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Title: A Moderated Model: Task Ambiguity and Task Complexity Moderating Servant Leadership and Employees Turnover Intention

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Conflict of Interest

The author (s) declared no conflict of interest and have not received any funds for the project.

A Moderated Model: Task Ambiguity and Task Complexity Moderating Servant Leadership and Employees Turnover Intention

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Abstract

Apart from contributing towards GDP and employment generation, SMEs face the challenges of retaining talented employees. Besides other factors, the type of leadership, task ambiguity, and complexity affect employees' attitudes toward work and organizations. Given its importance, the study examines the effect of "servant leadership, task ambiguity, and complexity" on turnover intention. It also examines the moderating roles of "ambiguity and complexity on turnover intentions" in SMEs in Karachi. We collected a sample of 252 from local SMEs in Karachi. The study found servant leadership negatively affects turnover intention. Task ambiguity and task complexity positively affect turnover intention. Task ambiguity insignificantly moderates "servant leadership and turnover intention. Task complexity significantly moderate servant leadership and turnover intention. Due to a lack of job description and direction, employees often get confused, adversely affecting their motivation, well-being, and productivity. We suggest leaders delegate jobs by aligning employees' characteristics, skills, and job requirements. They must be clear about what they expect from the employees by communicating verbally and in writing. Firms must arrange seminars, workshops, and counseling sessions on leadership styles. Such sessions may improve leaders' attitudes and behaviors toward employees.

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Introduction

To compete in the present era, firms must be "sustainable, proactive, and visionary." Employees are the firms' assets (Kucharska & Kowalczyk, 2019). Therefore, firms must ensure employees are satisfied and have low turnover intentions (Murray & Holmes, 2021). High turnover adversely affects the employees' morale and increases their intentions to look for new jobs. Another reason for spending resources on existing employees is hiring a new employee is more expensive than retaining the existing one (Tinwala & Biswas, 2020). The average turnover in Asian countries and developed countries in 2015 was 55%, which has increased to 70% by 2019 (Guo et al., 2019).

Extant literature suggests a servant leadership style is important as it aligns employees and organizational values (Westbrook & Peterson, 2022). The literature on servant leadership style suggests servant leaders care about the well-being of their employees and keep them engaged. Consequently, it increases employees' loyalty to the organizations (Zia, Naveed, Bashir, & Iqbal, 2022). Despite the importance of servant leadership style, literature shows inconclusive results on the association of servant leadership style and employees' attitudes and behaviors. Some studies found a strong correlation between servant leadership style and turnover intention (Ling, Lin, & Wu, 2016), while others found insignificant associations in this relationship (Ahmed et al., 2018; Eva et al., 2019).

Despite the importance of tasks, researchers have inconsistent arguments regarding their definitions (Jach & Smillie, 2019). Some researchers include skills and knowledge in the definition of tasks, while others include performance and related psychological dimensions in the concept of tasks (Gao et al., 2020). The concept of task complexity is important in goal setting. While setting goals, managers must focus on the characteristics of the task and the employees' capabilities (Krijgsheld et al., 2022). Besides motivational factors, researchers believe difficult goals or task complexity positively stimulates employees' attitudes and behaviors toward work (Winkelhaus, Grosse, & Glock, 2022). The researcher believes task complexity and ambiguity directly affect turnover intention (Gao et al., 2020). Past studies have examined the effect of task ambiguity and complexity on servant leadership and turnover intention (Saleem et al., 2023). But a few have examined the moderating effect of task ambiguity and complexity on servant leadership and turnover intention. Thus we have examined the impact of servant leadership, task ambiguity, and task complexity on turnover intention. And the moderating effect of task ambiguity and complexity on servant leadership and turnover

intention.

Theoretical Grounding and Conceptual Framework

We have extended the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory that assumes employees acquire and conserve vital resources, including time and energy, to cope with future job-related problems and stresses (Cheng, Lyu, & Ye, 2023). The theory has four basic principles (Peng et al., 2023). Principle one assumes that the proportion of resources gains and losses in employees differ. They lose more resources than they gain (Jabeen et al., 2020). The second principle advises employees to invest in resources to "cope with task ambiguity, task complexity" (Sörensen, Rzeszutek, & Gasik, 2021). Principle three postulates employees, while losing resources, may understand the importance of gaining resources (Cheng, Lyu, & Ye, 2023). Principle four assumes that employees that lack resources are more aggressive and irrational than others (Peng et al., 2023). Many researchers believe that personal and organizational resources are important for employees' attitudes and behaviors. Personal resources include "time and energy for family and work." Organizational resources include "employer or boss support, rewards, and recognition" (Zhang et al., 2019). The study has used four variables in its conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.
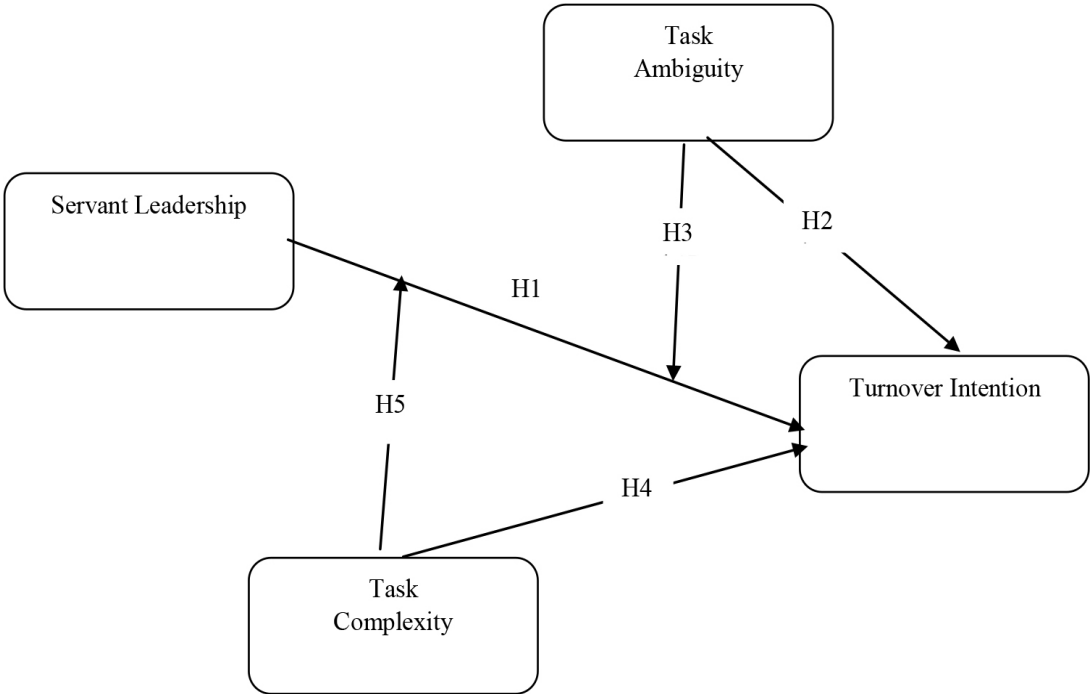

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Literature Review

Servant Leadership and Turnover Intention

Servant leadership theory stresses that leaders develop a conducive environment for the followers that promotes a sense of attachment and loyalty to the firms (Prakasch & Ghayas, 2019). Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers and often sacrifice their goals for them (Westbrook & Peterson, 2022). The leaders look after their followers' well-being. Therefore employees develop a positive attitude toward work and low intention to switch jobs (Mustamil & Najam, 2020). Omanwar and Agrawal (2022) stress servant leadership, apart from directly affecting turnover intention, indirectly through organizational ethics and employee engagement affect turnover intention. Employees who work under servant leaders believe their leaders will help them when they are dissatisfied with their jobs and feel undue stress from their jobs-related outcomes (Achen et al., 2019). Employees' perception of their leaders' support reduces stress, positively affects well-being, and reduces turnover intentions (Li & Xie, 2022).

H1: Servant leadership negatively affects turnover intention.

Task Ambiguity and Turnover Intention

Task ambiguity is adverse working conditions and confuses employees on how to do their jobs. It promotes burnout and emotional exhaustion (Alblihed & Alzghaibi, 2022). Anees (2021) asserts that leaders' lack of clear direction promotes negative feelings and high turnover intention (Dodanwala, Santoso, & Yukongdi, 2022). At the same time, when employees find low role ambiguity, they develop a positive feeling about their future with the organization, reducing turnover intention (Li et al., 2022).

Puhakka, Nokelainen, and Pylväs (2021) asserts that when leaders do not give clear work-related directions to employees, they perceive that their leaders do not respect them. Lack of clarity on the job descriptions and responsibilities promotes a perception that employers want to control employees, which also promotes high turnover intention (Anees, 2021). Consequently, this negative perception motivates employees to seek new employment (Afzal et al., 2029). Lin and Huang (2021) believe role ambiguity often promotes a perception that organizations are not interested in employees' well-being, so their focus on seeking alternative employment increases.

H2: Task ambiguity promotes turnover intention.

H3: Task ambiguity moderates servant leadership and turnover intention.

Task Complexity Turnover Intention

Employees' motivation and attitudes toward work significantly depend on job design (Ogbeibu et al., 2022). Bande et al. (2021) assert that job description has multiple dimensions, including "skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback." A complex job motivates employees to find a novel approach to find the solution rather than following the standard procedures. Apart from being challenging, a complex job requires multiple complex skills that promote excitement and interest in the employees (Chang et al. 2021). Thus job complexity promotes positive attitudes toward work. Many past studies have documented that job complexity promotes "motivation, organizational commitment, job engagement, and low turnover intention" (Cole et al., 2021). At the same time, many studies found that job complexity is negatively associated with turnover intention (Ogbeibu et al., 2022). Many past studies document that job complexity significantly predicts turnover intention (Cho, Lee, & Kim, 2019).

H4: Task complexity negatively affects turnover intention.

H5: Task complexity moderates servant leadership and turnover intention.

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

The study aimed to ascertain the influence of servant leadership, task ambiguity, and task complexity on turnover intention and the moderating roles of task ambiguity and task complexity on servant leadership and turnover intention. The study has focused on SMEs in Pakistan since it generates high employment at low investment worldwide. The study employed five BBA students to collect the data from the preselected SMEs, using a questionnaire adopted from earlier studies. The enumerators distributed 300 questionnaires and received 252.

The respondents' profile suggests 68% were males and 32% were females. Concerning marital status, we found 43% were married, and 57% were single. The education profile suggests 53% of respondents had a high school education, 27% had a Bachelor's degree, and the rest had Master's degrees.

Pretests

The study conducted two pretests before administering the questionnaire to the target population. Initially, we distributed the questionnaires to a sample of 35 graduate students to have their input on the content and wording of the questionnaire. The respondents, after the pretest, informed us that they found no ambiguous questions.

Also, they confirmed there was no issue with the wording and flow of the narration. We selected another sample of 40 students in pretest two and administered the complete questionnaire. The pretest two shows that internal consistency, normality, and validity were within the acceptable range.

Scales and Measures

The scales and measures used in the study have 19 questions, three related to demographics and 16 related to the indicator valuables. We have measured responses related to the demographics on the nominal scale and the rest on the 5-Poinit Likert scale. "Five suggest a high agreement and one low agreement." Table 1 depicts the summary of the scales and measures.

Table 1: Scale and Measures

Constructs	Sources	Indicators
Servant Leadership	Barbuto Jr and Wheeler (2006)	4
Turnover Intention	Jaramillo et al. (2009)	4
Task Ambiguity	Nishina, H. (2012).	4
Task Complexity	Liu and Li (2012).	4

Statistical Analysis

We have used Smart PLS for data analysis. We adopted two steps procedure. In the first step, we generated a measurement model for the reliability, validity, and predictive power results. In the second step, we generated a structural model for the results related to the hypotheses.

Results and Findings

Measurement Models

Before generating the structural model, we generated a measurement model for "reliability and validity results." We have presented the measurement model in Figure 2 and the results in subsequent sections.
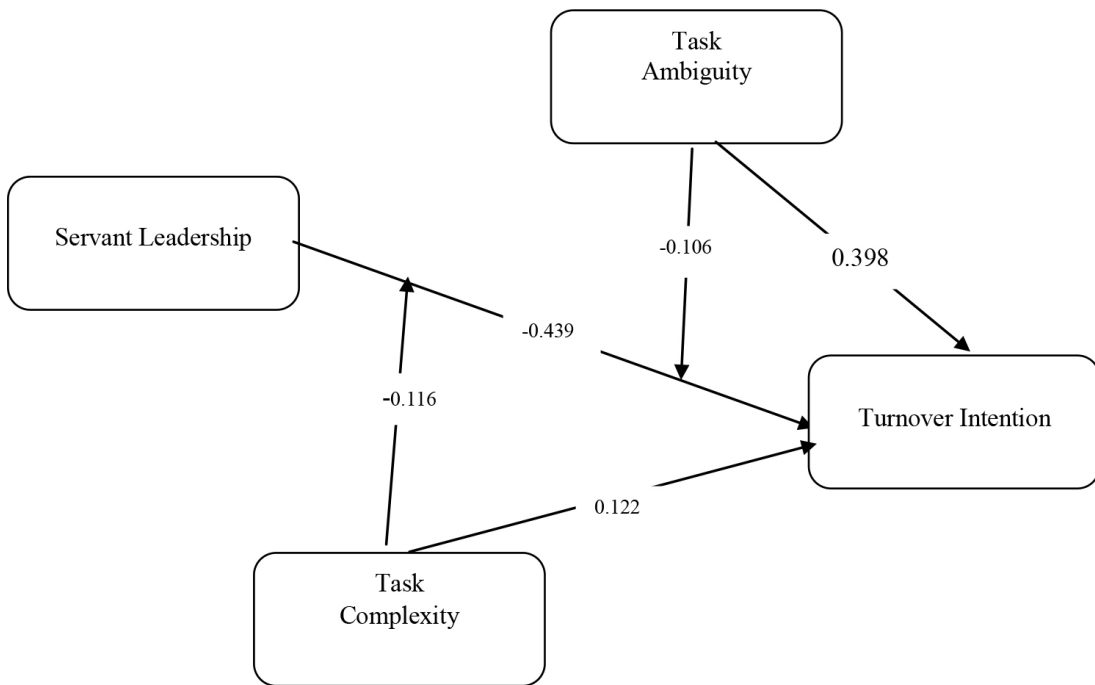
Figure 2: Measurement Model

Descriptive

The descriptive analysis in Table 2 shows the results related to internal consistency, means standard deviation, Skewness, and Kurtosis.

Table 2: Descriptive

Variable	Cronbach's α	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
Servant Leadership	0.903	4.723	0.851	-0.359	-1.362
Task Ambiguity	0.870	4.202	0.952	-0.412	-1.197
Task Complexity	0.767	4.037	0.774	-0.401	-0.806
Turnover Intentions	0.888	3.756	0.527	-0.453	-1.197

We found Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.767 to 0.903. At the same time, all Skewness and Kurtosis values are between ± 2.5. Thus, we have inferred that the constructs used in this study meet the requirements of "internal consistency and univariate normality" (Hair et al., 2019).

Converging Validity

The study presents composite reliability and AVE values in Table 3. We found all

the composite reliability values are higher than 0.70 and AVE values greater than 0.70, suggesting the constructs satisfy the requirements for convergent validity.

Table 3: Convergent Validity

Variable	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Servant Leadership	0.932	0.775
Task Ambiguity	0.911	0.719
Task Complexity	0.851	0.752
Turnover Intention	0.923	0.749

Discriminant Validity

In Table 4, we have presented results related to discriminant validity showing "AVE square root values are greater than Pearson Correlation values." Thus we have concluded that the constructs used in the study are unique and distinct" (Fornell & Larcher, 1981).

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

	SL	TA	TC	TI
Servant Leadership	0.880			
Task Ambiguity	0.701	0.848		
Task Complexity	0.681	0.804	0.807	
Turnover Intentions	0.805	0.801	0.741	0.865

The Output of a Structural Model

The outputs of the structural model were derived using a one-tailed test and bootstrapping of 5,000 subsamples at a 95% confidence level. Table 5 presents the findings, and Figure 3 shows the structural model.

Table 5: Hypothesis Results

Variables	β	t-Stat	p values	Results
Servant Leadership -> Turnover Intention (H1)	-0.439	6.329	0.000	Accepted
Task Ambiguity -> Turnover Intention (H2)	0.398	5.052	0.000	Accepted
Servant Leadership -> Task Ambiguity-> Turnover Intention (H3)	-0.106	1.447	0.148	Rejected
Task Complexity -> Turnover Intention (H4)	0.122	2.137	0.033	Rejected
Servant Leadership -> Task Complexity -> Turnover Intention (H5)	-0.116	1.969	0.499	Accepted

The results validate Hypothesis 1, stating "servant leadership negatively affects turnover intention" (β=-0.439, t=6.329<.05). We accepted Hypothesis 2, stating "task ambiguity positively affects turnover intention" (β=0.398, t=5.052<.05). The study did not find support for Hypothesis 3 stating "task ambiguity moderates servant leadership

and turnover intention" (β= -0.106, t=1.447>.05).

The results do support Hypothesis 4, stating "task complexity negatively affects turnover intention" (β=0.122, t=2.137<.05). Although the relationship is significant, we rejected it because the relationship is positive, contrary to the assumption that the relationship would be negative. The study accepted Hypothesis 5, stating "task complexity moderates servant leadership and turnover intention (β= -0.116, t=1.969<.05).
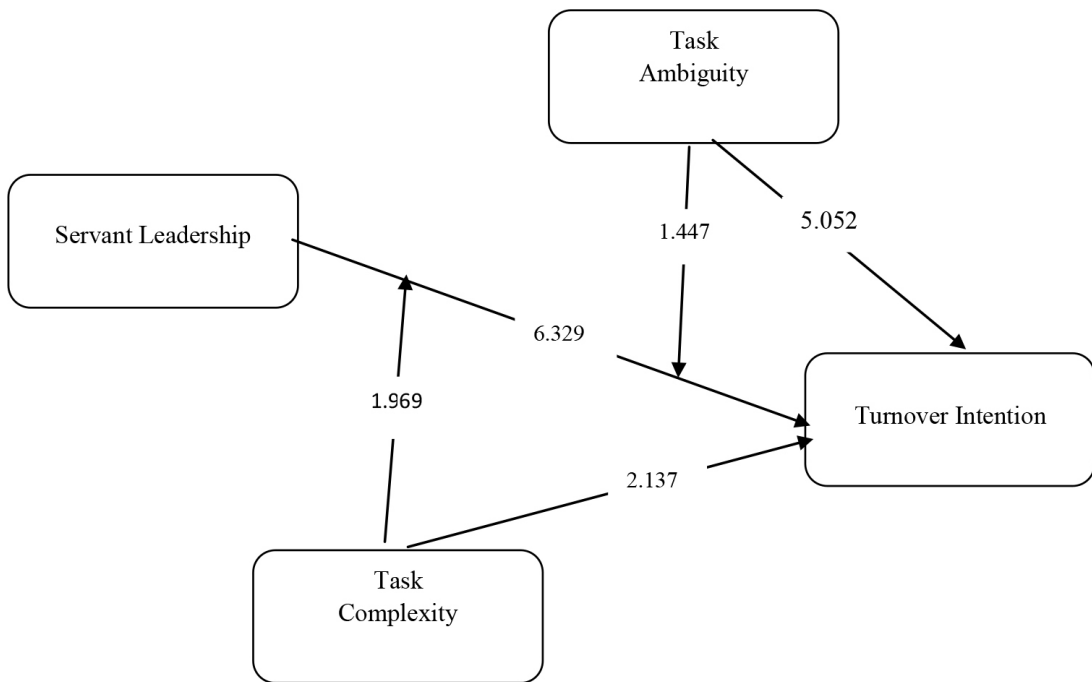

Figure 3: Structural Model

Discussion and Conclusion

The study found that "servant leadership negatively affects turnover intention." Servant Leadership Theory stresses that leaders develop a conducive environment for the followers that promotes a sense of attachment and loyalty to the firms (Prakasch & Ghayas, 2019). Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers and often sacrifice their goals for them (Westbrook & Peterson, 2022). The leaders look after their followers' well-being. Therefore, followers develop a positive attitude toward work and have a low intention to switch jobs (Mustamil & Najam, 2020). Omanwar and Agrawal (2022) stress servant leadership, apart from directly affecting turnover intention, indirectly through organizational ethics and employee engagement affect turnover intention. Employees

who work under servant leaders believe their leaders will help them when they are dissatisfied with their jobs and feel undue stress from their jobs-related outcomes (Achen et al., 2019).

We found that "task ambiguity positively affects turnover intention and task ambiguity insignificantly moderates servant leadership and turnover intention." Task ambiguity is adverse working conditions and confuses employees on how to do their jobs. It promotes burnout and emotional exhaustion (Alblihed & Alzghaibi, 2022). Afzal et al. (2019) assert that leaders' lack of clarity and direction to employees promotes confusion and increases turnover intention (Dodanwala, Santoso, & Yukongdi, 2022). At the same time, when employees find low role ambiguity, they develop a positive feeling about their future with the organization, reducing turnover intentions (Li et al., 2022). Puhakka, Nokelainen, and Pylväs (2021) assert when employees believe the leaders do not respect them, they develop negative attitudes toward the job leading to high turnover intention. Role ambiguity often promotes a perception that organizations are not interested in employees' well-being, so their focus on seeking alternative employment increases Lin & Huang, 2021). Lack of clarity on the job descriptions and responsibilities promotes a perception that employers want to control employees strictly, promoting high turnover intention (Anees, 2021).

We found "task complexity positively affects turnover intention and significantly moderates servant leadership and turnover intention." Employees' motivation and attitudes toward work significantly depend on job design (Ogbeibu et al., 2022). Bande et al. (2021) assert that job description has multiple dimensions, including "skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback." A complex job motivates employees to find a novel approach to find the solution rather than following the standard procedures. Apart from being challenging, a complex job requires multiple complex skills that promote excitement and interest in the employees (Chang et al. 2021). Thus job complexity promotes positive attitudes toward work. Many past studies have documented that job complexity promotes "motivation, organizational commitment, job engagement, and low turnover intention" (Cole et al., 2021). At the same time, many studies found that job complexity is negatively associated with turnover intention (Ogbeibu et al., 2022; Cho, Lee, & Kim, 2019).

Implications

The study has several implications for policymakers and marketers. Turnover intention is a problematic issue worldwide. All the organization leaders have different leadership skills, mostly in-build and partially acquired. Consequently, organizations are suffering since attracting new talent is challenging and expensive. We found servant leadership

style negatively affects turnover intention, suggesting that firms, while hiring new leaders, may focus on those with servant leadership traits.

Firms must arrange seminars, workshops, and counseling sessions for leaders and employees. Such sessions may motivate leaders to focus on employees' needs and well-being. Due to a lack of job description and direction, employees often get confused, adversely affecting their motivation, well-being, and productivity. Consequently, they start looking for new jobs. Thus, we recommend that the employees' job descriptions must have clarity. The leaders must be clear about what they expect from the employees by communicating verbally and in writing. We also suggest that leaders delegate jobs by aligning employees' characteristics, skills, and job requirements.

Limitations and Future Research

This research measured the effect of "servant leadership, task ambiguity, and complexity on turnover intentions" and the moderating roles of "task ambiguity and task complexity." Other researchers may use these variables as mediators between servant leadership and turnover intentions. We have focused on SMEs in Karachi and advice others to extend this model to other sectors and cities. We have focused on servant leadership style, and other studies may examine the impact of other leadership styles on turnover intentions. Spirituality and ethics affect job-related consequences, which we did not consider in this study. Examining these aspects may bring more insight into the discussed phenomenon.

Annuexure:1

Constructs and Items Used in the Questionnaire

Servant Leadership

SL1. This person puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.

SL2. This person could help me mend my hard feelings.

SL3. This person has great awareness of what is going on.

SL4. This person is very persuasive.

Turnover Intention

TI. I do not think I will spend my entire career with this organization.

TI2. I intend to leave this organization within a short period.

TI3. I have decided to quit this organization.

TI4. I am looking at some other jobs now.

Task Ambiguity

TA1. I don't tolerate ambiguous situations well.

TA2. I try to avoid ambiguous situations.

TA3. I prefer familiar situations to new ones.

TA4. I am tolerant of ambiguous situations.

Task Complexity

TC1. A higher job priority and a short duration affect the complexity of the task.

TC2. The number of sub-tasks in the task description affects the complexity of the task.

TC3. The number of terminologies in the task description affects the complexity of the task.

TC4. A hard to understand narration in the job affect the complexity of the task.

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