior. Through his study on models of voluntary turnover of employees over ten years, the American Professor Mitchell found out, a combination of the traditional mainstream attitude turnover model with other several attitude variables could only explain less than 25% of variation of turnover. (Liang Xiaowei, 2005).

The multipath turnover theory refers to prediction on multipath turnover behavior with the incident of "system shock" as the initiative. Considering the deficiency of prediction by traditional turnover models on turnover behavior, Lee and Mitchell broke through the traditional research perspective of job attitude in 1994 and put forward a multipath expansion model which made an analysis from the multipath perspective of the social background and turnover types of organizing employees for turnover decision making (Liang Xiaowei, 2005). This model points out that, there are several paths for employee turnover, and some turnover decision may break away from job satisfaction and exist on their own, such as, via the incident of "system shock". The multipath model has enhanced strength of prediction on turnover behavior, but it has not taken into account influences of other subjective attitude variables (such as organizational commitment) in addition to job satisfaction. (Zhang Mian & Li Shuzhuo, 2002)

Job embeddedness theory is a model which predicts turnover behavior of employee from the three dimensions of Links, Fit and Sacrifice. In view of limitations of previous study models, Mitchell and Lee et al applied embeddedness theory into discussion of the internal organization in 2001 based on the basis of the concept of "social embeddedness" proposed by Granovetter (1985), and put forward the theory of "job embeddedness". They expanded studies which concentrated only on the overall organizational level or which deviated to pure interpersonal relationship level. This model proved that, compared with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, job embeddedness showed stronger strength of prediction on employee turnover. Job satisfaction is not necessarily the entire decisive factor of employee turnover, and other factors outside the job may also exert influences on turnover and retention of employees. "Job embeddedness" represents a series of general factors which affect retention decision making of employees, which not only include job factors, such as contact with colleagues, fitting of personnel and posts and community service activities sponsored by the organization, etc, but also include some non-work factors, such as responsibilities of individual, family and the community. The theory of "job embeddedness" goes into deep study and discussion about influences of non-work factors on employee turnover. According to this theory, "job embeddedness is just a net which people 'sink into'. People with high embedability have a lot of closely connected relations and combination of these relations can be diversified. An individual may embed or sink into the social network which they reside in with several methods." The more complicated the social network of employees and the more their connection with the job, the stronger their job embedability and the closer the dependency relationship between employees and the organization.

There are three key analysis dimenions for job embeddedness, that is, Links, Fit and Sacrifice. Each dimension makes an analysis from the two aspects of organization and community, and thus, six analytical fields are formed: Links—organization, Fit—organization, Sacrifice—organization, Links—community, Fit—community & Sacrifice—community. Definition of relevant concepts about job embeddedness is shown as in Table 1.

Compared with the former two theories, the theory of "job embeddedness" has the following advantages: it has explained well two phenomena which often perplex business owners. Firstly, employees leave their positions due to satisfaction with the job or they retain because they are dissatisfied with the job. According to the "embeddedness theory", when employees are satisfied with the current job, they may volunteer to seek for more satisfactory job opportunities as a result of the low degree of job embeddedness. That is to say, they leave their positions due to satisfaction with the job. When employees are dissatisfied with the current job, they may also choose to retain owing to the high degree of embeddedness of non-work factors and close connection. That is to say, employees choose to give up turnover because of high cost caused by turnover, and choose to retain even though they may be dissatisfied with some aspects in the enterprise. Therefore, at the time when an enterprise concentrates on traditional job satisfaction, it should also pay attention to influences of other subjective factors and non-work factors on employee turnover. Secondly, employees may have different aspirations of retention/turnover who work in the same organization, possess similar working conditions and environment and have equal work selection opportunities. According to the "embeddedness theory", under the equal condition, employees with deep job embeddedness are more likely to choose retention, whereas employees with low degree of job embeddedness are more inclined to turnover. Thus, job embeddedness theory provides a new perspective for voluntary turnover of employees and is more and more concentrated by the academia.

2. The latest progress of studies on "job embeddedness" theory

In 2004, Mitchell et al took 1650 employees from large-scale financial institutions as research sample and made a distinction between the component factors of job embeddedness --- on-job embeddedness and off-job embeddedness. Through regression analysis, he pointed out that, off-job embeddedness could predict significantly voluntary turnover of employees, whereas on-job embeddedness had weak prediction strength. The analysis also showed that on-job embeddedness could predict significantly the citizen identity and work performance of the organization, wehreas off-job embeddedness had weak prediction strength. In addition, job embeddedness could mediate influences of absence, citizen identity and performance on turnover of employees.

David Allen pointed out in his research, the strategy of socialization could enable new employees to be further embedded in the organization, which in turn might affect turnover rate of new employees. This theory has been verified in a study which took new employees as the sample in a large-scale financial service organization. According to the research, the strategy of socialization can make new employees embedded in the organization, and collective, fixed and authorized strategies are verified to be dominantly correlated with on-job embeddedness. The research also indicates, relevance of adjustment of the relationship between on-job embeddedness and turnover and between socialization strategy and turnover is weak (Brooks C. Holtom, Terence R. Mitchell, Thomas W. Lee, 2006).

Insert Table 1 Here

In the latest research, Mitchell et al integrated expansion model and job embeddedness model so as to obtain the most distinct organizational link skeleton. It is discovered in a large-scale international research which involved several hundred employees of turnover and retention, the job embeddedness of retaining employees is high, which verifies the precise prediction of job embeddedness on retention of employees. It is also found that, job embeddedness can buffer influences of "system shock" on employees. That is, under a system shock, employees with low embeddedness are more likely to choose turnover than employees with high embeddedness (Brooks C. Holtom, Terence R. Mitchell, Thomas W. Lee, 2006)

Furthermore, the recent studies abroad about job embeddedness have the following trends: switch from perspective of personal behavior to organizational research perspective, from theoretical research to applicable research, and the trend of combination of theory and practice is greatly strengthened.

The latest research by Holtom, Mtchell and Lee in 2006 focused on application of job embeddedness in enterprises. They not only put forward methods by some enterprises to improve job embeddedness of employees (see Table 2), but also studied a lot of living examples by the Fortune 100 Companies in application of job embeddedness theory and improvement of job embeddedness (see Table 3).

Insert Table 2 Here

Insert Table 3 Here

3. Enlightenment and application of job embeddedness theory in enterprises in China

3.1 The status quo of domestic studies on turnover based on the theory of "job embeddedness"

The earliest literature about job embeddedness at home began with "The Latest Progress in Study on Model of Voluntary Turnover of Foreign Employees" by Zhang Mian & Zhang De in 2003, which introduced the latest condition of turnover models and the theory of job embeddedness as well as its contribution to turnover models. Afterwards, some academics made discussion and empirical research on this theory in succession, such as Liang Xiaowei, Luo Jing, Liao Jianqiao, Wang Feibin, Li Qihui and Sun Xiaohua, etc. Their focus of studies was mainly on: 1) Expansion of research perspective, for which they put forward the organization-based perspective of research based on the basis of individual behavior as the research perspective. For example, they took knowledge employees as the research group, and discussed how an organization should employ the embeddedness theory to reinforce "stickiness factor" and improve the degree of organizational embeddedness of knowledge employees. (Liang Xiaowei, Luo Jing & Liao Jianqiao, 2006). 2) Focus on applicability of job embeddedness model at home. In combination with the status quo of China, they made research and improvement on the job embeddedness model and attempted to integrate this model with Chinese culture and management situation. For instance, they took Wuhan municipal state-owned and private-owned hospitals as research sample to study the applicability of job embeddedness model in China (Liang Xiaowei, 2004).

Generally speaking, studies on job embeddedness at home have just taken the initial step and are in infancy. There are a minority of academics and monographs within this field. Most of studies focus on introduction of foreign ideas and track of foreign research achievements, and exploration and development connected with

domestic situation are inadequate. However, as a new field of study on turnover, job embeddedness would certainly receive further concentration and development in practice.

- 3.2 Guidance significance of turnover theories to practice of enterprises in China based on job embeddedness
- 3.2.1 To enhance job satisfaction of employees is not the unique means to retain employees

Since studies on application of job embeddedness theory to study turnover of employees is still at a stage of theory discussion and test, they haven't aroused wide attention of the academia and the business field. Besides, research achievements have not been made which can directly be applied to enterprises. Therefore, at present, some enterprises in China mainly adopt "job attitude theory", that is, to improve job satisfaction of employees as a primary means to retain employees. For example, quite a large number of enterprises adopt survey of job satisfaction to predict their turnover rate, and attempt to improve job satisfaction of employees by all sorts of means (such as remuneration, welfare and share option, etc), in the hope of retaining core talents of the enterprises. For all this, turnover of core employees still make many business owners perplexed and nail-biting. Introduction of job embeddedness theory enables an enterprise to have another alternative, and they can conduct an overall study on turnover factors of employees and predict their turnover behavior from the two perspectives of work factors and non-work factors.

3.2.2 To retain core employees by means of increasing "embeddedness" of employees and increasing their turnover cost with goodwill

It is discovered that, an enterprise can obviously improve job embeddedness of employees, strengthen their retention aspiration, make the enterprise and employees an interdependent community interest and retain core talents for the enterprise by enhancing degree of fitting between employees and the enterprise and the community and by creating and consolidating links of employees and the enterprise.

3.2.3 Qualitatively speaking, influences of application of the idea of "job embeddedness" into the relationship network in China are of certain value.

Fei Xiaotong has ever pointed out, the network of Chinese interpersonal relationship exhibited a "pattern of difference sequence" and a cultural background in which relationship network was complicated and non-work factors occupied an important status in an individual's life. Therefore, study on the problem of turnover from the angle of "job embeddedness" has definite theoretical and practical exploration value in China.

3.3 Practices of Chinese enterprises related with "job embeddedness"

Application of job embeddedness in Chinese enterprises is not without any reason. As a matter of fact, some enterprises have already applied the principle of job embeddedness without consciousness for corporate management and cultural construction. The depth and breadth of application is still open for expansion under the guide of theory. Taking the ten top CCTV annual employers iin 2006 as research representatives, the authors made relevant studies on the status quo of management in these enterprises and status quo of their culture. Selection for these research samples was because employees of these enterprises showed high dependence and loyalty to the enterprises and their turnover rate was relatively low.

It is discovered through the research:

- 1) These enterprises have already employed dependently the job embeddedness theory in some aspects to improve job satisfaction of employees, strengthen quantity and degree of links between employees and the enterprises and construct dependent affection of employees towards enterprises (see Table 4). It is proved in practice, these explorations have achieved obvious effects.
- 2) Most of these enterprises tend to take measures from the perspective of organization to improve job embeddedness of employees, whereas they seldom take measures from the perspective of community, because understanding of community at home and abroad is different and development and healthiness of community is diverse. Development of community abroad is relatively sound, and links between individuals and the community is relatively close. By contrast, the concept of community at home is relatively not that strong, and community is being developed and perfected. At the same time, according to the authors, distinction might exist as for influences of measures on retention of employees taken from the two perspectives of organization and community. Differences might also exist as for influences of the six research areas produced by the two perspective of organization and community and the three key dimensions of job embeddedness theory. It is still open for further research and verification which perspective an enterprise should choose to take measures to more effectively affect decision making of retention/turnover of employees.
- 3) Definition of the three key dimensions in the job embeddedness theory seems a little bit abstract and

ambiguous. For instance, "flexible schedule" can not only be considered a measure of fit-organization since flexible schedule may enable better coordination between employees and the enterprise, but also can be regarded as a measure of sacrifice-organization since turnover of employees may result in loss of this treatment and a new enterprise may not offer flexible schedule. Besides, under different cultural backgrounds at home and abroad, prejudice might not be avoided as for understanding of relevant concepts of job embeddedness, such as understanding of "community".

Insert Table 4 Here

4. Developmental direction of job embeddedness theory

Through studies on the status quo of theoretical development and application cases in enterprises in China, the authors conclude that there are the following several aspects for job embeddedness theory to be further improved in China:

- 1) By taking into consideration the actual domestic situation and cultural background, we should further define clearly connotation of the three key dimensions of job embeddedness and make them more easier to discriminate, eliminating overlapping or confusion of concepts.
- 2) We should conduct research in applicability of the connotation of the three key dimensions in China and make correction and expansion to concepts in combination with the actual situation and cultural background in China.
- 3) We should study differences of influences of measures taken from the two perspectives of organization and community on retention of employees, study differences of influences of the six aspects of job embeddedness on retention of employees and study from which perspectives and fields an enterprise should take measures to more effectively affect decision making of retention/turnover of employees.
- 4) We should further verify applicability of job embeddedness model in all industries in China.
- 5) We should make corresponding adjustment and correction to the theoretical models according to actual situation in China.
- 6) We should study achievements that are connected with the actual situation in China and that can be directed applied by enterprises.

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Table 1. Definition of job embeddedness

(Brooks C. Holtom, Terence R. Mitchell, Thomas W. Lee, 2006)

Concept	Instruction
Job embeddedness	Job embeddedness represents a broad series of influential factors for employee retention. The key of job embeddedness is as follows: (1) the degree of similarity or fitting of job, community and other aspects of individual living; (2) the degree of connection of individuals and others or activities; (3) loss of personal turnover.
Fit—organization	Fit-organization reflects the compatibility with the organization or comfort perceived by an employee. The values of an individual, his/her career target and career plan in the future ought to fit with the current job requirements and even the mainstream culture of the enterprise (such as knowledge, skill and competence).
Fit—community	Fit-community refers to the degree of fitting with the community and the surrounding environment perceived by an individual. The weather of the residential area of the individual, the domestic installation and the general culture can all be related with the perceived fit-community.
Links—organization	Links-organization includes the formal and informal links between employees and others or the group within the organization.
Links—community	Links-community refers to links between employees and others and the group within the community. Links-community reflects the great influences exerted on individuals and their decision making by the family and other social institutions.
Sacrifice—organization	Sacrifice-organization refers to the perceived material profits and psychologically anticipated profits lost due to personal turnover. For example, leaving an organization might mean loss of an individual (such as, loss of colleagues, a project or special treatment). The more an employee loses as a result of his/her turnover, the more difficult it is for him/her to separate with the organization.
Sacrifice—community	Turnover relocation is a primary problem in sacrifice-community. Usually, people are not willing to move from an attractive, safe and respectable community. Of course, an employee may dismiss without moving away. However, even so, a lot of amenities, such as the convenience of rush hour traffic and flexible working hours may also be lost with turnover.

Table 2. Methods to increase degree of job embeddedness (Brooks C. Holtom, Terence R. Mitchell, Thomas W. Lee, 2006)

Methods	Application
Fit—organization	To provide a lot of internal recruitment information about vocational development opportunities
	To employ realistic job previews
	To recruit employees who match with the values of the organization
	To offer socialization for new employees so as to come to acquaint themselves with other employees, especially members of the group or team
	To encourage employees' participation to directly affect their decision making
	To encourage employees to make a career plan
	To provide training and development opportunities for employees which can help them realize the long term career target
	To arrange appropriate work schedule for employees (full time or part time, work shifts and hourly workers)

	To allow employees to choose whichever team or project
Links—organization	To furnish supervisors to subsidize or guide new employees or young employees
	To help mutual acquaintance of colleagues
	To provide opportunities for knowledge sharing of employees and to promote escalation of customer service skills
	Recommendation award for employees
	To establish maternal alliance for current and previous employees so as to offer sponsorship and other assistance
Sacrifice—organization	To update welfare forms, such as cafeteria plan, etc, so as to satisfy demands of different individuals and improve balance between job and life
	To provide stimulation or subsidy based on length of service
	To allow employees to participate in design of the working environment and planning of celebrations of the company
	To furnish day-care services in the company
	To provide commuter services and work arrangement which is convenient for living of employees' family
	High wages
	To increase generously retirement fund
	Profit sharing
	To offer stocks and stock option (such as 401(k))
	To allow employees to use vehicles of the company
	To recruit mainly in the market and/or community nearby the company
	To try to avoid employee relocation
Fit—community	To provide information for employees about community activities and resources
	To set up new facilities nearby the community of employees or on the route of rush hours
Links—community	To support employees for their service in the community (such as, two days' service in the community each year), especially a project burdened by the group
	To encourage employees to participate in activities held by local schools (such as, being a supervisor)
	To encourage employees to join in the citizen or professional organization based on the community
	To offer sponsorship for children sport league match or sports team of the community alliance
	To provide learning courses of the second language for employees whose mother tongue is not English
	To reduce times of employee relocation
Sacrifice—community	To provide family purchase assistance
	To provide local traffic support

Table 3. Activities by the Fortune 100 Companies to increase job embeddedness (part) (Brooks C. Holtom, Terence R. Mitchell, Thomas W. Lee, 2006)

Companies	Fit—organization
First Horizon National	To promote female employees with brilliant achievements; and 83% managerial staff are female
SEI Investments	To enable each one to perceive fairness of the plan of "vocational promotion"
Valassis	To bring new occupations for absorption of particular talents
Companies	Links—organization
American Fidelity Assurance	To prepare birthday cakes for employees' birthdays each month
Bingham McCutchen	Strong network of supervisors
Four Seasons Hotels	To receive recognition by the peer industry through annual employee award in each hotel
Procter & Gamble	Guidance on exchange between elementary female employees and senior managerial personnel
Stew Leonard's	Contest of pie eating; outing on a hay ride; travelling of skiing
W. L. Gore	Mutual evaluation by members of the team to decide reward distribution
Companies	Sacrifice—organization
Aflac	The company pays all tuition for employees' children and grandson (granddaughter), as high as \$20000 each year
American Cast Iron Pipe	The health center possesses 20 doctors and nurses, 11 dentists and dental hygienists as well as 4 pharmacists; rehabilitation centers
Booz Allen Hamilton	2/3 employees can enjoy flexible working arrangement
Cisco Systems	Enjoyable working environment
J. M. Smucker	To present bagels and sponge cake free of cost each day
Men's Warehouse	Three weeks' paid holiday after five years' service
General Mills	100% application for reimbursement, as high as \$6000
Starbucks	Extensive medical insurance (part-time duty personnel; spouse of the same gender or the opposite spouse)
Four Seasons Hotel	Winners of the annual award may obtain a week' holiday and a retail voucher worthy of \$1000
IKEA North America	To provide tuition subsidy for spouses
Lots of companies	To provide profit sharing, stock rights, pension funds and favourable wages and treatment for employees
Lots of companies Companies	
	favourable wages and treatment for employees
Companies	favourable wages and treatment for employees Fit—community
Companies Adobe	favourable wages and treatment for employees Fit—community Seasonal peasant market Wiley may enquire employees whether they are in need of special welfare allowances for their relocation. In addition, the
Companies Adobe John Wiley& Sons	favourable wages and treatment for employees Fit—community Seasonal peasant market Wiley may enquire employees whether they are in need of special welfare allowances for their relocation. In addition, the work unit also offers coffee rooms and fitness centers.

Microsoft	Local donation
David Weekley Homes	Employees may join in the annual company meeting together with their spouses and kinsfolk
Principle Financial Group	Service for the community with several days off
Timberland	Service for 6 months with a paid leave
Morrison & Foerster	Volunteer service opportunities
Texas Instruments	To sponsor children summer camp
Companies	Sacrifice—community
Marriott	Local traffic aid
SAS Institute	Family purchase assistance; country club members (discount of 90%)
Vision Service Plan	To provide service of eye care for friends of employees

Table 4. Examples of application of job embeddedness by domestic enterprises

Company	Fit—organization
ZJS	To arrange university students for internship by work shift at the grass-root organizations and let them select the most appropriate positions through practice
Li Ning Company Limited	The perfect personnel training system establishment draws up TOP2008 Plan for almost 100 key personnel.
Aokang Group	To set up "three barriers and five instructions" during recruitment so as to ensure each employee of Aokang can synchronize with the principle of the company and coincide with requirements of the company and development of the company
Redstar Macalline International Furniture Chains Group	Competitive compensation system, and equal promotion and wage hike opportunities among male and female employees
Motorola	To give priority to female employees when the conditions of employees are similar; one of the candidates for successors of key positions has to be female in succession plan.
Company	Links—organization
Li Ning Company Limited	To hold an annual meeting each year, to set up a grand ceremony for award presentation and to let excellent employees to receive the greatest honour and acknowledgement
Wanda Group	To hold a grand annual meeting at the end of each year, to release all sorts of awards and to hold artistic performance of employees
Neusoft Group	To set up tutorial system

CMBC	Trade Unions of all levels of institutions organize all kinds of entertainment and sports to enhance relationship between leaders and employees and relationship between employees.	
Company	Sacrifice—organization	
Li Ning Company Limited	To conduct periodically physical test on employees who participate in the sports club of the company	
Wanda Group	To offer commercial supplementary medical insurance of reproductive responsibilities for female employees; to provide preference for employees to purchase children supplementary medical commercial insurance.	
Aokang Group	Each year, the company provides dinner welfare allowances worthy of several million Yuan.	
Hisense Group	Each year, employees whose children take the university entrance examination may get several days off for special "accompany"	
Redstar Macalline International Furniture Chains Group	The company sets up employee activity room, reading room and employee recreational area during the office time; each year, the company regularly holds spring outing and walking, and autumn outing and mountaineering as well as overseas travelling for excellent employees; employees are provided with paid vacations according to their ranks and contributions to the company, with an average vocation of 20 days or so each year.	
Company	Fit—community	
ZJS	To hold social clubs for overage youths and to care about marriage of employees	
Aokang Group	To invest 30 million Yuan to build a three-star standard living residential district for accommodation of employees	
Hisense Group	To resolve housing problem of Hisense's employees	
Company	Links—community	
Li Ning Company Limited	To hold a Parents-Child Campaign each year on the Christmas and employees may participate in the activity with the whole family so as to enhance emotional communication	
Wanda Group	Employees of the companies of the Group may set up Wanda volunteer stations.	
Company	Sacrifice—community	
Aokang Group	To hold a group wedding for employees and present diamond ring and wedding pictures	
Redstar Macalline International Furniture Chains Group	To accommodate staff from other districts free of charge	