

Turnover intent of new workers: social exchange perspectives

Turnover
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workers

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the impact of task interdependence and leader–member exchange, as social exchange variables, on affective commitment and turnover intent of new workers in an industry with high attrition rates. In addition, the paper examines the mediating effects of affective commitment.

Design/methodology/approach – The present study drew insights from the literature to formulate hypotheses that link the two social exchange variables on affective commitment and turnover intent. Through the utilization of the data collected from 441 call center agents working for eight call centers in the Philippines, the hypotheses were tested and analyzed using structural equation modeling.

Findings – The results reveal that task interdependence and leader–member exchange are positive antecedents of affective commitment and negative predictors of turnover intent. Further analysis reveals that affective commitment fully mediates the effects of the two social exchange variables on turnover intent.

Practical implications – The results imply that call centers can help improve new workers' affective commitment and reduce their turnover intent through job designs that can facilitate high task interdependence. Furthermore, training team leaders or supervisors to develop leadership styles that are more focused on people and relationships may also increase the agents' commitment and reduce their quit intention.

Originality/value – This paper is the first to demonstrate that social exchange variables can also impact the affective commitment and turnover intent of new workers in an industry known to have heavy supervisory monitoring, high demands in terms of work quotas and high turnover rates.

Keywords Call center, Task interdependence, Leader–member exchange, Affective commitment, Turnover intent

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the large pool of computer-literate and educated young Filipinos with English communication skills, combined with cheap labor costs, has attracted a sizeable number of foreign companies to subcontract their business operations to third-party vendors in the Philippines (Padios, 2018; Lee, 2015). Among all types of business process outsourcing (BPO) in the country, the largest and most in-demand are call centers. The industry has grown so fast that the Philippines has become the world's call-center capital (Bunachita, 2018; Mercurio, 2018). The call centers mostly represent large American businesses such as Citibank, Safeway, Chevron and Aetna, as well as other smaller businesses (Lee, 2015). The centers cater to customers' needs 24 hours a day and seven days a week. They contributed \$13bn to the Philippine economy in 2017, and under the existing roadmap, the forecast is that their revenues will increase to \$20.4bn by 2022 (Mercurio, 2018).

Despite its robustness, the Philippine call center industry has also been facing several challenges. One of the more obvious concerns is the high employee turnover rate. In recent years, the average attrition rate in call centers has exceeded 50%, and it has even peaked at 70% in some centers (Lee, 2015; Magkilat, 2016; Sallaz, 2019). The majority of the reported turnovers were from voluntary resignations (Hechanova, 2013; Sallaz, 2019). The high



turnover phenomenon and the short-term nature of workers' tenure make the Philippine call center industry a *revolving door*, a term used to describe a situation in which people work for a company only a short period of time before quitting (Hechanova, 2013).

Workforce attrition has a variety of negative implications. Mainly, it puts the organization's position into jeopardy through its enormous costs. The amount of money spent in the process of having to select, recruit and train new workers is the primary direct tangible costs associated with turnover (e.g. Biron and Boon, 2013; Roche *et al.*, 2015). Additional direct costs include separation costs due to severance pay and accompanying paper work, vacancy costs for overtime pay for experienced employees taking extra duties to fulfill quota requirements and productivity loss costs (e.g. Hillmer *et al.*, 2004; Takase, 2010).

Apart from the direct costs, the exit of employees also contributes to indirect costs implications that include reduced morale due to stress and pressure on the remaining staff and the loss of human capital (e.g. Hillmer *et al.*, 2004; Roche *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, resigned good-performing employees leave unfinished tasks and project behind in their workplaces, which may take a considerable amount of time, money and effort to finish by replacements, who may also underperform due to inexperience.

As organizations realized the importance of understanding and reducing turnover, it has attracted broad research interests in the past decades. Most of the findings revealed that turnover intent, job satisfaction and organizational commitment are the most potent precursors of actual turnover (e.g. Tett and Meyer, 1993; Zopiatis *et al.*, 2014).

In recent years, many turnover-themed studies have utilized turnover intent as a proxy of actual turnover (e.g. Flint *et al.*, 2013; Skelton *et al.*, 2019) in line with the notion proposed by the theory of planned behavior that intention is the best predictor of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The studies' findings reported that job satisfaction and organizational commitment were the most influential precursors of turnover intent. Tett and Meyer (1993) defined turnover intent as "a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization" (p. 262).

Previous studies on call centers revealed that service workers' turnover intent had more antecedents than for those who worked in other sectors. In particular, empirical studies conducted among call center workers in Asia found that, apart from job satisfaction and organizational commitment, stress-associated emotional exhaustion and burnout also influenced turnover intent. For example, Poddar and Madupalli (2012) stated that emotional exhaustion felt by Indian call center agents positively affected their turnover intention. In China, Li and Zhou (2013) reported that customer verbal aggression was a stressor that increased call center agents' turnover intent, and emotional exhaustion fully mediated the relationship. In the Philippines, Hechanova's (2013) study found that work-life conflict due to graveyard shifts and demanding workloads was a stressor that significantly contributed to the workers' turnover intent. Ruppel *et al.* (2013) highlighted that working under emotional labor conditions made the Filipino call center workers emotionally stressed, which led to decreased organizational commitment and increased intention to leave the organization.

In addition to heavy workload and graveyard shifts, the Philippines call center industry also employs other stressful practices. These include heavy monitoring and strict performance evaluation (e.g. Friginal, 2013; Ofreneo *et al.*, 2007; Sallaz, 2019), indicating that the primary culture of call centers in the Philippines revolves around improving individual performance and efficiency. Although these practices have had beneficial results, empirical studies provide evidence of their unfavorable effects, including higher job strains and quit rates (e.g. Haley *et al.*, 2012; Holman *et al.*, 2009). Hence, given the general impression that call center jobs in the Philippines are stressful, it is understandable that most researchers (e.g. Hechanova, 2013; Ruppel *et al.*, 2013) directed their investigations toward stress-related variables and their effects on the workers' attitudes and behaviors.

The preliminary qualitative investigation for the current study also supported the findings of Hechanova (2013) and Ruppel *et al.* (2013). As expected, the thematic content analysis results revealed that most of the turnover-related themes that emerged from the interviews were associated with stress-causing variables such as customers' unfriendliness, work-life conflict and graveyard shifts. However, the interviews also provided some new insights. The respondents disclosed that apart from focusing on the individual agent's productivity and performance, the centers also placed weight on team efforts and interdependence to achieve desired outcomes. The interviews further revealed that the call center workers' turnover intentions were influenced by the quality of their interpersonal relationships with their colleagues and superiors.

Call center studies in other countries highlighted that agents should share common goals, share knowledge and cooperate to solve work-related problems and enhance individual and group performance (e.g. Batt and Moynihan, 2002; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014). Other researchers stated that social factors such as coworker relationships and support, organizational support and supervisory support among others contributed significantly to the variance of turnover intent of service workers (e.g. Kalemci Tuzun and Arzu Kalemci, 2012; Kang *et al.*, 2015; Kim and Stoner, 2008).

Based on the reviewed papers, social variables are underrepresented in turnover studies of call centers in the Philippines. Hence, the current study aims to contribute to the literature by developing and testing a predictive model that uses the social variables task interdependence and leader-member exchange as antecedents of turnover intent of call center workers in the country. As affective commitment is one of the main precursors known to reduce turnover intent, the current study also aims to investigate whether it mediates the effects of the aforementioned social variables on turnover intent. To the researchers' knowledge, this is the first study that examines the impacts of social exchange variables on turnover intent of Filipino call center workers. Therefore, the results are expected to offer many implications that could challenge existing norms and provoke scholarly debate on how to adjust work designs and leadership styles to reduce the turnover problem in the call centers in the country.

This paper continues as follows. The first section reviews the relevant literature and presents the hypotheses. The second section discusses the sample, measurements and methods of analyses. Then, the next section reports the results of the investigations and hypotheses testing. After presenting the results, the discussion follows. The theoretical and practical implications are then expounded. Finally, the last section presents the conclusion of the study.

Literature review

Task interdependence

Previous studies have highlighted that work teams are integral components of a call center job (e.g. Batt and Moynihan, 2002; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014; Sallaz, 2019). Sallaz (2019), for example, implied that, in call centers in the Philippines, teams comprising of a leader and several employees typically work together to reach the team quota. Batt and Moynihan's (2002) study, involving qualitative fieldwork and archival data collection, indicated that task interdependence among teams is an essential aspect of call center work design. They argued that assigning workers in groups with common goals and outcomes makes them share their skills and knowledge to solve work-related problems, hence improving their problem-solving skills. Additionally, Tjosvold *et al.* (2014) found that cooperative teams help enhance call center workers' performance and well-being.

Task interdependence pertains to the level to which workers need to work closely with others to fulfill their job duties (Thompson, 1967). In his book, Thompson (1967) conceptualized that when task interdependence is high, workers tend to communicate more often, work closer together and regularly support and influence each other.

Recent studies have generally supported the beneficial effects of healthy task interdependence. For instance, high-quality task interdependence has invariably been reported to strengthen the positive relationship between employee job performance and its antecedents (e.g. [Vidyarthi et al., 2014](#); [Zhao et al., 2019](#)). More specifically, task interdependence was found to strengthen the positive relationship between leaders' emotion perceptions and employees' job performance ([Vidyarthi et al., 2014](#)). It also exacerbated workplace ostracism's negative association with task performance ([Zhao et al., 2019](#)). Additionally, higher levels of task interdependence could lead to more robust individual behavioral engagement ([Zhang et al., 2020](#)) and help improve the positive relationship between empowering leadership and organizational job embeddedness ([Erkutlu and Chafra, 2015](#)).

[Kiggundu \(1983\)](#) proposed the concepts of initiated and received dimensions of task interdependence. The former refers to the experienced responsibility for other employees' work outcomes. In contrast, the latter pertains to the extent to which a team member is affected by the work of other team members. [Kiggundu \(1983\)](#) also advanced the notion of critical task interdependence, which suggests that a team's success depends on the coordination among members.

The current study surmises that, for new workers in call centers, their teammates' inputs and influences are forms of received and critical dimensions of task interdependence. The current study also posits that the combined received and critical task dimensions have favorable results due to the implied social support from other team members.

Social exchange theory ([Homans, 1958](#)) and related concepts proposed by subsequent researchers (e.g. [Blau, 2017](#); [Emerson, 1976](#)) imply that an attitude or behavior can result from a social exchange process between two or more persons. Psychologically, the fundamental purpose of this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. When one perceives that the benefits of being in a social relationship outweigh the costs, positive consequences follow. The current study infers, therefore, based on the mentioned theory that the new workers' involvement in high-quality received and critical dimensions of task interdependence produces a variety of personal and social gains. These gains, in turn, improve the workers' attitude and behavior toward the organization and may include enhanced affective commitment and reduced turnover intent. Otherwise, if there is low interdependence, workers may receive unsatisfactory social support from their peers, leading to reduced commitment and higher intention to quit.

In addition to [Homans' \(1958\)](#) theory, [Gouldner's \(1960\)](#) norm of reciprocity can also provide a complementary explanation of the benefits of task interdependence. The notion of reciprocity posits that good-quality exchange relationships between individuals have a variety of positive implications that may include increased social support and mutual obligations to reciprocate the received favor ([Gouldner, 1960](#)). The current study surmises that new workers who have desirable reciprocal relationships with their colleagues in activities requiring task interdependence are more exposed to their peers' social support. As such, they become more inclined to feel obligated to reciprocate by supporting their peers in return. This supportive reciprocal relationship process made possible by task interdependence is expected to help create a work environment that can improve the new workers' attitudes and behaviors toward the organization, including increased affective commitment and reduced turnover intent.

Therefore, based on previous empirical findings, social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity, the current study advances two hypotheses pertaining to task interdependence's effects on affective commitment and turnover intent. The hypotheses are:

- H1.* Task interdependence positively affects affective commitment.
- H2.* Task interdependence negatively affects turnover intent.

Leader–member exchange

Leader–member exchange pertains to the interpersonal relationship between supervisor and subordinates (Schyns *et al.*, 2007). Researchers generally expect that supportive and high-quality relationships between leaders and their subordinates lead to a variety of positive outcomes. A favorable leader–member exchange enhances organizational commitment (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2010; Jaiswal and Dhar, 2016; Keskes *et al.*, 2018) and reduces turnover intent (Al Hashmi *et al.*, 2019; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Harris *et al.*, 2014; Wang and Yi, 2011). A high-quality leader–member exchange also intensifies organizational citizenship behavior (Peng and Lin, 2016; Khan *et al.*, 2017), knowledge sharing (Khan *et al.*, 2017) and work engagement (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, it also helps create an impetus for creative work involvement (Ahmed *et al.*, 2014; Kahrobaei and Mortazavi, 2016).

Despite the considerable evidence suggesting the critical role of leader–member exchange in driving affective commitment and turnover intent, it is notable that it is overlooked in empirical studies conducted in the Philippines call center industry. Hence, an inquiry in call centers in the country looking into these factors fills a gap in the literature. The results are expected to provide useful information to understand how, and to what extent, leader–member exchange improves affective commitment and turnover intent of workers in an industry where substantial performance monitoring and high quota demands are regular practices.

The regulation of emotions plays a central role in call center work. When they are on the phone with customers, Filipino call center agents are required to express friendly behaviors and regulate their emotions (Padios, 2018; Ruppel *et al.*, 2013). Such requirements expose them to negative emotional states such as exhaustion and stress resulting from the inconsistency of their expressed and experienced feelings when dealing with unfriendly customers (Hilario, 2009; Ruppel *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, it is not unlikely that the workers may come to judge their managers as contributors to the negative emotions they experience. Their managers' constant transaction monitoring, a known norm in call center jobs (e.g. Friginal, 2013; Holman *et al.*, 2009; Sallaz, 2019), may also magnify the negative feelings, reducing their participation in quality task interdependence in the process. The reduced quality in leader–member exchange, in turn, is expected to have unfavorable effects on the workers' attitudes and behavior toward the organization.

The effects of leader–member exchange on the workers' attitudes and behaviors can also be theoretically justified using Homans' (1958) social exchange theory and Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity. Based on the former, the current study surmises that call center workers participate less in social exchanges when they perceive their leaders as contributors to their negative emotions. Based on the latter, it is posited that workers may view the social exchanges with indifference, as a reciprocal reaction to the negative emotions attributed to the leaders' managerial duties. The reduced participation and lack of interest in social exchanges with their leaders may result in lower affective commitment and increased turnover intent.

Therefore, in line with the findings of previous studies and supported by the concepts advanced by social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity, the current study proposes two hypotheses regarding the roles of leader–member exchange in this study. The hypotheses are:

H3. Leader–member exchange positively affects affective commitment.

H4. Leader–member exchange negatively affects turnover intent.

Affective commitment

Previous studies were in consensus in the finding that affective commitment has a notable impact on turnover intent (e.g. [Ramalho et al., 2018](#); [Rathi and Lee, 2017](#); [Tarigan and Ariani, 2015](#)). Studies conducted in call centers and other service organizations also provided significant empirical support of affective commitment's impact on turnover intent (e.g. [Flint et al., 2013](#); [Ruppel et al., 2013](#)).

In addition to its direct effect on turnover intent, prior studies also indicated that affective commitment mediates the influence of a variety of organization-related and employee-related variables on turnover intent (e.g. [Fazio et al., 2017](#); [Poon, 2012](#)). In light of the findings of the studies mentioned earlier, the current study hypothesizes that affective commitment has a substantial negative impact on turnover intent of call center workers in the Philippines, and it mediates the effects of task interdependence and leader–member exchange on turnover intent. Hence, the final three hypotheses of the present study are:

- H5.* Affective commitment negatively affects turnover intent.
- H6.* Affective commitment mediates the effect of task interdependence on turnover intent.
- H7.* Affective commitment mediates the effect of leader–member exchange on turnover intent.

Salary, age and gender as control variables

As seen in the diagram of the hypothesized relationships in [Figure 1](#), the present study also includes three control variables that can directly influence turnover intent. The first is salary. Previous studies provided empirical evidence regarding the workers' tendency to develop a higher level of turnover intent when they felt that their wages were not congruent with the value they believed they rightfully deserved (e.g. [Kim and Stoner, 2008](#); [Lee et al., 2012](#)). Hence, in light of the finding, the current study predicts that salary has a negative relationship with turnover intent.

The second is age. The life course perspective contends that career exploration tends to be more common among younger workers ([Elder, 1994](#)), suggesting that they have a higher tendency to leave work to find new employment elsewhere than older workers. Previous studies have supported this claim as they found that intention to leave work and actual turnover rates were higher among younger employees (e.g. [Lambert et al., 2012](#); [Moynihan and Landuyt, 2008](#)). Based on these findings, the current study posits that age has a negative relationship with turnover intent.

The last control variable is gender. In the Philippines, issues relating to gender bias in the workplace are still persistent, with men being preferred and having more employment opportunities than women ([Batara et al., 2018](#)). Thus, female workers are expected to develop less desire to find new employment elsewhere, where the chance of being mistreated is also

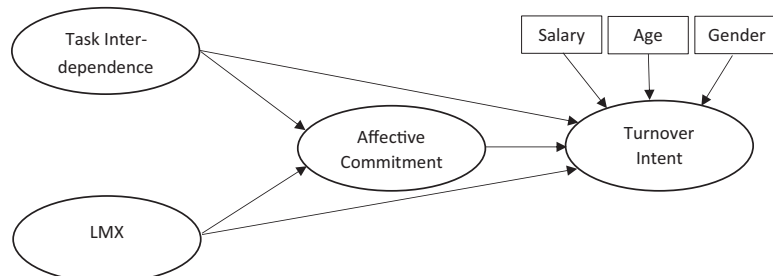


Figure 1.
Overview of the hypothesized relationships

high. Women were also found to have lower intention to quit than men (Moynihan and Landuyt, 2008). Hence, the current study predicts that female call center workers have lower turnover intent than their male counterparts.

Data and methodology

Sample

Before the formulation of the current study's conceptual framework, a preliminary qualitative inquiry was conducted to explore the factors the agents faced in their call center jobs that may potentially influence their intention to stay or leave their employment. The investigation involved a comprehensive interview with 34 call center agents who had between six months and two years of job tenure. The results provided support for the relevance of the constructs used in this study.

The sample selection process of the present study had three phases. First, three cities known to have call center hubs were conveniently selected. The cities were Davao, Cagayan de Oro and Cebu. These locations received little attention in turnover intent research as most studies were concentrated in call centers in Metro Manila. Second, the researchers contacted people with leadership positions working for more than 40 call centers in the three cities. Four centers from Davao, three from Cagayan de Oro and one from Cebu agreed to participate. The centers were of different sizes. The most prominent employed around 3,000 workers and was based in Davao City. The smallest was based in Cagayan de Oro City, and it only had around 100 workers.

Approximately, the total number of agents working in the eight call centers at the time of the data collection was about 8,000. The researchers tried to convince the representatives of the eight centers to make answering the survey compulsory for their agents. However, they argued that they could only allow a portion of their workers to participate for internal reasons. The four centers in Davao pledged between 300 and 500 participants. The three centers in Cagayan de Oro agreed to ask 200–400 of their workers to participate. The lone participating center in Cebu promised a maximum of 100 participants. From the figures they provided, the estimate was that the participating centers could provide at least 600 participants and at most 1,000. In anticipation that not all participants would return the questionnaires with useable data, it was decided that they would be distributed to 1,000 conveniently selected respondents.

Before its distribution, members of a review board for population and social research scrutinized the questionnaire to ensure its contents' ethical appropriateness. The board members approved the survey questionnaire and provided a certificate of approval. Furthermore, the researchers requested that the participating centers' human resources departments comment on the contents of the questionnaire. They agreed that it did not contain any items that could cause ethical concerns. The selected respondents were also briefed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw anytime. Each questionnaire was placed inside a sealable envelope along with a copy of the ethical approval certificate and a cover letter that addressed concerns on voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity.

Of the distributed questionnaires, 689 were sufficiently answered, resulting in a 68.9% response rate. Since the targeted samples were new workers with subordinate-level positions, only participants with under two years' tenure and no leadership positions were included, resulting in the final sample of 441. The average salary of the respondents was Philippine peso (PHP) 14,122, or US dollars (US\$) 272 per month, with 34 (7.7%), earning below PHP10,000 (US\$ 192) and 26 (5.9%) earning more than PHP20,000 (US\$ 385). Most of the respondents (381 or 86.3%) received between PHP10,000 and 20,000. The average age of the respondents was 24.7 years. The majority of the respondents were aged 18 to 22 (242 or

54.9%). The remaining respondents' ages were from 23 to 27 (158 or 35.8%) and from 28 to 32 (41 or 9.3%). The slight majority of the respondents were female (258 or 58.5%).

Measurements

The current study adopted all measures of the latent variables from the literature, using well-established scales. All items for the variables task interdependence, affective commitment and turnover intent were measured with a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A five-point Likert-type scale measured the items for leader–member exchange.

The current study adopted the seven-item scale of [Langfred \(2005\)](#) to measure task interdependence. Langfred's scale is a modification of [Kiggundu's \(1983\)](#) scale, containing items that measure both received and critical elements of task interdependence. The current study used the measurement to measure the degree to which workers are affected by their coworkers during task interdependence and the extent to which a team's success depends on the coordination among members. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) found that two of the items had lower than 0.50 factor loadings. Those items were omitted from the study. The remaining items have a scale reliability of 0.85.

For the measurement of leader–member exchange, the seven-item scale from [Scandura and Graen \(1984\)](#) was adopted. In the current study, the items measure the quality of exchange relationship between call center supervisors and their subordinates as perceived by the latter. The reliability of the scale is 0.89.

The current study adopted [Allen and Meyer's \(1990\)](#) six-item affective commitment scale to measure the extent to which Filipino call center workers show emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization. One item was omitted due to low factor loading. The reliability of the remaining items is 0.83.

Turnover intent was measured using the five-item measurement developed by [Wayne et al. \(1997\)](#). The measurement was adopted to measure call center workers' propensity to leave the organization. The reliability of the scale is 0.93.

The measurements for salary and age were in rank orders. Eight-rank ordered categories, ranging from under PHP 10,000 (US\$ 200) to over PHP 40,000 (US\$800), measured the workers' salary, while seven brackets that range from under 25 to over 50 specified the respondents' age classification. The categories were converted into midpoint scales in the analysis. The application of midpoints means that the categories' rank orders were transformed into a substantively meaningful scale ([Powers and Xie, 2008](#)). Concerning the categorical control variable gender, the current study created a dummy for males.

Data analysis

The current study utilized the two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. In the first step, the researchers created a measurement model to represent the measurement theory. The Chi-Square (χ^2) Statistic, Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) were examined to assess the model's validity.

The ideal value of the χ^2 statistic is small and insignificant as a value closer to zero implies a better fit ([Hair et al., 2010](#)). Conventionally, RMSEA values are acceptable if they do not exceed 0.08 ([Hair et al., 2010](#)). [Hu and Bentler \(1999\)](#) suggested that SRMR should be less than or equal to 0.08 to conclude that the model fits well. RMSEA and SRMR values that are 0.08 or lower fulfill the absolute fit requirements. Generally, a CFI or TLI of 0.90 or higher ([Hair et al., 2010](#); [Hu and Bentler, 1999](#)) indicates incremental fit acceptability.

The assessment also involved the inspection of the factor loadings. The factor loading of a measured item should be at least 0.50 and ideally 0.70 or higher and significant at the 5% level

($p \leq 0.05$) (Hair *et al.*, 2010). A loading that satisfies the cutoff criteria demonstrates that the item is related to the latent variable it supposedly measures.

The analysis also involved the assessment of the construct validity of the model through the examination of its convergent, discriminant and nomological components. Fundamentally, the construct validity measures the extent to which a set of measured items accurately reflects the theoretical latent variables they are designed to measure (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

After validating the measurement model, the second step proceeded by transforming the measurement model into the hypothesized structural model. The validation of the structural model also included examining the model fit using the same indices and conventional criteria followed in the first step. Additionally, the measurement and structural models' indices were compared to see whether there were significant changes. An unsubstantial deterioration of the structural model's overall fit was desirable as it would suggest that the validity remained intact (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The effect sizes and their significance levels and the R -squares (R^2) of the endogenous variables were also examined. Significant parameter estimates that followed their predicted direction would also support the structural model's validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

The path analyses for both the direct and mediated effects were tested simultaneously using the statistical software AMOS. The software's estimates show each independent variable's effect on the dependent variable before mediation (c) and after mediation (c'). The estimates also show the indirect effect (ab), which represents the amount of mediation and is the product of multiplying the independent variable's effect on the mediator (a) and the mediator's effect on the dependent variable (b). Results that show significant c' , c and ab imply partial mediation. In contrast, significant c and ab along with an *insignificant* c' direct effect estimate indicate full mediation.

Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, correlations and the reliabilities of the scales. As expected, task interdependence and leader-member exchange are positively correlated with affective commitment and negatively correlated with turnover intent. Also, in confirmation of the expected relationship, affective commitment correlates negatively with turnover intent. Of the control variables, salary has a negative correlation with turnover intent while age and gender have no significant relationships with the dependent variable.

The measurement model's initial evaluation revealed that three measured items had factor loadings lower than 0.50. The three were omitted from the model. The resulting modified measurement model showed factor loadings that are all over 0.50.

As seen in Table 2, the χ^2 statistic test revealed a significant value ($\chi^2 = 735, p < 0.001$), potentially suggesting poor fit. However, the χ^2 statistic is sensitive to sample size and almost

	TIN	LMX	AC	TI	Sal	Age
Task interdependence (TIN)						
Leader-member exchange (LMX)	0.17**					
Affective commitment (AC)	0.22***	0.36***				
Turnover intent (TI)	-0.18***	-0.29***	-0.58***			
Salary (Sal)	-0.06	0.10	0.10	-0.09		
Age	0.01	0.08	0.03	-0.07	0.13**	
Gender	-0.03	-0.08	-0.06	-0.05	0.11*	0.02

Note(s): $N = 441$. Salary was converted to US\$ (1 US\$ = 52 PHP), age was measured in years, gender was coded 1 for male and 0 for female. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 1.
Means, standard
deviations (SD) and
correlations between
the variables

always significant in large sample sizes (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Hence, the large sample size of the current study renders the χ^2 statistic less meaningful. The SRMR and RMSEA show figures supporting the acceptability of the absolute fit (SRMR = 0.058, RMSEA = 0.065). The CFI and TLI values of the measurement model are 0.921 and 0.908, respectively, supporting the model's incremental fit.

Furthermore, all construct reliabilities in the modified model are over 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) of each of the latent variables is higher than 0.50. These figures support convergent validity. Discriminant and nomological validities are also supported. Overall, the construct validity of the model is confirmed.

Step two's main objective was to assess the validity of the hypothesized structural model. The values of the fit indices, as also seen in Table 2, show acceptable goodness of fit [$\chi^2 = 738$ ($p < 0.001$), SRMR = 0.059, RMSEA = 0.065, CFI = 0.917 and TLI = 909]. The comparison of the relative model fits between the structural and measurement models reveals a slight and insignificant increase in χ^2 and minimal overall change, suggesting insignificant deterioration in fit. As shown in Figure 2, the results also indicate that the signs of the structural path estimates are in line with their hypothesized directions.

Figure 2 also shows the path coefficients in the structural model. The coefficients indicate that both task interdependence ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$) and leader-member exchange ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) have positive effects on affective commitment, supporting H1 and H3. In turn,

Goodness-of-fit statistics	Measurement model	Structural model
χ^2	734.937***	738.361***
df	257	260
χ^2/df	2.860	2.840
SRMR	0.058	0.059
RMSEA	0.065	0.065
CFI	0.921	0.917
TLI	0.908	0.909
PCFI	0.789	0.798
PNFI	0.758	0.766

Note(s): $N = 441$. *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Goodness-of-fit statistics of the measurement and structural models

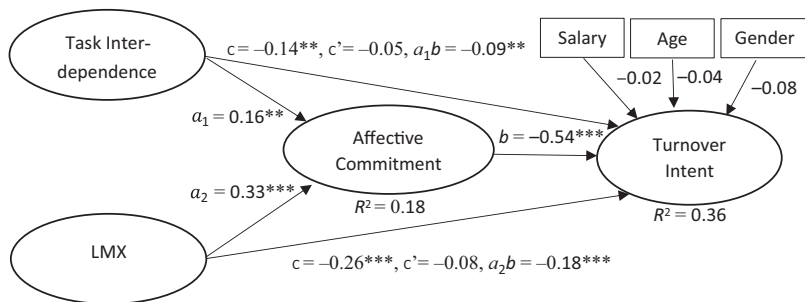


Figure 2. The structural relationships showing the path estimates

Note(s): c = independent variable's effect on dependent variable before mediation; a = independent variable's effect on mediator; b = mediator's effect on dependent variable; c' = the mediated effect of independent variable on dependent variable; ab = indirect effect. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

affective commitment negatively affects turnover intent ($\beta = -0.54, p < 0.001$), confirming H5. With regard to the path estimates of the direct effects from the independent variables to the dependent variable prior to the mediation of affective commitment (c), the results are supportive of H2 and H4 as the effects of task interdependence ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.01$) and leader–member exchange ($\beta = -0.26, p < 0.001$) on turnover intent are negative and significant. All control variables (i.e. age, salary and gender) have insignificant effects on turnover intent.

The mediation analysis supports H6 and H7. The analysis reveals that affective commitment diminishes the significant effects of task interdependence and leader–member exchange on turnover intent. More specifically, the significant effect (c) of task interdependence on turnover intent becomes insignificant when mediated (c') by affective commitment (from $\beta = -0.14, p < 0.01$ to $\beta = -0.05, p > 0.05$). Likewise, when mediated (c') by affective commitment, the significant effect of leader–member exchange before the mediation (c) on turnover intent also becomes insignificant (from $\beta = -0.26, p < 0.001$ to $\beta = -0.08, p > 0.05$). The indirect effects (ab) that run through the mediator affective commitment are all significant ($\beta = -0.09, p < 0.01$ for task interdependence; $\beta = -0.18, p < 0.001$ for leader–member exchange), implying that affective commitment fully mediates the relationships.

The R^2 of turnover intent is 0.36; this indicates that task interdependence, leader–member exchange, affective commitment and the three control variables together can explain 36% of the variation in turnover intent between employees.

Discussion

This study's primary objectives were to investigate the effects of two social variables at work on turnover intent; to assess whether they also affect affective commitment; and to test whether the commitment is a mediator. The study results provide empirical evidence that social exchanges also impact the affective commitment and turnover intent of stressed emotional laborers in Philippines call centers. Specifically, the findings reveal that task interdependence and leader–member exchange are positively linked to affective commitment and negatively related to turnover intent, and that commitment mediates the relationships.

The findings that task interdependence affects affective commitment positively and turnover intent negatively provide insights that may challenge existing management practices in call centers in the Philippines. The call centers in the country apply strict and intensive work monitoring and evaluation procedures to improve or maintain employee performance and efficiency (e.g. Friginal, 2013; Ofreneo *et al.*, 2007; Sallaz, 2019). However, these practices are known to have drawbacks that include higher levels of job strain and workforce attrition (e.g. Haley *et al.*, 2012; Holman *et al.*, 2009). Hence, as an alternative to existing management practices, the Philippines' call centers may start considering work designs that facilitate more task interdependence and less individual monitoring and evaluation. Regular assignments of workers in groups that emphasize cooperation and aiming for common goals and outcomes are expected to improve their interdependence, which, in turn, increases their commitment and reduces turnover intent.

The results also confirm that high-quality leader–member relationships, as perceived by the subordinates, influence their commitment and intent to quit. From these findings, it can be inferred that when call center agents perceive social exchanges with their leaders to be fruitful and satisfactory, there are positive consequences. However, if social exchanges are perceived to be unbeneficial or unrewarding, there are adverse outcomes. It is implied that the unsatisfying nature of being in a dysfunctional relationship with their managers elicits negative responses that spill over to the organization, resulting in weaker affective commitment and increased turnover intent. Hence, call centers may also consider adopting leadership styles conducive to enhancing the quality of leader–member exchange. The

literature suggests that relationship-enhancing and supportive leaders help improve the quality of the exchange (e.g. [Bhandarker and Rai, 2015](#); [O'Donnell et al., 2012](#)).

The results regarding the role of affective commitment in the model are in agreement with earlier studies in confirming that commitment is one of the most important antecedents of turnover intent (e.g. [Albrecht and Andreetta, 2011](#); [Tarigan and Ariani, 2015](#)). Further, the finding that it mediates the effects of the social variables on turnover intent helps solidify its position as one of the most potent mediators between turnover intent and its antecedents. Accordingly, the dependencies between the social variables and turnover intent are more favorable, given that the workers' emotional attachment to their employments is sufficiently reinforced.

To the researchers' knowledge, the current study is the first to empirically confirm the importance of social variables at work in reducing turnover intent of new workers in the context of the Philippines call center industry. Hence, it contributes to the literature by providing empirical support to the notion that leader-member exchange and task interdependence are significant antecedents of new agents' turnover intent in an industry where worker monitoring and high quota demands are standards. The study also proves that concepts proposed by the social exchange theory and norm of reciprocity can be adopted to explain and justify the effects of the aforementioned social exchange variables on turnover intent of new workers in an industry where attrition rates are high. The theoretical and practical contributions of the study are described in the next two sections.

Theoretical contributions

The current study demonstrates that the concepts postulated by proponents of social exchange theory (e.g. [Blau, 2017](#); [Emerson, 1976](#); [Homans, 1958](#)) are applicable in work situations in the Philippines call center industry. The theory presumes that when an individual involved in a social exchange process perceives that the benefits of being in that social relationship outweigh the costs, positive consequences follow. In support of the theory, the current study demonstrates that workers who have a favorable perception of the quality of task interdependence and leader-member exchange develop a higher level of affective commitment and a lower degree of turnover intent. As social variables are not a common theme in previous studies devoted to developing and testing models of turnover intent in call centers in the Philippines, the results may provoke further interesting debates and management changes beneficial to the workers and the organization.

The study also demonstrates the applicability of [Gouldner's \(1960\)](#) norm of reciprocity in the Philippines call centers. The notion of reciprocity posits that good-quality reciprocal relationships between individuals in a social setting have a variety of positive implications. Therefore, based on the results, it is inferred that agents involved in high task interdependence and quality leader-member exchange receive social support from their peers and leaders and react by also extending their support. The agents' perception that the social transactions in the workplace are healthy, enticing and supportive encourages them to reciprocate in various forms that may include an increased affective commitment to the organization and reduced turnover intent.

Practical implications

Philippines call centers' common practices include strict monitoring and evaluation of employees (e.g. [Friginal, 2013](#); [Ofreneo et al., 2007](#); [Sallaz, 2019](#)). Although these practices are implemented to ensure organizational success in terms of efficiency and competitiveness, they are known to be detrimental at both organizational and personal levels as they are associated with job strain and turnover (e.g. [Haley et al., 2012](#); [Holman et al., 2009](#); [Sprigg and](#)

Jackson, 2006). Based on the findings that task interdependence has a positive effect on affective commitment and adverse impact on turnover intent, human resource managers in Philippines call centers can use the results to implement new job designs that can maximize quality task interdependence.

The call centers may argue that such changes in managerial practices may have detrimental effects on the workers' performance. However, previous empirical findings can be cited to counter that argument. Studies show that having teams with members having common goals and outcomes and sharing knowledge to solve work-related problems encourage social support that benefits the workers' performance and well-being (e.g. Batt and Moynihan, 2002; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the changes are expected to be more beneficial than costly, with long-term positive implications for the workers and the organization.

As for the finding that the new workers' perception of leader-member exchange significantly influences their affective commitment and turnover intent, it is inferred that leadership styles improvement or development can expedite positive consequences, which may include improved affective commitment and reduced intent to leave. The exchange is social in nature; hence, managers should concentrate on developing or adopting leadership styles that focus more on people and relationships, rather than on productivity and task. Some examples of these leadership styles are transformational, resonant, supportive and considerate leadership styles (e.g. Bhandarker and Rai, 2015; Mathew and Gupta, 2015). The literature suggests that workers generally perceive leaders who have friendly traits and innovative methods of communication as supportive, and supportive leaders are known to increase workers' participation in a higher-quality leader-member exchange (Michael, 2011; O'Donnell *et al.*, 2012). The roles of leaders in improving the exchange are well documented by previous studies, which suggested that leader variables explained the most variance in leader-member exchange (e.g. Dulebohn *et al.*, 2012; Li *et al.*, 2018).

Organizational support can also be improved to increase the quality of leader-member exchange. The suggestion is based on previous studies' findings that leader-member exchange is strongly related to perceived organizational support, which is also a positive antecedent of affective commitment and a negative antecedent of turnover intent (e.g. Flint *et al.*, 2013; Madden *et al.*, 2015; Ng, 2016). The literature indicates that employees perceive an organization as supportive when they feel that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (e.g. Baran *et al.*, 2012; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2010). Hence, rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in recognition of the workers' contributions to the organization are expected to increase workers' perception of organizational support. Intrinsic rewards can be in the form of plaques or certificates of appreciation for the workers' performance or even a simple e-mail from the management that recognizes the workers' contribution. Extrinsic rewards are monetary or nonmonetary incentives such as free vacations given to the workers as a reward for their work performance. Consequently, workers who perceive that they are well supported by the organization are likely to develop more positive attitudes toward their exchanges with their leaders, which, in turn, further increases their affective commitment and reduces their turnover intent.

The results also confirm that affective commitment has a strong negative effect on turnover intent and fully mediates task interdependence and leader-member exchange's influences on intent. The results provide further empirical evidence on the importance of affective commitment in reducing turnover intent, in agreement with earlier studies (e.g. Ramalho *et al.*, 2018; Tarigan and Ariani, 2015). As an implication, managers should see the result as confirmation that affective commitment is one of the most potent antecedents of turnover intent in the Philippines call centers. Therefore, to reduce turnover intent, managers should prioritize implementing measures that can improve affective commitment.

Finally, the current study also reveals that task interdependence and leader–member exchange have positive influences on affective commitment. Consequently, the design and adoption of highly functional task interdependence and relationship-focused leadership styles are expected to increase affective commitment significantly.

Conclusion

In the Philippines, the call center industry makes vital contributions to the national economy. It employs more than a million workers and contributes billions of dollars to the national treasury (Chanco, 2017; Mercurio, 2018). However, the industry has also shown a disturbing high employee turnover rate that has not been seen in other industries. The majority of the recorded turnover is from voluntary resignations.

In recent years, several studies have developed and tested models of turnover intent in the Philippine call centers (e.g. Hechanova, 2013; Ruppel *et al.*, 2013). The studies have generally focused on personal-level and organizational-level variables that are already known to have potency in affecting turnover intent. The findings of those previous studies solidified the significance of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and stress-related variables in understanding turnover intent and suggesting managerial practices beneficial to the workers and the organization. The current study, however, observed a lack of research considering the role of social variables. Hence, the current study sought to investigate task interdependence and leader–member exchange as social variables influencing the workers' affective commitment and turnover intent. The affective commitment was also posited as a mediator. The hypothesized relationships were analyzed through SEM.

The results indicate that improved task interdependence and leader–member exchange have positive effects on affective commitment, which in turn can reduce turnover intent. In the context of the call center industry in the Philippines, these are original findings. In addition, affective commitment is also found to mediate the relationships, which is consistent with the literature in suggesting that commitment is a central mediator between turnover intent and its antecedents (e.g. Fazio *et al.*, 2017; Poon, 2012). Overall, the results fulfill the study's objectives of providing a plausible empirical explanation of how the two social variables influence affective commitment and turnover intent and how affective commitment mediates the relationships.

Like other empirical studies, the current study also has limitations. First, the current study utilized a cross-sectional approach. A cross-sectional study's main feature is that the data were collected at a single point in time. Therefore, the study's results cannot be used to make accurate causal inferences (Sedgwick, 2014). Future studies can improve it by utilizing a longitudinal approach. In a longitudinal study, each participant is observed at multiple time points, thereby allowing changes in key outcomes such as turnover to be monitored over time.

Another limitation is related to the number of call centers involved in the study and their locations. The current study's analysis was performed on a data set derived from workers' responses from only eight call centers located in three cities in Central and Southern Philippines. Hence, the findings' external validity has some restrictions. Future research may consider a national survey that will utilize random sampling to improve the results' external validity and generalizability.

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Variable/Item	TIN	LMX	AC	TI
<i>Task interdependence (TIN)</i>				
1. Most of my work activities are affected by the activities of other people on the team	0.52			
2. Team members have to work together to get group tasks done	0.87			
3. The team works best when we coordinate our work closely	0.92			
4. The way individual members perform their jobs has a significant impact for others in the team	0.77			
5. We cannot complete a project unless everyone contributes	0.53			
<i>Leader-member exchange (LMX)</i>				
1. How well does your boss recognize your potential?		0.77		
2. How well does your supervisor understand your job problems and needs?		0.81		
3. How would you characterize your working relationship with your boss?		0.79		
4. I have enough confidence in my supervisor that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so?		0.77		
5. Do you know where you stand with your supervisor. . . and do you usually know how satisfied your supervisor is with what you do?		0.71		
6. Regardless of how much formal authority your supervisor has built into his/her position, what are the chances that he/she would use his/her power to help you solve problems in your work?		0.71		
7. Regardless of the amount of formal authority your supervisor has, what are the chances that he/she would "bail you out," at his/her expense?		0.53		
<i>Affective commitment (AC)</i>				
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization			0.51	
2. I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization			0.81	
3. I do not feel like "emotionally attached" to this organization			0.88	
4. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me			0.52	
5. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization			0.76	
<i>Turnover intent (TI)</i>				
1. As soon as I can find a better job, I'll leave this company				0.83
2. I am actively looking for a job outside this company				0.91
3. I am seriously thinking of quitting my job				0.96
4. I often think of quitting this job				0.93
5. I think I will still be working in this company five years from now				0.60
Construct reliability	0.85	0.89	0.83	0.93
Average variance extracted	0.55	0.54	0.51	0.74

Table A1.
Factor loadings,
construct reliabilities
and average variances
extracted

Note(s): Items omitted due to lower than 0.50 factor loadings: (1) My work cannot be done unless other people do their work (from task interdependence); (2) Team members frequently have to coordinate their efforts with each other (from task interdependence); (3) I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own (from affective commitment)

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