



Understanding the influence of polychronicity on job satisfaction and turnover intention: A study of non-supervisory hotel employees[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality industry is characterized as a work environment where time use is important and where switching behavior among multiple tasks is frequently required within a given time period. These work environments promote polychronic behavior, which requires employees to deal with two or more activities in the same time block (Bluedorn et al., 1999). The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a study examining the interrelationship among polychronicity, job satisfaction, and turnover intention within a hotel context. The sample ($n = 609$) was collected from non-supervisory employees of two hotels located in the southwestern United States. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to empirically test the proposed hypotheses. Our results provided evidence that polychronicity significantly contributed to job satisfaction and turnover intention. Implications of these results and directions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Different patterns of time use have been considered as an important topic for effective workplace behavior (Beehr and Newman, 1978; Bluedorn et al., 1992; Persing, 1999). One construct on time use that has paid attention recently is polychronicity, which refers to the extent to which people prefer to switch among multiple tasks in the same time block (Bluedorn et al., 1999). Hall (1983) developed the concepts of monochronicity–polychronicity in order to describe the “temporal personality” of individuals. For example, people with monochronicity tend to focus on a single task within the period, while people with polychronicity are likely to engage in several activities within given time period.

The hotel industry is characterized as requiring employees to work multiple activities. In order to remain satisfied under such a work environment, employees in a service organization such as a hotel and restaurant need to possess adequate characteristics that would best fit the hospitality industry. This is supported by person–environment theory (P–E theory) which refers to compatibility between individuals and their work environment (Ehrhart and Makransky, 2007). The main idea of P–E theory is that individual characteristics match with work environment attributes in

predicting the perceptions that individuals have regarding how well they match their work environment, which affects work outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance (Verquer et al., 2003). Accordingly, given that the hotel industry stands out as a work environment where switching behavior between the tasks is frequently required, polychronicity may play a vital role in increasing positive work outcomes. For example, a strongly polychronic individual may interact with several customers at once. Such person's time use preference accurately matches with hotel work environments that involve working on multiple tasks and frequent switching behaviors in the flow of work.

Kaufman et al. (1991) argued that the time congruity between individuals and the organization is crucial for productivity and individual well-being. It is expected that polychronic individuals will yield a significant relationship with such work-outcomes as job satisfaction and employee turnover intention. However, research examining the effects of polychronicity in the hospitality context has not been identified. This study addresses polychronicity as a significant employee trait in the management of job satisfaction and employee turnover intention in a hotel context. The results of this study may enable hotel managers to better understand polychronicity as one of the significant personality characteristics. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to investigate the association among polychronicity, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions within a hotel context.

Following this introduction, this article reviews the main constructs, including polychronicity, job satisfaction, and turnover intention, used in the current study. This article then proposes

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hypothesized relationship among them. The findings of the study and implications for practice are then suggested. The article concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Polychronicity

Different patterns of time utilization have received attention in relation to effective workplace behavior (Bluedorn et al., 1992). Traditional time approach has focused on a single time use within a given limited period time that activities are sequenced (Kaufman et al., 1991). However, as competitive pressures intensify in rapidly changing environments, employees are required to engage in an additional variety of tasks, activities and roles that they must handle simultaneously (Persing, 1999). One construct that describes how individuals approach time that has received increased attention recently is polychronicity.

Polychronicity refers to the extent to which people prefer to switch among multiple tasks in the same time-block (Bluedorn et al., 1999). After first introducing the concept, Hall (1983) further developed the concepts of monochronicity–polychronicity to describe the “temporal personality” of individuals, and even of entire peoples. According to Hall’s (1966) book, *The Hidden Dimension*, monochronic individuals are typified by low involvement, scheduling one activity at a time, and becoming disoriented if too many things have to be done at once. For example, people who have a monochronic personality would tend to focus on a single task or project for the same time block and regard an unscheduled event (e.g., phone call) as an interruption. On the other hand, polychronic individuals are comfortable engaging in several activities. People with polychronic orientation would anticipate involvement with multiple activities during the given time period, intending to move back and forth among several tasks and projects. Unscheduled events would be interpreted as part of the normal activities rather than as interruptions or deviation from the plan or schedule (Arndt et al., 2006).

Polychronic time use has broadened into two discrete forms: (1) multi-tasking; and (2) task-switching (Bluedorn et al., 1999; Arndt et al., 2006). Multi-tasking, as one of the forms of polychronicity, is defined as involving several activities at the same time (Ofori-Dankwa and Julian, 2001). Bluedorn et al. (1999, p. 207) have pointed out that the element of “at the same time” in the definition of polychronicity refers literally to “very short spans of time” or instantaneous. For example, it may be possible for individuals to talk on the phone and walk at the same time. On the contrary, task-switching refers to the preference for moving back and forth between tasks in the given time period (Frei et al., 1999). For example, individuals may be able to shift their attention from one task to another task within time-block. Therefore, the concept of multi-tasking is conceptually different from the concept of task-switching. In the hospitality context, task-switching behavior is suitable because it is reasonable to assume that employees can engage in multiple activities by moving back and forth among tasks in the same time block. In this study, we use task-switching as the concept of polychronicity.

There has been research to develop the scale for polychronicity. The Polychronic Attitudes Index (PAI), a four-item scale was produced by Kaufman et al. (1991) in order to measure polychronicity. However, the alpha coefficient (0.68) was lower compared to the alpha coefficient (0.8) suggested by Nannally (1978). Later, Bluedorn et al. (1999) developed and tested Inventory of Polychronic Values (IPV, $\alpha=0.84$) using the data ($N=2190$) from bank employees, undergraduate students, hospital personnel, dentists and state agency managers. More recently, Hui et al. (2010) used this scale ($\alpha=0.73$) with a sample

of 260 middle and their immediate supervisors in three Chinese organizations.

Several studies have suggested that polychronicity has a significant relationship with work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance and employees’ organization-based self-esteem (Arndt et al., 2006; Madjar and Oldman, 2006; Souitaris and Maestro, 2010; Hui et al., 2010). For instance, Conte et al. (1999) described polychronicity as being associated with striving for achievement in the sample of college students. Conte and Gintoft (2005) demonstrated that polychronicity was significantly and positively related to supervisor ratings of customer service using a sample of 174 sales associates from a computer organization. In recent study, Souitaris and Maestro (2010) examined the effect of polychronicity on strategic decision speed, which can lead to financial performance among top management teams. They found the positive impact of polychronicity on financial performance. Hui et al. (2010) examined the moderating effect of polychronicity on the relationship between task variety and employees’ organization-based self-esteem, using 260 mid-level managers in China. They found that polychronic individuals reported higher level of employees’ organization-based self-esteem when an organization provides them with task variety. However, polychronicity produces a negative effect on the job performance of some individuals. For example, Slocombe and Bluedorn (1999) measured not only individuals’ preferred patterns of time utilization, but perceived time patterns of managers and coworkers. They found that an incongruity between individual and perceived supervisor/coworkers’ time patterns would result in lower organizational commitment and perceived fairness of performance evaluation. Similarly, Barley (1988) stated that most contemporary workplaces are complex organizations with multiple groups that operate with different temporal frameworks. While similar temporal frameworks are helpful to build and maintain group cohesiveness, difficulties can arise when groups with different temporal frameworks are asked to interact (Frei et al., 1999).

2.2. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” (Locke, 1969, p. 316). Spector (1997) defined job satisfaction as “how people feel about their job” (p. 2). Within the organizational behavior literature, job satisfaction has been shown to have a positive relationship to many variables. For example, several studies suggest that job satisfaction is significantly related to job performance (Tait et al., 1989; Judge et al., 2001; Morrison, 1997). A meta-analysis by Judge et al. (2001) found the positive correlation between job satisfaction and job performance. Feather and Rauter (2004) found a positive relationship between job satisfaction and productivity in the service environment. Lowry et al. (2002) indicated that job satisfaction was positively associated with organizational commitment among 454 employees at registered club in Australia. Hospitality research on job satisfaction can be divided by types of respondents and measurement used in the study, with either general or specific facet of job satisfaction (Chung et al., 2009). For instance, Hancer and George (2003) explored the level of job satisfaction with a sample of 798 restaurant employees, using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) short version and they found that satisfaction with pay showed the lowest mean score of job satisfaction, while job security had the highest mean score of job satisfaction. Rayton (2006) using this scale reported that satisfaction with pay, the perceived supervisor support, and career opportunities were significant predictors of employee job satisfaction. More recently, Erkutlu (2008) employed Job Descriptive Index (JDI) to investigate the effect of leadership behavior on job satisfaction at boutique

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