

Is Mission Attachment an Effective Management Tool for Employee Retention?

An Empirical Analysis of a Nonprofit Human Services Agency

Seok Eun Kim

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville

Jung Wook Lee

University of Illinois at Springfield

Nonprofit organizations have been known as mission-driven entities, in which people are attracted by their passion for the mission and remain there to accomplish it. This study tested the traditional assumption of mission orientation among nonprofit employees by replicating Brown and Yoshioka's research on the role of mission attachment as a factor in nonprofit employee retention. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis are generally consistent with Brown and Yoshioka: Human services employees showed a positive attitude toward the agency's mission, but dissatisfaction with working conditions—pay and career advancement—overrode the role of mission attachment in employee retention. However, employees' positive perceptions and strong correlations between nonprofit working conditions and mission attachment suggest that mission can still play a significant role in retaining nonprofit employees by reducing dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement.

Keywords: *employee retention; mission attachment; human services; turnover intentions*

There is a growing consensus that employee turnover has become a serious management challenge in nonprofit human services agencies (NHSAs). The turnover of qualified employees negatively affects recruitment, training, and service effectiveness. Filling positions is a daunting task in the nonprofit world, with reduced chances of obtaining qualified candidates, increased costs for employee training and development, and higher chances of service disruption. Several studies report the direct costs of turnover ranging from \$2,000 for the cost of one nursing home aide in Kansas (Institute for the Future of Aging Services, 2003) to \$5,276 for a paraprofessional direct care worker in Massachusetts (Vinfen Corporation, 2004). The direct costs include advertising, time spent by human resources personnel, new employee training, and overtime pay for remaining staff.

However, the true costs of turnover may be far greater than these immediate management issues. High turnover not only damages employee morale, because of the increased workload for remaining workers, but also compromises the quality of services that directly affect clients' welfare. The sizable costs associated with employee turnover in NHSAs call for new attention to employee retention. A series of studies have been conducted to examine what causes nonprofit employees to leave or stay (Ben-Dror, 1994; Blankertz & Robinson, 1997; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984). As a result, a great number of causes and antecedents have been identified. However, some important variables still remain unexplored. For example, mission attachment has been neglected as a factor in nonprofit employee retention, although numerous studies have reported the importance of mission attachment as a valuable tool for attracting and retaining nonprofit employees given the "doing more with less" environment (Light, 2002b; Salamon, 2002).

This negligence of important variables prevents us from greater understanding as to why employees choose to leave or stay with NHSAs. Recently, Brown and Yoshioka (2003) made a significant contribution to turnover research in NHSAs by developing and testing their own four-item mission attachment scale as a factor in employee retention. Regression analysis of their data found that mission attachment did not play a significant role in nonprofit employee retention because of the pre-eminence of pay dissatisfaction. However, the findings are limited because of their neglect of other important variables, such as promotional opportunity, pressure for accountability, and feelings of appreciation, which are frequently discussed as factors affecting turnover in NHSAs.

This article examines the efficacy of mission attachment in nonprofit employee retention by replicating Brown and Yoshioka's (2003) study in a different setting with extended independent variables. To that end, first, a conceptual model is introduced, followed by research hypotheses. Second, the research setting and measurement scales are described in conjunction with their reliability estimates. Third, hierarchical multiple regression analysis is performed to determine whether mission attachment explains employee turnover intention beyond and above perceived ease of movement and nonprofit working conditions. Finally, the implications of the findings are discussed.

Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

Figure 1 proposes our conceptual model of employee turnover intentions in NHSAs and research hypotheses that direct subsequent data analysis. The conceptual model is drawn from March and Simon's (1958) classical work on employees' decisions to participate in an organization, an intellectual origin of the current research on turnover across disciplines. March and Simon proposed that an employee's decision to leave is an effect of two major causes, the perceived ease of movement and the perceived

desirability of leaving the organization, which are interrelated but distinct mechanisms. Turnover intentions—employees' expressed likelihood of staying or leaving the organization—serve as a dependent variable in the conceptual model for two reasons. First, many researchers have consistently recognized employees' intentions to change jobs as the most indicative precursor of actual turnover (Liou, 1998; Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978; Razza, 1993). Second, measuring employees' expressed intentions to turn over may be more practical than actually tracking them down in a cross-sectional design (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001).

The perceived ease of movement depends on the availability of jobs to which the employee is able to move. Demographic and labor variables (e.g., age, education, and perceived job availability) serve as proxy measures for perceived external career opportunity. The perceived desirability of leaving typically stems from overall job satisfaction, which is affected by a variety of workplace circumstances such as satisfaction with pay, supervision, and career advancement. The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 divides the perceived desirability of leaving into work attitudes toward NHSAs and nonprofit working conditions to explore the relationship between mission attachment and work characteristics in NHSAs. Mission attachment here refers to "awareness of the mission, agreement with its principles, and confidence in one's ability to help carry it out" (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003, p. 8).

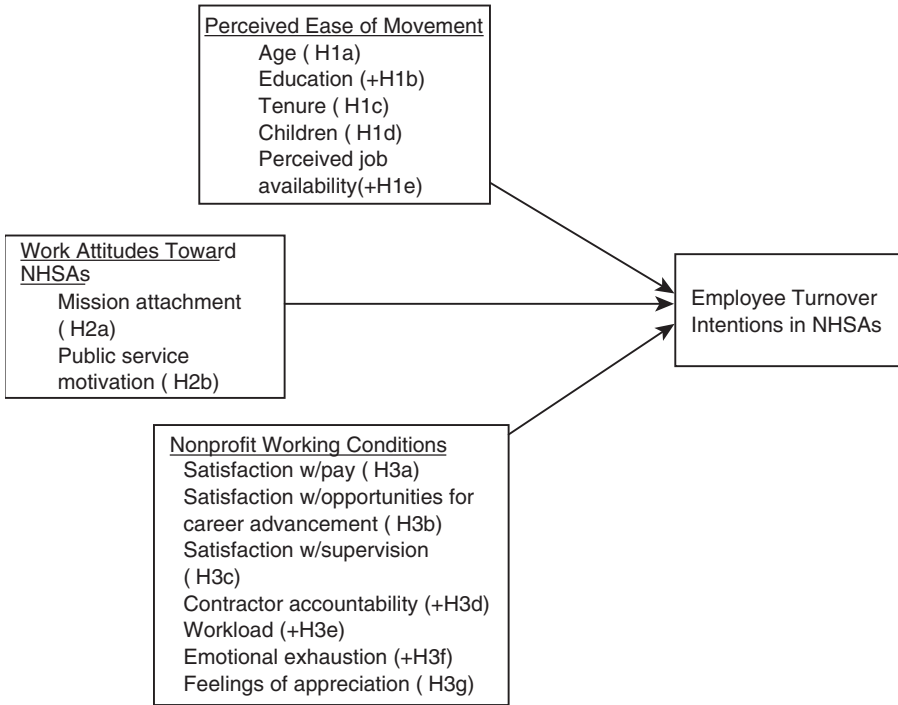
Work attitudes toward NHSAs that are known to be motivators for people to enter into the nonprofit world include mission attachment and public service motivation (Light, 2002b; Salamon, 2002). Variables in nonprofit working conditions include satisfaction with pay, career advancement, supervision, workload, emotional exhaustion, feelings of appreciation, and the pressure for contractor accountability. Consequently, the model represents 14 independent variables in three broad categories—perceived ease of movement, work attitudes toward NHSAs, and nonprofit working conditions—that influence an employee's intention to leave.

Perceived Ease of Movement

Five variables were selected as factors affecting the perceived ease of movement: age, education, tenure, number of children, and perceived job availability. Age and education serve as proxy variables for external job availability (Blankertz & Robinson, 1997). Older employees are unable to compete with younger workers in a tight job market because the latter are willing to work for less money and fewer benefits. Similarly, a more educated employee may be more capable of moving to other areas than an employee with less education. Literature consistently reports the role of age and education as indirect measures of external job opportunity (e.g., R. T. Lee & Ashforth, 1993; Manlove & Guzella, 1997), with few exceptions (e.g., Jayaratne & Chess, 1984).

Considerable evidence supports an inverse relationship between tenure and turnover. Turnover rates are significantly lower among employees with a longer

Figure 1
Conceptual Model of Nonprofit Employee Turnover
Intentions and Research Hypotheses



Note: NHSAs = nonprofit human services agency.

length of service because longer tenured employees may have more investment in an organization than those with a shorter length of service (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Mor Barak et al., 2001). Recently, conflict between work and family responsibilities has emerged as an important predictor of turnover intentions. Although the effect of having children at home on turnover intentions is still in dispute, we predict that an increasing number of children at home would decrease employee mobility in the job market (T. W. Lee & Maurer, 1999). Finally, March and Simon (1958) considered perceived job availability to be the most accurate single predictor of labor turnover. The greater the number of job alternatives in the external market, the greater the perceived ease of leaving a job. The discussion concerning demographic and economic factors affecting turnover intentions suggests the following five hypotheses concerning NHSAs employees:

Hypothesis 1a: Age is inversely related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 1b: Education is positively related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 1c: Tenure is inversely related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 1d: The number of children is inversely related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 1e: The perceived job availability is positively related to turnover intentions.

Work Attitudes Toward NHSAs

It has long been assumed that nonprofit employees are attracted by their passion for the mission and remain there to accomplish it. For example, mission is the most important reason to stay among child welfare caseworkers (Rycraft, 1994). A 2002 Brookings Institution survey of 1,213 human services workers concluded that nonprofit employees are the most satisfied of all three sectors and that mission remains the major attraction for nonprofit employees (Light, 2003). These findings indicate that nonprofit mission serves as a guiding value in continuing one's current employment. Ironically, however, virtually all turnover research in the nonprofit sector—with only one exception (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003)—neglected mission as an important attitudinal variable to explain nonprofit employee turnover.

This dearth of attention to the role of the mission in nonprofit management can be partially explained by the fact that mission still remains a fairly unexplored management issue across the sectors (Bart & Baetz, 1998; Campbell, 1992; Campbell & Yeung, 1991). The previous research on organizational mission is geared largely toward understanding its role in improving organizational performance. Research on mission statement, for example, focuses on linking the content or clarity of a mission statement with organizational performance (Bart, Bontis, & Taggar, 2001; Bart & Tabone, 1999; Weiss & Piderit, 1999). Ihrke (2004), however, discovered that any fundamental change in a federal agency's mission significantly influenced the employees' desire to change jobs within the agency. This finding implies that the fit between the mission of an organization and its members heavily affects its employees' decisions to leave.

Public service motivation is an equally important but neglected variable along with mission attachment. Public service motivation represents an altruistic inclination to help others and provide meaningful community services, even if it requires self-sacrifice (Mesch, Tschirhart, Perry, & Lee, 1998; Perry, 1996). Perry and Wise (1990) speculated that public service motivation would be positively associated with an individual's intention to remain with an organization because of his or her organizational commitment. Naff and Crum (1999) provided empirical evidence of the negative relationship between public service motivation and turnover intention in governmental settings. Using the 1996 Merit Principles Survey of the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, they found that employees with lower levels of public service motivation were more likely to leave government employment than those with higher levels of public service motivation. This discussion leads to the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Mission attachment has a strong inverse relationship with employees' turnover intentions in NHSAs, above and beyond employees' perceived ease of movement and nonprofit working conditions.

Hypothesis 2b: Public service motivation has a strong inverse relationship with employees' turnover intentions in NHSAs, above and beyond employees' perceived ease of movement and nonprofit working conditions.

Nonprofit Working Conditions

Satisfaction with pay, career advancement, and supervision. Scholarly opinion has not yet reached a point of consensus on pay differentials between the nonprofit and for-profit world. A number of studies have claimed lower wages in nonprofits against comparable positions in for-profit entities. For example, Preston (1990) estimated that an average 10% to 15% pay differential exists between nonprofit- and for-profit-sector employees. Weisbrod (1983) claimed that lawyers in nonprofit "public interest" law firms are paid 20% less than those in the private sector because of their strong preference for pursuing social goals. However, Ruhm and Borkoski (2003) argued that nonprofit workers earn virtually the same wages as their for-profit counterparts. The authors found that although nonprofit workers earn about 11% less than those in the for-profit sector, this pay differential was eliminated after controlling work hours, industries, and occupations.

Although scholarly debates continue in pay differential, many observers tend to agree that dissatisfaction with pay is one of the leading causes of staff turnover in nonprofit organizations and that there is a strong relationship between turnover and compensation (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Stergios & Weekes, 2002; Vinfen Corporation, 2004). Dissatisfaction with pay means that nonprofit workers often seek better offers from within or outside the sector or tend to have more than one job to meet their compensatory expectations (Vinfen Corporation, 2004). Recently, Borzaga and Tortia (2006) affirmed that nonprofit workers driven by economic attitudes are less satisfied at work, but their intention to stay with the organization is positively related to their economic satisfaction.

Given that compensation and career opportunities often advance concurrently, it is no wonder that pay dissatisfaction is often highly correlated with a lack of career advancement opportunities. Although Onyx and Maclean (1996) failed to confirm the importance of linear career advancement, others found strong positive relationships between lack of promotional opportunities and employees' intention to leave (Alexander, Lichtenstein, Oh, & Ullman, 1998; Jayaratne & Chess, 1983; Stremmel, 1991). Alexander et al. (1998), for example, declared that a lack of upward promotional opportunities sometimes compels employees to leave the profession altogether. Mesch et al. (1998) also concluded that instrumental career-related factors, rather than altruistic motivation, shared a strong negative relationship with turnover intentions among stipend volunteers.

Although pay and career advancement have been considered strong predictors of turnover, employees' intentions to leave are far more complex than these instrumental factors (Bartolomé, 1989; Larson & Hewitt, 2005). For example, Larson and Hewitt (2005) contended that the importance of pay as a turnover factor may be inflated because direct service professionals often leave their jobs not because of dissatisfaction with pay but because of conflicts with their supervisors. Similarly, Stremmel (1991) reported a strong negative relationship between satisfaction with supervision and turnover intentions among child care workers. To the extent that a supervisor shows respect, gives fair treatment, and provides clear directions along with appropriate support, employees will be less likely to leave. Three hypotheses, again regarding NHSA employees, follow from this discussion:

Hypothesis 3a: Satisfaction with pay has an inverse relationship with turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 3b: Satisfaction with opportunities for career advancement has an inverse relationship with turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 3c: Satisfaction with supervision has an inverse relationship with turnover intentions.

The contractor accountability, workload, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of appreciation. The increasing attention to nonprofit accountability has made governments favor performance-based contracting, in which contractors must demonstrate program successes to gain and retain government funding (S. R. Smith & Lipsky, 1993). As typical government contractors, NHSAs are required to develop individual program goals along with specific performance indicators in an effort to ensure fulfillment of contractual obligations (Salamon, 2002). Although the pressure for accountability may have some benefits in bolstering donor confidence and sustaining government funding streams (Light, 2000; Wilson, 1989), it often imposes considerable procedures and paperwork, forcing employees to reallocate time that could otherwise be spent providing services (Salamon, 2002; S. R. Smith & Lipsky, 1993). For example, Kim (2005) reported that the practice of state micromanagement has produced sizable amounts of paperwork and excessive workloads that force mental health workers to sacrifice client service time to meet the state's accountability requirements.

Studies have consistently recognized a positive relationship between workload and employees' intentions to turn over (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2003; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Samantrai, 1992). For example, Samantrai (1992) found that all 455 child welfare workers who participated in his survey expressed despair about the unmanageably high caseloads and paperwork, reporting that they spent about 65% to 75% of their time on paperwork. The pressure intensified emotional exhaustion among human services workers who already suffer from work stress as a result of encountering the immense pain and suffering of their clients. As expected, numerous turnover studies have reported the significant influence of emotional exhaustion on employees' intention to leave their job (Blankertz & Robinson, 1997;

R. T. Lee & Ashforth, 1993; Manlove & Guzell, 1997). Heavy workload and excessive regulation also foster a perception that their jobs are not valued, and not feeling valued is a consistent cause of turnover (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). Four hypotheses follow from this discussion:

Hypothesis 3d: The higher the pressure for contractor accountability, the higher the chance of employees' intentions to leave NHSAs.

Hypothesis 3e: The higher the workload, the higher the chance of employees' intentions to leave NHSAs.

Hypothesis 3f: The higher the emotional exhaustion, the higher the chance of employees' intentions to leave NHSAs.

Hypothesis 3g: The higher the feelings of appreciation, the lower the chance of employees' intentions to leave NHSAs.

Method

Research Setting and Sample

An anonymous survey was administered to 451 employees of a nonprofit community mental health center across 10 counties in a southeastern state. As a comprehensive NHA, the center operates more than 35 service units, including mental health, developmental disabilities, residential services, community employment, and alcohol and drug prevention. The 113-item surveys, including three qualitative questions, were distributed via interoffice mail from June to August 2005, with a request that the respondents mail the completed surveys to one of the author's mailboxes to retain anonymity. Two weeks after sending the survey, two reminders were sent by the investigators and the director of the Continuous Quality Improvement department with additional copies of the survey, resulting in 198 (43.9%) responses.

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of the sample. Of the 198 responses, more than 73% (146) of the respondents were female, and only 52 (26.3%) were male employees. Age was almost evenly distributed across categorical age brackets. About half of the respondents had 4-year college or higher degrees, whereas the other half had completed 2 years of college or less. A majority of our sample enjoyed 1 to 5 years of tenure at the agency. However, about 35% of employees had stayed with the agency less than 1 year. Almost 60% of our samples came from nonsupervisory positions such as administrative assistant, service technician, and secretary, whereas about 40% served as program managers, counselors, coordinators, and directors.

Measures

The survey questionnaire was designed to collect information on the 14 independent variables in three broad categories—perceived ease of movement, work attitudes

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	52	26.3
Female	146	73.7
Age		
20-29	42	21.2
30-39	52	26.3
40-49	46	23.2
50-59	46	23.2
60 or older	12	6.0
Education		
High school diploma or GED	35	17.7
Some college or technical school or AA degree	69	34.8
4-year college degree	46	23.2
Master's degree or higher	48	24.2
Tenure		
Less than 6 months	34	17.2
6 months to 12 months	35	17.7
1 to 5 years	80	40.4
6 to 10 years	29	14.6
11 years or more	20	10.1
Status		
Nonsupervisor	115	58.1
Team leader, supervisor, or lead therapist	42	21.2
Program manager or coordinator	22	11.1
Director	8	4.0
Other	11	5.6
Positions		
Program manager or clinician	12	6.1
Social worker or counselor	38	19.2
Nurse	15	7.6
Support staff	55	27.8
Administrative assistant	50	25.3
Management (manager or director)	28	14.1

toward NHSAs, and nonprofit working conditions. In addition, three open-ended items were included to cross-validate findings from the analysis of the 14 independent variables. These items directly asked respondents why they would choose to leave or stay with the agency and, if they were the agency leader, what they would do to prevent employees from leaving (see Appendix for individual survey items and reliability estimates).

The perceived ease of movement was measured by five variables: age, education, tenure, number of children, and perceived job availability. Categorical brackets were

used to measure age and education, whereas tenure was assessed by asking approximate starting dates of employment. Respondents were also asked to write in their number of children. The perceived external job availability was measured by a single item using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Items for measuring work attitudes toward NHSAs and nonprofit working conditions were averaged to produce combined scores. Mission attachment and public service motivation were used to assess work attitudes toward NHSAs. Mission attachment (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$) was measured by a four-item mission attachment scale developed by Brown and Yoshioka (2003). According to Brown and Yoshioka, their mission attachment scale reflects an employee's awareness and contribution to the agency's mission. The higher scores indicate that an employee not only has a high level of awareness concerning the agency's mission but also wishes to contribute to carrying out the mission. Public service motivation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$) was measured by a short, convenient form of the five-item scale originally developed by Perry (1996) and used in Alonso and Lewis (2001).

Several variables were used to measure nonprofit working conditions. Satisfaction with pay (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$) was measured by a three-item scale, two of which were taken from Hackman and Oldham's (1980) Job Diagnostic Survey. Satisfaction with opportunities for career advancement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$) was measured by three items focusing on opportunities for performance-based promotion, training opportunities, and professional growth. A three-item satisfaction with supervision scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$) was again taken from Hackman and Oldham's Job Diagnostic Survey. Higher scores on these three scales indicate higher levels of employee satisfaction with pay, career advancement, and supervision.

The perceived pressure for contractor accountability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$) was measured by a five-item accountability scale developed specifically for this study. The higher scores represent a higher level of perceived pressure for accountability, such as pressure for improving productivity and fulfilling documentation requirements. Workload (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$) was measured by three items selected from F. J. Smith's (1976) Index of Organizational Reactions. Two items were reversed before they were averaged to produce a combined score. Emotional exhaustion (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) was measured by a seven-item emotional exhaustion scale, one of the three components of Maslach's Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Finally, an employee's feelings of appreciation at work (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$) were measured by two items developed specifically for this study.

Analysis and Results

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between turnover intentions and the 14 independent variables. The correlation matrix was generated

using pairwise deletion procedures to account for missing data. Age ($r = -.29, p < .001$) and education ($r = .28, p < .001$) were significantly correlated with turnover intentions in the hypothesized directions, but no significant correlations were found from the rest of the three variables (tenure, number of children, and perceived external job availability). As predicted, a strong negative correlation was found between mission attachment and turnover intentions ($r = -.40, p < .001$). However, no significant correlation exists between public service motivation and turnover intentions. All nonprofit working condition variables except contractor accountability were strongly correlated with turnover intentions in the hypothesized directions. Satisfaction with pay ($r = -.41, p < .001$), career advancement ($r = -.38, p < .001$), supervision ($r = -.34, p < .001$), and feelings of appreciation ($r = -.25, p < .01$) had strong negative correlations with turnover intentions. As expected, workload ($r = .35, p < .001$) and emotional exhaustion ($r = .41, p < .001$) presented significantly positive correlations with turnover intentions.

Table 3 presents results of a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. This statistical method was chosen for two reasons. First, the method can sequentially examine the effects of the predetermined three major sets of independent variables on turnover intentions. Using hierarchical regression, we wish to test Brown and Yoshioka's (2003) finding; that is, whether dissatisfaction with working conditions can override the role of mission attachment as a significant predictor for turnover intention. Second, multiple regression analysis can evaluate the simultaneous effects of multiple independent variables by partialling out inflated intercorrelations among independent variables. All independent variables were greater than .20 tolerance levels and less than 4 variance inflation factor (VIF), indicating that multivariate multicollinearity was not a concern in the specified models. In the table, ΔR^2 assesses the incremental explanatory power of each set of independent variables, and β represents the standardized regression coefficient that estimates the relative importance of each independent variable affecting turnover intentions.

Model 1 illustrates that perceived ease of movement accounted for almost 15% of the variance in employees' intentions to leave at a highly significant level ($p < .001$). However, only age and education made significant contributions to the prediction. Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 1b were confirmed, whereas Hypotheses 1c, 1d, and 1e were rejected. The addition of mission attachment and public service motivation in Model 2 significantly improved the prediction of turnover intentions above and beyond the perceived ease of movement by 13.7% ($p < .001$). However, this improvement stems only from mission attachment (Hypothesis 2a), whereas public service motivation did not make a significant contribution to the prediction (Hypothesis 2b). Squared semipartial (part) correlation of mission attachment ($r = -.345, p < .001$) indicated that mission attachment, alone, accounted for an additional 12% of variance in turnover intentions, above and beyond the perceived ease of movement.

In Model 3, however, the significant effect of mission attachment disappeared once several working condition variables were added. Seven nonprofit working

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations Among Turnover Antecedents

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Turnover intentions	1.71 ^a	(0.770)	1														
2. Age	3.63	(1.19)	-.29***	1													
3. Education	3.56	(1.03)	.28***	-.17*	1												
4. Tenure	58.4 ^b	(73.6)	-.10	.43***	-.08	1											
5. Number of children	0.77	(1.06)	-.13	.07	-.11	-.07	1										
6. Perceived job availability	3.33	(0.974)	-.03	.08	-.11	.04	-.08	1									
7. Mission attachment	3.87	(0.708)	-.40***	.14	-.03	.07	.06	.17*	1								
8. Public service motivation	3.91	(0.552)	-.12	-.02	-.05	-.09	-.13	.21**	.25**	1							
9. Pay	2.86	(1.13)	-.41***	.11	.01	.24**	-.09	.06	.34***	-.04	1						
10. Career advancement	2.84	(1.19)	-.38***	-.09	-.02	-.09	-.07	.22**	.42***	.31***	.28***	1					
11. Supervision accountability	5.27 ^c	(1.54)	-.34***	-.03	.02	.11	-.04	.10	.42***	-.01	.42***	.24**	1				
12. Contractor exhaustion	3.53	(1.08)	.13	-.04	.10	.12	.12	.04	-.03	.06	-.04	.08	-.10	1			
13. Workload	2.74	(0.862)	.35***	.07	.27***	.20*	.05	-.02	-.19*	-.08	-.27***	-.23**	-.35***	.24**	1		
14. Emotional exhaustion	3.44	(1.47)	.41***	-.05	.22**	.19*	-.04	-.03	-.26***	-.13	-.16*	-.28***	-.24**	.14	.60***	1	
15. Feelings of appreciation	3.24	(0.969)	-.25**	-.05	.18*	-.05	-.08	.17*	.41***	.12	.39***	.32***	.65***	-.06	-.35***	-.29***	1

a. Measured by 4-point scale.

b. Measured by month.

c. Measured by 7-point scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis of the Conceptual Model

Variables	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)
Perceived ease of movement			
Age	-.262**	-.221*	-.249**
Education	.228**	.232**	.166*
Tenure	.026	.030	.016
Number of children	-.086	-.067	-.142
Perceived job availability	.007	.076	.101
Work attitudes toward NHSAs			
Mission attachment		-.364***	-.086
Public service motivation		-.049	-.060
Nonprofit working conditions			
Pay			-.237**
Career advancement			-.237**
Supervision			-.149
Contractor accountability			.076
Workload			.028
Emotional exhaustion			.176*
Feelings of appreciation			.055
ΔR^2	.149	.137	.203
ΔF	4.351***	11.672***	6.543***
R^2	.149	.286	.489
Adjusted R^2	.115	.245	.427
F value	4.351***	6.978***	7.870***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

condition variables significantly improved the prediction above and beyond the perceived ease of movement and work attitudes (mission attachment) toward NHSAs ($R^2 = .49$, Adjusted $R^2 = .43$), explaining an additional 20% variance in turnover intentions at a highly significant level ($p < .001$). Both pay ($\beta = -.237$, $p < .01$) and opportunities for career advancement ($\beta = -.237$, $p < .01$) provided major contributions in predicting intentions to turnover by adding an additional 7.5% of variance (Hypotheses 3a and 3b). Also, employees' emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .176$, $p < .05$) significantly influenced their intentions to leave (Hypothesis 3f).

Contrary to our expectation, satisfaction with supervision, workload, and feelings of appreciation presented no statistically significant associations with turnover intentions (Hypotheses 3c, 3e, and 3g). Although these variables showed strong correlations ($p < .001$) with turnover intentions, they did not contribute to the multiple regression when other variables in the regression equation eliminated all overlap among predictors. Unexpectedly, no statistically significant association was found between the pressure for contractor accountability and turnover intentions (Hypotheses 3d).

A content analysis of open-ended qualitative responses was generally consistent with the findings of the hierarchical regression models. In all, 72 individuals provided extensive written comments on why they would choose to leave, whereas 103 individuals provided comments on why they would stay with the agency. A majority of employees (45 comments) selected dissatisfaction with pay as the most important reason to consider leaving the agency. Not only did employees complain about a low level of pay that does not meet basic needs, but they also claimed that they were underpaid in comparison to the overwhelming workload. Dissatisfaction with career advancement (13 comments) and workload (10 comments) were associated with the frustration from insufficient pay. Frustration with management styles (20 comments) was the second most important factor in employees' intentions to leave. In fact, employees felt upper management treated them with disrespect (13 comments), showed them a lack of appreciation (4 comments), and pulled away from the agency's mission (3 comments).

Employees also provided more than 100 extensive comments on why they intend to stay with the agency. A majority of employees (65 comments) selected commitment to the mission and their desire to help people as the most important reasons why they intend to remain at the agency. These employees believe that their work is rewarding because they are making a difference in someone's life (30 comments), helping people (26 comments), and getting respect and appreciation for their work (9 comments). Working with good staff and supervisors was the second most important reason why they intend to stay with this agency (26 comments). Many agency employees cited an enjoyment of working with their coworkers (17 comments), whereas others were satisfied with their supervisors who treat them with respect (9 comments). A flexible work schedule (11 comments) was also attractive to agency employees on the grounds that it was compatible with their family responsibility.

Discussion and Conclusion

Conventional wisdom suggests that nonprofit employees are mission driven and have a strong nonmonetary orientation. This study tested the traditional assumption of mission attachment among nonprofit employees with empirical data. Consistent with the previous findings (e.g., Brown & Yoshioka, 2003), the results of the hierarchical regression analysis indicate that although human services employees presented highly significant mission attachment, dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement were sufficient enough to override the role of mission attachment in curbing turnover intentions. The impacts of pay and career advancement on turnover intentions were highly significant, even when strong correlations of other working condition variables with turnover intentions were partialled out in the multiple regression.

Numerous studies have confirmed dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement as probable reasons why nonprofits lose qualified workers (Alexander et al.,

1998; Mesch et al., 1998; Stergios & Weekes, 2002; Stremmel, 1991; Vinfen Corporation, 2004). Dicke (2002), for example, warned that "even highly altruistic, public service-minded individuals will not be attracted or retained by organizations offering hard work at insufficient wages" (p. 465). Light (2002a) also warned that although commitment to the mission provides a special force in nonprofits, it can also exploit or sacrifice nonprofit employees. These arguments imply that relying solely on the mission attachment in employee retention may not be effective and may even be harmful to NHSAs.

Thus, we argue that the role of pay and career advancement should not be underestimated if NHSAs are to recruit and retain qualified employees. Comparable pay could serve as a key motivator because it often accompanies achievement, recognition, and other valued outcomes (Lawler, 1971). Performance-based bonus has been increasingly popular in a few private foundations and nonprofit hospitals, but this high-cost strategy may not be affordable in NHSAs where large percentages of agency budgets rely on government grants. Instead, leave bonuses, paid days off on birthdays, recognition awards with small sums of money, and family-friendly work policies are a few low-cost strategies that can be used to retain employees in an era of financial uncertainty.

Offering employees greater chances to move up in their career paths could also attract and retain qualified employees. Onyx and Maclean (1996) claimed that nonprofit employee turnover could be better explained by a spiral (lateral) career model than the conventional linear career model. Our data also found indications of lateral movement because of family relocations and career changes, but a larger number of employees desired to have upward mobility with expectation of salary increase. We surmise that spiral career movement in NHSAs may result from the lack of opportunity for linear career advancement. As evidence, Alexander et al. (1998) demonstrated that lack of linear career advancement is a universal concern of nursing personnel, forcing many nurses into lateral moves to advance their careers.

NHSAs are typically structured with a large supervisory span and a paucity of higher-level positions because of the labor intensiveness and lack of specialization in work (Blankertz & Robinson, 1997). Without a clear pattern of career advancement, employees, especially those who are young with high levels of education, may perceive greater job availability in the market and therefore begin to search outside job opportunities for career development. Adding intermediary positions within the existing career ladders may retain those qualified employees by increasing opportunities for career advancement (Blankertz & Robinson, 1997). An empirical study found that building a mini hierarchy among caregivers increased a sense of growth and development (Golembiewski & Rountree, 1999).

However, focus only on pay and career advancement may disguise the real causes of turnover among human services employees. Several researchers recognize the importance of pay and career advancement in retaining qualified workers, but they also agree that what makes nonprofit employees decide to leave is often not low

salaries or lack of opportunities for career advancement. Rather, employees leave when they are overwhelmed by paperwork, get burned out by accountability requirements, and feel that their work is not adequately valued by supervisors. These causes of turnover imply that the link between their work and the mission has become weaker because of the loss of time to provide services as a result of excessive workload and frustration caused by a lack of appreciation for their work. This dissatisfaction with mission accomplishment would create large unmet expectations among nonprofit employees who not only wish to leave their organizations but also turn their eyes away from mission accomplishment and toward pay and other material incentives.

Recently, however, economists contend that extrinsic incentives may crowd out intrinsic motivation by undermining cherished social values (e.g., Frey & Jegen, 2001). This crowding-out effect may occur in the nonprofit sector if it places greater emphasis on the material incentives than commitment to the mission. Our qualitative data demonstrate that mission attachment remains the major cause of holding employees in the agency. For example, although 58 respondents complained of insufficient pay and career advancement, 65 employees intended to stay with the agency because of their strong commitment to the mission. This qualitative result implies that leaving and staying with the organization are independent constructs with different determinants. Dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement account for employees' intention to leave, but these antecedents for leaving may not necessarily result in actual leaving. Conceivably, employees' decisions for actual leaving are closely tied to their mission attachment.

The correlation matrix in Table 2 provides additional strong evidence of the efficacy of mission attachment as an important factor in employee retention. Highly significant correlations between nonprofit working conditions and mission attachment suggest that commitment to the mission can help mediate dissatisfaction with pay and career advancement. In other words, the higher the mission attachment, the higher the satisfaction with pay and career advancement. Similarly, Table 2 also illustrates that commitment to the mission could reduce dissatisfaction with supervision, workload, and emotional exhaustion while enhancing feelings of appreciation. These results imply that pay and career advancement would certainly be effective strategies in curbing turnover intentions, but mission still plays an important role in attracting and retaining nonprofit employees. Thus, we only partially agree with Brown and Yoshioka's (2003) conclusion that "mission might be salient in attracting employees but less effective in retaining them" (p. 5).

Creating a positive work culture may evoke strong attachment to the agency mission among nonprofit employees. Upper management should make employees feel important, respected, and valued by listening to their concerns and making them a top priority. Satisfaction with supervision promotes a stronger tie to the agency's mission, which affects intentions to stay by fostering a feeling of unity between the employees' values and those of the organization (Flowers & Hughes, 1973). Mutual

trust between the state and the agency may relieve some accountability requirements, thereby reducing workload and emotional exhaustion. Ongoing dialogue with the state regulator could narrow differences in expectations and criteria of service effectiveness. Finally, society should also have realistic expectations toward nonprofit employees and value their work and commitment to the mission.

Several limitations of this study suggest that the results of the data analysis must be interpreted with caution. First, the data were collected from a single community mental health center. Thus, the authors cannot claim that these findings are representative of employees' turnover intentions across all NHSAs. Second, common method variance is a potential problem because the same respondents are the source of information for both independent and dependent variables. This may inflate relationships to turnover intentions, as suggested by some significant correlations between measures (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2003; Mor Barak et al., 2001). Third, the potential exists for sample selection bias, which can occur when responses come from the most dedicated workers with strong commitment to the mission. In fact, 30% of the survey respondents were considering leaving the agency, whereas average turnover rates in the agency for the past 5 years were around 38%. Finally, variables selected to measure turnover intentions are not comprehensive and may still exclude important measures that can better predict turnover intentions among NHSAs employees (e.g., value conflict). Meta-analysis of the variables used in the nonprofit turnover literature could provide a solid basis for future empirical research on employee turnover in NHSAs.

Attracting and retaining qualified employees has become a pivotal subject in NHSAs, as excessive turnover negatively influences the quality of services. Human services are all about relationships, and thus stability can have important implications on organizational performance through seamless service provisions (O'Toole & Meier, 2003). Given the significance of the impact of turnover on quality of services, the limitations of the study should be addressed, and the topic should receive continued attention.

Appendix

Survey Items and Reliability Estimates

Perceived Ease of Movement

Age

1. What is your age? (1 = younger than 20, 2 = 20-29, 3 = 30-39, 4 = 40-49, 5 = 50-59, 6 = 60 or older)

Gender

1. Are you (1 = male, 2 = female)

Tenure

1. Approximate start date of employment in this organization? (1 = less than 6 months, 2 = 6 months to 12 months, 3 = 1 to 5 years, 4 = 6 to 10 years, 5 = 11 years or more)

Number of children

1. Number of dependent children?

Perceived job availability

1. I see a good job market for what I do.

Work Attitudes Toward NHSAs

Mission attachment (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$)

1. I am well aware of the direction and mission of this organization.
2. The programs and staff at my work unit support the mission of this organization.
3. I like to work for this organization because I believe in its mission and values.
4. My work contributes to carrying out the mission of this organization.

Public service motivation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$)

1. Meaningful community service is very important to me.
2. I am not afraid to go to bat for the rights of others even if it means I will be ridiculed.
3. Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements.
4. I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.
5. I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another.

Nonprofit Working Conditions

Satisfaction with pay (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$)

1. The amount of pay I receive.
2. The amount of total fringe benefits I receive.
3. Considering my skills and the effort I put into my work, I am very satisfied with my pay.

Satisfaction with opportunities for career advancement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$)

1. Fulfilling all my job responsibilities does improve my chances for a promotion.
2. I receive continued training to perform my job.
3. My current employment situation gives me the opportunity to fully express myself as a professional.

Satisfaction with supervision (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$)

1. The degree of respect and fair treatment I receive from my boss.
2. The amount of support and guidance I receive from my supervisor.
3. The overall quality of the supervision I receive in my work.

The pressure for contractor accountability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$)

Please indicate how frequently, if at all, you have been pressured to engage in each of the following at work? (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *rather often*, 5 = *all the time*).

1. Increasing work productivity (e.g., direct service time).
2. Maintaining annual contract with the state.
3. Fulfilling documentation requirements of the state (e.g., PERMES, clinical charts and billing statements).
4. Obtaining accreditation from an outside accrediting body.
5. Earning more Medicaid reimbursements from the state.

Workload (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$)

1. I feel my workload is (1 = *never too heavy*, 2 = *seldom too heavy*, 3 = *sometimes too heavy*, 4 = *often too heavy*, 5 = *almost always too heavy*).
2. How does the amount of work you're expected to do influence the way you do your job? (1 = *it never allows me to do a good job*, 2 = *it seldom allows me to do a good job*, 3 = *it has no effect on how I do my job*, 4 = *it usually allows me to do a good job*, 5 = *it always allows me to do a good job*).
3. How do you feel about the amount of work you're expected to do? (1 = *very dissatisfied*, 5 = *very satisfied*)

Emotional exhaustion (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$)

1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.
2. I feel used up at the end of the workday.
3. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning.
4. I feel burned out from my work.
5. I feel frustrated by my job.
6. I feel I'm working too hard on my job.
7. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.

Feelings of appreciation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$)

1. High-performing employees in my work unit are recognized or rewarded on a timely basis.
2. My work is appreciated.

Turnover intentions

1. Considering everything, how likely are you to continue to work for this agency? (1 = *very likely*, 2 = *fairly likely*, 3 = *not very likely*, 4 = *not at all likely*)

Three qualitative items

1. If you plan to look for another job in the near future, please specify reasons for your decision.
2. If you are NOT planning to look for another job in the near future, please specify reasons for your decision.
3. If you were the Executive Director, what would you do to increase the time employees worked in this agency?

Note: NHSA = nonprofit human services agency.

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Seok Eun Kim is an assistant professor of public administration at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, where he teaches organization theory and not-for-profit management. His research interests include accountability in public and nonprofit agencies, organizational performance and behavior, and public trust and bureaucratic legitimacy.

Jung Wook Lee is an assistant professor of public administration at the University of Illinois at Springfield. His research interests include organizational performance, the political context of public management, and human resource management practices in public and nonprofit organizations.