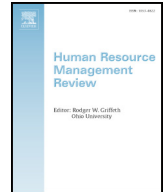




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Human Resource Management Review

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/humres](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/humres)

## Collective turnover: An expanded meta-analytic exploration and comparison

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 19 December 2015

Received in revised form 27 June 2016

Accepted 27 June 2016

Available online xxxxx

#### Keywords:

Collective turnover

Meta-analysis

Organizational performance

HR practices

Collective attitudes

### ABSTRACT

As evidenced by the publication of three meta-analyses in 2013, the importance of collective turnover is garnering increasing attention. Although each of these meta-analyses delivers a unique and significant impact to the HR literature, there remain opportunities to expand and build upon their contributions. In a comparison of the three extant meta-analyses, we found over 90 unique papers that were included in only one of each of the three studies, and >10 new studies published since 2013. We combined and expanded the existing meta-analyses, offering a comparison of results, as well as contributing to a greater understanding of the role of collective turnover. In the most comprehensive analysis to date, analyzing 2149 effect sizes from 159 studies across 150 articles, we find both support for and divergence from several previously examined relationships, as well as evidence of a curvilinear turnover-performance relationship and of the contagious influence of turnover.

Published by Elsevier Inc.

### 1. Introduction

Research and theory on strategic Human Resource Management (HRM) emphasizes that the nature of a firm's human capital is a key factor in understanding organizational performance (e.g. Becker, 1980; Dess & Shaw, 2001). An organization's ability to retain this human capital is, then, both a key indicator of the results of myriad HR practices and a key factor influencing firm performance. Studies of collective turnover have provided important insights into how unit-level turnover rates influence performance outcomes such as customer service (e.g. Koys, 2001), financial performance (e.g., Batt, 2002; Huselid, 1995; Kacmar, Andrews, Van Rooy, Steilberg, & Cerrone, 2006), and labor productivity (e.g., Guthrie, 2001; Siebert & Zubanov, 2009). Furthermore, studies have examined how macro-level turnover is influenced by important human resource systems and practices, such as high performance or high commitment work systems (e.g., Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995), benefits and training (e.g., Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998; Shaw, Dineen, Fang, & Vellella, 2009), as well as autonomy-reducing HR practices (e.g., Batt, Colvin, & Keefe, 2002; Detert, Trevino, Burris, & Andiappan, 2007; Shaw et al., 1998).

Consequent to the growing popularity and importance of this topic for HR and general management, several cumulative studies have explored how collective turnover fits into the overall HR picture (Hancock, Allen, Bosco, McDaniel, & Pierce, 2013; Heavey, Holwerda, & Hausknecht, 2013; Park & Shaw, 2013). Although each of these meta-analyses delivers a unique and significant impact to the HR literature, there remain opportunities to expand and build upon their contributions. Thus, we combine and expand the existing meta-analyses, contributing to a better understanding of HR in five important ways.

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First, we expand and update existing meta-analyses, including 2149 effect sizes across 159 studies, providing the most comprehensive analysis to date. Second, in addition to exploring the influences of HR practices and systems and collective attitudes and perceptions (CAP) on collective turnover, we examine two previously unexplored antecedents to collective turnover: the influence of prior firm performance on collective turnover and the influence of personnel changes on collective turnover, suggesting that turnover contagion effects may be present at an aggregate level. Third, we expand the consideration of boundary conditions by providing a more comprehensive treatment of moderators. The inclusion of both contextual and methodological moderators highlights the importance of human capital and collective turnover as a conduit to the successful performance of firms, as well as how various methodological approaches influence these relationships. Fourth, we build upon the tests for curvilinearity outlined in Hancock et al. (2013), providing an important theoretical test of the influence of collective turnover on organizational performance and HR outcomes. This curvilinear test continues a line of research addressing the theoretically interesting but empirically elusive search for an optimal turnover rate. Finally, we highlight findings of variables that are unique to this study, as well as provide an overview of finding differentiations across all four meta-analyses.

## 2. The role of collective turnover

It has been suggested that a dominant analytical mindset (DAM) has developed among turnover researchers (Allen, Hancock, Vardaman, & McKee, 2014), leading to a somewhat stifled progression towards understanding turnover at the multiple levels at which it occurs. Traditionally, employee turnover has been examined at the individual level; however, unit and organizational level examinations of the phenomenon have increased over the last few decades (Allen et al., 2014). Recent years have seen an increased interest in better understanding the role that collective turnover plays in organizations. More specifically, scholars are interested in exploring how turnover is influenced at a collective level and, subsequently, the consequences of collective turnover on organizational performance.

Hausknecht and Trevor's (2011) collective turnover framework offers an overview of and theoretical rationale for the antecedents to and consequences of collective turnover, along with potential moderators of these relationships. Their review of 115 articles led to five major considerations of collective turnover research. First, turnover rates at a collective level are often measured using a variety of different formulas, typically separation rates, instability rates, or retention rates (e.g. Van Iddekinge et al., 2009). Turnover rates also differ based on a number of leaver characteristics, such as what type of leaver the data reflect (voluntary, involuntary, or total turnover), as well as the quality of leaver (functional vs. dysfunctional turnover). Furthermore, the data for collective studies tends to come from either company records (from which the turnover rate is calculated) or from data provided by an HR manager or other key respondent. Second, based in human and social capital theories, the consequences of collective turnover have often been expected to be negative, with distal outcomes exhibiting a weaker relationship than proximal outcomes.

Third, although the relationship between turnover and performance has often been considered linear and negative, the evidence is varied and assertions surrounding the idea that the relationship may be curvilinear have been made. Turnover has also been suggested to have beneficial consequences under certain circumstances. For example, as suggested through a cost-based lens, compensation or other organizational costs in the form of benefits may be decreased when hiring newer, less tenured employees (Alexander, Nuchols, Bloom, & Lee, 1995). Additionally, via human and social capital lenses, poor performers who leave may ultimately offer an opportunity for the organization to replace those individuals with higher performing ones, allowing for opportunities for innovation (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984; Dalton & Todor, 1979) and to decrease homogeneity in the organization (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Thus, it has been suggested that curvilinearity exists in the turnover-performance relationship and that this may indicate an optimal level of turnover (Hancock et al., 2013). Additionally, Hausknecht and Trevor's (2011) third consideration also suggests several within-study moderators of both the antecedent-turnover relationship, such as the presence of various HR practices, and of the turnover-performance relationship, such as unit size (Hausknecht, Trevor, & Howard, 2009).

Fourth, Hausknecht and Trevor (2011) suggest that methodological and conceptual differences, such as specifics of the job, may influence the degree to which antecedents influence collective turnover and, in turn, the degree to which collective turnover influences performance. Finally, their review highlighted the importance of antecedents to collective turnover, leading them to suggest that the use of high-commitment systems tend to lower collective turnover rates, as do higher levels of some CAP, such as commitment and satisfaction. Antecedents such as HR Systems and Practices, as well as CAP, contribute to collective turnover which then contributes to consequences, such as productivity, firm performance, and customer outcomes.

**Table 1**

Comparative overview of previous meta-analyses.

	Hancock	Heavey et al.	Park & Shaw	Current
Total # of studies (k)	48	82	110	159
Total # of effect sizes	157	694	300	2149
Antecedent-turnover relationship		✓		✓
Moderators of antecedent-turnover		✓		✓
Turnover-performance relationship	✓	✓	✓	✓
Moderators of turnover-performance	✓	✓	✓	✓
Curvilinearity	✓			✓

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