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REASONS FOR QUITTING: A COMPARISON OF
PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

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by

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Reasons for Quitting: A Comparison of Part-Time and Full-Time Employees

Abstract

Based on the construct of "partial inclusion," it was hypothesized that the turnover of full-time employees would be best explained by job-related reasons and that of part-time employees by nonjob-related reasons. To test these hypotheses, data were collected from 1558 part-time and 640 full-time persons who voluntarily quit their jobs. With the exception of three items dealing with work schedules, the results tended to support the hypotheses. These results were discussed with regard to the management of turnover within full-time and part-time employee groups and the importance of continued research aimed at identifying company controllable factors which influence the turnover decisions among part-time employees.
Reasons for Quitting: A Comparison of
Part-Time and Full-Time Employees

The purpose of the present investigation was to explore differences in "reasons for quitting" across part-time and full-time employment status groups. This investigation was prompted by (a) the increasingly evident suggestion from the research literature that part-time and full-time employees differ in important ways, and thus, might represent different employee populations, (b) the need to assess the predictability of turnover across different, distinctive populations of working adults (Muchinsky, 1978), and (c) the increasingly larger percentage of part-time employees in today's labor force (Rotchford & Roberts, 1982).

With few exceptions, recent studies (Allen, Keaveny, & Jackson, 1979; Hall & Gordon, 1973; Hom, 1979; Logan, O'Reilly, & Roberts, 1973; Miller & Terborg, 1979; Peters, Jackofsky, & Salter, 1981) have pointed to the conclusion that part-time employees cannot be regarded simply as full-time employees who happen to work for less than 40 hours each week. Hall and Gordon (1973), for example, found that part-time working women reported less career satisfaction and greater role ambiguity and overload than their full-time counterparts. With regard to job satisfaction, Miller and Terborg (1979) found significant differences in reported satisfaction levels on three job facets, all of which were predicted based on their analysis of the specific employment situation under study. Hom (1979) also provided data of some interest but not directly relevant to this issue. While never directly comparing part-time and full-time workers, he did show that (a) job peripherality (based on the number of hours worked per week and steady versus seasonal employment) was associated with various
facets of job satisfaction, but that (b) observed job peripherality - job satisfaction associations could be accounted for in terms of the varying demographic characteristics (especially race) within his large sample.

Allen et al. (1979) also found differences between full- and part-time employees. Instead of facets of job satisfaction, however, these authors explored differences in preferences for various job attributes (high income, job security, short hours, advancement and accomplishment).

In addition to the above studies, two studies have found differences, across employment status groups, in the "predictability" of affective and behavioral outcomes. With regard to affective responses, Logan et al. (1973) found evidence which indicated that full- and part-time employees do not perceive their overall job satisfaction as a function of the same job facets. Among full-time employees, they found an overall measure of job satisfaction to be significantly related to each of the five facets of the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). Among part-time employees, however, none of these satisfaction scales related to the measure of overall job satisfaction. In a similar vein, Peters et al. (1981) found evidence to indicate that the predictability of turnover differed across employment status groups. Using conceptually appropriate predictor variables (e.g., satisfaction, thoughts of quitting), these authors found (a) all antecedent variables to be at least marginally significant predictors of turnover within their full-time sample, (b) none of them to be significantly related to turnover within their part-time sample, and (c) the difference between corresponding correlations to be at least marginally significant in all but one instance.

Such results are consistent with the predictions made by Ratchford and Roberts (1982) who argued that it will take a different "psychology of
work" to explain the behavior of full-time and part-time employees. The Logan et al. (1973) and Peters et al. (1981) studies are particularly important in this regard, since they both provided evidence to indicate that part-time employees differed from their full-time counterparts in terms of the manner in which they "process" job experience. It would seem that the full-time/part-time distinction might be representative of two distinct worker populations, each requiring a unique understanding in order to be managed effectively.

To date, there is little in the way of theory to explain the results reported above or guide future research efforts. The construct of "partial inclusion" (Katz and Kahn, 1978), however, seems to be the one theoretical explanation most often mentioned in attempts to explain why such differences might reasonably be expected (see Miller & Terborg, 1979; Peters et al., 1981; Rotchford & Roberts, 1982). This construct refers to the partial or segmented basis by which persons might be involved in the functioning of any given social system. If one were to assume that part-time employees, as a group, are more partially included in their work social system than full-time employees, as a group, then differential predictions can be made based on this differential degree of psychological attachment to the work social system.

It is reasonable to assume that part-time workers are less included in the organizational social system than are full-time workers, not only by the very fact that they chose to work on a part-time basis, but also by the way organizations often treat such employees. Indeed, there is an abundance of evidence which indicates that part-time employees are treated differently than their full-time counterparts with regard to a variety of job and organizational variables (e.g., benefits, work opportunities)
(see Rotchford & Roberts, 1982 for a complete review).

From a psychological perspective, as Miller and Terborg (1979) have pointed out, it also is reasonable to find part-time workers to be less a part of the work social system and more a part of other social systems (e.g., home, family, primary job). If, compared to full-time workers, part-time employees (a) are less included by their employing organizations, and (b) are more strongly attached to nonjob/nonorganizational social systems than to their job/organizational social systems, then one could expect part-time workers to be more sensitive to pressures to fulfill role requirements in their dominant, nonjob social system than to those in their nondominant, employment social system. This is not to say that all part-time employees are partially included in their organizational social system and therefore insensitive to organizational role pressures, or that all full-time employees are fully included in their work social system, and therefore, highly sensitive to organizational role pressures. It is to say, however, that, taken as two distinct groupings, part- and full-time employees are likely to differ from each other along this important dimension and, therefore, to differ in other ways which are logical consequences of differential organizational attachment.

Peters et al. (1981) used this same partial inclusion argument to hypothesize that turnover among part-time employees would not be predictable from the same organizationally-relevant variables which have been shown to predict turnover in previous research with full-time employees. As reported above, these authors found all five of their antecedent variables (e.g., job satisfaction) to be at least marginally predictive of turnover within their full-time sample and none of them to be even marginally related to turnover within their part-time sample.
The present investigation is a logical follow-up to the Peters et al. (1981) investigation. If the turnover of part-time employees cannot be predicted by the same organizationally-relevant variables shown to do so within full-time employment status groups, then to what is such part-time turnover related? Based on the conceptual argument concerning the construct of partial inclusion, it may be that turnover within part-time employee groups is more likely to result from nonjob social system pressures than from job-relevant or organizationally-relevant social system pressures. On the other hand, full-time workers, due to their greater likelihood of being more strongly attached to the work than nonwork social system, should be more sensitive to work than nonwork social system pressures. In effect, the partial inclusion construct leads to the following hypotheses: (a) nonjob-related variables will be more likely to explain the turnover of part-time employees, and (b) job-related variables will be more likely to explain the turnover of full-time employees.

Method

Overview and Sample

Data for this investigation were collected by the participating company as part of an applied turnover reduction program. The purpose of this program was to identify particular reasons for quitting so that company officials might better understand if, and how, policy decisions impact upon their turnover rate.

All data were collected from individuals who had been employed in an eleven state region of a national retail merchandizing organization. A short, one-page questionnaire was mailed to the home address of all nonmanagement personnel who were recorded as voluntary terminators during a
nine month period (July, 1979 through March, 1980). The accompanying cover letter solicited the help of these former employees in providing the company with their reasons for leaving from a list of 23 specific reasons contained in the questionnaire. The items chosen for inclusion on this questionnaire were derived from an analysis of exit interview data.

Participants were requested to return the questionnaire anonymously to the regional personnel office in a pre-addressed, stamped envelope. In order to insure anonymity of responses, no identifying information (age, sex, race, etc.) was requested. In fact, the only classificatory information requested from participants was whether they had been employed on a full-time or part-time basis when they left their jobs with the company. As a result, data are not available to either describe the demographic characteristics of the sample or estimate the comparability of the present sample to the work force in general in terms of such demographic information.

It is known that participants held a wide variety of nonmanagerial jobs involving retail sales, clerical, stock, technical service, and warehousing work. Of the 2198 participants, 1558 had been employed on a part-time basis and 640 on a full-time basis. Eight persons who gave no indication of their employment status were excluded from the analyses. Measures

The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the degree to which each of the 23 specific reasons for quitting (see below) influenced their personal turnover decisions. Subjects responded to each item using a four-point rating scale which ranged from "no influence at all" (1) to "strong influence" (4). For purposes of this investigation, only reasons
which subjects indicated were a "strong influence" on their turnover decisions (i.e., at the highest intensity on the four-point rating scale) were utilized. Using this procedure, more than one specific reason could be identified as having a "strong influence" on each participant's decision to quit.

Analysis

The first step in the analysis was to place each of the 23 reasons for quitting into job- and nonjob-related categories. For this purpose, each of the authors separately classified the 23 items into job- or nonjob-related categories depending upon whether the items described reasons directly related to the participating company's work and/or organizational content/context or whether they described reasons for which nonjob considerations were the major issue. Where the authors differed in their classifications, consensus decisions were reached to place a given item into a job-related or nonjob-related category. 3

Based on this procedure, 12 items (work surroundings/physical conditions, preferred different company assignment, desired work not available in company, reduction in incentive programs, opportunity for advancement, benefits, friction with supervisor, friction with fellow employees, compensation/wages, time of day scheduled for work, too many hours scheduled, and too few hours scheduled) were categorized as job-related and 11 items (increased responsibilities outside of company, starting/returning to school, pregnancy/no planned return, family illness/problems, conflict with another job outside of company, joining military service, transportation problems, moving to another area, location of work, getting married, and illness) were categorized as nonjob-related.

For each of the 23 reasons for leaving, the proportion of full-time
employees who identified each item as a strong influence on their turnover decisions was calculated. Corresponding proportions were calculated within the part-time sample. Since it was hypothesized that nonjob-related items would represent stronger influences on turnover decisions among part-time employees, compared with full-time employees, and that job-related items would represent stronger influences on turnover decisions among full-time employees, compared with part-time employees, differences between corresponding proportions were tested using the appropriate t-test (Clark & Schkade, 1969).

Given the large sample available for this investigation, steps were taken to better insure that the findings were not simply the result of too much statistical power. To this end, all hypotheses were tested against a two-tailed null and judged significant only if the difference between corresponding proportions exceeded the .01 level of statistical significance.

Results

The proportion of respondents within each employment status group who indicated that a reason strongly influenced their turnover decision was calculated for each of the 23 reasons for quitting. These proportions, and results from the t-tests used to test for differences between corresponding proportions, are reported in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, there were 15 instances in which a significant difference (p < .01) between proportions, across employment status groups,
was observed. In particular, of the 12 job-related reasons for quitting, 10 significant differences were observed, seven of which were in the predicted direction. The three job-related items (time of day scheduled, too many hours, too few hours) mentioned as a major reason for quitting significantly more often among part-time than full-time employees were those dealing with work schedules. For the remaining significant job-related reasons for quitting (work surroundings, preferred different company assignment, reduction in incentive program, opportunity for advancement, friction with supervisor, friction with fellow employees, and compensation), results were as predicted -- a greater proportion of full-time employees indicated that these work-related factors had a strong influence on their turnover decisions than did part-time employees.

Of the 11 nonjob-related reasons for quitting, 5 significant differences were observed. As hypothesized, all significant differences were in the predicted direction. For the significant nonjob-related reasons (increased nonjob responsibilities, starting/returning to school, conflict with another job outside present company, transportation problems, and moving to another area), a greater proportion of part-time employees indicated these to be a strong influence in their turnover decisions than did their full-time counterparts.

Discussion

With the exception of the three work schedule items, support was found for both hypotheses. As predicted, nonjob-related reasons were seen to be more important influences on the turnover decisions of part-time as compared to full-time employees, and job-related reasons tended to be seen as more important to full-time than to part-time employees.
The nonconfirming results regarding the three work schedule items were unexpected. Responses to these job-related reasons indicated that they were seen as more important to part-time than to full-time employees. While these findings, therefore, do not fully support the construct of partial inclusion as a basis along which such groups of employees differ, they do add to the growing body of literature which suggests that the full-time/part-time distinction is an important one.

We do not wish to suggest that the construct of partial inclusion is completely without merit as a meaningful way to distinguish between part-time and full-time employment status groups. With regard to such work factors as pay, employee relations, working conditions, etc., and such nonwork factors as outside responsibilities, attendance in school, etc., results were indeed as predicted from this construct. It may well be that work schedule considerations, while clearly job-related, form the basis of a particular set of job-related factors which are strongly considered by part-time employees when making exit decisions. This would suggest that both part- and full-time employees strongly consider job-related factors when making important job-related decisions, but that different job-related factors would be considered by persons within these different employment status groups. Thus, future research aimed at identifying job-related factors differentially important for full-time and part-time employees would seem highly appropriate. With regard to those job-related factors identified to be of importance to more fully included persons, the construct of partial inclusion might still provide a meaningful avenue for suggesting how part- and full-time employment status groups might differ.

The implications of these results should be of interest to all persons interested in the study of turnover, and in particular, to those persons
responsible for policy formation in organizations which hire a large number of part-time employees. To the extent that (a) part-time employees are more sensitive to nonjob- than to job-related factors in general and (b) future research helps to identify those particular job-related factors which are considered important by part-time employees, then two important implications follow.

First, policies developed and implemented to stem turnover within full-time employee groups can be anticipated to be ineffective if implemented within part-time employee groups. This implication follows from the results of both the present research and the Peters et al. (1981) study. These studies indicated that the reasons that part-time employees quit their jobs may have more to do with what happens to them off the job than on the job. This greater sensitivity to nonjob factors naturally makes interventions aimed at reducing turnover rates among part-time employees groups more difficult. Further, attempts to control part-time turnover by focusing on those variables known to predict it within full-time employee groups (e.g., dissatisfaction with various job facets) might result in an expenditure of time, effort, and money which will not be strongly reflected in the turnover statistics.

The second implication stems from the data involving work schedules and suggests that new directions need to be developed to positively influence the turnover of part-time employee groups. As discussed above, certain job-related variables might be highly relevant to turnover decisions among part-time employees, and the identification of such job-related factors should be meaningful for controlling turnover within this group of employees. At the very least, the number of hours of work provided and the scheduling of those hours exemplify such job-related work
factors important to part-time employees.

The present results clearly demonstrate that consideration of work scheduling concerns might well impact the turnover decisions of part-time employees. In the present data set, for example, 28 percent of the part-time employees mentioned at least one of these three scheduling items as a strong influence on their turnover decisions whereas only 8 percent of the full-time employees did so. These, and other company-controllable job-related factors identified through future research, would seem to be more appropriate choices for turnover intervention programs than those factors identified through previous research on full-time employees.

This investigation represents a first attempt to explore differences in why part-time and full-time employees quit their jobs. As such, the interpretation of these data should be regarded as tentative. Further, there are two issues related to the design of this study which need to be discussed. One such issue is the postdictive nature of this investigation. Retrospective data are always subject to question, since one can never be certain that persons are accurately recalling what went on prior to and leading up to their actual turnover decision. However, since the focus of the present study was on a comparison between full- and part-time employees, this issue should not be a major problem. There is simply no reason to suspect that the memories of full-time and part-time workers would be differentially affected.

An additional issue concerns whether or not the reported differences can be explained with reference to demographic differences across the full-time and part-time samples. It will be recalled that Hom (1979) found that job peripherality differences associated with job satisfaction could be accounted for by demographic differences (especially race). Given that
part-time employees, in general, differ from their full-time counterparts in terms of demographics (see Rotchford & Roberts, 1982), such differences may also "account for" the present results. Since this study was designed to protect the anonymity of participants, this explanation could not be tested within the current data set. It would, therefore, appear useful to examine potential explanations involving demographic characteristics in future research comparing part-time and full-time employees.

In conclusion, the present data suggest the need to regard part-time employees as different from their full-time counterparts, and as such, lend further credence to Rotchford and Robert's (1982) suggestion that it might take a different "psychology of work" to explain the behavior of persons within each employment status group. The need for continued efforts along these lines is becoming increasingly important. Although only 13 percent of the labor force was employed on a part-time basis in 1967, this figure had reached 18 percent by 1977 (Monthly Labor Review, 1968; 1978). To the extent that these figures portray a trend in the employment of part-time workers, more attention is clearly needed in this area. Such information should be of great value to organizational decision makers who are, or will be, faced with the need to develop and implement human resource programs aimed at the effective utilization of a part-time work force.
References


7. Katz, D., & Kahn, R. *The social psychology of organizations*. New York:


Footnotes

2. Hom, Katerberg, and Hulin (1979) have reported that attrition within a sample of National Guardsmen can be predicted from variables (e.g., satisfaction) commonly found to relate to turnover. While National Guardsmen are clearly part-time, they seem to represent a "special" class of part-time employees. It is not clear that such persons are representative of part-time employees from civilian occupations for which research evidence is now accumulating. Thus, while valuable for policy decisions within military organizations, such National Guard results are not considered in the present research.

3. An earlier version of this manuscript included the three work schedule items (time of day scheduled, too many hours scheduled, and too few hours scheduled) as nonjob-related, because it was felt that the appropriateness of one's work schedule depended upon how well it "meshed" with one's nonjob activities and interests. However, since the scheduling of work activities is typically company initiated, implemented, and controlled, it was felt that these items must be reclassified as being job-related factors. As such, the present manuscript represents a considerable change from the earlier version and removes all ambiguity from the classification of reasons for quitting into job- and nonjob-related factors.
Table 1: Proportion of Part-Time and Full-Time Employees who identified Each of 9 Job-Related and 14 Nonjob-Related Reasons for Leaving as having a Strong Influence on their Turnover Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Quitting</th>
<th>Proportion Part-Time</th>
<th>Proportion Full-Time</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job-Related Reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Work surroundings/physical conditions</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>5.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preferred different company assignment</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>3.61*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Desired work not available in company</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reduction in incentive programs</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>8.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Opportunity for advancement</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td>8.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Benefits (Insurance, vacation time, etc.)</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Friction with supervisor</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>9.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Friction with fellow employees</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Compensation/wages</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>10.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Time of day scheduled</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>5.84*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Too many hours scheduled</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>3.89*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Too few hours scheduled</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>23.92*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonjob-Related Reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Increased responsibilities outside of company</td>
<td>0.241</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>8.97*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Starting/returning to school</td>
<td>0.247</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>11.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pregnancy/no planned return</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family illness/problems</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conflict with another job outside of company</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>7.96*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Joining military service</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Transportation problems</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>3.33*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Moving to another area</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>2.80*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Location of work</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Getting married</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Illness</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 640 for full-time sample; N = 1558 for part-time sample. Subjects could indicate more than one strong influence on their turnover decisions.

* p .01, two-tailed test of significance
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