

**LEADER EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, LEARNING CLIMATE,
FOLLOWER POSITIVE AFFECT AND TURNOVER INTENTION:
SUPPORT FOR A MULTILEVEL, MODERATED-MEDIATION
MODEL**

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November 2018

Abstract

To enhance a better understanding of how an emotionally intelligent leader may curb follower turnover, the present multilevel study focuses on how emotionally intelligent leaders affect follower turnover intention. The data were collected by an e-survey among the employees of the branches of a large South-Korean bank. The sample comprised of 2,229 employees from 425 branches. We report in this paper empirical evidence of a moderated-mediation model. As hypothesized, we found a direct significant association between leader emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention. At the unit level, learning climate mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention. At the individual level, positive affect mediated the relationship between leader emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention. Positive affect also moderated the relationship between learning climate and turnover intention. The paper discusses the findings and sketches suggestions for follow-up research.

Key words: leader's emotional intelligence, learning climate, positive affect, turnover intention

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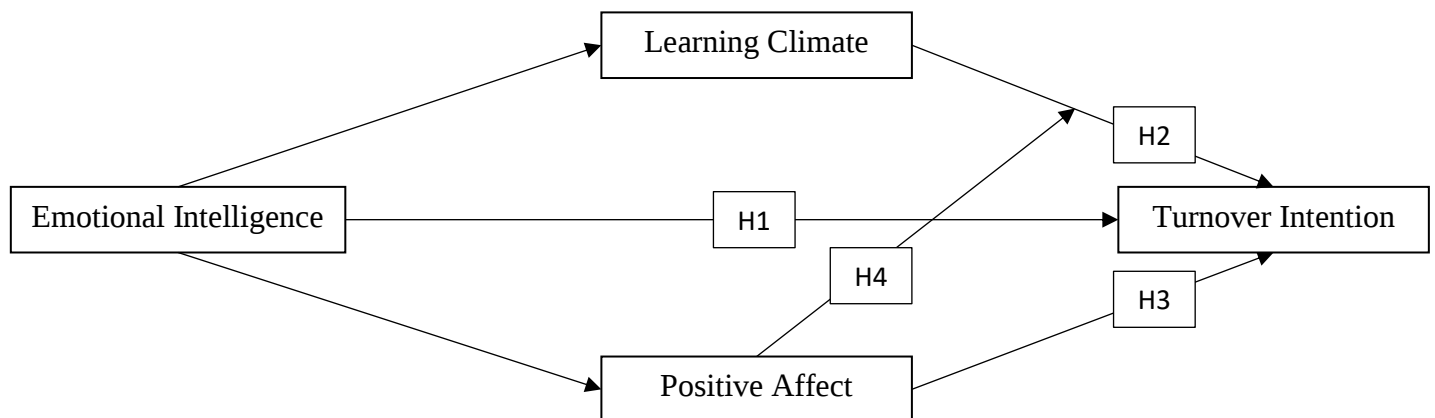
Introduction

An important indicator of organizational stability and growth is the willingness of employees to remain working in their organizations. Intention to turnover has been shown to have an impact on actual turnover (Wanberg & Banas, 2000) and when high quality people announce to leave it might be too late to reverse their decision. It is therefore important to know which factors have an influence on employee turnover intention. Prior research showed that transformational leadership has an impact on followers' turnover intention (Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, & Sassenberg, 2011; Herman, Huang, & Lam, 2013; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011); Employees have lower intentions to quit or transfer when their managers demonstrate transformational leadership. One of the most important effects of a transformational leader is emotional in nature (Butler & Chinowsky, 2006). Higher emotional intelligence among leaders was shown to be a predictor of transformational leadership (Leban & Zulauf, 2004; Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Clarke, 2010). Thus, a leader's competence to handle their own and followers' emotions well can have a direct and indirect impact on turnover intention. To enhance a better understanding of how an emotionally intelligent leader may curb employee turnover, the present study focuses on the mechanisms of emotionally intelligent leaders that are likely to affect follower turnover intention.

Stimulating work environments, and in particular employee growth and learning opportunities, have a positive effect on the intention to stay within a given organization (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Maerts, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007). These learning activities increase employee organizational attachment and therefore lower turnover intention. An employee's individual work experience can thus have a direct impact on the decision to stay with or leave an organization (George & Jones, 1996). Experienced affect in the work place has been shown to impact followers' individual work experiences. Turnover intention decreases among employees who experience positive affect (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de

Chermont, 2003). In contrast, employees who experience negative affect at work show higher turnover intention and behavior (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Furthermore, positive affect of individuals can have an impact on systems that underlie the learning processes of a group of employees (Bierhoff & Muller, 1999; Grawitch & Munz, 2005). It can therefore be assumed that positive affect among employees creates a better learning climate in a work unit which in turn lowers follower turnover intention. Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, and Eberly (2008) called for future multilevel research with regards to turnover. They advocated a multilevel approach to distinguish between effects on the group and individual level. The present study created a multilevel mediation model that includes a moderation effect of individual-level positive affect. The above led to the model presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The multilevel hypothetical model of the study



Theoretical Framework

Turnover Intention

Turnover intention can be defined as an employee's intention to leave an organization (Kaur & Pakaj, 2013). Whenever an employee of an organization has made the voluntary decision to turnover, in other words the decision to leave or quit the organization willingly, there is a process that precedes this behavior. The best predictor for a behavior is to measure the intention of a person to perform the said behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It is therefore interesting to measure turnover intention in order to determine whether a person will demonstrate turnover behavior. Indeed, turnover intention is known as the strongest predictor of turnover behavior (Mobley, 1977; Hom, Griffeth, & Sellaro, 1984; Currivan, 1999; Lee & Whitford, 2007). Even though the strength of the relationship between turnover intention and active turnover behavior varies between studies, multiple studies have found a direct and strong link (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006; Cho & Lewis, 2012).

According to Takase (2010), turnover intention is a multi-stage process consisting of psychological, cognitive and behavioral components. In the first stage, employees experience psychological responses in reaction to negative aspects pertaining to their jobs or the organization. These psychological responses result in affective and attitudinal withdrawal reactions such as dissatisfaction and frustration with regard to their jobs and the organization (Houkes, Janssen, de Jonge, & Bakker, 2003). These negative affective states can increase the likelihood of turnover intentions among employees, leading to the cognitive component of turnover intention, which is seen as the core of the multi-stage process. Turnover can be seen as the final, decisive, cognitive step (Hang-Yue, Foley, & Loi, 2005), which in turn leads to the active behavior displayed by employees.

Emotional Intelligence and Turnover Intention

When focusing on the turnover intention of followers, the role of the leaders should be taken into account. Research has shown that perceived supervisor support can lead to higher organizational trust among employees, which leads to lower turnover intention (Cho & Song, 2017). Higher perceived supervisor support can also have a direct negative impact on employee turnover (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Li, Kim, & Zhao, 2017). Therefore, it is important to look at the emotional intelligence of leaders. Emotional intelligence involves identifying and managing one's own feelings as well as the moods and feelings of others. The ability of a leader to influence other people by using emotional knowledge to stimulate their emotional and intellectual growth can also be seen as emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Due to the fact that emotionally intelligent leaders have a better understanding of emotions and emotional responses, they can understand and respond more adequately to the emotional reactions of their followers. Emotionally intelligent leaders understand, for instance, that an angry emotional expression could evoke a similar angry emotional response. Clearly, emotionally intelligent leaders are able to manage their own emotions and the emotions of their followers better (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

To demonstrate the relationship between the emotional intelligence of leaders and their followers' turnover intention, it is helpful to look towards transformational leadership. This type of leadership can be defined as focusing on the higher order psychological needs of followers by making sure that they feel valued and important in the organization (Bryman, 1992). Leaders who showcase this type of leadership style need to understand their employees' emotions and moods to understand what makes them feel valued. Research has pointed out that emotional intelligence is indicative of higher levels of transformational leadership displayed by leaders (Leban & Zulauf, 2004; Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Clarke, 2010). Transformational leadership was shown to have a negative impact on the turnover intention of followers

(Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, & Sassenberg, 2011; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011; Herman, Huang, & Lam, 2013). Moreover, the emotional characteristics of a leader, most importantly interpersonal skills such as empathy, have the most impact on the displayed leadership behavior (Butler & Chinowsky, 2006). Therefore, it can be assumed that the capability of a leader to manage their own emotions and the emotions of their followers in an appropriate fashion has a direct impact on the turnover intention of followers. This leads to the first hypothesis of this study:

H1: There is a direct significant negative association between leader emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention.

Learning Climate as a Mediator

According to Küpers and Weibler (2006), emotionally intelligent leaders allow followers to express their full range of emotions in an open and honest fashion. This open environment could help to prevent a build-up of negative feelings among followers and stimulate learning within the work place. Leaders that showcase behavior which stimulates discussion within a group and gives the followers within this group a perception of psychological safety, contribute towards an environment that enables progress on organizational goals through reflection and action (Edmondson, 2002). Therefore, when followers feel safe within a group, the interactions within the group can stimulate the building of new knowledge and learning. A perception of psychological safety within a work group also leads to a higher intent among employees to retain their current employment (Kruzich, Mienko, & Courtney, 2014).

Furthermore, the work environment and organizational practices can be instrumental in employees' decision-making with regard to turnover intention. Organizational practices that signal investing in the development of employees should lead toward lower turnover (Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998). The turnover intention among employees decreases within

organizations that invest in HR practices that stimulate growth opportunities (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003). According to Rousseau (2004), such organizational practices contribute towards the psychological attachment of an employee towards the organization and increase their intention to stay. The degree of psychological attachment towards the organization is dependent on the perception of the employee. Ng and Butts (2009) found a significant relationship between the employees' perceptions of learning opportunities provided by the organization and the intention whether to remain with an organization or not. It was also shown that an organization learning culture leads to an increase in the organizational commitment of employees which leads to lower levels of turnover intention (Joo, 2010; Islam, Khan, & Bukhari, 2016; Wilke et al., 2018). These results show that an organization which invests in the development of their employees and creates an open learning environment decreases its turnover intentions.

Other research showed that higher self-efficacy and job competency brings about higher organizational commitment and lower turnover intention among nurses (Jacobs & Roodt, 2007). These nurses achieved higher levels of self-efficacy and self-competence through sharing and discussing their knowledge with colleagues and reflecting on their work experiences through learning activities. Opportunities to interact and discuss experiences with fellow colleagues strengthen the social network bonds within an organization which could lead to an increase in the organizational commitment among employees (Lankau & Scandura, 2002) and hence less interest to leave their job. One would therefore expect to find a lower turnover intention among individual employees within teams with an open and supportive learning climate which stimulates discussion and reflection. The above leads to the second hypothesis of this study:

H2: At the unit level, learning climate negatively mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention.

Positive Affect as a Mediator

Affect can be defined as an umbrella term covering a broad range of feelings that individuals experience. Affect can be split into two categories, namely feeling states and feeling traits. Feeling states are momentary or short-term affective experiences. Feeling traits are more permanent long-term tendencies to feel and act in a certain way (Watson & Clark, 1984). Work motivation is created and sustained through affective processes. These types of processes are an essential leadership aspect within organizations (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). When negative emotions arise internally within an organization or externally, emotional intelligent leaders are able to adjust to and manage these emotions better (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Leaders can set an example for the organization with their behavior when dealing with these situations. Emotional intelligence helps leaders maintain their emotions in a positive mode (George, 2000). Followers can mirror the positive emotions that are displayed by the leader, which can lead to an increase in positive affect among the followers (Lewis, 2000; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005).

An employees' work experience is the starting point of a turnover process and turnover intention, which culminates into a final decision to stay with or leave the organization (Takase, 2010; Carmeli & Weisberg, 2006; Koys, 2001; Tett & Meyer, 1993). George and Jones (1996) state that affect is an important factor in the work experience of an employee. An affective state reflects how an employee feels in the job and it does not necessarily reflect their more general feelings about their jobs. How an employee feels during the job has an influence on the thinking process, through which employees select, interpret or recall information. This process has an influence on their performance in work situations (Forgas & George, 2001). Positive affective states and expressing positive emotions help employees obtain higher work engagement attitudes and interactions with colleagues which tend to increase their job performance (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994; Bledow, Schmitt, Frese, & Kühnel, 2011). Experiencing negative affective states in a situation stimulates a desire to escape from

this situation. Therefore experiencing negative affective situations in the workplace has been shown to cause withdrawal behavior, increased absenteeism and an increase in turnover behavior among employees (Pelled & Xin, 1999; Necowitz & Roznowski, 1994; Ashkanasy, Ayoko, & Jehn, 2014). Furthermore, studies have shown that positive affect is related to higher job performance, higher commitment and lower turnover intention (Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky, 1993). Other research demonstrated that followers' perception of leaders' listening had an impact on the followers' turnover intention and that this relationship was mediated by the followers' positive affective state (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, & Voelpel, 2015). Based on the above, it can be assumed that employees who score high on positive affect have lower turnover intentions, which leads to the third hypothesis of this study:

H3: At the individual level, positive affect negatively mediates the relationship between leader emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention.

Positive Affect as a Moderator

The relationship between learning climate and turnover intention, as well as the relationship between positive affect and turnover intention, have already been established. Thus, an argument can be made for an interaction effect between individual positive affect and group learning climate. Clearly, the discussed learning climate is a group-level variable and these groups are made up of the individual employees that are discussed with regard to the individual level variable, positive affect. Therefore, it is of interest to examine the interaction between these two variables. Edmondson (2002) stated that a perception of psychological safety among employees can improve the process of taking new actions and building new knowledge. A learning process creates tension, which can lead to either excitement or anxiety and defensiveness among employees (Vince, 2001). Change and learning new ways of working together is often resisted by employees, in part because of the experience of such negative affective states. Employees are more inclined to initiate difficult tasks after experiencing

positive affect (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). Experiencing positive affect counters cynicism and resistance that can be felt among employees when initiating new practices in the context of organizational change (Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008). An organization that stimulates positive affect among members of workgroups helps create an open and honest environment that supports idea generation and problem solving which are essential to the learning process (Bierhoff & Muller, 1999; Grawitch & Munz, 2005). Furthermore, Seo (2003) suggests that positive affect among employees helps overcome emotional barriers that hinder effective learning and organizational change. Hence, one can expect that higher individual positive affect leads to an increase in the relationship between group learning climate and turnover intention. This leads to the fourth and final hypothesis of this study:

H4: Positive affect positively moderates the relationship between learning climate and turnover intention.

Method

Survey and Participants

The data for this study were collected through an e-survey among the employees of all the branches of a large South-Korean bank. While some of these bank branches provided standard banking services such as checking and saving accounts, mortgages, and various types of insurance, other branches specialized in corporate pension funds and investment schemes. The employees were queried about their branch manager's emotional intelligence, their affective states as well as their perceptions of the learning environment and practices within their branch and their intention to leave.

Permission for the data collection and support was obtained before the start of the study from the bank's top management. An introductory letter in which voluntary participation and confidentiality were assured, were sent to respondents through the company's internal electronic mail. Pre-testing involved interviewing ten middle and upper managers from corporate headquarters to assure the applicability and validity of all the survey items. The original English-language questionnaire was translated into Korean using the standard backward translation method (Brislin, 1980). The final survey was administered to all of the 5,950 employees who worked at the branch level. Of these, 2,390 employee questionnaires (40.2% response rate) were returned from the population of 525 branches across the nation. To ensure branch representativeness, 100 branches were eliminated from the analyses due to the fact they had returned less than 3 completed questionnaires. The final usable sample was comprised of 2,229 employees from 425 branches.

Measures

Emotional Intelligence at the Unit Level

Emotional intelligence of each branch manager was measured using an extended version of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002). The

WLEIS consists of four scales: the ability to understand and express one's own emotions (Self-Emotion Appraisal); the ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others (Others' Emotion Appraisal); the ability to channel one's emotions toward constructive activities that facilitate performance (Use of Emotion to Facilitate Performance); and the ability to regulate one's emotions (Regulation of Emotion). Four items were added to the 16 original ones. Two items were taken from Wong, Law, and Wong (2004) (e.g., "Motivates himself/herself to face failure positively"), and the other two items were from the Emotional Competency Inventory (Sala, 2002) (e.g., "Spots potential conflicts and brings disagreements into the open and helps deescalate them"). This survey instrument, which was developed expressly for Asian respondents, is consistent with Mayer and Salovey's (1997) conceptualization of emotional intelligence; moreover, its validity was demonstrated in a Korean sample (Hur, van den Berg, & Wilderom, 2011). The twenty items were measured, making use of a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

Factor analysis was performed to check for dimensionality. One factor had a high correlation with all but one of the items. The item "My branch manager always tells himself/herself (s)he is a competent person" showed a low correlation with the factor as well as the other items. It was therefore removed from the emotional intelligence scale in further analyses. To calculate the emotional intelligence group level scores, the responses to the nineteen items were added and the means of these scores were taken. These means were then aggregated into a group level measure using group mean averaging.

Learning Climate at the Unit Level

The learning survey items were taken from Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino (2008) who developed three broad factors that are essential for ongoing organizational learning and adaptability: a supportive learning climate; concrete learning processes and practices; and supportive leadership behaviors. In our survey, seventeen items were comprised of perceptions

of a supportive learning environment (e.g., “People in this branch are eager to share information about what does and doesn’t work”) and twenty-one items covered concrete learning processes and practices (e.g., “This branch frequently identifies and discusses underlying assumptions that might affect key decisions”). Participants responded to the items using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (highly inaccurate) to 7 (highly accurate).

Positive Affect at the Individual Level

The Job Affective Scale (JAS) was used to measure positive affective states of employees in each branch (Burke, Brief, George, & Roberson, 1989). Respondents indicated through each of the ten items how they had felt at work during the past week using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (very much). Although memory biases may be involved when people describe their affect or moods retrospectively, Parkinson, Briner, Reynolds, and Totterdell (1995) reported that people’s ratings of their moods a week ago are quite close to their ratings of their average daily moods. The validity of the one-week time frame used in the present study is supported by George and Zhou (2002) as well as Tsai, Yen Huang, and Huang (2007).

Turnover Intention at the Individual Level

Three items, adopted from Carmeli and Weisberg (2006), measured turnover intentions. A sample item is: “I am actively searching for an alternative to the organization.” The three items were tested with a five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Turnover intention is an individual measure; hence we used the mean of the scores on the three items.

Control Variables

Demographic factors may influence turnover intentions (Ostroff, Atwater, & Feinberg, 2004; Pelled & Xin, 1999). Hence, employee gender, age and the size of the bank branches were included as control variables. Female workers and employees with longer organizational

tenure have been found to have lower turnover intentions (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006; Thompson & Prottas, 2005). Moreover, it is suggested that female raters tend to have more accurate emotion-related perceptions than males (Byron, 2007; Craig et al., 2009) and they tend to provide higher and perhaps more lenient ratings for managerial behaviors (Ostroff et al., 2004).

Statistical Analyses

Employee scores were aggregated at the branch level; each branch is a discrete business unit, with an own management or governing structure. It may be argued that the variables formed by aggregating individual perceptions to the branch level are meaningful psychological constructs that express the common experiences and shared perceptions of a work unit. Aggregation also requires statistical justification. Specifically, attitudinal measures can only be aggregated if there is sufficient consensus amongst the individual respondents (Bliese, 2000). The bank employees' responses to the scales of learning climate and managerial emotional intelligence were therefore aggregated at the branch-level. To test whether there was consensus on or sufficient similarity within the ratings of these scales, the intra-class correlation (ICC1 and ICC2) and within-group inter-rater reliability (r_{WG}) were obtained for all the variables. These results are summarized in Table 1. The ICC1 is a measure of within-group consensus, and the median value in organizational research is typically .12 (James, 1982). Our ICC1 values ranged from .03 to .17.

The ICC2 is the reliability of the group mean that is formed when individual scores are aggregated. Ostroff and Schmitt (1993) suggest that when the ICC2 values exceed .60, the reliability of group means is acceptable. The interpretation of the r_{WG} is similar to that of other types of reliability coefficients. A value of .70 or above is suggested as a good amount of within-group agreement (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984). The median r_{WG} values here, presented in Table1, ranged from .91 to .96, indicating high levels of agreement within the branches. Thus,

aggregating employees' scores for the emotional intelligence and learning climate variables at the branch-level can be justified on statistical grounds.

Cronbach's alpha is another internal consistency measure. It measures the reliability of the supposedly interrelated items of a scale by means of the average correlation of items within the test. The Cronbach's alphas in this study comfortably exceeded the traditional threshold ($\alpha > 0.70$), indicating good internal consistency of all the variables.

Table 1. ICC1, ICC2, $r_{WG(J)}$ and Cronbach's alphas of the four variables in the model

Scale	ICC1	ICC2	$r_{WG(J)}$	Cronbach's alphas (α)
Emotional Intelligence	.17	.55	.90	.98
Positive Affect	.03	.15	.96	.88
Learning Climate	.11	.43	.93	.96
Turnover Intention	.08	.34	.91	.91

N = 2,229 employees in 425 bank branches

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Size	11.16	4.20	-						
2. Gender (1 = Male)	1.50	.50	-.03	-					
3. Age	36.13	8.78	.01	-.54**	-				
4. Emotional Intelligence	5.30	1.26	-.06**	.01	.00	-			
5. Positive Affect	3.49	.72	-.02	-.10**	.07**	.25**	-		
6. Learning Climate	4.62	.93	-.11**	.02	-.01	.73**	.31**	-	
7. Turnover Intention	1.99	1.07	.01	.05*	-.08**	-.25**	-.43**	-.28**	-

N = 2229

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2 also shows information about the number of employees per branch and the gender and age of the employees. Half of the employees were male with an average age of 36.13 years (SD = 8.78). The branches had on average 11.16 employees (SD = 4.20) with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 33 employees per branch. There is a significant correlation between positive affect and learning climate ($r = .31$) as well as a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and positive affect ($r = .25$) and learning climate ($r = .73$). These correlations correspond to the expected relations within our theoretical model.

Test of the Model and Hypotheses

The theoretical model and hypotheses presented above were tested by making use of a mixed model multilevel regression analysis. The scores of all the variables were standardized beforehand. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results from the mixed model's multilevel regression analysis

	X^2	β	p
Model 1			
Intercept		.00	.93
Size		-.00	.93
Gender		.02	.41
Age		-.07	.00
Emotional Intelligence		-.25	.00
-2 Restricted Log Likelihood	6189.44		
Model 2			
Intercept		.00	.90
Size		-.01	.56
Gender		-.01	.50
Age		-.07	.00
Emotional Intelligence		-.08	.01
Learning Climate		-.11	.00
Positive Affect		-.39	.00
-2 Restricted Log Likelihood	5804.58		
Δ -2 Restricted Log Likelihood	384.86**		

Model 3

Intercept		-.01	.50
Size		-.01	.64
Gender		-.01	.54
Age		-.06	.00
Emotional Intelligence		-.07	.02
Learning Climate		-.11	.00
Positive Affect		-.38	.00
Positive Affect x Learning Climate		.05	.00
-2 Restricted Log Likelihood	5801.32		
Δ -2 Restricted Log Likelihood	3.26		

Dependent Variable: Turnover Intention

* $p < .05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Firstly, Model 1 in Table 3 shows that there is no significant relationship between the control variables size ($\beta = -.00$, *ns*) and gender ($\beta = .02$, *ns*) with the dependent variable of turnover intention. However, the age control variable ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .01$) has a significant relationship with the dependent variable, turnover intention. This shows that employee turnover intention decreases with age.

Secondly, Model 1 in Table 3 shows a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intention ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .01$), meaning that the higher the emotional intelligence of the branch manager the lower the turnover intention of the employees. This supports Hypothesis 1.

Thirdly, Model 2 in Table 3 shows a significant negative relationship between learning climate and turnover intention ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .01$) and between positive affect and turnover intention ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .01$). This means that an increase in learning climate at the branch level

leads to a lower turnover intention among employees. This lends support for Hypothesis 2. At the individual level, it shows that as the employees' positive affect increases, the turnover intention decreases, which supports Hypothesis 3.

Finally, Model 3 in Table 3 shows a significant positive relationship between the interaction between positive affect and learning climate with turnover intention ($\beta = .05$, $p < .01$). This means that an increase in positive affect leads to an increase in the relationship between learning climate and turnover intention. This confirms Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

This study presents empirical evidence that supports the multilevel moderated-mediation model with regards to turnover intention. The results show a direct significant negative relationship between leader emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention. At the unit level, learning climate negatively mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention. At the individual level, positive affect negatively mediates the relationship between leader emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention. Also, the results show that positive affect positively moderates the relationship between learning climate and turnover intention.

Theoretical Implications

One of the main findings of this study is the support for the relationship between emotional intelligence and turnover intention. To the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the first that empirically establishes a direct and indirect effect between emotional intelligence of leaders and the turnover intention of followers although one other study obtained support for the relationship within an ICT branch (Mohammad, Chai, Aun, & Migin, 2014). Many publications stress the importance of emotional intelligence and the impact that it can have on leadership and organizations (Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan, & Adler, 1998; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). The present study shows that emotional intelligence can indeed have an impact on leadership and leadership can have an impact on turnover intention of individual employees which can have an impact on the organization as a whole.

Another finding of this study is the role of positive affect. Prior studies demanded further research on whether positive emotions actually improve group and interpersonal functioning in organizations (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). We show that higher positive affect among individuals can have an impact on their individual turnover intention. Also, positive affect improves the relationship between learning climate at the group level and turnover intention.

The double effect of positive affect within our multilevel model is unique. These effects show that a focus on stimulating positive affect can have more than one impact when trying to decrease turnover levels of individual employees. Seo (2003) suggests two ways to improve positive affect within an organization. One method is to start with single-loop win-win approaches. This consists of solutions for parties to work together to achieve mutual gains. These solutions do not touch on deeply held values and therefore they remain single-loop solutions. The other method that Seo (2003) suggests is to earnestly accept and join the emotionality of employees. This approach is also advocated by Nielsen (1996), among others, for stimulating individual learning, personal growth and change within an organization.

The control variables, gender and size of the bank branches, show no significant effect on turnover intention of employees. However, employee age does have a significant negative impact on turnover intention. This means that older employees tend to have a lower turnover intention. Prior research also pinpoints age as a negative predictor of voluntary turnover (Iverson & Pullman, 2000). Other studies suggest that age is negatively related with turnover intention among nurses (Simon, Müller, & Hasselhorn, 2010; De Gieter, Hofmans, & Pepermans, 2011). Clearly, our work compliments earlier research by supporting age as a negative predictor of turnover intention.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The strengths of this study are its examination of a moderated-mediation model as well as a large sample. However, some limitations must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

Firstly, this study has a cross-sectional design. Therefore, it is not possible to be conclusive on the assumed direction of causality. The research design has an impact on the strengths of the different variables in this study. Affect levels at work can vary over time and can have short-lived effects (Tsai, Chen, & Liu, 2007). Therefore, time is a factor in determining

the relationship between affect and turnover intention. However, time also has an influence on the learning processes that take place at work. These are ongoing processes which take time to develop and to have an influence on the work units and the individual employees. It would be interesting to follow them over time and perform interventions and experiments within organizations to further test the suggested causal effects of this study.

Secondly, due to the cross-sectional design, there is a possibility that this study has some halo effects (Cooper, 1981). The measures for perceived leader emotional intelligence and individual positive affect were conducted at the same time. Prior research shows that people or external stimuli are characterized more positively by participants who experience more positive emotions compared to participants who experience more negative emotions (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). The employees in our research, with higher scores on positive affect, are therefore more likely to rate their manager's emotional intelligence more favorably compared to employees with lower scores on positive affect. Future studies need to distinguish between effects due to the employed method and the real effect that is present.

Thirdly, Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) states that affective work events have an influence on the affective states of employees. Positive work events can lead to employees experiencing positive affective states. Similarly, negative work events are likely to evoke negative affective states among employees (Ashkanasy, Ayoko, & Jehn, 2014). The influence of these affective work events can be seen in the employees' work related task performances (Bledow, Schmitt, Frese, & Kühnel, 2011). This study focuses on the individual experience of positive affect among employees and its influence at an individual level and unit level. However, when taking AET into account, it should be interesting to research the impact of affective work events further on the affective states of employees as well as the potential impact on units within the organization (Ohly & Schmitt, 2015).

Fourthly, researchers argue that the emotional norms within an organization or unit determine the type of affect that is allowed to be expressed at that level (Huy, 1999; Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Furthermore, other non-affective aspects, for instance member stability, were found to be positively related to mood convergence within units (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000). Given the double effect that positive affect shows in the results of this study, it would be interesting to incorporate emotional norms and other, non-affective aspects at the unit or organizational level in future research.

Finally, due to the fact that this study was performed within one organization, it is possible that organization-specific characteristics limit the generalizability of the findings.

Practical Implications

The results of this study signify a number of practical implications that can be of help for managers and organizations to lower the turnover intentions of their employees. Firstly, we show that having leaders with higher emotional intelligence within a unit leads to a lower level of turnover intention among followers. Recruiting and selecting new managers who score high on emotional intelligence may, therefore, be especially important in sectors with difficulties keeping good personnel. Secondly, ensuring an open and supportive learning climate within teams can lead to lower levels of employee turnover intention. Companies with difficulties in retaining personnel should evaluate the learning climate within their organization and if needed invest in improvements based on employee feedback. Hiring and training new personnel can be less cost efficient than improving the organizational learning climate. Thirdly, higher levels of positive affect among individual employees leads to lower levels of turnover intention. The impact of positive affect on work related behavior should be recognized by managers. Finally, this study finds that higher levels of positive affect among individual employees leads to an increase in the negative relationship between learning climate and turnover intention. Specifically, it means that higher positive affect among individual employees leads to a lower

turnover intention due to the open and supportive learning climate within the work unit. Therefore, investing in increasing positive affect among employees can aid companies in decreasing turnover.

Conclusion

This study has created and empirically substantiated a multilevel turnover-intention model that takes variables at the individual as well as the group level into account. Furthermore, it includes leadership and the effect emotionally intelligent leaders can have on their followers. It is one of the first studies to empirically substantiate the relationship between leader emotional intelligence and follower turnover intention. We contribute, therefore, to those eager to aid organizations in lowering the costly turnover rates among their employees.

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