

Relationship between employability and turnover intention: The moderating effects of organizational support and career orientation

INTRODUCTION

Employability has become a topic of interest due to changes in the broader economy and adverse employment conditions, which made employees more vulnerable and exposed to employment uncertainty (Van der Heijden, 2002; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Clarke, 2008; Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2014). Employability is defined as ‘the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires’ (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 25). This definition is portrayed as a form of optimal use of employee personal competences, which are developed to address the challenges of the labour market, through ‘boundaryless’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) or ‘protean’ (Hall, 2004) career development. This shift demands that employees, to a greater extent than before, be responsible for their own career development, adapt to changes, such as technological advances and globalization trends (Fugate et al., 2004; Savickas, 2005) and commit to lifetime employability rather than lifetime employment within one organization (Bloch & Bates, 1995; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Froehlich, Beausaert, Segers, & Gerken, 2014).

Furthermore, perceptions of less job security enhance flexibility and trigger highly mobile behaviour of employees (Grame, Staines, & Pate, 1998). Organizations thus need to address the ‘employability paradox’ (Nelissen, Forrier, & Verbruggen, 2017) that investment into the workforce aimed at performance enhancement and development of organizational

capabilities (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) may put returns at risk due to employees who are less committed to one organisation (De Grip, Van Loo, & Sanders, 2004) and possible increased staff turnover (Benson, 2006).

As the empirical research on employability and turnover intention remains limited and a few recent studies conducted in this domain have shown mixed results (Benson, 2006; Rahman, Naqvi, & Ramay, 2008; De Cuyper, Mauno, Kinnunen, & Mäkikangas, 2011; De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, & De Witte, 2011; Acikgoz, Sumer, & Sumer, 2016; Lu, Sun, & Du, 2016) we followed De Cuyper and De Witte (2011) to introduce two dimensions to employability: internal and external, both of which differ in scope and in focus of opportunities (De Vos, Forrier, Van der Heijden, & De Cuyper, 2017). Furthermore, this study advances previous research and responds to a recommendation by De Cuyper, Mauno et al. (2011) to account for possible moderators in the indirect employability-turnover relationship through the introduction of perceived organization support and career orientation as possible moderating factors that might explain this complex relationship. Inspired theoretically by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Rousseau, 1995), the aim of this study is to further examine ‘employability paradox’ and answer two specific research questions: 1) Does employability (internal and external) affect employee turnover? 2) How do perceived organizational support (POS) and career orientation interact with employability (internal and external) in influencing employee turnover?

China provides an appropriate context to conduct this research as although the country has shown relatively strong economic growth over the decades, the abolition of ‘iron rice bowl’ policy, which historically guaranteed lifetime employment for employees, triggered

changes in employer-employee relationships (Tsui, Wang, & Xin, 2006; Zhang & Morris, 2014) and led to more frequent employee voluntary turnover in Chinese organizations (Ding, Goodall, & Warner, 2000; Liu, Huang, Wang, & Liu, 2017). As reported in recent studies (He, Lai, & Lu, 2011; Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2011), compared with other Asian countries, China has experienced a high employee turnover rate averaging 19.7% across industries (Aon Hewitt, 2017).

We aimed therefore to develop a conceptual model to examine the impact of employability on turnover intention by differentiating internal and external employability, and considering the possible moderating roles of perceived organizational support and career orientation. The data was collected by means of a two-wave survey with a sample of 411 employees from six cities in China's Yangtze River Delta Region. The study provided a useful distinction between internal and external employability and demonstrated that the effect of these two forms of employability taken together was different to the effect of either. From an applied perspective, the findings could be of use to employers, as it was demonstrated that perceived organizational support makes a difference to the turnover of employees with external employability and the latter would not show turnover intention unless they have a disengaged type of carrier orientation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship between employability and turnover intention

For decades employee development remained one of the most important human resources initiatives in organizations, given the intent of the latter to have high-performing, dedicated and flexible employees, which form a source of sustained competitive advantage

(Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Nelissen et al., 2017). Given significant changes in the labor market worldwide, such as deteriorating job security, skill obsolescence and widespread organizational downsizing accelerated by rapid technological advancements, the relationship between employers and employees shifted the responsibility to develop career from the former to the latter (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008).

Employees become more concerned about their own employability, which is defined by Rothwell and Arnold (2007) as the ability to retain the job with their current employer (i.e. internal) or seize opportunities in the external labour market and thereby nurture boundaryless career development (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Although not yet extensively studied by researchers (De Vos et al., 2017), the widespread belief among practitioners indicates that organizations may face an ‘employability’ paradox (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; Nelissen et al., 2017). Employers driven by the need to have employees with high occupational expertise may face a dilemma when organizational investment into employee development (i.e. employability) may not yield returns due to the risk of losing them to competing organizations. As mixed evidence was presented regarding the relationship between employees’ employability and their turnover intention (Benson, 2006; Rahman et al., 2008; De Cuyper, Mauno, et al., 2011; De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, et al., 2011; Acikgoz et al., 2016; Lu et al., 2016) and following De Cuyper and De Witte (2011), we introduced two dimensions to employability: internal and external, both of which differ in scope and in focus of opportunities (De Vos et al., 2017). This reasoning is underpinned by social exchange theory.

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Rousseau, 1995) conceptualizes reciprocal

relationships between two agents within organizations (employer and employee) in such a way that two-sided rewarding interaction is based upon the norms of trust, kindness and respect. Employer investments into employees' development are returned in the form of enhanced capabilities, expertise and willingness to perform the tasks, subsequently leading to disclosure of a wider range of career development opportunities by employees as well as their confidence for the development internally. The scope of opportunities for employees is, therefore, narrowed down by the perception of being valuable, resourceful and able to realize career goals with a current employer (Benson, Finegold, & Mohrman, 2004; Nauta, Van Vianen, Van der Heijden, Van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009). Therefore, employees with a high level of internal employability incline towards risk aversion, vigilant behavior to ensure safety, non-losses and thus advancement of their career success internally (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001; Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Glomb, & Ahlburg, 2005; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011).

Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H1a: Employees' internal employability negatively influences their turnover intention.

Considered as alternative to internal career development path, external employability is embedded in boundaryless career concept (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), which is based on employee commitment to lifetime employability rather than lifetime employment within one organization (Bloch & Bates, 1995; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Froehlich, Beusaert, Segers, & Gerken, 2014). Employees with a high level of external employability do believe that career development opportunities are there to be seized and attained (De Vos et al., 2017) without obligation to reciprocate through organizational commitment (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011).

Such employees are driven by individual aspirations and task accomplishments with maximum positive outcomes. They commit themselves to organization through affective attachment, which contrasts with normative or continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990), thus employees with higher external employability are more confident about career development opportunities outside their organization (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011).

Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H1b: Employees' external employability positively influences their turnover intention.

Moderating effect of perceived organizational support

Given mixed evidence provided by previous studies regarding the relationship between employees' employability and their turnover intention, and as a response to a recommendation by De Cuyper, Mauno et al. (2011) to account for possible moderators in the indirect employability-turnover relationship, we introduce perceived organization support as possible moderating factor that might explain this complex relationship. Given the substantial exchange of tangible and intangible resources within an organization (Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2012), employer-employee relationships are underpinned by the tenets of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which shows the existence of reciprocal and implicit obligations as well as trust between the employee and the organization to enable the former to contribute to the development of organization in return for benefits from the latter (Rousseau, 1995). Such relationships are underpinned by moral norms and it has been widely studied through the lens of perceived organizational support, which is defined as employees' 'global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares

about their well-being' (Eisenberger, Huntington, & Sowa, 1986, p. 501). Although prior studies identified a variety of positive consequences of POS at work, such as affective commitment (Liu, 2009), job satisfaction (Riggle, Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009; Cao, Hirschi, & Deller, 2014), psychological well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017), knowledge sharing and employee communication (Erdogan, Kraimer, & Liden, 2004; Jeung, Yoon, & Choi, 2017), organizational citizenship behavior (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), we believe that its impact on employee turnover is the critical one. POS was chosen by us as a possible moderator in the employability-turnover relationship because a number of prior studies (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007; Haar, de Fluiter, & Brougham, 2016) identified the negative relationship between POS and turnover intention. Retaining employees appears to be among the priorities for many organizations (Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Koster, De Grip, & Fouarge, 2011; Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017) and the latter strive to control and mitigate the manifestation of such organizational withdrawal through employee employability enhancement initiatives to invoke organizational commitment and continued participation (Maertz et al., 2007; Mathieu, Fabi, Lacoursière, & Raymond, 2016). We expect therefore employees possessing internal employability to respond to a high level of POS by a low intention to withdraw from the organization.

Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H2a: POS moderates the negative relationship between employees' internal employability and turnover intention such that the relationship becomes stronger for employees perceiving a high level of POS.

It is anticipated that the level of reciprocity is lower for employees with high external employability as they are committed to their organizations in an autonomous way through affective commitment, promotion orientation career path, intrinsic motivation and directed toward achieving positive outcomes by pursuing ideal goals, personal growth and advancement (Markovits, Ullrich, van Dick, & Davis, 2008; Johnson, Chang, & Yang, 2010). Turnover intention of promotion-oriented employees with external employability therefore can be reduced through the support from the organization to allow the former to grow and aspire within the organization (Andrews, Kacmar, & Kacmar, 2014) and develop positive emotional bond with the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Supporting and promoting employee development initiatives, such as training, salary increases and promotions would encourage such employees to adopt an organizational membership, lead to greater inducements and belief in the reciprocity norms in organisations and reduce employee turnover (Allen et al., 2003; Maertz et al., 2007; Koster et al., 2011).

Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H2b: POS moderates the positive relationship between employees' external employability and turnover intention such that the relationship becomes weaker for employees perceiving a high level of POS.

Moderating effect of career orientation

Given employees' exposure to widespread career uncertainty and the necessity of taking greater control over their own career management to remain employable in a highly competitive labor market (Direnzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2015; Callanan, Perri, & Tomkowicz,

2017), we argue that career orientation should be considered as another potential moderator in the employability-turnover relationship. Career is perceived differently by employees and its orientation is comprised of 'attitudes expressed by superordinate intentions of an individual that will influence career-related decisions' (Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, & Staffelbach, 2009, p. 304). Studies by Tschopp et al. (2014) and Gerber, Grote, Geiser and Raeder (2012) showed that employees act differently when faced with external job opportunities and the response is dependent on their career orientation, which according to Gerpott, Domsch and Keller (1988) reflects employees' personal values and attitudes towards the career.

The concept of traditional career orientation (Guest & Conway, 2004) assuming employees consider job security and loyalty to their organizations crucial and aim to develop vertically within one organization was split up into two types: traditional/promotion oriented and traditional/loyalty oriented (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, & Staffelbach, 2009). Both of these orientations are based on long-term tenure with an employer and the norms of reciprocity, which are underpinned by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Employees with the traditional/promotion orientation are eager to achieve career success by climbing up the hierarchical ladder, whereas traditional/loyalty oriented ones demand the provision of job security and long-term commitment in the form of employment within the organization (Tschopp et al., 2014).

Given further manifestation of the 'boundaryless career' development approach (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), more recently emerged independent career orientation is inclined towards employment mobility shaped by sets of multiple and coexisting boundaries (Gerber,

Wittekind, Grote, & Staffebach, 2009; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). Employees with independent career orientation value the self-management of their careers and possess active as well as positive attitudes towards frequent changes of organizations and display loyalty to themselves rather than to their organizations (Guest & Conway, 2004; Tschopp et al., 2014).

Disengaged career orientation means that employees consider personal life to be more crucial than their career and strive to maintain work–life balance, may occasionally be work-centered and thus their disengagement mainly refers to limited commitment to vertical career advancement, rather than to work itself (Tschopp et al., 2014).

Earlier studies such as Guest and Conway (2004), Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, Conway, et al. (2009) and Gerber, Wittekind, Grote and Staffebach (2009) showed that employees with independent career orientation exhibited the highest intention to leave, followed by those with disengaged career orientation and then by those with traditional career orientation (promotion and loyalty). Therefore, we believe that the relationship between employability and turnover intention may be moderated by four career orientation categories: traditional/promotion, independent, traditional/loyalty and disengaged.

Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H3a: The four career orientation categories will have different moderating effects on the negative relationship between employees' internal employability and turnover intention.

H3b: The four career orientation categories will have different moderating effect on the positive relationship between employees' external employability and turnover intention.

METHOD

Sample and procedure

We collected our data from a sample of employees from six cities in China's Yangtze River Delta Region (Nanjing, Suzhou, Nantong, Changzhou, Taizhou, and Yancheng). Following Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff (2003) in order to prevent possible common method variance the self-administered questionnaires were distributed in two waves both by post (return post-paid) and through emails but offered no incentives. In the first wave, demographic variables, employability, and perceived organizational support were measured; and in the second wave, career orientation and turnover intention were measured. The two waves were separated by one week. On the first page of the questionnaire, detailed instructions were provided and the participants were informed of the research purpose and assured of the anonymity of participation. Only four zip-code digits and the final four digits of the participants' cell phone numbers were required (e.g. "0094, 5361").

A total of 550 pairs of questionnaires were distributed. For the first and second rounds of the survey, 512 and 486 questionnaires were returned, respectively. After pairing, 465 pairs were obtained. The return rates for the first and second rounds were 93.1% and 88.4%, respectively; the return rate for the pairing of the questionnaires from the first and second rounds was 84.5%. The questionnaire pairs that were incomplete or exhibited obviously irregular or contradictory answers were removed (54 pairs). Overall, 411 valid questionnaire pairs remained for an overall valid return rate of 74.7%. Table 1 shows the profile of the participants.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Measures

Employability. We adopted the scale for employees' self-perceived employability developed by Rothwell and Arnold (2007). We hereafter used the term 'overall employability' when referring to this construct. It contains two sub-constructs: internal employability and external employability. The measurement was based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree and 5 = totally agree) comprising 10 items; among them were four items about internal employability (e.g. "Among the people who do the same job as me, I am well respected in this organization") and six items about external employability (e.g. "The skills I have gained in my present job are transferable to other occupations outside this organization"). The value of Cronbach's α for the overall scale was .86; and the values of Cronbach's α for the internal and external employability dimensions were .84 and .84 respectively.

Perceived organizational support. We adopted the scale for measuring perceived organizational support developed by (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006), which comprised six items (e.g. "The organization values my contribution to its well-being" and "The organization shows very little concern for me"). A 7-point Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). The value of Cronbach's α for this scale was .79.

Career orientation. This study adopted the career orientation scale widely used in the literature (Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, & Staffebach, 2009). This scale comprised nine items and used a dichotomous forced-choice method (e.g. "Being employable in a range of jobs vs. having job security" and "Commitment to yourself and your career vs. commitment to the organization"). The participants were required to choose based on the prospects of future

careers. In accordance with the research of Guest and Conway (2004), the Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) and Latent GOLD 4 (Vermunt & Magidson, 2005) statistical software packages were employed to classify the measures into four types: traditional/promotion, traditional/loyalty, independent and disengaged career orientation.

Turnover intention. The employee turnover intention scale was adopted from (Hui, Wong, & Tjosvold, 2007). This scale comprised three items (e.g. “It is very possible that I will look for a new job next year”). A 7-point Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). The value of Cronbach’s α was .64.

Control variables. The demographic variables were used as the control variables, including sex (1 = men and 0 = women), age (1 = below 25 years, 2 = 25–35 years, 3 = 36–45 years, 4 = 46–55 years, and 5 = above 55 years), education level (1 = below senior high school, 2 = senior high school, 3 = college, 4 = Bachelor’s degree, 5 = Master’s degree, and 6 = doctorate or above), and employment position level (1 = operational employee, 2 = first line manager, 3 = middle manager, and 4 = senior manager).

The reliability and validity of the scales used in this study have been verified previously in empirical studies. We used a translation-back-translation method to develop our questionnaire in the Chinese language. Two coworkers with high English proficiency were first invited to translate the original English scales into Chinese. Thereafter, a bilingual scholar with a PhD degree in industrial psychology and work experience in an English speaking country was invited to back translate the Chinese scales into English. The back-translated English scales were compared with the original English scales. Inconsistencies were discussed and modified (the translation-back-translation process was

repeated for considerably inconsistent parts) to produce a final version of the Chinese scales.

RESULTS

Confirmatory factor analysis

We used chi-squared value (χ^2), degree of freedom (df), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) as the goodness-of-fit indices to assess the construct validity of the scales (i.e. employability, career orientation, POS, turnover intention). As shown in Table 2, the construct validity of the scales used in this study was acceptable.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Latent class analysis

Latent class analysis (LCA) is a statistical technique that integrates latent variables and categorical variables and is used to explore latent class variables hidden behind explicit class variables (Meng et al., 2010). In this study, LCA was performed to statistically investigate career orientation. By performing LCA, participants were classified into groups based on the degree of similarity in the way they answered a series of items. Specifically, the participants were classified into a minimal number of groups (i.e. latent class variables) to explain differences in the item-answering styles used among the participants within a group (Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, Conway, et al., 2009).

In LCA, the Pearson chi-square (χ^2), the likelihood ratio chi-square (G^2), the Akaike information criteria (AIC) and the Bayesian information criteria (BIC) are the main indices for model fitness. Generally, assessing goodness of fit typically begins with a single model (i.e. the number of latent classes is 1), and then the number of latent classes gradually increases. The fit between hypothetical models and observation data should be repeatedly examined to identify an optimal model (Meng et al., 2010). No significant χ^2 and G^2 , and lower AIC and BIC values indicate excellent model fitness.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

As shown in Table 3, when the number of latent classes was 4, the G^2 value was not significant ($G^2 = 420.33$, $df = 472$, $p = .96$), and the AIC and BIC values were relatively lower, especially the latter. The χ^2 , G^2 , AIC values for M1–4 decreased sharply, while gradually decreasing for M4–9. Meanwhile, the P-Values of Vuong–Lo–Mendell–Rubin (VLMR) and adjusted Lo–Mendell–Rubin likelihood ratio tests for 4 (H0) versus 5 classes were not significant ($p = .19$; $.19$). Taking these into account and in line with Gerber et al. (2009), we adopted M4 as the optimal model.

After the optimal model was determined, the names of latent classes were determined. Table 4 and Figure 1 show the conditional probabilities of nine items for the four latent classes.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, for Class 1, the conditional probability values on all the items where the participants chose Option 1 were very low (all below .10). For Class 2, the conditional probability values on items 2 and 4 where the participants chose Option 1 were very high (both above .60), the conditional probability values on items 1 and 7 were moderate (both between .30-.60), while the conditional probability values on other items were very low (all below .20). For Class 3, the conditional probability values on items 1-4 where the participants chose Option 1 were very low (all below .10), while the conditional probability values on items 5-9 were very high (all above .60). For Class 4, the conditional probability values on four items (items 2, 4, 6, 7) where the participants chose Option 1 were very high (all above .60), and the conditional probability values on the other five items (items 1, 3, 5, 8, 9) were moderate (all between .30-.60).

Based on Gerber et al. (Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, Conway, et al., 2009), we named the four latent classes “traditional/promotion career orientation”, “independent career orientation”, “traditional/loyalty career orientation”, “disengaged career orientation”.

Descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis

Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations (SDs) of various variables and the correlation coefficients between variables. The results indicate that the independent variables (employability, internal employability, and external employability) and the moderator variables (POS and career orientation) were almost significantly correlated with the

dependent variable (turnover intention).

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

Moderated multiple regression analysis

Moderated multiple regression analysis was performed to explore the influence of the independent variable (employees' employability) on the dependent variable (turnover intention) and to examine whether perceived organizational support and career orientation exhibited moderating effects on these relationships.

Moderating effect of POS. Table 6 shows the regression analysis results regarding the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between employees' employability and turnover intention. In Model 2, only the independent variable (overall employability) was included. Its coefficient of determination (R^2) was .08, and thus accounted for 8% variance. Model 3 included the variable POS, it accounted for 15% more variance in turnover intention. Model 4 included the interaction term of employability and POS, its R^2 was .23 but explained no more variance in turnover intention. The interaction term exhibited no significant effect on turnover intention ($\beta = .03, p > .10$). In other words, POS did not significantly affect the relationship between employees' overall employability and turnover intention. However, in Model 5, the independent variables internal employability and external employability were included, the R^2 was .12 and internal employability exhibited a significant negative effect on turnover intention ($\beta = -.16, p < .01$) and external employability exhibited a significant positive effect on turnover intention ($\beta = .26, p < .01$). Therefore, H1a and H1b were

supported.

Next, we turned to examine the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between employees' internal employability, external employability and turnover intention. In Model 6, the variable POS was included, its R^2 was .23 and the F value for the overall regression model was 17.00 ($p < .01$). In Model 7, the two interaction terms were included, R^2 was .24 and the F value for the overall regression model was 14.06 ($p < .01$). The interaction of external employability and POS significantly affected turnover intention ($\beta = .11, p < .05$), while the interaction of internal employability and POS only had a near significant trend to affect turnover intention ($\beta = -.09, p < .10$). Therefore, H2b was supported, whereas H2a was not supported.

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

Next, we conducted post hoc analyses for the two interaction effects. First, the interaction between POS and external employability on turnover intention was examined (Figure 2a). Post hoc probing indicated that at both one SD below ($\beta = .5394, p < .01$) and above ($\beta = .8841, p < .01$) the mean on POS, external employability could predict turnover intention. However, using the Johnson-Neyman technique (Johnson & Neyman, 1936), the interaction was found to be insignificant at $p < .05$ level for any value of POS below 2.79 on this 7-point Likert scale. Next, we examined the interaction between POS and internal employability on turnover intention (Figure 2b). In post hoc analyses examining simple slopes for POS at one SD below the mean, internal employability predicted turnover intention ($\beta = .3462, p < .01$), but at one SD above the mean, only at the margin of significance ($\beta = .4392, p = .05$). Using Johnson-Neyman, the interaction was found to be insignificant at p

< .05 level for any value of POS below 3.06 on this 7-point Likert scale.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Moderating effect of career orientation. Table 7 shows the moderating effect of the four types of career orientations (Career Orientation 1-4) on the relationships between internal employability, external employability and turnover intention. In Model 4, the independent variables internal employability, external employability and moderator traditional/promotion career orientation (Career Orientation 1) were included. The R^2 was .16 and the F value for the overall regression model was 8.21 ($p < .01$). In addition, the interaction term of external employability and traditional/promotion career orientation exhibited a significant effect on turnover intention ($\beta = .13, p < .05$), but the interaction term of internal employability and traditional/promotion career orientation did not ($\beta = .06, p > .10$). In other words, being traditional/promotion career orientated only significantly affected the relationship between employees' external employability and turnover intention.

Similarly, in Model 6, independent career orientation (Career Orientation 2) significantly but negatively affected both the relationship between employees' internal employability, external employability and turnover intention ($\beta = -.33, p < .01$; $\beta = -.15, p < .01$). However, in Model 8, traditional/loyalty career orientation (Career Orientation 3) only affected the relationship between employees' internal employability and turnover intention significantly positively ($\beta = .27, p < .01$), but did not affect the relationship between external employability and turnover intention. In Model 10, being disengaged career oriented (Career Orientation 4) only affected the relationship between employees' external employability and turnover intention significantly positively ($\beta = .06, p < .05$), but did not affect the relationship

between internal employability and turnover intention. Therefore, both H3a and H3b were only partially supported.

INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

Next, we conducted post hoc analyses for the five interaction effects. First, the interaction between traditional/promotion career orientation (Career Orientation 1) and external employability on turnover intention was examined (Figure 3a). In post hoc analyses examining simple slopes at one SD above the mean, external employability predicted turnover intention ($\beta = 1.3890, p < .01$), but at one SD below the mean, only close to being statistically significant to predict turnover intention ($\beta = .2263, p = .07$). Next, we examined the interaction between independent career orientation (Career Orientation 2) and internal employability as well as external employability on turnover intention. For internal employability (Figure 3b), simple slopes at one SD below ($\beta = .4374, p < .01$) and above ($\beta = -.9942, p < .01$) were both significant. For external employability (Figure 3c), simple slopes at one SD below ($\beta = .8876, p < .01$) and above ($\beta = -.3275, p < .05$) were also both significant. We also examined the interaction between traditional/loyalty career orientation (Career Orientation 3) and internal employability on turnover intention (Figure 3d). Post hoc analyses indicated that simple slopes at one SD below ($\beta = -.3110, p < .05$) and above ($\beta = .4263, p < .01$) were both significant. Finally, we examined the interaction between disengaged career orientation (Career Orientation 4) and external employability on turnover intention (Figure 3e). Post hoc analyses also indicated that simple slopes at one SD below ($\beta = .3955, p < .01$) and above ($\beta = .9106, p < .01$) were both significant.

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to further examine ‘employability paradox’ (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; Nelissen et al., 2017) through probing the association between employability and employee turnover, differentiating between internal and external employability and including perceived organizational support and career orientation as two possible moderators of the relationship. Although previous studies such as Acikgoz et al. (2016), De Cuyper, Mauno et al. (2011), Berntson, Näswall and Sverke (2010) have failed to find the direct relationship between employability and turnover intention, or provided mixed evidence (Benson, 2006), the findings from our research show that overall employability exhibited a significant positive effect on turnover intention. Furthermore, differentiation of internal and external employability, which is widely accepted conceptually (Van der Heijden, 2002; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Vanhercke et al., 2014) also led us to revealing contrasting results to the effect of overall employability. Our empirical evidence showed that employees with high internal employability tend to seek promotion with their current employer and that employees with high external employability are likely to leave their current organizations for more favorable career development elsewhere.

Another notable result of our research, which concurs with previous POS related empirical studies (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997; Allen et al., 2003; Loi, Hang - yue, & Foley, 2006; Newman et al., 2012), shows that POS significantly and negatively influenced turnover

intention, indicating that employees who perceived that their organizations highly valued their contributions or interests did not easily exhibit turnover intention. By examining the interaction effect of overall employability, we found that POS did not significantly affect the relationship between employees' overall employability and turnover intention. Yet, when we look closely by examining internal and external employability as two separate constructs, the results indicate that the moderating effect of POS mainly existed between external employability and turnover intention, but it had a certain trend to moderate the relationship between internal employability and turnover intention.

Lastly, as for the moderating effect of career orientation, our study results indicated that for employees of all four career orientation types, internal employability significantly and negatively influenced turnover intention. The negative influence of internal employability on turnover intention was the most significant among employees with traditional career orientations (promotion and loyalty), followed by those employees with disengaged and independent career orientation. This may be because employees with traditional career orientation objectives tended to develop themselves within one organization, possess high internal employability conducive to their development within the current environment, and hence be unwilling to leave their organizations (Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, & Staffebach, 2009). Despite independent career orientation embracing the notion of self-management and inclination to more frequent change of employers (Tschopp et al., 2014), when employees with this type of career orientation possess high internal employability, they can competently perform their current job, but also acquire new skills and be successful in careers within their organization (Weng & McElroy, 2012). Similarly, high internal employability

helps employees with disengaged career orientation to offset the antecedents of turnover intention such as low organizational commitment and lack of willingness to advance the career vertically through better achievement of desired work-life balance within their current organization (Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, & Staffebach, 2009). Our results show that only those employees who are high in external employability but have disengaged career orientation tend to leave their current employer, and employees with other career orientations tend to remain loyal to their organizations despite there being external opportunities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

The study has several important implications for investment in staff employability and retention, which may be of use to practitioners while addressing the concerns related to the employability paradox (De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, et al., 2011; Nelissen et al., 2017) namely the tension between enhancing employees and the risk of their turnover.

First, the study shows that the link between internal employability and turnover intention helps to retain employees, while external employability has the opposite effect. Therefore, combining our results with the findings from Benson's (2006) study, organizations should attempt to develop internal employability by embedding on-the-job employee training into career development planning in order for employees to gain more specific rather than general skills needed for within organization promotion.

Second, the results of our study show a negative moderating effect of perceived-organizational support on the relationship between external employability and turnover intention. In other words, POS can significantly buffer the unfavorable impact of

external employability on turnover intention. This highlights the importance of nurturing an employability culture within organizations (Nauta et al., 2009) to facilitate the dialog between employees and their managers of how to best self-develop, create challenging work assignments, which will enable employees to fulfill their potential without the need to seek opportunities outside. Furthermore, having in place supportive human resources management practices to advance organizational commitment (Koslowsky, Weisberg, Yaniv, & Zaitman-Speiser, 2012), such as work–life balance policies, family social activities and personal wellbeing programs, could help to retain employees who have strong external employability.

Finally, our results suggest that for employees with disengaged career orientation, external employability significantly and positively influences turnover intention, but this is not the case for independent, traditional/promotion and traditional/loyalty career orientations. Management should therefore be aware that not all employees with high external employability want to quit but only those who have disengaged career orientation are likely to consider job alternatives externally. For this group of employees, the management should be cautious about investing resources in their employability development, but may rather strengthen the links between co-workers and the organization to promote the intrinsic values and unique supportive climate unavailable elsewhere (Van den Broeck et al., 2014).

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations and the findings should be interpreted cautiously. First, several participants in this study were employees in state-owned enterprises. Known as the

'iron rice bowl' system (Zhang & Morris, 2014; Liu et al., 2017), employment in these organizations is guaranteed for the lifetime but induces non-productive behaviors and creates a sense of stability as well as loyalty to their organizations. Regardless of employability level, these employees were unlikely to leave their current organizations. We believe this phenomenon partially influenced the relationship between employees' overall employability and turnover intention. In the future, researchers should consider the homogeneity of participants and survey employees in private enterprises.

Second, this study selected only two individual factors (i.e. POS and career orientation) for the moderation test. Other factors could also influence the relationship between employability and turnover intention, such as psychological contract type, leadership style (Green, Miller, & Aarons, 2011; Yizhong, Baranchenko, Lin, Lau, & Ma, 2019), and career commitment (Koslowsky et al., 2012), therefore future research could investigate these additional moderating factors.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to conduct a closer examination of employee employability by differentiating impacts of internal versus external employability on turnover intention. We tested these impacts by considering organizational support and career orientation as possible moderating factors. The results of our empirical work support the distinction of impacts of internal and external employability and the study contributes to the literature by helping to explicate the previous inconsistent findings on the relationship between employability and turnover intention.

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TABLES

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of participant profile (n = 411)

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Men	203	49.4
	Women	191	46.5
	Missing	17	4.1
Age	Below 25 years	73	17.8
	25-35 years	234	56.9
	36-45 years	75	18.2
	46-55 years	18	4.4
	Above 55 years	3	.7
	Missing	8	1.9
Education	Below senior high school	18	4.4
	Senior high school	91	22.1
	College	115	28.0
	Undergraduate	160	38.9
	Master	16	3.9
	PhD	1	.2
Position	Missing	10	2.4
	Operational	196	47.7
	First line management	62	15.1
	Middle management	82	20.0
	Senior management	36	8.8
	Missing	35	8.5

Table 2. CFA results regarding questionnaire construct validity (n = 411)

χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR</i>
480.27	113	.90	.93	.09	.09

Table 3. Summary table for the goodness-of-fit indices of the exploratory latent class model (n=411)

Model	χ^2	G^2	AIC	BIC	df	Number of Parameters
M1:1-class model	8758.71 (.00)	1314.27 (.00)	4463.52	4499.69	502	9
M2:2-class model	2096.45 (.00)	645.29 (.00)	3857.23	3933.58	492	19
M3:3-class model	2788.23 (.00)	489.62 (.36)	3708.78	3825.32	479	29
M4:4-class model	728.75 (.00)	420.33 (.96)	3629.58	3786.31	472	39
M5:5-class model	685.60 (.00)	380.38 (1.00)	3609.63	3806.54	462	49
M6:6-class model	609.42 (.00)	346.58 (1.00)	3595.83	3832.93	452	59
M7:7-class model	579.00 (.00)	322.08 (1.00)	3591.33	3868.62	442	69
M8:8-class model	570.93 (.00)	300.90 (1.00)	3590.15	3907.62	432	79
M9:9-class model	451.69 (.15)	273.67 (1.00)	3592.44	3950.10	421	89

Table 4. Conditional probabilities of nine items for the four latent classes (n = 411)

Regarding your work life, which option do you tend to choose?

Item number	Option 1	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Class	Option 2
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
1	Being employable in a range of jobs	.04	.56	.00	.35	.96	.44	1.00	.65	Having job security
2	Managing your own career	.07	.89	.00	.75	.93	.11	.1.00	.25	Having your organization manage your career for you
3	A short time in lots of organizations	.00	.08	.01	.41	1.00	.92	.99	.59	A long time with one organization
4	Commitment to yourself and your career	.00	.65	.10	.61	1.00	.35	.90	.39	Commitment to the organization
5	A series of jobs at the same kind of level	.04	.07	.63	.50	.96	.93	.37	.50	Striving for promotion into more senior posts
6	Living for the present	.02	.11	.92	.63	.98	.89	.08	.37	Planning for the future
7	Work as marginal to your life	.00	.33	1.00	.72	1.00	.67	.00	.28	Work as central to your life
8	A career is not important to you	.00	.00	.89	.52	1.00	1.00	.11	.48	Career success is very important to you
9	Spend what you've got and enjoy it	.00	.17	.72	.46	1.00	.83	.28	.54	Save for the future

Note: $f_{\text{Class 1}} = 63$, $f_{\text{Class 2}} = 209$, $f_{\text{Class 3}} = 85$, $f_{\text{Class 4}} = 54$.

Table 5. Descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis (n = 411)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>													
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
1 Sex	.52	.50														
2 Age	2.12	.78	.19**													
3 Education level	3.17	.98	-.02	-.21**												
4 Position	1.89	1.05	.11*	.20**	-.21**											
5 Overall employability	3.75	.63	.07	.11*	-.07	.02										
6 Internal employability	3.83	.75	.07	.14*	.03	-.03	.80**									
7 External employability	3.70	.72	.05	.07	-.12*	.05	.91**	.47**								
8 POS	4.97	1.02	.05	.22**	-.12*	-.04	.56**	.64**	.37**							
9 Career orientation 1	.15	.36	-.01	.10	-.11*	-.12*	.31**	.16**	.34**	.16**						
10 Career orientation 2	.51	.50	.06	.01	.24**	.21**	-.14**	.02	-.22*	.09	-.44**					
11 Career orientation 3	.21	.41	.01	-.12*	-.22**	.37**	-.01	-.11*	.06	-.12*	-.22**	-.52**				
12 Career orientation 4	.13	.34	-.08	.03	.02	-.01	-.11*	-.06	-.11*	-.15**	-.17**	-.40**	-.20**			
13 Turnover intention	3.46	1.39	-.07	-.15**	-.05	.18**	.09	-.06	.18**	-.30**	.16**	-.39*	.28**	.08		

Note: * signifies $p < .05$, and ** signifies $p < .01$; Career orientation: 1-traditional/ promotion career orientation,

2-independent career orientation, 3-traditional/ loyalty career orientation, 4-disengaged career orientation.

Table 6. Moderating effect of POS on the relationship between employability and turnover intention (n = 411)

Variable	Turnover Intention						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Control variable							
Sex	-.05	-.06	-.07	-.07	-.06	-.06	-.07
Age	-.18**	-.19**	-.11*	-.11*	-.17**	-.11*	-.11*
Education level	-.05	-.04	-.08	-.07	-.01	-.06	-.08
Position	.20**	.20**	.16**	.15**	.19**	.16**	.17**
Independent variable							
Overall employability		.11*	.37**	.37**			
Internal employability					-.16**	.11†	.07
External employability					.26**	.29**	.32**
Moderator variable							
POS			-.48**	-.47**		-.45**	-.45**
Interaction terms							
Employability × POS				.03			
Internal employability × POS							-.09†
External employability × POS							.11*
R^2	.07	.08	.23	.23	.12	.23	.24
Adjusted R^2	.06	.07	.21	.21	.10	.22	.22
F value	7.04**	6.75**	19.56**	16.82**	8.86**	17.00**	14.06**
ΔR^2	.07	.01	.15	.00	.05	.11	.01
F value for ΔR^2	7.04**	5.32*	77.26**	.50	11.75**	58.34**	3.11*

Note**signifies $p < .01$, * signifies $p < .05$, and † signifies $p < .10$.

Table 7. Moderating effect of career orientation on the relationship between internal employability, external employability and turnover intention (n = 411)

Variable	Turnover Intention									
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Control variable										
Sex	-.05	-.06	-.05	-.06	-.03	-.01	-.06	-.06	-.05	-.04
Age	-.18**	-.17**	-.18**	-.17**	-.14**	-.16**	-.12	-.13**	-.17**	-.17**
Education level	-.05	-.01	.00	-.01	.05	-.02	.03	-.02	-.01	-.01
Position	.20**	.19**	.21**	.20**	.13**	.15**	.12*	.15**	.19**	.18**
Independent variable										
Internal employability		-.16**	-.15**	-.14**	-.12*	-.27**	-.13*	-.27**	-.15**	-.15**
External employability		.26**	.21**	.21**	.17**	.18**	.24**	.28**	.27**	.27**
Moderator variable										
Career Orientation 1			.15**	.05						
Career Orientation 2					-.34**	-.31**				
Career Orientation 3							.21**	.19**		
Career Orientation 4									.10*	.12*
Interaction terms										
Internal employability × Career Orientation 1				.06						
External employability × Career Orientation 1				.13*						
Internal employability × Career Orientation 2						-.33**				
External employability × Career Orientation 2						-.15**				
Internal employability × Career Orientation 3								.27**		
External employability × Career Orientation 3								.01		
Internal employability × Career Orientation 4										.03
External employability × Career Orientation 4										.06*
<i>R</i> ²	.07	.12	.14	.16	.21**	.37**	.15	.21	.13	.13
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.06	.10	.12	.14	.20**	.35**	.14	.19	.11	.11
<i>F</i> value	7.04**	8.86**	9.09**	8.21**	15.72**	25.88**	10.14**	11.50**	8.26**	6.74**
ΔR^2	.07	.05	.02	.02	.10	.15	.03	.06	.01	.01
<i>F</i> value for ΔR^2	7.04**	11.75**	9.40**	4.55*	50.40**	40.49**	15.85**	14.00**	4.27*	1.34

Note: **signifies $p < .01$, * signifies $p < .05$, and † signifies $p < .10$; Career orientation: 1-traditional/ promotion

career orientation, 2-independent career orientation, 3-traditional/ loyalty career orientation, 4-disengaged career orientation.

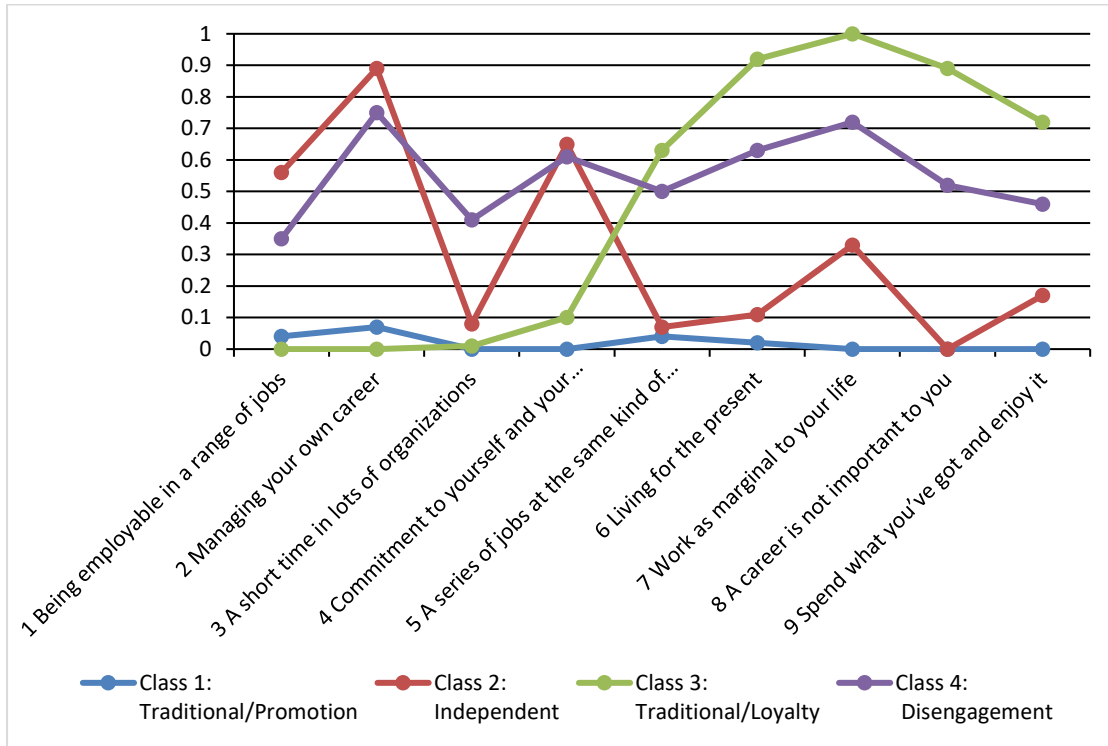


Figure 1. Conditional probabilities for the four latent classes

Note: $f_{\text{Class 1}} = 63$, $f_{\text{Class 2}} = 209$, $f_{\text{Class 3}} = 85$, $f_{\text{Class 4}} = 54$.

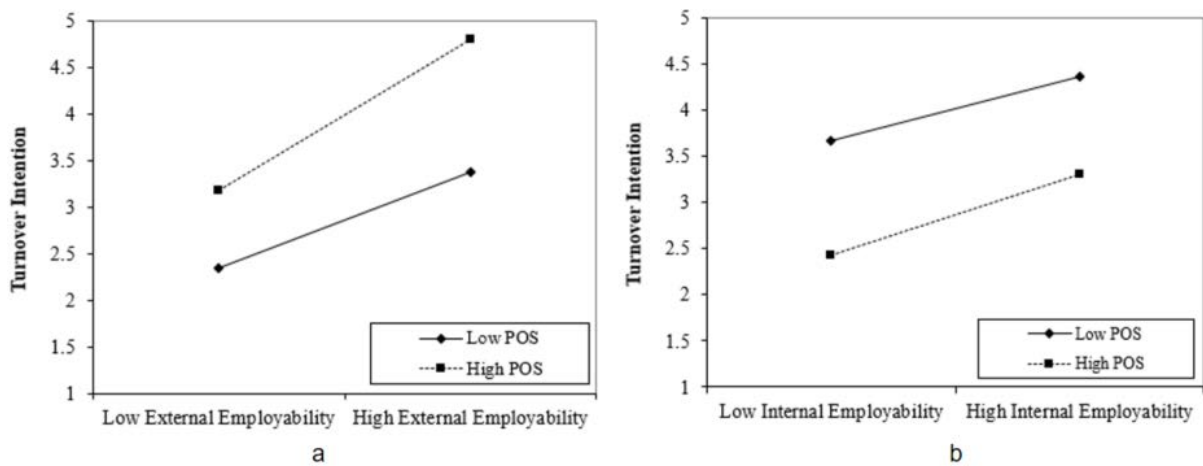


Figure 2. The 2-way interaction of POS and External Employability (a) and Internal Employability (b) on Turnover Intention. Low designates -1 SD for the scale; high designates +1 SD for the scale.

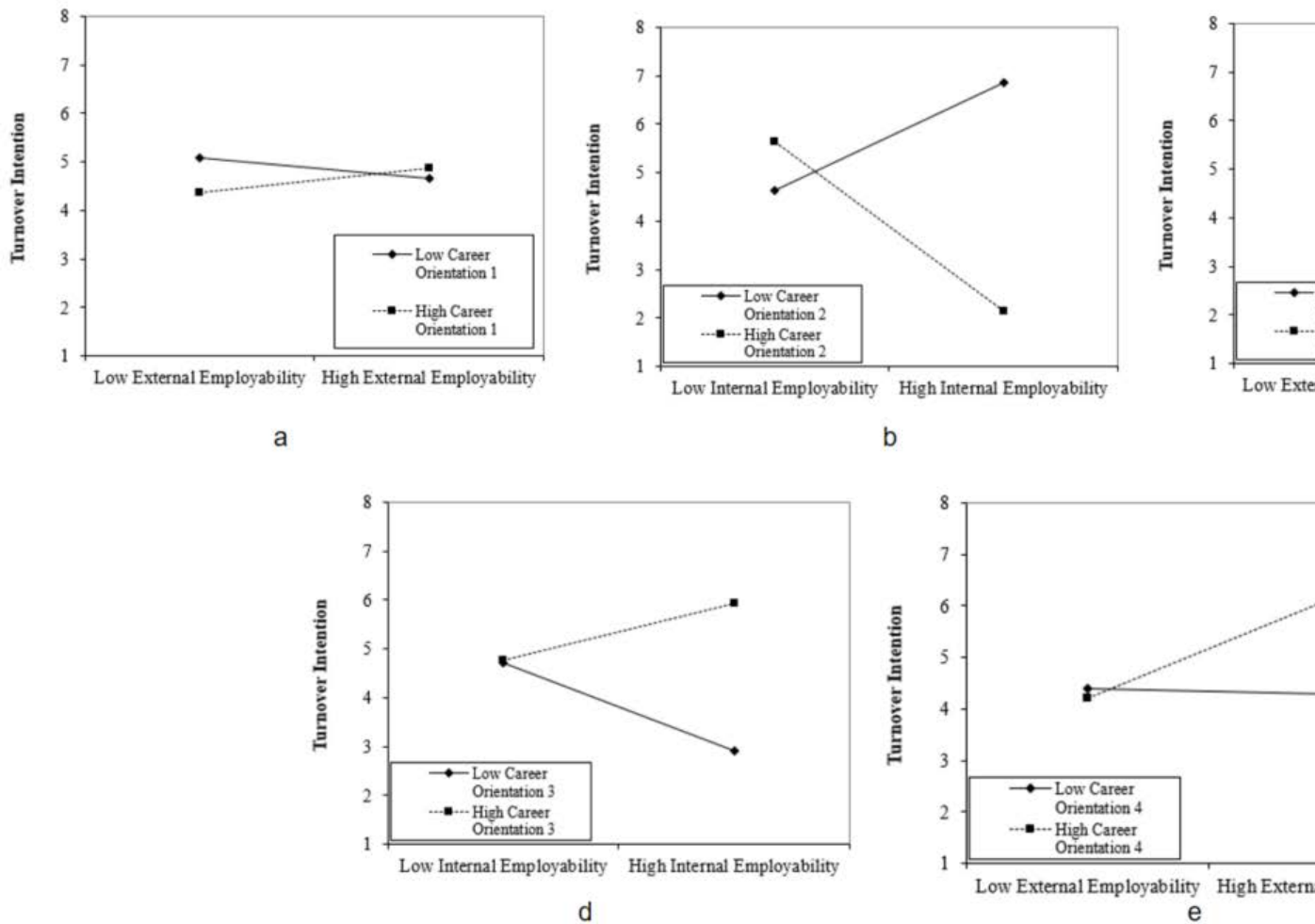


Figure 3. The 2-way interaction of Career Orientation and Employability on Turnover Intention. (a) Career Orientation 1 and External Employability, (b) Career Orientation 2 and Internal Employability, (c) Career Orientation 2 and External Employability, (d) Career Orientation 3 and Internal Employability, and (e) Career Orientation 4 and External Employability. Low designates -1 SD for the scale; high designates +1 SD for the scale.