

Teaching & Learning Guide

A century of labour turnover research: A systematic literature review

This guide accompanies the following article:

Bolt, E.E.T, Winterton, J. and Cafferkey, K. (2022) 'A century of labour turnover research: A systematic review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

Read the original article at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijmr.12294>

Author's Introduction

Labour turnover has been an important research topic in social science over the past century, involving disciplines such as human resource management, industrial relations, organizational behaviour, individual and organizational psychology, economics, and health sciences. Earlier reviews of turnover literature include meta-analyses (e.g. Jiang et al. 2012, Rubenstein et al. 2018) and narrative syntheses (e.g. Hom et al. 2017, Winterton, 2004). Given the volume of turnover literature, such reviews focussed on specific aspects of turnover and/or a limited range of journals. The aim of this article was to conduct a comprehensive review. This article presents the most comprehensive systematic literature review of voluntary labour turnover to date, providing in-depth analysis of 1,375 labour turnover articles published up to July 2019 in 142 academic journals listed in the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) Academic Journal Guide 2018.

The analysis of theoretical and empirical labour turnover studies reveals: (1) distinctive foci in the development of labour turnover research over the past hundred years; (2) relative lack of attention to testing specific labour turnover theories; (3) a prevailing quantitative approach to identifying antecedents of labour turnover; (4) increased reliance on turnover intention as a proxy for actual turnover. This article highlights these trends, providing insight into problematic areas from theoretical, methodological and empirical points of view. We suggest avenues for a more coherent theoretical, methodological and empirical development of labour turnover research.

Author Recommends

Journal articles reviewing labour turnover literature

- Allen, D.G., Hancock, J.I., Vardaman, J.M. & McKee, D.N. (2014). Analytical mindsets in turnover research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, **35**, pp. 61-86, <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1912>
- Hom, P.W., Lee, T.W., Shaw, J.D. & Hausknecht, J.P. (2017). One hundred years of employee turnover theory and research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **102**, pp. 530-545, <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000103>
- Holtom, B.C., Mitchell, T.R., Lee, T.W. & Eberly, M.B. (2008). Turnover and retention research: A glance at the past, a closer review of the present, and a venture into the future. *The Academy of Management Annals*, **2**, pp. 231-274, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520802211552>

- Rubenstein, A.L., Eberly, M.B., Lee, T.W. & Mitchell, T.R. (2018). Surveying the forest: A meta-analysis, moderator investigation, and future-oriented discussion of the antecedents of voluntary employee turnover. *Personnel Psychology*, **71**, pp. 23-65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12226>
- Winterton, J. (2004). A conceptual model of labour turnover and retention. *Human Resource Development International*, **7**, pp. 371-390, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1367886042000201967>

Books

- Hom, P.W., Allen, D.G. & Griffeth, R.W. (2020). *Employee Retention and Turnover. Why Employees stay or leave*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Link: <https://www.routledge.com/Employee-Retention-and-Turnover-Why-Employees-Stay-or-Leave/Hom-Allen-Griffeth/p/book/9781138503816>
- Saridakis, G. and Cooper, C.L. (2016). *Research handbook on employee turnover*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
Link: <https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/research-handbook-on-employee-turnover-9781784711146.html>
- Griffeth, R.W. and Hom, P.W. (2004). *Innovative theory and empirical research on employee turnover*. Greenwich, CN: Information Age Publishing.
Link: <https://www.infoagepub.com/products/Innovative-Theory-and-Empirical-Research-on-Employee-Turnover>

Turnover research in the broader HR context

- Kaufman, B.E. (2020). The real problem: The deadly combination of psychologisation, scientism, and normative promotionalism takes strategic human resource management down a 30-year dead end. *Human Resource Management Journal*, **30**, pp. 49-72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12278>
- Godard, J. (2014). The psychologisation of employment relations? *Human Resource Management Journal*, **24**, pp. 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12030>

Systematic review methodology

- Pickering, C.M. & Byrne, J. (2014). The benefits of publishing systematic quantitative literature reviews for PhD candidates and other early career researchers. *Higher Education Research and Development*, **33**, pp. 534-548, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.841651>

Useful Links

Employee Turnover & Retention

- The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the professional body for human resource managers, offers definitions of employee turnover and retention, practical guidance on how it is measured, and some of the reasons why people leave organizations. The CIPD identifies conditions under which turnover becomes problematic and suggests ways employers can improve labour retention. The site suggests further reading.
Link: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/resourcing/turnover-retention-factsheet>

The future of jobs

- The report of World Economic Forum (2020) describes the emerging trends and patterns of jobs world-wide, emphasizing on emerging labour markets and future professions in the new economy. This material can be used by scholars to improve their understanding of the labour market in terms of types of jobs, future jobs, and trends in skills per sector.

Link: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/jobs-of-tomorrow-mapping-opportunity-in-the-new-economy>

Human capital

- The World Bank Human Capital Project is a global effort to encourage more investment in people to promote equality and economic growth. The need to close the human capital gap is more urgent because the pandemic has eroded much of the progress made in recent years. The human capital index is explained and there are country reports and case studies as part of the project. Labour turnover is best understood in the context of recruiting, developing and retaining human capital.

Link: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital>

HR Metrics

- This source provides a video during which Professor Richard Dich Beatty discusses HR Metrics, including how metrics are used to understanding labour turnover. This discussion helps scholars to understand different aspects of HR Metrics, including the role of metrics to HR and an organization, the meaning of HR metrics, explained with practical examples. Metrics in relation to labour turnover are discussed from minute 7 onwards.

Link: <http://www.workinfo.org/index.php/webcasts/item/1578-the-next-generation-of-hr-metrics-speaker-richard-dick-beatty-phd>

Systematic literature review methodology

- The methodology used in this systematic review is explained by the authors, Pickering C.M. and Byrne, J., through video tutorials. Several videos explain the methodology in detail step-by-step, making it easier for scholars to get a clear understanding of the fundamentals to enable them to conduct their own systematic review.

Link: <https://www.griffith.edu.au/griffith-sciences/school-environment-science/research/systematic-quantitative-literature-review>

Sample Syllabus 1

TITLE: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF LABOUR TURNOVER, ITS PROCESSES AND CONTENT

- 2 sessions as part of a broader module on human resource management, general management, and/or organizational behaviour.

Week 1: Is all labour turnover the same?

Week 1 could explore the different meanings, types and functions of labour turnover, from the perspectives of individuals and organizations. Once the meanings, types and functions of labour turnover are clear, the impact of turnover on individuals and organizations could be considered. The main take-away from this session should be that turnover is not simply people leaving organizations for a variety of reasons, but a much broader and deeper individual and organizational concept.

Suggested Reading

- Abelson, M.A. (1987). Examination of avoidable and unavoidable turnover. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **72**, pp. 382-386, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.72.3.382>
- Call, M.L., Nyberg, A.J., Ployhart, R.E. & Weekley, J. (2015). The dynamic nature of turnover and unit performance: The impact of time, quality, and replacements. *Academy of Management Journal*, **58**, pp. 1208–1232, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0669>

- Dalton, D.R., Todor, W.D. & Krackhardt, D.M. (1982). Turnover overstated: The functional taxonomy. *Academy of Management Review*, **7**, pp. 117-123, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1982.4285499>
- Hausknecht, J.P. & Holwerda, J.A. (2013). When does employee turnover matter? Dynamic member configurations, productive capacity, and collective performance. *Organization Science*, **24**, pp. 210-225. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1110.0720>
- Lepak, D.P. & Snell, S.A. (2002). Examining the human resource architecture: The relationships among human capital, employment, and human resource configurations. *Journal of Management*, **28**, pp. 517-543. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920630202800403>
- Nyberg, A.J. & Ployhart, R.E. (2013). Context-emergent turnover (CET) theory: A theory of collective turnover. *The Academy of Management Review*, **38**, pp. 109-131, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2011.0201>
- Winterton, J. (2004). A conceptual model of labour turnover and retention. *Human Resource Development International*, **7**, pp. 371-390, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1367886042000201967>

Focus Questions

- Is there a single way of defining labour turnover? If so, how, and if not, why not?
- How do the types of labour turnover differentially impact organizations and individuals?
- What should be considered to assess the impact of labour turnover?
- How has the definition and character of labour turnover evolved over time?
- What are the pros and cons of labour turnover in relation to a team, department, and organization?

Project Idea

Undergraduate/graduate

Divide the students into small groups (e.g. 4 students per group). Ask them to discuss the meaning of turnover and develop a comprehensive definition of labour turnover. The goal here is to have a broad definition that stimulates classroom-wide discussion.

Postgraduate

Divide the students into small groups (e.g. 4 students per group). Ask them to identify an organization, such as a hotel, factory, or hospital, preferably based on their industry experience. Let them brainstorm examples where individuals who quit the organization can be functional/dysfunctional, avoidable/unavoidable.

Week 2:

During week 2 the students will gain understanding of the difference between turnover process models, content models, and the emergence of both process and content models. This weeks material provides students with information focussing on the origin of turnover research and with the aim of understanding how this influences the development of newer turnover theory.

Suggested Reading

- Mobley, W.H., Griffeth, R.W., Hand, H.H. & Meglino, B.M. (1979). Review and conceptual analysis of the employee turnover process. *Psychological Bulletin*, **86**, pp. 493-522, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.86.3.493>
- Price, J.L. & Mueller, C.W. (1981a). A causal model of turnover for nurses. *Academy of Management Journal*, **24**, pp. 543-565, <https://doi.org/10.2307/255574>
- Lee, T.W. & Mitchell, T.R. (1994). An alternative approach: The unfolding model of voluntary employee turnover. *The Academy of Management Review*, **19**, pp. 51-89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/258835>

- Dorenzo M.S. and Greenhaus J.H. (2011). Job search and voluntary turnover in a boundaryless world: A control theory perspective. *The Academy of Management Review*, **36**, pp. 567-589, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0333>
- Rubenstein, A.L., Eberly, M.B., Lee, T.W. & Mitchell, T.R. (2018). Surveying the forest: A meta-analysis, moderator investigation, and future-oriented discussion of the antecedents of voluntary employee turnover. *Personnel Psychology*, **71**, pp. 23-65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12226>

Focus Questions

- What are the differences between process and content models of turnover?
- How have these differences influenced the development of turnover models?
- How can an organization best use a process model?
- How can an organization best use a content model?
- What are the most important factors causing labour turnover?

Seminar

Divide the students in small groups to work on this project collaboratively. Ask the students to prepare a mock presentation during which they will perform a mock resignation. The students should include both the employee and the employer and prepare their own script of how such a process will go. Encourage the students to incorporate the *unfolding model of turnover*, the *process and content model of turnover*, and the *causal model* in the script.

Sample Syllabus 2

TITLE: CONDUCTING A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

- 2 sessions as part of a broader social science final year undergraduate or post-graduate module on research methodologies

Week 1: Understanding the basics of systematic reviews

Week 1 considers the basics of systematic reviews, such as topic selection, inclusion and exclusion factors, and aspects to look for in articles. This session is designed with the aim to improve the students understanding of how they themselves can eventually conduct a systematic review themselves.

Suggested Reading

- Chartered Association of Business Schools. Academic Journal Guide, <https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2021/>
- Denyer, D. & Tranfield, D. (2009). Producing a systematic review. In Buchanan, D.A. & Bryman, A. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*, London: Sage, pp. 671-689. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2010-00924-039>
- Pahlevan Sharif, S., Bolt, E.E.T., Ahadzadeh, A.S., Turner, J.J., & Sharif Nia, H. (2021). Organisational support and turnover intentions: A moderated mediation approach, *Nursing Open*, **8**, pp. 3606-3615, <https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.911>
- Pickering, C.M. & Byrne, J. (2014). The benefits of publishing systematic quantitative literature reviews for PhD candidates and other early career researchers. *Higher Education Research and Development*, **33**, pp. 534-548, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.841651>

Focus Questions

- How does a systematic review differ from other review techniques?
- What are the benefits of a systematic review?

- What are the drawbacks of a systematic review?
- How do you decide on keyword selection in searching for articles related to your topic?
- What are possible aspects to look for in journal articles?

Project Idea

Undergraduate/graduate

Provide the students with one journal article (Recommended article: Pahlevan Sharif, S. et al. 2021) to read prior to the start of the project. Discuss what type of article this is and whether and/or how it can be used for the purpose of a systematic review.

Postgraduate

Provide the students with one journal article (Recommended article: Pahlevan Sharif, S. et al. 2021) to read prior to the start of the project. The students should, either individually or in small groups, find aspects in the recommended article that can be used to develop categories for a systematic review. It is crucial that the reading materials are used by the students during the project.

Week 2: The challenges of a systematic review

This session focusses on the challenges researchers encounter while conducting systematic reviews. Such challenges include: what type of articles to include, how to recognize the type of article, searching for specific aspects, and how to overcome inclusion challenges if articles do fit the topic but do not fit inclusion criteria.

Suggested Reading

- Bolt, E.E.T., Winterton, J. & Cafferkey, K. A century of labour turnover research: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12294>
- Hom, P.W., Lee, T.W., Shaw, J.D. & Hausknecht, J.P. (2017). One hundred years of employee turnover theory and research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **102**, pp. 530-545, <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000103>
- Allen, D.G., Hancock, J.I., Vardaman, J.M. & McKee, D.N. (2014). Analytical mindsets in turnover research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, **35**, pp. 61-86, <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1912>
- Holtom, B.C., Mitchell, T.R., Lee, T.W. & Eberly, M.B. (2008). Turnover and retention research: A glance at the past, a closer review of the present, and a venture into the future. *The Academy of Management Annals*, **2**, pp. 231-274, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520802211552>
- Rubenstein, A.L., Eberly, M.B., Lee, T.W. & Mitchell, T.R. (2018). Surveying the forest: A meta-analysis, moderator investigation, and future-oriented discussion of the antecedents of voluntary employee turnover. *Personnel Psychology*, **71**, pp. 23-65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12226>

Focus Questions

- What types of articles should be included in systematic reviews?
- What are the characteristics of each of the type of article?
- What are examples of inclusion and exclusion criteria?
- What do you do with an article that fits the criteria?
- What do you do with an article that does not fit the criteria but matches the focus of the systematic review?

Project Idea

Undergraduate/graduate

The reading materials should be provided prior to the session. Engage in group discussion to discuss how the reading material articles differ from each other. To illustrate, the differences between empirical and conceptual journal articles can be discussed. This projects aim is to improve the students understanding of the types of articles available.

Postgraduate

The reading materials should be provided prior to the session. The students should work in small groups to discuss how each of the articles could potentially fit in a systematic review, or why the journal article would not fit, and how such challenges can be overcome by broadening the focus of a systematic review. This projects aim is improving the students critical thinking and problem-solving skills in preparation of their own systematic review.